

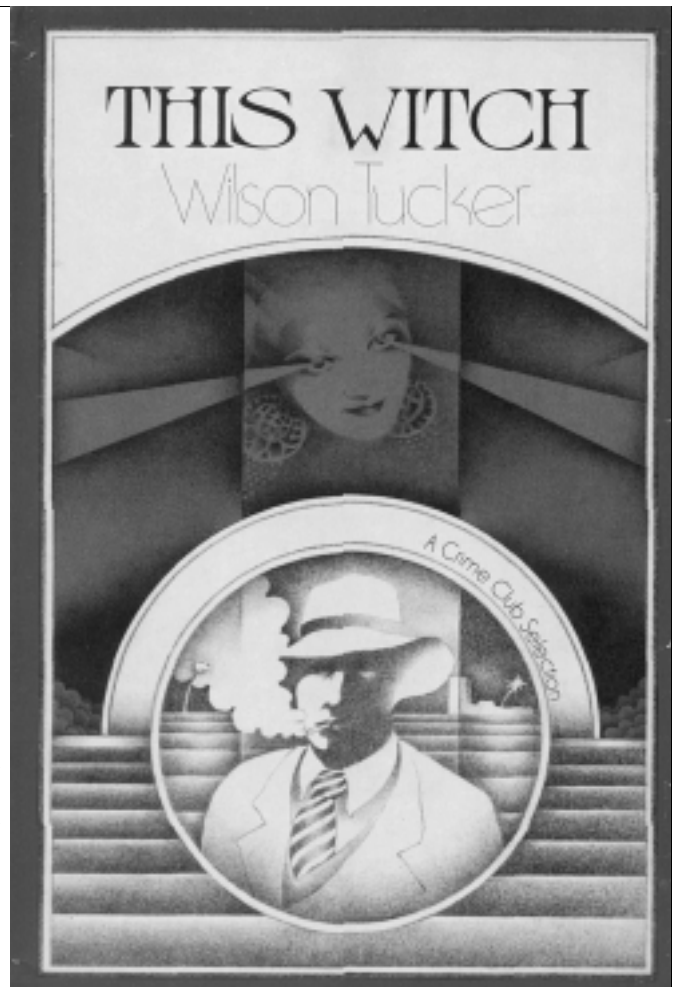
his wanderings throughout the world, and he is eventually successful in this venture, though not without suffering artillery attacks, wounds, wasted time, double agents and vicious guerrillas before finding the treasure. In the process he falls in love with Kelly, who remains always an enigma.

Finally Ross learns something about Kelly, thanks to the Israeli agent he had dealt with. She is a witch from the Sudanese Islands. Ross learns from a book lent to him that such witches are hated and feared by the islanders, and so are given away by their parents. He also learns that not all men fear such witches: 'Some men had mated with witches and profited thereby . . . But yet the witch paid an unhappy price for helping another, for listening to the secret winds and reading the webs of the future, for aiding the man who had tamed her. She paid, not the man — *that* was necessary to the male fantasy . . . for every favour, for every reading of the future, for every benefit given man for his welfare and profit, the witch paid with a day from the end of her life.' Knowing this, and having many times offered Kelly her freedom to go, Ross decides to allow Kelly to go with him on his next adventure.

One reviewer claimed that the character of Kelly made *This Witch* a sexist book. Certainly the idea of allowing a woman to actually give up part of her time on earth to aid a man is troubling. Tucker himself points out how much this reeks of male fantasy. Perhaps the important idea is that this is one of those rare fantasies and odd stories which is seemingly true.

