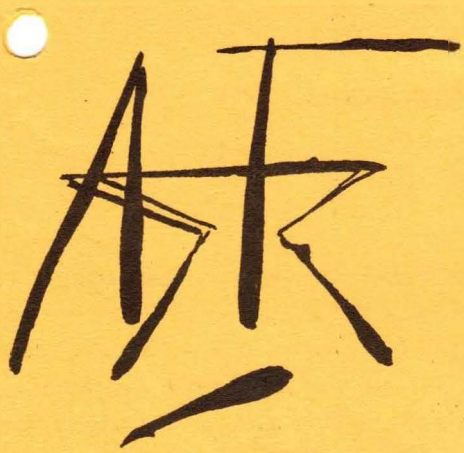

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AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
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DICEBAMUS HESTERNA DIE

[Having been informed that Brian Aldiss had contributed several puns (including one from the French) to this issue of ASFR, John Bangsund has retaliated with the following mythic link. Several years elapsed between the first and second series of ASFR and, to while away some part of them, John began publishing anecdotes about Keats and Chapman - who were the heroes of Flann O'Brien's **The Various Lives of Keats and Chapman**. (O'Brien himself has been described by V.S. Pritchett as a `fierce, elusive and legendary figure [who] seemed to inhabit a wide-brimmed black hat and disappeared and reappeared, dissolving his anger, sorrows and learning in whisky and black porter.') The first of the following links between the new and original ASFR emerged from John Bangsund's **Newsletter** for the Society of Editors, February 1979, and the second from his **Philosophical Gas** 28, Winter 1974. He describes these anecdotes as `spurious'. YR]

KEATS AND CHAPMAN once went on holiday in Italy with a bohemian singer named Michael Balfe. In Milan they met another acquaintance, the famous campanologist Sir Nigel Batt, and the four spent many happy hours together in the sunny villages and vineyards of the north. Batt was investigating the local bells and belles (there was more than one string to this beau); Balfe was indulging an interest of his youth, looking at fortifications, earthworks, gun emplacements and the like; Chapman was doing a bit of research for some footnotes he was writing about the Roman Census In Imperial Times; and Keats was just mooning about as usual, jotting down the odd rhyme, making the odd delicious moan upon the midnight hour (this was when he drafted his celebrated `Lasagna Recollected in Tranquillity', you may recall) and that sort of thing.

At a pub in Cremona they fell in with Louis Bettson, an earnest drinker and gifted conversationalist of uncertain origin, who kept them amused with his witty tales of art, life and Italian politics for as long as they cared to ply him with grog.

One drowsy afternoon, Keats found himself alone, alone, all, all alone - and was about to jot that down until he remembered he had read it somewhere - and he began to wonder where his companions were. Sir Nigel is probably up a bell-tower somewhere, he thought, and Balfe will be looking at some boring old gun emplacements, and Chapman will be wearing his brain down to the knuckle deciphering old Roman statistics. Keats sighed, and wondered all over again what he wanted to be when he grew up.

Just then, Chapman stumbled into the room. He had obviously been drinking, and there was an odd gleam in his eyes. `What have you been up to?' exclaimed Keats, `And where is everybody!' Chapman paused for a moment, then said, all in one breath, `Bettson the bar-fly says Batt's in the belfry and Balfe's in the battery!'

`Good heavens, man!' cried Keats, `Have you taken leave of your census?' Chapman tripped over a pot of basil and lay on the floor, giggling his head off.

****

KEATS AND CHAPMAN were discussing poetry.

`I have often wondered' said Keats `what exactly is meant by the expression "poetic justice".'

`I always imagined it to be a singularly appropriate punishment meted out to some wrongdoer,' said Chapman. `And such a thing, with respect, seems to happen more frequently in poetic creations than in real life. On the other hand, it may have its origin in some historical occurrence.'

`Such as?' said Keats.

'I am thinking,' said Chapman, 'if you will forgive me, of some possible connexion between the bard and the barred, the court and the caught, the, ah...'

'I am finding it difficult to forgive you,' said Keats.

'So sorry,' said Chapman. 'But you can perhaps imagine some learned judge, in some far-off time, handing down his decisions in verse...'

'I cannot,' said Keats.

'...and becoming known far and wide as the Poetic Justice,' Chapman continued. 'I can just see him, addressing some quivering miscreant thus:

I find the accused a veritable worm!
Sweet Thames, run softly, till you end your term.'

'Lord preserve us!' moaned Keats.

'or: **Bid daffadillies fill their cups with tears,**
For thou art in the jug for fifteen years.'

'Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour!' sobbed Keats.

'Or: **The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,**
But winding slowly o'er the rack's for thee!'

'Enough! Enough!' cried Keats.

'Really?' said Chapman. 'Do you accept my conjecture?'

'Oh, certainly' said Keats, in a rare outburst of sarcasm. 'I don't know how to thank you for this brilliant hypothesis!'

'All retributions gracefully conceived' murmured Chapman, modestly.

JB 24.10.86

OUR COLLECTIVE WAYS

After this editorial you enter a Russell-Blackford-free zone. Conscious of having puffed out two of the first four issues of this august if not Augustan publication with extensive and intensive articles first on Wynne Whiteford and most recently on Samuel R. Delany, I'm telling the rest of this scurrilous anarchist crew that it's their turn. Mind you: one of the aforementioned scurrilogues, the one known as the Accuser, has been having at least a fair say in his ongoing (if intermittent, complaint later) 'The Long View' article, while the one known as the Mouth of the South loomed large in issue 2 via her reprinted debate with George Turner. So it's up to the others: Lucifer and Interferon. Actually, why should they have all the responsibility? It's also up to our readers. Anyway, thanks especially to Lucifer Sussex, there is clearly no room for an RKB dissertation in this ish. Ms Sussex is represented by her scholarly vivisection of van Vogt's fix-up **The Voyage of the Space Beagle**, originally presented to the Nova Mob and formerly published in **Foundation** (with whose kind permission it sees reprint).

Now why, you may be wondering, should anyone trust or heed an anarchist collective whose individual members have names like 'Lucifer', 'Interferon', 'the Accuser', and 'the Mouth of the South'? Further, then, to our last editorial, in which the Mouth discussed the personality of the Mean Editor, something should be said about the mean components. On this occasion, let me concentrate my attention on John 'the Accuser' Foyster, the meanest of the lot.

Lord high muckamuck and Falstaffian muckraker, polymath, panjandrum, and lithic legend, Foyster is best remembered for his critical, not to say hazardous, writings under pen-names like 'Anti-Clockwise Gaelic W.E.R.C.S.'. More recently, he has achieved notoriety for such pronouncements as that in the local fanzine **j'accuzzi** (ed. Kermit Kirsch and Miss Middle): that 'most Melbourne sf fans would try to get a male brown snake pregnant by looking for its belly-button to stick a finger in'. He offered this as both a true

reflection of the proclivities and an accurate measure of the level of general intelligence of the majority of his acquaintances - then waved a list of fans he had caught in this very practice one Wednesday night. **Maybe you are on the list.**

The Accuser's monumental critical feature, 'The Long View', is still in recess (his idea, not ours - really!), but is intended to return soon, with A.E. van Vogt taking the stage of world sf just in time to miss out on Ms Sussex's belling of the **Space Beagle** (can't these guys get their act together?). Of Sussex, Interferon Blackford, and the Mouth of the South Rousseau, more next time it's my turn.

As you say (who said?), who would trust this lot? Write in and let them know what you think of them! And, as well as letters of comment, the Mean Editor is looking for reviews, interviews (Earl Ingersoll interviewing Gene Wolfe this time), entertaining snippets, sn-words (like 'snippet' - one that even Cherry Wilder missed) and the best critical articles about sf. Over to you, kiddo!

Now for the winning list of sn-words, from Cherry Wilder:

snaffle (piece of equipment which goes over horse's nose), snark (large-nosed creature. See boojum), snarl, sneak, sneaky, sneer, sneering, sneeze, snicker, snickering, snide, snigger, sniggering, sniff, sniffy, sniffle, snifter, snitch, snipe (wading bird with long bill), snivel, snivelling, snob, snobbery, snobbish, snobbishness, snodder (Scottish slang for snot), snoek (long nosed edible South African fish), snook, snooks (US term of endearment ... cute, snub-nosed), snookums, snoop, snooper, snoopy (adj., see Roget), snoot, snooty, snooze, snorkel, snore, snorer, snort, snorter, snot, snotty, snozzle (US slang for big nose), snub (verb: to turn one's nose up at), snub 2 (short, blunt ... orig. short or blunt nosed), snub-nosed (double nose formation), snuff, snuffbox, snuffle, Snurg Sorguth (The Awful God of the Filthy Proboscis ... Lovecraft).

