ALAN STEWART

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AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
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DICEBAMUS HESTERNA DIE

Every time I / hear de spirit / movin' in my heart I / am glad, but / every time I / hear from Foyster / den I feel so / awful bad - because it means ASFR has survived another two months and I have another editorial to write. I'm damned if I know how I let myself in for this.

I thought (said Foyster) you were looking forward to this one, on account of this time you can show Yvonne up for the (adjectives and nouns suppressed) she is. Who, me? I expleted. Well, you did say she'd got it all wrong about Flann O'Brien, John said. A bit wrong, I said, here and there. All wrong, you said, John said. Did I? It's not what I said to Yvonne, anyway. I'm almost tempted to think that, somewhat bored in his semi-retirement, John is deliberately trying to provoke some kind of strained feeling between two of his best writers. We're not about to let him get away with that. Death-wish, I said to Yvonne. A classic case, she said. Poor man, one of us added.

In a joint statement today or thereabouts Ms Rousseau and Mg Bangsund pointed out that `Keats and Chapman' were the exclusive invention of `Myles na gCopaleen', not `Flann O'Brien' as stated in our last issue; further, that `Myles na gCopaleen' and `Flann O'Brien' were the patented invention of Brian O'Nolan, also known as Brian O Nualláin, late of Dublin, Ireland, and regular patron of the Scotch House down beyant, where Art imitates Liffey and anything goes.

One of the great myths about sf fandom is that science fiction is the only literary genre that fosters correspondence between readers and writers. I may be wrong, but I seem to recall that Sir Walter Scott got a fair bit of fan mail, some time before Ms Shelley invented science fiction. Be that as it may (and let Brian Aldiss fend for himself) I have sf fandom to thank for getting up the courage (and some would say developing the gall) to write to authors I've enjoyed reading. It seems a natural thing to do, but it's obvious that few do it.

Take Benedict Kiely, for example. No, take A. D. Hope first. Alec will be 80 next year, which makes him even older than George Turner, Wynne Whiteford and possibly Robert Heinlein (but here we get down to months, since both were born in 1907, just 75 years after Sir Walter Scott died). I wrote to Alec Hope, Australia's greatest living poet, in 1972, not long after I moved to Canberra, and, you know, not only did he answer my letter - he invited me on over to his place for a drink and a chat. It was the worst moment of my life. Worse, he wasn't home when I arrived. I sat in my VW, outside the place next door to Alec Hope's place, alternately reading Thomas Love Peacock (whose novels I keep in the glovebox along with the spare headlight globes and emergency folding plastic windshield) and wishing I'd never learnt from fandom and fanzine-publishing that writing to authors is OK.

It was a great night. Hell, it was one of the greatest nights of my life. Most people do their average three-score-and-ten without spending a night with someone like A. D. Hope (or an afternoon with Nancy Keesing or Les Murray, a day with Ursula Le Guin, Bill Rotsler, Geoff Blainey or Lloyd Robson, a fleeting moment with Foyster, Yvonne, Lee Harding - you wanna drop a name, write to the editor; this is **my** turn, OK?). Alec, it turned out, is a closet sf reader. He knew `Cordwainer Smith', had talked to him often. During the evening the conversation turned to favourite books, and I said the book I would most wish to have written was **At Swim-Two-Birds.** Ah, said Alec, the throwaway Irish novel. I have no idea what he meant by that, and don't wish to know.

A few years later I wrote to Benedict Kiely, the mon who once described Brian O'Nolan as the `three-headed man'. He edited the collection Yvonne referred to last issue, **The Various Lives of Keats and Chapman** and **The Brother** (Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, London, 1976). In my letter I probably recounted my conversation with Alec Hope. And with it I probably enclosed some of my own feeble Keats and Chapman stories. Despite all that, Ben Kiely wrote to me, in the largest hand I've ever seen, and sent me a copy of his novel **Proxopera** (the saddest, most sensible, most chilling book I've ever read about Ireland's continuing troubles) and suggested I drop in some time.

There's a pattern about this. The first fair-dinkum author who ever suggested I drop in some time was Lee Harding. That turned out OK. The next was George Turner. George was the first to write about meeting **me**, but he has been swiftly followed by Gerald Murnane. Be warned, dear reader: this can happen to you! (And I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.)

JB 14.12.86

OUR COLLECTIVE WAYS

A couple of months ago Russell Blackford was able to write entertainingly in this space about the delights of moving thereafter into a Russell-Blackford-free zone. This month, alas, no reader can look forward to moving into a John-Foyster-free zone, for my words greet you on all too many pages. But I've managed to postpone the next instalment of 'The Long View' yet again, which reduces the amount of my contribution to this longer-than-usual edition.

With the completion of a year's volume of the revived **Australian Science Fiction Review** I suppose it is tempting to look back and report on whether we've managed to get as far as we hoped. With the excuse that it isn't yet **quite** one year I would like to pass on that and leave it to outgoing convenor Jenny Blackford to comment on next time around. (Lucy Sussex, in case you didn't read the fine print earlier, takes over as convenor of the collective for 1987.)

If one does look back on 1986, however, there are some nagging matters. Isaac Asimov, Norman Spinrad, and Robert Silverberg, in a couple of the science fiction magazines (**Asimov's** and **Amazing**), wrote about some alarming trends or events they had noticed.

Asimov was blunt: he indicated that one book publisher had withdrawn future advertising from a magazine which published an unfavourable review of one of that publisher's books. Quite apart from the distaste one must feel for such behaviour, it's hard to believe that any publisher would feel the need to do that, given the ease with which oozingly unctuous blurbs may be obtained from writers of all sorts. It is interesting to note that **Locus** and **Science**

Fiction Chronicle have not reported Asimov's remarks - but then those magazines **are** published on the back pages of book ads.

Spinrad and Silverberg were concerned about something more general: the image of science fiction. Their remarks appeared within a couple of months and, I think, represent a growing concern amongst serious writers of science fiction; Brian Aldiss has some similar comments in **Trillion Year Spree**. The question they address is not merely one of the public image of science fiction, but rather whether that public image is a constraining one.

I found myself with similar thoughts at the end of last year, and have written about them a couple of times for the Australian sf news magazine **Thyme**. And the symposium in this issue presents another angle.

Bluntly put, the question is `is there, or should there be, science fiction after nineteen?' or `is science fiction only for teenagers?' The public image of science fiction - whether as represented in the advertisements upon the backs of which **Locus** and **Science Fiction Chronicle** are published or as modelled by the `kids in costume' about whom Robert Silverberg has expressed concern - is that it is fiction for young people or, if you prefer it, unsophisticated people. Since we all read science fiction, and the likelihood is that we started reading it in our teens, we can understand the perception that this is the ideal audience at which to aim. But what happens to science fiction readers as they grow older? And must all science fiction writers write only for that age group?

Reporting on the **Locus** Poll earlier this year, Charlie Brown noted an apparent rise in the age of his readership - which in any case is not, on average, a teenage readership and is, I suspect, somewhat atypical of science fiction readership. But the advertising **Locus** carries is pitched at teenagers: does it work? One would like to think not, and that rather the **Locus** readers, veterans of science fiction, were resistant to appeals to teenage power fantasies. If this is right, then publishers are not advertising in **Locus** to sell books, but to support the magazine (a highly worthy aim in itself). On the other hand, just maybe it is the case that the oldies who read **Locus** still get off on the kind of science fiction implied by the magazine's advertising.

That's from the reader's point of view. I believe that the other side of the coin needs also to be examined, for the writer of science fiction is also affected by its image. Some writers, like Ursula K. Le Guin, no longer publish their work as 'science fiction', but there may be many reasons for a writer taking that line.

The risk lies, I believe, in the possibility that writers who try to write adult science fiction may find themselves without a market, for if science fiction increasingly identifies itself as a teenage market then it will no longer be possible for writers for the adult market to sell sf. And it is not yet the case that 'adult' science fiction will be recognized for its quality and published outside the ghetto with ease. Some science fiction certainly can be published that way - and a good thing it is too - but the teenagers need somewhere to turn to.

Perhaps this is unnecessarily alarmist. Yet the coincidence in the timing of publication of the various remarks which have proved to be a springboard for this editorial is itself alarming. In any case, one possibility, as I have pointed out in one of my pieces for **Thyme**, is that the two components of the public image which have been mentioned - the kids in costume at conventions and the juvenility of the advertising of science fiction - can themselves act as a stimulant to a runaway in this direction. As Silverberg suggests in **Amazing**, anyone looking in at a convention would conclude that science fiction is for kids. I argue that the same holds for anyone looking at sf advertising. Silverberg wants someone adult to write for, and a publisher for that market, and so do other authors, I have no doubt.

The question to be faced by the world of science fiction is whether, in addition to the identified market for teenage fiction, there should be a market for writers who want to write about adult ways of thinking and, conversely, science fiction books for adult readers.

Just to make it clear where **ASFR** stands, next issue we have Chip Delany writing about sex, science fiction, and various other things I can't quite recall in detail at the moment. But I'm sure it's all of cosmic significance.

JF 24.12.86

SCIENCE FICTION IN 2001: A SYMPOSIUM WITH BRIAN ALDISS, POUL ANDERSON, DAVID COMPTON, URSULA LE GUIN & LARRY NIVEN

Introduction

In 1971 the Adelaide fan Alan Sandercock wrote to a number of prominent writers asking them to answer two questions relating to the future of science fiction. He intended to use those answers at a science fiction convention. In 1978 the questions, together with their answers, were printed in the first issue of the Adelaide fanzine **Auto Delirium** (edited by Perry Middlemiss) under the title 'SF in 2001: A Symposium'.

When **Australian Science Fiction Review** was revived at the beginning of 1986 it struck me that this was now exactly halfway between the time of the initial questions and answers and the time those answers were meant to describe. The answers which had been given in 1971 were themselves inherently interesting, but it could be the case that the writers might want to make some mid-course corrections.

Sandercock had asked these two questions:

> What form, if any, do you think sf will take in the year 2001?

and

> Is it desirable for sf to gain acceptance with mass-media type audiences?

The rest of the Science Fiction Collective is easily led, and so when I proposed to them that we should invite writers to update their earlier responses they quickly agreed. I wrote to all of the participants I could contact, and the following pages present the answers of those whose replies had reached us by mid-November 1986. A further issue may present answers that arrive later. The answers are presented for each question separately, with each author presenting first the 1971 answer, then any 1986 comment. Where the 1986 comment addresses both questions it is printed in response to the first question. (JF)

WHAT FORM, IF ANY, DO YOU THINK SF WILL TAKE IN THE YEAR 2001?

BRIAN ALDISS (1971)

You probably know that I've been asked a couple of questions which I'm supposed to answer. How the hell you think I should know what form science fiction will take in the year 2001, I don't know. By that time, I suppose I will have qualified for a plush geriatric ward somewhere, or be looking out of the window at the fireworks concerned only, no doubt, that my books are still selling and not caring who else is on the scene at the time.

However, it so happens that in the present day I do care very much what form science fiction will take. Which is not to say that I'm certain, because obviously what form it takes will depend on the state of the world at the time. When one attempts that exercise in earnest rather than in fiction, it's very difficult indeed.

I've just been involved as adviser to Southern Television on a series of programs that they are proposing to do, dealing with the future on the south coast of England. They're particularly interested in the development that's going on between Southampton and Portsmouth ... a little tiny area of the globe and yet, as we started working over the problems, we found we were gradually carried further and further out until we had entangled the whole globe. The particular problem, of course, in the British Isles is that we import 60% of our food and, in exchange, we have to export manufactured goods.