Tucker has never used a female as his lead character, which is not too surprising in a genre which usually emphasises male detectives. But he has created a number of intriguing female characters. Tucker uses basically three types of female characters: the scheming, amoral female villain: Betty, Lonna Randolph, Fugere and Stone; the exotic woman whom the hero inevitably falls in love with — Annette and Kelly as prime examples, while even Irma Louise has an exotic tone, and these are the oriental sisters of *The Chinese Doll*. These are basically stock figures from the genre, done with Tucker's own touches. But Tucker is at his best in painting the intelligent, generally capable female character, such as Elizabeth Saari, Leila Dove, Ellen Miller of *The Man in My Grave* and Karen Collins of *The Warlock*. These women are able to combine elements of mystery and attractiveness with their other characteristics. These are strong, believable characters, the sort of female characters one likes to find in their genre fiction. Certainly it is not surprising that Tucker works with the other type of female characters, considering that they are common in the genre, and fun to do, but it would be nice to see him concentrate his efforts on the more elemental female characters.

The transitional and modern periods contain books which are well researched and well written, books which emphasise character more, and rely less on plot devices. The background becomes as important as the plot. Tucker has obviously become a more mature writer, one who is willing to take more time with his books, probably because he enjoys the research. Certainly they reflect Wilson Tucker, the mystery



writer, taking more pains with his art.

But the later books lack something. They are not as fun to read as the Charles Horne books, in many ways, but especially to fans. The Tuckerisms have been disappearing slowly, and I, for one, miss them. Certainly, the fan who picks up a recent Tucker mystery will be getting a good book for his money, even if he can't read it with the superior feeling of knowing something that most other readers don't. Still, Tuckerisms are fun, as was the not-entirely-serious attitude with which the early Tucker novels are permeated.

The Man in My Grave seems to me to be the book which comes closest to combining the two most enjoyable elements of the Tucker mysteries — the researched backgrounds and interesting characters and the fun. Perhaps my choice of this as my favourite Tucker mystery reflects my bias towards older mystery novels, particularly those with a true crime aspect, and away from the spy novel. But I think it is a book any fan would enjoy.

A science fiction fan who has never had the chance to read a Tucker mystery is missing something. He's missing finding out what kind of a mystery Wilson Tucker, the science fiction writer, can write. He's missing finding out what kind of a mystery writer Bob Tucker, the fan, is. But most of all, he's missing some very entertaining books.

— Lesleigh Luttrell, 1974

The science fiction

Author's introduction, 1976:

'As I've mentioned several times within 'Hidden Heroes', this article is designed as a long footnote — or pre-note — to the article I wrote in 1971 about Tucker's *The Year of the Quiet Sun*. It aims to show by what stages Wilson Tucker became the writer who was able to write *Quiet Sun*. It fulfils this aim by a method that some may think unnecessarily longwinded. If you think this, you are probably right; it's just my way of setting down, not only what is in the novels but, more importantly, what it is like to experience the novels. If you think this article unnecessarily worshipful to Tucker, again you are probably right. I wrote it during the three months preceding the World Convention held in Melbourne during August 1975, and hoped very much to give a copy of the *SFC* containing the article to Tucker when he was visiting Melbourne. A bit late, Bob, but here it is:'

Introduction 2003:

Ice and Iron and *Resurrection Days* are the only two Wilson Tucker novels to appear since *The Year of the Quiet Sun*. **Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell** review the former, and I've added a note about the latter. Tucker's responses to both the 1971 and 1976 articles appear at the end of this magazine.

Bruce Gillespie

Hidden heroes: The science fiction novels of Wilson Tucker

Warning: This article also reveals the ends of some novels.

'Bob Tucker is an honest man,' writes Robert Bloch about his long-time friend and verbal duelling partner. 'He has always gone his own way, governing his life pattern with the same quiet determination which marks his progress as a professional writer. He is neither a blatant exhibitionist nor a timid conformist' (quoted in Harry Warner Jr's *All Our Yesterdays*).

'Bob' Tucker is also Arthur Wilson Tucker, the author of nine science fiction novels and twelve mystery/adventure novels. Even the most careful readers tend to confuse the two figures. It's not difficult to see why.

'He has become a legend in his own time,' writes Bloch. 'It is impossible to imagine this curious microcosm, science fiction fandom, as it might have evolved without his influence.' Bob Tucker, the fan, is so much of a legend that in science fiction fans raised a large sum of money to give him a trip to Australia in 1975. When most readers of *SF Commentary* hear the name of Tucker, they are more likely to think of the jovial dispenser of Beam's Choice and good cheer at conventions, or the witty, irreverent writer of articles for fanzines, than they are to think of the science fiction writer whose work (again in Bloch's words) 'is

to science fiction what Graham Greene's "entertainments" are in relation to the average whodunit'.