Hum! RKB 13.9.86

FAN-DE-SIECLE

CHERRY WILDER

The name of this column is a product of the fantasy and wit of AL FITZPATRICK. Once he was the true, nitty-gritty Ur-Fan who was still asleep in an armchair in the hotel lobby when one went down to breakfast... that is if he wasn't racketing round the fish-markets with other dubious types such as (Whatever happened to) Sandercock and Uncle Rafe Lafferty. Now Al is alive and well and living in New Jersey.

DON'T SAY IT HASN'T BEEN FUN...
The Frankfurt Book Fair bursts upon us every year in early October. The hectares of industrial display space on the mighty Fairground are filled with books instead of automobiles or textiles or brass bung bibcocks. Here they come again: the dressed-up denizens of the publishing houses, worldwide, dashing hither and thither and yon with clipboards or disporting themselves with bright, businesslike smiles in their shiny book-lined booths. There are agents in the agents' nook, snapping up the newest how-to-feed-your-home-computer book or selling lusty-busty romances to Yugoslavia. There are too few chairs... or rather there are lots of lovely chairs on which one dare not sit because they are in the booths of strange publishing houses with which one has nothing to do. There is an absence of all the people one might have a reason to say hello to, an appalling crush in the restaurants, over-priced and nasty wine and frankfurters in the snack bars.

I have on occasion made a creative deal, being stuck in a lift, exchanged desultory chat with Old Pals in Publishing - who are eager to get back to selling aerobic books to Outer Mongolia - and been weighed to the ground by the presence of hundreds of literate, book-loving folk with whom I am totally unable to communicate. They deal in books; I write books; I feel like a cow in a butter factory.
It is even worse for Horst who comes to lend his Old Lady moral and physical support. He spends even more time standing around admiring

exquisitely printed works on the Wild Flowers of the Himalayas while Mum makes like an author.

Well, perhaps it won't be too bad this year. Jim Frenkel of Bluejay, who is coming to stay with us, can provide a lively run-down on the Scene. I can meet dear Maggie Noach, super British Agent, in the agents' nook. I can potter along to Allen & Unwin who must in all conscience have a title or two of mine on display or in their brochures. Heigh-ho! Off we go, threading our way through the glittering labyrinths of books, hoping perhaps for some Meaningful Encounter...

...`Stetson!
`You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
`That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
`Has it begun to sprout?...
`You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!'

THE SPLENDOUR AND MISERY OF NEARLY EVERYBODY

I should know all about that French Lit. reference in Samuel Delany because we had a telly serial the other year called I guess La Gloire et La Misère de la Courtesan. I'm not sure which French Author was responsible... Balzac? Les Frères Goncourt? Have to ask George (Napoleon) Turner. At any rate we were watching a rather similar serial on the other channel, perhaps it was La Belle Otèro, about the ups and downs of a dancer. The french expression sounds expansive and French, the English translation sounds like a translation from the French, but the German comes out as GLANZ UND ELEND (DER COURTESAN) and this is a snappy phrase. Soon we were hearing about the Glanz und Elend of various politicians or political parties, the Glanz und Elend of Boris Becker, Maggie Thatcher, the Cannes Film Festival, the National Soccer Team and New York City. All meant with a touch of irony of course and showing that it doesn't pay to generalize. C'est la vie!

Since we are being so deuced literary here is a post-structuralist poem, dedicated to Dam (Broderick) and Sam (Delany). I found it in a

journal for English and American studies, reprinted from the **Times Lit. Sup.**

Deconstruction
D'ya wanna know the creed'a
Jacques Derrida?
Dere ain't no reada
Dere ain't no wrider
Eider.

(Peter Mullen)

Had a nice chat on the phone with Jenny Bryce, en route to Basel, and thought of her again when we went to have a Chinese meal in beautiful downtown Langen. Jenny and I sat in that oriental eating-house some time back waiting for the Boys. Foyster was at that time wearing a large bushy beard... the same one he wears to this day. Synchronicity struck and we counted **fourteen beards** who converged on the restaurant before Foyster turned up. I wonder if he has this effect everywhere?

My reading doesn't lend itself to a decent review notice. **Husman's Pets** by Kate Wilhelm is an exciting 'genetic' thriller. **The Year's Best Science Fiction** edited by Gardner Dozois is too massive to whisk through, it needs to be digested. The John Crowley story 'Snow' is very good, the Avram Davidson is very cute, 'Rockabye Baby' by new writer S. C. Sykes is moving and well-written, there is a marvellous Lafferty entitled 'Magazine Section'. On the other hand 'The Only Neat Thing To Do' by James Tiptree Jr is dumb and sentimental.

I have been reading around in various reference books on Occult Phenomena of all kinds, including witchcraft, hauntings, poltergeist activity, Swedenborg, mysterious disappearances, apparitions and so forth. **The Occult** by Colin Wilson is still a useful compendium, although it is rather tendentious. I'm never too happy about the discovery, by an author, of an elite group of which he himself is a member.

Michael Harrison, author of **Fire from Heaven** and **Vanishings**, is an excellent reporter who plunges straight overboard and blames 'spontaneous combustion' and the vanishings on Mysterious Entities who are Doing It. A super conspiracy theory, in other words. I've noticed that reporters on these topics start out hard-headed but when they are persuaded to accept one or two unusual ideas immediately believe in everything. A mild belief in Telepathy, for example, opens the flood-gates for belief in spiritualism, reincarnation, ghosts, the razor-sharpening properties of paper pyramids and the snatching of victims in the Bermuda Triangle by THEM.

The spectrum of belief was dealt with in a questionnaire I received years ago from a group called Creative Psychology of Linnet Lane, Liverpool. It lists parapsychological phenomena and a 1-5 scale indicates degrees of belief, thus:

Strongly disbelieve Don't Know Strongly believe

X

--------------------*----------*----------*----------*

1 2 3 4 5

1-2 indicates disbelief, 3 Don't Know, 4-5 indicates belief. In the above example a person is indicating mild belief.

It turned out that I strongly disbelieved in traditional superstitions (of the walking under a ladder kind), mildly disbelieved in astrology, graphology, palmistry, reincarnation and UFOs, didn't know about ghosts and intuition, mildly believed in acupuncture, clairvoyance, faith healing, precognition and psychokinesis, and strongly believed in Hypnosis (as a trance state), life on other planets, and mental telepathy. These ratings would have to be qualified with explanations of what I took the 'phenomena' to mean. Faithhealing, I believe, works on certain psychosomatic ailments of the faithful... it won't mend a broken leg or make cancer vanish. My mild disbelief in all those odd things tends always towards strong disbelief, depending on the circumstances. I believe in Mental Telepathy but regard it as a power of very limited

application which may warn you that Uncle Tom has had a heart attack but will not give you much help with race results or the plans of the enemy missile site.

The Creative Psychology people also enquired about left/right handedness and about the societies, associations or clubs of which one was or had been a member. (Were they hunting for Communists?) My list might have given them pause, if I had returned the form. It included the Science Fiction Writers of America, the B.S.F.A., the Women Writers of Australia, various Little Theatre groups, the Workers' Educational Association and (long ago) the Girl Guides. I received the questionnaire together with the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research but was not a member of the Society. I wonder if I am credulous for a writer of sf/f or sceptical?

And to wind up
A SIMPLE AMERICAN FILK SONG (Tune: Streets of Laredo)

As I walked out in some Hilton or other
In search of a donut, in search of a drink,
I spied a young tru-fan all wrapped in old fanzines,
Wrapped in old fanzines and filthy with ink!

`I see by your beanie that you are a tru-fan!'
These words he did say as I boldly walked by,
`Turn off your propellor and hear my sad story,
Before I blast off to that Con in the Sky!'

`Twas once in New Jersey I used to read Heinlein,
Once in Atlanta I used to read Pohl
First down to L.A. and then up to Boskone,
Now I-M a-dying - Goodbye and Fiawol!'

(The verses continue until the dying fan gets over his hangover and they both go to breakfast...)