Now obviously this balance is pretty precarious; and since I visited Japan last year, I've realized that the thing rapidly becomes more and more precarious. The rest of the world is not going to be wanting our manufactured goods, forever.

Japan, as we all know, is coming up very high in the manufacturing stakes. It amused me while I was there to see that the

Japanese were looking over their shoulders - just as Europe looks over its shoulder at Japan, Japan is looking over its shoulder at South Korea which is coming up apace. You in the Pacific Basin (I almost said 'theatre of war'), you in the Pacific area will be more aware of this than most people are in England. But what it does point to is that there are tremendous forces working in the world which are going to have bearing on everything, including a bearing on science fiction, by the end of the century.

One thing that came out of this (and this is an idea that I've long had) was that the only way to get the balance right was for us to produce our own food as much as possible; and that to do this, the population had to be tapered down until we reached a steady balance of about 30 million (it's getting on for double that now!).

Well, that would mean a large proportion of old folks and it would entail a number of drastic changes as you can visualize including, of course, an entire political change. As long as you elect politicians for five years, you aren't going to get them being able to think ahead further than that.

But more than this, I think it would entail also a change in the moral climate. One really has to be conservation-minded and to get away from all this nonsense of an expansionist economy which, in fact, merely means that you run faster all the time. It would require a profound moral change to bring about this sort of thing. I think maybe a profound moral change could come. For instance, it's very easy to give up smoking if you fully realize how disgustingly you're clogging up and blackening your lungs; then the will is there and you give up smoking. And if people generally felt disgusted at their blackened cities and their desolate landscapes then, I think, they might have a change of heart.

Changes of heart, changes of mind - these have happened before and sometimes very rapidly. A minor example, I'd say, was the sort of feeling in the UK during the 'sixties which became a much more pleasant place to live in. Now we're threatened by a Tory government and things have gone back a bit, but the improvement was rapid and noticeable. That was the era of the Beatles, I suppose you might call it.

Well now, after all this, how does one predict what science fiction is going to be like in the year 2001?

Change, I think, would be much accelerated. It's happening now and is something I have been talking about for a long time; as is the splitting of science fiction into two layers, the popular layer and the more esoteric layer - if you like, high-brow and low-brow, just as ordinary literature has been split that way for a great time. I don't know if any of you know a particularly pernicious but perceptive book by Mrs Q.D. Leavis called **Fiction and the Reading Public**. She spells out that sort of split very clearly.

I think that this will come in science fiction too, simply because there is now such a great deal of science fiction about. Then everyone will recognize clearly that they don't have to read everything, that there may be some forms in which they aren't interested. And in some respects, it may be better for the authors too. I think maybe I'd be glad to be known as a high-brow author: at least it would save a lot of battle.

What I foresee in the event of such a development is that popular science fiction - 'low-brow' science fiction if you like - would chunter on much as it does now with all the imitators of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Conan and the rest of it. But the upper echelons would be able to journey into entirely new spheres. They'd be much freer to invent and explore a new kind of fiction, new sorts of possibilities, surrealist or philosophical or whatever, without being hampered by the feeling of the Gothic School panting along behind them.

In time, perhaps, that upper echelon would itself divide; would have a more rarefied stratospheric upper chamber maybe in some sort of verse, and maybe a less rarefied, more oxygenated, lower chamber.

In relation to something like that, we must realize and expect that science fiction proliferates all the time. If anyone counted up total wordage, you'd find that year by year it was on the increase and, of course, it's now getting all sorts of ramifications; there are international symposia on the subject and terrific academic interest, I think particularly in the States but also in France, the USSR, England - and I would like to see some sort of academic awards instituted which, instead of encouraging dear old Larry Niven's

Ringworld (the sort of novel which springs up without any encouragement), would encourage something a little more adventurous in the realms of intellect. I don't think it would harm anyone.

In three days' time I'll be flying off to the States; I'm going to talk at Middletown, Connecticut, at a symposium there, and I'm hoping to get an academic audience and maybe drop in this idea of some sort of an academic award. I'd think it needn't necessarily be tied to a yearly award. You probably know that next year there is the first European convention, to be held in Trieste. They're instituting the Europa Award; but although one is very hopeful about this, you can't help thinking at the same time that they'll probably give it to Perry Rhodan or some other bomb-throwing activist of that sort. It seems to me that one should encourage as much diversity as possible in science fiction and not discourage any of it.

In saying this much I've tried to be impersonal, but I'd like to say on a personal level that one form I see for my own writing to take is into a more philosophical form. I don't necessarily mean a more difficult form. I've explored some forms: for instance in **Report on Probability A** which I felt, from my own point of view, was a very successful novel, but I didn't feel I could carry that kind of detached style any further. If you carry it further, I think ultimately you arrive at Samuel Beckett's position of almost total silence. And I don't think I necessarily mean **Barefoot in the Head.** That was really too rich.

But, well, I think that there are a lot of scientific developments coming off that are not explored because they are much harder to explore. They need a lot more attention than, for example, the old idea of space travel which is now one of the tired old clichés of the genre.

I'm writing a novel at the moment (which is going to be interrupted by my trip to the States) which is provisionally called **The Eighty-Minute Hour** and that, among other things, explores the distinct possibility coming up that the neurosciences will prove for good and all that we are creatures of determinism; that mind is an epiphenomenon of brain and that there is really no free will; that every future event could be predicted if one were given all the sufficient premises from which one starts towards that event.

When this comes about, since the illusion of free will has been a happy one for four or more centuries, it's going to be a psychic shock to have that sort of pin removed and I think a few novels on the subject beforehand might be very apropos. To have it aired and discussed in other than scientific journals would be a very good and helpful thing - well, that's one way of putting it... the other way of putting it is that it makes a very interesting story point.

One of the other story points I've got in this story is that it foresees what it calls the 'CapCom' treaty, which is an agreement between the capitalist countries and the communist countries to make a one-world state; and the central characters in my book are a group of dissidents who don't believe in that sort of thing at all, are terrified by the idea, think it's a very bad carve-up and are fighting it as well as they can by religion and pornography and other methods. I'm having fun doing it.

BRIAN ALDISS (1986)

In your transcription of my 1971 tape, I recognize my own garrulous tones. Since Sandercock posed the original questions, sf has certainly become a mass-medium, flowing like floodwater into home-computers and big-box-office big-screen events. Has that been good for sf or bad? There is no response to that question; you can only say that it has been good for some writers (and maybe bad for others).

Take the case of Vonnegut again, as I did previously. To my mind, **Slaughterhouse-Five** was his last good book for many a novel. Vonnegut had been taken up. Gurudom had been bestowed upon him. It was as I said: he had a very acceptable message, just aimed right at Middle America. They didn't mind Ole Kurt scratching his arse as he wrote. His books became very indulgent, celebrating his birthdays and all that stuff. His star then appears to have waned a bit, maybe because Middle America became involved with Spielberg, whose **E.T.** is pure Middle-Period Vonnegut, nicht war? Perhaps as a result of this partial eclipse, Vonnegut has evidently started to work and sweat a little. The result is **Galapagos**, to my taste as good, clever, and sharp a novel as **Sirens of Titan** or even **Mother Night**. Oh, the

cleverness of the plotting! - What he couldn't teach the cyberpunks... It's easier to write well when you're hungry - even if it's only attention you're hungry for.

We know that some sf writers are too fat these days. Take a look at the absurd enterprise on which Asimov is engaged: fifteen volumes, is it? at a million dollars a throw... Precisely the kind of public disgrace we fought against at **New Worlds** in the 'sixties. However, if Asimov is still with us, so, thank god, are Ballard and Moorcock, and they keep getting better, keep creating. There's really no sf Empire, much as many would like one: only a number of chaps and chapesses at desks, writing their own thing; and naturally some writing is better than others.

No, I'll keep this letter short. For thirty years I've been campaigning to keep the literary end of sf alive, knowing the schlok end will always survive. David Wingrove's and my **Trillion Year Spree** is about to appear (so bang up-to-date it records an August event). That book is really the response to your question: there is reason not to go into fits of despair about the future of sf - particularly when you look back and see how awful and crude the past was...

POUL ANDERSON (1971)

As for the form of sf in the year 2001, I really don't know. It has been pointed out that sf does not predict anything - what few correct guesses it has made have been on the shotgun principle, and always wrong in many important details - so why should it be able to foresee its own future?

If you want a guess, however, here is the best I can make. There will be no sf at that time, in the sense of a labelled genre. Already today we see the techniques and conventions of sf becoming more and more widely adopted by the so-called mainstream, while sf writers are beginning to discover techniques and conventions developed a couple of generations ago outside their ghetto. Thus I would look for literature, drama, art, etc., which use sf themes where these are convenient. The only kind of story which we today would clearly recognize as sf will be the tale of adventure on far-off imaginary worlds, or via time-machine or whatever. And its

readers will simply think of this as romantic entertainment, the way Haggard's thought of his lost civilizations in Africa.

And a good thing, say I. Verne, Wells, Kipling, weren't saddled with any category labels when they felt like writing sf. The ghettoization of fiction is strictly a twentieth-century invention and ought to go out with the wretched era which produced it. Real imaginative fiction can only benefit.

POUL ANDERSON (1986)

I find little to add to my remarks of 1971. So far the label 'science fiction' has shown no signs of disappearing, as I suggested it might. On the contrary, categorization of all kinds seems to be more pervasive than ever. On the other hand, science fiction and, to a slightly lesser degree, fantasy have become thoroughly accepted and economically important activities of the publishing industry, as well as the audiovisual media.

Moreover, in subject matter and technique they are increasingly becoming like the so-called 'mainstream', though often still blessedly free of the omphaloskepsis which has for so long been fashionable in the latter. Thus it may be that in 2001 we will still see category labels, but they will be a meaningless vestige.

D. G. COMPTON (1971)

As for my answers to your two questions, I'm afraid they boil down to the monotonous refrain I resort to whenever anybody asks me anything even vaguely connected with sf. I dislike compartments, classifications, genres. Fiction that is specialized in content is specialized in readership and specialized in relevance. However good an example of its kind it may be, it starts out with the insuperable handicap of its genre.

Mercifully, sf, never really easy to strait-jacket into a formula, is now bursting out in all directions. It is my sincere hope that within 20 years sf as such will have ceased to exist, its freedom of vision, its relevance to the human situation past, present, and future totally absorbed into the wider fabric of

storytelling. (Books, TV, Cassettes, Holographs, post-holocaust ceilidhs.)

D. G. COMPTON (1986)

I hardly feel qualified to thunder forth on the subject of sf, having failed to publish in the field now for upwards of five years, and my previous several books having earned such a tiny proportion of their advances that one has to wonder seriously whether anybody actually read them...

Still, you're generous enough to invite my comments, so it would be ungrateful of me to refuse them. And sadly, try as I may to moderate them, they make sour reading. Fifteen years ago I hoped (realistically, I thought) that sf would disappear, its many special qualities absorbed into the `wider fabric of storytelling'. Today all the signs are of a contrary motion. The success of space opera movies, with their paroxysms of special effects, reinforces the general reading public's pulpish image of sf, and builds ever higher ghetto walls around the genre. Within the steadily narrowing confines of which it is further constricted - soon to suffocation point, I suspect - by its one-time poor relation Sword and Sorcery, now grown disproportionately stout and prosperous. The result, undeniably, is lots of good fun, and good reading, for the fans. But I don't like inward-spinning spirals. They have a reputation for disappearing eventually up their own fundaments.