It's hard to find Wilson Tucker hiding behind the longer, leaner shadow of Bob Tucker. They are so much like each other. Bob Tucker is known as one of the most amiable figures in fandom. When I think of Wilson Tucker, I get the same impression. His books contain few villains, little violence, no explicit sex scenes and little of the gnashing-of-teeth or adrenalin-powered supermen that spoil so much other science fiction. Tucker's novels and his characters are so disarmingly *pleasant*. Most confusingly, we keep finding Tucker himself (but Wilson or Bob?) right in the middle of the books:

[Benjamin Steward was] a lanky, slow-speaking and slow-moving individual [who] seemed colourless, almost useless . . . Steward's amiable face, like his clothing and manners . . . was nondescript. He and his habits belonged to no particular age, reflected no particular pattern in life . . . Benjamin Steward gave the appearance of being perpetually at peace with the world, seemingly unmoved by it or caring little or nothing for it . . . He was tall, appallingly thin, with unkempt hair and an unhurried metabolism. (*The Lincoln Hunters*)

Surely that's Tucker describing himself, much as he appears to other people. It's not the only such portrait. In *Ice and Iron*, a novel published sixteen years later, we meet:

Fisher Yann Highsmith [who] was too tall, too thin, and too long to cast a decent shadow before the sun . . . His two most persistent problems were getting his long legs and big feet in and out from under desks and workbenches and standing upright outdoors in gale winds off the glacier.

Or, in *Time Bomb*:

Danforth was taller, leaner, hardened. He wore his hair in a crew cut solely because of the ease of grooming it. His features were plain and undistinguished, a prime asset for a man who occasionally worked in plain clothes.

Tucker's main characters even have the same kind of tastes and ways of enjoying themselves. In *The Lincoln Hunters*: 'Obeying an impulse, [Steward] sat down on the dew-wet grass and spread his hands, letting his fingers curl about the tufts of grass. The sod was cool and refreshing.' In *Time Bomb*, Danforth experiences his most pleasurable moment when he is 'sprawled on the bare wooden planking of the small dock . . . in a warm, lazy, and — for him — reckless mood. Stripped to his waist, and with trouser legs rolled up, he dangled bare feet in the water. An occasional motorboat or a swimmer near the far shore was the only visual reminder that an outside world existed. Danforth was at peace with himself.'

Peace, self-contentment, the love of the countryside, the ability neither to give in to the world nor to push it around — all these are so often aspirations of Tucker's characters that it is easy to think of his novels as nine books featuring the one main character. Tucker is famous for his practice of 'Tuckerisation', of giving to his characters the names of people who are known only inside the world of science fiction readers. We might suspect Tucker of reverse Tuckerisation; of taking the character of Bob Tucker and giving it different names in different novels. Appreciate the writer and you like the books.

However, most readers of Wilson Tucker have never met Bob Tucker the person. Yet even these readers will find at the centre of each of Wilson Tucker's novels an immensely likable figure with a life of his own. He is a casual, wisecracking, relaxed figure who still has an intense interest in archaeology and nature and takes very seriously any task he sets himself. His conversation is light and rambling, yet he knows when to keep quiet. He is efficient and calm in a tight spot, yet makes too many mistakes for him ever to become a company executive. People notice him in a crowd, yet he is unnecessarily modest. This figure of fiction, given such names as Danforth, Paul Breen and Benjamin Steward, is as real and enjoyable to meet as a Pierre Bezuhov, a Leopold Bloom or a Dorothea Brooke. When we know him, we feel that we have come a long way towards knowing the novelist.

Yet, even saying this, we must suspect the thought and look again at the books. Suppose that Bob Tucker had simply written about himself and his friends.