A CONVERSATION WITH GENE WOLFE

EDITED BY EARL G. INGERSOLL

As everyone knows, Gene Wolfe is a writer of both fantasy and science fiction. He has won two Nebula Awards and a World Fantasy Award, one of the Nebulas and the World Fantasy Award having been given for his current tetralogy **The Book of the New Sun.**

Gardner Dozois, the editor of **The Year's Best Science Fiction, Second Annual Collection** (New York: Bluejay Books, 1985), which contains two of Gene's stories, says:

> Gene Wolfe is perceived by many critics to be one of the best - perhaps the best - SF and fantasy writers working today. His tetralogy **The Book of the New Sun**... is being hailed as a masterpiece, quite probably the standard against which all subsequent science-fantasy books of the '80s will be judged; ultimately, it may prove to be as influential as J. R. R. Tolkien's **The Lord of the Rings** or T. H. White's **The Once and Future King.**

The following conversation took place 29 June 1982, while Gene was writer-in-residence in the Brockport Writers Forum Summer Workshop at the State University of New York College at Brockport. Speaking with Gene were English Department member Calvin Rich, who regularly teaches a course called 'Fantasy and Romance', and Nebula Award nominee Nancy Kress, whose latest fantasy novel **The White Pipes**

appeared early in 1985 and whose collection **Trinity and Other Stories** is scheduled to appear in August 1985.

Kress: There are a number of readers, and especially critics, who would say that if life is your concern, fantasy and science fiction are removed from the mainstream. What leads you to write fantasy and science fiction, rather than mainstream literature?

Wolfe: I don't agree with those people. They assume that the ephemera of today are somehow permanent and important, that we will always have yellow buses and fire plugs. What is permanent and important is the creations of the human mind (of which buses and fire plugs are only very minor creations) and the physical world. The first involves fantasy; the second, science fiction, when you put it into a literary context. I don't think that reality can be defined as a knife edge in time. And, of course, if you actually study physics, you discover that the time-knife edge does not, in fact, exist. If you cut time finer and finer, there is no such thing as this present instant. There is only the future and the past.

Kress: You stated something similar in an article that you wrote on fantasy; in it you said that the landscape of fantasy is not the landscape of myth, but the landscape of the future. How did you mean that?

Wolfe: Well, I think that it's quite obvious that the human race is increasing in its power to alter the world in the directions that it desires. To take a very obvious instance, we are now just at the beginning of the biological revolution: for example, cloning and the ability to combine biological material from two different organisms. By 'different', I'm not trying to be redundant; I mean different species. As we increase in our ability to shape the world of our dreams in the real sense, we will have the magic flying horse of the **Arabian Nights**. We're going to see unicorns in this century, certainly in the first half of the next century, because people want unicorns, and unicorns are fairly easy to build once the genetic

engineering is there. You start with a horse, and you introduce a few modifications; then, you can have the unicorn of myth. You can have the faun or the satyr of myth. I did a couple of stories on this - 'The Woman Who Loved the Centaur Pholus'. If you create a man's head on a horse's body, and if you figure out some way to make the thing live so that it can eat, you are not going to be able to keep it in the kitchen like a cat forever; eventually it's going to break free. The centaur may very well be a better man than you are, and you are going to find that you cannot be his jailer indefinitely, and people will have to deal with the problems that are involved in genetic engineering. Of course, there are much more dangerous things that they will have to deal with - the creation of new diseases, for example.

Rich: Do you think that this is one of the reasons some readers, like some of my students, accuse science fiction and fantasy of being so repetitive? They keep saying you use the same materials, the same themes, over and over. I keep telling them to look for the variations.

Wolfe: I think that some of it is repetitive, but there are certain mechanisms that are used in science fiction because they're useful: interplanetary or interstellar travel makes possible a lot of stories that couldn't be written if you didn't have some way of getting your characters to a different planet. So, they're repetitive in that sense; but, I don't think that there are a great many stories around now that are specifically about interstellar travel as a thing in itself.

Kress: The same repetitiveness shows up in fantasy. I'm thinking now of your **Book of the New Sun** and the way that it uses specific, traditional fantasy motifs, almost as though you were paying tribute to the genre. There is the gift of a valuable and trusted sword that recalls Excalibur, and there is the sense of a jewel of power called Conciliator that recalls Tolkien's Ring. Were these deliberate? Is this your way of paying tribute to the genre?

Wolfe: Yes, in some sense of it. The more intentional thing was to try and show in the first place how such a thing might happen and, in the second place, what the effect might really be of getting such a sword, of getting such a jewel or relic. Actually, the Claw of the Conciliator is a relic. About half of the reviewers who have read the book think that **Terminus Est** is the magic sword. It isn't. It's simply a very old and valuable sword that's very well made.

Kress: You have mentioned at various times that academic study of your work, the kind of thing that we're skirting around the edges of here in talking about **The Book of the New Sun**, scares you to death. Why is that?

Wolfe: I think that students tend to dislike what they are made to read in class, and I would hate to see science fiction and fantasy lifted out of its position as a sort of criminal genre and given academic respectability, because I think when it has academic respectability, a great many people are going to say, 'It's dull, so I don't want to read that.' I read 'pulp' magazines when kids who read them frequently had to do it with a flashlight under their bedcovers because their parents wouldn't let them read 'pulp' magazines. As a result, they wanted very much to read them.

Kress: Your objection, then, to dissection of your work academically is the effect that it has on the readers rather than any effect it might have on you as a writer. Do critics and reviewers bother you when they dislike something that you've read? Do you think there's a circle in which feedback from critics affects what the writer writes?

Wolfe: I think there is with some writers, but I don't particularly think I'm one of them. When a writer is greatly affected by critics, particularly by academic critics, I think that he has to stop reading the criticism. I don't think that that is helpful. He begins writing to be reviewed, rather than to be read. When I get a bad review, or a critic tears up my work, I really feel bad, but only for about forty-five minutes. There are people who are wiped out for years by this sort of thing.

Kress: Why particularly academic critics? Why are you making that stricture?

Wolfe: Because I think that academic critics are farther from the popular taste than newspaper reviewers. Secondly, they tend to be taken more seriously by the writers who take criticism seriously. They can use stupendous words and refer to the works of James Joyce, and God knows what. It's all very, very impressive, but if it's destructive you ought not to pay any attention to it. It's like pounding your head against the wall.

Kress: Do you think science-fiction readers differ from mainstream readers?

Wolfe: Yes, I think so.

Kress: In what way?

Wolfe: I knew you would ask that. I should have said, `No.'

Kress: Sorry.

Wolfe: They do differ. To start with, I think science fiction readers are brighter. When I say, mainstream readers, I'm not talking about the people who read Shakespeare or Dante; I'm talking about the people who read John Jakes's **The Bastard** and so forth. I think that science fiction readers are much less frightened of new ideas, eager to escape the here-and-now, whereas the mainstream reader is frightened to be drawn away from the here-and-now.

Kress: So much of popular mainstream literature - the Harlequin Romances, for example - however, is more escapist than science fiction in that it has less connection with any reality that's underneath.

Wolfe: Yes, I agree, but there's a difference. It's a non-frightening escape, whether it's an adventure or not. I think

the people who read science fiction or fantasy are looking for a kind of adventure. The people who read Harlequin Romances are looking for a kind of paradise.

Kress: And, of course, the adventure can be intellectual, not merely physical.

Wolfe: Oh, certainly, certainly. Ideally, it should be both. It should have an intellectual component, or a spiritual component, as well as a physical component.

Kress: I sense from what you say, and also from **The Book of the New Sun**, that you don't make a sharp distinction between science fiction and fantasy.

Wolfe: No, I don't. I don't see that a sharp distinction can be made. What we're talking about, really, are publishing categories - which wire rack a book goes on to. Science fiction is always, to some degree, fantasy. If you say I'm going to extrapolate what the science of the next fifty years will be like, that is in itself fantasy: if you pretend that you think that your extrapolation is going to be one hundred per cent accurate, it never is. It may score some astounding hits. Unicorns, I think, are science fiction if you put them in our world rather than in the world of the medieval past. And so you see, we can argue about that indefinitely. If somebody in the 1800s wrote a book about robots or mechanical men - and there were such books written - they were generally clockwork. Then, to someone who never thought such things would exist, that was fantasy. Looking back on the mechanical men, we see that robots, mobile robots, can be made, automata for Disney or what not. Then it's science fiction. But why should the passage of 100 or 200 years make the book change its genre? It depends on the preconceptions that we bring to the book.

Kress: So that's why **The Book of the New Sun** has so much science and magic - or seeming magic - intertwined, right in the same paragraph sometimes. You're making a statement on science and magic there.

Wolfe: Yes. If you don't think you know how a radio works - most people don't know how it works, they only think they know because it has always been there - then the radio becomes a magical instrument. These voices speak to you from this box. That's a fantasy device. If you're enough of a radio hobbyist that you could buy a kit at Tandy and put the thing together, then it's science fiction.

Rich: You seem almost classical in the way you're concerned with the audience, though, and I didn't get that as I was reading your work. You're trying to do something to the audience and make them project, it seems, sort of the opposite of what C.S. Lewis calls 'egoistic castle-building'. It strikes me as interesting that your main hero is a torturer - someone that the audience will find it very difficult to associate with at first and empathize with.

