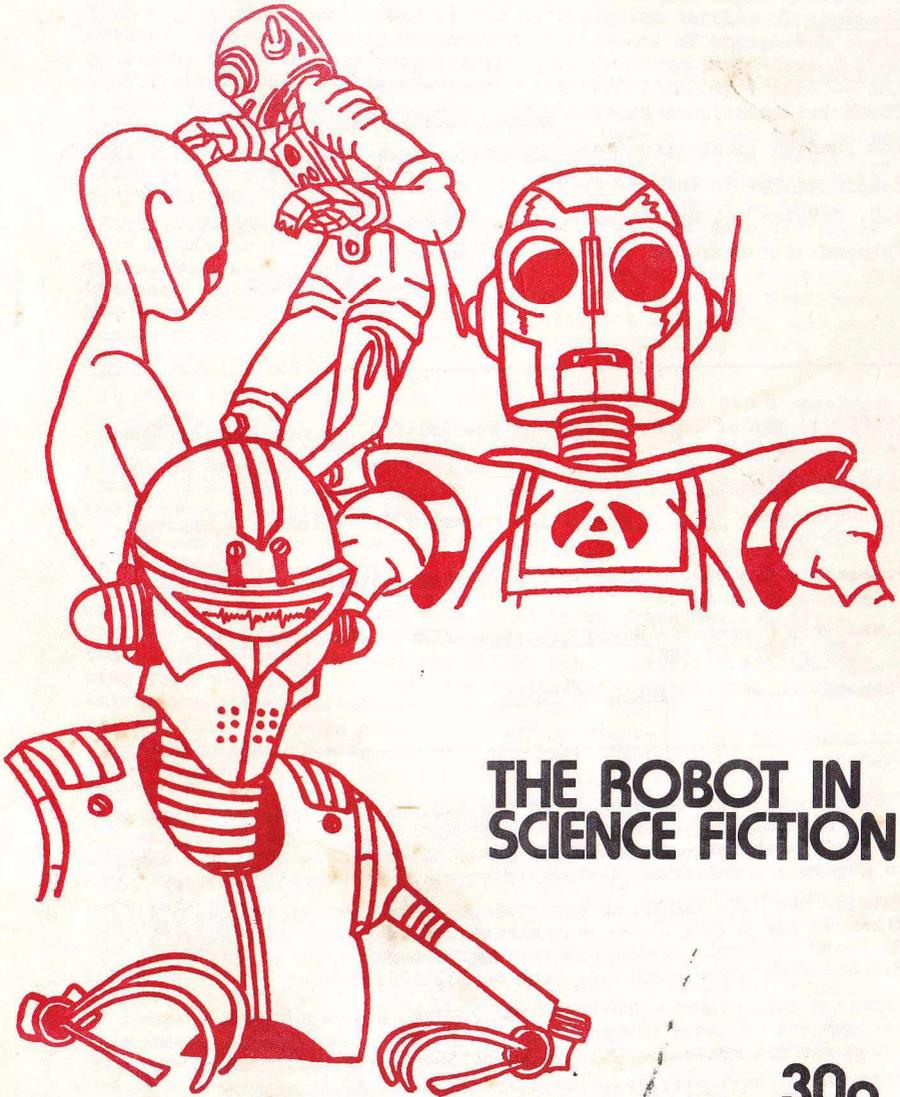


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THE ROBOT IN SCIENCE FICTION

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Edited by:
Malcolm Edwards
75A Harrow View
Harrow
Middx HA1 1RF

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Contents

Lead-In.....	1
The Robot in Science Fiction/ <u>Brian M. Stableford</u>	5
The Fannish Inquisition/ <u>Peter Roberts</u>	21
<u>D.G. Compton</u> : An Interview.....	24
D.G. Compton and New Standards of Excellence/ <u>Mark Adlard</u>	29
The Infinity Box: book and film reviews/ <u>Cy Chauvin</u> <u>Malcolm Edwards</u> <u>Chris Fowler</u>	34

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LEAD-IN

The life of a famous publisher in Harrow is, as you might expect, filled with excitement. One of the most regular thrills is the arrival, via the friendly neighbourhood postman, of unexpected copies of books, despatched by generous publishers. Thus it is that I find myself sitting here contemplating a pile (well, hardly a pile — more a small heap) of paperbacks from Tandem Books. Now, I do have an arrangement with Tandem Books whereby they send me (when they remember, which isn't often) their catalogues, and I write to them if there is any title I wish to review. Since their most regular sf author is John Norman whose Gor series, although it is no doubt fascinating and excellent and not at all an attempt to outdo Edgar Rice Burroughs in both prolificity and tedium, is not really to my taste, such requests are rare. In this instance, this procedure was bypassed, suggesting that the publishers feel that these four books are of exceptional interest and value (I'm not suggesting that sending copies to me is the key element of a massive publicity drive, but it may be symptomatic).

Pause for identification. For those who can contain themselves no longer, the four titles, each at the popular price of 35p, are: Flying Saucers Through The Ages, by Paul Thomas; The Flying Saucer Story, by Brinsley Le Poer Trench; Flying Saucers From Outer Space, by Donald E. Keyhoe; and The Warminster Mystery, by Arthur Shuttlewood. So now you know.

My own attitude to UFOlogy is, perhaps, a little ambiguous. As an open-minded observer, I do not exclude the possibility that Earth may have been visited by members of extra-terrestrial civilisations; I even accept that they could be Up There Now, watching over us in a benevolent, or alternatively menacing, fashion. In fact, just to guard against the latter possibility I'm writing this away from the window so that they can't spy on me with their clever extra-terrestrial telescopes. On the other hand I don't really believe this: I'm more prepared to lend credence to the existence of things like sea serpents, or the Loch Ness monster (although, regretfully, I have to admit that I no longer believe that there's a family of plesiosaurs sunning themselves off Castle Urquhart when nobody's watching). My real difficulty arises because although I can accept the possibility of UFO's I nevertheless believe that anyone who claims to have actually seen one is either mistaken or a nut. This may sound unfair — and it probably is — but whenever I turn to a flying saucer book I find my belief reinforced by their apparently universal tendency never to be content with just one or two instances. Either the meddling aliens have been dropping in on Earth throughout recorded history (excluding, as it happens, the present), causing religions, building spaceships, giving people rides in their spaceships, leaving behind mysterious artifacts, and generally having a jolly good time; or they are out there now, not just in ones or twos, but in bloody great fleets. In this latter case, reason suggests to me that if they were there they would either drop in and say hello or keep well out of detection range; what they wouldn't do (and please correct me if I'm wrong) is spend their evenings swooping around buzzing inoffensive Wiltshire towns. (Un-

less -- and here's a thought -- flying saucers are the interstellar equivalent of Harley-Davidsons, and their pilots the galactic Hell's Angels, out on a rumble over the Solar System....)

So. The first of these books -- Flying Saucers Through The Ages -- adopts the historical approach. Is there more to the biblical tales of pillars of cloud and pillars of fire than ancient legends? Are the cherubim of the Old Testament more than merely creatures of fable? The most notable examples of this sub-genre are, of course, the three books by Erich von Daniken: Chariots of the Gods and its sequels. The first of these, you may remember, was serialised in one of the Sunday newspapers (I'm not about to boost its circulation and wreck its rivals with a plug here) as "Was God An Astronaut?" -- a question which immediately gave rise to a whole host of intriguing alternatives. Was God, perhaps, a Bus Driver? A Chartered Surveyor? A Dentist?

(Daniken, an amiable and reasonable sounding man somewhat resembling Bob Shaw, recently gave a couple of lectures over here. I saw him suffering the ultimate ignominy of being interviewed by Jimmy Savile on his thankfully short-lived chat show. Savile started by asking a question: Now, Mr Von Daniken, you believe, don't you, that this Earth was actually visited by like people from other worlds in the past, eh? Daniken would then give a fairly long, quite interesting answer, involving perhaps a few slides. When he finished, Savile's keen mind seized immediately on the implications: Yes now, Mr D., so what you're saying, isn't it, is that like these people from like, other worlds visited this world, Earth, some time way back in the past, before any of us was born, is that what you're trying to tell us? If Daniken sighed it wasn't apparent; he launched on another explanation. At the end, Savile clicked (or possibly clunked) back into top gear: Yes, Erich, but I mean are you trying to say that hundreds of years ago, there was these people from other planets from this one.... And so it went. I almost finished up believing the unfortunate Mr Von Daniken out of sympathy.)

There are undeniably certain oddities from this planet's past which one might (I suppose) choose to explain in terms of extra-terrestrial visitors. Unfortunately writers on the subject always wreck any case they may have by making every primitive painting with a stylised head represent an alien visitor, any account of the visit from above of a god symbolic of a spaceship descending. Mr Thomas is no exception, giving a detailed spaceship-by-spaceship account of the Old Testament. My own favourite is Chapter Five, with its intriguing title 'Elijah, Pioneer of Petrol'.

The other three titles deal with happenings nearer the present day. The book by Le Poer Trench is a general survey; the others are 'Me and the Flying Saucers' accounts. They share a common wonderment that there can still be people who do not believe what is so obviously true. How can people be so blind? Le Poer Trench marshals a wealth of documentary evidence, including eight pages of photographs. Photos are the main thing which destroy any vestige of belief I have in these things, and this set is no exception. A caption speaks of 'this amazing photograph', when all I see are some white blips on a dark background that look more like the evidence of faulty emulsion than anything else. Others, taken in daylight, show disc-shaped objects in varying degrees of lousy focus (it looks that much better when you can't distinguish all the details) which resemble nothing so much as decorated frisbees. The cover of this book, incidentally,

continued on p.43

BRIAN M STABLEFORD

the robot in science fiction

deus ex machina: science fiction and technology - part one

"They stood again outside the building, three little metal men. Out yonder in the west the sun was dipping below the horizon. A soft dusk was coming down, hiding the barren world, and still the lonely wind was stirring in the shadows.

"Eight saw the statue lying on the ground and vague thoughts stirred within his mind. 'They may have eaten grass,' he said. 'They may have eaten the flesh of other animals; they may have been weaklings; they may have risen out of slime, but somehow I think there was something fine about them. For they dreamed, and even if they died —'

"The robot bent over. Tiny, ageless, atom-fed motors within him surged with an endless power. The robot lifted the dream of an age-dead man and set the statue back on its feet.

"The three returned to their ship, and it lifted, following its path out to the stars. The proud, blind eyes of a forgotten statue seemed to follow it." (1)

So ends the sad story of the "Robots Return", written by Robert Moore Williams in 1938. They have discovered that their own kind was created by Man, and that Man is now dead. The robot heroes of the story, named simply Seven, Eight and Nine, maintain a valiant dignity in the face of the apparent futility of their quest. Their faces are metal masks, but Nine "sighs softly", the gleam in Eight's eye holds a touch of awe, and Seven gasps in surprise when he finds the statue which he mistakes — at first — for a robot. When they discover the truth the first thing they feel is wonder and then disgust. But the disgust rapidly gives way to the sentiments expressed at the end of the story.

There are two threads of thought inherent in the theme of this story:

- (a) The robot and the man are intrinsically different.
- (b) It doesn't matter.

Exactly the same points emerge from Lester del Rey's "Helen O'Loy", published later that same year. Here, the point of view is reversed — the protagonist is human — but the same assumptions hold true.

Helen O'Loy is a beautiful robot — "a dream in spun plastics and metals, something that Keats might have seen dimly when he wrote his sonnet." (2) Her owner falls in love with her, but cannot admit it to himself until his friend announces his intention of redeeming the tense situation by replacing the robot's mind. The man marries the robot. The man grows older, and the robot puts lines in her face and

turns her hair grey. When he dies, she expresses a wish to be burnt out by acid and buried with him. Again, the distinction between man and robot is basic — it goes without saying. The point of the story is to supplement that assumption with the statement that the differences don't matter.

At first glance, this seems a strange role for the robot to adopt in science fiction. A robot is an anthropomorphic machine. There is no reason why it should, ipso facto, be an anthropopathic machine. Indeed, if science fiction is to be thought of as a product of a literary tradition, there is every reason to expect that the robot would be used in quite a different way. Like virtually all of science fiction's vocabulary of symbols, the robot was inherited from earlier literature. The word itself originated in Karel Čapek's play R.U.R., but Čapek's robots were simply artificial men, not mechanical artifacts, and science fiction referred to such creations as androids. The most notable robot (in the science fiction sense) before Gernsback was probably the chess-playing automaton in Ambrose Bierce's "Maxon's Master".

Tracing the symbol to its absolute origin is, however, not important. The important thing is that the robot was introduced into literature, and was used in literature, as part of the Frankenstein tradition. The creation of an artificial man, no matter what his constituent parts might be made of, was a blasphemy, and the purpose of the story could only be to illustrate the consequences of such blasphemy. The robot outside science fiction was a figure of horror. Whence, then, came the science fictional robot?

The early days of sf featured a number of stories carrying titles like "The Robot Aliens", "The Robot Terror", "The Robot Peril" and "The Robot Beasts". But these robots were hardly ever anthropomorphic, and in at least one case ("The Robot Aliens" by Bando Binder) the terror was purely in the minds of the people and the robots were, in fact, peacefully inclined. Once the Campbell era arrived, the robot menace was virtually extinct.

Binder emphasized his renunciation of the Frankenstein tradition in "I, Robot" in 1939, in which Adam Link — a childlike and amiable robot who wouldn't hurt a fly — relates the story of his involvement with the Frankenstein tradition. His creator is killed in an accident and he is hunted down by a mob. Happily, he is saved, his innocence established, and he marches triumphantly on into a series of sequels. Once again, the message of the story is that Adam Link's differences are quite irrelevant — he takes his creator's name, and his creator speaks quite confidently of establishing the robot as an American citizen.

