

# VECTOR

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The Critical Journal Of The BSFA

VECTOR EDITOR

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# EDITORIAL



G.D. Rippington

I feel that it might be wise to start this editorial with an important non-notice. Some of you, I expect, might have read that I'm moving home in the near future from Birchington-on-Sea to that powerhouse of the BSFA empire Reading-on-Thames. The catch in this statement is 'in the near future' which, in my case, means from now to six months time. To avoid letters and articles going astray as soon as I know when and where I'm going to move I'll announce it in Vector. Until then, please send them to the current address. Because of the move, I would also ask you for your patience concerning replies to letters. Unfortunately it is inevitable that there will be longer delays than before, but all letters requiring a reply will be answered eventually.

As I expect you have just turned over from reading the contents page you will have noticed that this issue is specially dedicated to one of the greatest SF Writers, James Blish. A message of thanks must go to Cy Chauvin for gaining access to the material and to David Ketterer for then investigating the history of the pieces. It is not often

that Vector has the first publication of an article by James Blish! Also, my thanks to Gregory Feeley for "The Unglimpsed Reign of King Log" an area of Blish that was virgin territory to me, and I'm sure will be to you as well.

Blish, has always seemed to me to hold a peculiar position within SF. He was just as happy with the extravagant clothes of the American magazine SF or the sometimes dour uniform of British SF. Part of this could be explained by the fact that although born in America (1921), he emigrated to Oxford in 1968 where he lived until his death in 1975, but if one looks at his work before 1968, the geographical location really has no bearing on it. Blish wrote in so many areas; from "The Cities in Flight" series, which may be nominally classified as Space Opera, (what battles there are, are economic rather than physical) to the trilogy "After Such Knowledge", which is made up of A Case of Conscience, Doctor Mirabilis and Black Easter and The Day after Judgement which poses the question "Is the desire for secular knowledge, let alone the acquisition and use of it, a misuse of the mind, and perhaps even actively evil?". When trying to think of authors that have covered the same expanse as Blish I could come up with some that had covered pieces but because of the diversity of his writing one reaches the conclusion that he is unique within the SF genre. What I would like to know is where are Blish's counterparts today? Earlier I talked arbitrarily about the different attitudes to SF by British and American writers, a difference, I would suggest, which has for some reason become more marked over the last decade. I am not going to claim that one camp is better than the other - they are just different. For instance, an obvious example is that while British SF has a couple of writers involved in the hard SF camp (notably, of course, Bob Shaw) on the American side the hard SF camp holds the majority of the field. Similarly, (and this I feel is to our detriment) the women's viewpoint in SF's male chauvinistic preserve has gained its rightful place though the work of American authors Joanna Russ, Vonda McIntyre and many others. On this side of the Atlantic the male preserve still holds on. Those two differences are the most obvious, but there are many more. What has bought about this divergent personality? In an age of supposed global communication, one would believe that our fictional identities would be converging not diverging.....

# FOUR FUGITIVE PIECES

BY JAMES BLISH

INTRODUCED BY DAVID KETTERER

[[[ More than eight years after his untimely death, James Blish's work and reputation are still very much alive. And as the years go by, this cliched statement is likely to become increasingly true. All of his best work is currently available in paperback on both sides of the Atlantic and a flurry of editorial, biographical and critical activity related to Blish will shortly result in a number of publications. Cy Chauvin has prepared a collection of some of Blish's scattered critical pieces that Advent Press will publish as The Tale That Wags the Dog. It will also include a complete bibliography of Blish's work by Mrs. Judith Blish and a large section of previously unpublished autobiography called "A Science Fiction Coming of Age." This book will go some way to compensate for a projected volume of criticism entitled Dead Issues at Hand, a successor to the two Advent Issues at Hand volumes, that Blish did not live to complete. Gregory Feeley is at work on a biography while my own bio-critical study, James Blish: Imprisoned in a Tesseract, is to be published by Frederick Ungar. The Blish re-evaluation now clearly underway provides an appropriate context in which to present the four fugitive pieces published below. The first three items are revised versions of letters responding to queries while the fourth, an article published here for the first time, will also appear in The Tale That Wags the Dog.]]]

## I: ARISTOTELEAN SPHERES: INTRODUCTION

[[[ The account that Blish gives here of the moment of revelation regarding why "Surface Tension" (made up of stories originally published in 1942 and 1952) was and remains one of his most popular stories overlaps with the information provided in "The Pantropy Series: Introduction by Judith and James Blish," in The Great Science Fiction Series, ed. Frederik Pohl, Martin Harry Green, and Joseph Olander (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 112-13. It is made up of two letters, the first from Speculation (1971), the second from Cypher (1972). They were first published together in Seldon's Plan. If nothing else, Blish's confession of blindness to what is the most obvious feature of "Surface Tension" (it is, after all, directly about the revelation of different realities, the experience of conceptual breakthrough or philosophical apocalypse) provides some justification for the labours of literary critics and theorists. As Blish's agent at the time, Frederick Pohl has confirmed in a letter to me (14 July 1983) that the copycat story was, as Brian Stableford guesses in his A Clash of Symbols: The Triumph of James Blish

(1979), "The Thing in the Attic" (1954).]]]

#### ARISTOLELEAN SPHERES BY JAMES BLISH

"Surface Tension" is the most anthologized story of any I've written - and thereby hangs a tale, though maybe one of not much interest to anyone but me.

It's been said elsewhere that I actively dislike the story, but that's untrue and was untrue even then. I did recognize even then (1949) that it was unusual, in that it explored a background - fresh water microbiology - I knew very well and which hadn't to my knowledge been used before by anyone else. But that wasn't new ground for me; the story was, in fact, a commissioned sequel to one first published in 1942 (which I incorporated as 'Cycle One' in the version which most of its modern readers know).

In all other respects it struck me as being, to be blunt, a creditable piece of hackwork - and the editor who commissioned it wouldn't even give it that, saying that he wouldn't take it unless I cut it by one-third, which I refused to do. And it took three years and the addition of a prologue, still in the story now, to get "Surface Tension" into print, by which time it was my 78th published work; the story to which it was a sequel was my 11th. It can be understood, I think, that when this did happen my only emotion was relief at having finally placed an old turkey..., plus a little fear - not much, because I had no emotional investment in the story by then anyhow - that the readers would recognize and dismiss it as such.

Its subsequent history astonished me, and continued to do so until last year (1972). I didn't dislike it, and still don't. But what I dislike, more and more, was that it came to be and remains almost everyone's favourite Blish story. To many fans I have met at conventions and elsewhere, it was the only story my name brought to mind, and there were even more who remembered the story but could not remember or had never heard of its author. And I couldn't see why. Not only had I written other things I thought better on almost every count - no author's favourites ever match item for item with those of his readers and critics - but if the readers were going to make a favourite of one of my scores of conventional sf stories, why had they settled so overwhelmingly on this one?

I began to ask this question not only of fans, but of other writers who knew much about my other work and yet felt the same preference without getting any farther toward an answer than what I already knew was there; the unusual backdrop, the occasionally charming little critters, the inch-long spaceship, in short, small ingenuities of the same kind I'd used as stock-in-trade in half a hundred other conventional stories that had made no such dent.

Once, again on commission and for a far fatter fee, I made an exhaustive analysis of the story from general structure right down to individual word choices, and then wrote another one which followed the analysis exactly, even including elements of it that I'd otherwise have tried to do better, or even omit - after all, since the whole thing was a mystery still, maybe the secret was hidden in one of its mistakes! This act of critical mimicry dropped dead on publication, and I've never since consciously tried to repeat a success, let alone that minutely.

In the meantime, in Huxley's phrase the Absolute's tail was unsalted; and though by this time I was visibly wincing every time anyone said "Surface Tension" in my hearing, it wasn't from pain, or dislike of the story itself, but simply because 20 years of mounting bafflement over what could be so compelling about it (or 30 years, if I took into consideration that the germ of it was that old, and that the germ itself had proven to be popular enough to move its editor to ask for a sequel after a lapse of seven years).

In 1972 we had Darko Suvin as a house guest for a few days, as we had several times earlier, and by then I'd known him long enough and had talked to him about so many different kinds of things, always to my benefit, that I made



a last hopeless attempt at asking this question. And miraculously, he had the answer. Though as a Marxist I'm sure he wouldn't so describe it, but to me it was like a Eucharist.

It explained not only the popularity of "Surface Tension", it also explained the popularity of some other conventional works of mine, the reason why the larger number of my conventional pieces had quite failed to be memorable, and a good many other

things too. "Surface Tension" shared with the other successes a unique attitude toward all their disparate backgrounds and devices that I'd completely failed to detect in it, hence the utter failure of my attempt to imitate it. In answer to my bafflement, Darko Suvin asked me to dig out of my library either of the two issues of the Aldiss-Harrison SF Horizons and look at the cover picture. "That," he said, "is the central thrill of "Surface Tension", and what most of your serious work is about." The picture is a woodcut showing a monk, on his hands and knees, crawling out of the familiar world through a break - which he seems to have made himself - in the Aristotelean spheres and looking amazedly at the totally different universe he finds outside them. This view of my central theme includes Damon Knight's view of it - "getting born" - but isn't nearly so restrictive for me, nor does it require the complex and admirable ingenuities of detail Knight had to resort to (about 'Common Time', see In Search of Wonder, chapter 26) to buttress it, or Suvin's admittedly sometimes murky formalistic terminology. In fact, what could be simpler?

## II: A BAD IDEA TRAMPLED TO DEATH BY DUCKS: INTRODUCTION

[[[ This account, written in February 1972, of the painful genesis of ...And All the Stars a Stage (1971) was first published in the fanzine Disclave, no. 80. The novel mentioned, One in Three Hundred (1954) (which may explain the title "98.00%", the phantom seed story that may have been incorporated into ...And All the Stars a Stage), is by J.R. McIntosh (pseudonym of James Murdoch MacGregor). It is about a select group who survive the sun's going nova by migrating to Mars. Lawrence Ashmead, Blish's Doubleday editor, travelled to London to sort out the mix up of the ...And All the Stars a Stage typescript with that of Anywhen (1970). Nevertheless, Doubleday, unlike Faber and Faber, still managed to omit the last story "Skyhook" from the American edition of the Anywhen collection. But ...And All the Stars a Stage is a better novel than this sorry tale suggests. Blish had a habit of putting down his more routine work, in some cases accurately, in others not. ]]]

Michael T. Shoemaker wonders implicitly how much the Doubleday ...And All the Stars a Stage was changed from the 1960 serial in Amazing. The answer is, hardly at all - I added a few thousand words but nevertheless the novel had previously been through a dizzying series of changes, the like of which I hope I never encounter again. It all started some time in 1958 when Truman M. ("Mac") Talley, then editor of Signet Books, took me to lunch and proposed to me a great idea for a science fiction novel which he wanted me to write: essentially, the story of refugees from a nova (eventually revealed to be what is now the Crab Nebula, which was to supply the novel's title) who colonize Earth - but with the story apparently starting on a place very much like Earth and the twist produced as a surprise at the end.

I hadn't read One in Three Hundred, only pieces of it that had previously appeared in the magazines (Damon Knight's review of the book decided me not to try the whole course), but the notion didn't strike me as great. I was about to say, "It's really a petty old idea" when Mac went "The advance will be \$3000". That was the biggest advance I'd ever been offered up to that time, so I accepted, with certain cavils. For one, the Crab Nova had been seen in historic times, and it isn't really very far away as sidereal distances go; the actual time of the explosion was roughly contemporaneous with the Ubaid occupation of southern Mesopotamia. Secondly, I had anthropological objections to the notions that man might not have evolved on Earth; I argued that it would be enough of a miracle if the two races could interbreed.