Wolfe: I did that intentionally because I wanted to take a very unsympathetic hero so that I could show things from his standpoint. Everyone, I suppose, is a hero in his own mind. You know, the executioner who pulls the switch on the electric chair is a monster to the man who's seated in the electric chair and sort of a hero or representative of society to himself, perhaps. And I wanted to show it as something very far removed from the usual hero of fiction who is, you know, commander of the space rescue squad or something of that sort.

Rich: That's one of the things that struck me first about the book. I admire an author who will take the hard job to do. I think that's another thing you did.

Kress: I didn't find Severian unsympathetic, even from the beginning, and asking myself after I finished the first three books why I didn't find the torturer unsympathetic, I think it was partly because you started out with him as a child. I saw how his world had built the attitudes into him that he naturally would have. If you had started out with an execution over which he was presiding, I

might have felt differently, but I never found him an unsympathetic character, from the beginning.

Wolfe: Some people simply threw down the first book after the first 100 pages or so, because he is the torturer. And they can't take that. They can't deal with that, or they don't **want** to deal with it.

Rich: When you have descriptions of the torturer, it does require a certain kind of fortitude to work.

Kress: You didn't release the first manuscript for the four books until you had all of them done. Is that correct?

Wolfe: I had all of them in second draft. I did all four in the first draft, and then I did all four in the second draft, and then I did all the final drafts on the first book.

Kress: So you knew before the first one was published how it was going to end, and how it was going to come out.

Wolfe: You betcha.

Kress: And you stated before that you can't write a story unless you can see the ending at the beginning.

Wolfe: I think it's foolish to try. I think you're trying to do your mental work on paper. A story should point toward its ending. When the ending happens, the reader should say two things: I didn't see that coming, but it was inevitable; I don't see how the writer can write the story that way, unless he knows what's coming.

Kress: What is your working procedure when you have a story? Is there a long germination period when you're not doing your mental work on paper?

Wolfe: Yes. I think there is. Fundamentally, the germination period consists of a coming together of a number of ideas. I've

always got a number of ideas shaking around in my head and, thinking what if such-and-such a character were to exist, what if these places were to exist, and sooner or later everything clicks - or I should say a number of those ideas click - and I say, 'Gee, that character there is with this place here and this event here and then naturally so and so...' And when I do that, then I see the story, I understand the fundamental outlines of the story: how it should begin, where it will go, what kind of an ending it should have. But sometimes I make false starts, certainly.

Rich: You start out then with a 'what if'?

Wolfe: That's one way of phrasing it.

Rich: How do you get the 'what ifs', though? Is there any genesis for the kinds of 'what ifs' you start putting together?

Kress: Is that the old 'Where-do-you-get-your-ideas?' question?

Wolfe: Yes...

Rich: Is there a kind of exercise you can go through? In my course in 'Fantasy and Romance', I have students practise their own 'what ifs', and some of them find it impossible to get started with them. I just wondered if you had a little exercise?

Wolfe: I've done that kind of exercise any number of times - brainstorming stories by encapsulating each story in a single sentence. I can sit down with a tablet of paper and I can brainstorm more work in a half hour than I can do in two years. You can say, what would happen if one of the freaks in a carnival freak show was really what he or she was presented as being? You can have a mermaid, right, with her legs deformed in a certain way, and so forth. What if one freak, the mermaid, was really that thing? Would she know it? Would the others know it? How would they come to know it? What would be the result of it, and so forth?

Kress: What story did that idea lead to?

Wolfe: Oh, none. I haven't written that story yet. I was just doing it for you so that you can see how it's done.

Rich: After you have brainstormed, then you go back and pick up the most pregnant ideas.

Wolfe: Yes, sometimes.

Kress: You mentioned exercises. We've had writers before who have had (and stated) a very low opinion of workshopping stories and of any kind of creative-writing course. They say the only way that you can learn to write is to write. What is your opinion of creative-writing courses?

Wolfe: Well, the only way that you can learn to write is to write. That is perfectly true. The only way that you can learn to swim is to swim, and the only way that you can learn to play the violin is to play the violin. But one of the things that students in a creative-writing course do is write, and because they have some immediate feedback, hopefully from some fairly informed, concerned people, they can progress much more quickly than they would if they wrote their amateur story and sent it to a magazine and six weeks later got it back with a printed rejection slip. That was the way I learned to write, and it took me about seven years to do it. I don't think people should have to take seven years to learn.

Kress: So the function of the creative-writing class is to sharpen the critical faculty, not necessarily the creative one.

Wolfe: No, quite the contrary. The function is to sharpen the creative one, and not the critical one. But if you listen to reponses, your creative faculty is sharpened. I think that's the main thing that we have to be working toward. People are saying things like, 'This is fake; it should be specific.' The next time if the student tries to make it specific, then he becomes more creative,

because he has to create something. He can't just say, `The three men walked in the door.' What were these men? Why were they doing this? People say, `This is dull. I want it to be more interesting. I want you to put more energy into it.' This turns up creativity. If a student just studies criticism, long courses of dissecting the old masters, then what he learns is criticism and as a creative writer his brakes are locked, because he can see that his stuff is very, very bad, but he can't see any way to make it any better.

Kress: So given all of that, what would be your advice to young hopefuls who want to become science-fiction and fantasy writers?

Wolfe: First of all, to read widely. I don't think that most students have read anywhere near as much as they should.

Kress: Not only science fiction.

Wolfe: No, widely, widely, but with particular emphasis on the type of material that they're trying to write. But, secondly, to do what you said - to write. The trouble with many talented `writers' that I have worked with is that they produce practically nothing. They have quite a bit of talent. Their work, when they do it, is good, but they produce two short stories a year. That doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't do anything.

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Another Official Filler

Janeen Webb reports the following sentence from a student's essay on Cormier's **I am the Cheese**, which - lest you draw any salacious conclusions - is a triple-stranded fantasy:

> This was an amazing book with a fantastic climax: everyone came together at once and a lot of things were revealed.

LONG VERSUS SHORT SF: THE EXAMINATION OF A FIX-UP

LUCY SUSSEX

It has long been claimed that science fiction is essentially a short-narrative, rather than a novel, form. Certainly, reference publications like William Contento's **Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections** indicate that a considerable proportion of sf appears in small packages. Yet to assert, as Brian Aldiss has, that the short story is 'ideal' [1] for science fiction is to argue from an effect rather than from a cause.

The prevalence of short fiction stems from the publishing history of the genre, in particular the golden age of pulp (1920s to 1940s). During this period, magazines were virtually the only outlet for sf, and it adapted to these circumstances: short fiction is most suited to the magazine format. However, difficulties arose in the 1950s, when sf began to appear in books. Apart from anthologies, book publishing favours long narratives. As a result, a common practice in sf became to rewrite short stories, novelettes and novellas, as novels.

There are several methods by which short narratives may be brought to the appropriate length. One technique is simply to continue the story, as in James Blish's **A Case of Conscience**. Another, and far more devious, method is to construct a fix-up: 'a book made up of stories previously published (independently), but altered to fit together, usually with the addition of new cementing material' [2].

Science fiction criticism has been aware of the existence of fix-ups for some time; the definition quoted above was formulated by John Clute. However, there has not yet been a detailed analysis of a fix-up, particularly with regard to its component stories. This article will examine a typical fix-up, as a contribution to the long vs short sf debate. It needs to be established whether a fix-up is more than the sum of its parts, or whether such genre practices

actually do sf a disservice, by producing novels inferior to their original (constituent) short fiction.

The fix-up chosen, A.E. van Vogt's **The Voyage of the Space Beagle** (1950), is of historical importance as the first sf novel produced by this method. In fact, van Vogt has compiled [3] more fix-ups than any other notable writer in the genre, mostly recycling in book form his early (and prodigious) magazine output. **Voyage** was composed of four novellas, three of which had appeared in **Astounding**: 'Black Destroyer' (July 1939), 'Discord in Scarlet' (Dec. 1939) and 'M33 in Andromeda' (Aug. 1943). The fourth, 'War of Nerves', was published in the March 1950 issue of **Other Worlds**, six months before the fix-up.

Before discussing these novellas as the building blocks of the fix-up, it is necessary to see how they function independently. 'Black Destroyer' was only the second sf story van Vogt had written, and was the first to be sold. It was therefore an apprentice piece. The narrative is told in the third person, partly from the view of Morton, Commander of an interstellar scientific expedition, and partly from that of Coeurl, an intelligent but malign alien. The latter finds humans edible, and runs amok in their spaceship. After a struggle, he is defeated.