"Rust", by Joseph E. Kelleam (1939) demonstrated that it was entirely possible to write a sympathetic story about robots without any reference to Man at all — here the point of the story is the tragic failure of the robots to survive after the extinction of humankind.

"Farewell to the Master" by Harry Bates (1940) used the new perspective with respect to the robot to put a new slant on an old theme. An alien and a robot visit Earth. Attempts to communicate meet with little success. At the end of the story it is revealed that the attempts were wrongly directed, because the robot is the master and the humanoid the flesh-and-blood instrument. It is most interesting

to note that the purpose of this revelation is not to horrify -- which could only have been the intention had the story been a part of any other milieu -- but merely to offer an example of the dangers of making assumptions based on one's own situation. Already, in 1940, Bates is working within an intellectual climate in which the role of the robot is established within a set of precepts for which there is virtually no literary precedent. It is nonsense to suggest that "Farewell to the Master" worked as a story purely and simply because the handful of stories which I have already mentioned prepared its ground. Obviously, "Farewell to the Master" was written in accordance with a way of thinking which had far more to support it than a few short stories. It points inevitably to the conclusion that the robot had stepped right out of the Frankenstein tradition into a wholly new ethos. The symbolic function of the robot had changed.

"Jay Score" (1941) by Eric Frank Russell was another story which was built around its final revelation, and it is perhaps this story more than any other which relied wholly upon a new set of assumptions regarding the role of the robot. The story is a simple account of an act of heroism by Jay Score aboard a spaceship, and would be a mere anecdote but for the fact that the information that Jay Score (J20) is a robot is withheld until the punchline. The punchline could hardly work if it were not assumed that there is an absolute and basic difference between a man and an anthropomorphic machine, but the whole purpose of the events which take place is to render that difference immaterial.

From these stories there is a definite image of man's relationship with machines which can be distilled. It is an image which involves no conceptual conflict -- there is no hint of the robot's actually being a man, or of a man's actually being a machine -- but it is an image which stresses more than anything else the harmony of the relationship. In these stories the machine is seen as an extension of man's ability to deal with his environment. This attitude to the machine derives in no way from previous literary employment of the robot as a symbol, nor did it long remain the prevalent attitude within science fiction. The role of the robot in science fiction has, in fact, undergone a considerable evolution which involves five distinct phases. Undoubtedly, many critics will want to find in such an evolutionary account a testimony to the influence of certain stories and to the "maturation" of science fiction as a literature. This viewpoint seeks to confer upon the ideas which are employed in science fiction some kind of "life" according to an organic or spiritual analogy similar to the Toynbeeian or Spenglerian accounts of history. Before giving my account of the evolution of sf's use of the robot as a symbol, I should like to point out that any attempt to consider the account in the light of a purely ideative heredity is quite incompetent to explain the original usage of the symbol that I have already detailed.

I would like to suggest now that the changing attitude of science fiction to the anthropomorphic machine is both symptomatic and symbolic of attitudes found in society to the increasing mechanization of society. This suggestion will, of course, be developed further in the course of this essay.

* * * * *

The view of the robot as an extension of man was rationalized by Isaac Asimov in the earliest of his famous robot stories. Asimov

introduced the Three Laws of Robotics, which were specifications for the design of robot minds. They comprise a hierarchical system of ethics.

They are:

- 1 -- A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
- 2 -- A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
- 3 -- A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law. (3)

Asimov has stated that his Laws were simply safety devices, and that his stories were a rebellion against the Frankenstein tradition (his stories make occasional reference to the 'Frankenstein complex', sufferers from which had the strange delusion that robots were dangerous).

He said: "I began, in 1940, to write robot stories of my own -- but robot stories of a new variety. Never, never, was one of my robots to turn stupidly on his creator for no purpose but to demonstrate, for one more time, the crime and punishment of Faust." (4)

This statement glosses over the fact that Asimov was a contributor to, not the inventor of, a new variety of robot story. His laws of robotics merely formalised the attitude already implicit in Helen O'Loy, Jay Score, etc. No one could seriously have questioned the moral values of Adam Link. His behaviour was exemplary. The ethical robot had already arrived in science fiction well before Asimov published "Strange Playfellow" (better known as "Robbie", first story in the collection I, Robot.) All that Asimov's laws of robotics did for the robot in sf was to deny him any choice which he might have had in the matter of deciding ethical priorities. The laws of robotics rationalised the fundamental difference between man and machine which was assumed in all the stories so far cited, and which was, in fact, necessary to them. At the same time, they established the robot as a thoroughly useful character, worthy of replacing the dog as man's proverbial best friend. At this stage of development, in fact, the robot's role had a lot in common with that of the dog in the sentimental story of canine heroism which is one of the staples of pulp fiction. Like the dog, the early robot was a little simple-minded, limited in scope and in communicative ability, but his loyalty and devotion were unquestionable.

Asimov's "Victory Unintentional" (1942) is a perfect example of the robot's role as an extension of man's abilities. Three robots visit Jupiter on an exploratory mission. The Jovians -- previously implacable hostile to the human race, with whom they have been communicating by radio -- lose their aggressive attitude entirely when they find that the robots are unimpressed by ray guns, are immune to poisons and drowning, have no need of microscopes, and do not need to breathe. They do not, of course, realise that the robots are machines -- they believe that they are the people with whom they have been communicating.

This story makes use of the fundamental difference between man and robot in much the same way that "Jay Score" did, only this time it is the Jovians, not the readers, who are being deluded.

"Reason", in which a robot decides that logic points unequivocally

to the fact that robots and men were independently created, stressed the other part of the attitude of the time -- that the difference between man and machine did not matter. QT-1 continues to serve his purpose despite the substitution on an entirely new rationale of the situation.

"Liar!", which followed "Reason" in Astounding in 1941, and "Run-around" (1942) explored the problems of robot insanity. So did "Deadlock", by Lewis Padgett (Henry Kuttner). These were the transitional stories which heralded the first significant change in attitude to the robot. Though the three laws were still very much in evidence in the Asimov stories, their literary function was no longer to ensure safety -- it was to provide a framework for an investigation into robot psychology. The change in emphasis from a pragmatic point of view to a preoccupation with what the robot might be thinking and why, preceded a period when the robot was no longer viewed simply as an extension of man. In the mid-forties there was a distinct trend towards identifying man with his anthropomorphic machines and vice versa. Not only was the difference between man and robot of no importance, it was very difficult to pin down. "Liar!", for instance, was about a robot who told lies -- not only in spite of, but in accordance with his built-in ethics. In "Runaround" a truant robot is recovered by means of a desperate appeal to that same built-in better nature.

In "Robot AL-76 Goes Astray" the personification of the robot goes somewhat further than in these two stories. The robot here takes on the role of the absent-minded genius, who builds a device for moving a mountain powered by two torch batteries by means of sheer ingenuity, and then forgets how he did it. This is a role which is intrinsically different from the faithful servant-and-companion image projected earlier. This intensification of the humanity of the robot, and the projection of human failings on to the robot, was to be a continuing theme over the next five years or so.

The characterisation of the robot as an eccentric was furthered by Henry Kuttner's "The Proud Robot" (published, like "Deadlock", under the pseudonym Lewis Padgett) in 1943. Kuttner's Joe -- created by the equally eccentric Gallagher while blind drunk -- spends most of his time admiring himself in the mirror. His dialogue is snappy and idiosyncratic, he sings, and he can hypnotise himself. It transpires that his primary function is to be the perfect can-opener.

This is obviously not the same kind of robot that was characteristic of the field during 1938-42. Joe has personality far beyond his purpose in life, and his ethics -- though never called into question -- are far from obvious. The implicit difference between man and machine which was at the heart of stories like "Helen O'Loy" and "Jay Soore" has been replaced by a kinship between eccentric and eccentric. Joe and his creator are clearly two of a kind.

Kuttner's wife, C.L. Moore, achieved a more remarkable synthesis between the human role and the robot role in "No Woman Born" (1944). A dancer, killed in a theatre fire, is resurrected into a robot body. She is determined to go back to the stage, and does so.

She describes the feel of her new body:

"It's -- odd ... being in here in this ... this ... instead of a body. But not as odd or alien as you might think. -- I've

begun to realise what a tremendous force the human ego really is. I'm not sure I want to suggest it has any mystical power it can impress on mechanical things, but it does seem to have a power of some sort. It does instill its own force into inanimate objects, and they take on a personality of their own It's as if machinery with complicated moving parts almost simulates life, and does acquire from the men who use it -- well, not exactly life, of course -- but a personality." (5)

This statement exemplifies the erosion of the precept which dictated an absolute and unchallengeable difference between flesh and metal. "No Woman Born" is not an adventure story or a vignette, but sets out to explore the consequences of this premise. Maltzer -- the man responsible for the rebirth -- has doubts about what he has done which crystallise after Deirdre's stage comeback:

"I've made a terrible mistake, Deirdre. I've done you irreparable harm I've made you vulnerable, and given you no weapons to fight your enemies with. And the human race is your enemy, my dear, whether you admit it now or later. I think you know that. I think it's why you're so silent They're going to hate you, after a while, because you are still beautiful, and they're going to persecute you because you are different -- and helpless." (6)

But Moore's conclusion is that Maltzer is wrong. Deirdre does not forfeit her humanity in being made into a robot -- not in her own eyes, nor in the eyes of the world. Instead, Moore represents her as having gained from the change. She says:

"I haven't lost contact with the human race. I never will, unless I want to. It's too easy ... too easy." (7)

The implications of the words "too easy" clearly suggest that the identification of the robot with the human has come about because it is too easy for the robot to duplicate humanity. It remains an open question in this story whether the identification of man and robot comes about via the degradation of the human role or the glorification of the mechanical.

"Though Dreamers Die" (1944) and "Into Thy Hands" (1945) by Lester del Rey both reflect a very different current of thought from the author's earlier "Helen O'Loy". In both stories the robots are seen as heirs to the human race. "Though Dreamers Die" sees the robots established on a new world to fend for themselves, and the man who leaves them commands them to erase all memory of man and Earth. But one of the robots -- named simply Five -- evades the order by preparing a star map with Earth clearly marked upon it, which will presumably be sufficient to make the robots return.

The story is, in fact, a prequel to Robert Moore Williams' "Robots Return", providing an explanation for the events leading up to that situation. But the ethos of the story is quite different. The role of the robot here is quite clearly that of child of the human race rather than tool of the human race. It would not be in character for Five to let disgust mingle with his wonder when he rediscovered the race which had built him.

"Into Thy Hands" is an account of the robots taking the place of men in order to bring about the renaissance of the human race -- to pass on to the new men the heritage of the old. This is a robot Adam

and Eve story which could not possibly work if the equivalence of man and robot were not assumed by the reader. The story demands more of the reader than sympathy for the robot protagonist — it requires identification.

There is a brief hiatus in Asimov's work at the beginning of this period. "Catch That Rabbit" (1944) and "Escape" (1945) do not deal with anthropomorphic machines within the narrow sense of the definition — "Catch That Rabbit" is about a "multiple-robot" and The Brain in "Escape" is only a two-foot globe. Even so, the theme of "Escape" fits into the pattern in that it concerns circumstances under which a machine is forced to develop a sense of humour. Asimov's whole approach to the robot story made it impossible for him to take the point of view implicit in "No Woman Born" — his concern was with gadgetry, and in order to conform to the current trend it would obviously be necessary for him to approach from the opposite direction — by giving his robots more and more human characteristics. This he did. "Little Lost Robot" (1947) involves a robot with a modified First Law (with the "through inaction" proviso removed) who conceals himself among a number of physically identical machines when an exasperated engineer instructs him to "Get lost!" The wayward robot is finally detected by a stratagem that takes advantage of a failing which seems wholly human — the robot acts reflexively without thinking fast enough and betrays himself.

Asimov's major contribution to this mode of thought, however, was "Evidence" (1946) which poses the problem of exposing a robot posing as a man. Not only does the robot succeed in convincing all and sundry that he is a man, he then goes on and is a more than adequate replacement for the man (a politician) whose place he is taking. Thus Asimov had reached the conclusion that a robot could do everything a man could do, and do it well, just as C.L. Moore had reached the conclusion that a robot could be everything that a woman could be — and more.

The identification of man with machine in no way implied that he had to like his machines. Moore was sensitive to the point of view advanced by Maltzer in her story, and Asimov included mobs who were horrified by the thought of their Mayoral candidate being a robot in his. This period of time also saw the publication of Robert Bloch's "It Happened Tomorrow", where the machines surrounding man in contemporary society suddenly decided that the time was ripe for revolution, and Theodore Sturgeon produced "Killdozer", a shock-story about a homicidal bulldozer. Henry Kuttner, in "This is the House", gave a frightening picture of a fully automated house with a mind of its own. These stories obviously represent a wholly different train of thought to the one apparent in the robot stories, and they emphasise the point that the robot was not symbolic of the machine *per se*, but was symbolic of the relationship between man and machine. The machines themselves remained amenable to use as instruments for inspiring fear during this period, but the robot was not so used. Surely this implies that the role attributed to the robot in the science fiction story of the time was a symptom of a social process, rather than simply a literary fad.

* * * * *

In 1947, the role of the robot changed again. This time the change was more dramatic, the new mode of thought being incarnated abruptly in a single story: "With Folded Hands", by Jack Williamson.