Mac accepted these reservations and asked me to send him an outline. I did so, the contract was signed, and I wrote the book. To the best of my knowledge, the manuscript followed the agreed-upon outline faithfully, but Mac was not satisfied with it and asked for a rewrite, suggesting some additional ideas which were even older-hat than the main one. This time, feeling myself pinned to the ground by what I knew to be a mass of cliches, I tried to give the book at least a little Blishness by introducing a lot of odd little biological critters, a penchant of mine to which, I had long ago discovered, readers almost always responded with approval.

Mac didn't like this version either, and suggested that he send the manuscript out "for a third opinion". Months went by, and finally, after an inquiry from me, I got the manuscript back - but it hadn't been subjected simply to a third opinion, it was a completely new manuscript. What had apparently happened was that Mac had sent the novel to some Bennington ponytail who was so eager to prove her worth as an editor (creative type) that she had rewritten the whole thing. I have mercifully blanked out on most of the details, but I do recall that she had taken out all of my little critters, and had added a love story of such pulpy soppieness (not to say irrelevance) that only a revival of the vomitorium would do justice to it.

I had had enough at this point. I notified Mac that I would consent to the publication of this version only if it were titled "Crab Nebula, by Truman M. Talley and Bennington Ponytail, as told to James Blish". Barring that, I would return NAL's \$3000 (though necessarily in installments).

Mac had the good grace to recognize an impasse when he saw one. He not only released me from the contract, but soaked up the advance by re-issuing another of my books (The Seedling Stars) instead.

I sold the carbon of the second (pre-Ponytail) draft as a serial to Amazing and then as a hardcover to Doubleday. It's my hypothesis that Doubleday wasn't really enthusiastic about the novel, but bought it to get me on their list; certainly they sat on it for years and years, until I finally insisted that they publish it. By this time, of course, I hadn't the faintest idea myself whether the surviving version was any good, but I did think that I ought at least to be given the chance to earn some royalties on it.

Then followed a further comedy of errors. Doubleday also had a story

collection of mine, Anywhen, and I discovered (through an announcement in Publisher's Weekly which Dean McLaughlin sent me) that they were just about to release this under the title of the novel. What had happened was that Doubleday had changed SF editors in the interim, the manuscript of ...And All the Stars a Stage had been lost, and the collection had been put into the folder which bore the title of the novel. This would further louse me up with Faber & Faber, my British publishers, who had bought the collection but not the novel (they now have) - and Faber and Faber prints such things by offset from Doubleday's pages. Eventually, after many exchanges of cables, letters, and even a meeting in London, this too got straightened out - but the story did not end even there: the blurb writer for the novel never did notice that the novel does not start on Earth, though I had taken great pains at the beginning to show what the solar system involved could not possibly be ours; moreover, she also got the name of one of the major characters wrong. (The manuscript never was found; Doubleday had to get a copy of the Amazing serial, I think through Sam Moskowitz, to whom thanks.)

This all was followed by a subsequent louse-up on Anywhen, but that's another story which is still too recent for me to have the heart to tell. After all these vicissitudes, I no longer have any idea whether ...And All the Stars a Stage contains anything worth reading. Its history to me is that of an initially bad idea progressively trampled to death by ducks.

### III: THE STRANGE CAREER OF DR. MIRABILIS: INTRODUCTION

[[[ Blish was certainly not in the habit of putting down Doctor Mirabilis (English edition, 1964; revised American edition, 1971). He regarded it as his finest novel. The account of Roger Bacon and the genesis of Doctor Mirabilis offered here first appeared in John Bangsund's Australian SF Review, no. 6 (January 1967), pp. 22-24. It should be compared with that offered in a couple of other Blish pieces: "The Shadowy Figure of Roger Bacon," Science World, 5 (21 April 1959), pp. 11-12 (expanded as "The Adventure of Science" in Adventures of Discovery, ed. Tom Purdom [New York: Doubleday & Company, 1969], pp. 47-60); and "The Development of a Science Fiction Writer," Foundation, no 2 (June 1972), p. 21. The American edition of Doctor Mirabilis (but not the English one) includes an epigraph from Eddison's The Worm Ouroboros (1922). Blish planned but did not complete at least one further work in what he conceived as "a series of novels about crucial figures - or events - in the history of science" (see below): a Venetian novel to be entitled Glass Night. It was to have been about "the invention of the security system for technical information" and its unfortunate consequences (see letter from Blish to Philip K. Dick, 13 June 1964). ]]]

### III: THE STRANGE CAREER OF DR. MIRABILIS BY JAMES BLISH

As sometimes happens, Dr. Mirabilis didn't start out to be at all the sort of work it finally became. I had been an admirer of the heroic fantasies of E.R. Edisson for many years; and when in the mid-fifties or thereabouts a US publisher re-issued a hardbound edition of The Worm Ouroboros, it occurred to me that I might enjoy writing something like it - not with much swashbuckling in it, since I don't write sword-swinging heroics well, but a book involving high politics, a fair amount of magic, and a 'high' style a la Malory where the situation seemed to justify it.

My first thought for a subject was Roger Bacon, but at that time I knew very little about the man; what I was attracted to was the Bacon legend. I think you can see that the legend might have made a good book of Eddison's sort - and in fact he in part dictated my choice, because of his use of a Baconian cypher as the major conjuration formula in the WORM.

However, once I started reading about Bacon, I became much more interested in the historical figure, and less interested in the legend. There was so much drama in his futile fight for recognition, his imprisonment, his (apocryphal) death-bed apostasy, which gave the whole tragedy a modern - or at least, a non-Greek - turn, and of course the inherent irony of his attempt to invent theoretical physics four centuries too early. Then, too, I had a pre-existing interest in the Middle Ages; though hardly anybody is willing to grant the fact now, the 12th and 13th Centuries were periods of tremendous intellectual ferment, and the politics were as interesting to me as anything in Machiavelli. Finally, opportunities abounded for me to use a formalized style and one for which I felt a strong affinity, since I've always felt that Middle English was the most beautiful (though not the most flexible) form of the language. In contrast, the Bacon legend came more and more to seem to me like a pastiche of the Faust legend - and besides, I found, there was already a novel about it, John Cowper Powys's The Brazen Head, as well as the Greene play Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. On the other hand, there was no novel at all about the historical Bacon - or if there is, I've yet to encounter it. This figure, the real man, was also an immensely complicated one, not just a conventionalized sorcerer, and that was also attractive.

As I got into the job, I thought I might make it only the first of a series of novels about crucial figures - or events - in the history of science, a subject which is a special hobby of mine.

And, too, as I got to work, I discovered for myself what might have been obvious to a critic, and had been discovered independently by several other sf writers, notably Poul Anderson and L. Sprague de Camp, and lately, Avram Davidson: that for the sf writer of a certain cast of mind - the kind that is directly interested in the sciences themselves, keeps up with them, and likes to do homework - in other words, the 'hard' sf writer - the historical novel is a natural second medium. It calls upon many of the same skills at handling an unfamiliar culture, at digging out what are the crucial facts upon which an event may turn, and in dealing with a whole flock of givens which cannot be scamped, written around or taken for granted. Thirteenth Century Paris was as odd a place as Mars, and 13th Century motivations a good deal odder than some I've seen attributed to Martians.

It also has some of the same temptations, particularly that of shoving the exotica into the foreground and letting them do the work which ought to be being done by the characters and the emotions.

Is the result science fiction? Though I gratefully acknowledge defense of the affirmative, I myself am on the other side. It's certainly true that I intended the premature emergence of scientific method to be as much a 'person' in the story as Bacon himself; but I still feel that there is too little speculative content in the book to make me comfortable calling it sf. It seems to me to belong to another class of novel, and a very well recognized one which we might call 'novels of science;' for example, the novels of C.P. Snow, Harasanyi's novel about Galileo, or Arrowsmith may also be a sub-class of the novel of manners.

Thus, pleased though I am with the Roger Bacon novel as it finally turned out, it doesn't in the least satisfy my original itch to write a novel in which ceremonial magic would play a large part. Happily, I am not coming down the home stretch on just such a novel, to be called Faust Aleph-Null. Hubris can hardly go much farther than that.

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#### IV: A NEW TOTEMISM?: INTRODUCTION

[[[ This article is a typical product of Blish the metaphysician. The opening question ("What is the shape of the soul?") is glossed in different ways in much of Blish's fiction but most directly in The Seedling Stars (1957), which includes "Surface Tension" (see I above) and Spock Must Die! (1970). In the pantropy stories, the question arises, What constitutes a human being, a human soul perhaps, if everything about a person physically can be changed? The plot of Spock Must Die! gets underway with Dr. McCoy wondering if the transporter can reassemble the soul. The quotation is from Eiseley's The Immense Journey (1957). Blish's discussion of "The Arts in Science Fiction," Vector, 61 (Sept. - Oct. 1972), reprinted in A Multitude of Visions, ed. Cy Chauvin (Baltimore: TK Graphics, 1975), pp. 58-67, and his Preface to the anthology New Dreams This Morning (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), pp. xi-xii, is relevant to this discussion of which artists might best help us to appreciate the human soul, or its equivalent, in alien forms. Can we ever break out of those Aristotelean spheres? ]]]

#### IV: A NEW TOTEMISM? BY JAMES BLISH

The imminence of manned spaceflight, though it may answer many questions, brings us to the verge of being posed anew one of the oldest and knottiest questions of iconography: What is the shape of the soul?

The connection between the two subjects is not immediate, but it is direct. We suspect that life of some sort exists on at least one other local planet, Mars. We know that at least two other suns beside our own, both relatively nearby, have at least one planet apiece. The implication is strong that planets are normal in the life history of a star; and that many stars must have planets like the Earth. The most conservative estimate published thus far puts the number of Earthlike planets in our Milky Way galaxy alone at 100,000.

We already suspect unEarthly life in these gulfs; in due course, we may find intelligent life.

It is not likely to look much like us. A frequent argument is that something very like the human shape presents so many advantages for an intelligent animal that that shape cannot help but evolve independently, parallel to our evolution. For instance, two eyes (at a minimum) [1] are essential for depth perception - hence for survival - and if they are to function at their best they must be reasonably close together and as high up on the animal as possible. An erect posture is necessary to free the forelimbs for tool-using; the brain is best located in the head, in close association with the sense-organs; and so on.

To this argument, which is logical but suspiciously unimaginative, is opposed a school of thought whose spokesman is the eminent University of Pennsylvania anthropologist Loren C. Eiseley. It is his position that man as we know him is a product of an enormous series of evolutionary accidents, most of them so delicately poised that man must necessarily be alone in space. His poetic summation is worth quoting:

"Lights come and go in the night sky. Men, troubled at last by the things they build, may toss in their sleep and dream bad dreams, or lie awake while the meteors whisper greenly overhead. But nowhere in all space or on a thousand worlds will there be men to share our loneliness. There may be wisdom; there may be power;

[1] Not a frivolous aside; early terrestrial reptiles had three; the human pineal gland is a relic of the third.

somewhere across space great instruments, handled by strange manipulative organs, may stare vainly at our floating cloud wrack, their owners yearning as we yearn. Nevertheless, in the nature of life and in the principles of evolution we have had our answer. Of man elsewhere, and beyond, there will be none forever."

It is a positive wrench to think that a man who can assume so pure an apocalyptic tone might be wrong, but it will be a greater wrench if he is right - and his opponents are right, for the question will probably resolve itself into, What degree of approximation of the human form are we prepared to accept as manlike? Sophisticated minds will be unlikely to rebel at a giant spider with intelligence, or at any of the other zoological idiocies with which the movies lately are vaguely trying to frighten us; but if the Other Intelligence we first meet is vaguely manlike yet at the same time obviously not a man, all our training since the Dark Ages, when teratology was the most highly organized branch of medicine, will whisper to us: "A monster!"

