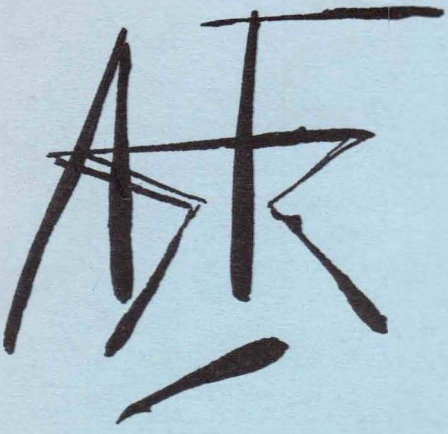
ALAN STEWART



MARCH 1987

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
Second Series Volume 2 Number 2
Whole Number 7

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AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (Second Series) (ISSN 0818-0180) is published six times a year for the Science Fiction Collective (Jenny Blackford, Russell Blackford, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau, Lucy Sussex (Convenor)) by Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia.

Logo by Steph Campbell/John Bangsund

$2 a copy/$10 a year by subscription

DICEBAMUS HESTERNA DIE

As I have said at least once before in these editorials I never volunteered to write, I never volunteered to write these editorials. The feeling grows that I am merely the froth on the bubble (sometimes on the substance, such as Larry Niven's sales predictions last issue); even I feel it; and that I am stuck here, for ever dicebamusing away about hesterna die, like a fly in amber, or Iphigenia in Aulis, before the main event. So what am I to say about John Foyster, from whose extraordinarily civilized farewell to Melbourne I have but hours returned? That I wasn't there? That it's up to the collective to tell you he has moved to Adelaide (the Athens of the South)? Alas, I was there, and can report that John looked as a man can only look when he has just packed umpteen thousand books and his friends drag him across town to say `Good luck, mate, and God bless!' and mostly on his mind is leaving home and wife tomorrow, getting on that train first thing in the morning, and coming to terms with a much-loved but alien city, by himself. It's one thing to step off the train and say `So, this is Adelaide' (or `Wow, Adelaide again'), quite another to say `Adelaide: my home.' John and I didn't manage to talk much at his farewell dinner there at La Paella in Brunswick, but we grimaced at each other from time to time, and I did manage to advise him not to smoke on the buses. Sally and I left him and Jenny there, still surrounded by well-wishing friends, and came home, and were sad in our own ways.

The organizers of this event most thoughtfully had asked me to make sure George Turner was there, which meant that when they asked me to make a speech I could demur politely and point to George (who has not known John quite as long as I have, but who was the oldest friend of John's present). `God damn you, Foyster!' George said jovially, yet with an unmistakable intensity of feeling, and we all drank to that, because we didn't want John to go, either.

There are people you can take or leave; there are people you can let go easily and those you can't; and there's John Foyster. There are those two kinds of people we know so well, the kind that say there are two kinds of people, and the kind that say there aren't;

and there's John Foyster. That John should choose, for whatever good reason, to leave us, is unthinkable; but he has. We stood outside the restaurant, unsure what to do next; some of us had never met before, or if met, never spoken to each other; and we looked at each other as if we must do something; and we got into our cars and went home. We weren't sure what we would do next, but we would think of something. JB 14.1.87

OUR COLLECTIVE WAYS

John Bangsund has done the hard editorial work for this issue, letting you know that Our Glorious Leader has now moved to Adelaide, where he will be Something Fairly High Up in the Education Department. What more can I say?

Personally, of course, I'll miss John; so (I am sure) will the rest of the Collective. Life just won't be the same without him turning up at the front door, come to use our PC, standing there meringues in hand, dressed in one of his collection of bizarre pink t-shirts (I assume somewhere there is a correlating collection of washed-out red underwear...), a deerstalker hat and great big steel-capped boots, sneezing and grumping about his latest cold (really just one continuous cold with occasional slight remissions). I am Sore Tempted to follow up on my early poetic successes, from the long-ago era before the Education System knocked all that rubbish out of me, by publishing here the poem about John that came to me all of a sudden in the shower one morning, but I probably couldn't cope with the Healthy Constructive Criticism provided by fandom, even if Lucy Sussex, now Führer of the Year, would let me.

I must assure everyone that ASFR will continue despite John's geographical separation from us. He will continue to do paste-ups, by the grace of Australia Post, and to generally boss us around, by the grace of Telecom (he has already started to make strange random phone calls at odd hours to keep us in line), and he assures us that he will turn up in person for one mammoth ASFR meeting every two months, in which we will collate, staple, guillotine, decide who deserves to get copies this time, get the issue ready to post, make decisions about upcoming issues, and Eat Meringues! JBI. 8.2.87

AULD ACQUAINTANCE

CHERRY WILDER

The German Christmas, which sidles into the shops in October, heralded by lebkuchen hearts, chocolate Santas and candles, seems more purposeful and drawn-out than any other I have experienced. There is an Advent wreath with four candles, for the four Sundays before the feast and an Advent calendar with twenty-four doors or containers for sweets or little gifts. St Nikolaus comes on 6th December to put goodies in children's shoes. There are none of those heedless booze-ups on Christmas Eve, enjoyed in the Old Country, where Christmas was warm. Christmas Eve or Heilige Abend is a religious festival for the family - the idea of crashing into anyone else's house on Heilige Abend is impossible. Everyone battens down the hatches, dresses up in their best clothes, keeps the kids out of the sitting room. Then, following the ringing of the little silver bell, the kiddies are allowed to see the beautiful tree and receive the gifts left for them by the Christ Child. Every person gets a Bunte Teller, a colourful plate of sweets, fruit and nuts. There is a festive meal and perhaps a trip to midnight Mass; kiddies recite Christmas poems. The two following days are the First Feast Day and the Second Feast Day - one can get through two Christmas dinners, though I have never felt happy about cooking a turkey dinner on Boxing Day. There is a fashion for tasteful Christmas trees with decorations of one colour only but we stick to our coloured ornaments and have amassed a regiment of angels, Santas - including one in a red aeroplane - and other wooden figures. To say nothing of the glass balls, straw stars, lametta foil and red apple candle-holders. Our beautiful German Christmas record is old and cracked and now it reminds us of - sob - good old Aussie, canned beer, a swim for the kids ...

The other day I read an article in the **Frankfurter Rundschau** which claimed that the real centre of Christmas Madness was London. The Brits are carrying on alarmingly in the Deck the Halls, Good King Wenceslas, plum Pudding tradition. Good for them. It all began to

snowball when Prince Albert launched his PR action back in 1850 or so, importing the Tree and those new-fangled Christmas cards. And with Santa's helpers of the calibre of Charles Dickens no wonder he succeeded so well. The point is that Christmas or Yuletide is a pagan festival of winter which comes from Germany and the northern forests. The St Nikolauses or Weihnachtsmänner who appear on the 6th - and are either Onkel Walter dressed up or a student earning an honest mark - recite a little poem which says: 'From out of the depths of the woods I come ... '

We had pre-Christmas visitors from London and were able to show them not only the famous Christkindl Markt in Nuremberg but also the market in Frankfurt and a couple of smaller ones in Langen and a picturesque little place nearby called Three Oaks, Dreieich. Sausage, decorations, gingerbread were purchased and mulled wine was consumed. There was also a welcome pause with champagne in the back room of the handsome UTOPIA bookshop in Nuremberg with our pal, bookseller Michael Kunath.

HISTORICAL CHRISTMAS JOKE

There were plenty of funny names of the Praise God Barebones variety hanging around shortly after the English Civil War when puritans, dissenters and such were having a field day. A curious narcissistic neurosis was evidenced by an M.P. called Massfield Massey Massey who proposed that the vile Popish word **Mass** should be removed from words like Christmas, which should henceforth be **Christtide.** His colleagues were quick to ask the silly fellow whether he intended to call himself Tidefield Tidey Tidey...

IN GOOD KING CHARLES'S GOLDEN DAYS

A further Historical Note for Mr Aldiss:

When Charles II was restored to the throne the distinction between actresses and whores did indeed become blurred at times, thanks to the activities of the Merry Monarch himself. The predicament of William Prynne (see ASFR November 1986), who lost both ears for saying there were bawds on the boards, was not forgotten. A generation later, in 1664, a disaffected Grub Street scribbler, name of Egregious Hack, published the following squib:

Judgement Day
Though strumpets flourish throughout the land
And Virtue's called a frump,
Soon God Himself will take a hand
And play a final Trump!

His Hosts will resurrect the dead,
Restoring parts they lack,
Angels will give King Charles his head
And Prynne his ears back!

At the same time the actress Mrs Scintilla Merryweather, a friend of Nell Gwynne, took up her quill to deplore, among other things, the double standard. Here is a brief extract from her pamphlet **The Honest Actress Or, Who stones the cast first?**

> Poor puritanical Will Prynne hears no more this thirty year but **Pyynne's Lie** gains ground at the expense of our honorable profession! Is it **Princely**, my lords and gentlemen, when you allow that there are more whores on the street than elsewhere? And if some of our sister thespians are indeed frail who amongst you would deny that it takes two to dance the fandango?

FROM LONDON TO HOLLYWOOD

A beautiful Christmas book, with evocative line and wash illustrations by Michael Foreman, is **Letters from Hollywood** by Michael Moorcock. The letters were written to James Ballard between 1979 and 1982 from Los Angeles, with a small amount of later material. The seedy grandeur of Hollywood and Los Angeles exactly suits the mood of Moorcock, on the lam from a horrific financial mess - not of his own making - in London, and heading for the deathbed of an old friend. California has rarely had a kinder or more clear-sighted observer in its midst. There is plenty of gossipy interest for sf/f fans but the heroine of the book is Los Angeles:

> As a result of Hollywood, Los Angeles has achieved the status of a mythological city, carrying a cargo of romantic dreams at least as great and various as Rome's or London's. She's a rich city (though no richer than many others) and, for better or

worse, her wealth came principally from creative fantasies. As a result she still abounds with monuments to the fantastic and sometimes grotesque imaginations of her first great aristocrats, the stars, producers and tycoons who set the tone and style for LA. No matter how many glass and steel business districts they raise to offer an international uniformity so consoling to the world's money managers, the real Los Angeles continues to be symbolised by her huge imported palm trees (originally from Australia), her gigantic Egyptian-Moorish civic buildings, her Spanish-Colonial housing developments, her unique Bradbury Building (designed by a naive architect inspired by Bellamy's **Looking Backward** and most recently a location for Ridley Scott's **Blade Runner**), the mansions and follies of her film-stars, the facades of her studios and the extravagances of her entrepreneurs large and small, who gave us Grauman's Egyptian and Grauman's Chinese, Bullock's Wilshire, The Brown Derby and the Tail o' the Pup.