Would the novels have become anything more than rollicking accounts of circumstantial adventures? Wouldn't they have bogged down in the trite, the sentimental and the confessional? How do we account for the dark side of Tucker's books: the grim 1953 of *Wild Talent*, and the even grimmer accounts of the year 2000 in *Time Bomb* and *The Year of the Quiet Sun*; the enslaving logic of a Sister or Russell Gary's maniac challenge to a whole world; the anonymous deaths of such remarkable minor figures as Gregg Hodgkins or Major Moresby; the general theme of unfulfilled dreams? Surely these are more than the outpourings of a man saying merely, 'Here am I; look at me'?

Can we become so interested in the surface features, especially the main characters, of Tucker's worlds, that we forget about the books? The 'Tucker figure' is *not* the same in each book. The lively figure prancing in the foreground puts on a different mask for each play. I want to look at those masks — but also I want to look at the scenery, examine the stories and perhaps find quite different Tuckers. Perhaps Wilson Tucker is not just the amiable midwestern, quiet-speaking Everyman he makes himself out to be? Where do we find the Wilson Tucker, the novelist, the figure right off the stage, holding it in his hands, giving all of it life? I'm as interested to find out as you are, since 'Hidden Heroes' is more of an exploration than an exposition.

The prairies of heaven

1951: *The City in the Sea*

The City in the Sea has never been thought much of a success by anybody, including the author. Yet it is the beginning of Wilson Tucker's career in science fiction (five years after Tucker's first mystery novel). A pilgrimage must have a beginning; Tucker's current position on his journey as a novelist is so distinguished that we might reasonably expect to find in his first novel some clues to his eventual success.

Readers of science fiction have forgotten the ambitiousness of *The City in the Sea*. Tucker attempted to rid himself of most of the then-current preconceptions about 'the way an SF story oughta go'. In 1951, most of the characters in SF were men. A woman might make an occasional appearance as a weeping heroine. In 1951, in *The City in the Stars*, all the characters except one are women. Not only that but, early in the novel, two of the women show that they are in love with each other. A lesbian love affair, in 1951, in a science fiction book? 1951 was about the time when SF writers started to write plots like Minoan mazes, and took pride in perplexing readers. In 1951, Tucker makes quite a serious attempt to leave out the plot altogether. He's just not interested in shenanigans or melodramatics. I don't know how he ever sold the book and, to this day, I don't suppose he does either. Science fiction is not a field in which an author breaks the rules without getting hurt. At any rate, nobody seems to like the book, it's been out of print for years, and I guess I'm rather lucky to have a copy. And patience enough to discover that *The City in the Sea* is not completely worthless, after all.

If *The City in the Sea* has little 'plot', it certainly has

a pleasant enough story. At the beginning of the book, a man wanders into the army camp established by the colonists who control Western Somerset. This is the eastern coastal region of a large continent (a future, depopulated North American continent, as we discover later in the book). The man is something of an oddity in the camp, as all the troops are women. The visitor cannot speak. He is bronzed, well muscled and does not resist capture. He is certainly not one of those week-kneed striplings of men that the army left behind at home across the Atlantic.

Doctor Barra takes up the pleasurable task of performing a complete physiological examination of the captive, but Captain Zee, the commanding officer, worries about his probable effect on morale. Any novelty can disturb morale, especially when the troops are stuck in a country where it rains most of the time and the sun rarely breaks through the clouds. 'The sea was rough for swimming, the mountains hard to climb, there was little else to do but range the coast — one thousand, four hundred and sixty-two miles of it.'

The City in the Sea is the story of people who find unexpected new directions for the paths of their lives. The troops have never imagined any possibility but returning from this rainy, miserable country east across the ocean to 'home' — the England of the future. Now 'Wolf' (the name given to the mute stranger) points westward, across mountains thought uncrossable. He makes signs on a map to show that, somewhere out west, there is a 'city in the sea'. Although she remains cautious, Captain Zee cannot resist the bait. 'The known was known,' she tells Barra, 'and under complete control. But now . . . a stray appears . . . and he carries a scar made by a weapon we've never dreamed of before.' However, Zee is still primarily a military commander. She will not admit that she seeks adventure. Instead, she says, 'For our own safety we have to find what — or who — is out there.' We can almost follow the line of her thinking — a good thousand-mile hike will do wonders for morale and keep the troops fit. Like the viewpoints of many of Tucker's main characters, Captain Zee's is rather limited.