How an artist depicts a man is in some sense - probably in the important sense - how he sees the indwelling spirit. This is visible even in totemism; if the divine is thought to reside in the animal, then the animal will be painted in idealized form, the man reduced to a pursuing stick-figure, as in the Spanish caves. The Egyptian deities glorify both the human and the animal at once, but in neither element of the mixture is there any pretense of depicting a visible surface drawn from experience. Greek and Babylonian totem-human mixtures shade off into forms apparently all human, but clearly labelled Love, Power, Thievery, Healing, Wine, Earth. The age of anthropomorphism spans the whole history of the transformation of the invisible, beardless, nightgownless Jahweh into somebody's grandfather, and his subdivision into such creatures as Raphael's angels.

Some residues of totemism still remain, in the West in the dove as the symbol of the soul; in the East in the doctrine of metempsychosis, and in the serpent, as Krishna saw it issuing from the dead body of his half-brother Balarma, as the symbol of Vishnu. The virtual extinction of belief in the soul itself in a scientific age might be read into the mystic animals of Morris Graves, such as his "Bird Caged by Moonlight" which seem to be in the process of disappearing into the elements of the earth and the air.

In the universe we are about to enter, even the nobility of Michelangelo's hand of God may be utterly irrelevant, and our whole iconography of the demonic and the divine become blurred beyond redemption. The first intelligent extra-solar race that we meet may be wiser and nobler than we are, and look all the same like something out of Heironymos Bosch. The wisdom and nobility may or may not be there, but we are not going to be able to judge it by looking at the physical form and reading it as though it were a hieroglyph for "good" or "evil". The situation is comparable to a first encounter with African artworks, where no insight is possible until we realize that what seem like distortions to us are symmetries in a culture where our norms do not prevail.

Modern art may moderate the shock somewhat, at least that part of it which has not abstracted itself entirely into light, composition, texture and other wholly painterly matters and left the forms of experience behind. We have seen so many special versions of the human form now that it is perhaps hard to imagine one that is capable of upsetting us. Nevertheless, there is always something shocking about the real (to use this word in its most limited sense); the reactions of the man who encounters a live mermaid or chimera are yet to be written down. But the time may be coming.

The artists who are likely to be of service to us at that moment will be the Bosches and the Dalis rather than the Picassos, the Klines and the Klees. Paintings like those of the Cubists, or like "Caprice in February", in this context are not true distortions of our image of the human soul, but indeed are hieroglyphics for it; indeed an excellent case could be made for this

idiom as a form of writing, half picture and half word. With a few signs - a figure 7, a one-syllable visual convention for "hat", a stroke indicating motion - Klee gives us not only a windy street and a blowing newspaper, but also something we know to be a nose, and know it so well that we have not trouble in seeing the man attached to it, though Klee gives us nothing else but his feet, and the ghost of his overcoat. The gaiety and warmth of this idiom are not in question, but it depends utterly upon many centuries of comfortably expectable bodies, however idealized or abstracted.

We will never meet a creature like Klee's except among ourselves. Our counterpart on some possible Earthlike planet of Alpha Centauri or 61 Cygni is much more likely to be constructed of something more like boiled beans, as in Dali's "Preminition of Civil War", and quite as tangible; and for this, only biomorphism can prepare us.

It will be interesting to see if the calligraphic artists, who are now generally higher in our esteem than the biomorphists, will hold their place in so vastly expanded a universe of discourse. While it may well be true that a rational soul, the hnau, remains the same regardless of its bodily clothing, the visual arts have seldom so regarded it. By the time the new point of view is fully assimilated, the totem will surely be back among us, and perhaps to stay.

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# THE UNGLIMPSED REIGN OF

## KING LOG

BY GREGORY FEELEY

'It is the Country of King Log, the fabulist would say: thousands of logs lie booming on the hillside, while their subjects croak around them; if you shut your eyes it is hard to tell who reads, who writes, and who reviews... But highest of all, in crevices of the naked rock, cowering beneath the keen bills of the industrious storks, dwell our most conscious and, perhaps, most troubled readers; and for these -- cultivated or academic folk, intellectuals, "serious readers," the leaven of our queer half-risen loaf -- this is truly an age of criticism. It is about them and their Stork-Kings that I am going to talk for the rest of this article.'

-- Randall Jarrell, "The Age of Criticism"

'Bliss Wagoner had not been cut out to be a general. As a god he was even more inept.'

-- James Blish, They Shall Have Stars

James Blish's short story "Our Binary Brothers" appeared in the February 1969 issue of Galaxy magazine. The story was not announced as the beginning of a series (by the mid-1960's, a high proportion of that space in Galaxy not given over to serials was devoted to novels in progress published as sequences of novelettes), but any reader familiar with Blish's methods could have suspected it at the outset. Blish's contributions to Galaxy and its companion publication If in recent years had all been serials or adapted portions of novels, which for the past decade had almost exclusively occupied his attention. Most of the longer stories with which Blish had first made his reputations in the early 1950s - the Okie series, "Surface Tension," "Beanstalk" - had been fathered or reworked into novel form, a practice reflecting both Blish's characteristic reconsideration of published work and financial exigency; and what material Blish published in SF magazines in the 1960s tended to be novels or portions of projected novels. Though "Our Binary Brothers" was unusually brief for Blish, it was given the cover of the magazine, something of a distinction for a short story. Regular readers could turn to it confident that they held the beginning of a new series, though few could have guessed at the problematic status it would assume.

"Our Binary Brothers" begins with an improbable space traveller, John Hillary Dane, looking out of his ship at the world around him. (As none of these stories has been published in England or remained in print in America, discussion of them requires some degree of plot summary.) He has landed on Rana, a planet whose humanoid inhabitants take him for a divinity, and encourages this impression by making a daily ceremonious appearance. When he

steps out, however, a pair of armed Ranidae accost Dane and informs him, in their limpid language which he has already learned, that he must accompany them.

As Dane is led down the mountain toward Rana's capital city, the reader is given some background to the story. Dane is an immensely wealthy industrialist of the late 20th century, who had made his fortune in the decades following World War II helping develop the technology that allowed the proliferation of government security systems in the West. Some years earlier, an observatory built in Chile with his funding discovered that the Sun is a double star, its companion a dwarf one sixth of a light year distant "standing over the South Pole, invisible, even its proper motion disguised by the precessing of the equinoxes," which had never been mapped and whose existence is unsuspected. Disgusted with the modern world whose blights he had helped make possible, Dane undertakes to have a ship built which could reach the star, and leaves Earth alone in it. He has found this small but inhabitable world, whose very large but essentially human inhabitants live "in the state of development roughly corresponding to that which had been attained by Europe and the United States circa 1895," and demonstrate a human intelligence but noticeably less aggression and individualism. Fostering the notion of his divinity, Dane plans to lead them slowly through industrialization, which he intends the Ranidae to experience without the calamitous missteps Earth had taken.

In the capital, Dane is questioned by their monarch, the Panechruse, who has inferred that Dane has come from Sol and concludes, not unreasonably, that Dane is an exile or fugitive, whom the Ranidae need not treat with particular compunction. The Ranidae are a scientific people, and the Panechruse has technical ambitions, which the hill tribes who have deified Dane resist, being superstitious and traditionalist. The Panechruse wants Dane's help in accelerating Rana's technological progress, and presents Dane with the prospect of considerable rewards for his cooperation or coercion should he balk. Dane, who has no taste for what the Panechruse can offer him and is convinced that the Panechruse would "reorganize Rana into another technological hell on the Earth model," feigns compliance, but resolves upon returning to his ship to oppose him.

After considering exploding his ship above the Panechruse's palace, which notion he rejects as "Earth thinking at its typical worst, all empiricism and no mercy," Dane decides to lead the hill tribes, who already revere him, in revolt. He devises a plan for evangelical insurrection including miracles to create converts, weapons for the faithful, propaganda to foment dissension, and the humane gesture of giving both sides the technology to make anaesthetics. Reflecting that the tribesmen have exotic names he has difficulty pronouncing, Dane decides to take up the messiah's privilege of renaming his converts. He thinks suddenly to give them names his ship's computer can easily handle, then decides simply to assign them numbers. On this note the story ends, as "The airlock opened and the One Redeemer went forth to cypher his disciples, and bring them joy."

The story's irony is sufficiently pointed to leave no doubt that Dane is now set to replicate all the dehumanizing evils of Earth he has professed to repudiate. As such, the story seems to stand as a dark little fable, with no particular indication given, or need evident, that a sequel might follow. Several details of the world of Rana, such as the development of the "steam telephone," which Dane hears of but does not have the opportunity to see, are left tantalizingly unsketched; but Blish would frequently leave such suggestive details in his work, and it is possible that he wrote "Our Binary Brothers" with nothing more in mind than a mordant and pessimistic short story.

In the July issue of Galaxy, however, Blish published another cover story, a novelette entitled "The City That Was the World," that set to rest any questions regarding the status of the earlier, inconclusive piece. In a departure from the tentative tone of "Our Binary Brothers," the opening para-

graph of "The City That Was the World" puts forth its premise and setting with bold assurance:

"Nobody but John Hillary Dane would even have considered trying to build a major conservatory in the snow-rimmed crater of Coropuna, and nobody -- unless you counted a government as somebody -- but Dane could have actually done it."

Blish swiftly develops a more complex background and mood to the story, which is now told through the point of view of a new figure, the journalist Toby Walker. Walker, who has known Dane since college, has made a reputation by his ability to get infrequent answers from the world-famous industrialist, who rarely gives any account of his various large-scale projects. About an earlier undertaking, the outlandish construction of an office building a mile high in Denver, Dane will make no comment, but as the story begins he is standing with Toby at the construction site of his South American observatory (whose site, as well as cost and other details, Blish has now revised).

The austere snowscape of the mountaintop, where oxygen masks and goggles must be worn at all times, is vividly evoked by Blish, whose imagery and tableaux often center upon aspects of physical cold. A construction accident, in which a power cable ruptures (ominously foreshadowing Dane's later adversity with high technology), wrecks part of the project and nearly kills Dane, who is saved by Toby. When the injured journalist awakes on Dane's jet, en route back to America, Dane tells him that he owes Toby an answer to one of his questions, and will show Toby why he built his mile-high tower.

In a research laboratory atop the tower, Dane explains that he has been conducting experiments with Time, and has succeeded in probing the future through an indirect process that allows scientists to take primitive photographs. He shows the skeptical Toby some murky snapshots, and explains that by the middle of the next century the entire world will be covered to a depth of more than a mile by a vast megalopolis, compelling Dane's scientists to take their photographs a mile above the ground in order to reach sunlight. This future world is a sort of despotic technocracy, whose engineering class inhabits the uppermost levels of the world-city atop an evident wretched underclass. After demonstrating his scientists' ability to send small animals to the future for brief periods, Dane comes to the reason he has confided in Toby: the technocracy, he explains, is maintained by a massive computer, to which all administrative control has been gradually surrendered and which the society, which appears to have greatly degenerated, virtually worships. The computer, Dane intones, is undergoing progressive malfunction, and shall soon break down, with catastrophic results. Dane's scientists have diagnosed the malfunction and believe that they can repair it, but could never enlist the cooperation of the superstitious citizenry. What Dane wants of Toby - and why he told him at the outset that the answer to his questions would probably prove fatal to him - is for Toby to be sent into the future the effect the repairs of the computer.

The rest of the story deals with Toby's preparations for the mission and its aftermath. When he is catapulted into the future, the experience proves extraordinarily painful, and Toby has only begun his reconnaissance when he abruptly snaps back to the transmission room, seconds instead of hours later. Dane unhesitatingly sends Toby forward again, who finds himself snapped back after an even shorter period. Dane propels Toby twice more before Toby, almost incapacitated with pain, throws away the component necessary to repair the computer.

The last scene takes place in the hospital bed from which Toby has spent a month recovering. Dane and Toby are permanently estranged, and Toby charges that his mission would have crippled the computer rather than repair it, which Dane acknowledges. Dane's hatred for the "universal tenement" is such that he would not balk at causing millions of deaths by destroying it, much less

subject a friend to virtual electrocution four times. His scientists' discovery that organisms more complex than lab animals face a stiffer entropy gradient in being temporally conveyed and could never remain there for more than fleeting periods caused Dane to abandon his sabotage project, and he tells Toby that another is now engaging his attention. The story ends with Toby's parting shot, a reminder that Dane's observatory can only see into the past.