SAME PROCEDURE AS LAST YEAR

New Year's Eve in Germany is called Sylvester (after St Sylvester) and is celebrated with midnight fireworks in the snow. It is the occasion for a bizarre television experience. A glance at the program will reveal that on every channel - beginning, say, with Bayern III at 19.30 and ending with Hessen III at 1.00 - there is a twenty-five minute item entitled, in English, `Dinner for One or the Ninetieth Birthday'. The times are staggered, as you might say, so that viewers can watch this priceless jewel four or five times. Every Year.

`Dinner For One' is a sketch performed in English by an elderly British comedian named Freddie Frinton and his partner Mae Weedon. Freddie is a chirpy little chap with a Midlands accent; I had never heard of him in any other connection but I am assured that he was indeed quite well known in the north of England. `Dinner For One', roughly speaking a drunk sketch, is a work of genius. Miss Sophie, sweet and ladylike, on her ninetieth birthday, has her long-suffering butler James serve dinner. More than that, he must drink her health with every course, taking the parts of her former suitors

whose places are laid at table. So poor old James toasts her after the Mulligatawny, the Bird and the Froo-it in the person of Admiral von Schneider (Sköl!), Mr Winterbottom, Sir Toby etc. He gallantly serves dinner balancing the dishes and tripping over the tiger-skin rug. So in the end they go up to bed. Poor James, reeling badly, asks for the umpteenth time `Same proshedure ash lasht year, Miz Sophie?' and she replies `Same procedure as every year, James.' He leers at the audience and says: `Well, I'll do my very best...'

It is a marvellous sketch, no doubt about it. Dull would he be of soul who did not hoot with laughter at Freddie's timing. Some astute producer filmed it, in Germany, in 1957 and now millions - literally millions - of German viewers know it off by heart. They wait with bated breath for the moment when James **doesn't** trip over the tiger-skin, for the time when he drinks water from a flower vase and says `Oo, I'll kill that cat!'. Politicians and journalists often quote the Same Procedure As Last Year line and are instantly understood. I hope Freddie was well paid for his performance. He is now a part of New Year's Eve in West Germany - like fireworks in the snow.

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Yet Another Official Filler

The July 1986 issue of **ASFR** included a letter by Cherry Wilder, which contained the following tantalizing sentence: `George Turner once called me an Amazonian Girl (I would never dream of calling him a Napoleonic Boy).' Now it can be told! We tracked this down to George Turner's report on Seacon,`Glimpses of the Great' (**Chunder!** January 1980):

> I had barely wandered into the lobby on the opening morning when someone screamed my name (`Somebody actually knows me!') and Cherry Wilder came battleshipping through the throng in one of those comfortable kaftans that make small girls look formidable and big girls Amazonian.

OF SEX, OBJECTS, SIGNS, SYSTEMS, SALES, SF, AND OTHER THINGS

SAMUEL R. DELANY

> Note: Tesseract was the name of the science fiction society of the University of New Hampshire. In August or September 1975, their then president, Frank Brunner, extended an informal invitation to me through Bernard Kay to come and discuss my science fiction novel **Dhalgren**, which had been published eight or nine months before in January 1975. I sent them the following open letter, which, I was later told, would appear in the Tesseract sponsored 'zine, **S-Forum**. At the end of that year, however, Brunner graduated from the University, and S-Forum suspended publication before the piece could appear. To my knowledge, it has never been published. (SRD)

Dear Frank - Thanks muchly for your letter. (Bernie Kay read it to me over the phone; so I haven't, as it were, been exposed to the actual text.) Thanks also for the invitation to sit in on Tesseract's **Dhalgren** meeting. I'm afraid, however, I have to decline. A couple of years back I would have replied to such an invitation, quite imperiously, 'I never discuss my work in public,' and let it go. But I've mellowed. I dislike discussing my own work for a host of reasons, some highly admirable I'm sure, others no doubt suspect, low-down, and neurotic. Nevertheless, that's me.

The discourse of personal criticism is useful as it treats of the writer as a fictional Other. For A to ask B what B thinks writer Y was trying to do (and for B to return an answer either the same as or different from A's) is a useful, even a rich enterprise. For A or B to turn to writer Y and ask such a question (and for Y to come back with an answer) defeats the whole enterprise of fiction. (As you can see, I love to theorize about language/writing and will do it at the drop of a postcard; the fact that I enjoy it so much is one of the (possibly neurotic) reasons I like to stay away from such discussions of my own work.) Such discussions, for me as a writer at any rate,

are essentially fictions - as much as any story or novel. The relation between two fictions is a complex business to map out, especially when it must be done by the creation of a third. Julia Kristeva, Carol Jacobs, and Jacques Lacan (among others) have been exploring, from their respective positions, the complexities that lurk behind that most complex of fictions: commentary. Fictive discourse aims at producing a range of reactions, a field of multiple responses, responses not as in a scatter-pattern of buckshot, but as interrelated and ordered as lightwaves in a spectrum. Critical discourse between two readers, both by its disagreements and by its angles of agreement, no matter how linear, preserves that plurality in emblem and embryo. The same discourse between reader and writer rotates the lines of communication ninety degrees away from the currents that pass between equals so that now it lies directly across those currents, stalled in that ill-charged space auctority (authority) creates, that plurality abolished.

I work hard on my science fiction. Much of that work is theoretical (though the theorizing done when entangled in the text of fiction has a very different feel to it from the theorizing whose end is a theoretical, rather than a fictive, text); but the work is to read, and reread, reform, and respond to (making sure they proliferate properly) the resonances of whatever is put down on paper. In a live question-and-answer situation, the spontaneity alone - on my part at any rate - would defeat all accuracy in linearly verbalizing what was (as is so much of writing) such a many-layered and finally non-verbal process.

I am perfectly happy to write about what's outside the text. You asked about sales, for example. Last time Bantam communicated with me anent the subject, there were 273,000 copies of **Dhalgren** in print, with more to come. Actual sales are hard to judge after only six months, but the general Bantam policy is not to order a new printing until at least 80% of the previous one has sold out; the sixth printing is currently on the book racks. The seventh is on order. Yes, it's a minor record for an sf novel in the first half of 1975, but in only a few weeks **The Mote in God's Eye** will raise its

braying yawp in paperback and go galumphing off, I'm sure, with all the medals.*

Because I love the sf field, in some respects I'm downright gleeful to discuss what's outside the text! In a giant field like the Post-Modern Novel, with thousands upon thousands of examples high and low produced each year, it would be terribly presumptuous for any single author, even a post-modern Proust or Mann, to hope that a single work, or even a series of works, might restructure to whatever extent the concept of the form. In a field like sf, with not quite 325 original sf novels produced this year from substantially less than that number of writers - and most of these novels in a commercially fixed form the writers themselves would be the first to admit was dead from the outset - it is not so preposterous for a writer to hope that a single work, fermenting in the acknowledged live area of the field, might loosen and recontour the web of possibilities, charging that web at each repositioned intersection of possible word and possible word. I think, in exactly that slow and inevitable way that causes shrieks both of rage and delight, **Dhalgren** is doing that. And I like it. What I don't mean here is that I want to see more novels that resemble **Dhalgren** either in texture, form, or subject matter. (What writer would!) But I would like to see the range - the space of possibilities - that the texture and organization in **Dhalgren** imply explored by other sf writers.

Of course the line between what is inside the text and what is outside the text is frequently foggy - especially for the writer. And it is at least as permeable as Lacan's version of the Saussurian bar between **signifier** and **signified.** [1] Another reason I hesitate to attend a live discussion is because in live discussions that line may be too easily transgressed, by auctorial accident or enthusiasm - with disastrous results. I prefer the reflection afforded by ballpoint and notebook. As an sf writer I frequently see myself as

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*Ten years later, in 1985, **Dhalgren** was in its 18th printing with a shy million copies in print and more than 750 thousand certified sales - over 100 thousand more than Pynchon's **Gravity's Rainbow** and twice as high as **The Mote in God's Eye.**

trying to reach the boundary, the edge, the limit of fiction, a journey that can only be made on paper. Similarly, I am tempted to come as close to the line as possible from the critical side - one wants to live not just dangerously, but dangerously **and** intelligently.

Is this, for example, outside or in?

I've always wanted to write books that I wished to read but could not find on any library shelf or bookstore rack. A kind of book I've always liked is one that is witty, intelligent, formal, colourful, written with life and brio. But there's another that, from time to time, I hunt out as well:

Oddly enough, you will find it described in occasional contemporary introductions to various novels by Eliot and Stendhal. It is a long book, covering exhaustively the social workings of some heretofore unexplored sector of society, orienting it within the greater social context - but it does this almost off-handedly, as if in a passing nod to Arnold's observation that the life of fiction lies in the exactitude with which it can evoke the surfaces of life. But much more than that, it is a complex metaphysical construct: to understand it requires considered and deep response, measured and multiple readings. We note, at this point, the novels described in these introductions are novels-of-the-mind. They are seldom the novels of Eliot or Stendhal that follow. I do not mean that Eliot's and Stendhal's are not rich works, or that they do not benefit from close attention or careful rereading. But the entire critical stance these introductions assume is, in historical terms, a back-reading. A critical gaze that has no existence before the commentary garnered from the specific aesthetic undertakings of, first, Flaubert and, second, Joyce, can only meet with its true object as long as it gazes forward.