In synopsis, 'Black Destroyer' does not sound very impressive, but the story is undoubtedly effective. Despite crude writing, and some illogicalities of plot, the story won first place in the **Astounding** readers' poll. Encouraged by this response, van Vogt wrote a sequel. 'Discord in Scarlet' occurs on the next voyage of the expedition, and is practically the same story as 'Black Destroyer', with Coeurl being replaced by one Ixtl. Van Vogt has admitted to using formulas in his writing [4], and the structures of the novellas (their basic plot element is an 'unfriendly Thing that gets loose inside a spaceship' [5]) are identical.

It was four years before van Vogt wrote another **Space Beagle** story. 'M33 in Andromeda' is a further sequel, set 'seven months' (p. 130)

after the events of 'Discord in Scarlet'. Despite the intervening and prolific years, van Vogt was still writing about Morton et al. according to a strict formula: this time the hostile alien was a mist entity called the Anabis. Yet with this story van Vogt varied the system slightly, experimenting with structure. For instance, the first two novellas opened with a long section of alien viewpoint, which in 'M33 in Andromeda' forms the penultimate section of the narrative. There is the inevitable intrusion into the ship, but it is not (unlike the previous tales) the main action of the story. The assault is quickly repulsed, and the rest of the novella is devoted to discovering the nature of the intelligence behind it. Vam Vogt was attempting, in effect, a mystery story.

Another important difference in 'M33 in Andromeda' is that the narrative has a sub-plot. 'Black Destroyer' and 'Discord in Scarlet' were roughly cyclic stories, with the expedition reverting to normal at the end of the novella. Van Vogt added a 'log cabin to White House' sub-plot to his basic formula. In the previous stories, the aliens had been defeated through plans conceived by various scientists. In 'M33 in Andromeda' the victory is solely due to Elliot Grosvenor, the 'lone, despised Nexialist' (p. 139) of the expedition. Van Vogt has had an almost fascist preoccupation with supermen, and Nexialism is a fictional system of training that produces polymaths. In some respects, it is an interesting prefiguration of Dianetics. Neither Grosvenor nor Nexialism had appeared in the previous novellas. 'M33 in Andromeda' ends with the formerly disdainful scientists treating Grosvenor with respect.

Given that 'Black Destroyer', 'Discord in Scarlet' and 'M33 in Andromeda' had a common background, it is not surprising that van Vogt should try to convert them into a novel. His method was to write another story, into which the three novellas 'not only fitted neatly but actually contributed meaning to the new material' [6]. This fourth narrative was essentially an extension of the sub-plot to 'M33 in Andromeda' - a story of the aggrandizement of Elliot Grosvenor and his Nexialism.

The connective narrative is concerned with a power-struggle aboard the spaceship. In the already published stories, Commander Morton's authority is unquestioned, although the ship is a democracy (van Vogt is vague on this point). **Voyage** gives Morton's title as 'Director' - of what is best described as a travelling (and quarrelsome) research institute. The position is elective, and running for office is the chemist Kent, a character found in all the earlier narratives. For the purposes of the fix-up, he becomes the villain, Grosvenor's archenemy. In brief, Kent gains control of the ship, but is unseated by Grosvenor. The novel ends with most of the ship's company converted to Nexialism.

'War of Nerves' has not yet been discussed in this article, because its relationship to the fix-up is problematic. It appeared in the same year as **Voyage**, and of all the separately published novellas, it varies least from the novel version. 'War of Nerves' was first published (and has been reprinted) with a foreword which not only refers to 'three...deadly attacks by aliens' (p. 36), but gives a summary of the leadership crisis aboard the **Space Beagle**.

The question arises: was 'War of Nerves' written before **Voyage**, or as part of the fix-up? Certainly at points the text of the novel improves on the **Other Worlds** version. An example is the sentence: 'Only a score of suns were still visible of the approximately five thousand suns that made up the system' (**Other Worlds**, p. 36). In the novel, the expression is more concise: 'Only a few of the five thousand-odd suns of the system were still visible' (p. 68). Also a totally erroneous use of the word 'hymen-opter' (p. 44) - van Vogt seems to think that it refers to parthenogenesis - is omitted from the text of **Voyage**.

It is likely that van Vogt wrote 'War of Nerves' before the fix-up, probably while the connective narrative was still in note form. It seems fairly clear why he wrote the novella. If the novel had been constructed with the **Astounding** stories in chronological order - 'Black Destroyer' followed by 'Discord in Scarlet' followed by 'M33 in Andromeda' - two highly similar narratives would have been

adjacent. Something was needed between the 1939 novellas, and so `War of Nerves' was written. This story is basically a development of the first part of `M33 in Andromeda', in which the key action is the throwing of a switch which energizes the ship's protective screen, preventing alien intrusion. In `War of Nerves' the aliens, called Riim, have already invaded the ship, and must be ousted before the switch is thrown.

In **Voyage**, `Black Destroyer' occupies chapters 1-6, and `War of Nerves' chapters 9 to halfway through 12. `Discord in Scarlet' occupies chapters 13-21. `M33 in Andromeda' is spread over chapters 22, three-quarters of 23, 24, the middle part of 25, and almost all the final chapter, 28. The connective narrative occupies the gaps in the above listing, and also makes minor appearances throughout the novel.

George Turner has described the fix-up process as procrustean [7], and it is certainly true that van Vogt had to alter his original novellas extraordinarily before they could constitute a whole. This is not to say, though, that they conflicted with each other, except in details. A far greater problem was dovetailing the novellas to the connective narrative, and bringing all the components to a common stylistic level.

`Black Destroyer' and `Discord in Scarlet' have Morton as the protagonist; in `M33 in Andromeda' this role is shared by Morton and Grosvenor. Making the latter the central character of the novel involved the changing of viewpoint and the re-allocation of speeches. The role of Morton was consistently de-emphasized, until in the revised `M33 in Andromeda' he disappears altogether. At the beginning of the fix-up (`Black Destroyer'), Grosvenor is an insignificant member of the ship's company. His participation in the action is largely as an observer. As the novel progresses, he comes to dominate events, appropriating most of Morton's speeches. He is also credited with some of the defence plans devised by other scientists in the original novellas.

One consequence of dovetailing was a resurrection. In 'Black Destroyer' one of Coeurl's first victims was the psychologist Siedel. However, the connective narrative required the presense of a psychologist in several places, notably to diagnose the malady of some crewmen hypnotised by Grosvenor (chapter 8). In **Voyage**, van Vogt spared Siedel and in his place had Coeurl kill one Siever (p. 29).

The **Astounding** novellas were afflicted with stylistic faults that, to a certain extent, persist in the fix-up. The first is simple logorrhoea. An example occurs in 'Discord in Scarlet': 'where sudden intolerable hell would break loose in a devastating, irresistible torrent of energy' (p. 32). In revision this statement is more concise: 'where a hell of energy would break loose at any moment' (p. 141). Sometimes van Vogt's expression is awkward: 'Kent and Jarvey had chummed together for years in the way only two men can' ('Black Destroyer', p. 17). For the fix-up, this comment was altered to 'Kent ... and Jarvey, were very good friends' (p. 17).

Van Vogt is a writer who delights in the use of language, but he is not always very accurate. Notably, he attaches ungrammatical suffixes to words, such as 'extrania' ('M33 in Andromeda', p. 133), and 'sadistical joy' ('Discord in Scarlet', p. 34), the latter of which survives in the novel (p. 144). One peculiar expression was 'His thoughts kept breaking up into little pieces of light and lightless - a chain of dazzle and dark ('Discord in Scarlet', p. 13). In the novel, the less idiosyncratic 'His thoughts kept breaking up into kaleidoscopic memories' (p. 101) appears. At points van Vogt seems in need of a dictionary, for instance with the word 'sympodial' which he defines as 'capable of adaptation to any environment' ('Discord in Scarlet', p. 18). In fact, 'sympodial' refers to 'A malformation in which the legs and lower extremities are united' (OED). This error was not corrected in the fix-up.

Van Vogt strives for poetic effect by using words in unusual combinations, some of which succeed, some of which defy logic. For example, is it possible to 'revive long rotted machinery' ('Black

Destroyer', p. 21)? Can a mist be described as 'eviscerated' ('M33 in Andromeda', p. 141)? Neither of these curiosities was retained in the fix-up, but the following was: 'the symphony of vibrations that throbbed in discordant melody through the ship' ('Discord in Scarlet', p. 32; **Voyage**, p. 140). Van Vogt can also be guilty of tautology, as in 'sibilant voice hissed ('Discord in Scarlet', p. 22), or of contradictions in terms, such as 'formless form' ('M33 in Andromeda', p. 140). The former was omitted from **Voyage**, the latter altered to read 'formless state' (p. 186). While van Vogt greatly enhanced the style of his novellas in revision, it must be said that they are still flawed in places.