Today's marketplace is fiercely competitive, most publishers are over-producing ridiculously, margins are tiny, and in consequence editors are profoundly reluctant to take risks. Perhaps they can go on selling more of the same, in undiminished quantities, for ever and ever, but I doubt it. If I'm asked about AD 2001, therefore, and I take current trends seriously, I predict sf's reduction to a computabook succession of musclepersons and Space Westerns. (Mind you, I'm gloomy about pretty well every other aspect of 2001 life too, should we get to live that long, so maybe it's my overdue male menopause. Or just all those aforesaid cautious editors no longer willing to publish Compton.)

Would I urge everyone to read sf? In a pig's eye, I would. Today's sf is for insiders. Some of my best friends write sf, and all generalizations are a load of crap anyway. But in a pig's eye would I urge everyone to read sf. Read **books**. (Fifteen years on, and I'm as sententious as ever.) Read all the good books you can, old and new, and in the natural, most excellent order of things a fair proportion of them will **be** sf.

URSULA K. LE GUIN (1971)

(A) Probability.

A1. The mainstream has become sf.

A1a. The epic **Comèdia Planetaria** by F. Astùrias-Garcia has just been published in Venezuela. It is a work comparable only to those of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare.

A1b. The market is booming with novels about the building of a Soviet hydroelectric power plant on Delta Aurigae II and the American Jewish Mother Syndrome on Proxima Centauri III and the African Identity Problem on Betelgeuse VIII. Plus ça change...

A2. Sf has become the mainstream.

A2a. All of it, instead of 50% of it, is written by Robert Silverberg.

A2b. All of it is written by Michael Moorcock, under 67 pen-names.

A2c. All of it is written by a computer in Des Moines, Iowa.

(B) Probability.

B1. There are no more books, because there are no more trees.

B1a. All literature has been reduced to some pamphlets put out by the major lumber companies, explaining how they are re-foresting East Antarctica.

B1b. Sf has become an oral/visual art form. Interminable assonantal **gestes** are chanted nightly on the radios of Melbourne and Cape Town. Six billion people watch worldwide television serial **Captain Zapten**, broadcast worldwide by satellite.

B2. There are no more radios and television sets. Sf has become an oral art form, chanted nightly around the campfires of Broadway and Bond Street by masters of improvisation called harlans. If they do not perform well, the harlans are eaten.

B3. There are no more ears. Sf has become a telepathic art form, esped nightly around the abfrest by mutants.

(C) Probability.

C1. There is no more sf because people realized it was all true all along, and hanged the sf writers for writing under false pretences. Nothing is now read but escapist literature, such as Sociology, Political Science, Hard Core Porn, Economics, and the Book of Mormon.

URSULA K. LE GUIN (1986)

I was terrified by reading my 1971 response to Alan Sandercock's questions ... rather as one can be scared by an old photograph, my God was that me?! - Unnerving; but I envy my energy, and I still like the harlans...

All I can do at this point is, all too characteristically, to assert dogmatically that I have lost all the underlying dogmatisms of my previous response and believe none of it, particularly the last quarter of the last sentence. (I do still support the third quarter of the last sentence.)

As for coming up with a new set of responses, my hang-up is fairly total; in the first question I don't know well enough what sf is any more to answer it; in the second question I don't know what `a mass media type audience' is, really - `a mass media type audience' as opposed to what? an elite audience? As exclusive of intelligent readers? Or simply meaning a very large audience? I can no longer glib off these words as I did in '71. A painful and probably fatal desire to know what I'm talking about has set in, leading to longer and longer silences. But when silent one can listen, and I assure you I will be listening with interest to the answers of others.

LARRY NIVEN (1971)

I think science fiction will still be around, and it'll be what it is now: stories exploring the forefront of the possible, and the interaction of the same with humanity. One difference will be that our notion of `the possible' will have changed.

The stories may also exist in a different form. The movie 2001 explored some radically new techniques for dramatizing sf stories. Magazines of the science fiction field seem to be failing, here in the USA. Videotapes look like the wave of the future anyway. Science fiction fans thirty years from now may buy cassettes, tapezines.

LARRY NIVEN (1986)

Second Thoughts

Many things have changed since 1971.

Our notion of `the possible' has expanded more than changed. There was the math for orbital towers in 1971; now there are half a dozen varieties of orbital launcher designs, and Arthur Clarke has made the general public aware of the Beanstalk.

Grand unified field theories describe a universe strange beyond imagination. 'String' theories give us a final number for elementary particles. It's 496. (Not 42.) Most of the particles are huge; only a few are at the proton/electron/photon size; the particles include magnetic monopoles and gravitons.

Earth's G constant measures differently underground than at the surface. There may be a fifth force, a surface phenomenon that allows convenient flying belts.

Neuromancer and like stories explore the possibilities of the man-computer interface.

Videotapes have indeed become popular and successful. The way to bet is this: somebody will eventually be selling programs and computer equipment to make cartoons from stock furniture and characters and a script. Around 2001 you'll see two-hour cassettes for sale: animated versions of thousands of science fiction and fantasy stories, none of which would have had enough mass market appeal to make a profit, back when **Star Wars** cost umpty-dozen millions of dollars.

The magazines seem to have recovered. **Omni** is solvent; **Playboy** and other mass market mags publish occasional sf.

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IS IT DESIRABLE FOR SF TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE WITH MASS-MEDIA TYPE AUDIENCES?

BRIAN ALDISS (1971)

And now, perhaps, I should move on to the other question, which is 'Do you think it is desirable for sf to gain acceptance with mass media-type audiences?'

I think in a sense what I have already said answers that question. I would think that it was desirable for just as many people as possible to have science fiction stuffed down their throats. But the only sort of fiction, be it sf or any other fiction, that is going to be acceptable to a wide audience is going to be something which in its nature is very popular. So that at no time, even in the present, will science fiction hit mass media.

I can imagine, for example, that Vonnegut might come on very strong and might write a very popular novel - let's say, **Slaughterhouse-Five** - but my feeling about Vonnegut is that, although he is immensely entertaining, he also tends to be a bit daring and avant-garde: and in fact he's peddling the old Bradbury message that says 'Make Love, Not War'.

In their cases I think it isn't anything as daring and active as love, but it's at least 'Make a little gentle conversation and not war'. And this sort of watered-down message appeals very widely. It appeals to the middle-class, and it appeals to the middle-aged, and it's very trendy with the young.

So I think that Vonnegut has a lot of safe cushiony messages about him that could launch him out into a very wide audience. And with the filming of **Slaughterhouse-Five** I'd think he could be set to be the Beaumont and Fletcher of our age, if you like - that sort of thing. But, you know, what's the good of having anything widely accepted unless it has some intrinsic merit?

I don't think there is any intrinsic merit in science fiction; there can only be intrinsic merit in the works of the various authors who write it.

I've always thought that Heinlein's **Stranger in a Strange Land** reached a very wide audience, not because it's terribly good but because it's terribly bad - all those awful wish-fulfilment things that go on in there; anyone can vanish when the cops come after them and love is very easy to get - all those lying messages couched in a sort of intellectual format. I should have thought it was a very bad book that (well, it sounds cynical) was bound to appeal to a mass readership.

And I think there are some science fiction writers who are sensible enough not to want to appeal to a mass readership. They may like the cash - that's another thing - but they may nevertheless be much more interested in exploring their own medium and their own selves and putting that down and getting that right, and then worrying about the audience afterwards. Maybe Heinlein did that, and I'm sure that popular authors are often deeply serious people, but the fact remains that `by their fruits ye shall know them', and I think that on those levels **Stranger in a Strange Land** is a pretty sick bit of fantasy really.

The other point about mass acceptance is this sort of thing: presumably, looking at it in historical perspective, Shakespeare has had an enormous number of readers, although to begin with he had little support. This is an argument that I've got it right. And one would say the same about James Joyce, that originally **Ulysses** and **Finnegans Wake** were published rather obscurely, were victims of censorship and reached very small audiences, and rather esoterical audiences, and both books gained an enormous reputation for difficulty. But nevertheless, if one tots up the readers and the number of editions that those books have been through, Joyce has obviously reached a very wide readership.

I date back to **Astounding** in the early 1940s. I read the first Heinleins and the first Asimovs as they were cut off John W. Campbell's endless lathe. I enjoyed them immensely and I suppose the guys got something like (I don't know what it was) about 2½ cents per word, or something like that, and a very small readership, all of

whom, if you can believe the adverts, suffered from psoriasis, black feet, and spots. And yet, since those stories and novels and serials have been published in volume form, they've gone on selling ever since! Now that's thirty years! Count it!

In those thirty years it's obvious that a great number of readers have read those early Heinleins and Asimovs; they've picked up a tremendous cumulative audience. Now I think that their works were perhaps too difficult for general acceptance to begin with because the concepts they were putting over were very difficult to assimilate, were not popular concepts - in other words, they defied the current state of affairs. They're widely read now simply because they are now easy and palatable. They've been made easy and palatable by time, and this is something that I think is very valuable to science fiction - the concept that it should be difficult to swallow, should be challenging.

I don't read much science fiction now mainly because I've had my belly full of it reviewing the damn stuff for so many, many years. But my impression is, from the little I do pick up and get through, that it isn't challenging any more.

This is not only because people still depend on concepts that were once challenging like, shall we say, telepathy or space travel, but there's been a change on the other side of the fence. People play it `cool' now: they aren't surprised any more. Once upon a time you could fight against their disbelief - it gave you something to push against. But now, if you push against it you'll go through because people are prepared to believe anything. They just aren't as easily surprised any more.

So this is one reason, not only why science fiction has **got** to adapt to changed times, but why it's **begun** to adapt to changed times. And this I think is what, partly at least, the New Wave furore was about - because writers sensed this; the more intelligent ones of them sensed this.

I think this is what Mike Moorcock, however obscurely, felt in **New Worlds**. And this was why **New Worlds** was so damned exciting, because suddenly there was this feeling, `Okay, boys: the bathwater's old and dirty, let's throw it out and run some new water '. Okay, maybe the baby went out as well, but that new bathwater is, I think,

very welcome, and points to what I was saying earlier about a more esoteric sort of science fiction growing up. Don't mistake me there; let me just say what I've said before: a lot of the experimentation, so-called, is not only bad per se but it's also terribly dated. But within the context of the science fiction field it was new and original because, as a literary genre, the science fiction field was light-years behind the rest.

POUL ANDERSON (1971)

Implicit in the above is my answer to your second question.

Yes, by all means, sf as it is today needs to stop being a little mutual-admiration society, go out and meet the challenges and standards of general literature. In the process, it will have much to offer this wider world.

But I don't think everyone needs to be urged to read the stuff. This has already happened. Every half-way intelligent reader, whatever his tastes, has now had some exposure, whether or not he ever glanced into a speciality magazine. Courses are being taught in high schools and universities. Suitably tedious theses are written and suitably pompous academic conferences are held. (That sentence is admittedly unfair to many genuine enthusiasts such as Tom Clareson, Ivor Rogers or Virginia Carew. But you just can't keep the Herr Doktor types out. They are one of the hazards involved in leaving the pulp enclosures.) Those people whose interest has been aroused more than casually know where to look for more.