It has been known as long as stories have been recognized that stories are made more coherent, vivid, exciting, and energetic by resonances leap-frogging from one section over another to relate to yet another; a multiplicity of such resonances binds the living and lively construct together. (What else is 'plot' than something at the end of the tale relating clearly and strongly to something at the

beginning. And if 'plot' is 'dead', it is only because in most people's minds the only relation they will respond to has become far too limited, formalized, and restricted to a ridiculously narrow repertoire of revelatory actions.) But for a writer to expand such Flaubertian labours to make a complex web of responses **the** experience of the fiction is a specifically post-Joycean enterprise. And it is worth reminding ourselves that Joyce, to do this, had to shatter, more and more as **Ulysses** progressed, the novel's fictive foreground (though he allowed one to retrieve a foreground structure by means of the referent myth); in **Finnegans Wake**, he shattered not only the fictive foreground but all foreground mythical reference as well, so that all could be used, **in fragmentia**, to form the infrastructure on which the recomplicated resonantial textus was moored. Yes, Stendhal and Eliot used such resonances to bind their work together; but they did not use them in the same way as Joyce, to the same extent, or with the same intentional charge: this charge is fixed on so many other things in their work that it makes the kind of modern criticism that frequently introduces them court distortion of them each time it is evoked. Nor does such criticism fit, say, with Proust, Mann, or Kafka. These are all very nineteenth-century-oriented artists. If they add an obsessional concern with one sensibility or another, reflected in 'excessive' (with Proust and Kafka, at any rate) labour over the text itself [2], this still only winds up the decadent ends of the nineteenth century. We still have not approached the parameters of Stein, Charles Olson, and Frank O'Hara around which the vital art of the second half of this century organizes itself. (And if Olson and O'Hara respected Pound and Williams, it was as much for their negative as well as their positive examples - the only truly rich example one generation of artists can bequeath another.)

Fictive discourse contains within it (as one of its most powerful fictions) the possibility of exhaustiveness. Critical discourse, as Foucault showed in **The Order of Things**, is inexhaustive by virtue of very épistèmé in which it generated back with its birth in medieval commentary. (The basic reaction of most readers of Barthes' **S/Z** has to be, when all is said and done, how much **more** could have been said! The margins of my own copy crawl with commentary upon his.) Which brings me, abruptly, back to **Dhalgren**.

Was it written **for** the critics, as various of them have rather megalomaniacally suggested? Well, it was definitely written to appease a certain richly critical resonse in myself - a response which, in myself, I associate with something mature and measured. I wanted to read a book - solid, sedate, sexual and complex - full of mysteries that proliferate in orderly fashion by the very fact of their solution, a book I could sink my mental teeth into after they had been sharpened by what I'd found valid in the art and aesthetic discourse of the past century-and-a-quarter. But if it was written `for critics', it was **not** written for any fancied reward to be gleaned from any critical commentary.

The largest influences on the book that I am aware of, at any rate, were Michel Foucault (primarily **Madness and Civilization,** secondarily **The Order of Things**), John Ashbery's poems **The Instruction Manual** (and the Richard Howard essay on Ashbery in **Alone with America**) and **These Lacustrine Cities,** G. Spencer Brown's **Laws of Form** (given me as a birthday present, months after its publication, by a young Harvard student when I lived in San Francisco), Frank Kermode's **Sense of an Ending** (bits and pieces of **Dhalgren** were worked on in Kermode's old office at Wesleyan University's Center for the Humanities, where I was a guest for a couple of weeks in 1971), and, of course, the works of Jack Spicer, whose memory and whose poems haunted San Francisco, where most of **Dhalgren**'s first draft was written, the years I lived there, as Cavaffy's hovered over Durrell's Alexandria. Anyone who thinks the elucidation of my science fiction novel worth the trouble might pursue these works with hope of at least a small reward over and above the great interest of the works themselves.[3] But certainly anyone who had read the Foucault thoroughly would know I could not expect much commentary:

We can separate fiction into foreground and récit: récit is the written commentary that occurs within fictive discourse. Foreground is the referential presentation of `what was there' and `what happened to it'. Foucault demonstrates clearly that it is commentary which breeds commentary - and very little else. By a simple extension, only those novels proportionately rich in récit (James, Proust, Joyce, Stendhal, Kafka, or Faulkner, for examples) are likely to be much commented on at length. Novels proportionately rich in

foreground (Chandler - whom no less than Gide called the finest stylist in America and of whose works no less than Auden said, `they are darkly powerful works of art' - R. L. Stevenson or D. Mereshkovsky, for examples) are experienced as more or less richly detailed slabs of experiece itself; if this presentation is done with a rich web of language (to do it in a conscientiously impoverished language, e.g. Robbe-Grillet, to whom we shall return, reduces foreground to the status of récit; thus the commentary), the effect is of a double text of structured reality highlighted by a complex superstructure of attentional nodes. Mapping the relation between the two illusory texts (the `referent' (or even `meaning') of the text and the nodal highlights of the text) is an infinite job because the separation between them - only the old warhorse `content vs style' in another guise - **is** illusory and vanishes into an ungraduated unity wherever we fix our attention on it. Possibilities of commentary in such cases are **so** endless (they will generate wherever **we** decide to fix graduations) that the sane critic **must** eschew them. The only thing that, as a reasonable endeavour, we can comment on in such works is what they have to say **about** certain subjects. But heaven protect us once we get lost in the primary critical task of discovering and recovering what such works, phenomenologically, **are**. That is best left to the solitary dialogue between sovereign reader and playful page; those are the only participants in the dialogue that I, or the novel I wrote, are concerned with.

Dhalgren is (as is most sf) practically all foreground - at any rate, the proportion of foreground to récit is high enough to assume a paucity of **serious** (written) analysis. Here, standing **on** the line, it would be most presumptuous for me to suggest that the language within the text was rich, complex, or worked. It may well (and from my own, most privileged position, despite what anyone says, I shall never know) be simply flabby, opaque, and confusing. What I can hazard - not as my own response to any of the words on paper but merely as a projected observation that someone who visited me at any of the places I lived while I was writing it would have had to make - is that the language was worked **on**. (And what a Lacanian plenitude of readings that little preposition offers up to that most

Calvinistic of verbs!) Where one goes with **Dhalgren** after that is entirely a matter of personal temperament. The reasons I wrote it are precisely those which prevent me from urging anyone else to read it. I can far more easily think of reasons to encourage people to avoid it.

My most vituperative critic (not Lester Del Rey), but Harlan Ellison, in his review in the **Los Angeles Times**) abandoned the book at page 361, remarking that **Dhalgren** was not a novel but a 'career'. I wonder if it doesn't mean something when the most violent detractor hits the point precisely. Certainly the greatest single fiction among the many that weave together to make up the text are subsumed by the two dates which, nominally, enclose its creation - the last writing of mine one reads in the novel.

One person who has read **Dhalgren** a number of times writes me she found it easier to hear the voice of the writing if she actually paused, when reading to herself, between sentences. Many hundreds of sentences in the book were written down on index cards and/or separate notebook pages, worked over and revised as autonomous verbal objects to ensure they did their particular micro-jobs as economically as possible before they were mortared back in edificial place. (Many of the sentences I am least satisfied with are ones I did not give this kind of attention to and which only underwent their various buffings on their half dozen trips through the typewriter.) Is there any relation between this reader's discovery of a way to respond to the text and my way of composition?

I don't know.

But her method and mine are ultimately outside the text and of merely anecdotal interest.

But let me see how closely I can approach the dangerous city-limit from a different direction.

A few months ago someone doing an article on 'Sex in the Future' called me, along with a number of other sf writers, for a quote. I sent him:

> There's a prevalent theory that society, in some mysterious way, is and will always be a mirror of some mysteriously eternal sex act, i.e., Standard Missionary position. This theory, of course, is nonsense. Every sex act, from the most 'normal' to

> the most 'perverse', is an internalization of one or another set of social uparameters. Sex in the future will be no better or worse than society in the future. If future society is vigorous, open, and varied, then so will future sex. If future society is repressive, authoritarian and monotonous, you won't be able to hope for too much better in bed.

Somewhere in the text of the last chapter of **Dhalgren**, readers have noted some sentences that they feel express more or less the same thoughts as the first four sentences of the above. It would ill-behoove me to argue.

Without commenting on what is in **Dhalgren**, I will say that the first three sentences of my quote (we can ignore the last three speculative ones) are about psycho/social facts-in-the-world. One might quibble with terms - perhaps it is not a 'theory' so much as a largely unexamined model that explains much ill-considered action, many glib statements, and vast numbers of movies, novels, and plays; one could argue over how and in what way and when and exactly which social parameters are internalized to give specific forms to the varieties of human sexual responses. But that is arguing over whether the Earth is a sphere, an oval, or a pear - not whether it is flat or round. **Dhalgren** certainly isn't **about** this psycho/social fact - nor the conflict between those who are aware of it and those who are its unknowing victims and/or exploiters - any more than Shakespeare's **Tempest** is about the fact that the Earth is round, a fact which the discovery of Bermuda had brought to the general attention of the British public only a few years before the play was written. Nevertheless, to know about the discovery of Bermuda and the new status of both magic and science that had resulted from it is certainly to make the **Tempest** more comprehensible. More to the point, contemporary play-goers who did not 'believe' in the roundness of the Earth, nor in the existence of outlying tropical islands, and had no feeling for the new distinctions between fantasy/magic/reality/science that were then being etched on the modern English-speaking consciousness, though they might recognize the form of the Masque, would, with all else in the play, be totally at sea. They simply would not be able to make the storm-tossed landing on that tropical island, nor read properly the emblems of what is real and

what is not and the dialogue between them which are the structure, significance, and charm of the play. It is not that they would miss the surface plot: they would miss the sub-text which gives the surface plot its reason for being what it is.

I think a good number of **Dhalgren**'s more incensed readers, the ones bewildered or angered by the book, simply cannot read the proper distinction between sex and society and the nature and direction of the causal arrows between them, a vision of which lies just below the novel's surface and which gives the book its logical coherence. Though these readers are perfectly willing to respond to a `sympathetic portrayal of the social problems of those who deviate sexually from the statistical norm', they are at first confused by and ultimately angered with a presentation that completely subverts the entire subtext that informs a discourse of `social problems/ sympathetic/sexual-deviate/normal' in the first place. They still see `real' society as a projection of an `idealized' sex act (which somehow involves vast amounts of male aggression inchoately coupled with total female passivity), and read all fictional accounts of sex-and/or-society as accurate, relevant, and charged with value as they constitute themselves under the shadow of this model. Such a mistake is understandable. Precisely this model charges with sense the fiction of writers as diverse as Lawrence, Mailer, Malzberg, Oates, Ellison, Barth, Roth, Bellow, and (Thomas, though not John) Berger. To read **Dhalgren** against this model, however - that is, to use this model as a template against which to discern the sense and weight of various scenes and sentences - is to render the book a non-sense far greater than any which might come under the rubric of `un-orthodox plot', `sexual explicitness', or `reality vs fantasy'. It renders a very long book a mere mass of unordered, quotidian psycho/social detail.