The 1939 stories were riddled with improbabilities, which were also removed in revision. One example will suffice. In 'Discord in Scarlet', a physicist makes a quick sketch, which when described proves so complex that it must have taken considerable time to draw: 'a single atom of neutronium alloy, with only eight hundred of the ... electrons showing, but the design of each eighty electrons with their sixteen sides clearly indicated' (p. 24). With **Voyage**, van Vogt avoids detailing the sketch.

The fact that the novellas were written to a formula presented problems in the fix-up. The recurrence of certain events like alien attack could, in combined form, have produced a very predictable novel. The solution was to introduce some arbitrary differences. In all the original narratives, the aliens were hostile if not actively malevolent. When van Vogt revised the text of 'War of Nerves' for the fix-up, he altered the intent of the Riim; their attack is a misguided attempt to be friendly. Unfortunately, this change meant that Grosvenor's treatment of the Riim now seemed callous, not to mention imperialistic. He was not intended to be an anti-hero, and the change makes him a far less sympathetic protagonist.

Kingsley Amis has commented that **Voyage** 'moves well for sixty thousand words simply by introducing a succession of BEMs, each nastier than the one before' [8]. This remark, although flippant, is apt, for the novel is highly episodic as a consequence of the fix-up

process. However, the episodes in **Voyage** are all variations on a theme of humans and aliens. Van Vogt's formula, when repeated in the context of the fix-up, creates a patterned narrative (given that a pattern consists of the controlled repetition of certain elements). It is a very odd but successful means of achieving a unified narrative: the component stories parallel, and thereby reinforce, each other.

Unified **Voyage** may be, but it is a somewhat distasteful novel. The fault lies with the connective narrative, particularly the events by which Elliot Grosvenor comes to control the **Space Beagle**. The Grosvenor of 'M33 in Andromeda' was a modest fellow ('I'm afraid my training had nothing to do with the fact that I happened to turn and see your danger' - p. 132), but in **Voyage** he was an 'egomaniac' (p. 174), rendered infallible by Nexialism. Van Vogt goes to some lengths to vindicate Grosvenor, yet he cannot prove that the Nexialist's ends (saving the expedition from destruction) justify his means (using conditioning and other psychological techniques to take over the **Space Beagle**). In its later stages, **Voyage** is alarmingly totalitarian, and this aspect of the novel is arguably a flaw.

So what is the achievement of **Voyage**? Does it represent an advance on its component novellas - is the sum greater than the parts? The answer is: substantially yes. 'Black Destroyer', 'Discord in Scarlet', and 'M33 in Andromeda', though exciting, were highly erratic stories, and van Vogt improved them greatly in revision. However, 'War of Nerves' is an exception, for it was in finer form, (barring several stylistic weaknesses) in **Other Worlds**.

Arguably, 'War of Nerves' is more successful than the fix-up novel. There are several grounds for this claim. The novella was the last **Space Beagle** story written within the framework of humans versus aliens, and it represents the most sophisticated use of the formula. The inevitable description of the alien is not presented in an indigestible lump, but gradually, through the perceptions of Grosvenor. Instead of the plethora of scientists in the **Astounding** stories and the connective narrative, there are really only two

characters, Grosvenor and the collective entity of the Riim. Unlike `Black Destroyer', which brings `ideas of the most complex kind down to the level of physical combat' [9], most of the action is mental, taking place in inner space.

In **Voyage**, the text of `War of Nerves' is surrounded by two and a half chapters of connective narrative, which tends to detract from it. In these chapters, Grosvenor clashes with Kent, in a manner that raises serious questions about his ethics, later to be underlined by his behaviour towards the pacific Riim. `War of Nerves' is at its best when self-contained - not part of a novel which links a quartet of vivid adventure stories with an apology for totalitarianism.

It is to be hoped that the critic approaching **Voyage** (or others of its ilk) will be aware that he or she is examining a fix-up. It would be easy to dismiss **Voyage** as episodic, if it were not known that the novel had originally appeared in different form. Van Vogt's book is illustrative of the general condition of the fix-up: because of its construction, it cannot avoid being episodic. **Voyage** is reasonably successful in overcoming its inherent discontinuity, and it probably constitutes a `good' fix-up. However, this discussion of the phenomenon does support Aldiss's claim that science fiction appears at its best in short form. While **Voyage** supersedes three of its composite novellas (due to their original amateurishness) the short narrative of `War of Nerves', written as a filler, surpasses the novel in toto.

Notes

1 Brian Aldiss, **Billion Year Spree**, Corgi, London, 1975, p. 51.

2 John Clute, `A.E. van Vogt', in **The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction**, gen. ed. Peter Nicholls, Granada, London, 1979, p. 627.

3 Clute's term, p. 627.

4 `"A man called John W. Gallishaw wrote a book called **The Only Two Ways to Write a Short Story**. I borrowed it from the Winnipeg Library, and read it all the way through ... He had an idea of writing a story in scenes of about 800 words, and each scene has five

steps in it. If all those steps aren't there in their proper way, then there's something wrong with that scene" ... Van Vogt adopted this system, and has always used it' - Charles Platt, **Dream Makers**, Berkley, New York, 1980, p. 134.

5 Paul A. Carter, **The Creation of Tomorrow**, Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1977, p. 221.

6 George Turner, Letter to Lucy Sussex, 14 May 1981.

7 Turner, letter.

8 Kingsley Amis, **New Maps of Hell**, Gollancz, London, 1961, p. 44.

9 Richard Mullen, quoted in Carter, p. 221.

REVIEWS

Lisa Goldstein, THE DREAM YEARS, Bantam, 1985, 181 pp., $A13.95
Rudy Rucker, THE SECRET OF LIFE, Bluejay, 1985, 246 pp., $A14.95
Carole Nelson Douglas, PROBE, TOR, 1985, 383 pp., $A6.95

reviewed by Lucy Sussex

Any novel which links the Surrealists with the Paris Spring of '68, and argues that both movements were precursors of an anarchist utopic future - any novel with a premise so unfashionable in the cynical 'eighties deserves a medal for bravery. Moreover, to put this case without tub-thumping, via the medium of an ethereal fantasy, places Lisa Goldstein's **The Dream Years** in the almost impossible achievement category.

Having sung these praises, the reviewer has to clear her throat, and niggle. The novel's high ideals are expressed in a prose which is lucid, but colourless. The 'twenties, 'sixties and twenty-first century were/will be exciting times, but Goldstein's account of them lacks both vitality and immediacy. One feels she is at one remove from her material, in the research library perhaps.

Here is Robert St. Onge, a surrealist stepping from the 'twenties to a 'sixties street-fight:

> The street seemed to elongate as he turned the corner; the houses moved for a moment and then were still. Someone shouted. A loud blasting noise came from the direction of the river. Terrified he ran on....He felt horribly disoriented now. Where was he? `The police!' a high woman's voice said to his right. `The police are coming!'
>
> He blinked, blinked again as hie eyes teared from the smoke. Those impossibly tall buildings - surely he would have noticed them before. (p. 10)

Given the events of these paragraphs, Goldstein's account is underwhelming. `Terrified he ran', `he felt horribly disoriented' are not only clichéd but telling rather than showing. There is a sense of hesitation, even a lack of visualization.

Lack of living the story also shows in the revolutionary Solange, who flits blithely from 'sixties to 'twenties without attracting much attention. Since there is no mention of costume changes, her 'sixties clothes must be blending in with the jazz age. But would they? In '68 Robert is `slightly shocked' (p. 12) to see a woman in trousers; since he has already met Solange without reacting to her clothes, she is presumably a **sans-culottes**. Unfortunately, in '68 there was only one skirt length and that abbreviated - to wear a miniskirt in 'twenties Paris would cause a furore (and bottom-pinching). Even Robert would be more than a little shocked.

One could go on in this vein, noting that the brainwashing scenes smack of **1984** or that the novel's climax, a psychedelic battle between anarchy and order, is flat. However, sneering at this novel produces unease, as if one is siding with those who label the 'sixties a `silly season' and the Surrealists cranks whose visual records make art dealers rich. In other words, the forces of control, and **The Dream Years'** appeal is to the other side, the little revolutionary inside all of us.

If only, though, the novel were as worthy as its message, the work of a Dylan rather than a Donovan.