Williamson called his robots "Humanoids" and to all intents and

purposes they are anthropomorphous. They have all the qualities of the robots who, in previous years, had been represented as people. But Williamson turned his attention back to the empirical difference between man and mechanism. The humanoids were invented "to serve men, to obey, and to guard men from harm." This is their Prime directive, their raison d'être. But the way in which they set about fulfilling this function is completely different from the modus operandi of the Asimov/del Rey ethical robot. All that the humanoids lack is a human sense of proportion. They set about guarding men from all harm, including the harm which men seek to do themselves in the normal course of everyday life. Smoking is harmful. So is drinking. So is eating anything other than the basic balanced diet. So is fast driving. So are a hundred other things. The humanoids ban the lot. Even more significant, they ban people from harming themselves by worrying about the situation, or being unhappy about it, or being angry about it. The humanoids set out to make human beings into perfect robots, like themselves, and Williamson leaves the reader in absolutely no doubt the difference between man and robot. In a sense, "With Folded Hands" is a reaction against the trend which had dominated us during the previous few years. It began a five year period whose significant feature with respect to the anthropomorphous machine was the reification of the symbol.

This was not simply a return to the late Thirties attitude. In those days, the difference between man and machine had been so basic that it went completely without saying -- the idea of confusion had been out of the question. But the difference no longer went without saying. The writer now tended to go to great lengths in order to make the difference clear. The period of identification was now completely dead. "Evidence" -- quite appropriate to 1946 -- would have been a total anachronism in the thought of 1949.

Williamson followed up "With Folded Hands" with a sequel ...And Searching Minds (1948, better known as The Humanoids) which featured the overthrow of the dictatorial humanoids by the human race.

The way of thinking implicit in "With Folded Hands" and its sequel appeared in A.E. van Vogt's "Final Command" (1949), where the robots demand (and get) emancipation, but are prevented from organising a revolution because the aliens who have been waging war on Earth turn out to have been doing so purely and simply because they were horrified by the idea of a robot civilisation, and had only just realised that men existed. At the heart of this story is the same mistake that was made by the Jovians in Asimov's "Victory Unintentional", but its significance is now totally different. In the earlier story, the mistake served to point out the usefulness of robots to mankind. In "Final Command", the mistake has tragic consequences, and is used in the story to highlight the difference between man and machine. It is significant, however, that van Vogt's conclusion is that man and robot must continue to co-exist, but that their relationship must be set on a new basis. The reification of the robot did not necessarily imply the renunciation of the robot.

It is also significant that, in the final analysis, The Humanoids devolves into a conflict between hero and villain -- the robots themselves cease to be the lynch-pin of the story long before the finale.

"Quixote and the Windmill" (1950) by Poul Anderson reflects the same kind of concern, but takes an entirely different point of view. Here, the author points out the folly of trying to duplicate man in a

machine. His premise is that the anthropomorphic man is ipso facto useless because there is no need for a substitute for man. The logic of this claim is extremely suspect, and the only real justification for the story is that it accurately reflects a contemporary climate of thought as regards the robot.

Asimov reflected the new direction of concern in "Satisfaction Guaranteed" (1951), where a woman's love for a robot is made tragic by the fact that the robot is only a thing. (Yet in different periods Asimov found nothing amiss in a child's love for Robbie and Susan Calvin's love for Lenny).

One of the most significant stories of this era was undoubtedly "The Quest for St. Aquin" by Anthony Boucher (1951). In an age when religion is driven underground, the Pope sends an emissary to locate a preacher named Aquin, whose existence must be established in order for him to be canonised and used by the Church as propaganda. The emissary, Thomas, is accompanied by a robot ass, which acts throughout the story as devil's advocate. When Thomas discovers the body of Aquin and finds that the teacher was a robot, the ass recommends that he conceal the truth, as the fact that Aquin is a robot can only harm the Christian cause. But Thomas sees the situation in a different light — Aquin was a robot, with perfect logic, and that logic had made him a preacher. Like Thomas Aquinas, the robot had discovered God by reason alone and had justified faith.

The reification of the robot is explicit throughout in the point of view of the ass, but the reification of the robot in no way makes it necessary for Thomas to reject the truth about Aquin.

In the period 1947-52, therefore, the robot survives the indictment levelled against it in "With Folded Hands". There is a sweeping change in the attitude to the robot, but it is quite clear in the assumptions underlying all these stories that we still have to live with the robot. The new exposure of the difference between man and machine does not lead to a reiteration of a Rousseauesque romanticism. Instead, the next shift in emphasis was to the confrontation between man and machine — a preoccupation which characterised sf throughout the later Fifties. It is difficult to reconcile this unidirectional development of concern in purely literary terms. How else to explain the failure of sf to throw up a new romanticism except that the possibility was ruled out by the circumstances which were determining the evolution of the whole chain of thought? Only if we accept that the use of the robot as a symbol in sf was determined by the changing relationship between society and its technology can we explain the coherence of development of the symbol. If it had not been absolutely necessary that society should come to terms with mechanisation, then we would surely have seen a flood of stories showing the easy way out -- "back to the trees". It is surely clear that sf, in this chain of thought, is reflecting social concerns rather than purely ideative ones.

* * * * *

The last story which highlighted the reification of the robot without incorporating the theme of confrontation was "A Bad Day For Sales" by Fritz Leiber (1953), which described the thoroughly robotic reactions of a sales robot to the beginning of a nuclear war.

The Caves of Steel by Isaac Asimov, in the same year, was an attempt to fuse science fiction with the detective story, but quite a

lot of the early part of the book is concerned with Lije Bailey's having to come to terms with -- and later overcome -- his dislike of robots when a robot is forced upon him as a partner. The sequel to this novel (The Naked Sun, 1956) featured a more dramatic confrontation theme, when Asimov and his readers face the idea that even the thoroughly ethical and safety-first robot of the Asimovian Laws of Robotics is capable of homicide, albeit in a passive capacity. A more explicit examination of this possibility is featured in the minor Asimov story "Let's Get Together" (1957) (which forsakes the laws altogether) which involves seven robots carrying subcritical quantities of nuclear fissionables into the United States, intending to join together and become a bomb. "Galley Slave" (also 1957) also has confrontation as its theme, featuring an attempt by an anti-roboticist to discredit robots by means of a law-suit. Asimov's other robot story of this period was "Lenny", in which a robot with a defective mind reverts to the status of a human infant. Susan Calvin, Asimov's robot psychologist, wants to educate the robot infant and "bring it up" as one might a human child, but before she is allowed to do so she has to defend the robot against the charge of being dangerous.

Similar to "Let's Get Together" was "Impostor" by Philip K. Dick -- who was later to replace Asimov as the most significant contributor to robot literature -- in 1953. "Impostor" confronts the robot with himself in an ingenious fashion. The protagonist of the story (which is told in the first person) is pursued because people believe him to be a robot bomb. In evading his pursuers he discovers his own body. The realisation that he is a robot triggers the bomb.

In the same year, Dick produced "Second Variety", which showed mankind at war with, and at the mercy of, its robots. The robots designed as war machines have the capacity to improve their own design, and they proceed to evolve in a manner dictated by their purpose as instruments of war. They produce several human archetypes which react not only to real people, but also to each other, and whose basic nature is to destroy.

This, however, is confrontation on a crude scale, and extreme in its implications, and these stories are not really typical of the time although they do reflect the basic current of thought. Although the war with the robots seemed to offer far greater scope for adventure and melodrama than confrontation within a social context, it is stories in the latter milieu which are more typical.

The archetypal story of this era was a brilliant novelette by Walter M. Miller called "The Darfsteller" (1955). Virtually no other story in science fiction has explored its theme in such detail and with such sensitivity.

The Darfsteller is Ryan Thornier, an actor who has been put out of a job by robot theatre, and who now makes a living as a janitor in one such theatre. After an argument with his employer he is sacked. As a final gesture, he sabotages the robot which is to be the lead player in the play scheduled to open that evening, carefully arranging matters so that in order to get the curtain up at all there will be no alternative but to put on a human actor instead -- himself. He knows that if the audience realises that he is not a robot, then his performance will become ludicrous simply because of the circumstances. He plans to cap his gesture with a touch of high drama -- the script calls for the lead character to be shot in the final scene, and Thornier loads the gun with a live bullet.

The robot actors are "directed" by a computer called the Maestro, which feeds all the robots their lines and programmes them individually with "personalities" which have been taped from real actors in the past. Thornier, as a matter of principle, would not let himself be taped — despite the fact that he would make a comfortable living from the royalties. The tape to be used in the female lead in the play is the tape taken from one of Thornier's ex-leading ladies. It is part and parcel of his grand gesture that she should be at the opening night in person to watch her robot self playing alongside Thornier's real self.

In the first act, Thornier is very bad. The entire situation is against his acting well. The Maestro, the everpresent director, begins to compensate for Thornier by subtly altering the way the robots handle their lines. In the second act, Thornier finds himself being turned from the hero into the villain by the way the robots interpret the script. He fights back, producing lines ad lib to compensate for the Maestro. The Maestro is unable to change the lines, and can only repeat statements uncertainly in the face of Thornier's improvisations. The Maestro's inability to cope threatens the whole of the third act, and the stage manager has no alternative but to send out the real actress instead of the robot to play opposite Thornier. At last Thornier begins to act well, and the experience changes his whole mood. At the beginning of the fourth act his sensation of triumph — he feels that he has won a battle against the Maestro — leads him to change his mind about the morbid climax to his scheme, and he surreptitiously asks his leading lady to eject the live cartridge from the gun. Only after repeating himself several times does he realize that he is no longer playing opposite the real woman, but that the stage manager has sent out the robot again, because Thornier has already undone the damage in the third act. Thornier plays the part to the end, and is shot, but not fatally wounded.

Throughout the story, Miller remains aware of both sides in his argument. He states unequivocally that the public wants robot theatre rather than the real thing, and at no time is Miller's argument directed against the public. Thornier fights his battle in his own terms, and he wins in his own terms, and he wins in his own eyes. The conflict is purely personal. Miller never attempts to reach any sort of conclusion in terms of whether the robot or the man is "better" — he is concerned with analysing the difference between them, and his conflict arises purely from that difference. In Miller's eyes, the difference between man and robot is akin to the difference between the darfsteller — the self-directed actor who lives his part, and the stauchspieler — the actor who can put on and take off his part like a suit of clothes. The theatrical setting for the story is an analogy as well as an arena. Miller's point is that outside of his role, the robot is nothing, whereas the man can go on to create new roles. It matters not that the live theatre beloved of Ryan Thornier is dead, because dramaturgy — the art of theatre — cannot die. Thornier concludes that the robot actors are true to his time — which he conceives as being ruled by "the Great God Mechanism", but that there are other considerations which are timeless.

Throughout this essay I have attempted to discover the attitudes which were latent in the stories I have discussed. Many stories — especially those written by Asimov — present attitudes within themselves, but these are always attitudes of man to robot, never attitudes of man to man's relationship with the robot — all such perspect-

ives are implicit within the story, never explicated therein. "The Darfsteller" is the first story which actually contains a consciousness of what it is telling the reader about the relationship between man and machine. Miller knew what his assumptions were, and he wrote them down, and he recognised that his story is a reflection of social ideas:

"The times came as a result of a particular human culture And Cultural Man was a showman. He created display windows of culture for an audience of men, and paraded his aspirations and ideals and purposes thereon, and the displays were necessary to the continuity of the culture, to the purposeful orientation of the species." (8)

These are Ryan Thornier's thoughts about the theatre (and also about religion). Logically, they should also be Walter Miller's thoughts about his own writing. "The Darfsteller", therefore, is direct evidence for the case which I am attempting to present.

* * * * *

A different arena for the confrontation of man and robot — a simpler and more obvious arena — was presented independently by two authors in 1956. "Title Fight", by William Campbell Gault, and "Steel", by Richard Matheson, both match man with robot in the boxing ring. In view of the fact that the contest here is basically physical, it comes as no surprise that in both instances the robot wins by a knockout. Neither story, however, is simply concerned with the result of the contest. In "Title Fight" Alix 1340 represents the self-image of the robot, and his opponent is the Great White Hope. In the story the robots are analogised to the American negro — Alix's manager claims that the fight is with the white man, and that the black man knows how the robot feels — and the inspiration for the story might well have been Jack Johnson's bid for the world heavyweight title. But in the end, Alix turns out to be a prophet and not a revolutionary. The inevitable conclusion is that man and the robots have to get along with one another.

"Steel" takes a different viewpoint. The manager of a robot fighter cannot afford to get him repaired. In order to win the necessary money, he has to take the robot's place in a contest. While Niok Nolan of "Title Fight" appeared to have a chance of beating Alix 1340, the prospect facing "Steel" Kelly is far more out-and-dried. The only question at issue is how long it will take the Waynard Flash to knock him out, and whether Kelly can make it enough of a contest to collect a share of the purse. In the end, he collects half of it — hardly enough to put Battling Maxo back on his feet. The ethos of "Steel" is far more akin to that of "The Darfsteller" than of "Title Fight". Kelly is not fighting against robots in the abstract — he only wants to get his own robot back in the ring. His fight is personal, the confrontation arises quite naturally out of his relationship with his own machine.

The idea of confrontation resulting from the closeness of the association between man and machine is also evident in "Robots Shall Be Seen" (1957) by Lester del Rey, in which a man has to prove his robot sentient in court in order to export him from one world to another. The same closeness also provides the plot for Robert F. Young's "Emily and the Bards" (1956).