The story presents a number of striking features when considered in conjunction with "Our Binary Brothers," and the reader may wonder at the plan of any of any novel that was to incorporate them. John Hillary Dane's prospects at the end of "Our Binary Brothers" are sufficiently intriguing to fill out the body of a science fiction novel; there would be no evident reason for writing a prologue set back on Earth that not only involves a plot intrigue having little evident bearing upon Rana and Dane's fortunes there, but is told from the point of view of a secondary character, who could moreover be expected not to appear again. Blish occasionally wrote novels whose various sections were presented from different points of view (The Seedling Stars, A Torrent of Faces), but this multiplicity of viewpoint offered a reasoned structure that a narrative novel one chapter of which (even the first) violated unity of both setting and viewpoint would not possess. It does not seem credible that the rest of the novel would concern Dane's campaign on Rana, with "The City That Was the World" standing out like an excrescence.

Another arresting element in the latter story is its powerful foreshadowing of much later events, like soundings whose resonance suggests large spaces beyond. At the end of the first section of the story, Toby meditates upon Dane's sense of time's tyranny and evident need "to build physical bridges from one second to another." The final paragraph reads:

'Toby was not to learn the answer to that question for twenty years, and even then, not the whole answer - not even Dane ever learned that. Nevertheless, the burden of knowledge - and not only about Dane - that the observatory in Coropuna was to bring him was very nearly more than he could bear.'

Other elements introduced but not elaborated in "The City That Was the World" seem likely to have demanded fuller exploration in the eventual novel. Arriving at the top of the Dane Tower, Toby experiences the sensation that gravity was lighter there, which neither the tower's astronomically modest altitude nor Toby's convalescent state could account for. Dane explains that "in the course of our tampering with Time, we've created some kind of leak in which gravitational energy is flowing from here into the future." He declines to go into the theoretical implications of this, noting only that it is this which allows them to send objects into the future, rather than merely recover information from it. There is no reason, however, for the reader to assume that the unspecified implications were a matter that Blish merely neglected to consider. The ominous prospect of an evidently ongoing leakage of gravitational force as a result of disrupting the integrity of spacetime may well have been introduced in order to create cumulative adverse effects on Earth, which would perhaps play a role in whatever series of events leads Toby eventually to discover what became of Dane on Rana. (It played no part in Dane's decision to flee Earth, as we shall see below.)

Another notable feature is, of course, the rigid deterministic philosophy that must undergird any novel in which the future is so predestined that photographs and explorations can be undertaken. Blish had raised the issue of determinism in his fiction before, as in "Beep" (1954) and to a degree in his immediately preceding novel, Black Easter (1968). The discovery that the future is strictly fixed must deeply affect anyone capable of brooding on the matter, and Toby's musings that;

'For Dane, Time was the evil. Time present, time past, time to come: Time is, Time was, Time is Past! Nothing that he did gave reason to what he was but this; at his heart's core was the word, tolling like a bell. Time, Time, Time!

Any yet every man knows, as one unregretful poet said, that Time is the bridge that burns behind us. Why was Dane, who was so powerful, and by all ordinary standards so free, so desperate to revise the ages, and even the fleeing minutes?'

would have seemed less mysterious to him had he returned to them at the story's end.

Fatality and free will, then, occupy the center of this story as implicit themes, which the sequels Blish projected could only have brought to the fore. This subject's importance to Blish can hardly be overstated; it forms the single theme of an entire, if short, novel, The Quincunx of Time (1973). It is also worth noting that the quotation "Time is, Time was, Time is Past!" is from Doctor Mirabilis, where it comes to Roger Bacon as hallucinatory revelation. And the references to Dane's wish to "revise the ages, and even the fleeing minutes," strongly echoes the cry of Goethe's Faust to the passing moment, "Bleibe doch, du bist so schoen" (Stay a moment, thou art so fair). It is worth noting that this utterance allows Mephistopheles to appear for Faust's soul; and that Blish, who had recently completed Black Easter (his own title had been Faust Aleph-Null), showed great familiarity with the body of Faust literature (albeit Black Easter has a closer affinity with Marlowe's than Goethe's). Almost certainly Blish intended Toby's speculation to suggest Faust's final overweening desire, and consequent (stipulated) damnation.

The third and final portion to appear, "Dark Crossing," was published over a year later, in the December 1970 Galaxy. In terms of chronology it falls between the other two, bridging most of the period between Dane's abandonment of his time-viewing project and his arrival on Rana. As such, it advances the narrative by very little: a series of small scenes - Dane bidding farewell to his mistress; his first look at the new star - create a texture and conviction absent from the earlier, somewhat tentative installments. Blish manages the difficult feat of making Dane's private construction of a starship seem almost credible: his acquisition of the design specs of a recent manned Saturn probe for his own ship, which he has built piecemeal by different contractors and alters so as to reduce life-support capacity to serve himself alone and devote the savings to propellants; is rationalized by the phenomenon of "technological fallout," whereby aspects of space technology quickly appear in corporate industry. Dane assembles his vessel in orbit behind the Moon, distastefully turns his back on family and world, and takes off.

"Darkside Crossing" is the most polished and accomplished of the three stories, and has been anthologized as a separate work. Blish again slightly alters details of chronology and expenditure, and makes Dane more aged than he appeared in "Our Binary Brothers." More significantly, the text is charged with recurrent religious imagery, suggestive predominantly of primitive worship and - unsurprisingly in a novel set in a determined universe - of fortokening and prophesy. Contemplating the enormous complexity inherent in his plan to go the double star, Dane realizes that his unique circumstances make the voyage truly possible:

'Indeed, he was a little awed at the way all his interests, without any foreplanning on his part, seemed to fit into - and to have been pointing toward - the flight to the dwarf companion. Some familiarity with the sacred literatures of the world might have acquainted him with his predecessors and his prophets, but his early interest in poetry had not lasted long enough; he was

now only an engineer and entrepreneur. He was yet to realize that for a god nothing can go wrong in the youth of his power; even his errors are fruitful or can be corrected by deluge of rain, blood, locusts or money.'

One scene may contain the seed of eventual complications. Some months into his solitary voyage, Dane turns for a last look at the Sun and discovers that it can no longer be distinguished among the background of stars. Deeply shocked, he falls into an amnesiac fugue, unable to recall who or where he is. The ship's computer, which is a copy of the vast machine Dane sought to destroy, addresses him; and the mildly startled Dane begins asking it questions, from which he recovers, perhaps incompletely, his memory and reason. Finding himself unable to recollect the experience of joy or be aroused by the pornographic films he had stored, Dane concludes that he is "no longer quite human." Whether the computer also informed Dane that he despised and had sought to destroy it we do not learn, nor whether the computer possessed self-awareness to resent the fact. Blish may have intended to bring this element into later play.

The story proper ends with Dane coming into orbit around the tiny inhabitable world circling Beta Solis. Both his arrival's religious significance and Dane's ambiguous mental state figure prominently in the lyrical climax:

'Only mildly elated, the creature which had been John Hillary Dane in some past broke out of storage the dove-shaped child of the Tranchemer which would be his landing craft and began to prepare his epiphany. In his earphones, from the earth beneath, he could already hear voices speaking in tongues.'

"Darkside Crossing" was the last story in the series Blish was ever to publish. In 1972 Blish listed among his works in progress a novel entitled King Log, which readers of "Our Binary Brothers" could confidently guess was the novel these stories inaugurated. No further word about it, however, was published in Blish's lifetime, nor has any been since.

Research among Blish's letters and interviews with colleagues and editors bring some small facts about the intended novel to light. King Log was to have been a 180,000 word novel which Blish had contracted to write for Avon Books. Blish wrote the first three stories, but found himself unable to progress further - "It is not that I do not know what is going to happen next," he wrote in 1975, "but that for some reason I feel a distaste amounting almost to revulsion about going on with it. I do not understand why but since I have been feeling that way for nigh on to five years I have to face facts." Blish did not submit an outline of the novel to Avon, and may not have written one. He did not tell his wife how he planned to continue the novel, but mentioned to Paul Shackley that later in the book Dane's children were to follow him to Beta Solis. Blish referred to King Log as a "major interstellar novel" and once, very surprisingly, as a trilogy, and continued to list it as forthcoming for the rest of his life.

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What kind of novel did Blish intend in King Log? Such strictly biographical information as we have is unavailing, except to help dismiss various conjectures. The sketchy nature of "Our Binary Brothers," plus the fact that it does not demand or promise a sequel, suggests that, like many of Blish's stories that proved germs for eventual novels, it may not have been conceived as part of a longer work. Blish's contract with Avon for King Log, however, seems to preclude that: it was signed in 1967, nearly two years before the appearance of "Our Binary Brothers." The proposed length of the

novel - twice as long as any novel Blish completed - is also difficult to account for, save to note that in 1967 Blish had just published a long (by his standards) SF novel, A Torrent of Faces, and may have been feeling sanguine about working in greater lengths. Speculation that Blish and Avon may have been hoping to duplicate the success of the omnibus Cities in Flight volume - whose length King Log would match - is also refuted by that early contract date, as Cities in Flight was published in 1970.

What information we have seems to demonstrate that King Log was conceived from the start as a long novel, and that notwithstanding the backing and filling Blish engaged in after writing the first installment, along with the slight alterations in details and tone, Blish evidently had the general plan of his novel in mind from the start. Whatever there is to know about that plan must, it appears, be gleaned from the three extant stories.

The King Log of the title undoubtedly refers to Aesop's fable of the frogs who wanted a king. When they protested against the log Zeus sent them to venerate, the god in his anger sent them King Stork, who proceeded to eat them. (If Blish had seen any reference to the story - which is not a common source of allusion - since childhood, it was probably in Randall Jarrell's essay "The Age of Criticism," a well-known cultural polemic of the 1950s. Blish's own interest in criticism as topic was such that his unpublished collection of essays on modernist literature, The Agent as Patient: Seven Subjects with an Object, devoted as much attention to critical attitudes toward his putative subjects as to the works themselves.) The relevance of the title to "Our Binary Brothers" is obvious, and suggests further that the regime Dane stands ready to inaugurate bids certain to prove disastrous for all concerned.

How the three stories would have fit into the larger plan is uncertain: arranging them in chronological order (and removing various details in "Our Binary Brothers" the later stories render redundant) creates various problems. A gap in the narrative remains (Dane's landing on the planet and decision to allow the natives to take him for a god), and the cursory treatment given the action of "Our Binary Brothers," in contrast with the other installments' fuller detailing, would seem to call for an expansion of some of the existing material. This would have accorded with Blish's and Norman L. Knight's procedure in their collaboration A Torrent of Faces, two sections of which had first appeared in Galaxy in rougher and self-contained form.

The problem of narrative viewpoint was probably going to be settled by juxtaposing the section told from Toby Walker's vantage with another portion of the novel, correspondingly close to its conclusion, that would again shift the narrative locus away from Dane. Blish was especially concerned with such technical aspects of fiction, and took unusual care to inform his novels with a measure of proportion and equipoise. Blish's indication that Dane's family would follow him to the dwarf star would be a possible solution (though difficult to reconcile with what we are told of them in "Darkside Crossing").

A more plausible one is hinted at in the last sentence of that story: "A very long time later, Toby Walker, who had a fix on Macbeth, was to say that nothing in his life so ill became John Hillary Dane as the leaving of it." Taken in conjunction with the premonitory paragraph quoted earlier, this seems heavily to foreshadow Toby's eventual discovery of Dane's refuge and ultimate fate. Dane's inviolacy on Rana depends of course on the star remaining undiscovered, and Blish had shown himself too fully aware of the impossibility of any natural law or phenomenon being long kept secret - the issue is discussed in Chapter Black Easter and informs much of Doctor Mirabilis - for him to have believed that the existence of Beta Solis could remain an industrial secret of Dane's even for the balance of this lifetime. Twenty years would give ample time for its discovery and the mounting of another expedition, which doubtless would have arrived to sully Dane's garden only in time to see him complete its destruction himself.