The Dream Years is partly, and Rudy Rucker's **The Secret of Life** wholly set in the 'sixties. This coincidence inevitably leads to comparisons and what-if games. Had Rucker written **The Dream Years**, there would have been none of the stylistic problems aforementioned: he writes vividly and has a good sense of zeitgeist. On the other hand, Goldstein could probably not have written **The Secret**. Even supposing her willing to depict male adolescents without lashings of feminist irony, the ending of the novel is conformist.

The premise of Rucker's novel is basically monstrous teenager discovers he is a teenage monster from outer space! Young Conrad Bunger is really a mind-wiped alien sent to study Earth's indigenes and incidentally to discover the meaning of life. Whether with Rucker's consent or not, this denouement is writ large in the blurb, effectively destroying any suspense in the first part of the book. As might be expected, Conrad has special powers, which lead him into scrapes with his College, the other aliens and the FBI. However at the end of the book he renounces both otherworldliness and student rebellion to settle down and marry in dear old USA. The secret of life, it appears, is love.

Initially **The Secret** seems to be a shotgun if happy marriage between the genres of sf and College Picaresque. Superman meets Animal House was one description that came to mind, and immediately the highly visual nature of the book became filmic. **The Secret** reads as if writ for the lens: there is even a duel with light-swords which parodies **Star Wars** by being set in a graveyard. Filmed with visual jokes of this kind, and with stars like Tom Hulce and Molly Ringwald as Conrad and his girl, **The Secret** could earn Rucker much money on the teen/-college circuit. Yet, one doubts very much whether it would be to Lisa Goldstein's taste.

Any film made of Carole Nelson Douglas's **Probe** would be as cheap and exploitative as the book itself. Two lines into this novel the gaze alights upon the name Biff Matusek, which for a yobbo Police Sergeant is too damn obvious. On the same page Biff tightens `the belt underlining his prominent Milwaukee goiter' [**sic**] which leads the evil-

minded to speculate that (a) he wears his belt around his neck and (b) he has a mobile thyroid gland.

Confession time: wild cyberhorses could not have dragged the reviewer to the end of this novel. Page one was bad enough, but on page twenty-three CND pressed the description button hard, which brought the reading of **Probe** to an abrupt close:

> Martin Kandinsky, a human pretzel in a white lab coat with an incendiary beard and hair the texture of crepe hair tied back into a ponytail, jacknifed his angles onto the moulded plastic chair next to Kevin's.

Holy father, can a pretzel jacknife? Does the sentence really need two hairs (although it is hairy enough)? What does `hair the texture of crepe hair' feel like - a pancake, fabric, or wrapping paper? Does Kandinsky's beard really commit arson?

My child, life is too short to waste on sub-literate crap.

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Vassily Aksyonov, THE ISLAND OF CRIMEA, Random House, 1983, 369 pp., US$16.95 hb

reviewed by John Foyster

Novels set in alternative worlds offer extraordinary opportunities for analysis and discussion of our own times. What is more, as Brian Stableford puts it in his unfortunately-titled entry in the Nicholls encyclopaedia (`Alternate Worlds'), `The alternate-worlds genre has had a continuing popularity with mainstream writers of sf, and it is possible to gain popularity with such works without being stimatized as a genre sf writer...' Stableford's long entry sandwiches many references to genre sf, however, between his non-genre introduction and his non-genre final paragraph, without connecting sf and mainstream in any significant way. One difference he might have taken an interest in is the tendency of mainstream novels to announce

their species in the title - Clark's **Queen Victoria's Bomb**, MacKinlay Kantor's **If the South Had Won the Civil War**, for example - while science fiction novelists stick to those same old run-of-the-mill modest titles with which science fiction readers have had so long to deal - **The End of Eternity, Worlds of the Imperium, The Legion of Time, Destiny Times Three**, ad naus.

Aksyonov and his work clearly fit into the first category, yet the possibilities of science fiction as social criticism are well known to Aksyonov: exactly this question is raised in the **White Book** edited by Alexander Ginsburg ('Can the genre of science fiction contain slander of the system?') whose trial was the subject of a petition signed by Aksyonov. It is reasonable, therefore, to imagine this novel to hover between science fiction and the mainstream, just as, in the novel, Crimea - the Eastern Mediterranean Region - hovers between the capitalist and communist worlds.

But Aksyonov seems - in translation at any rate - unclear as to where he intends to situate the novel. The resolution - the invasion of Crimea by the Soviet Union in the guise of re-unification - is handled in a very pulpy way, and indeed as the novel progresses one can't help but sense the increasing influence of Ian Fleming. But what, in any case, was Aksyonov trying to do?

The shift from this world to the alternative one is simple: Crimea, not a peninsula but an island, formed a refuge for the Whites at the end of the Civil War and, in the years since its establishment, has played a role towards the Soviet Union somewhat analogous to that of Hong Kong or perhaps Taiwan vis-à-vis China. It is economically convenient, and therefore 'allowed' to exist. The rest of the alternative world matches our own: the existence of Crimea as a separate state has no impact on the broad trends of history - the same people rise to the same kind of power as in our own. The only differences lie in the divided Russia.

This is difficult to believe, but it seems to be central to Aksyonov's purpose. He appears to wish to present a world very much

like our own so that his social criticism is more pointed: lambs should **not** lie down with lions. For that is the substance of the novel. Over the years the ties to Mother Rus have remained strong, while the influence of the Whites has declined. The islanders have very many different viewpoints as to the best outcome but it is the party founded by the protagonist, Andrei Luchnikov, upon the Idea of a Common Fate, which triumphs. The party's view is that the Soviets should be invited to join with Crimea to re-form, in some bastard sense, Holy Russia. And there's a bloodbath - Afghanistan in an unclever plastic disguise.

Plastic - or perhaps tacky - is a quite appropriate word for this world. In the opening chapters one can almost believe that Aksyonov is working towards a thoughtful analysis of how this world operates. To be sure, he has taken upon himself the great handicap which science fiction lusts after: the important character (man) in the novel is the important man in the world. But in the early chapters, while the nature of the alternative world is being explored, this is no great handicap. It proves to be a useful device despite the character's superficiality. But as events begin to take place in that world the shallowness begins to grate. Luchnikov is simple-minded - to the point of being almost wholly limbic - yet he has risen to a position of great power so it is necessary that the people around him be even more simple-minded. This would strain the credulity of all except those who take James Bond as the literal truth, and to have to endure it for a couple of hundred pages is more than merely demanding - one needs an explanation for such heroic behaviour.

Well, I suppose one wants to know how it all turns out, which may be all that Aksyonov wants. But one's interest is more in the way Aksyonov works than in the outcome of Luchnikov's ploys. It is hard to imagine a novel like this as anything more than an idle entertainment, yet one suspects that Aksyonov intended it to be taken seriously. It is all rather reminiscent of the more ponderous humour of Stanislaw Lem; heavy-handed as it seems to the reader, it no doubt appears to be sparklingly witty to the writer. It is this difference

in perception which sabotages all too many efforts at political writing. In the case of **The Island of Crimea** a good idea has been turned into junk by a thoughtless approach to character construction. Seems a bit like skiffy to me.

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Suzette Haden Elgin, NATIVE TONGUE, Women's Press, 1984, 301 pp., £2.50.

reviewed by Janeen Webb

Native Tongue is a discourse on the power of language, and, as a basis for action, Elgin offers a nice juxtaposition of the linguistic pitfalls inherent in Man's communications with women and other aliens.

The Other Aliens represent the easier part of the problem. **Native Tongue** is set in the not-too-far-future world of USA circa AD 2205, when Mankind has made contact with innumerable extraterrestrial civilizations, and is busily solving the economic and environmental problems of the late 20th century by colonizing the stars. The obvious need for expert communication with Other Species has created enormous power for skilled linguists, so much so that the USA's political structure now includes the dynastic cartel of 'The Lines' - an extended family group which controls all interhumanoid species translation. The Lines are a sort of linguistic Mafia whose power rests in the ability to grant or withhold communication with the stars, and much of the novel's sub-plot concerns the struggles of an impotent Government attempting to cope with the impasse.

The emergence of the quasi-feudal Linguist dynasties is symptomatic of the book's larger framework of repression. In this feminist dystopia, patriarchal power has resumed absolute dominance: the term 'Mankind' definitely excludes women, who are far more alienated as a human sub-species than any visiting Alien-in-Residence (AIRY). The genesis of this repression is itself an example of the power of

words: in this case, a Nobel publication (1987) in which two respected researchers (male?) offered `scientific proof of the inherent mental inferiority of women'(p. 73). Men acted swiftly to redress the `cruel and dangerous burden' (p. 73) of female `equality' by repealing all legal, economic and social rights for women, effectively legislating them into slavery.