I think this model - a platonically ideal sex act after which all social relations must be formed in order to partake of the good - is pure literary excrescence. (To call it `literary invention' implies that someone, sometime, somewhere invented it with malice aforethought; and I do not think this is the case.) I would like to see it dispelled. It distorts the true polarities of the human universe, mystifying the known and the knowable, subverting and

diffusing human energies away from where they might help real women and real men: because it makes human problems accessible to analysis appear adamantine, monolithic.

Sex is sex, pleasure is pleasure, anger is anger, sadness is sadness, joy is joy, and fear is fear: all are intricately and intimately related, and the sudden paths from one to the other are endlessly surprising. All of them, and all the paths between, are affected by the material universe we live in. All affect our picture of the universe. Also, each of us experiences the complex of them differently, first because we are in different positions **vis-à-vis** the ordered external universe and moving through that order at different trajectories, and second because we are different individuals at our respective positions and the internal factors - capacities for pleasure, anger, joy, sex, etc. - are constituted **vis-à-vis** themselves differently in each of us.

Mapping all of this, either with the fictive device of 'character' or 'narrator', or employing such a map to move with words the 'character' of the reader through such a territory, is one of the writer's possible tasks. Confusion in the map (or generalizing too quickly between one element and another) is an aesthetic flaw.

To use the sex-produces-society model as a mapping tool (rather than society-contours-sex) in any sort of narrative fictions (science or otherwise) foredooms us to losing our way, both practically and ethically, once we turn back to the world - and it does so without any implication that any particular set of morals need be reflected in the fictions themselves.

Here follows a random galaxy of notes, most of them no doubt familiar to anyone who has read at all in the last decade-and-a-half's work in semiology and structuralism, which, from their disorder will hopefully force at least **some** coherence between what has gone before and what will come after them.

1. Our actions influence the material world.

The material world influences (among **many** other things) our emotions and our general psychology. Frequently we are unaware of it - often we are only partially aware of it.

2. Our landscape, entirely true for any urban environment (and, today, almost entirely true for any rural environment in Europe, the United States, and Canada), is made up totally of emblems of former human actions. From the sky (overcast because of the industrial effect or the greenhouse phenomenon), to each tree or grass blade in the city parks (the trees are there because someone **put** them there, or because someone **left** them there when clearing away others), the landscape is a dense, interlocked web of the detritus of haphazard human action and/or intentional human undertaking.

One way to look at it is as a vastly recomplicated code of human signs (or semes).

As we walk down any street, we read (or sometimes misread), consciously or unconsciously, this code. What it says affects us. It is the real world influencing (among **many** other things) our emotions and general psychology.

3. I call it a code; but this code has many aspects of a true language. For one thing, syntax is all-important. A new building encountered in a section of the city where all the buildings around it are new has one meaning; a new building encountered in a section of the city where all the buildings around it are decrepit slums and tenements has another. As well, these signs, semes, or codons affect one another in purely autonomous ways that change their meanings so that those meanings cannot be traced back to any intention on the part of the initial human actors: soot in the air (one seme) defaces a new building (another seme) creating a new seme - a grimy building - with a new meaning for the city itself. An unused sewer main beneath the street (one seme) collapses and causes a tenement (another seme) to drop a wall and collapse at one corner.

The abandoned, half-ruined building where people have been injured and fled from it is a different seme (with a different meaning) from either an overcrowded tenement **or** an abandoned sewer main.

4. Fiction as we know it today begins as a response to an industrial phenomenon, to which the social analysis of Marx was equally a response. To quote Sartre quoting Marx: `The means of production affect the political, spiritual, and economic life of the people.' Responding to the same phenomenon that Marx's words were

attempting to model, various nineteenth-century novelists (in France, they included Balzac, Stendhal, the Goncourts and Zola; in England, they included Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and Dickens) realized, more or less articulately, that to describe the **products** of production, to evoke their textures and suggest their syntagmic relation to one another in various settings, in the novel's foreground social space, not only fleshed out the representation of material life, but was also a way of implying - through their relation with the means of production - a commentary, in the novel's background social space, on the values, aspiration, and ethics (political, economic, and spiritual) of everyone involved in the described object's production, distribution, and purchase. Thus to describe an object was to generate a web of commentary, just beyond direct apprehension yet nonetheless strongly felt as one reads the texts to hand, on the politics, economics, and religion of both the material and the fictive world, charging the whole work with significance and a sense of coherent worldly knowledge. This is what all those descriptions of furniture, fashion, fabrics, and carriages are doing in the novels of Balzac. More or less under control, this is more or less what they have been doing in the novels of all the fictioneers since - and this includes science fictioneers.

5. Consider: Our clothes are a sign system. So are our hairstyles; and whether or not we wear makeup, whether or not we shave; natural pigment in our skins is a direct sign (or an indirect reminder) of others' actions. The pigment acquired by exposure to sunlight is a sign of our own recent histories. Again, syntactic relation is all: deeply tanned skin on a well-dressed young man carrying an attache case means one thing. Deeply tanned skin on a ragged old woman carrying a bulging, frayed shopping bag speaks something else entirely.

The entire visible surface of every urban landscape we walk or ride through, as well as ninety-nine per cent of the visible surface of every human being in it, is constituted of signs of specifically human actions, human reactions, class and individual histories, ordered in informative, syntactic relations. (At a previous point in history, it might have been useful to distinguish between human signs and natural signs. Today the distinction is meaningless. The

reading of `purely natural signs' generates the whole discourse we know as science; but with its humanly organized `controlled experiments' we have devised to verify our readings, the natural signs at this point have been absorbed by that discourse - at least for the West. Nature, or the study of nature, as soon as we turn to a book to help us pursue it, is absorbed in the implied discourse of human technology.) The autonomous inter-effects of these signs on one another and one another's meanings suggest the volatility of a living language - rather than the lexical extensionality of a simple code or cipher.

We may, for a moment, locate two areas in this language of human signs: the signs constituted under the rubrics of nature, architecture, furniture, cooking, craft and science form one area; and in general they are far more ambiguous, resonantial, and connotative than the signs in the other area we can locate, i.e., those signs constituted under the rubrics of bodies (and gestures), fashions, faces, texts, and voices, which, by comparison, are straightforward, clear, and denotative.

6. Marx still provides the basic transformation by which the rare, simple declarative statement in the nonstop din of this language of human-made, human-charged, and human-structured signs may be translated into its political, economic, and spiritual equivalent: `Who made it? How much were they paid? Who profited, and by how much, from its sale? Who profits most from its having been put specifically **there** - in that specific syntagmic order with the world around it?' Though they may use the answers differently, both the poet and the politician will find these good questions to ask of the objects they encounter on their trek and trajectory.

But `simple declarative utterances' in the total surround of the sign language we live in today are rare.

7. We tend to forget that Shakespeare's art was precisely an art of bodies, fashions, faces, texts, and voices - with a little music thrown in on the side: lavishly costumed, full of poetry, and from report brilliantly acted. But how many thousands of post-Elizabethan performances have obscured the fact that the plays were performed without scenery and with an astonishingly meagre prop-box: letters, handkerchiefs, swords (which are really part of

fashion), jewel boxes (ditto), cups, chairs, and a few musical instruments practically exhaust the lot. Precisely what there was of the sixteenth century language of objects, so connotative and resonantial, Shakespeare, on his bare boards, collapsed with the language of the actors. Another thing we tend to overlook is that, thanks to the fleshing out provided by the imagination of modern theatrical and film directors, for all the rich gallery of character types, covering such a goodly span of Elizabethan society, high and middle (if not low), it would be next to impossible, from the corpus of thirty-six, to construct a rich vision of the material life of any of those types: details of architecture and shelter, food and food preparation, textile weaving and sartorial technology are just not terribly forthcoming from his texts. And these are the same details that the novels of the Goncourts and Zola - following from examples begun in Balzac - threaten to collapse under. The list of foods, clothing, and shelter mentioned in Shakespeare is thin and generalized: wine, roast meat, bread, fruit, `sweets' and `sweet meats', doublet, hose, cloak, hat, bonnet, gown, armour, sword, shield (encore ditto), castle, courtyard, dungeon. And an unbiased translator could confirm for us that there were not many more things on this list than could be found, say, mentioned in the **Iliad**, written twenty-five hundred years before (we except the descriptions of war articles - we are talking of the texture of material life).

The language of artifacted objects did not become the relative treasure of connotative riches it now represents for literature until it had been recomplicated by industrial development, as well as given a clear reading by that development's political consequences.

But the social developments that made the language of objects literarily decipherable did not halt; those developments that made this language both rich and clear (by providing an industrial, or sometimes an industrial vs cottage, reading) continued to lay complexity atop complexity in that language so that its resonances, by the end of the First World War, if not well before, were too complex for the orthodox rhetoric of nineteenth-century fiction to represent clearly and precisely.

8. Some months ago, I happened to encounter, by one of those chains of coincidence which are fiction, six SONY eight-inch portable colour television sets:

The first was in the office of the chairman of the philosophy department at the University of Buffalo where I was teaching. The chairman was keeping it, on top of his filing cabinet, he explained, for a woman professor who was picking it up from him later that afternoon.

The same model set, a few days later, was brought around to the bachelor digs of one of my older students (who worked as a carpenter when not in class, and who had bought the house with three other young men some two years ago, though now its kitchen sink was filled with dishes, its carpet worn through, its bathroom always in the midst of home repair, and its porch steps in need of new boards), by a rather scroungy, bearded seventeen-year-old, who wanted to sell it. My student didn't want to buy, and it was carried away across a wet, leaf-plastered Buffalo street.

Several weeks later, in New York City, I encountered the same set on the large, teakwood desk of a successful homosexual novelist in his largish, plant-filled, one-room studio apartment in Soho.

That same evening I found it on the cigarette-burned table top in the room of my next-door neighbour in the residence hotel where I'd been staying: he was a twenty-two-year-old black, a year out of North Carolina and ten months into a job as a security guard for an uptown building. He was sharing the room with (and I suspect supporting as well) a friend who was a not very effectual grass-dealer and their two girlfriends, who were always in to borrow my iron.