What we should do, I think, is less tub-thumping and more trying to make our literature worthy of the attention of the intelligent non-addict.

D. G. COMPTON (1971)

As for your mass audience question, therefore, my answer is predictable enough. While sf is on the way to ceasing to be sf, it should and will gain readers. It will also, by seeking human truth on whatever level, lose readers. A mass readership, therefore, is desirable for everybody's sake, but unlikely. And as for today, here

and now, any urging of sf on a wider audience must be accompanied with a responsible assessment of each particular work being urged. Dyed in the wool genre sf may be great in-group fun, but outside the group it is liable to do the wider sf cause considerable damage.

So there you are, I'm afraid I've been very sententious. This strip of blue paper is neither long enough to allow serious but sprightly prose, nor short enough for only these snappy shallow epigrams.

URSULA K. LE GUIN (1971)

This is essentially a question of publicity. How **widely** a novel, any novel, is read during the first couple of years after publication depends on publicity - on money spent on ads and pushing by the publisher, critical notice in large-circulation journals, television talk shows, prizes, etc., etc. This accrues a readership considered as the 'Mass' in Mass Media: a manipulable corporate entity: reader as consumer.

How **long and widely** a novel continues to be read is a totally different matter, and depends essentially on its intrinsic quality as a work of art. The work of art accrues, over years and decades, a readership which cannot be considered a Mass, but instead remains a body of **persons** exercising **choice**.

Only this second aspect of the problem really interests me; so I have no answer for your question, other than this: I think it desirable that good books be written; and if they are written, they will get the audience they deserve.

LARRY NIVEN (1971)

All other fiction is a small branch of science fiction. Sf explores all of 'the possible', including that which we regard as 'the real'. Nonetheless the answer is **no**.

I write for a select, relatively small audience, whose average member is Larry Niven. Some ideas are easier to popularize than others, because they are easier to understand. I always write for as wide an audience as possible, but there are stories that simply

cannot be understood by the Average Man. In such cases, the hell with him.

Obviously, I'd be in deep trouble if the only markets were wide-audience markets. But I don't fear that possibility. Science fiction fans may be a small branch of the public, but they're dedicated. If there were no promags, the number of fanzines would double, and eventually they'd start paying their writers money.

It would be nice to get some respect out of the mass audience. After all, it does take a high IQ to understand good science fiction. But we don't need that respect, and we don't need the task of constantly telling Average Man what it's all about.

LARRY NIVEN (1986)

`I write for a select, relatively small audience.' Well, it wasn't me that changed, though in fifteen years I was bound to learn some new skills. In particular, I've become good at collaborating.

`It would be nice to get some respect out of the mass audience.' I did it! Rather, **we** did it, Jerry Pournelle and I. I never would have tried to write **Lucifer's Hammer** or **Footfall** alone. I do better with fewer characters; but the world-wide themes required on the order of a hundred.

`It's too good to be science fiction.' We still hear that from a few moss-covered academics. True, **Hammer** is on the borderline: science fiction at the level of the older **Earth Abides**. But **Footfall** is about the invasion of Earth by aliens from Alpha Centaurus. Clearly science fiction.

Both books got huge advances. Both made the best-seller lists. Sales in the millions. We're finally talking to the wide audience.

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REVIEWS

Brian W. Aldiss with David Wingrove, **Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction**, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1986, 511 pp, hc £15, pb £9.95, $A26.95

reviewed by John Foyster

The numerical change in title from Aldiss's earlier work, **Billion Year Spree**, turns one's mind to arithmetic. Why not start, then, by looking at those additions and subtractions which differ between editions?

David Wingrove has been added as co-author: Aldiss refers to their relationship, in his introduction, as a perfect collaboration. (To tell the truth, to show his capacity to rise above the conventions of English usage, Aldiss uses two sentence-like but verbless constructions which, appended to an orthodox sentence, appear to convey this information. I hope I have it right. There are quite a few of these interjectory utterances in **Trillion Year Spree**: perhaps this change from **Billion Year Spree** is an unidentified contribution from the new co-author?) The introduction indicates that there has been considerable interplay between the two by way of re-writing, but that nevertheless the new material about recent developments has been drafted by Wingrove. We shall see, later in this review, whether that matters.

And there's the change in subtitle, as well as in title. **Billion Year Spree** was `The True History of Science Fiction' while **Trillion Year Spree** is `The History of Science Fiction'. Now the section on Lucian of Samosata is, in my opinion, a little weak in that Aldiss (like many historians of science fiction) only reluctantly acknowledges Lucian's parodistic intent in writing the **True History**. This makes me wonder about my opinion that there were overtones of self-mockery in the original subtitle which are missing from the sombre later version.

That word is inappropriate. It is unfair to describe either book as `sombre' for, as one might expect from a writer with so

well-deserved a reputation for humour as Aldiss has, there's a lightness of touch which makes them both easy reads. But you can always tell that a book is serious (especially a history book) by the copiousness of its notes. In the case of **Trillion Year Spree** the much-amplified critical apparatus in the form of endnotes has been relegated to the back of the book from the earlier position at the end of each chapter, but whether this is an improvement is difficult to say; quite often some of the most interesting remarks are to be found in these notes, and having to shuffle pages to find them is distracting no matter where they are placed once they have separated from the main body of the text.

Another change is more puzzling. The 'Critical Bibliography' has been altered extensively. One could understand that the authors would want to add references published since **Billion Year Spree**, but the deletion of titles is more difficult to grapple with. To take an example from early in the alphabet, it is not easy to see why W. H. G. Armytage's **Yesterday's Tomorrows: A Historical Survey of Future Societies** should have been omitted in the 'second edition': I think it is safe to say that this is a significant work in the literature about science fiction. The authors claim to have included in the Critical Bibliography those books which have been most frequently consulted, and I should have thought one could not unconsult a book.

In another case, the deletion of a title from the bibliography may lead to considerable uncertainty (or quite a spate of page-turning) for some readers. In discussing Jules Verne, Aldiss writes (p 107)

> a good translation of his best novels might effect a revaluation of his vast **oeuvre**, as seems to be happening presently in France, with critics of the stature of Butor and Chesneaux.

Butor's name is indexed in both books, and it is easy to identify his writing about Verne from the appropriate endnote number. This is not so for Jean Chesneaux, whose name is not indexed in either book. In **Billion Year Spree** his book about Verne is listed in the critical bibliography, so one may identify it without reading through the endnotes to the chapter. There's no such luck in **Trillion Year Spree**, for the book about Verne is one which has been deleted from the critical bibliography, and the endnotes are, as

noted, more copious. Hard lines for the reader! (On page 453 of **Trillion Year Spree** you will find, if you wish to know it, the title of Chesneaux's book.)

I guess this is all only trivially annoying (as is chapter VIII's being identified as chapter VII in the headers on each page - except that it is exactly by this chapter numbering that one identifies endnotes) but it gets in the reader's way. Books intended to be used, even 'to serve in the schools', should not make life unnecessarily hard for the readers.

Pushing aside all of this, on the assumption that committed readers will read no matter what barriers are erected, one finds between the covers not a history of science fiction at all but a collection of refreshing and perhaps even seminal ideas about science fiction, presented in more or less chronological order: most of this was present in **Billion Year Spree** (I shall now try to cut down on references in this review to that earlier work).

The Aldiss definition of science fiction - shortly to be quoted - is driven, I think, by his certainty that Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** is the first work of science fiction: in his opening chapter Aldiss firmly rejects the Gernsbackites and the Gilgameshites as deviationists who do harm to theorizing about science fiction. Yet his perhaps somewhat grandiose definition, broadly read, could provide a basis for both of those views:

> Science fiction is the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode. (p 25)

Aldiss bolsters his case with an extended treatment of Mary Shelley in the first chapter. Indeed, in the earlier parts of **Trillion Year Spree**, the standard approach is to prepare a chapter which focuses upon one author but which provides us with a rather fuzzier vision of those more or less contemporaneous with the star. But in this first chapter, after a general introduction, the treatment is almost exclusively of Mary Shelley (we learn of her pet name for her son William, for example); it is established that she unquestionably wrote something which might as well be called science

fiction. (This chapter is very heavily revised from the earlier version, in many places by extended omissions.)

The second chapter diverges in that the treatment of Poe's contemporaries is slight, but this may be in deference to H. Bruce Franklin's **Future Perfect** (Oxford University Press, 1966, 1978 - although the Critical Bibliography only identifies the earlier, now presumably more difficult to obtain, first edition) which covered that period so well. But around the core on Poe are to be found trendy paragraphs about earlier and later times whose purpose is not easy to decipher; if they were intended to lock Poe into history then they are surely unnecessary, and otherwise they merely intrude.

The third chapter deals with the Gilgameshites at some length: in a few pages Aldiss gives the nod to the various precursors of **Frankenstein**. The treatment is broad and thoughtful, but there are disturbing paragraphs.

In treating the early utopias - the great threat, one assumes, to the claim on Mary Shelley's behalf - there are a few peculiar sentences:

> Utopianism or its opposite is present in every vision of the future. There is little point in inventing a future state unless it contrasts in some way with our present one.
>
> This is not to claim that the great utopias are science fiction. Far from it. Their intentions are generally moral or political. But they point to a better world in which the follies of our world are eliminated or suppressed. (p 75)

This is curious stuff. It clearly implies that utopias are about `better' worlds rather than `other' worlds - the vulgar but acceptable view --and also that works with moral or political intent cannot be science fiction - which is probably less acceptable. But it also skates around the point: in a chapter titled `Honourable Ancestors' writers with the view of Aldiss and Wingrove surely need to produce more than this to refute the claim that utopias **are** early forms of science fiction.

The next odd section occurs a few pages later (page 81) when, dealing with Jonathan Swift's **Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World: in Four Parts,** which vulgar readers like you and me know as **Gulliver's Travels,** Aldiss writes (only slightly revised):

> It is fortunate that this masterly work does not count as science fiction, being satirical and/or moral in intention rather than speculative, for, if it did so count, then perfection would have been achieved straightaway, and the genre possibly concluded as soon as it had begun. But Swift's magical book defies any category into which critics try to place it. (p 81)

We now have an expansion on the earlier claim: science fiction has to be speculative in intent, rather than satirical, moral, or political. Perhaps it is explained elsewhere just how this fine distinction is to be made, but it is not clear to me that current writers of what we think handily of as science fiction would be entirely happy to learn that their works are not permitted to have satirical, moral, or political intent. Is science fiction, after all, speculation **in vacuo**?

There's another implication which may be read into this - the acceptance of the ghettoization of science fiction. I doubt that the authors intended to imply that science fiction and literature don't mix, but the implication is inexorably there.

It's at the end of this chapter that the defence of the Aldiss-Wingrove definition of science fiction is strong, however, for they argue that the reason for taking **Frankenstein** as the first work of science fiction is that this makes useful distinctions possible. **Frankenstein** was finely balanced between introspection and outwardness, and this provides a handy starting point. Definitions are good when they enable helpful categories to enter into discussion. Fair enough: who needs all that other stuff? It is unclear, however, that this useful distinction is employed later in **Trillion Year Spree**.