The whole thread of thought which runs through the robot story

in the mid- and late Fifties is confrontation, but the stories just mentioned illustrate a second element in the thread — that the cause of confrontation is to be found in the sort of relationship which exists between man and machine. The story in which the robot and the man are pitted against one another as part of the natural order of things is very rare. "Title Fight" starts out this way, but its conclusion cancels its earlier thinking. In much the same way, the robots in Brian Aldiss's "Who Can Replace a Man?" (1958) start out with this point of view, but the conclusion shows up the folly of their attitude in no uncertain terms. The robot is exclusively a figure of menace in Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore's "Two-Handed Engine" (1955), which introduces the robot Fury to dog the footsteps of murderers, but in the end the man who can control the Furies finds that he can still hear the footsteps behind him. The Fury is not in the robot — it is in the human mind.

For a good many years, therefore, the construction of robot stories appears to have been very narrow-minded. Not only are the themes the same, but the manner of presenting the theme falls within a very narrow spectrum. In terms of the literary imagination there is no way to account for this. It is only explicable with the aid of the sociological perspective.

* * * * *

The confrontation theme became more-or-less extinct in 1959. From then on, the robot virtually ceased to be a leading player in the science fiction story. In the Sixties, there are no more than a handful of stories which can be labelled simply "robot stories". When this analysis began, the robot's mechanical nature went without saying. Now, it seems that the robot himself goes without saying. He finds his place as part of the standard background material of science fiction — his role is that of an extra. He ceases to matter.

In terms of man's relationship with his machines, what can this mean? We have passed from the phase where man regarded his machines as an extension of himself, through the phase where he identified his machines as part of himself, through a phase where the robot was reified again, and finally through a long phase where there was a pre-occupation with defining the exact status of the machine relative to man. But what did we decide about that status? Where have we finally arrived?

Of the handful of robot stories that post-date the era of confrontation, two — Robert F. Young's "Robot Son" (1959) and Roger Zelazny's "For a Breath I Tarry" (1966) — deal with robots without any reference to man whatsoever. "Robot Son" is about the attempt of a machine god to organize a machine Christ which fails, and about the genuine coming of a machine Christ thereafter. The implication is that though one machine god was false, this does not negate the possibility of a real one. "For a Breath I Tarry" is an exercise in machine mythology, less derivative than "Robot Son", but implicitly similar in its view of mechanical Creation.

Others are throwbacks to earlier periods: "The Critique of Impure Reason" (1962) by Poul Anderson recreates the eccentric robot of Kuttner's 1943 story, "The Proud Robot". "After a Judgment Day" by Edmond Hamilton (1963) is a reworking of the theme of "Though Dreamers Die" (del Rey, 1944). Ray Bradbury's "I Sing The Body Electric" (1968) goes all the way back to "Helen O'Loy" and "Robbie"

in its presentation of a robot grandmother who is wonderful for the kids, and who comes back into her own again when they get to her age and resurrect her from the attic.

The only substantial difference between these modern stories and their counterparts in previous ages is in the intensity of their presentation. Poul Anderson's robot is a literateur in a world where the book has gone out of fashion. The humans of "After a Judgment Day" have not been wiped out by plague and cut off in their prime — they have destroyed themselves by war, and the survivors on the moon elect to go back to Earth and die rather than go with the robots to the stars. Ray Bradbury's robot grandmother accompanies a glut of sentimentality which makes it quite clear that the only reason Grandma is a robot is because human Grandmas just aren't good enough at being what they are.

In brief, the result of the confrontation between man and robot was that man lost. The heritage of the Fifties is a whole range of new possibilities in terms of extension, identification and reification. But now it is the man who is the extension of robot; it is the robot who identifies with the man; and it is man who is reified relative to the robot. What the evolution of the robot in science fiction has achieved is a totally new perspective. The key stories of the Sixties are the stories which are told from the robot point of view — the stories which offer a new idea of what it is to be a robot. The first of these was Clifford Simak's "All The Traps of Earth", in which a robot hero battles for survival against the petty jealousies of the human race, whose laws forbid his mind to last any longer than their own. Richard Daniel is a robot butler who has spent six hundred years serving one family of man, but the story does not begin until the family is dead and gone. What the reader is involved with is Richard Daniel's fight to establish himself an identity thereafter. The characters with which he is involved are almost all robots, and the most remarkable feature of his conduct throughout is his tremendous dignity relative to those humans who do appear, and their humanity relative to the robots.

The most significant work concerning the role of the robot in the last decade has been that of Philip K. Dick, who makes no distinction between robot, android and "simulacrum" — all of which he constantly equates with man. In two of his stories the protagonists are robots: in "The Electric Ant" Garson Poole wakes in hospital to be told that he is not a man but an "electric ant". He commits suicide. In A. Lincoln — Simulacrum (We Can Build You in the book version), the narrator does not discover until the end that he is a simulacrum himself. In the meantime he has suffered a schizophrenic breakdown because he could not adjust to normal human life. The whole point of both these stories is that it does not matter whether either character is robot or man. All that matters is how the person views himself. The narrator of A. Lincoln — Simulacrum does not go insane because he is a robot, but because other people know him to be a robot, and he does not. Poole, the electric ant, does not not kill himself because he is a robot — he kills himself because he knows that he is a robot.

The Sixties, then, is the era of confusion. We have searched hard for the difference between robot and man, and in the end the confrontation has served simply to prove that the only difference is one of perspective. As Miller concluded in "The Darfsteller", the robot theatre is a representation of our times — it is the way we live our

lives. "Robot Son" has offered the suggestion that robots are entitled to robot souls, but even if robots do not have souls, it makes no difference if we conceive of ourselves as having no souls, and this is the core of the Dick argument. The difference between man and machine can only be in the way we see ourselves, whether we be man or robot or whatever.

The pattern of thought which I have tried to extract from this evolutionary chain therefore becomes complete as follows:

1938-42, the machine is an extension of man, not part of man.

1942-47, man identifies the machine as a part of himself.

1947-53, man reifies the machine, but retains it within a social context.

1953-59, man confronts the machine within a social context in order to establish the relative status of man and machine within that context.

1959-??, the role of man and the role of the machine are inextricably bound together. Man is mechanized, the machine humanized.

To the above argument we might add just one last example: In 1971, Robert Silverberg won a Nebula award with "Good News From The Vatican", a story which describes in simple, matter-of-fact terms, the election of the first robot Pope.

* * * * *

The question remains: is this evolution an ideative chain of thought, or is it a representation of the changing attitude of society throughout the period in which these stories were written.

In other terms: is science fiction the bloodstream of a transcendental philosophy which functions only in the abstract, or is it a literature which is sensitive to society and to the changes in society, appropriate in particular to a machine society and adapted for the representation of a machine society and changes therein.

I suggest that science fiction is orientative — that it conceptualises and rationalises attitudes intrinsic to contemporary society. It is not, as some people have said, making us think. It is helping us to think. It is not providing a route of escape from the real world. It is helping us to put the real world into perspective.

The argument I have set out in this essay establishes a clear social relevance for a chain of thought in science fiction. I submit that it would be ludicrous to dismiss this relevance as coincidence. And surely we cannot overlook the fact that at least two writers have been conscious of the presence in society of the trends they have reflected in their fiction: Miller in "The Darfsteller" and Philip K. Dick in his essay "The Android and the Human", from which this final quotation is taken:

"As the external world becomes more animate, we may find that we — the so-called humans — are becoming, and may to a great extent always have been, inanimate in the sense that we are led, directed by inbuilt tropisms, rather than leading. So we and our elaborately evolving computers may meet each other half way. Someday a human being may shoot a robot which has come out of a General Electric's factory, and to his surprise see it weep

and bleed. And the dying robot may shoot back and, to its surprise, see a wisp of gray smoke arise from the electric pump that it supposed was the human's beating heart. It would be rather a great moment of truth for both of them." (9)

— Brian M. Stableford

References

- (1) Robert Moore Williams, "Robots Return" in The Robot and the Man, ed. M. Greenberg. London: Grayson & Grayson, 1954. p.199.
- (2) Lester del Rey, "Helen O'Loy" in The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, ed. R. Silverberg. London: Gollancz, 1970. p.42.
- (3) Isaac Asimov, I, Robot. London: Panther, 1968. p.8.
- (4) Isaac Asimov, The Rest of the Robots. London: Panther, 1968. p.14.
- (5) C.L. Moore, "No Woman Born" in Tomorrow x 4, ed. D. Knight. Greenwich, Conn.: Gold Medal, 1964. p.101.
- (6) *ibid.* p.125.
- (7) *ibid.* p.135.
- (8) Walter M. Miller, "The Darfsteller" in The Hugo Winners, ed. I. Asimov. London: Penguin, 1964. p.86.
- (9) Philip K. Dick, "The Android and the Human", Vector Mar-Apr. 1973. p.7-8.

I mustn't forget to mention (lest he print alternate pages upside down) that our friendly printer, Jim Diviney, is himself a fan, and has produced an Index to the British edition of Astounding/Analog from November 1953 (when it adopted a smaller size) to August 1963 (when it ceased). It gives by contents, by title and by author. It is neatly printed by the man himself, the same size as Vector, and even features a neat Diviney cover. The critical reader would be forced to point out that a visible division between the three sections would have been helpful and the abbreviation 'N' for novel seems to be used throughout to designate novelettes. Also there are one or two consistent mis-spellings, e.g. Lester del Rey and Darrell T. Langhart. However, if you have a run of the British edition of Astounding, the Index will undoubtedly help you find your way around it; while for those with a mixed collection, the author entries also give the date of the American edition in which the story appeared. It runs to 41 pages, costs 45p, and comes from Jim Diviney, 28 Manchester Road, Brampton, Huntingdon, FE18 8QP.

Jim also publishes a very tiny fanzine called Microdot, which you can get for the price of a 3p stamp. No material of lasting value here, but it's probably the smallest fanzine around, and certainly the most easily mislaid. (It measures roughly 2 1/2" x 2".)

peter roberts

THE FANNISH INQUISITION

Choosing fanzines for review in this column is becoming a little difficult. I don't yet want to repeat myself by considering the latest issues of fanzines already dealt with in Vector, though the temptation to do so when a fine new Energumen or Outworlds appears is strong. So the field is narrowing. There are plenty of fanzines out there, of course, but not that many that I feel like reviewing; only the best for the BSFA, eh?

One new fanzine appeared recently, however, which certainly looks like becoming one of the best of its kind (if it manages to continue); it's called Kangaroo Feathers 1 and is published by the Australia in '75 Bidding Committee with Bruce Gillespie as overall editor and David Grigg as the issue editor on this occasion. The idea behind the magazine is to publicise Australia's bid for the 1975 world convention (and we all hope they'll win, don't we?) and to do so by producing an attractive fanzine full of the best of Australian fan writing, reprinted from sundry sources. For the first issue David has chosen material from ANZAPA, the Australian amateur press association, which has had little circulation outside Australia (I'm the only member from the UK, so I assume no one else over here will recognise the reprints).

Most of the pieces are humorous accounts of various incidents, a few of them relating to sf and fandom; John Brosnan and John Bangsund, probably the two best current fanwriters, are included, but there's also some fine writing from Leigh Edmonds, Peter House, Dennis Stocks, and John Foyster. This first issue is fairly thin, but beautifully produced (thanks largely to Noel Kerr) and profusely illustrated with some fine cartoons. Co-operative efforts tend to be rather unstable and I only hope Kangaroo Feathers survives for further issues. Anyway, I'll happily recommend it on the first issue alone -- and remember to vote for Australia if you're a member of TORCON 2.

Another recent arrival was Kratophany 3 from Eli Cohen, one of the inhabitants of The Avocado Pit, a New York fannish retreat. The fanzine is somewhat irregular, but always welcome; it's fairly typical in layout and content, with a mixture of articles and a good batch of letters. The first three issues, however, have had as their centrepiece an unusual and fascinating cartoon serial: "Wendy and the Yellow King" drawn by Judy Mitchell and written by Mike Mason. I'm not an aficionado of comic strips, but this one appeals to me and I only wish Kratophany might appear more frequently just for the sake of this. Most of the other artwork, incidentally, is also good, particularly that by Vincent DiFate and the great cover by Steve Stiles. As for the articles, there's an amusing army tale from Dave

Emerson, a rather wretched Peghoot, and a not too esoteric article on the impossibility of PTL travel by the editor, Eli Cohen (almost PhD). A rather strange mixture perhaps, but it's all most readable and enjoyable: recommended.

Kratophany isn't exactly large, but the recent issues of the British fanzine, Les Spinge, have been distinctly small considering that past issues ran to 100 pages or so. After a variety of editors and countless changes of format, the current Les Spinge seems to have settled down as a personalzine produced largely for OMPA by Darroll & Rosemary Pardoe. The ten pages of the 28th issue contain just a couple of letters with the remaining space devoted to an account of the Pardoes' genealogical investigations, a review of William Hope Hodgson's The Night Land, and a short piece on the joys of Cambridge punting. Not exactly stunning stuff, but pleasant enough and neatly produced.

I think I ought to mention Riverside Quarterly, the 20th issue of which arrived from Canada recently. It's a sometime Hugo nominee and likes to think of itself as a respectable critical journal as well as a fanzine — I note that the Saskatchewan Arts Board paid for this issue, for example. Unfortunately, the two elements in RQ just don't mix; there's no particular reason why they shouldn't, of course — it seems to me that it's simply the editor's fault in picking poor fannish and poor academic material.