I'd already resolved to write down this chain encounter, so it was something of a humorous footnote to my proposed text when, almost two months later (and no writing actually done), I noticed the same model set under the elbow of a fortyish salesman in a green banlon shirt in a Fourteenth Street appliance store where I had gone to buy a digital clock radio.

What finally impelled pen to paper, however, was encountering a half-mad old woman who used to wander, mumbling, around Union Square and who later turned out to live on welfare in the basement of a

building on Avenue D where a friend of mine lived on the third floor. In her basement room, where she beckoned us in to see, were piles and stacks of old TV chassis, broken sets and discarded pieces found all over the streets. I did not see the SONY. But there was a plastic SONY colophon in a large paper bag full of knobs and electronics parts, leaning against the leg of a rickety table - all of which, considering what had gone before, brought up quite clearly a SONY-of-the-mind.

Now the point of all this: the SONY eight-inch color portable speaks in far more muted tones than, say, the Aubason tapestry on the wall of a Proustian drawing room - a simple cypher of money and taste, a simple symbol of time, if not history, passed in sight of an emblem of both.

The sociological syntagmic accompaniments to solid state circuitry, both synchronically and diachronically, are too complex for us to read from these half dozen situations a simple, industrial message. We live in a world where the language of signs has grown too complicated for money, morals, aesthetics, philosophy and technology to collapse, as in the case of Proust's Aubason, under a single symbol.

This does not mean that the objects of modern technology - by virtue of their likelihood to appear in such varied social syntagms - have gone literally mute. Rather, we simply must listen much more carefully if we are to hear what such a TV set has to say. Certainly it fulfills its task in generating a Marxist commentary, trailing the image of myriad Japanese women technicians (like a sexually inverted Hamlet's ghost viewed through the eye of a fly) as well as implications about wealth, supply, demand, production and production values, international tariffs and the like. But in complex harmony with these, it signs a whole wb of social values and social values denied, of communication - between classes, sexes, ages - and communication subverted. Even to say, `Several weeks later, in New York City, I encountered the same set...' generates a discourse almost totally congruent with one of those tedious aesthetic texts that begins, `Can we locate the single object under consideration in, say, six copies of **Ulysses**...?' - a problem that does not raise its head with the individually fashioned wall hanging. The SONY, if only

through the greater multiplicity of its possible environments, sings a far more complicated, if quieter, song. One must constantly invoke the clanking music-box of nineteenth-century novelistic rhetoric just to make clear that these jigs and brass cadenzas are **not** what we are listening for: that we are attempting to hear a much subtler and complicated interweave of melodies.

9. The best-known attempt to present fictively the language of objects in all its modern complexity is, of course, the novels of Robbe-Grillet. By suppressing all traditional novelistic rhetoric, he hoped that the complex interrelation of object and object (or object perception and object perception), would speak forth loudly and state itself with its own, inchoate voice. The flaw in his strategy, a shy quarter of a century after the appearance of the first of the novels that made Robbe-Grillet a scandal and then an institution, is today too apparent:

Objects in the world speak the language of objects in the world: material life. Words on paper speak the language of words on paper: writing.

The other thing one must remember is that a good deal of that suppressed nineteenth-century novelistic rhetoric grew up precisely to represent in words the growing complexity in the language of objects that industrialism had rendered so aesthetically rich. Much of that rhetoric, frankly, was successful. (There is also the fact that the language of human signs in the 'seventies is substantially more complex than it was at the appearance of **Les Gommes** in 1953.) The solution to the problem of the fictive representation of signs is more complicated than Robbe-Grillet's solution - indeed, it is not likely to be found in any specifically unilateral method. Like any other modern artist, the modern novelist must take from the past what seems to remain useful, discard what is irrelevant or what specifically distorts, and invent an artistic structure or set of structures adequate for what she or he feels has not been dealt with before. For the novelist, this means devising a set of fictive tropes, rhetorical devices, etc., complex enough to present/represent what one wants.

If Robbe-Grillet's novels are powerful works and remain viable, it is rather in the way Seurat's paintings remain forceful nodes of

aesthetic tension/attention, i.e., not because of the method but because of the artists' faithfulness to it. That, as artists, they needed their particular methods psychologically as well as intellectually (what a strange vision of the mind, where these aspects are so sundered!) only circles our point. One must remember that if what Seurat in particular and the impressionists in general wrote about their methods were to be taken literally, then their canvases, when viewed from more than ten feet off, should suddenly look like Andrew Wyeth's! Similarly, the problems spelled out in Robbe-Grillet's **Notes Towards a New Novel**, while they are certainly **real** problems, are **not** the ones his novels triumph over.

Since the literal interpretation of neither of these artists' written theories appears, after an encounter with their works, as a literal description of their aesthetic undertakings, we are in the somewhat tricky position of asserting - in a work that is essentially a written theory of our own - that artists writing about their own theories are constructing not a descripton of their work, but a metaphor to take with one into the orderly chaos of that work as a tool for making one's own, personal map.

As Seurat's paintings create their stunning impression of stylized light and life by the power of paint placed **so** systematically on canvas, so Robbe-Grillet's novels gain their hypnotic quality through the strength of systematically disciplined words.

10. The sexual/social myth that the good society takes its form from the most socially condoned sexual act (and, contrapositively, that bad, or perverse, sex takes its form from the bad or the perverse in society) is a result of two factors that, here, need only to be mentioned, as elsewhere others have exhaustively described them. First, there is a mental template that was worked into the very form of fiction (among social entities) by the same industrial forces that contoured so much of the rest of the rhetoric of the nineteenth-century novel - forces that compelled all people, to the extent of their identification with, or even their contiguity to, the white male, middle-class centres of power, to see the working class in general, racial and religious strangers in particular (as they represented, in large amounts, possible additions to the labour

market), and the unstable (Do they work or don't they? Are they property or aren't they?) status of women in a radically revalued patriarchal society, as perennial threats to the order of things. The second factor - the twentieth century's addition - was to lay over this basic template a muzzy misreading of Freud, that saw `sex as the source of all things.' (What Freud said, of course, was that, in a society which represses and/or sublimates it, sex is still very strongly at work, even in places where the repression and/or sublimation appears successful - which is another thing entirely. And though the mechanics of the workings are different, the same can be said of anger, pleasure, sadness, fear, grief, joy, pain **and** intelligence.)

Lay over this the general aesthetic laziness of most modern novelists before the admittedly immense task of untangling the significance of the dense surround of human signs that is our life in the modern world, and you have the limits on the `impoverishment' of modern fiction.

One of the failures of Robbe-Grillet's method, for example, is that embedding all these objects in such textureless discourse (or, at least discourse of such limited texture) is that, rather than reading the true message that flashes out from their syntactical-interaction-as-objects, it is too easy to read the style itself as saying, `None of these objects means anything other than the amassed, inarticulate presence it achieves through the repetition of names, attributes, dimensions - the stuff of terror and despair.' The cumulative force of a Robbe-Grillet novel is, essentially, a negative one: the reaction of the reader to the text is best taken as a metaphor for despair before the task of ever untangling meaning from a complexity of objects - which is why his books that work best are the books that are about, in the most nineteenth-century way, `characters' for whom such despair is an appropriate reaction: a psychotic murderer, an obsessively jealous husband. And one cannot divorce the aesthetic success of these novels from the failure inherent in fictive discourse itself, which failure is emblemized by the `fact' that the `victim' in both the `successful' books is that terror and time-bomb which, in nineteenth-century fiction, **must** be gotten rid of, either by death or marriage, at any cost: the Female.

(In a sense, **Lolita** (1956) can be seen as a novel struggling, both in its textures and its plot/structure, with precisely what defeats Robbe-Grillet in **Le Voyeur** (1955).) What one is looking for is a novelist who can make sense out of the plethora of semiotic associations our world yields throughout every arc-second of its field, whether or not her or his 'plot' dramatizes the 'success' or 'defeat' of a 'character' before the same task.

11. To return to the end of the nineteenth century: The general despair of novelists at negotiating the recomplicated language of signs produced a fiction that responded, in historical terms, by becoming highly subjective and/or psychological. Between the seventeenth century and the end of the nineteenth century, the convention was established that a certain proportion of sentences in serious fiction **must** be devoted to récit - commentary on the subjective world of the characters or the sociological significance of the situation. To conform to this proportion was a way of metafictively signalling that the fiction was, indeed, serious.

It is just after the turn of the century that the myth of the sexual source of everything becomes an articulate force in modern fiction. It allowed the modern novelist (most specifically and successfully, D.H. Lawrence) to recharge these récit sentences, hitherto devoted to psychological analysis, with a certain energy that comes from our ever-present topical interest in the passions. Before Lawrence, those récit sentences had to stand or fall on pure wit and socio/psychological insight. These sentences were not so much to 'present character' (though this is how their task was referred to) as to present what the novelists knew of the workings of human psychology in interface with society - the task of the light essayist. (Yes, they knew this was not the 'character' itself: in the 'nineties Wilde had quipped: 'The more one analyses one's characters, the more they come to sound like everyone else.' Yet the whole history of the novel had shown the form committed to presenting the distinctions between human beings within the coherent matrix of society. The modern task of the novel, to show that all human beings are essentially the same while at the mercy of the flaws and contradictions of an incoherent society (a Durkheimian entity which, as Saussure's **langue** claims for itself an ontological status apart

from **parole**, claims for **itself** an ontological status apart from the social behaviour of any given individual), does not emerge until later.) But, at the same time, psychology itself, at the hands of Freud and others, was becoming a science. Lawrence's sentences of repressed sexual rhapsody implied, in the background social space of the novel, just as strongly as Balzac's descriptions of furniture **et al.** had accomplished its implication of economic commentary before, the entire discourse of that science. How could this implied discourse of a branch of medical science fail to triumph over those merely clever observations by amateurs who stated in their texts that psychology was a matter of verbal paradox, mental contradiction, step and mis-step through the social dance, knowledge and ignorance of What Is Expected?* At this point in the development of the novel, insightful and/or witty analysis of social and psychological situation was replaced by subjective rhapsody. Subjective rhapsody implied the entire discourse of a science just behind it; novelistic psychological analysis suggested a competition with that same science that the novelist, as amateur, could not possibly hope to win in the face of the new erotics. Looking slightly askance at this development, one also notes that such rhapsodies are certainly easier to read, if not write, than the rhetoric they replace.