Aldiss writes next of gas- and steam-powered science fiction: those works, up to the time of Verne, which celebrated the technological developments of the nineteenth century. Here, if we wish, we can begin to understand a little more about Aldiss's notion of what constitutes science fiction, and how the exclusions which have been discussed above are to be made; for the authors, in this chapter, foreshadow the role their hero is to play:

> H. G. Wells **shows** us, for instance in **When the Sleeper Wakes**, what happens when men are slaves to technology. What Wells imagines, Butler merely fears. (page 93)

In the earlier version, this last sentence is `Wells is involved, Butler merely a commentator'; the change is complex and interesting. I'm not sure that I can follow it, since I have this raging certainty that fear is involving. (Mere commentating I can follow: it sounds like the sort of thing that people whose works go beyond speculation might do - see above.) It hardly helps that this may be a key to the argument about what constitutes science fiction, since what is in or out, what's classical and what isn't, and what makes the difference is surely important. This is central here because Wells is taken as the exemplar of science fiction, and we need to understand him very well if we are to understand the Aldiss/Wingrove case.

I don't happen to understand Wells very well at all, and have to rely upon the chapter now titled `The Great General in Dreamland'. (In general, chapter titles have been recycled, by the way, but in the earlier version the Wells chapter was titled `The Man Who Could Work Miracles' and it is not really clear that this change is for the better.)

It is in the Wells chapter that the nature of **Trillion Year Spree** becomes transparently clear. The view expressed earlier - that what we have here is not a history so much as a collection of appreciations - seems borne out by the high level of energy accorded this chapter. As it happens Aldiss has a great sensitivity towards science fiction which enables him not only to write in a way which is exciting but also to identify key figures and to provide insights into them which are fresh (at least to me) and challenging. It is difficult to read the chapter on Wells, for example, without feeling an urge to go and buy a set of the wretched man's books. I've no doubt scholars other than Aldiss have written more deeply about Wells, but when it comes to getting the attention of the suckers Aldiss must be very nearly incomparable.

Apart from noting that Aldiss regards Wells as `the Shakespeare of science fiction' I'll take relatively little from this chapter. Aldiss's reserve with respect to politics emerges once again (`Wells

did not change the world as he would have wished. He did alter the way millions of people looked at it.'(p 132)) - though perhaps this is but a manifestation of the general political conservatism of science fiction. Aldiss forcefully summarizes the Wells he believes in:

> Within his own domain, Wells is **sui generis**. Within the domain of scientific romance, he managed three unique achievements. He elevated the freak event - a visit to the Moon, an invasion from another planet - into an artistic whole. In consequence, he greatly extended the scope and power of such imaginings. And he brought to the genre a popularity and a distinctness from other genres which it has never lot since, despite the blunders of many following in his wake. (p 133)

The imagery of the last sentence conveys the significance that Wells and those who write from within the same ideological framework have for Aldiss: they determine, in many ways, how he thinks about science fiction.

What a contrast it is to turn to the next two chapters! Here Aldiss deals with the writers whose reaction to the realism of Wells was a flight into irrationality. One manifestation of this flight was the exploration of fantastic pre-civilized societies, as in the works of Haggard, Griffith, and Shiel (for example), and this, together with what Aldiss calls the `tushery' school of fantasy (as exemplified by the works of William Morris - his comments incline the reader to look forward eagerly to Aldiss's extended remarks on today's glut of escapist teenage fantasy), forms the subject for the first of these. The chapter is introduced with some of the waffly sociological wank which is by now becoming increasingly intrusive upon an otherwise fascinating piece of writing:

> The pace of progress was quickening. The cities were growing. The wildernesses were being tamed. Trees were turning into paper before you could say Productivity. (p 136)

The treatment of these writers is brief: in the shadow of Wells, as we might expect, they hardly show up as contributing much to the Progress of Science Fiction. (In a way I am disappointed that Aldiss does not deal with George Allan England: but then, knowing just how successful my talk at a Star Trek convention on `The Political

Thought of George Allan England' was, and recalling the shyness with respect to politics of **Trillion Year Spree**, I'm not surprised.*) Nor do the writers discussed in the following chapter - mainly Burroughs, Merritt, and Lovecraft - appear to have made a great developmental contribution. But this, I suspect, is an illusion.

The division made by Aldiss is on the basis of the kind of reaction to Realism and Progress: pre-civilization for the writers of the first chapter, and the supernatural for the writers of the second (although Burroughs doesn't quite fit). But Burroughs **does** fit into the second of these two chapters if the separation between the two groups of writers is considered in a different way - as a division into those who wrote `literary' `books' and those whose major market was the pulp magazine.

This distinction is, to my mind, hardened in the second of these two chapters (`VII. From Barsoom to Beyond the Borderland') when Aldiss compares Wells and Burroughs: in a couple of pages (slightly expanded from the earlier version) Aldiss gives us his definition of good science fiction.

> ...Wells's is a serious tale enlivened by a little humour. Its aim is to discuss entertainingly ways in which mankind might improve itself and its lot. Burroughs's story is fantasy adventure without structure which we do not for one minute take seriously. [...]
>
> So why does one obstinately respect Wells the more? It must be because, whatever his failings, Wells is trying to grapple with what he sees as the real world. Burroughs, however expertly, is dishing out daydreams. [...]
>
> Wells is teaching us to think. Burroughs and his lesser imitators are teaching us not to think.
>
> Of course, Burroughs is teaching us to wonder. The sense of wonder is in essence a religious state, blanketing out

---

* Yes, Brian, I know that **Billion Year Spree** gave two paragraphs to George Allan England. Given that very little was omitted in preparing **Trillion Year Spree**, one does wonder why poor old GAE got the chop.

criticism. Wells was always a critic, even in his most romantic and wondrous tales.

> And there, I believe, the two poles of modern fantasy stand defined. At one pole wait Wells and his honourable predecessors such as Swift; at the other, Burroughs and the commercial producers, such as Otis Adelbert Kline, and the weirdies, and horror merchants such as H. P. Lovecraft, and so all the way past Tolkien to today's non-stop fantasy worlders. Mary Shelley stands somewhere at the equator of the metaphor.
>
> At the thinking pole stand great figures, although it is easy to write badly. At the dreaming pole stand no great figures - though there are monstrous figures - and it is difficult to write well. In the eighties, the dreaming pole is in the ascendant. (pp 164-5)

This fundamental statement of beliefs is extensive, detailed, contemporary - and prepares Aldiss to deal with the loathsome Gernsbackites in the following chapter, `In the Clutches of the Zeitgeist: Mainly the Thirties', which is mainly about Capek, Huxley, Stapledon, and Lewis (and so substantially about the 'Twenties and 'Forties), and interestingly deals with Gernsback (who chronologically preceded all of them) only after discussing the works of the more `literary' figures.

The treatment of Gernsback is odd, and somewhat expanded compared with that given in **Billion Year Spree**. Indeed, if we focus upon the major expansions we get a fair idea of the kind of treatment handed out to poor old Hugo. The first section deals with two of Gernsback's contemporaries at Bingen, Karl Hans Strobl and Otto Witt, each of whom, it turns out, published sf magazines **before** Gernsback! Each of their magazines lasted for over fifty issues, but one hardly ever hears of them - presumably because they somewhat lacked influence (the crime of which Gernsback is happily convicted). Furthermore - and here Aldiss and Wingrove quote at length from Sam Lundwall - because Gernsback was successful in **America** this led to an ignoring of the European heritage in science fiction.

But the second major addition, from the eminently sensible Robert Lowndes, undermines this latter argument by developing a point admitted by Aldiss himself; in fact, it was Hugo Gernsback and Hugo

Gernsback alone who attempted to bring the European writers to a world-wide audience. Gernsback only published about 100 separate editions of his magazines, but in those you will find more sf translated from European languages than in all the other sf magazines published in English put together! Gernsback's influence on the development of science fiction may have been malign but the particular matter taken up so eagerly in **Trillion Year Spree** does not stand up, I think, to any rational reading.

If Gernsback's place as 'The Father of Science Fiction' needs to be challenged - and I frankly doubt that there's any merit in arguing about a title so ephemeral in meaning - then it needs to be done more substantially than it is here, if only because it is the rise of magazine science fiction in the United States (for which Gernsback was at least to some extent responsible) which produced a change in the way science fiction was perceived, a break in its history which is recognized in the organization of **Trillion Year Spree.**

Gernsback is the first transitional figure in the history of science fiction and John W. Campbell, editor of **Astounding Science Fiction,** is the second. By the end of Campbell's editorship - indeed, well before the end - all the conventions of modern science fiction were in place. Science fiction from the Campbell era - no earlier - is freely reprinted, and this longevity of the stories of (say) the 'forties makes sf an attractive proposition to publishers who see in it a solid back-list. The Gernsback-Campbell period is thus, in my view, one which could be studied profitably, since over this period science fiction becomes a category - a genre of the ghetto only if the readers and writers make it so, I should add - or a label which some cling to and others flee: before Gernsback there was no such choice.

That study isn't to be found in **Trillion Year Spree.** The Campbell chapter sets a pattern which is to be followed for almost the whole of the second half of the book - a waltz with selected authors, talking about some of the science fiction they have written. The sense of purpose which informs Part I just isn't there for Part II because, one feels, the story is over.

One wouldn't think so from the book; after all, Part II begins just over halfway through (p 233), although the difficulty had been

recognized by Aldiss back in **Billion Year Spree**, where the parallel chapter began with the same paragraph:

> Since World War II ended, and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan became the first move in the Cold War, science fiction has diversified in a number of ways. That diversification leads us directly to the present.

But in **Billion Year Spree** these words introduced the next to last significant chapter whereas here it heralds another seven chapters.

The arrangement of and thinking behind these last seven chapters is difficult to fathom. The tenth chapter of **Billion Year Spree**, for example, is cut up and spread over at least three chapters of **Trillion Year Spree**, with various amplifications.

But exactly what is done is curious. There's a tendency in dealing with the current era to descend to presenting shopping lists and probably these are useful in a survey work. In updating an edition one can always expand and make corrections and page 246, which lists `an impressive array of novels' that `approach the science fiction condition', is a good example. But it is all too easy simply to carry over a passing remark. Of what value, one wonders, is the following sentence to the student of science fiction?

> The pseudonymous Robert Crane's **Hero's Walk** (1954) enjoyed a vogue.

When this appeared in the earlier edition it was surrounded by a pile of similarly innocuous remarks (such as `Colonel Theodore Cogswell's **Wall Around the World** is still being reprinted' and `Gordon Dickson, ambitious and productive writer, is best known for his Dorsai series') and as such one could take it at face value. But now, when the surrounding remarks have been amplified (or moved a few chapters away and then amplified), it appears lumpishly out of place. Away with all such pests!

In the reshuffling it was inevitable, I suppose, that some cards would be lost. It is particularly annoying, given the expanded attention given in Part I to the European heritage (as discussed above at some length), to find that the card relating to European science fiction seems to have been dropped on the floor at some stage. Lem, Nesvadba, and the Strugatsky brothers are dealt with

briefly on pages 379-81, but that appears to be it. **Billion Year Spree** has a short paragraph (page 307) which mentioned Vercors, Mrozek, Yefremov, Tung, Jensen, Martinson (all indexed) and hinted at other delights but all this - together with the later developments in those and other countries - seems to have vanished from the filing system.

Were it not that there appears to have been a substantial effort to be comprehensive, such an omission would be understandable but it does, in a compendious attempt such as this, leave a gap not easily explained.