The literal `battle of the sexes' that ensued was lost (and won) over four short years. **Native Tongue** delineates the resultant social structure, in which women have become the exploited property of a system of institutionalized misogyny, and the 20th century women's movement is remembered as a treasured, subversive, women's legend. The one loophole in the subjugation that withholds all but basic education from women occurs in the Linguist households, where greed and a shortage of male infants prompts the use of female linguists. The Lines acquire alien languages by `interfacing' a human infant with a humanoid alien, so the baby develops as a native speaker of the new language. There is a complex system of secondary languages, but in order to maintain the stranglehold on translation services, the Lines use every available infant to keep up with newly discovered languages. There is unabashed sophistry underpinning the use of women linguists, and the text is littered with explanations such as that women are acceptable inasmuch as `a circuit will carry any message you want to send over it, but you do not assume from that fact that it understands what you have said' (p.193). But the women, however invisible to their masters, have set about escalating the `cold war' between the sexes with the only means at their disposal - language.

The problem of communication with alien species has often been at the heart of sf writing, where most treatments of the theme - such as Le Guin's **The Word for World is Forest** and Delany's **Babel 17** - have emphasized accurate translation as the key to human understanding of alien consciousness. In **Native Tongue**, Elgin addresses questions of interpretation in the parts of the text that deal with Man's interest in extra-terrestrial species: a gruesome example of non-humanoid language barriers occurs when the Landry baby is literally turned

inside-out as a result of the attempt by the clandestine Government research team to 'interface' the infant with a non-humanoid AIRY.

But translations, like AIRYs, provide the counterpoint to the main concern of **Native Tongue**. Most language-dominated books are interested in decoding, but Elgin has changed the emphasis to explore the lexical encoding of a new language for another group of Aliens in Residence - Women. If men have been motivated to develop communication with AIRYs, the opposite has been true of their interactions with 'their' women, upon whom they have imposed what Marilyn Hacker calls, in **The Song of Liadan**, 'a treaty of silence' (**Babel 17**, p. 123).

To the women of the lines, the creation of La'adan is of paramount importance as an act of subversion. Extravagant sacrifices are made to protect the developing language from detection: the lovely Belle Anne surrenders herself to police (and certain brain-death) to pre-empt a search of Barren House; and Michaela, the perfect product of the Perfect Wife Agency, commits an act of quasi-suicide by murdering Thomas Chornyak when he guesses the existence of a Women's language. If this is heroic, what does such self immolation achieve? In sacrificing themselves, these women remain within their stereotyped sex-role conditioning that insists upon selflessness. The growth of La'adan has changed reality: in their relationships with men, the women of the Lines have become automatons (like Michaela), so that by the end of the book, they have achieved - by default - a nominal separation from their masters. Women's Houses are to be built, but they sound like latter-day harems in which the women can converse empathically as much as they like, provided that they service their masters when required. La'adan might eventually pervade society, but will it ever be the weapon for liberation suggested by the blurb?

There are many recent sf works, such as Charnas's **Walk to the End of the World**, and **Motherlines**, that include the development of a special women's language as part of a larger framework in which women have seized at least some measure of political control (if only in

isolated communities). Other texts discuss the impact of female language upon the world: concluding **The Female Man**, Joanna Russ suggests that when women stop denying their power and anger, a new society will emerge, so that 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will all be free' (**The Female Man**, p. 213); in **From the Legend of Biel**, the revolution is 'bloodless and thorough' when the female hero kills the patriarchal dragon of the 'syntax of despair', and transforms reality by changing language (see **From the Legend of Biel**, p. 176). Why, then, are Elgin's heroic female linguists still enslaved?

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A. A. Attanasio, IN OTHER WORLDS, Corgi, 1985, 175 pp., $A6.95

reviewed by Leigh Edmonds

This is a book which starts off with a great deal of promise, gets interesting and perhaps a bit too complex in the second act, flags a bit in the third act and fails to live up to its early promise in the closing stages. At times I was wondering if Attanasio isn't a pseudonym for our own Damien Broderick, for the author certainly pushes the known laws of physics to their extremities, and then extrapolates them even further in justification of the fantastical universe which his characters inhabit.

At times the book reads as though the author dreamed up this amazing world (called Werld) and then had to devise a way of getting the main character to it. By contrast, the plot of the novel is really quite plain. A rather pleasant, friendly and likeable fellow who, unfortunately, is not much of a physical specimen, gets turned into a bundle of light energy and shot into the far distance where the whole of the universe is collapsing into one final singularity. There a few of his photons are captured by a five-dimensional intelligence which eats him up and, as part of its digestive process, excretes an 'adamised' (that is, a person with no physical faults) version who is let loose on the Werld. There is a bit of going back and forth while

we find out how this World is organized and then our Carl meets Evoe, a woman whom this pan-dimensional being has specially organized Carl's alpha androstenol for - which means, in simple language, true love at first sight. Later Evoe is captured by the four-dimensional pain-sucking spider creatures who dominate the World and is sure to be used in one of their feasts (which basically involves having your pain centre stimulated for a few weeks while the resulting agony is gobbled up by the locals). Carl finds out that the only way to stop this happening is to go back through time and space to Earth and buy for the five-dimensional creature three and a half tons of pig manure which it needs to cure some disease it has. Things get a bit complex when Carl finds that he is not back on the Earth that he knew, but all the same all his old mates are there and that causes complications. At the same time the pain-sucking spiders start coming through to that Earth and Carl has to stop them from causing too much trouble while defending his pile of pig manure and trying to rationalize what's all going on.

I should warn you that the plot summary I've given here bears about the same similarity to what you actually get in **In Other Worlds** that a similar length description of, say, Philip K. Dick's **Ubik** would have to that novel. The difference is that, when you get to the climax of this book, it is clearly revealed as little more than an action-adventure story with a lot of super-science and metaphysics stuck on, most of which are distractions and not necessary to the story. It promises a combination of the complexity of **Ubik** and something of the feeling of Bester's **Tiger Tiger**, but in the end it comes out feeling like an overintelligent Edgar Rice Burroughs novel.

Still, this one gets more than just an E for effort. The disappointment I feel with it is mainly because the body of the story does not match the promise of the beginning. If it hadn't begun so well I might have liked it as a totality a lot more. I certainly hope that Attanasio gets his unruly talent under control soon so that his work can live up to my early expectations.

LETTERS

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Regarding ASFR 4 and Bruce Gillespie's Pun about Bangsund, the mythic link. Long before President Mitterrand had become portly and ascended to the peak of the French political pile - in fact while he was still fighting to build a party of the left - I was in Paris and saw, scrawled on a wall, the words, `Mitterrand, le myth errant'. It struck me as a blindingly wonderful pun (partly because I could actually understand it, unlike most French graffiti).

Why am I telling you this? Why this insane affection for the trivial? Why a day's serious work deflected by a puny fanzine? God, my life could have been so different. How I long to be austere. I don't mean Fred Austere, dancing my way through life, but walking rather solemnly yet lightly through the streets, a bit like P. G. Wodehouse's butler, in a procession of one. Instead, along has come fandom, and here I am fucking about writing histories of sf and similar frivolities. Such as writing again to you.

The reason why I've warmed up the Olivetti again on this occasion is because of Jack Williamson's passing comment that I did a `hatchet job' of 20 000 words on **Legion of Time**, way back when we were very young. No hatchet is that long. I was possessed by **Legion** over many years. I loved the thing. I saw its faults, and took care to point out how they were the faults of the genre at that time; but I believe my careful attention and much of the glee I had in writing it show how I felt about the story. It was rare if not unique at that time, mid-sixties, to find such close textual analysis of an sf text. You - and my friend Jack - will see from **Trillion Year Spree** (as indeed

from Billion) that I set better store by his writing, and, damn it, praise it better, than most other critics of the field. Even twenty years later, I hate to have that article of mine described as a hatchet job. There's austere for you.

I liked Cherry Wilder's Van Gogh joke, about advice going in one ear and staying. Here are some similar ones for her next column. What happens if you give advice to A. E. van Vogt? It goes in Nul-A and out the author. What happens if you give advice to Alexander Kinglake? It goes in one era and out Eothen. What happens if you give advice to Verdi? It goes in one air and out Aida. And so on... Triviality knows no boundaries...

> Groan. Anyone care to make a pun about William Prynne, who lost both ears in 1634 for declaring that actresses are whores? That is an offense? It is, if the queen of England has taken part in a court masque.
>
> And now for a French spoonerism (cuillèrisme?) in honour of Oz's papal visit: `La population formidable du Cape'. (LS)