Let me make my usual complaint about the production first of all: RQ is printed, yet the result is depressing. I don't object to a disinterested functional layout (though it's a rejection of opportunities and abilities*), but this fanzine apparently attempts something more since it makes use of illustrations; unfortunately the latter range from the adequate down to the pitiful (or laughable perhaps — Kirsten Cameron's scribbling could be bettered by a sub-normal chimpanzee) and these are scattered in any odd spaces that seem handy.

Occasionally Leland Sapiro puts an interesting article in RQ; more often, however, the articles are tedious, ill-written, and frequently lucidrous. The 20th Riverside Quarterly, for example, starts with Wayne Connelly's "Sf & The Mundane Egg", a consideration of "science-fiction sublimity" (defined at one point as "a form of 'manned intellectual content with excitement'" — eh?) in relation to "the eighteenth century sublime as introduced by Thomas Burnet" (in 1681) which "achieves its final maturation" (isn't that what warts do?) with Edmund Burke. This sort of article strikes me as absurd: very little sf is fit to withstand an academic glance, let alone a microscopic study — and Wayne's piece takes it for granted that it's worthwhile to fabricate a possible philosophical background for non-descript hack writing. The article is a mock-academic game and a poorly played one at that.

I don't really want to go through the whole issue picking at the articles, but I must say that the only item I enjoyed was Harry Warner Jr's look at British fanzines in his regular column, 'Opere Citato'; other than this, there's some wretched verse, and nine or ten articles and reviews of varying quality (but none of real interest). I must admit that plenty of people have good words to say about RQ, though virtually everyone thinks of it as 'heavy';

* In favour, perhaps, of sanity and occasional leisure..... (NJE)

many consider it a worthwhile, serious magazine about sf ... I think they are being conned.

The final fanzine for review this time is Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell's Starling 24. Nominally a rock fanzine which used to be associated with APA-45, Starling seems to have changed somewhat (at least as far as this issue is concerned) and now has a varied range of contents with particular emphasis on nostalgia. Juanita Coulson, for example, in her column "Dance to the Music", talks about the McCarthy era and compares the music and life-style of her teens with that of the contemporary rock-culture; I suppose, in fact, that this is actually anti-nostalgic, since Juanita undermines the myth that Things Were Better Then. The letter column, however, is full of people remembering tv sf of the past (and tv in general) -- I must say I find such reminiscing enjoyable, against my better judgement perhaps. Michael Carlson has an article on Raymond Chandler to coincide with Ballantine's reissuing of his novels -- well-written and interesting, even though the subject seemed unlikely to appeal to me. Finally there's a book review, a fairly long editorial, and an article on sf (the definition thereof) by Angus Taylor.

I must admit that Starling did not look very enticing on first sight (hence my somewhat unfavourable quick review in Checkpoint); but having decided to read it, I found I enjoyed it more than I had anticipated. The artwork is fairly good, with Jay Kinney's "Six Basic Fan Cartoons" being particularly fine. Only complaint I really have is that the reader is shunted to obscure pages to find the ends of almost all the articles -- annoying habit; otherwise recommended.

--- Peter Roberts

Kangaroo Feathers (Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia) 4/3 (US)

Kratophony (Eli Cohen, 417 W.118th St, Apt 63, New York, NY 10027, USA) 50¢ per issue

Les Spinge (Darroll & Ro Pardoe, 24 Othello Close, Hartford, Huntington, PE18 7SU) free

Riverside Quarterly (Leland Sapiro, Box 40, Univ. Station, Regina, Sask., Canada) 4/2

Starling (Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 W.Main 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA) 3/1

All should be available for contribution, letter of comment, or trade, as alternatives to cash.

At the foot of page 6 of the last issue there should have appeared the instruction 'Continued on p.44'. That it did not was naturally an unavoidable error and in no way an oversight on my part. So there.

D. G. COMPTON

an interview

Q. Would you like to expand your biography? (What happened at school to make you want to be a writer? Why D.G. and not David Guy? Your very believable women characters might lead one to suppose the author was a woman.)

A. What happened to make me want to become a writer? The blessed discovery, I suppose, that there was an ego-boosting activity available to me that didn't demand too much effort. Other lads had to toil around the running track to win significance, or be caned eight times in a week in order to gain notoriety. I just had to write some drivelly (I didn't think so at the time) verse for the school magazine, or some one-act play for the end-of-term dramatics.

In other words, I possessed a facility quite unhampered by any sense of discrimination. (I was very lucky that my school put up with me -- although being as staunchly English Public School as only a second-line English public school can be, several members of the staff were surprisingly sympathetic to the arts (tolerated, probably, because it was wartime and teachers of any persuasion were hard to come by). Anyway, I was very happy at school, academically not a disgrace, and determined (from as far back as I can remember) to be a writer.)

In those days I was going to write plays. My mother was an actress -- ergo, I would write plays. Also, plays were shorter and would take less time to write than proper books. (That piece of reasoning really happened, and indeed persisted on into my thirties. Even now, the months ahead of me when I start a book, that enormous boulder that has to be pushed up to the top of the mountain, doesn't bear thinking of.)

Since I was going to write plays, it was reasonable (and fun) to work first in the theatre for a bit. This I did, as soon as my National Service was over. About that particular eighteen months there isn't very much to be said, except that before or since I have never been unhappier. I'm not quite sure why. Put harshly, I suspect that for once in my life I was nobody's darling, and I didn't like it. Anyway, my brief (nine month) theatre career ended very abruptly when I got married, still only 21, and had to think about supporting a family.

After trying for a short time to fulfil my ambition to be a writer and discovering that it wasn't enough to have a facility, you had to have something to say, I settled down to various undemanding and uninteresting jobs in London. We lasted like this for ten years, going nowhere (I sold a couple of matinee-type radio plays to the BBC), and then sold up and took the proceeds of our house down to a rented cottage in Devon to give us a year's living while I tried my

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writing again. I was ten years older and, we hoped, ten years wiser.

It was in fact nearer to two years before I sold my first piece, a play for the BBC's Third Programme. In despair, with some twelve plays written and rejected, I turned to something novel-length. When you're very poor in a cottage in Devon you have to do something in the long winter evenings. I produced a thing called Too Many Murderers and when it sold fairly easily, turned out five more in quick succession. I wrote them as Guy Compton because my publisher thought it sounded tough. (Guy is my middle name.) But the books weren't in the least tough, and were very bad, in a 'literary' kind of way. I would prefer them ignored, better still, forgotten.

Why D.G.? Well, I'd happily have written as David Compton, but there's an English radio play writer called David Compton and his agent wanted to avoid any possible confusion. I didn't insert the 'Guy' as I've always hated it. Certainly there was never any intention of keeping my sex a mystery. I'm not sure I'm pleased that reviewers have had their doubts — shouldn't I feel vaguely threatened? I'm sure Hemingway would have.

Q. Why do you write novels rather than short stories? (The only short story I have found is "It's Smart to Have an English Address" from SF Impulse.)

A. I write novels because I get a usable idea so seldom that I dare not fritter it away on anything shorter. Even the one sf short story you mention was in fact a pilot study for SynthaJoy. I claim short stories in my credit by reason of five ghost stories I have written at various times for a friend who edits a couple of ghost story anthologies. Somehow simple little mechanical ideas for ghost stories come much more easily. The framework is so much closer and easier to work in. I can limit myself to the idea rather than to its human implications.

Q. Could you tell us something about your non-sf novel, The Palace?

A. The Palace is indeed 'mainstream' in theme — all about intrigue in a little Kremlin somewhere in Central Europe — but its treatment is much the same as all the others. Above all, the strong sense of place (usually imaginary) without which I can't start writing at all. I very much enjoyed writing it, and still think it's one of my better books — though, oddly enough, it was the direct result of Hodder & Stoughton's despair after four of my sf novels had sunk instantly, without trace. (This was before Ace took me on in America.) I was wasting my time, and his, with sf — would I please try something different? So I did, and it sank even more quickly and with even less trace.

Norton were kind enough to pick it up in America later on, where it did slightly — though not much — better. No paperback house will touch it. There's this odd thing about sf — you can be as serious, as sexually discreet, as socially aware as you like and still find a big readership. I'm sure The Palace was no sillier, no more ponderous, no worse written or duller or more ill-constructed than my others, but not being sf it got itself labelled 'cold' and 'depressing' and 'cerebral' and unacceptable to any except a few cranky literati.

Which is why — though you haven't yet asked it — I write sf. I can write about today, here and now, real people and their relation-

ships to each other and the civilisation they are building far more acceptably through this simple little distancing mechanism called ef. I can try to be relevant without risking dismissal as an over-earnest pamphleteer. (I hope.) —I'm afraid I'm sounding pompous. Perhaps that's because I am pompous.

Q. You seem to have more difficulty with British publishers than with American. Have you yet found a new British hardcover publisher? How about paperbacks?

A. I parted with Hodder on the best of terms — with six commercial duds behind me they were quite glad to see me go. They never disclosed the precise sales figures, but I rarely earned my advance -- which means something in the region of 2000. Why Michael Joseph thought they would do better than Hodder I cannot imagine, but in fact they did very much worse. Hutchinson are dithering over The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe. They've been undecided for nearly three months now. Nevertheless, since their paperback subsidiary, Arrow, have started taking up my books, I remain hopeful.

Q. The one novel which Michael Joseph published sank practically without trace. I only ever saw one review, in the TLS, and I've never been able to find a copy anywhere. Yet it was well-received in America. Why should this be? Could it have been anything to do with the change of title? Do you think the British title was a mistake?

A. Certainly the title was a mistake. Nay, a disaster. For some reason they didn't like the American title, Chronocules, so I idiotically came up with Hot Wireless Sets, Aspirin Tablets, the Sandpaper Sides of Used Matchboxes, and Something That Might Have Been Castor Oil. They took it as a gimmick, gambled on it, and lost. No bookshop would touch it. Still, it can't have been the title's fault that the TLS so hated the book. 'The Drool of Invention' the review was headed, and went on for far too many words in the same vein. But I've remembered the heading -- I'd like to use it one day as a title. It's a grand phrase.

Q. Have you had any more success with radio plays?

A. Ironically they were, every one of them, picked up in Germany some time after I switched to books. They go on round and round the various German stations, but mostly nowhere else. One made the crossing to Canada once a long time ago, but I don't know if they ever actually broadcast it. It was called "Bandstand". The plays were all a bit fey and fantastic -- though not in the least science-fantastic.

Q. Have you any new books in the offing?

A. As I mentioned, I've now finished something called The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe. I don't think it's the fact that it's my latest that makes me believe it's the best I've done for some time, probably since SynthaJoy. Now that I'm back in London and with a regular 9-5 job, I aim to start each book over my week's Christmas holiday and finish it in whatever odd moments the next five months allow. That gives me the rest of the year in which to pray for another idea and to fill in with various other literary-ish jobs.

Q. Would you describe yourself as a novelist who happened to write

sf, rather than an sf writer?

A. In spite of Terry Carr I still think of myself as a writer whose books happen to be sf, rather than an sf writer. The latter implies a knowledge of the genre and a conscious act of writing within (even if only just) that genre. Certainly my first six books were written with no knowledge of the genre whatsoever. When I decided to give up crime books, the first adequate theme that turned up was an sf theme. I enjoyed writing it, so did another. And another... Fitted into my general reading at that time had been Wells and Wyndham and Christopher and even dreadful Fred Hoyle, but nothing else to give me a firm awareness of the crowded and talented field I was entering. If I had had this awareness I might well have hesitated, and kept chickens instead.

So I was definitely a writer whose books happened to be sf. More recently, of course, as a reviewer I have come across much straight sf. Now, therefore, I am aware that once I extrapolate either socially or scientifically in a book I am become an sf writer. But I don't think this awareness pushes me into writing the book in any way differently than I would have done two or three years ago. The proof of this comes in the letters I sometimes see in fanzines saying what a dead mainstream bore my books are. So if I'm a genre writer now, I'm certainly not a very good one.

Q. Do you know the scientific establishments well as a background for your novels? You've said that a sense of place is very important to you. Do you ever visit a background when writing a story?

A. I have never knowingly been within fifty miles of a scientific establishment. My education was even so ridiculously limited that I never went into a school lab. We despised the scientists. (Perhaps I still do!) No, I never visit backgrounds. I often use Gloucestershire in my books because I know it well. I really do no research at all — if I don't know something I write round it. If that sounds idle, well I suppose it is. Certainly my books would be better (different?) if better researched.

Q. Which of your published novels are you most satisfied with? Which do you like least?

A. SynthaJoy is far and away my favourite. The problem is always to match the manner, the tone of voice, to the content. In SynthaJoy the intensely subjective way of writing, which changes as the book progresses, exactly suits the story being told. Besides it's the book most closely written out of my own direct experience and observation. My least favourite is The Missionaries. Too many viewpoints, too many plot creaks, and a moral compromise near the end. Somehow my idea of how it was going to be was never remotely realised.

Q. I see a (cyclic?) trend in that the intimate personal relationships of the main protagonist with each other get less and less as the number of points of view becomes greater; from The Quality of Mercy to The Silent Multitude and again from SynthaJoy to Chronocules. Any comments?

A. Incredibly enough, I've only very recently observed this pattern, and more particularly the sticky ends my poor women come to.

What it says about me I'd rather not know.

Q. How do you write? Do you do much rewriting?

A. I write very slowly indeed -- possibly a thousand words in an eight hour day -- but then I hardly change a comma.

Q. Your novels depend a good deal on strong characterisation, and this aspect of them has often been praised. Some critics have said that sf doesn't need particularly good characterisation; that it's unreasonable to expect it in addition to all the extrapolation, innovation and so forth. Is this a reasonable argument or an excuse?