The attempt to give a `once over lightly' to **all** of science fiction leads to some curious effects. The matter of omission of some authors is one which can be set aside as depending upon the background of the authors. But the way in which some authors are introduced is just clumsy. Here, for example, Gardner Dozois ambles on stage:

> Brin's popularity will grow and grow. His latest venture is a novel with Greg Bear, called **Heart of the Comet** (1986). Gardner Dozois, on the other hand, seems fated to be more influential than popular, especially now that he has taken over the editing of **Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine.** (p 418)

Huh? Surely serious writers can provide better continuity than this. (How about `Another writer with one "a" in his name is Gardner Dozois, recently become editor of **Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine**'?)

This is the major problem of the second half; there's almost no basis for the grouping of writers used by Aldiss and Wingrove. The chapter on the seven dinosaurs (those who came back - Heinlein, Asimov, and company) is a notable exception, and the chapter is most readable. The other exception is the fine but short chapter XI - `The Dawn of the Day of the Dumpbin: Cinemas, Computers, Colleges and Canticles' - which deals sensitively with the commercial success of science fiction and surprisingly (at least to me) gives several pages (277-80) to the economics and politics of science fiction.

There's a wealth of comment in Part II but it is just that - comment with little or no analysis. It's time, now, to examine just what else is missing.

Trillion Year Spree is almost exclusively a history of science fiction writers and their works. We learn from it very little about the social or the practical circumstances in which science fiction is produced. Thus, for example, when Hugo Gernsback is being dealt with, it is his writing, rather than his editing, which receives the brunt of the attack. There is grudging respect for some of his editorial work, together with some unsupported and negative remarks about his editorial influence. Yet neither Gernsback himself nor those who support his claim to a place of eminence in the history of science fiction would give much weight to his fiction. But because Aldiss and Wingrove see only the writer, their opinion is, in my view, biased.

By and large, editorial work, and the science fiction magazines and publishers generally, don't exist for Aldiss and Wingrove. For example, was Terry Carr's challenging work with the Ace Specials significant in the history of science fiction? I think so, but I can't tell you what Aldiss and Wingrove think because there's no reference to them in **Trillion Year Spree**.

Was Sam Merwin's work as the first editor to follow Campbell and shift sf magazines away from ultra-pulp, thus paving the way for **Galaxy** and so on, significant in the history of science fiction? I think so, but Merwin is not even mentioned in **Trillion Year Spree**.

Ian Ballantine's work as a publisher is regarded as significant in the general history of publishing since the 1940s, and most readers will know of his special support for and interest in science fiction over the years: not mentioned in **Trillion Year Spree**.

But one can look back into the past, into the world covered so well in Part I, and see the same pattern of omission. Dime novels are mentioned only in passing, with no attention given to their significance.

Yet to understand science fiction as it is, one must surely look at its origins and its context. As Didier Coste has carefully shown ('Installments of the Heart: Text delimitation in periodical narrative and its consequences', **Sub-Stance** 33/34, 56-65) much can be understood about a fiction by considering its context. Coste was writing about a Spanish periodical of the 1920s and '30s, but some of

his remarks seem to me to fit periodical (and popular) science fiction with great precision:

> it is an accumulation of objects of the same nature, which tends infinitely toward completeness without ever attaining it. Its systematic principles are contradictory: repetition is justified by the quest for the unrepeatable, by the untiring approximation of a model which does not and cannot exist anywhere concretely, because its concept can only be abstracted from what all the actual published texts share. Diversity, in this perspective, is a consequence of a repeated failure to achieve the model, but, at the same time, it is a pre-condition of the quest and the repetition. Each narrative seeks, at the level of the presented world, a state of affairs that places satisfaction out of time, but this very extra-temporality of the wish-fulfilment object can only be lived by the reader as an instant relief, and orgasmic satisfaction, if it is to call for endless, regular repetition, thus denouncing the very ephemeral character of eternity. (p 63)

Much of the character of science fiction may be in common with all periodical fiction; if this is so then I would like the matter discussed in any serious history of science fiction.

To ask this is to strike at the heart of books like **Trillion Year Spree**. For the truth of the matter is that there is no longer a place for 'serious' encyclopaediac works of this kind: at least not written by worthy writers like Aldiss.

There may be a place for popular introductions to science fiction, but they need not be so comprehensive as **Trillion Year Spree** attempts to be, nor should they consume the time of someone like Brian Aldiss who has so much to contribute to the investigation of the nature of science fiction; his time is better spent producing closer, more painstaking, studies of the kind currently being published by Serconia Press.

Science fiction as a field for investigation has grown beyond the stage at which it can be surveyed thoroughly in one volume: **Trillion Year Spree** should be the last of its kind, a dinosaur out of time, fascinating, annoying, but ultimately unsatisfactory because it is unable to address the questions it claims for its own. **Trillion**

Year Spree may have achieved much, but it attempted a task beyond any team of writers.

Science fiction should no longer be based upon the Sense of Duh: although the popularity of science fiction seems to be based largely upon appeal to the simplest of common tricks, serious science fiction writers may still prefer to look for an audience beyond those who

> "will stare by the hour to see a juggler draw ribbons from his throat, though he tells them it is all deception," men who "Surely ... love darkness rather than light". (H. D. Thoreau, September 20, 1860, as cited by C. John Burk, `A View of a Marsh: Vitality in Nature', **Antaeus** 57, Autumn 1986, page 61.)

Poul and Karen Anderson, **The King of Ys: Roma Mater**, Baen Books, 1986, 461 pp., $3.95, $A9.95

reviewed by John Foyster

`We have met the enemy and he is us' wrote the eminent American philosopher Walt Kelly: is Ys us?

Certes, I'd fain liefer - but I shouldn't be exhausting the period vocabulary of this historical novel so quickly. **The King of Ys: Roma Mater** is, after all, only the first of four volumes, as the back cover blurb excitedly informs us, and the Afterword explains that details of the `Breton legend' will appear after the notes to the fourth volume. There's a long haul ahead, and one wants to know whether the struggle will be worth it.

I should start by saying that if this is a fantasy novel then I don't think I am qualified to write about fantasy novels; on the other hand, while I've casually referred above to **Roma Mater** as an `historical novel' I don't think this is one of them either. The only thing I'm sure of is that it is a novel designed to make money; there's nothing wrong with that, but there are, of course, different ways of making money. Poul Anderson is, after all, one of the most successful of science fiction novelists, demonstrably capable across

the whole range of the field, and no slouch at what I think of as fantasy - **The Broken Sword** and **Operation Chaos** might be taken as two examples. But **Roma Mater** is something different, and this review is an exploration of what that might be.

The back cover blurb, which I've already perhaps pressed into service beyond its scope, reminds us also (in a way) that this volume 'is only the beginning of the story...' For orthodox readers it may be this that presents the first problem, since **Roma Mater**, if comparisons **must** be made, appears far more like the first episode of a soapie than a completed work. Indeed, once that comparison has been made, one's off and away: 'can Queen Innilis, now carrying Gratillonius's child, avoid the kind of spontaneous abortion which has previously threatened her life and left her weakened, **and** maintain the secret of her lesbian relationship with her fellow-Queen Vindilis, **and** undergo the high-powered absolutely **super** Midwinter Vigil on the top secret island of Sena?' (The answers are no, no, and no: did you really think there was any possible alternative?) The fact that this is a part-work cannot be ignored, since so much is left unresolved, but once this deficiency is identified and remembered it is best to put aside the resulting set of problems.

Roma Mater is set in Brittany during the Dark Ages. For the most part it is an unlikely tale about a centurion sent by a would-be emperor to garrison a mysterious town (Ys) in the far west of Brittany. Gratillonius is a worshipper of Mithra, and the rising domination of the Christ-worshippers is a sub-theme of the book. Gratillonius takes his prefecture of Ys rather seriously, marrying the Nine Queens, shaking up the city administration, and beating the shit out of a group of would-be infringers upon Roman Turf. By the end of **Roma Mater** that's about all that has happened, apart from a fair amount of copulation and an occasional Spooky Event.

All that distinguishes **Roma Mater** from a mainstream historical romance is the intrusion of these supernatural elements none of which, I think it is fair to say, actually influences the plot-development. But the excision of those supernatural elements would leave us with a pretty self-indulgent piece of writing without an identifiable market, and there's the rub. For this seems undeniably a work aimed at the teenagers with time on their hands and

a track record of passive consumption of serial and artificial experience. There are plenty of figures for them to identify with, power fantasies flying left and right with abandon, and an 'unknown' time and place in which to exercise those fantasies. **Roma Mater** seems to offer little else.

This is a pity because the writers are much more skilled than their work shows. For example, they explore the idea of a Roman soldier with a cockney accent in a reasonable way, and one hopes one will find out more about that character; but this is balanced by pretty hamhanded use of pseudoperiod language (see above) which characters flop into and out of as the mood takes them.

As a further example of failed opportunity I want to take a personal view. Few books have had the opportunity to grab me at the start as this one has. I have stood exactly at the spot at which this novel opens, at Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall, and I've looked in exactly the directions Gratillonius looks, and while the description fits and makes sense it fails completely to bring the scene to life; I was, as soon as the location was identified, perhaps too anxious in my expectation, but the failure to convey to me any sense of place was a great disappointment. This is a general feature of the handling of location in **Roma Mater**, and perhaps it is a requirement of novels of this kind generally - that there be no clarity of description which would bar the fantasies of the readers from developing.

There are many hares started in **Roma Mater** whose fates we do not yet know. Some of these are only suggestive and scarcely trouble the reader. For example, the second and fourth paragraphs hint that perhaps Gratillonius does not belong in this world - that he is inhabiting an unfamiliar body. Occasionally, during his priapic moments with the Queens of Ys when he feels the presence of Mithra, the reader senses that hinting again. But in a fantasy novel of this kind it seems that so many things may be hinted at without delivery that one hardly knows whether to bother.

On the other hand I felt distinctly uncomfortable about the introduction of the historical character Cunedag, who appears in the first chapter; Gratillonius is instructed to escort him to Northern Wales, and one feels that he is there for a purpose. But after

Gratillonius is given that instruction Cunedag vanishes. So far as the book is concerned Gratillonius now appears in Southern Wales on his way to Ys. Why was Cunedag introduced? Historical verisimilitude, or some Dark Purpose? Perhaps the reader will eventually find out.

Similarly, the details about the historical Hibernians (introduced in chapter 2 and then referred to intermittently as they enter the plot) are a puzzle. Are they there for the same reason as Cunedag, or for some other unrevealed purpose?

If we could care more about the characters we might be able to care about what happens to them. But Gratillonius has been deliberately made a barbarian whose coarse manners constantly offend the charming Ysans. At the end of **Roma Mater** it is too easy to be beyond caring about the world of Ys. So much, after all, is predictable.

Empires wax and wane; throbbing members rise and fall. The King's a prick, but by the pricking of this bum something wicked will surely come.