I have written elsewhere (as have a number of others) that science-fictional discourse redistributes the fictive attention between characters and landscape (i.e. between subject and object) in a manner different from mundane fiction. Science fiction makes the attention on the landscape much higher. To work within this reorganized fictive frame gives us, first of all, a basically better matrix in which to deal with the recomplications of modern 'sign' language. And I can think of no better place than science fiction in which to avoid 'certain conventions of fiction' that make so much fiction such a political disaster.

I am attracted to the areas that most fiction handles with both textual and structural clichés - blacks, women, the mentally ill, the

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*Proust and Musil are great precisely because they turned this, for one, massive, isolated work apiece, totally around.

socially marginal, the relationship between society and sex - because I have had firsthand experience with many of the situations they imply: I am black, I have spent time in a mental hospital, and much of my adult life, for both sexual and social reasons, has been passed on society's margins. My attraction to them as subject matter for fiction, however, is not so much the desire to write autobiography, but the far more parochial desire to set matters straight where, if one only takes the evidence of the written word, all would seem confusion.

One of the most pernicious things about the myths - for that is all one can call them - shadowing these areas is that they preclude any possibility of envisioning a different social order whose members, in response to it, might grow up reasonably to seek and expect, for example, quantitatively more sexual encounters and/or who might foster a more reasonable and relaxed attitude about those sexual encounters they do have. The view of sexual encounters as effected and affective **processes** is abolished from possible consideration by the kernel of illogic at those pernicious myths' core: sexuality is a substance, and what is more, some individuals possess more of it than others, in measures entirely proportional to their distance from certain centres of bourgeois power.

To deny this whole set of prejudices, kernel and superstructure, is to affirm that, from the inside, **all** people experience their own surface behaviour, sexual and otherwise, as a negotiable dialogue of response, reaction [4], desire, and control: not to experience the generation of one's own behavioural signs in this manner is the subjective experience of madness.

12. So we will always recognize it, let us have this model one last time in all its raw absurdity: All peoples who are not by heredity and/or active bonds of control fixed to the centres of bourgeois power are seething masses of dull, inarticulate sexuality. The man's is completely identified with jealousy and aggression, the woman's with jealousy and acquisitiveness. Take, as an example, the bulk of men (one could as easily take their wives, sisters, and daughters with very little translation in the ensuing description) that statistically form the plurality of unskilled and semi-skilled labour in this country - traditionally referred to once as `The

Working Class Male', and now as `The Lower Classes' (this social group is not to be confused in any way with any revisionary or other Marxist view of `the proletariat'), the `Under Class', or, most recently by ironic European sociologists as `the Fourth World'. In him, sex and aggression are one. The appalling and inhuman conditions under which he lives barely keep this sexuality/hostility under control. Conceivably, if he could ever lower his persistent and dull anger enough, he might be able to employ enough intelligence to exert some beneficial influence over his own life as an individual or over the lives of his fellow men. (The obliteration of women and their labour, within the home and without, from the model is pivotal to its working efficacy.) But since this dull and disfocusing rage is fed by that inexhaustible and ever-brimming pit of sexuality (with which it is one), this lowering is not very likely - except now and then, when a particular lower-class male is able to exert great self-control, repress all primitive urges (which, for him, will be a nearly killing effort and cannot help but cause some great psychological crippling) for the rest of his days. And should he ever fail to repress, and that sexuality/anger should break free, he will destroy himself and all he has achieved in a single sweep, probably taking the odd bourgeois-born woman with him. On the one hand (the myth continues) it is mildly sad that the conditions under which the majority of such men live are so oppressive; and it is sighed over that things won't get better for them - so that the lower-class male could blossom forth, while sticking to his place. But any logical assessment of the situation makes it perfectly clear (declares the myth) that if the restraints of inhuman labour and/or inhuman conditions over inhuman hours were removed for more than one or two days a week, that sexuality/hostility would erupt and run berserk, and lower-class males would destroy everything, more than likely including themselves. [5]

One can find this myth in all its quintessential absurdity in the portrait of Carlton Walpole, the migrant fruit-picker, at the beginnings of Joyce Carol Oates's 1967 novel, **A Garden of Earthly Delights**. It contours the portraits of all the prole-origined soldiers in Norman Mailer's 1948 novel, **The Naked and the Dead**. One tries to give these novels liberal readings - of a sort any

contemporary social worker or psychologist might be expected to bring to the situations the novels portray: `The hostility here is a **response** to the inhuman conditions. If these men cannot seem to get it together to do anything about the conditions, the best explanation is what behavioural psychologists call "psychological generalization", an inescapable process that is a response to emotional overload - a process that occurs on all social levels; as well, the pressures to be dealt with, from inside the situation, **are** more complicated than they could possibly appear from outside, since they include the conditioning of these men **and** our conditioned view of their situation.' But one can no more find emblems for this reading in the fictions than one can find emblems of the knowledge of the existence of the moons of Jupiter in **Don Quixote.**

The existence of the moons of Jupiter was simply not part of the aristocratic and upper-middle-class Spanish fifteenth-century épistèmé.

What makes the situation of the modern novel so appalling is that the liberal reading was, more than likely, very much part of the épistèmé of twenty-five-year-old Mailer in 1948 and certainly part of the épistèmé of twenty-eight-year-old Oates in 1967. But it is not part of the épistèmé that generated the nineteenth-century fictive discourses they write. And to write nineteenth-century fictive discourse, precisely to the extent that given examples of such discourse are recognizable as fiction, is to doom oneself to projecting the nineteenth-century épistèmé of which such appalling myths as the above are part and parcel.

Fictive discourse's treatment of women, blacks, Jews, homosexuals, etc., takes off from the same point as the myth we have outlined and moves along similar trajectories - with women's fictive treatment having a couple of particularly frustrating contradictions, which, to understand, we must begin with the understanding that women are not, as even my list might suggest, a category among four, but rather marginally more than half of the other three, and are just as exploitable within the work force (as that phrase is traditionally read) as they are `outside the work force' (i.e., at work in home for a father or husband), and that the two modes of exploitation are intimately connected and endlessly and mutually supportive. What all

these fictions do is, first, take only a novelistically valorized set of visible elements (never an individualized totality: everything done by **one** woman, **one** working man, one **Jew**), and, second, suggest causal arrows between these elements in absurd directions. What makes modern fiction **so** uninteresting is that the causality and analysis implied by the fiction is demonstrably **not** the matrix of causality and analysis that the writers themselves could possibly believe in. We are at a point in history where the basic models proposed by the objective discourse of sociology and psychology - even in their most vulgarized, cocktail party versions - are **more** accurate and interesting than the basic models that underlie the most 'serious' novels.

Let the above galaxy of twelve be the readings which anchor all our subsequent statements to this text as we put our toe over the brim into the oceanic text of **Dhalgren**.

Here, on the edge, we note that some of the most disappointed readers were those who tried to read the 'city' as a 'projection' of the protagonist's (or, heaven forbid, the author's) 'fantasies'. I suspect these are the people who see the récit/foreground (subjective/objective) proportion of sentences as a fixed sign evoking an interpretive judgement that - for the sf reader, at any rate - such a proportion simply doesn't call up. The logic runs: If there are too many subjective-sounding sentences, this is a sign that some objective mystery exists to be solved; it is a sign that there is some objective correlative which will clear up the mystery and make 'sense' of all this confused 'subjectivity.' (One recalls the more naive critics of books like **Finnegans Wake**, demanding to know what it was 'really' about, or those even more naively claiming to have 'discovered' its 'plot'.) Such readers simply assume that every book **must** have a clear and linear reading that 'explains' the 'story'; for them, the sign of its existence is the distortion of that proportion of sentences away from the objective. By the same token, too many objective sentences, again violating that proportion, for these readers is a sign to take all this objectivity as a projection of some traumatic, inner, subjective state-of-character: dream, guilt, psychosis...(One recalls the equally naive readers of

Le Voyeur at this point.) **Dhalgren** is almost all foreground - as I have mentioned. One can only speculate that these readers took this as a sign for some great and inner subjective distortion (above and beyond the description and analysis of psychological distress the text supplies) which would 'explain' it all.

They were, understandably, disappointed when the text did **not** supply one. [6]

And I suspect these were readers who, on the deepest level where it counts, simply could not read the book as science fiction - a practice of writing which has familiarized its readers with another proportion weighted **toward** the objective.

I would like to make the following suggestion humbly, but perhaps I have already crossed a limit, a line, into a landscape where humility has no existence. I may well be already in the city of the unacceptable:

Anyone who finds it helpful may approach **Dhalgren**, without fear of misreading the text because of the approach (though there is, alas, no way to ensure a 'proper' reading: it may have none) as (and in) an attempt to explore and respond to a small sector of the grammar of human signs. It tries to focus on the grammar of that language by a science-fictional reorganization of these signs' textual production/reproduction. Kid's sanity remains in question (and hopefully is never fixed to the circumscribed area of meaning that respectively overshadows the officially 'sane' or the officially 'insane') for the same reason the disaster of the city is unexplained: such explanations would become a fixed signified straiting the play and interplay of the signifier - the city of signs - that flexes and reflexes above it. To 'clear up' either question (that of the Kid's 'sanity' or that of 'what happened to the city') would prevent us from apprehending **Dhalgren**'s real/true (?) topic: the organizing and reorganizing transformations we are free to view and experience once these restraining models are tossed aside.

- New York, September 1975

Notes

1 Jacques Lacan,`The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious', in **Structuralism**, ed. Jacques Ehramm, Doubleday Anchor, New York, 1970.

2 Roland Barthes has quipped in **Writing Degree Zero** that Flaubert made writing acceptable to the bourgeoisie by joining the concept of `labour' to the creation of the text.

3 Readers who detected the pastiche of **Caliban to the Audience** in Newboy's second monologue might wonder if Auden shouldn't be included. Let me say, Auden is a writer who concerns me and delights me - rather than who influences me.

4 I intend these first two categories to cover habitual reactions that may run counter to more recently manifested desires.