A. An excuse, and not even a reasonable one. It's this aspect of some sf that has given the entire genre such a bad name. People like to read about People. As soon as people become mere objects in a book it shares the fate of hard-core pornography: it's only read by those few who happen to share that particular kick.

Q. You seem to share the common pessimistic outlook of many English sf writers. Why do you think this characteristic is so widespread?

A. Looking through my-shaped hole I'd say that any writer thinking sociologically must be pessimistic. And yet pessimism provides a very poor justification for writing books. If writers are the modern moralists they ought to find something about mankind to celebrate. Nihilism is a defensible attitude, but not one to be evangelised in books. This aspect of my own work concerns me very much.

Q. You have said on a number of occasions that the sf label should and must disappear. More recently you seem to have had second thoughts. Do you now think the label can be useful (to both readers and writers)? Is it possible that your books might do better in this country under an sf imprint?

A. I feel now that I got whooped up quite unnecessarily over the genre label. As a marketing concept it helps us middle range novelists to reach the readers most likely to enjoy our books, yet it can easily be discarded by a publisher who feels he has a best-seller on his hands -- witness The Andromeda Strain et al. Writers can take the label or leave it, as Wyndham and Christopher did, for example. So I honestly don't see why I got so hot under the collar. The genre label is wide and getting wider: it will grow out of its pulp connotations in due course and meanwhile it helps rather than hinders those writers and readers who choose to use it.

I think Ace lost a lot of money on me one way or another, so I don't know if my books would do better under an sf imprint here. They could hardly do worse. As I've said before, I don't choose my publishers. They choose -- or mostly don't choose -- me.

D. G. COMPTON

and new standards of excellence

Mark Adlard

We have now had six^{*} sf novels from D.G. Compton, and it is clear that he is one of the most important of those writers who have been setting new standards of excellence in the writing of sf.

His first novel, The Quality of Mercy, is set in 1979. Setting a novel in the near future can be attractive because it permits the writer to deal with problems of obvious relevance instead of with a menace which has somewhat less immediacy (e.g. the poisoning of Earth by D.D.T. instead of the predatory habits of six-legged Sirians). The danger of such a setting is that the fiction might be relegated prematurely to the sub-genre of historical sf (e.g. D.D.T. might cease to be a threat, while the six-legged Sirians continue to flourish unabated). The near future is attractive to the 'literary' writer also because it makes fewer demands upon his powers of 'scientific' extrapolation, and it avoids the near necessity of clogging his prose with invented words and of interrupting the action with detailed descriptions of an unfamiliar environment.

The Quality of Mercy exploits both these advantages: it deals with the continuing problems of international tension and over-population; and the literary treatment bears comparison with criteria drawn from the mainstream. Only in the matter of decimalisation has the novel been overtaken by history, and it was sheer bad luck that Compton assumed the ten shilling note would be the new unit. (And that is a better guess than the yards and inches still appearing in new stories of the far future.)

The centre of the action is an American airbase in England. The crews fly missions over Russia at an altitude which precludes detection by either satellite or radar, and they seed the air with material which is described as a device for detecting the departure of missiles from Russian soil. Their operations are therefore thought of as being defensive and morally justified. Meanwhile millions of people throughout the world are dying from a new and horrible disease known as V.P.D.

The action is seen through the eyes of Donald, who is a Special Duty officer seconded to the American airbase from the R.A.F. A good deal of the background is an up-dated treatment of that "international situation" which Henry James made the staple of his fiction from Daisy Miller onwards:

"Crass, gum-chewing up into the highest echelons ... They punched him, and said 'Donnie-boy'. Their fat backsides worried him ... Sometimes he wondered what sort of people these were who one day were going to inherit the earth."

* This article was written before The Missionaries was published. (NJE)

"Four responsible American officers playing the great American game of Let's-all-be-sophomores ... "

"He found baseball loud and vulgar and theatrical, and he was proud of being no good at it ... "

The English point of view is reinforced by a consciousness of class:

"Donald turned his thoughts to Amy Felton-Browne ... He wondered if he was being fair. He thought of the hyphen and the final 'e' and decided he was ... Mummy and Daddy would be the Hertfordshire Felton-Brownes, no doubt ..."

Consciousness of class has, of course, been a constant theme of English fiction since the days of Chaucer's Knight and Prioress, although it has appeared very little in sf. One of the exceptions is Aldiss in such stories as "Basis for Negotiation".

A public-school conditioning produces some typically odd generalisations:

"Like most Britishers, he rarely visited his father or mother, or wrote to them ... "

The moral seriousness of the novel is filtered through the consciousness of Donald. His reaction to the death of a girl unknown to him is light years removed from the moral blindness of so many heroic stereotypes. The final, horrifying connection between the missions over Russia (and elsewhere), and the millions of deaths from V.P.D., is approached by indirection and implication. In the absence of any explicit revelation you can continue to believe, if you really want to, that there isn't any connection.

The Silent Multitude (1966) is also set in the near future — in Gloucester during the 1980s. The buildings of the city are crumbling, and the inhabitants are evacuated. We are taken over halfway through the novel before we are actually told that this kind of disintegration is due to a spore brought back by a planetary expedition. The datum is therefore similar to that of Crichton's The Andromeda Strain, but the horrors are metaphysical rather than overtly dramatic.

The action is largely seen through the uncomprehending eyes of Billie Smith and his cat, who are derelicts in the crumbling city. There are indications that the collapse of the city is merely an external manifestation of something more essential which is collapsing in the human spirit:

"Somewhere inside him reality had got twisted, and it needed straightening. Whatever his fantasies might be, the framework that supported them was crumbling."

Once again there is a sharp eye for social comedy. As the novel approaches its climax in the cathedral, Billie is given some refreshment:

"The Dean came in with an old brown teapot, obviously the kitchen teapot, on a tray. Sim hoped that this and the thick kitchen cup were the result of sensitivity ... "

The cathedral endures miraculously, justifying the Dean's faith.

like the faith of Jocelin in Golding's The Spire. But then in the last paragraph the cathedral bell "sounded three times and then cut off".

In Farewell, Earth's Bliss (1966) the planet Mars has become a dumping ground for "people who had been found unacceptable to a society that they in their turn did not accept". This is not the Mars of Burroughs, Bradbury, or Zelazny's "A Rose for Ecclesiastes". The hurtling moons of Barsoom are a good deal less pretty in this terrible environment:

"She thought of the two moons circling above her in the always cloudless sky. How she had seen them the once and run and hidden and never wanted to see them again."

The novel is concerned with a new shipload of deportees. Compton is primarily interested in their reactions to their new environment. It is symptomatic that in 2001 Clarke should put Floyd in the 'toilet compartment' so that he could devote slightly more than a page to describing how it works. Compton simply says:

"The lavatories were ingenious, and Ruth hated them. They employed a suction principle to overcome the squalid effects of weightlessness."

In the settlement Ruth is trapped in a situation where the future holds nothing for her but a continuous re-reading of Dickens, like poor Tony Last in Waugh's A Handful of Dust. The novel ends with a mild hint at religious faith.

It seems to me that at this point Compton's sf can be divided into two equal parts. The first three novels have smooth, 'literary' titles, with epigraphs drawn from Shakespeare, Sylvia Plath and Thomas Nashe. This might be a convenient point, also, to illustrate Compton's facility for indicating details which, whilst irrelevant in themselves, make one see the things as being indisputably 'there'.

"The Commandant got up from the big leather chair. It bobbed lightly on its pedestal." (The Quality of Mercy)

"He stood up gradually, like a cow, in sections." (The Silent Multitude)

"One of the policemen offered her a cigarette and lit it from a lighter with a tall clear flame."

(Farewell, Earth's Bliss)

The second three novels have abrasive, synthetic titles, and a deeper commitment to sf themes. It is the first of these, and the two subsequent books, which have brought Compton to general notice.

Synthesjoy (1968) has as its background the work of Edward, a surgeon, and of Tony, an electronic engineer. Edward has developed Relaxatape. From this is developed Sensitape, which records the thoughts of talented men in such a way that they can be experienced by others. This makes it possible for the untalented to live through the ecstasy of a great musician conducting a first-class orchestra, and for the dying to face death with the absolute peace of mind enjoyed by a true believer. To this is added Sexitape, which enables the sexually inadequate to experience the feelings of a perfectly matched couple during love-play and copulation. To this

is added Synthajoy....

The novel has more technical interest (in the literary sense) than the preceding three books. The story is told by Thea, the widow of Edward and the lover of Tony. At the commencement everything has already happened, and the story emerges through reminiscence and interpolation while Thea is constrained in a nursing home.

Techniques of non-linear narration are sometimes bludgeoned in the fanzines, as if they were a bizarre innovation which threatened the pure story-line of E.E. Smith. In fact Conrad was using startling time-shifts in Almayer's Folly (1895), and deployed such techniques with marvellous effect in Lord Jim and Nostramo. He used such techniques so consistently that The Rover (1923) was described as 'a performance on the Conrad'. The film flash-back is usually little more than a crude derivative.

Compton uses the device very well indeed, and achieves a complex layering of reality.

Also of technical interest is the way the narrator slides from the first to the third person in order to distance her earlier, more innocent self:

"My memories of her are so vivid, they point the painful differences between us, what our eyes see, what our hands feel ... "

"I was Thea Cadence, B.C. -- Before Cynicism."

The insights provided by the Sextape give Thea a sexual trauma, and the horror of what they are doing destroys her:

"Once Eskimo women had softened their husbands' shoes every morning by chewing them. Was it really their gain that the shoes were now synthetic ... Love was so cerebral now, and the brief effects of skin on skin."

It seems to me that this is precisely that kind of horror which Ballard is attempting to explore in his different way.

As with the three preceding novels, Synthajoy ends on a note of ambiguity.

The theme of The Steel Crocodile (1970) is the growing menace of scientific discovery and the technological innovation and revised social behaviour which grow from it.

The Colindale Institute is unknown to the public. It is run by a handful of clever and high-minded men who are each expert in their particular fields. The discoveries revealed in new scientific papers and reports are fed to an associative computer, which then gathers together all the other data which is relevant and extrapolates the ultimate effects of the new discovery. If the future effects are considered to be 'bad' by the wise men (e.g. the effects of sex discrimination, of unlimited organ transplants) then steps are taken to ensure that the new discovery is not exploited. The Colindale Institute thus turns the head of Kapitza's 'crocodile of science' which would otherwise continue to 'go forward with all-devouring jaws'.

The near future is plausibly displayed, with its deserted and cavernous underground car-parks, its post-industrial attitudes, its vocational workers and the old people unhappily cured of their

physical ills. Even future art (the difficult subject of Blish's article in Vector 61) comes off reasonably well:

"Gryphon's room was cool, with reversible wall panels in green and black ... The picture on the back wall was responding to the harsh city sunlight with a range of metallic yellows and grays."

But the real problem, as usual with Compton, is that of people facing a moral problem. In particular the novel is about the relationship between Matthew and his wife Abigail, and it shows how their relationship is destroyed by the moral dilemma. The Colindale Institute is viewed through the eyes of husband and wife alternately, sometimes with an overlapping and recapitulation of the same section of actuality, and their conflicting viewpoints dramatise the conflict between two kinds of 'good'. As usual, the moral question is explored in great depth, but not answered.

Chronocules (1970) is Compton's contribution to time-travel literature, which one might have thought was done to death by Heinlein's "By His Bootstraps" (Astounding, 1941) but which seems to go on and on. It is true, however, that Compton's Professor has a horror of cliché equal to his author's, and he scouts all references to 'time-travel' with his own plausible gobbedgook about 'chronomic unity'.

The action is measured against the consciousness of Roses Varco, a mentally subnormal derelict who is devoted to his cats. I would guess that Roses Varco, and Billie Smith (in The Silent Multitude), are both inspired by the same prototype. In their stupidity and ignorance they nevertheless provide moral standards by which the 'scientific' activities can be judged. Roses, rather like an intellectually inferior Eliot Rosewater, is addicted to 'SF strips'. Lisa, after a sexual encounter with him, suffers a trauma similar to that of Thea in Synthesjoy.

An intriguing short chapter called 'Interjection' provides an example of 'multi-choiced narrative'. Compton, at slippered ease, is implying that despite our lack of orientation, the writer must nevertheless impose his own vision and purpose upon the amorphous mass of material at his disposal:

"Life is full enough of unavoidable decisions without -- in addition to paintings that are blank canvases and music that consists of silence -- the creation of multi-choice books."

Footnotes to the novel poke fun at the futility of any attempt to render actuality. The lesson seems to be that the writer has the obligations of a controlling intelligence, even if he wants to leave the final issues in doubt.

It is obvious that Compton is a very English writer. The settings of five of the six novels I have discussed are the Cotswolds, Gloucester, London (twice) and Cornwall. (The other is set on Mars.) References to a typically English environment abound.

At a less superficial level his attitudes to class and situation are English. At the most basic level he is perhaps the first sf writer to continue that tradition of moral seriousness which runs from Austen to James. His fiction does indeed stem from that tradition and not the American pulps. How odd, therefore, how extraordinarily odd and praiseworthy, that Ace should have published all six novels while the British paperback houses have done so little.