D.G. Compton, A USUAL LUNACY, Borgo Press, 1978, 191 pp., with 'Afterword' by George Edward Slusser; Ace Books, 1983, 215 pp, (page references are to the Ace edition)

reviewed by Andrew Whitmore

About nine years ago, I wrote a somewhat tendentious article for Bruce Gillespie's **SF Commentary** in defence of D.G. Compton, praising his work in extravagant terms and declaiming, with all the exuberance of youth, that 'he is the best of the science fiction writers, and the only one who has produced a body of work comparable with [sic] that of the best writers outside the field '(**SF Commentary** 52, June 1977, p. 7). Older and wiser now, I find, much to my astonishment, that, barring one or two minor amendments, my position in regard to

Compton's writing remains largely unchanged. *

A Usual Lunacy is the first Compton book I have read for some years. By a stroke of luck, I was half-way through it when approached to contribute to this august journal - conclusive proof, it would seem, that God's pursuits, too, are remarkably trivial at times. I am not particularly interested in `reviewing' the book as such, but perhaps a few casual comments here will serve to indicate why I continue to hold Compton's work in such high esteem and concur with Yvonne Rousseau's assessment of him as an `estimable' author. (Those seeking a more tedious appraisal of his novels may seek out Slusser's somewhat muddle-headed essay in the Borgo Press edition of the book). **

It seems mandatory that all commentaries on Compton's novels contain some reference to his allegedly superior powers of characterization. Thus we encounter lines such as `In all his works, the focus is what happens to people...to their lives' (from Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin, **Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision**) or words to this effect, as if Compton were engaged in some eccentric, perhaps even vaguely improper, activity that sets him quite apart from the company of his fellow writers. Of course,

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*For the record, I would make only one slight alteration to the sentence, inserting `even remotely' before the word `comparable'. After all, to be the best writer of science fiction is no great distinction, analogous, perhaps, to being the most robust physical specimen in a road trauma unit.

One cannot help but be suspicious of a man whose critical works include: **Robert A. Heinlein: Stranger in His Land; The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin: The Bradbury Chronicles; Frank Herbert: Prophet of Dune; I, Asimov: The Foundations of His Science Fiction; The Space Odysseys of Arthur C. Clarke; and (worst of all) **The Delany Intersection: Samuel R. Delany Considered as a Writer of Semi-Precious Words.** This is just the sort of academic clowning that we could all quite well do without.

Compton's unseemly preoccupation with people is rendered even more disturbing by his tendency to select women as the main protagonists in his novels. `People' may be seen as intruders in the world of science fiction, but readers will usually tolerate their presence on moral or ethical grounds: `women', however, are sheer anathema to the genre*; particularly quite unremarkable women whose horizons extend no further than the limited compass of their daily lives. Which brings us, by a somewhat circuitous route, to Tamsin McGillivray, heroine (if that's the correct word) of **A Usual Lunacy** and perhaps the most engaging character Compton has yet devised.

The women who've appeared in Compton's previous novels tend to be a relatively insipid lot: middle-class, demure, submissive, and conventionally neurotic. In fact, it could be argued that, like most writers, Compton doesn't write about `people' at all, but merely attaches the same assortment of character traits to roughly similar sheets of cardboard and gives them each a funny hat to trapes around in. If he is to be commended, it is because his constructions at least bear a far closer resemblance to reality than, say, the increasingly bizarre effusions of Heinlein's senile dementia.** Tamsin, however, is a far more vital figure than Compton's previous heroines: unpretentious, level-headed, resilient, and, to be brutally honest, as thick as two short planks. Ignorance, of course, has never been any impediment to happiness, and thus Tamsin emerges more-or-less unscathed from the sort of harrowing experience which

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*Even in these enlightened days, women are usually excluded from science fiction novels altogether or depicted as men in fancy dress. Like Marxism and religion, they are apparently a subject which most writers in the genre would prefer to avoid.

Alas, I am hereby revealed as a **Smart Aleck defined by Peter Nicholls in **Science Fiction At Large** (Gollancz, 1976) as a member of that critical clique `notable for an inability to keep away from the subject of Robert Heinlein'. One suspects that a penchant for superfluous footnotes may also be characteristic of this group.

would have shattered the fragile sensibilities of an Abigail Oliver or Thea Cadence.* Tamsin is neither prudish nor dull, and those sections of the novel narrated from her point of view are characterized by a sort of jovial vulgarity. Consider, for example, Tamsin's attitude to her husband's 'hard-on':

> There was this place up near the end, underneath and round a little to the left, a sort of crinkly place, and just touching it was enough to set him off. Set him off grunting and groaning...Not that she minded his grunting and groaning. Fact was, it gave her the hots, just hearing him...Mostly she thought it was on account of her finding his place that he'd married her. Which was all right by her. There were far worse reasons she could think of. (p 5)

Most of Tamsin's ruminations are couched in a similarly earthy vein. The fact that her husband, Jock, is a quite repellent creature (stupid, grasping, entirely self-interested) does not concern her in the least. Tamsin deals with such unpleasant aspects of her life by the simple expedient of ignoring them completely. She is assisted in this endeavour by an apparently congenital incapacity for rational thought. Indeed, it is debatable whether Tamsin **thinks** at all in the established sense of the word - a blessing for which she may well thank her lucky stars, given the fate of those who try to deal rationally with the horrors inhabiting Compton's fictitous universe. Like Faulkner** before him, Compton is suspicious of intellect. As

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*The protagonists, respectively, of **The Electric Crocodile** and **Synthajoy**. As if you didn't know.

I will be deliberately insulting here and point out that William Faulkner is the American Nobel prize winning author of such books as **The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and **Absalom, Absalom!** Lena Grove, the bovine protagonist of **Light in August**, is certainly a less endearing figure than Tamsin McGillivray, but shares her invincible stupidity. Joe Christmas, in the same novel, thinks rather too much, and is crucified for his pains.

Giles Cranston, the male viewpoint character in **A Usual Lunacy** observes, 'introspection wasn't good for a man' (p. 209). Cranston bears a strong resemblance to the voyeuristic reporter featured in **The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe**, or, for that matter, any number of Compton's previous male protagonists. He is not so much evil, as incapacitated by intellect. Foolishly, he believes himself the master of his destiny, and thus proves a perfect tool for the shadowy 'They' who manipulate events in the novel for their own less than inscrutable purposes. Constantly racked by guilt, Cranston remains morally and emotionally inert: a largely unpalatable figure whose main purpose in the novel is to highlight Tamsin's virtues and demonstrate the redemptive powers of spontaneity and simple affection.

In **A Usual Lunacy** Compton deals yet again with the threat posed by insidious dehumanizing forces masquerading as progress. It is, of course, his favourite theme - dare one say, his only theme - and, like all single-issue authors, he constantly runs the risk of wearing out his welcome.* On this occasion, however, he has struck on the perfect metaphor in which to clothe his pet obsession. Tamsin McGillivray inhabits a world where love has been reduced to the level of a viral infection, a Reciprocal Obsessive Fixation Syndrome at last amenable to scientific analysis and control. As Professor Scholes, discoverer of the virus, puts it during a court hearing involving Tamsin and Cranston:

> They used to say, you know, that all the world loved a lover. And they'd touch a hunchback's hump for the virtue. Sickness. Disease. If you can't beat it, glory in it. Don't you see? And today we **can** beat it. Immunizations. A government program. Don't you see...? (p 133)

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*What worse fate can there be for a writer than to become an ever-receding echo of his former self? The result can be either pathetic, as in the case of Ernest Hemingway, or merely ludicrous, as with Frank Herbert. That Compton has so far managed to retain some degree of artistic integrity is most commendable indeed.

Professor Scholes, of course, would maintain that he is acting in the best interests of mankind. Like Edward Cadence, Scholes is essentially an agent of evil, albeit an unwitting one. Both make the fatal mistake of isolating a basic facet of humanity from its proper human context. Thus love is first trivialized, then perverted by those unscrupulous forces in society who see in it a perfect means of mass manipulation. A similar process may be observed in **Synthajoy**, where the invention of a means of scientifically replicating emotions such as tranquillity, happiness, creativity or sexual desire is eventually used as an instrument of indoctrination by the authorities.

Synthajoy, of course, is a powerful and moving work. If it isn't on a list of the Top Ten Science Fiction Novels, the list must either have been compiled by Sam Moskowitz or the United States Publishers' Association. **A Usual Lunacy** is both a lesser and a livelier novel, mainly because Compton presents Professor Scholes as a comic and quite pathetic figure* so that it is difficult to take either him or his discovery seriously. It is almost as if Compton set out with the intention of writing a fairly light-hearted social satire** - but found it impossible to maintain the emotional distance from his characters that such a work requires.

I have neither the time nor the inclination to embark on a lengthy description of the plot. Let us merely say that the book

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*Scholes, for example, is a confirmed, if unpractising paedophiliac. Indeed, his researches were at least partially inspired by a desire to 'infect' pre-adolescent girls with the sexual 'desires' of mature females. So haunted is he by visions of naked, unattainable nymphets, that he literally breaks down during the court hearing and babbles on about 'breasts, body-hair and unappealing menstrual difficulties' (p. 127).

Along the lines of, say, **Ascendencies (Gollancz, 1980), one of Compton's least successful works. Deprived of a focus for his outrage, Compton really has very little to offer to us.

deals with intrigue (both domestic and political), adultery, betrayal, and death - among other things. It must certainly rate as Compton's most satisfying book since **The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe**, and may even appeal to those who have found his previous works rather too grim and depressing for their liking.

Earlier in this article, I asserted that Compton remains, to my mind at least, pre-eminent among the writers of science fiction. The reader may well ask on what grounds this particular assessment is made. Very well then. Allow me to present the following concluding remarks. Though admittedly somewhat generalized, they perhaps sum up my position far more clearly than any number of specific references to **A Usual Lunacy** itself.

1. Any writer who reminds me, however slightly, of William Faulkner must have something going for him. To be more specific, Compton (at his best) expresses the same kind of compassionate outrage which one finds in Faulkner's works - surely the only mature response to that on-going tragedy which we refer to as `The Human Condition'.

2. As I mentioned in a previous footnote, Compton's prominence in the field is largely attributable to the flatness of the surrounding terrain.* Edgar Pangborn and Philip Dick, alas, are dead. Ursula Le Guin's characters have increasingly come to resemble the players in some overly-elaborate Sunday School parade. Beneath Gene Wolfe's sumptuous prose lurk all the familiar fascist yearnings of a John W. Campbell. Michael Moorcock is facile and self-indulgent. Thomas Disch, enamoured of his own cleverness, has yet to produce a body of work commensurate to his undoubted talent. Brian Aldiss, unfortunately, has discovered that he has `Something to Say' and grows more stilted and pretentious by the year. When one considers the relative dullness of his surroundings, it is small wonder that Compton's star appears to shine even more brightly now than it did a decade ago.

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*Mt Wycheproof, for example, though the lowest registered mountain in the world, remains a familiar landmark for those dwelling in the Mallee.

3. Ultimately, however, Compton is to be prized for his inextinguishable humanity. His characters inhabit a bleak, inhospitable world; a spiritual wasteland in which individuals count for nothing and a man's worst instincts hold sway - yet, even amidst such desolation, we still occasionally glimpse a moment of laughter, or pity, or sacrifice, or pure, unviral love*. To rephrase the final lines of H.G. Wells's **The Time Machine**: Compton shows us that even when mind and strength are rampant, gratitude and mutual tenderness still live on in the heart of man. It isn't everything, of course; in fact, it isn't even very much: but, given the fallen nature of our existence, one suspects that it will have to do.**

Ursula K. Le Guin, ALWAYS COMING HOME (with composer Todd Barton, artist Margaret Chodos, geomancer George Hersh), Harper & Row, 1985, 525 pp., US$50 hb, US$25 pb (with cassette tape); Gollancz, 1986, £10.95 hb (plus £5.95 for cassette tape)

reviewed by Yvonne Rousseau

'I never did like smartass utopians. Always so much healthier and saner and sounder and fitter and kinder and tougher and wiser and righter than me and my family and friends.' These words are spoken by the author of **Always Coming Home**, calling herself Pandora and grumbling at a member of a community she imagines existing many centuries in the future. To enable this community to be, Pandora has had to let loose on our world all the Promethean evils - 'war, plague, famine, holocaust, and Fimbul winter' - combined with

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*I realize that I'm straining for effect here, but bear with me. The last few lines possess an almost elegaic quality which I'm sure will appeal to right-minded readers everywhere.