For there is little doubt that Blish's emphasis on Dane's potency as a

god "in the youth of his power," for whom nothing can truly go wrong, presages the inevitable time after a full turn of the wheel when nothing finally shall go right, an explicit Gotterdamnung as foregone as the observable future. The incomplete but apparent curve of Dane's fortunes is both greater than Dane and wholly of his own making, a seeming paradox that Blish, a Spenglerian and pejorist whose abiding moral theme was the inescapable responsibility of the individual, found easy enough to reconcile, or at least dramatize. Theron Ware, agent of Armageddon, knows Hell as an "incombustible Alexandrine library of such evasions" as claiming History or predestination, and John Hillary Dane - latest in a line of late Blish protagonists whose intellectualism has estranged them from common humanitarianism, such as Simon de Kuyll in "A Style in Treason," the men in "We All Die Naked," and Ware himself - recognizes and distantly regrets his loveless nature. Dane's plans for the improvement of his worshipful tribesman may have been an effect, corrupted from the start by hubris and his Faustian confusion of will with conscience, to amend for the evil he has wrought. That he seeks to clean another nest than that he has fouled itself tells us how his efforts shall end.

King Log was a deeply personal project for Blish, and the themes and character traits evident in even the three fragments echo many of his abiding concerns. The issue of security systems' stultifying effects on human inquiry, though mentioned only in passing, is an important element of They Shall Have Stars, and was to have been the central theme of the historical novel Glass Night, which like Doctor Mirabilis was to examine a crucial period in the history of science, in this case that of the Borgia pontificate, which Blish credited with the pernicious development of security systems for technical information. The notion that the Sun may have an unseen companion is mentioned very briefly toward the end of Blish's 1960 novel ...And All the Stars A Stage; Blish characteristically would exploit a provocative idea he had earlier left unexplored, often years later. And the notion of the steam telephone, whose details we shall never know, recalls that marvel of communication in the only other alien society Blish created in detail: the Message Tree of the Lithians in A Case of Conscience.

The personal significance of much of King Log accounts in fact for its central failing, one that Blish would have had difficulty correcting. John Hillary Dane was a young man at the outbreak of World War II, which would put him in his eighties by the time of "Darkside Crossing" (the first decade of the new century). Toby Walker is his contemporary. His mistress Eleanor, forty, is a European refugee who "has at sixteen married an Alsatian named Max (who?), a stranded Wehrmacht lance-corporal about whom even Dane's intelligence department had been able to find nothing further." If one credits one's suspicion that what stranded her husband had been the end of World War II, Eleanor would be sixteen in 1946 only to be forty in 1970, the year of "Darkside Crossing"'s publication. Similarly, the countercultural grubbiness of Dane's children clearly derives from the 1960s, down to the sourly satirical details that Blish could not honestly have thought would have persisted into the twenty-first century. Toby Walker is no more than middle-aged in "The City That Was the World," set perhaps five years before the other stories, and Dane, despite the additional signs of age given him in "Darkside Crossing," is not yet an elderly man. The details of the characters' chronologies consistently point to a period thirty years before the putative time of the novel, and the slight revisions of the stories' dates from one to the other side of the millenium cannot reconcile that. Like the Captain's daughter in Strindberg's The Father, whom we are told is seventeen but who acts as though she were seven - the age of Strindberg's daughter when his own marriage broke up - the resonance of Dane's belonging to Blish's own generation rather than the following one possesses deep significance for the author but created a distortion in the work's fabric, and would have compromised the book's sense of authenticity were Blish not to jettison it in revision.

[[ [ Continued on page 38 ] ]]

# BOOK REVIEWS



## VECTOR'S CHOICE



"SO WHAT?"

MIKE ASHLEY



[VICTORIAN SCIENCE FICTION IN THE UK: The Discourse of Knowledge and Power By] [DARKO SUVIN. G.K. Hall and Co., Boston (70 Lincoln St) 1983. 461pp., \$58.]

Everyone knows all science fiction fans are mad, because everybody says so. We're mad just for reading the stuff. Yet within science fiction itself there are other types of madness. There's the madness of those who have an unalterable desire to organize conventions despite the chaos that inevitably ensues or the lack of gratitude for their efforts; there's the madness of those who insist on publishing fanzines at an exorbitant cost, for little if any financial return, and for the inevitable insults that certain other fans will always heap upon them. And then there's the madness of the bibliographer, that most peculiar of dedicatees who hunts out rare or forgotten magazines and fanzines in the hope of tracking down the fourth variant version of the final chapter of "The Time Machine" or check all the printings of H.P. Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" noting editorial revisions. Then they proceed to publish these findings in magazines equally obscure, or in massive volumes issued at exorbitant prices, and they're read by people who have little if any opportunity to read the stories in question anyway.

I'm one of those bibliolunatics. I can appreciate all of the work that Darko Suvin has put into this 461-page index and guide to British Victorian sf. I can picture the fifty-plus year old Yugoslavian Canadian Professor of English pouring his way through the British Library registers, through the Census Records, through a hundred and one reference sources. I've done it all myself. But in the end, I can't for the life of me say *why* he's done it, because I never know why I do it. It gives a certain amount of satisfaction which, at the end always seems to compensate for the hours and hours of effort and expense, but it always is and always must be an exercise which is total self-indulgence, because otherwise it would never be completed. And the final product can only really be read and appreciated by other bibliolunatics who nod sagely at the revelation that I. Mullett Ellis, the much overlooked author of that grand *fin de siecle* Griffithian novel *Zalma*, was subsequently editor of the poetry magazine *Thrush* and wrote other adventure novels. But to anyone else, and I suspect most of you reading this, there will only be a muted response of, 'so what?'

This book is for those who don't ask 'so what?'. It's for those who appreciate that sf has a history and a heritage. That if someone of the calibre and determination of Suvin had not completed this work now, in a few years it may never have been done, perhaps could not have been done. One can appreciate sf simply by reading a book, and at that one level it may suffice most readers. But one can appreciate sf so much more by knowing its development and evolution, how themes originated, and who originated them. Just as the laser of television did not appear overnight but was the end product of a long chain of technological discovery, so all of science fiction

is a product of its generation and of past generations. Are you one of those that when walking through a garden may admire the flowers and plants for their colours and beauty, but have no thought for where they originated, how they came to this country, who introduced them, who developed the various strains and hybrids. If you do not wonder about such things then, by the same token, you are bibliographically blind and this book will mean nothing to you. If you do stop and wonder then you may well have the makings of a biblioloon and I would urge you to seek and you shall find.

So, for the biblioons amongst us I need only briefly outline what this book contains. It is divided into two main parts, each of which have their subdivisions. The first part, "Identification of the Science Fiction Books and Writers" is the bio-bibliography. There is a listing of all sf books published in Britain between the years 1848 and 1900 in chronological order. The books may, of course, have originated in other countries in earlier years. The listing is annotated with a resume of the plot and a brief comment all of which is extremely useful. Hence we can distinguish between William Delisle Hay's The Doom of the Great City [1880] which Suvin calls "preachy, clerical antimaterialism" and the same author's Three Hundred Years Hence [1881] a "fine example of protofascist racism, exemplary and influential.."

The beauty is in the biographical section where Suvin has done considerable original research in tracing and identifying these authors. Here we learn that Delisle Hay was a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society who also wrote books about New Zealand, the South Seas and, of all things, fungi. Does it not make you wonder why a man interested in these things should turn out two future warning books? If it does, then you've got the bug.

An interesting sub-section concerns the Social Classification of SF Writers in the period in question. Suvin's findings would be more beneficial if extended to cover writers in subsequent generations. As it is they have a curiosity value but little else. From all his statistics, for example, Suvin suggests that most of the writers lived for longer than the average life expectancy with a high percentage being 'professional gentlemen'. Suvin does compare his findings with those of more general analyses of the period and concludes that "sf was at the time written by people of much the same social origin of the writers of 'high' literature".

There is much, much more of this book. The whole of the second part is a "Social Discourse of Victorian Science Fiction" which sounds rather formidable. To further intimate the general reader it's written in academese, which is unfortunate as it tends to echo much the same pomposity as Suvin granted Delisle Hay's work. Nevertheless Suvin is breaking much new ground here as he looks at exactly who was writing sf at the time, their social background and upbringing, and thus what it was in Victorian society that bred such people. It's a fascinating section with more to offer than might first be apparent, with much intriguing insight into the raison d'etre of sf writing and publishing.

Despite the academese, which frankly irritates me, this book is an astonishing achievement and Suvin should be applauded. All biblioons should urge their library to stock it. All rich biblioons should buy a copy!



THE GREATEST..?

JIM ENGLAND



[ASIMOV ON SCIENCE FICTION By ISAAC ASIMOV. Granada 1983. 334pp., £7.95]

Anyone expecting to find in this book the distilled essence of Asimov's wisdom on the subject of science fiction writing, in theory and in practice, (as I

half-expected to) is doomed to disappointment. Nevertheless, it is of interest as it is the only book he has ever written on the subject. As he explains in the brief introduction: "'Hey', I said to myself, 'why don't I put together a group of essays that would make up a book I could call Asimov on Science Fiction?'" And so he did.

The result is no less than 55 essays under 8 headings that can be summed up as General/Writing/Predictions/History/Writers/Fans/Reviews/Himself. Unfortunately, they are nearly all reprints from various books and magazines, of which "Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine" predominates, and in which they appeared as editorials between 1977 and 1980. Asimov-bashing seems fashionable nowadays in British reviewing circles and I hate to join in it but must say that, although he assures us he has tried "to eliminate unwanted repetition" in these essays, he has certainly not succeeded, and when the reader finds himself re-reading the same old facts, anecdotes, bits of SF history, etc, for the second, third, fourth and even fifth time, it is bound to tire. Another fault is Asimov's tendency not only to explain the meanings of words (as if to a child) at the start of his essays, but to delve into their derivations. "Words and etymology are among my favourite passions" is his excuse for this. Having done this, he will often proceed to waste the reader's time by using the words to make very trite, non-controversial statements, making it hard to believe his chest-beating claim that he is "no fool". Perhaps he regards it as foolish to offend anyone. Perhaps his aim is, chiefly, to be as prolific as possible, and will end up publishing his old shopping lists.

Asimov is the Mohammed Ali of SF. He is 'the greatest'. Or, to be more precise, on page 227, he refers to the "Asimov-Clarke Treaty of Park Avenue", according to which he "must insist at all times that Arthur Clarke is the best science fiction writer in the world (accepting second place for himself) while Arthur must equally insist that Isaac Asimov is..." He hints that this ranking should be in the reverse order. But, of course, all this is a manifestation of his cultivated, bombastic persona, and the man endears himself to us, at times, by going to the other extreme of refreshing, frank modesty. For instance: "I have no judgement in stories. I have to work by some sort of primitive instinct." (page 41) "Nowadays, the standards are enormously higher, the difficulties of breaking in massively greater. I couldn't possibly sell the equivalent of my early stories in today's market." (page 116) We learn also that John W. Campbell, Jr suggested the Three Laws of Robotics to him, gave him the plots of countless stories and would sometimes demand that these stories be re-written three or four times before he was satisfied. Even now, he still gets rejection slips.

It comes as rather a surprise, after we have read of Asimov's indebtedness to SF magazine editors, to read in a later section of the book that he doesn't like critics. All writers "tend to join forces against the critic", he writes, and quotes Byron, Coleridge and Laurence Sterne, with relish, as having said "nasty things" about them. But what were his helpful SF magazine editors, if not his critics?