--- Mark Ailard

the infinity box

book & film reviews

Rendezvous With Rama, by Arthur C. Clarke. Gollancz; 256p.; £2.00

Reviewed by Malcolm Edwards

It's been a long time since we had a new Clarke novel. Not quite a hiatus of Asimovian proportions, but if we dismiss 2001 as the literary byproduct of a film (which I prefer to do, as it is noticeably substandard), we have to go right back to 1961 and A Fall Of Moondust to find the last one. It seemed unlikely that Clarke the sf novelist would ever return — in The Wind From the Sun he noted that his production of fiction seemed to be slowing to nothing — but here he is again with a brand-new novel published and at least two more to come.

In the last dozen years sf has changed in a lot of different ways, and one of the fascinations of a new work by a writer who has been largely absent from the field during that time is to see whether their work is still vital, or whether time has turned them into relics. (Despite its award-winning success, The Gods Themselves, for example, seemed to this reviewer like a very weak echo from the past.) Clarke has the advantage of being a purveyor of a type of sf where the demand has always greatly exceeded the supply — the story of middleweight scientific extrapolation, not so technical as to deter scientific illiterates like myself, but complicated enough to keep anyone so inclined happy. In his absence, there has been a tendency to try to fit Larry Niven into the pigeonhole left vacant; that this has been an unsatisfactory arrangement starts to become clear after a very few pages of Rendezvous With Rama.

The plot of this book could hardly be simpler. Rama is detected by instruments outside the orbit of Jupiter. At first it is thought to be a wandering asteroid, but when a space probe investigates it is found to be an alien spaceship — a perfect cylinder fifty kilometres long and twenty across. A manned crew is sent to explore it, but since it is set on a course which will swing it close round the sun and away again at high speed, they have a maximum of about three weeks in which to explore it. They do so.

That's it. Oh, there's a little politicking on the sidelines — is Rama a threat to mankind? should it be destroyed? — but it's all fairly perfunctory. The novel belongs to Clarke's new big toy, Rama.

The mechanics of writing such a novel are fairly obvious. First, design your spaceship.... It more or less stands or falls at that stage. Nobody is going to hold the reader's interest through a novel of the kind unless the hardware is sufficiently complex and mystifying. The plot is structured like a guided tour, with a new equivalent of the Niagara Falls every third chapter or so (they are very short chapters). In this Clarke seems thoroughly successful. Rama always retains its mysteries; Clarke knows better than to try to

explain everything. The impression that it all hangs together if we only had the key is conveyed strongly, and it's enough.

Rama is not physically a particularly vast object; nor is its basic design very startling (Larry Niven's 'Alternatives to Worlds' speech in Speculation deals with a more-or-less similar structure). Nevertheless, the sense of size and strangeness is always maintained. Compare this with a book like Ringworld, where a structure of incredible size is reduced to almost cosy proportions, and the only (if you'll pardon the phrase) sense of wonder is an initial and very short-lived 'Coo, isn't it big!'

Certainly, Rendezvous With Rama has faults. The opening chapters creak, the characterisation is pretty rudimentary, the sub-plots are unconvincing. There are a number of good literary reasons for not liking it very much, and in most cases I'd plug them as hard as anyone. However, I can find it in me to forgive Clarke all of this as I derived considerable enjoyment from exploring Rama in his company. To show you what to expect, here's an extract from Chapter Eighteen. Inside Rama, the ship lights have just come on, and the main character is trying to find a visual orientation:

"Safest of all was to imagine that he was at the bowl-shaped bottom of a gigantic well, sixteen kilometres wide and fifty deep. The advantage of this image was that there could be no danger of falling further; nevertheless, it had some serious defects.

"He could pretend that the scattered towns and cities, and the differently coloured and textured areas, were all securely fixed to the towering walls. The various complex structures that could be seen hanging from the dome overhead were perhaps no more disconcerting than the pendent candelabra in some great concert-hall on Earth. What was quite unacceptable was the Cylindrical Sea....

"There it was, half-way up the well-shaft — a band of water, wrapped completely round it, with no visible means of support. There could be no doubt that it was water; it was a vivid blue, flecked with brilliant sparkles from the few remaining ice-floes. But a vertical sea forming a complete circle twenty kilometres up in the sky was such an unsettling phenomenon that after a while he began to seek an alternative.

"That was when his mind switched the scene through ninety degrees. Instantly, the deep well became a long tunnel, capped at either end. 'Down' was obviously in the direction of the ladder and the stairway he had just ascended ... He was clinging to the face of a curving sixteen-kilometre-high cliff, the upper half of which overhung completely until it merged into the arched roof of what was now the sky ... The two other stairways ... slanted up into the sky and then curved far out over his head. Norton had now acquired enough confidence to lean back and glance up at them — briefly. Then he tried to forget that they were there....

"For too much thinking along those lines evoked yet a third image of Rama, which he was anxious to avoid at all costs. This was the viewpoint that regarded it once again as a vertical cylinder or well — but now he was at the top, not the bottom, like a fly crawling upside down on a domed ceiling, with a fifty-kilometre drop immediately below...."

That's a taste of it (a scene nicely visualised, incidentally, on the Bruce Pennington jacket painting -- Gollancz have given this one a rather more lavish appearance than their standard sf, which is nice for Clarke; but I can't help wishing that, having been such good friends to sf over the years and now having an obvious winner on their hands, Gollancz had plucked up courage and put the magic words 'science fiction' somewhere on the book). If it stirs you at all -- there's plenty more where it came from.

Soylent Green, directed by Richard Fleischer. ABC release; 85 mins.

Reviewed by Chris Fowler

The first thing to be said of Richard Fleischer's direction of Soylent Green, 'based on a novel by Harry Harrison', is that as a representation of the plot of Make Room! Make Room! it is a travesty. As a presentation of the theme of the novel, however, it is much better. For although the film utilises only a few elements from the plot of Make Room! Make Room!, it excellently portrays the background of the hideously over-populated New York of 2022. (Harry Harrison, at the SF Forum at the NFF on June 2nd asked why the date was changed; well, it's just 50 years on from the present, i.e. the 1972 of the film's making.) This portrait I found particularly well-observed and realistic, with people everywhere, sleeping on every inch of stairway space, crowding every square foot of a huge church, living in derelict cars -- no longer the status symbols of an affluent, mobile society, but doing service in a more basic role in the materially exhausted pedestrian society of 2022 -- and in shacks. In this New York, the only trees are in a sanctuary in Grammercy Park, totally enclosed to shield them from the poisonous atmosphere. All exterior scenes in the film are shot through yellow-green filters, to give the impression of fog, and this device works very well. One can almost taste and smell the foulness of the air; and of the people, sweltering in a temperature boosted by the greenhouse effect of air pollution, rationed in their use of water, packed together like battery animals. This simile is curiously apt, as we shall see later. Crowd scenes convey an almost overwhelming sense of the pressure of human beings, particularly the scene of the food riot.

Well, to the plot. Charlton Heston is a harassed and hopelessly overworked detective, working double shifts on murder investigations and riot control, detailed to find the murderer of a rich Soylent Corporation director. Soylent controls half the world's food supply, so the murder of such a high official is an important matter. Yet pressure is soon being exerted on Heston's chief via the Mayor to have him taken off the case. But not soon enough: Heston has discovered disturbing facts which induce him to continue with the case. He has come to the conclusion that the director was assassinated, with the complicity of his bodyguard, possibly to keep him silent. The detective also discovers two Soylent Corp. oceanographic survey reports, which he passes on to his 'book', Sol, played by Edward G. Robinson. After consulting the Exchange, a central repository for information from books, Robinson comes to a conclusion about the new product Soylent Green so horrifying that he ceases to desire life. He goes to a Suicide Centre (old sf standby) where he is painlessly put to sleep after 15 minutes of full-colour movies of the vanished beauties of Earth's past -- tulip fields, herds of deer, clear

rushing streams; but not before communicating the truth to Heston, who arrives at the last moment. Heston follows Robinson's body from the Centre, seeing his friend's remains treated like so much garbage throughout (shades of the brutalisation of Buchenwald and Dachau) — and finds the proof he needs, which the assassination was aimed at covering up. Heston returns to the Exchange to tell them they are right, but is caught by Soylent gunmen and shot down in a church. His chief arrives in time to receive the terrible message from Heston, and the movie ends — very movingly, I found — with him being carried out on a stretcher, bloody fingers stabbing to the skies, desperately telling what he has found.

Anyone familiar with Make Room! Make Room! will be able to tell from this outline that little of Harrison's plot has survived in Stanley Greenberg's screenplay. What especially suffers is the relationship between Heston and Leigh Taylor-Young, playing the 'furniture' of the murdered man's apartment. This is only sketched in: there is none of the love between the couple found in the book, and the relationship is abruptly terminated by Heston shortly before the end of the film. The actress has little chance to do anything with her role, and her performance suffers thereby. Where the film does gain over the book is in the performance of Edward G. Robinson. He is superb in the character of Sol, old enough to remember the times before scarcity and artificial foods, an anachronism surviving into a hostile age. His death scene is the most moving in the film, heightened by one's knowledge that Robinson died of cancer shortly after the completion of shooting. Charlton Heston's performance is very ordinary in comparison, though thoroughly competent. Much of the time, he just doesn't seem tired or harassed enough.

Harry Harrison at the NFT Forum criticised the film for not bringing home forcefully enough the message of population caused by lack of birth control. I think that this criticism is erroneous, and indicates a failure to understand two factors. Firstly, the fact that we are now eight years on from the first publication of the novel, and everyone is aware of the ecological crisis, and the need for birth control — or, at least, if they aren't now, they never will be. Thus the movie does not need to spell out the message. When Robinson asks 'How have we come to this?' there is no need for an answer — the viewer provides his own. Secondly, the fact that the cinema — the supreme art form produced by the 20th century communicates by a complex variety of visual means. There is no necessity for characters to talk about overpopulation; the movie shows it to us. There are dozens of incidents in Soylent Green highlighting the ecological crisis: the absence of cars, the lack of paper, the super-luxury nature of meat and of foods which we accept as natural, the wonder in Heston's eyes as he sees the films of deer, encounters hot running water, ice — one could go on almost indefinitely. No-one could be in any doubt that here we have a society in crisis, having exhausted its raw materials, its energy, and at last its food supply.

In sum then, Soylent Green stands up well when considered as a movie in its own right. Not a great film by any means, but worthy of seeing, distinguished by a clear and compelling message: control population or face this.... Perhaps the most horrifying thing about the film is that the picture of overcrowding and poverty in New York of 2022 is that of Calcutta now. Think about that for a while.

The Day the Sun Stood Still, by Poul Anderson, Robert Silverberg, and Gordon R. Dickson. Thomas Nelson; 240p.; \$5.95

Reviewed by Cy Chauvin

The man responsible for putting together this collection of three original novellas written around a common theme is Robert Silverberg. This type of anthology seems to have been fairly successful, for Silverberg has put together three others along similar lines — Three for Tomorrow (1969), Four Futures (1971), and Three Trips in Time and Space (1973). (I wonder who thinks up these incredibly unimaginative titles?)

The anthology starts out well, with a strikingly original theme suggested by Lester del Rey: "What kind of world might exist were the basis of faith replaced by certain knowledge?" Specifically, how would man react and evolve if a miracle — the stopping of the sun for a day and a night — made the existence of God nearly as certain and obvious as the existence of gravity? This is no idle trifle, no shallow 'gimmick' that del Rey suggests, but a subject with real depth. If it were truly just 'a literature of ideas', with the execution of a story being of minor importance, then these three authors should have had it made. As it is, you might still expect them to produce some exceptional stories.

The results, I'm afraid, are largely disappointing. In part, I think this is because original theme anthologies are inherently flawed. For a writer to produce a truly exceptional story, he has to feel and care a great deal about what he is writing, and he can't do that if he is writing his story around another man's idea. He may turn out a story that mechanically and even intellectually deals well with his theme, but unless he has had time to mull it over in his mind and feel it in his heart, to make it his own, the story will be emotionally empty — and emotion is, after all, the basis of all good fiction. A more general theme than that suggested by del Rey would actually have been better, since it would have given the authors more freedom to deal with something they were personally interested in and felt strongly about. It's interesting to note that Silverberg's own suggestion for a theme (in the latest anthology, Three Trips in Time and Space) is much more general than those in the three previous anthologies, for each of which he wrote stories. Obviously Silverberg realized this difficulty.

The anthology is also disappointing because, strictly speaking, the authors haven't followed del Rey's theme. In his column in the February 1973 If, del Rey says that the authors "seized as their theme the ... miracle itself rather than the eventual world that may have resulted" (my emphasis). The authors portray the miracle, and its immediate effects, but none go beyond that and portray how society might evolve thirty or forty years after the event (which is apparently what del Rey wanted). Nor is faith really replaced by 'certain knowledge' in these stories, at least not for any length of time; men temporarily accept God as fact, but most soon fall back into their own beliefs, and deny that the stopping of the sun is God's work at all.

Poul Anderson's "A Chapter of Revelation" is, perhaps, the poorest story in the book. The story opens with the threat of war with China hanging in the air, and the strain and tension radiates from every

character. The story focuses on two people: Simon Donaldson, a research scientist who works at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory in San Francisco, and Louis Habib, a middle class working man who owns an auto repair shop in nearby Oakland. Habib suggests (on a local tv talk show) that everyone stop one day and pray for a sign from God. They do; the sun stops; and Habib is regarded as a near-saint.