**Applause.

earthquakes and shifts along fault lines which have sunk half California, extending the Gulf of California into Arizona and Nevada. In this future, which Pandora accuses of being `utopian', much land is still poisoned, and every species has chromosomal damage, with a high proportion of human stillbirths and monstrous births, and two prevalent degenerative diseases unknown to our civilization. As a result, in the towns of **Always Coming Home**, along the 30-mile Valley of the Na River (in a transfigured California, with new watercourses and an inland sea), there are `not too many' people. Underneath all the evils, there has lurked an unexpected gift: `some room, some time...A living room.'

The future person that Pandora is grumbling at denies that the Valley society is utopia - and she also claims to `have no answers'. But, utopia or not, the Valley would obviously define our society as a dystopia; we are categorized as people with our heads on backwards (why else would we have poisoned the world?), and the Valley describes what we call history - all the civilized centuries - as `when they lived outside the world': an aberration.

The Valley is a thought-experiment of the kind that, in 1976 (in `Is Gender Necessary?'), Le Guin described as `one of the essential functions of science fiction ... reversals of an habitual way of thinking, metaphors for what our language has no words for as yet, experiments in imagination.' She imagines a post-holocaust world where information continues to accumulate, `incredibly sophisticated and destructive weaponry' is being developed, and there is mining not only on Earth but also on the Moon and planets. However, the mining is done by robot extensions; the weaponry is devised in the `pursuit of research as a cognitive end in itself'; and the researchers are not human but cybernetic devices or beings, collectively referred to in the Valley as `the City of Mind'. The City, which is engaged in `conscious, self-directed evolution', has become `several lightyears larger than the solar system, and immortal'.

Human communities worldwide have Exchanges (installed on request by City robots), which are computer terminals giving access to the City of Mind's `entire vast network' - including other Exchanges. The Valley has one Exchange, but could have had eight or nine, had it wanted them. Human beings can obtain from the City whatever

information they ask for (whether it is recipes for yoghurt or recipes for making armoured tanks - the main difficulty is to frame a request that produces a limited amount of data). The City likewise requests information about aspects of human life inaccessible to robot or satellite observation - and it keeps in its Memory any texts it is offered (whereas Valley librarians destroy valuable books every year on the principle that 'keeping grows, giving flows'). Valley dwellers are 'not disposed to regard human existence either as information or communication', and they classify the City of Mind and the Exchanges themselves as 'outside the world' - existing in the same mode as the Backward-Heads time which we call civilization, but which they call the City of Man.

I have described the opportunities the City of Mind offers because **Always Coming Home**'s thought-experiment depends on the Valley people's reasons for choosing to take so little advantage of that wealth. In contrast to the post-holocaust dwellers of many other writers' imaginations, these people are not forced to piece together inaccurately fragments of a wrecked culture's knowledge; they do not reverence and long to resemble their civilized ancestors; and their mutant births do not inspire cruel sacrifices to supposedly offended gods. But they have chosen to own the Valley 'very lightly, with easy hands' - like the first-comers there. To them, living well does not mean getting more and moving ever forward; and they are mindful of their interconnection not only with human people but with many other kinds: plants, rocks, stars, dreams and animals, for example, are also people. Their respect for the non-human implies a model of evolution resembling their local scrub-oak - where 'the little grey branches and twigs grow every which way' - rather than a ladder or tree where other life-forms belong below **homo sapiens** (in evolution's past), and where true humanity consists in an upward linear progress away from them.

The linear form that a novel usually takes would not attune readers to the Valley, where time itself is envisaged not as an onward-moving stream or arrow but rather as a house that one lives in. The experimental form of **Always Coming Home** (itself somewhat resembling a house to live in) is more than an anthropologist's mode of presenting an unfamiliar society - with its we details of customs,

kinship systems, the language, myths, recipes, plays, poems, life-stories, one chapter of a novel, some accounts of disputes being settled, Pandora's questioning of inhabitants and of her own enterprise; all surrounding and intervening in the book's longest narrative, by a Valley woman who has also experienced the lifestyle of her father's war-centred culture, which is based several days' journey north-east of the Valley. The discrete elements of **Always Coming Home** are all being related to one another laterally in the process of reading, so that the reader's experience is a microcosm of the Valley people's mode of perception: their mindfulness of the interconnection of `the innumerable kinds of being in the world'.

Our own metaphors tend to place things of most value at a summit or a centre - thus endowing them with static isolation. The Valley's pervasive `working metaphor' is the hinged spiral, which involves no summit, and a different kind of centre. To form an idea of it (which seems necessary in order to understand what kind of novel this is), hold the left hand above the right hand, palms facing and fingers slightly curved; adjust their positions so that the right thumb, curving downwards, lies about an inch above the left thumb, curving upwards. (The system can then be rotated so that the left hand is at the left; I have placed it above initially only to make the instructions clear in the absence of a drawing.) The curve of the left-hand fingers and thumb is the left arm of the double spiral, representing mortality; the right arm of the spiral (the interlocking right-hand curve) represents eternity; and the curves spring from or return to the centre, which is the empty space between the thumbs: a gap or a hinge which both connects and holds apart - a place of `reversal from in to out, from out to in' - a discontinuity which the Valley culture sees as `necessary and significant'. A Valley town, which to us would look simply messy, is laid out as a hinged spiral, the dwelling places lying along an invisible left arm (or several left arms, if the town is large), while the right arm consist of five **heyimas** (for these there is no simple English translation; but one of their functions is to be sacred meeting-houses). At the hinge of the town there is always running water or a well.

The notion of reversal, associated with the hinge, is very important in Valley culture, which attempts to provide (in Pandora's

words) `a way with no away'. Thus, their regular ceremonies include elements which reverse the community's normal behaviour and principles. There is room and attention for emotions and experiences which in our culture are glossed over as aberrant. A child, having braved a foggy dawn alone on the mountain where she fears that every sound is the stuttering of the traditional White Clowns (not all of whom may be living people), can fully integrate the realization, on her return home, that `part of me wanted to be cold and terrified and lost in the fog.'

In the Valley's vision of how to be human, emphasis falls differently. Their experience seems in some ways richer and in others poorer than ours, where attention is focused on our relation to other human beings. They seem, in part, an alien people on an alien planet, although a poem tells us that they were amongst us, `coming closer to the world', from the beginning: `the sold woman,/ the enslaved enemy.' We are told: `You did not know us./ We were the words you had no language for.'

This book answers some former criticisms both of Le Guin and of contemporary science fiction by being experimental in form and by choosing a female as its most important narrator (in a society which is matrilocal and matrilineal). The landscape, being no mere setting for a chase of some kind, is intensely real - and evokes, oddly, Australian vegetation I have known and loved in childhood. I have seen favourable reports of the music of **Always Coming Home**'s cassette tape (which is not available with the library edition); and the book's design and illustration have been accomplished with a care and grace that attest the Valley's significance for other people, besides Le Guin. This is a book to own, and to dip into at leisure when it has been read through - whether one takes the Valley view that it is a (momentarily heartlifting) `piece of pacifist jeanjacquerie' or whether one believes that (as I think Pandora hints) to achieve a complete imagination of the Valley might do `infinite good'.

Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, FOOTFALL, Gollancz, 1985, $A29.95; Sphere, 1986, xxix + 700 pp, $A9.95

reviewed by Russell Blackford

When I've told friends that I was reading this swollen behemoth in order to review it for **ASFR** they've looked upon me pityingly and invited me to dinner parties, dangerous excursions to wild yuppy restaurants full of Christmas drunks, and raging orgies of booze and dancing - all in an attempt to provide me with what they've perceived as much-needed distraction from the prose of Niven and Pournelle. And other clues are in the wind. It is assumed in certain circles that **Footfall** is no more nor less than an elephantine bonecrusher written in turgid endorsement of isms antithetical to the values of all right-minded (i.e. left-leaning) sf fans, a ponderous pachyderm trumpeting the praises of possessive individualism and a cheerful militarism. In fact, on a sufficiently reductive reading, the assumption is true. Also true is the notorious rumour that the book features a bunch of rogue sf writers (looking and sounding suspiciously like Heinlein, Forward, Niven, Pournelle among others) who save the world by interpreting alien psychology and dreaming up grandiose schemes to combat alien technology. There's a certain wallowing in self-indulgence here.

Oh, and Niven and Pournelle just love not only atomic energy but also atomic bombs, if one can judge from all the bull they come out with.

Other problems: well, at one stage the world gets trodden on very nastily and we see little result for it except some heavy, salty rain. The book reads better when a bunch of characters are trying to motor across the States while dams are getting busted and major highway crossroads cratered by asteroids that hit with the blast of thermonuclear weapons. Also, the drastic and risky choices that have to be made tend to come out a bit too conveniently in ways that justify the ideological mindset that generates them. Panshin and others have identified a similar problem in the convenient metaphysical structure underpinning the universe of Heinlein's **Stranger in a Strange Land**, but such special pleading is probably

endemic to most writers, merely more noticeable in those with obviously foregrounded ideologies disapproved of by liberal critics. And at times **Footfall**'s acknowledged dependence on the outcomes of risk and chance to justify or not justify choices appears to signify an awareness of the problem.

Despite the above demands and doubts, and despite **Footfall**'s creaking plot and cardboard characters, a kind of extended family of characters who all know each other but become centrally involved in the war against the snouts independently of each other, I found this a highly readable and (damn it all) entertaining piece of writing. It's a sort of cross between the two earlier Niven/Pournelle blockbusters, **The Mote in God's Eye** and **Lucifer's Hammer** (so naturally the Earth's secret weapon is called `Michael'). In this case, the hammeroid is dropped by a bunch of surprisingly lovable alien invaders who resemble baby elephants and are most notable for their herd mentality (unAmerican, to be sure, but Niven and Pournelle are apparently cultural relativists as well as cultural zealots: `Y'see it's all relative in the end, but me - well, give me that good ol' cheerful individualist militarism any time. Guess I'd die for it if I had to.'). Will the snouts trample humankind under foot? Or, almost as bad to sf world creators like our authors, will American know-how, guided by the wisest skiffy writers, and with a little help from the Russkies and the occasional Zulu guerrilla, drive the pachies into extinction? The risks are great and the choices made are admittedly dubious. Niven and Pournelle may be hawkish, but they don't strike me as simple-minded: `liberal' is apparently a dirty word for most of the sympathetic characters, but at many points the authors are able to show, and apparently feel, the strengths of moral/political viewpoints contrary to the official ones of the book. Give 'em that much credit.

Footfall lumbers along quite rapidly and keeps you reading. And you won't won't know for sure the results of the exercises in strategic brinkmanship which it depicts until the last page. If you're a Niven/Pournelle fan, need I say more? Besides, you've already bought the thing. If you love to hate these guys - you won't be disappointed.