It comes as a further surprise when he takes on the mantle of critic himself and proceeds to criticize Star Wars ("utterly brainless"), George Orwell's Animal Farm ("a dreadfully dull book - didactic, repetitious, and all but motionless"), 1984 ("very bad science fiction"), Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (an anti-technology tale, full of symbolism, by a man who inherited "the traditions of a ruling class" and was thus "too aware of the past pleasantness of life", writes Asimov, evidently unaware of Tolkien's real background and avowed hatred of allegorical tales) and Ursula K. LeGuin's The Lathe of Heaven ("There are holes in the logic large enough to hold Portland, Oregon.")

These latter essays are, however, among the most interesting (along with essay 15, designed to help aspiring writers) because of the insight they give into Asimov's limitations, biases and internal contradictions.

The book is indispensable to any Asimov fan who has set himself the

unenviable task of collecting every last word the great man has ever written.



## A DIABOLICAL PLOT!

DAVID LANGFORD



[MORETA: DRAGONLADY OF PERN By ANNE MCCAFFREY. Severn House 1984, 410pp.,] £8.95 - Corgi 1984, 410pp., £3.95]

I rather liked Dragonflight. Creakily melodramatic though it might be, the swashes were neatly buckled and its guaranteed boilerplate tear-jerker situations (Mills & Boon, prop.) performed exactly to specification - the whole thing a guilty pleasure to be enjoyed, like a surfeit of marshmallows, far from austere litcrit eyes. But the years went by, Anne McCaffrey became more and more besotted with her created world, like Dorothy Sayers with Lord Peter Wimsey, and the books and their titles grew inexorably longer. Six hundred thousand words later (it says in the foreword), we have Moreta: Dragonlady of Pern, which I tried to like but failed.

One problem is that Pern and its dragons have been worn pretty smooth. We know all about the dragonweyrs from which flying beasties rise to polish off unpleasant falling spores (Thread) with their fiery halitosis. We know that dragonriders and civilians will each be unchangingly competent, staunch, cowardly, noble, wayward, wrongheaded or wry, according to the Jonsonian humour assigned them by the author. We know the gimmicks of human/dragon telepathy, dragon teleportation, time-travel via dragon, excessive dragon cuteness, and the rest. We know with a deadly certainty that there's no escape from McCaffrey's recurrent ooh-aah scene in which boy or girl meets dragon via "Impression", combining the emotions of first sex, first communion and the dread initiation rite of the Secret Fourth Form Gang all in one hygienic package.

In a brave attempt at freshness, Moreta is set 900 years prior to Dragonflight, filling us with excitement at the truly remarkable lack of change in Pern society over this period. The main difference appears to be that in olden days people have even sillier names, leading to numerous paragraphs like this:

"'Sharth, Melath, Odiath," B'lerion closed a finger into his palm with each name. "Nabeth, as you suspected. Ponteth and Bidorth. That makes seven, and if my memory serves me, N'mool, Bidorth's rider, comes from Telgar Upper Plains. Of course I'grel's not the only rider who dissatisfied with M'tani's leadership. I told you, didn't I, Falga, that once those Telgar riders had had a taste of real leadership, there'd be trouble." He smiled winningly at Moreta. "I actually defer to Sh'gall's abilities..."

The point is not so much the ugliness of these bloody apostrophes spraying saliva all over the page, or the difficulty of having heroine Moreta sound heroic when stuck with lines like "Orlith says we've done a good job, A'dan.. You were marvellous assistants, M'Barak, D'Iltan, B'greal!" What's wrong is that, loving her world too much and convinced that clotted detail is what the fans want, McCaffrey is wasting time giving names and perfunctory (if at all) characterization to a horde of walk-ons and spear-carriers who in the leaner prose of Dragonflight would rightly have been "a boy", "a drudge", "a dragonrider" or whatever. The "Dragondex" (yuck) at the end of this book lists 145 characters' names. Too many.

Don't read further if you'd rather not know the plot. The foreordained



conclusion is that Moreta snuffs it on her famous Ride as chronicled in story and song as early as 1968. Following contact with Pern's forgotten South Continent, an influenza pandemic rages, leaving one to wonder why another doesn't rage 900 years later when similar contact is made in Dragonflight. About halfway through the book, a plague-surviving Masterhealer dimly remembers that back at Healer school he was taught the now forgotten secrets of vaccination; duly he gives blood (drawn into a carefully sterilized syringe through an interestingly unsterilized hollow thorn), has it centrifuged ("Desdra...began to swing the jar around her head") and uses the resulting serum to vaccinate all and sundry. I was looking forward to the scene in which the Healers then find a mouldering Encyclopaedia Britannica amid their archives and read the article on hepatitis: "transmitted usually by injection, as in blood transfusions... a common hazard." No such luck.

OK. Everyone is vaccinated. But the dreaded 'flu will strike again unless everyone is re-vaccinated in short order. And there's a hollow thorn shortage! Luckily dragons can time-travel, so Moreta and entourage instantly nip forward to the next hollow-thorn harvest. This apparently pointless plot turn serves two purposes. Firstly, it restores the beloved dragons to their wonted stage-centre position, which was in danger of being usurped by Pernian paramedics. (Nobody even considers trying to make hypodermic needles using the extensive metalworking and glassblowing facilities.) Secondly, it poses the fascinating question of how this extremely useful time-travel ability, which in these olden days is reasonably widely known and which young dragonriders are apt to stumble upon accidentally, should be completely forgotten over the next few centuries ready for dramatic rediscovery in Dragonflight. No credible answer emerges.

(By the way, McCaffrey cocks up another back-reference to Dragonflight. In that book, you'll remember, there was some stuff about olden-day lady dragonriders with flamethrowers, and 900 years after Moreta it's suggested for the first time that "agenothree" spray is better than flame. In Moreta the flamethrowers' fuel tanks are now said to be filled with agenothree, ie. HNO<sub>3</sub>, ie. nitric acid. Not the most likely of flammable fuels.)

Moreta now has to be set up for her Ride. For reasons which are not very clear, the great re-vaccination has to happen to everybody on the same day, necessitating huge logistical efforts by vaccine-carrying dragonriders. For reasons which are wholly opaque, one boss dragonrider refuses to do his bit; and for reasons of plot, only heroic Moreta and a chum can perform that last desperate vaccine run, in which she over-fatigues herself and --- well, yes, quite. I felt sorry for poor Moreta, not because of her heroic self-sacrifice (the silly woman could have paused at any time for ten hours' sleep and time-jumped back to carry on from the same instant) but because of the auctorial hand shoving her so crudely to her doom. It's something of an achievement, when you think about it, to shuffle a whole continent-full of teleporting, time-travelling dragonfolk out of the way, leaving our doomed heroine as The Only Possible Person to complete a task requiring approximately the same skills as a milk round.

(Another glitch. Great play is made in Dragonflight with the tragic old

'Ballard of Moreta's Ride', whose throbbingly significant chorus is all about freezing air and black dust: Thread crumbles to black dust when it's cold enough. But in Moreta, not only is there no reference whatever to black dust, but the celebrated Ride takes place in a mild Spring - certainly after sowing time. "Never mind the facts," I imagine the Masterharper saying, "the public loves some catchy stuff about black dust in it choruses.")

Luckily Moreta's tragedy is not allowed to leave everyone depressed. Within five pages, the entire supporting cast is saying spontaneous things like "I must think of the beginnings of this day. Not of the endings!" and cooing over the sugary delight of that unescapable Hatching and Impression. I know how Tonstant Weader would have reacted, if Tonstant Weader hadn't already frowed up at the sickening lurches and jerks of the plot.



## A CLAIM TOO LARGE

PAUL KINCAID



[BEST SCIENCE FICTION OF THE YEAR 12 Edited By TERRY CARR. Gollancz 1983,]  
[368pp., £9.95. ISBN 0-575-03341-X]

Does this volume contain the best short science fiction published in 1982? No. For a start its breadth is too narrow. There is nothing here by writers whose native language is other than English. Indeed - considering that 1982 saw the emergence of Interzone and the publication, among other things, of Keith Roberts' award-winning 'Kitemaster' - the volume contains nothing that did not appear first in America. So, the most that can be claimed is that this represents the best American sf of 1982.

But even that is too big a claim. There is at least one story in this collection that does not, by any stretch of the imagination, deserve a place in any anthology titled Best. 'Swarm' by Bruce Sterling is a dreadful little piece. It is, for a start, appallingly written. He has fallen victim to the beginning writer's syndrome of appending an adjective to each noun, an adverb to every other verb. It is a tiresome practice that all writers of any worth grow out of quickly. The habit is supposed to give colour to the descriptions and so lift the narrative - by choosing the most obvious and unimaginative adjectives, this is something that Sterling singularly fails to do.

A more damning criticism of this sorry effort, however, is that the whole thing rests on a morality that is, at best, dubious. The story concerns an attempt to enslave a supposedly unintelligent race. To give him his due, Sterling has the wit to realise that there are moral questions to be answered here. He then tries to fob us off with the most transparently false and unconsidered gobbledegook imaginable. All this allows the 'hero' to continue with this unpleasant enterprise until he discovers that the race not only has intelligence, but has also turned the tables upon him. It is a proficient piece of plotting leading to a confrontation that should allow Sterling either to confront the moral question head on, or at least to provide an ironic comment upon it. Sterling does neither, leaving you with the unpleasant impression that slavery is okay so long as one is superior.

All of which is to give the story more space than it deserves. Far from a best of the year collection, I would only include it on a list of stories I least want to re-read.

What we have then, at best, is a collection of Terry Carr's favourite American stories of 1982. Nevertheless, with the notable exception of Mr Sterling, Carr displays pretty good taste; and the anthology does provide a fascinating, if partial, view of the current state of science fiction. Of the thirteen writers represented, six are established names (Silverberg, Russ,

Pohl, LeGuin, Disch and Benford), six are relative newcomers (Sterling, Gibson, Johnson, Willis, Kress and McAllister). The thirteenth, O. Niemand, is a pseudonym for someone writing in the style of O. Henry, and since I know nothing of Henry's style, and since I think that this story on its own is slight if interesting, I shall make no further comment on it.

The new writers most obviously live up to the tradition that sf is the literature of ideas - taking the ideas as paramount in that definition. Sterling I've already dealt with. Bill Johnson also heads off into space with a John Varley type of story about life on the edge of a black hole. It is rudimentary, thrill-a-minute stuff that would not have been out of place in the old Astounding. Better written and more enjoyable, William Gibson's 'Burning Chrome' also has something of a 50's feel about it, though it deals with the contemporary subject of computer crime.

The problem, as I see it, with these three stories is that the authors are intent on loading as much detail as possible into the story. The alienness of space or the future is what they are concerned to present, so that what should be the background is forced to the front, and what should be the foreground finds itself overshadowed. It is all too easy a fault for science fiction to develop.

Interestingly, of the established writers, Gregory Benford is the only one to fall into this trap. He is also the only one of the established writers to go into space, a tale of a generation space ship whose inhabitants have lost the power to stop it, and which is now accelerating at a steady pace so that galaxies now pass as stars used to do. It is a very well told story, but it belongs 30 years ago. If Benford and Johnson truly represent the best of contemporary sf, then sf has no future, only a past.

Fortunately there is promise for the future in the shape of Connie Willis, Nancy Kress and Bruce McAllister. McAllister's 'When the Fathers Go' has an air of the 50's about its story of a man who returns changed from his years in space, and announces that he fathered a child upon an alien. But he lifts it above this unpromising outline by using it to present an examination of untruth - everything, to some extent, is a lie; totally opposite versions of the same story are told. The result is absolutely intriguing.

Truth and untruth also lie at the heart of Nancy Kress's 'With the Original Cast', in which a device allowing us to remember former lives is used to present Shaw's Saint Joan with the original Joan of Arc. There are some awkwardnesses in the story, and one or two issues are either ducked or dealt with in too slick, too clichéd a manner. If, for instance, the director of the play had, in a former life, been George Bernard Shaw, it might have made the basic conflict between art and truth more dramatic. Nevertheless, this is basically a very skilled and very telling piece of fiction.