Anderson's moral in this story — his own personal theme, if you will, concealed behind del Rey's grandiose miracle — is stated near the end, when Habib appears on national television to address the country. He is pressured by various groups into appearing to help prevent the disintegration of the country, but finds he cannot recommend any specific programme or plan of action. "I can't tell you what to do," he says. "Can anyone?" And later, privately: "People don't like being told they have to make their own lives and success isn't guaranteed. The country falls apart soon after this, and Habib is killed by a mob near his home. James Blish says that Anderson's tragic hero is 'a man who is driven partly by circumstances, but mostly by his own conscience, to do the wrong thing for the right reasons — and then has to live with the consequences' and Habib fits this definition perfectly.

Anderson's persistent tendency to let his characters' dialogue turn into lectures is more pronounced than usual in this story. Anderson wrote an article for Outworlds in which he defended this practice, and pointed out that people do lecture one another in real life. This is true; but a person in real life does not stop feeling, seeing, and hearing everything else when lectured by someone. In a story, however, this is what happens, since the printed page can convey only one kind of sensory impression at a time. It is not so much the lectures in themselves that are bad as the way they squeeze descriptive detail out of the story. And of all people Poul Anderson, who has said that he tries to appeal to at least three of the reader's senses in every scene in a story, should realize the value of this detail. No element of a story can be automatically justified merely because it is 'realistic'; it must be artistically pleasing as well. I do not think 'lecturing' meets this latter requirement.

Robert Silverberg's "Thomas the Proclaimer" is a competent but bland effort, lacking the originality and emotional depth that make Silverberg's best work ("Sundance", Downward to the Earth, etc.) worth reading and re-reading. The story is told in Silverberg's distinctive and easily recognisable style — short clipped sentences, present tense, few adjectives — but lacks another of his distinctive hallmarks, strong sexuality. I suspect the story was written more out of a sense of duty than anything else.

"Thomas the Proclaimer" is divided into several sections, each told from a different viewpoint. The main character, obviously, is Thomas, a former pickpocket and thief turned good. Thomas becomes the focal point around which an appeal to God forms, although he is in no way 'responsible' for the resulting miracle, any more than Habib was in Anderson's story. But unlike Habib, Thomas plays the role of the confident prophet (urged on, to a large extent, by Kraft, one of his underlings), even though he is troubled by doubt within. In the end he gives up his role as prophet and is turned on by a revengeful Kraft.

Many other characters play prominent roles in the story, however,

and this shifting of viewpoint from character to character enables Silverberg to fill in the background of his story without resorting to extensive lecturing. Silverberg's future society is very similar to Anderson's, for it is also a time of great turmoil, and men believe that the end of the world is near. They have given up hope. And like Anderson's story — perhaps even more so than Anderson's story — the stopping of the sun solves nothing for the people, and if anything only hastens their doom.

Gordon Dickson's "Things Which Are Caesar's" is the most interesting story of the three. Dickson takes a somewhat different approach from that of Silverberg and Anderson; he concentrates on the responses of six people to the miracle, and largely ignores the reaction of society as a whole. The story takes place in the countryside, where everyone has gathered after hearing the rumour of the miracle. They gather round campfires; at one is Dave, who was orphaned at an early age and wears a chain round his leg representing his debt to God; Walt, a former preacher whose faith in God is stained by the sin of doubt; Letty and Rob, two young people searching themselves; Ranald, an immortal who has witnessed the stopping of the sun 1000 years before; and Maybeth, a young woman from the city who Ranald finds laying in the pasture where they are camped, alone and afraid. Dickson's story revolves around these six.

Much of the richness of the story comes from Dickson's descriptive detail. For instance, "Like Ranald, he was bearded; but the dark-brown hair on his face was sparse and fine, so that when the wind blew this way and that it seemed he was only bearded in patches. Above his beard and narrow cheekbones his brown eyes had the dark openness of a suffering, new-born animal ... His body was thickened by layers of clothing."

Dickson is the only writer of the three to view the miracle with much hope, and even for him this hope is only a small, slim ray. Man will not change, he says. Ranald's attitude toward the miracle reflects this view, and he describes his experience thusly: "The sun was there, unmoving as it was this time ... But afterward, there was no difference. Just as there was no difference a little later after the gentlefolk ... wept at the chapel at hearing Piers the Flowman was closer to God than they."

I still felt dissatisfied with Dickson's story when I finished reading it. I believe an sf story's worth is in large part determined by the extent to which it exploits the unique imaginative possibilities offered by sf. "Things Which Are Caesar's" is a disappointing story because it exploits these possibilities only to a relatively small degree.

It is a shame that such an interesting and original theme couldn't have had better treatment. But as I have said, I think this is a result of an inherent flaw in the concept of the original theme anthology, rather than the fault of the authors. You can't write a great story using another man's idea. Del Rey is the man who should have written this book.

A Werewolf Among Us, by Dean R. Koontz. Ballantine, 211p.; \$1.25

Reviewed by Malcolm Edwards

To anyone who has ever wondered what the result would be of a cross between Ten Little Niggers and the Three Laws of Robotics, I can address two remarks. First, you can find about by reading this book. Second, you'll wish you hadn't bothered.

Although I'm far from being a completist in my sf reading (God forbid!) I do hate to feel I'm missing anyone potentially worthwhile. When browsing recently in Bram Stokes' shop I discovered a complete Five-Foot Shelf of Dean R. Koontz titles, and realised I had never read -- or even acquired -- a single one of them. Flushed with sudden guilt, I selected the two most recent (reasoning that he ought to have hit his stride by now) and dashed off home with them. This was the one I chose to read first, which may be unfortunate for the other.

Baker St Cyr, a cyberdetective, comes to the planet Darma to investigate a couple of mysterious murders out at the Alderban mansion. (The bodies are nastily mutilated, and local legend posits a creature akin to a werewolf...) And there are further murders, and everyone is trapped together overnight in the house (apart from the robot butler and St Cyr's bio-computer, it might as well be on the Isle of Wight), and they know that one of them must be the murderer! But who...??

Oh dear, I suppose it must have seemed like a good idea, but the end result is pretty dire. Perhaps it would have been better played for laughs. (Horrible thought: maybe it was!) Even the writing suffers: I had the impression that Koontz was a 'colourful' writer, but reading this is like chewing cardboard.

Valley Beyond Time, by Robert Silverberg. Dell; 223p.; 95c

Reviewed by Malcolm Edwards

I suppose any professional writer would be foolish to turn up an opportunity to put together a collection of old stories. However, when the writer has changed as much as Robert Silverberg has, one feels he does himself a disservice by presenting as a new collection four stories which would have been undistinguished on first publication, fifteen or more years ago, and which have not improved in the interim. Admittedly Silverberg's Introduction draws attention to their age, but not unnaturally he adds: "I offer that fact here as an explanation, not an apology, for if the stories needed apologies, they would not be again appearing in print." Would that it were so.

In "Valley Beyond Time" a group of men, women and aliens are kidnapped from various parts of the galaxy and find themselves imprisoned in a valley on a planet somewhere by an alien who tells them that while they remain they will not die, but if any of them succeeds in escaping they must all leave. Naturally, factions form. Some want to leave; others prefer to accept this paradise at face value. Nowhere is there any explanation of their captor's behaviour, or of why it should impose such arbitrary conditions. There's no logic behind the story: it's just a set of men and women (and aliens) against a

Situation, set up for the sole purpose of occupying 60-odd pages of prose.

"The Flame and the Hammer" is a tale of far-future galactic intrigue, redolent with Emperors and Imperial Proconsuls. Basically, it's the story of the young man who overthrows the Empire because his weapon is bigger than anyone else's. What is the nature of this wonderful weapon? Well, judge for yourself:

"The snout of the antique weapon jutted menacingly from the parapet of the Temple of the Suns ... It was of symbolic value. It had not been fired in twelve hundred years.

"Ritual prescribed that it be pointed at the skies each night ...

"He crouched in the firing bucket ... His fingers played over the impotent control panel ...

"Daysir reddened. 'Ever since the age of fifteen, Iugaur, I've raised that cannon to the skies at nightfall. Once a day for eight years.'"

You can well imagine that when he eventually manages to fire it, it goes off with quite a bang!

The other two stories are of similar quality. In "The Wages of Death" a man is caught in a cleft stick of absurd conflicting loyalties (any normal person would have shrugged off one of them). Whooops, sorry, that was "Spacerogue"! (I really should do rough drafts...) No, "The Wages of Death" is about a group of dissidents attempting to escape a planet taken over by a dictator, and one of their number who realises that he can't accept their easy way out (which they camouflage as a stand on a point of principle). But here again, as in "Spacerogue", the point at issue seems a phoney one. Silverberg tries to make it convincing, but he can't do it. Indeed the main failure of all these stories is a failure of plausibility. This one is for dishard Silverberg freaks only.

Books received (may be reviewed in future issues)

From Gollancz: Time Out Of Mind, by Richard Cowper (£1.90 — intriguing new novel, for review next time); The Gold at the Starbow's End, by Frederik Pohl (£1.80 — five stories, mostly surprisingly good); A Time Of Changes, by Robert Silverberg (£2.10 — hardly his best, but won him a long-overdue Nebula); To Here And The Easel, by Theodore Sturgeon (£2.25 — published by Ace as The Worlds of TS); The Embedding, by Ian Watson (£2.20 — new English author, looks promising, review next time).
 From Faber: Sack of Bones, by James Blith (£2.10); Tony Hale, Space Detective, by Hugh Walters (£1.60, by gosh); The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth, the Windows of His Nose, by Roger Zelazny (£2.25).
 From Sidgwick & J.: Age of Miracles, by John Brunner (£1.75); The Finest Hour Conspiracy, by John Hanning (£1.75); The Three Eyes of Evil, by A.E. Van Vogt (£1.95); SF Special 7 (£2.50).
 From Penguin: Penguin SF Omnibus, ed. Brian Aldiss (60p); Make Room! Make Room!, by Harry Harrison (35p); The People: No Different Flesh, by Donna Henderson (35p); A Plague of Pythons, by Frederik Pohl (30p); The Space Marchants, by Pohl & Kornbluth (30p). :: From Arrow: The Winds of Rath, Dural, Tovan, all by E.C. Tubb (35p each). :: From Pan: My Mill-Egan, by Pohl (35p); Kindness, by Buckley (30p). :: From Coronet: Urbenna, by Lou Cameron (30p). (ade it)

cont from p.6/ proclaims in large letters: 'With new material specially written for this edition'. On inspection, this new material turns out to consist of one chapter of roughly seven pages.

Keyhoe is much more personal; his account, full of breathless conversations, reads like a thrilling novel. It's a plea for the American people to be given the facts — facts which include the fact that the Comet which crashed at Calcutta in 1953 was either shot down by or collided with a UFO. The proof? Well, the Air Ministry statement said it had collided with an unidentified flying body. UFO, as everyone knows, stands for unidentified flying object. The inference is plain.

If Keyhoe's book reads like a novel, Shuttlewood's might easily have been a serial in a 1930's sf pulp magazine. Just listen to some of the chapter headings: "Pinned By Invisible Fingers Of Sound", "Curious And Burnished Amber Growth", "Cylindrical Cobwebs Coiled Into Circles", "Vanished In Cloud Of Yellow Smoke". My own favourite sequence is "Pigeons Are Killed In Flight", followed by "Vicar's Wife Breathless on Phone", while Chapter 23 — "Nightmare Of A Nurse" — raises a host of interesting possibilities. The pigeons, incidentally, were found in a field, and Mr Shuttlewood tells us they died as a result of "fatal contact with paralyzing sound beams". He has expert opinion on his side: a Mr David Holton opined that they were killed "by sound waves of a quality to which earth creatures are not accustomed". Mr Holton is a surgical chiroprapist.

Mr Shuttlewood's book is undoubtedly the most exciting of the four (in case you were wondering which to buy first). It has its share of amazing photographs, and has greater appeal in that it centres on this innocent Wiltshire town menaced by all kinds of weird things. The apparent explanation for this is that Warminster's site is a meeting of lays — not a get-together of the family of the late science columnist of Galaxy, it seems, but a mysterious set of lines connecting various spots, as lines have a tendency to do. The moral seems to be that if you don't want your sleep ruined by the thunder of UFOs overhead, make sure your home is nowhere near a nexus of lays, in the same way that you would avoid a house at the end of an airport runway or beneath a motorway interchange.

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At this point I have the option of either extending this issue for four more pages — which I am disinclined to do for various reasons — or of bringing it to a close in the next few lines, which means deferring letters until next issue. I don't want to do this either, but I will anyway. Let me quickly mention, then, a weekend course in Science Fiction and Futurology on 9th-11th November at the Arvon Foundation, Tottleigh Burton Manor, Wharfedale, Beaworthy, Devon. The course is to be tutored by John Brunner and Professor John Taylor, and inclusive cost is just £9. Write to the Administrator, Peter Mason. And let me mention those who wrote: Jean Groman, with some germane comments on fandom as a social institution which I'll comment on next time, Graham Poole, Den Morgan, Chris Priest, Joanna Russ (twice), Archie Mercer, Keith Walker, Eric Lindsay, Roy Gray (who asks how Newcastle can have bid successfully for the 1974 Convention when Bram Stokes's London bid had already been accepted. Well, I understand they checked carefully first and were perfectly entitled to bid), Cy Chauvin, Edward Aldous, Barry Gillam, Brian Aldiss and George Hay (who tells me gleefully that he's managed to get some English publisher to buy some awful Perry Chapdelaine novel. I can't wait, George.) More next time.



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These titles are available from your bookshop or, in case of difficulty, can be ordered by post from J. Barnicoat, PO Box 11, Falmouth, Cornwall. Please enclose the price of books required plus 7p per volume for postage.