5 In a depressingly real sense, the Marxist glorification of work for its own sake, coupled with the naive assumption that as long as everybody is working **hard**, all sexual `problems' will disappear, i.e., reduce to a pastoral (and suspiciously bourgeois) vision of respectful, shy, young working men getting up the nerve to propose to respectful, shy, young working women, who must get up the never to respond, quiveringly, `Yes' (both, finally, taking courage from the fact that they are serving the state - the Marxist equivalent of `doing it for Old Glory'?), is historically, if not archetypally, one with the nineteenth-century industrial mythos: `Keep the proles working hard enough and they'll be too tired to break out into the orgies of lust, rapine, and (incidentally) economic devastation (the absent text supplies the term, "looting") we **know** seethes just below the surface of every prole soul. Under industrial containment (read: exploitation/exhaustion) their sex (read: aggression) can be limited to the most conventional and tepid expressions.' The entire template, Marxist and Capitalist, is a pre-Freudian disaster area which Freud's own inability to distinguish between sensuality, sexuality, biological gender, and sex role socialization has done as much to perpetuate in the West as his basic discovery of the unconscious, repression, transference, and infantile sexuality, have prepared the groundwork to alleviate.

6 All possible readings of a book, naive or otherwise, are of course in dialogue with one another - but in different modes and at different intensities!

REVIEWS

Damien Broderick, THE BLACK GRAIL, Avon, 1986, 310 pp., US$3.50

reviewed by Michael J. Tolley

The Black Grail is a longer version of **Sorcerer's World**, a work of Damien Broderick's relative youth (1970), before my time as an active reader of Australian sf. It would be unsafe to guess at what kinds of change have been effected but I'll do it anyway. A quest can always have extra episodes pushed into it but it need not have the extra sophistication provided by an invocation of great names such as Bertrand Russell, John Gribbin, Otto Rank and Plotinus to preside over the four parts of the narrative with their portentous headings, LIFE, SLEEP, DEATH, REBIRTH. An early work might well lack also an elaborate underpinning of allusions to the great fraternal opposites of myth, such as Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Cain and Abel, Osiris and Set, not to mention the deeply ambiguous Grail legend. Most of this novel may be read on the level of a good sword-and-sorcery quest narrative (note: the effects of very high technology might just as well be called sorcery in this context), well salted with humour, eroticism and violence; however, some of it, and particularly the beginning and end, require more close and careful attention, if the full irony of the fiction is to be understood. This marked difference in textual density, especially in the final section, is possibly a structural flaw brought about by Broderick's desire to extract the maximum yield from his mine.

One of the things **The Black Grail** is about is yet another explanation for the disappearance of dinosaurs; another is the pacifist ethos; a third is the value of experience; a fourth is fidelity. Alternatively it is about Xaraf, the first-person-narrator hero, brought up in a primitive tribe where his father espouses military values and his mentor, Darkbloom, a eunuch magician (the book's Merlin) teaches combat arts but inculcates 'the way of the Open Hand' (peaceableness, not holding a sword). Golan wants his son to learn to kill, to become an adult warrior and so take part in the war against a threat from Northern sorcerers. Darkbloom forbids

Xaraf to kill; yet it is only when he has done so, breaking his oath in order to please his father, that he gains what seems in the end a necessary experience. So this is another story about the benefits of leaving Eden by falling out of it. Xaraf falls out of his time into the far future and he ends his quest as the loser, trapped in a world very like our own, where people do not fight to the death just because they disagree, yet if he had not fallen, he would never have met the woman of his dreams (literally) or encountered the gross evil king who enslaved her. By the same token, he would never have met Darkbloom as (bewilderingly) she is, but named Flowers of Evening, at the time of the dying sun, and would never have been sent on his mission to the beginning of things by her and the other Powers in order to restore the energy they need, which they have lost by their direct drilling into the early sun (via wormlines that run through time); he would never have become immortal (at least in the way that he does). He would never have met Glade, the woman who loves him and accompanies him on his quest, or the other talking sword (Glade means sword), Alamogordo (Xaraf treats both with less courtesy than becomes a knight on a Grail quest). He would never have left us with the tantalizing puzzle with which the novel closes: did his failure wipe out the future he has visited, or did it preserve it? For all his failure, was Xaraf a hero or not - and will he be redeemed and restored to his beloved Comhria? His perfect, godlike, inhuman brother, after all, is as bound to the human Flowers of Evening as he himself is to her **alter ego**, Darkbloom.

Xaraf's brother calls himself Galahad. Xaraf seems to hover uneasily between Arthur, Perceval and Lancelot. We know whom we would rather be. The title may have two significances; in one sense it is a black version of the Grail myth; but there is also a black vessel in the story, which represents Death, to which Xaraf is able to find the liberating key. He achieves at least one of his quests.

I think most readers will enjoy this Broderick novel more than they have done some of his other books. It has one great advantage over some of his writing, a relative absence of hard words: Xaraf would not be capable of understanding them. Buy it, read it, have fun with the quest romance and torture your brains with the mythological puzzle. Also, learn a little of ethics.

WOULD I WRITE A FIX-UP?

GEORGE TURNER

Lucy Sussex's dissection [in **ASFR** 5] of **Voyage of the Space Beagle** as a fix-up (dreadful term, seemingly of van Vogt's own coinage - conflation would be near enough for most purposes) gives the scholarly insight but does not ask the question, 'Why do fix-ups at all?' - possibly because the answer might be different for each writer concerned.

In the case of van Vogt, the fix-up king (I can count nine such novels offhand and suspect the existence of others I have not looked at), there are possible clues as to why he used the method and they all indicate simple commercial convenience. When in the early 1950s hardcover sf at last became commercially viable for the publishing trade, van Vogt entered the market with rapid production, turning out six novels in two years, three of them fix-ups of series written in the late '30s and early '40s (**Space Beagle, Weapon Shops of Isher, The Mixed Men**). It is reasonable to assume that he used the material at hand in the interest of quick production, to cash in on what might turn out to be an ephemeral market (but did not).

During the '50s and '60s he produced little original fiction by comparison with his previous output but mined his early stories for more fix-ups (**The Mind Cage**, 1957; **War Against the Rull**, 1957; **The Wizard of Linn**, 1962; **The Beast**, 1963; **Rogue Ship**, 1965), keeping his name in the publishers' lists while he concentrated his major attention on his personal variations of Dianetics and Scientology (to the considerable anger of Hubbard **et al.**).

All this speaks of simply maintaining an income with minimum effort. It can be confidently argued that he was not concerned with 'literary' achievement as such, only in a saleable and repeatable method, and Lucy Sussex makes it clear that his work has little to commend it beyond the superficial reader-bait of bizarre happenings retailed at high speed and pressure. (Cf. Alfred Bester's **The Demolished Man** and **The Stars My Destination**, similar in mode to the van Vogt adventures though not fix-ups and, though far better

written, ultimately as empty.) In hindsight it seems doubtful that the van Vogt novels are worth critical attention save as examples of what mass-market publishing demands of the writer and of the production-line techniques needed to satisfy it. (Alexandre Dumas had many of his novels 'assembled' by a research assistant and himself wrote only the final drafts, so it cannot be argued that factory methods inevitably produce shoddy results.)

More interesting are the less mechanical methods of creating long works from shorter. Somewhere between the mechanical and the creative stands Theodore Sturgeon's **More Than Human**. The core of this novel is the notable novella, 'Baby Is Three' (**Galaxy**, 1952) and one can only guess that Sturgeon felt - rightly - that his treatment of the **gestalt** theme required elaboration. This he provided by adding a fairly satisfactory introductory section which set the theme firmly in place and a disastrous final section - psychologically slipshod, plotted to a forced conclusion, romantically sentimental and finally maudlin with love and forgiveness - wherein his usually dependable sense of impact seemingly deserted him. **More Than Human** makes some support for Aldiss's claim for the superiority of the short sf form over the novel.

Against this might be set Walter M. Miller's excellent novel **A Canticle for Leibowitz**, a linkage of three novellas illustrating the role of the church as guardian of art and science (cf. the Irish monasteries during the European dark age), all of which were rehandled and expanded for novel publication. The first, 'Fiat Homo', was in fact enlarged from 8000 to 40 000 words and used to plant the historic and philosophical seeds of all that followed. Here, three excellent novellas became, by reason of sustained elaboration of theme, a novel greater than the sum of its parts.

The two examples prove little. Sturgeon and Miller both tried to give definitive treatment to their themes by enlargement of the action; Sturgeon mishandled his attempt, Miller succeeded in producing one of the few genuinely memorable novels in the genre. It was a matter of talent rather than method. The argument about the superiority of the short form remains open though my own feeling, without statistical verification, is that more good sf stories remain in memory than good sf novels.

The foregoing provides no answer to my question, 'Why bother?' and I doubt that a final answer exists. Any reader who studies the half-dozen or so pages prior to the 'Contents' page of any novel (and every serious reader should) will be aware of the huge number of mainstream novels whose core lies in shorter works. The announcement is commonplace that 'Parts of this novel appeared in shorter form in ...' or 'Chapter * appeared, in slightly different form, as a complete short story in ...' One cannot tell whether the novel was developed from the excerpts or the excerpts modified for magazine publication, but some questioning of local writers indicates the former as more common.

Reasons will vary individually. Wynne Whiteford has been engaged on a fix-up based on two shorter tales. I hope he will forgive me for tattling out of school, but his reason for doing so is that his American publisher suggested it and it seemed to Wynne like a good idea. I can't think of a better reason for anybody doing anything. What I don't know (because I didn't think to ask) is whether or not the publisher made any structural suggestions (they do that in Yankeeland) and what Wynne thought of them. Perhaps he will enlighten us. (We like our bits of gossip about the goings-on in the corridors of wordpower.)

I have indicated that good literary reasons may dictate these expansions and I believe, rightly or wrongly, that these reasons are more likely to work towards an improved fiction than will the mechanical need for a longer story to fit a publishing format. I have written one novel from a novella and am at present engaged on a novel based on another novella. The reasons for doing so are widely different in the two cases and may be of interest because I **know** the reasons whereas with the work of others I can only infer or guess.

The Sea and Summer is an expansion of the material in the novella, 'The Fittest' (**Urban Fantasies**, Ebony Books). The literary reason is that the ideas advanced in the novella did not satisfy me when I re-read it, nor did the storyline, in particular the downbeat ending; what had seemed suitable during the writing lacked charm in retrospect. There was, however, another reason which could scarcely be suspected by even the most astute literary detective.