However, on this showing the best of the newer writers is Connie Willis. Her novelette, 'Firewatch', tells a basically simple story of a history student who travels back in time to witness the Blitz. Within this framework her characterization is very perceptive, especially the build up of distrust and suspicion as the time traveller and Langby each believe the other is intent upon destroying St Paul's. To add an extra flavour, there is also an understated atmosphere of regret for events still in our future but finding an echo in the time traveller's adventures in the Blitz. Willis occasionally allows an American idiom to slip through, but otherwise this is a story I could hardly fault.

It is interesting that what separates Silverberg, Russ, Pohl, LeGuin and Disch from all the others in this book, except for Willis and Kress, is their sparing use of ideas. None of them overload their stories with exotic inventions, alien landscapes or vastly different societies. Instead they all take one simple change, and explore it in believable, accessible, human terms. In these five stories - and also in the Willis and Kress - it is very much the characters to the fore. They still maintain the thesis of science fiction as the literature of ideas, but here the emphasis is upon the literature.

Pohl's contribution is the slightest of the group, a simple but very amusing satire in which a robot farm worker is made redundant and re-programmed to become a mugger.

LeGuin's story, too, is rather slight - at least at first sight. It belongs somewhat in the tradition of her award-winners 'The Ones who walk away from Omelas' and 'The day before the Revolution', in which the strength lies not in the plot but in the intent of the story. I would even question whether it deserves the title science fiction. It is, I suppose, a statement about the nature of the feminine, as opposed (by implication) to the masculine - which is not to suggest that this is any aggressive feminist tract, far from it. An expedition of South American women reaches the South Pole before Amundsen, but because they leave no signs and do not publicise the feat it remains unknown to history. Very simple, but a lot more is said than is actually stated.

'Understanding Human Behaviour' by Thomas M. Disch is, as might be predicted, a touching story about a person's place within society. The sf element - the erasing of memory - is simply a device allowing Disch to present an innocent and watch, with a typically tolerant and amused eye, his social growth.

Incidentally, it is interesting that two of the most original and most interesting of the stories in this collection concern memory - either its erasure as in the Disch, or its amplification as in the Kress.

Robert Silverberg, meanwhile, has returned to the sort of form he hit so regularly during the late 60's and early 70's, and which I feared he had lost for good when he embarked upon such monstrosities as Lord Valentine's Castle. 'The Pope of the Chimps' concerns a project that teaches chimps to communicate by sign language, in which the chimps suddenly develop religious sense. The story is witty but also serious, intelligent, well written and very worth reading.

Of the 13 stories, therefore, that comprise Best Science Fiction of the Year 12, those by Silverberg, Pohl, LeGuin, Disch, Willis, Kress and McAllister are good pieces that make the collection worthwhile. The stories by Gibson, Johnson, Benford and O.Niemand are disappointing but acceptable make-weights. Only the Sterling is an out and out dud.

But there remains one story that would make this collection worth the price even if nothing else was included: 'Souls' by Joanna Russ. To be honest I've never paid a great deal of attention to Joanna Russ. Her novel And Chaos Died was confused and confusing, the other stories and novels by her that I've read have varied between the so-so and the quite good. Until now I've not read anything by her that was particularly outstanding or memorable. 'Souls' changes that, it is a masterpiece. A brilliant example of evocative, atmospheric writing that caught me up in its web from the word go.

In tone and feel it reminded me a little of Richard Cowper's 'The Custodians' or John Fuller's Flying to Nowhere. Told through the innocent, not always comprehending eyes of a young boy, it is set in a remote abbey during the dark ages. Vikings appear, the abbess attempts to persuade them not to harm the villagers, but they rampage anyway. The abbess, however, has a startling and powerful secret. Before this secret is revealed, in a climax that does not, perhaps, gel quite as well as it might with what went before, Russ shows us perceptions of Humanity, power and mankind's role in the nature of things that clash head on. It is a beautifully written story, always interesting, always enjoyable, always believable, always intelligent, and always powerful. And suddenly Joanna Russ has won herself an ardent new fan.

Traditionally Terry Carr's annual anthology has managed to feature many of the winners and runners up in Hugo and Nebula Awards. Indeed, there have been times when this has been used as a measure of the excellence of the series. Well the awards for 1982 were so outstanding that at the moment of writing I cannot remember a single one of them, so I cannot say how well the anthology stands up by that criterion. I do have an uneasy feeling that

Benford, Johnson and, God-forbid, Sterling are far more likely to have picked up the honours than the more deserving Willis, Disch and Russ. But that is irrelevant, as the awards are irrelevant. For my money this series is a far better display of excellence within the genre - for all my reservations at the start of this review - and it does at least provide a panorama of the current scene. [[[ Editorial Note: To save you hunting the Hugo/Nebula Award results the correlation went as follows. Hugo award: Only 'Souls' by Joanna Russ, 'Swarm' by Bruce Sterling and 'Fire Watch' by Connie Willis were included by Terry Carr and nominated. 'Souls' won the Best Novella category, 'Fire Watch' the best Novelette. Nebula Award: Here, the same nominations as the Hugo but also 'The Pope of the Chimps' by Silverberg was included by Terry Carr and nominated. 'Fire Watch' by Connie Willis won the best Novelette category. ]]]

## WHAT OF THE ERUDITION?

PAUL BRAZIER

[THE ENTROPY EXHIBITION: MICHAEL MOORCOCK AND THE BRITISH 'NEW WAVE' IN] [SCIENCE FICTION By COLIN GREENLAND. Routledge and Kegan Paul 1983,] [XII+244pp.,£11.95. ISBN 0-7100-9310-1]

This book is based on the thesis for which Colin Greenland received his doctorate from Oxford in 1980. The brief for a PhD is that the thesis should represent a contribution to human knowledge, but far too many doctorates are awarded for me to believe that this brief is always fulfilled. As most theses are filed away unseen by humans, it is hard to tell. However, the best are published in appropriate academic journals and sometimes are even read because of this. Now the very few which represent what Joe Public might consider a contribution to human knowledge are published as books, and actually become available to humanity in general and not only to that inferior cadre known as academe. Of course, most are written in that dry and dusty prose which reveals their author's presupposition of their destination in oblivion. Occasionally a book slips through which is not only erudite but entertaining: The Entropy Exhibition is one such. Without doubt it is one of the easiest-to-read books of criticism I have ever encountered. But apart from the accessibility of the style, what of the erudition?

I approach a book of criticism with one of two attitudes: either I am familiar with the subject matter already and am thus intent on comparing my own judgement with the author's; or I seek enlightenment in a previous unknown area. In this second case, if the book is successful I will be stimulated to investigate some texts, then re-explore the criticism in the light of this new reading. I was moderately aware that the history of sf was overwhelmingly American, but that there had been a British 'New Wave' in the 1960s. However, that was the total of my knowledge, so I had to approach this book in the second mode described above.

The book falls into three major parts: the first deals with themes; the second with major authors of the period; and the third with style. On opening the book and reading the contents page, my heart sank. The three major authors dealt with are Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock. (Aldiss I have always found impenetrable, Ballard too depressing, and Moorcock so slight as to be silly.) So it was with trepidation that I embarked on reading for this review.

Thus my first reading of this book surprised me: I liked it! In the acknowledgements Colin Greenland thanks Tom Shippey for his help in 'modulating the rhetoric of enthusiasm to the more sober tones of critical analysis.' Well, perhaps the rhetoric is modulated: the enthusiasm shines through withal. From punning chapter titles through perceptive comment to

copious quotation this book reads like a labour of love, and certainly prompted this reader to re-read some other books long put aside.

Interestingly, the first chapter looks at the place of SF in the 1960s-as-a-social-phenomenon. This establishes firmly that the 'New Wave' was a product of social pressure as well as a backlash against American-pulp-attitudes domination of the genre. I found this particularly pertinent, for there is rarely enough artistic energy in a revolution per se to carry forward the kind of literary expansion which the 'New Wave' represents. There have to be other motive forces. The 1960s were a time of turbulence in all spheres of human activity, so when sf expanded into a more self-conscious literariness, when it began to take itself seriously, it was manifesting the profound re-evaluation which the whole of western youth was experiencing. This is termed 'revolution in the head' here, and Colin Greenland relates this in part to the use of new 'mind-expanding' drugs. My own experience of the 1960s was separately evoked recently by the discovery of several copies of *IT* and *OZ* in my archives: I was pleased to find that Colin evokes the same sense of the decade, and it is hard to fault his argument. Indeed, what he says is something I have often thought but never grasped firmly enough to articulate.

Now the expansion of SF into the literary and socially conscious mode inevitably brought it to the attention of literary critics: if you constantly take yourself seriously, pretty soon other people will too. So I was puzzled by the epigraph to the book, a quote from J.G. Ballard:

"The one hazard facing science fiction, the Trojan Horse being trundled towards its expanding ghetto...is that faceless creature, literary criticism."

Certainly this is a salutary warning to readers and writers alike that too-close inspection may destroy that joy - the vaunted 'sense-of-wonder' - they have in the genre. But the joy is essentially escapist: or at least it was, until we began to take SF seriously. One could hardly term serious socially conscious literature 'escapist': its very function is to confront the problems of reality.

So perhaps the quotation is used as epigraph for ironic effect. The inexactness of the metaphor and the wooliness of the thought behind it - A Trojan Horse is used to penetrate defences by deceit in order to destroy what is defended, where literary criticism is only intended to enhance appreciation; and whoever heard of using a Trojan Horse to invade a ghetto - for me serves only to counterpoint the lucid expression of thought and the acute observation in the rest of the book.

Chapter Two gives a potted history of New Worlds, and the next three chapters investigate the themes of the fiction it published, comparing and contrasting specific texts with examples from American magazines of the same or slightly earlier period. Thus, at the end of five chapters, the reader is left with an uncluttered picture of where Moorcock and New Worlds stand in relation to both traditional American pulp-orientated sf and their contemporaneous society.

The next three chapters investigate how these influences are manifested in the appropriate works of the three major authors. I have already noted my antipathy to these writers, and having finished this book I felt strongly motivated to re-read some Aldiss and Ballard. To make this review more compelling it would be nice to report my total conversion. Regrettably honesty takes precedence over rhetoric, and I have to admit that I found both authors just as unpalatable as before. But with the help of The Entropy Exhibition I think I am now a lot closer to understanding why I don't like them (and not all the faults lie with the authors!)

The final third of the book consists of two chapters on style and one overall summing up and justification of the title. The chapter on stylistic practice is straight practical criticism within the parameters set up in the



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rest of the book, showing interesting stylistic variations and how they work. It leads conveniently into the chapter on Stylistic theory which attempts to investigate why they are there. I have no dispute with Colin Greenland's treatment of the discussion on style, although the general reader may falter here as this chapter assumes a greater knowledge of the current theory and practise of literary criticism than the rest of the book. However, it seems;



'New World authors resolutely maintained the dissociation of style from content, not only when writing casually, like Moorcock with his 'ideas' or 'notions' and the 'trappings' in which to 'dramatise them', but also in the course of intense disquisitions.' (pp182)

It is in the course of one of these intense disquisitions that Colin Greenland finds the claim that this hoary dichotomy is resurrected because it 'reflects some actual design on the intention of the authors.'

The idea that form can be separated from content is a fallacy, and I was surprised that Colin Greenland didn't come out and say so. Instead he quotes other refutations and in so doing introduces other information. At this point I had intended to launch into a detailed refutation of some points, but on re-reading the chapter a second time I found it irrelevant. What Colin Greenland is doing is bringing together the threads of his argument throughout the book in order to sum up. But the most important, nothing should be taken as read, made me think about everything that was said. So there is something to be learned from this book: it is not merely a case

of reading it, slotting the author's opinions into agree/disagree modes in one's memory, and forgetting it. It actually makes you think for yourself. The British 'New Wave' was not inconsiderable: but until now it had gone largely unsung critically. I am assured that this book has received some thirty reviews so far. Merely the fact that so many people think it necessary to record their comments must indicate that there are a lot of opinions out there waiting to be tapped and looking for a focal point. In his review for Foundation Patrick Parrinder takes Colin Greenland to task for failing to 'engage with the enemy'. The enemy is Kingsley Amis and his dismissive remarks about the New Wave in his recent anthology The Golden Age of Science Fiction. But Amis's remarks are only personal statement, and hardly a basis for comprehensive debate. To rewrite the whole book in order to include a refutation of this comparatively minor comment would destroy its carefully maintained neutral/historical tone and balance.

If this book were more reasonably priced, I would recommend anyone interested to buy it: as it is, order it from your local library and make sure your friends read it. I have the feeling that if it ever achieves a reasonably priced paperback edition, it will become bedrock reading for a burgeoning debate which, with this book, will be long-lived and fascinating.

# Dangerous Divisions

JEREMY CRAMPTON,  
10 Vicarage Road,  
Moole,  
Chester  
CH2 3HZ

I was mightily glad that you produced an issue with an in-depth analysis of Gene Wolfe. Have you noticed that despite the praise the only words about Gene Wolfe are to be found in book reviews, usually quite short? Considering the length of some of his work this seems strange, and it is about time that widely available criticism of Wolfe's work was published, and, on the whole you produced a fine job of it between you all.

There are one or two points I would like to pick up though. Firstly the interview. For various reasons circumstances combine to give the impression that Wolfe's Castle of the Otter is not a 'real' book. Wolfe says he wrote it as a joke when Charlie Brown of Locus misheard him say Citadel of the Autarch. This may well be so, but there are in fact several very interesting insights into "The Book of the New Sun" in it; things that are also mentioned in the (equally valuable) interview you published. Although Castle of the Otter is unavailable in this country, there are at least two copies over here (according to John Clute). One is John Clute's own, which is deposited in the SF Foundation's library at NELP. I recently had the opportunity to read this copy, sometime last year (although you cannot remove it from the actual library). I do not think that enough emphasis was placed on the potential value of this book in the interview, probably because Joseph and Judith had not read the book. One of the things that Wolfe says in Castle of the Otter for example is that the names he gives to people and places mean just what they appear to say. Severian is an obvious example (although I would agree with Mike Dickinson that there are possible similarities to Venus in Furs as well. On the other hand I don't like claiming too many similarities, they may be fictions of an over-active imagination).

The other thing about the interview is that I do wish people wouldn't ask stock questions like 'When did you start writing?'. It is only right and proper that the interview should have been concerned with Wolfe not the "Book of the New Sun", but for heaven's sake there were thousands of more interesting questions to've asked him! Anyway, as they say, this was all covered in the previous Vector interview in no. 65 which is just as interesting as the previous one. [[[ I would agree that there are a batch of stock questions which do keep on appearing, but I would suggest that they elicit answers which always differ. And in some ways it is the way in which they are answered, rather than what is actually said, that is interesting. My favourite is "How important is the role of 'idea' in science fiction?" ]]]

I don't know just what you did, but you seem to have made my speech a great deal funnier than it actually was. I thank you, but I rather wish you had done it before Fantasycon instead of after. Please be a little quicker

GENE WOLFE,  
Barrington,  
Illinois,  
USA

next time.

May I step timidly between you and Dorothy Davies, although I can speak only from an American perspective? Ms. Davies said, "If you are any good, you will get published." That is quite true, but only if "you" are persistent; many fine books have been rejected a dozen times or more. If editors were blessed with perfect taste and flawless judgement, they would not be editors.

Furthermore, although an editor can buy a fair book without danger, he runs a considerable risk if he buys a good one. The businessmen who run publishing houses have a low opinion of SF readers, for the most part. An editor who gets a reputation for buying good material is liable to be replaced by one who will buy the adolescent power fantasies that his management believes consumers want. This is true even when the good books make money, because no actual book line can make as much money as management believes could be made by tapping the high-school market in the way it envisions. Someday publishing management will realize that most of those boys do not read, because they cannot read well enough to enjoy a book; but that day may be a century off.

NIGEL E RICHARDSON,  
9 Windsor Green,  
East Garforth,  
Leeds

Gregory Benford's article would be very well if I could work out exactly what it was about. Was it a send-up of academic SF articles? Do scientists really read hard SF? Do they really consider it

"an expression of the bittersweet truths emerging in our century, an echo of man's progressive displacement from a God-given centre of creation"? If so then they're either heading for Pseuds' Corner or early retirement as most SF, hard or soft, lags at least 10 years behind what the scientists themselves are doing. Compare any recent book by Paul Davies with a copy of Analog and you'll see that hard SF is a pale, pathetic thing compared with the excitement of, say, quantum physics. What I feel Gregory Benford has overlooked is that "hard sf" is usually used as a derogatory rather than a generic term, indicating a concern not with the wonders of the universe but with the machineries that will enslave it. For me, one photograph of Saturn from a space probe says more about the immense cold beauty of the universe and our attempts at comprehending it than any amount of Asimov, Anderson, Clarke or Pournelle...

Paul Kincaid's article provided a neat contrast; were they commissioned as companion pieces, scientist as reader against scientist as hero? [[[ Not that it really matters, but no they were not. ]]] Paul is correct in saying that there are few realistic scientists in fiction, but there are just as few realistic lawyers, clerks, dentists, plumbers or whatever other profession or occupation you care to mention. Generally the only profession that writers are good at describing is writing, which is why there are so many novels about novelists. The best way to find out what it is like to be a scientist is, naturally, through the writings of scientists rather than science fiction. Disturbing the Universe by Freeman Dyson, Most Secret War by R.V. Jones, and J.J. O'Neill's biography of Nikola Tesla have all impressed me far more than any fictional account. The problem with books like Benford's Limescape and C.P. Snow's novels is that they seem to say that novels about "real" scientists have to be determinedly realistic and so tend to be rather dull. John Banville's novels avoid this, going for feeling rather than the grim, gritty exacting detail.

I'm not sure from Sue Thomason's letter exactly what she wants from fantasy. As far as I'm concerned fantasy is a means rather than an end. Literary fantasy connects to the real world; it is ultimately concerned, no matter how obliquely, with life. Romantic fantasy might be more fun to read (for some), but it is a journey to a candyfloss world from where you'll always return emptyhanded and empty headed. As for dismissing Lanark because the hero is a wimp.... I suppose on that basis Hamlet, Candide, Jude the Obscure, The Trial, Confessions of a Crap Artist, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

and countless other works in which the protagonist isn't a mighty and macho hunk can also be assigned to Wimp's Corner....

Your comments at the end of Sue's other letter: I've got the feeling that Wolfe has deliberately worked in all these parallels and references - maybe not cynically by knowingly. The best way of keeping a book alive is to ensure that people will keep writing about it rather than merely reading it. I bet that more people have written about Finnegans Wake, for example than have read it for pleasure. Wolfe isn't quite as obscure as Joyce, but there are references in "The Book of the New Sun" that will elude 99% of the readers. I know that I might feel pretty smug about finding out what so-and-so refers to but I also know that there'll be a whole host of things that I'm going to miss until they're pointed out to me. The trouble is, once you've found these references are they relevant? Is it worthwhile re-reading "The Book of the New Sun" with the complete Oxford English Dictionary, Graves' The Greek Myths, and an encyclopedia of world mythology by my side? Perhaps I'll wait for the guidebook and let someone else do the dredging...

Could I borrow a few lines in Dangerous Divisions for a policy statement on Focus and Orbiter, concerning fiction.

DOROTHY DAVIES,  
3 Cadels Row,  
Faringdon,  
Oxon

I will, if at all possible, try to show as many opportunities for the writer to place their work, in paid and unpaid publications, in Focus. To do that I will need a degree of co-operation from editors, which I appealed for in Matrix 52. Help me to help the aspiring writers out there in BSFAland get into print, duplicated, lithoed or otherwise. If you have a magazine to promote, send me some flyers, and I'll send them out with Orbiter info sheets. Orbiter is as wide and varied as I can make it. I'm prepared to include any flyers with the Orbiter sheets, as long as you realise I sometimes only get one request per ad. But I will send them out. Help me to help you. Together we can do much for the BSFA writers, aspiring, professional, whatever. And that is a Dorothy Davies promise. OK?

KEN LAKE,  
115 Markhouse Avenue,  
London  
E17 8AY

I have just acquired two items of SF/philatelic interest. One is a rather large envelope with a heroic SF design, inscribed for Eastercon 22 and postmarked with the Worcester datestamp of April 10th, 1971, with an extra handstamp "Posted at Eastercon 22"; the other is a neat postcard for Ompacon 73 with a lunar module design and, cancelling the stamp, an attractive large handstamp showing a spaceship and inscribed "24th British Science-Fiction Convention" at the Grand Hotel in Bristol, dated April 20th, 1973.

Can anyone please inform me of any (or all) envelopes, postcards or other items, issued for conventions or other SF events in Britain, which have passed through the mails? Reason for request: as a philatelic writer, I plan to write about these in specialist magazines and hence (hopefully) get new converts to join the BSFA and/or play some part in fandom. Anyone wishing to SELL such items may send them along with their price; I shall only want one of each! Thanks.

Just a couple of points in Terry Broome's letter that I must take up.

MARTYN TAYLOR,  
Flat 2,  
17 Hutchinson Square,  
Douglas,  
Isle of Man

Firstly, I do not believe that what I wrote can reasonably be interpreted as saying that it is the philosophy behind the Mercerism subplot which precluded it being filmed. It is not the philosophy but the form which renders it almost unfilmable within the overall



The attainment of godhood was a recurrent theme of American science fiction writers of Blish's generation, from early van Vogt to late Heinlein, but Blish was alone in regarding the temptation thereunto, that technology and pulp plotting afforded, as an unmitigated trap. The stated theme linking the four novels constituting After Such Knowledge - "Is the desire for secular knowledge, let alone the acquisition and use of it, a misuse of the mind, and perhaps even actively evil?" -- clearly touches this, as does much of They Shall Have Stars, Titans' Daughter, "Skyhook," and many of Blish's other major and minor works. The failure of moral responsibility in the absence of personal maturity held an even stronger interest for Blish -- as seen by the effort he made in giving original expression to the theme in "Common Time," "Testament of Andros," and Fallen Star -- and it, too, is evaded in science fiction save for the coming-of-age aspect of juvenile novels, where it is treated as a question of non-adulthood.

In King Log, Blish set out to create a broad canvas upon which the failures of his protagonist could be dramatized against a complex background whose detailed intricacy would both call forth speculations upon those matters of cosmology and metaphysics Blish loved so well, and afforded room for the pleasures of intellectual play, as of implements and fauna unexpectedly possible in the circumstances given. The existing fragments, like the partial foundations of an unbuilt cathedral, suggest only faintly the arches and arabesques that were to rise above them, but offer in their contemplation a poignant illustration of the ravages of time and uncertainty of endeavor, more moving than mere art can be.

[C] 1984 Gregory Feeley

## [[[ DANGEROUS DIVISIONS: CONTINUED ]]]

context of the rest of the story.

Secondly, I cannot see how anyone could watch that bleak film and contend that the technological wizardry and simulacra are held up as an ideal. Quite the reverse. Perhaps Scott doesn't spell it out, but there may be some significance in the fact that there are only two non-human(ish) creatures in the film - the snake and the owl - and they are both artificial. No, the condemnation of destroying our environments is there. And surely the corruption of humans and human ideals, the depths to which we have sunk in our abuse of the replicants, is very much in keeping with the tenor of so much of Dick's work, even if it is not spelled out.

I notice a third quibble. Every single non-fan I have spoken to about Bladerunner, and it is a film which has generated significantly more intellectual interest among the non-fans of my acquaintance than any other SF film, have told me that the voice overs were necessary to their comprehension of the film. So us fans is clever and special, but its worth a thought.

[[[ WAHF: Hilary J. Wilson, David Ratovitsky and Philip Collins. ]]]

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