I had promised myself that after **In the Heart or in the Head** I would leave sf long enough to write a mainstream novel but when the time came to plan the work I found myself in unexpected trouble. At 70 years of age I have grown away from two-thirds of the world, the young and the middle-aged, to the point where I observe them, understand them up to a point but can no longer enter into their motivation or ways of thinking. Rock music seems a monotonous and uninventive corroboree stomp, bank card is a trap for the self-indulgent, protest has yet to learn the saving asset of being able to laugh at itself, education has become a horror of squabbling egotists who **know** that **their** view is right, parental liberalism produces juvenile crime waves, people are attacked in public and the bystanders look away ... I don't doubt that I have it all wrong; the dreadful thing is that I can't get interested in these things at the heart of everyday life or in the people who accept them. (Well, they aren't interested in me, either, so fair's fair.)

This worried me until I looked at the works of my contemporaries and saw that, almost without exception, they are writing about the Australia of thirty to fifty years ago or setting their stories in timeless microcosms (country towns, boarding houses, institutions) where unwanted modernity can be held out of sight and mind. It was something of a relief to find that I am not an odd man out, just another of the historically superannuated. There comes a point when we seem to be survivors of our own traumas rather than participants in the daily wave of new problems.

So I could write another old-time 'Treelake' novel, couldn't I, rounding off the series? But I didn't want to write about the past; I don't feel nostalgic. I simply wanted to write about **people** instead of technological and biological projections. It hit me that in 'The Fittest' I had the ideal basis for what I had for a long time aspired to write: a science fiction novel in which the technical background was secondary to the study of workaday people coping with the vicissitudes of normal existence. (Not **our** normal, **their** tomorrow normal. But basic problems don't change, only the detail of handling them.) It was wonderful after so many years to sit down to a traditional novel again. And this time I could get the ending right.

Faber and Faber have even promised not to publicize it as sf, but I'll believe that when I see the jacket.

At the end of an exhausting two years (it wasn't an easy write) I needed a change of pace and thought of doing a straight action yarn, just for the hell of it. Again the material was ready to hand.

'On the Nursery Floor' was written to order (more or less), the first time I had worked to someone else's requirements. Damien Broderick had accumulated much of his material for **Strange Attractors** but was short of straightforward traditional stories (at least, this is my guess at the reason for his request) so he rang me and asked for something along the lines of a John W. Campbell selection for **Astounding** of the '50s. He even suggested the theme, the 'superman', which was typical of the magazine and the period. I wasn't too keen, feeling that the subject had been worked to death, but decided to try it; in the end it worked out reasonably well.

Only when I saw it in print did I perceive that I had written the wrong story. The absolute human nullity of the narrator-hero was disguised effectively enough by the use of varied intruding voices carrying the story forward but the ending was facile (though good enough in action-yarn terms) and the inferred problem - the difficulty of communication between ordinary minds and super-intellects - was not examined. The key, of course, was the narrator's father - a genius but not a super-genius - and the real story should have been of the difficult relationship between father and son. (It would not then have been '50s **Astounding**, of course.) Their difficulties could be worked out against the background of the original story of the Nursery. Again I would have to give thought to a more effective ending, something tying up the two strands of the plot. (I haven't found it yet.)

These are my personal answers to 'Why do it?' - a matter of trying to get it right. I think that **The Sea and Summer** gets it right (in my terms, that is; reader judgement may say otherwise) but **A Game on the Nursery Floor** looks like being a more difficult proposition, full of technical traps to be cleared without the reader noticing. And I only wanted to write a nice, easy thriller without pretension to be anything more than a good yarn...

(Acquisition of a word processor helped not at all. An invention of the devil!)

LETTERS

Samuel R. Delany
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Thank you for the copies of **ASFR**. It's wonderful to see it back [...] Please thank Mr Blackwell for his astutely perceptive article on **Stars/Sand.**

> The name you used for Mr Blackford has dissatisfied me with this world; having pondered upon Blackwell - its mysterious depths, from which vivifying draughts may be drawn up by the bucketful - what can a Blackford seem, but muddied shallows? (Exit, pursued by Blackfords.) (YR)

Martin Bridgstock
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Nathan Qld 4111

Rosaleen Love makes a good point (**ASFR** September 1986) when she characterizes Asimov's portrayal of science as being of the 1950s. However, I think she underrates 'The Dead Past'.

The government does not suppress the chronoscope 'because continually reliving the past, the dead past, will be bad for us'. The suppression is because the chronoscope can effectively be used to view the present; privacy, as we understand it, would cease to exist.

The two themes of `The Dead Past' make it difficult to fit into the formulae of any era. One theme - that uncontrolled scientific research can have disastrous consequences - would not be palatable to the gung-ho technocrats of the 'fifties. The other - that the government can have reasons for what it does, yet be unable to state them - would not please many of today's intelligentsia. For this reason, I rate it an important and interesting story.

> I share your opinion of `The Dead Past', which carries a complex emotional charge rare both in Asimov's work and in sf generally. It also contains one of my favourite ripostes, when - many years in the future - Dr Foster is being warned that he will rot in jail with no lawyer, no trial and no formal accusation: `"Oh, no," said Foster, "you're bluffing. This is not the twentieth century, you know."' (YR)

Robert A. W. Lowndes
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All thanks to you [John Foyster] (or to whoever else was responsible) for sending me issues number 3 and 4 of volume one. I'm hooked.[...]

> Your letter - although delightful in tone and substance - has fuelled our fears that **The Flying Dutchman** has grappled the ship on which copies of **ASFR** 1 and 2 went surface-mail to America, and that these issues are simply voyaging around the globe until the last trump. They ought to have come ashore long before issues 3 and 4. (YR)

Patrick McGuire
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I think I'll start with Cherry Wilder's column [in **ASFR** 4] since that has more or less local interest for me. Her German is obviously much

better than mine, as demonstrated by her German transliteration of Chernobyl and by the fact that she got plugged into a lot of the German media and political overreaction that was sliding right by me. In the recent state elections here in Bavaria, where we got more Chernobyl fallout than most of Germany, the habitually dominant, and pronuclear, conservatives retained a parliamentary majority. The socialists and the Greens both ran on anti-nuclear planks, but I think the socialists were seen as somewhat opportunistic converts to this philosophy. The Greens picked up enough votes to go over the 5% threshold and thus get seats in the parliament, but it was almost equally at the expense of the other two parties. For Bavaria, then, this didn't mean a whole lot. If, however, the same pattern should obtain nationally where the major parties are more closely balanced, the Greens with maybe just over 5% of the vote could end up determining the next West German government. Thus it seems to be too early to tell what sort of long-term impact there will be. There are enough differences between Soviet reactors and general approach to engineering questions and Western ones, that it is much less clear to me than it seems to be to Cherry that there are any new lessons to be drawn here for the West. The Soviets themselves, who could certainly ill afford the economic cost and the international embarrassment of a second Chernobyl, seem ready to stick with nuclear power.

I also saw the film on Bradley that Cherry mentions [`Taking Leave of the American Dream - The erotic fantasies of Marion Zimmer Bradley']. She fails to convey the sheer wrongheadedness of the thing. The basic orientation is that we are to be astounded that someone could live in modern urban America and write fantasy. One way of illustrating, not to say hitting the viewer over the head with, this contrast is lots of establishing shots of freeways with a soundtrack of American music. Country music, as I recall, it never having entered the filmmaker's head that there was a dichotomy here between soundtrack and image. Bah!

I would much rather read Blackford on Delany than be obliged to read Delany. If, however, we assume with Blackford that Delany either wants to be logically consistent or at least ought to want to be logically consistent, I think that with **Stars** (as described) Delany is describing a rather silly use of pronouns, principally in

that this is a distinction in the third person that doesn't show up in the second person. This is of course true of gender in English (he/she, but you), but the person addressed already knows his/her gender. Distinctions that indicate something non-obvious - social status or familiarity/endearment - either exist only in the second person (e.g., formal vs familiar `you' in many languages), or are preserved both in direct address and in narration. And surely it's more important for the sexual-exciter to know than for any third parties.

> In **Stars**, the use of the pronoun `him' is informative in the first instance to the person being sexually excited - it is a linguistic reflex bypassing the sense of `what is fitting' which (in our world) may cause people to deny to themselves that their feeling really is excited by its apparent object. In the novel, Rat Korga says of his world (which uses language as we do), `On my world "he" was what everyone, male or female, wanted to be ... perhaps the males thought they were a little closer to it. On your world and, I have been told, on the vast majority of others, "he" is what everyone, male or female, wants to have. Perhaps all of us are equally far away from that.' (YR)

John D. Berry
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[Referring to the September 1986 editorial:] Incidentally, just how can a five-member collective live equally on either side of the Yarra? Which of you dosses down in the river each night?

Cherry Wilder's column in **ASFR** 4 is a bit disconnected after the initial paragraphs on Chernobyl, but entertaining nonetheless. It's always a small shock to be reminded of the relativity of points of view - not just by the different reactions of people in West Germany, but by details like her spelling Chernobyl in the German fashion, `Tschernobyl'. (Both spellings, of course, are adaptations to the

Latin alphabet, but using the spelling conventions of two different Western languages.) Her descriptions send my mind into meandering paths, making me think how the Chernobyl reporting might have differed in Australia and the United States (here in the Pacific Northwest we were in the path of the cloud as it blew over the Pole, and the disaster fueled a lot of rethinking and renewed protest over proposals for a national nuclear-waste dump, and the cumulative effects of past nuclear tests in the deserts of Utah and Nevada), and other divergences of perspective, such as how the Australian news media have reported the unheavals in South Africa and how their reports and the emphasis they give the stories might differ in a country without the large African-derived black population of the United States.

> Nothing of the Mean Editor rests in the river; merely, the location of the Sussex fifth varies - she lives sometimes in Kensington and sometimes in Yarra Glen (both on the wrong, or northern, side of the Yarra). Now, however, the Foyster fifth has not only transferred to the wrong side of the Yarra but has also elongated the Aggregate Editorial Entity by an ungainly 7 degrees 15 minutes (more than 600 kilometres) in a north-westerly direction - so symmetry and grace are gone; but not (we insist!) `The Long View'. (YR)

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