Zee might be a disciplinarian, but she is hardly another Patton, and she doesn't know her soldiers very well. 'I've noticed some things, little things,' says Zee to Barra, as the column tramps onward, led silently by Wolf. 'The troops are imitating some of [Wolf's] habits and mannerisms. If it goes too far, it can lead to a serious breakdown in morale and discipline . . . Have you noticed that the troops fall to the ground and drink out of the streams now?' Zee is still so busy looking at the prim rule-book on the end of her nose that she cannot see the playground of the prairie that stretches away at her feet. The troops have discovered what is, to them, a heaven. Wolf has led them away from the drizzling coastal plain, along a previously unknown tunnel through the mountain, and outward and onward over the endless prairies. Zee is the last person to notice that people might need to change so that they can enjoy a new world.

Zee won't allow her conscious mind to deviate an inch from the true path of discipline and loyalty to the mother country. But even Zee, in one unconscious gesture, starts to free herself. 'She took off her jacket

to expose her shoulders to the warming rays of the sun, and noted with a small shock that most of the troops had done likewise.' When Wolf deserts the group, inexplicably, for some time, Zee discovers, almost with annoyance, that she is in love with the man. Even she realises, almost with surrender and enjoyment of the fact, that 'she held but the vaguest of notions where they were going, had nothing more than a shimmering image of their goal, had no concrete plan of action or single direction of movement beyond *movement* . . .' She loses her sense of direction in order to find a direction.

The trouble with *The City in the Sea* is that it loses direction as well. Tucker allows form to follow content a bit too closely. Not long after it begins, the book holds but the vaguest of notions where it is going, shows no concrete plan of action, and proceeds in no single direction of movement beyond movement. Tucker sets out to tell the story of a quest but, instead, describes a static idyll, interrupted by episodic adventures. The reader can lose interest as easily as he or she could watch the neighbour's slides of a recent beach holiday.

When we read *The City in the Sea*, all we do is watch pale lantern slides. We remain bystanders in the stalls, looking onto the screen of heaven. We are never inside the book; when he wrote *The City in the Sea*, Tucker did not seem to know how to take us there. Tucker tries to take us along for an enjoyable adventure, but he does not let us get to know the nice people whose company we are supposed to find so pleasurable. We *look at* these amiable people; we *overhear* conversations. '[Zee] tried to wipe tobacco smoke out of the air with her hand': a nice detail that shows that Tucker knows these people. For a moment, he shows Zee to us quite clearly. She stands before us . . . then retreats. She begins to give orders and organise the expedition. She disappears into the haze of undifferentiated chatter and peremptory adventures.

The City in the Sea lacks a centre because Tucker is so coy in the way he reveals Captain Zee to us. Soon after she has met the mysterious man from over the mountains, Zee notices that 'Wolf had precious little fear and respect for anything, much less her . . . She didn't want any man her equal, much less her master.' Without making an attempt to do anything much, Wolfe provides a powerful stimulant. From stimulation, Zee proceeds to arousal, then attraction, shown in isolated sentences and incidents throughout the book. 'Unable to untangle her chaotic thoughts or even understand a queer new emotion now playing havoc with her mental stability, he was woodenly plodding alongside the man a space later who happened to glance down and discover she was still holding his arm. Zee hooked the fingers of both hands in her belt.' Several chapters after that, she decides that she wants to follow the dolt.

If *The City in the Sea* is meant to be any particular type of book, it is meant to be a social comedy. It tells the story of how a group of nice but fettered people find a better way to live. It does this by showing how one of these people, Captain Zee, puts up a brave, silly fight against liberation. The book is comic and social because, even in this first SF novel, Tucker knows how people talk to each other. Real people hold real conversations here — and sometimes I think that

Tucker is the only SF writer we can say this about.

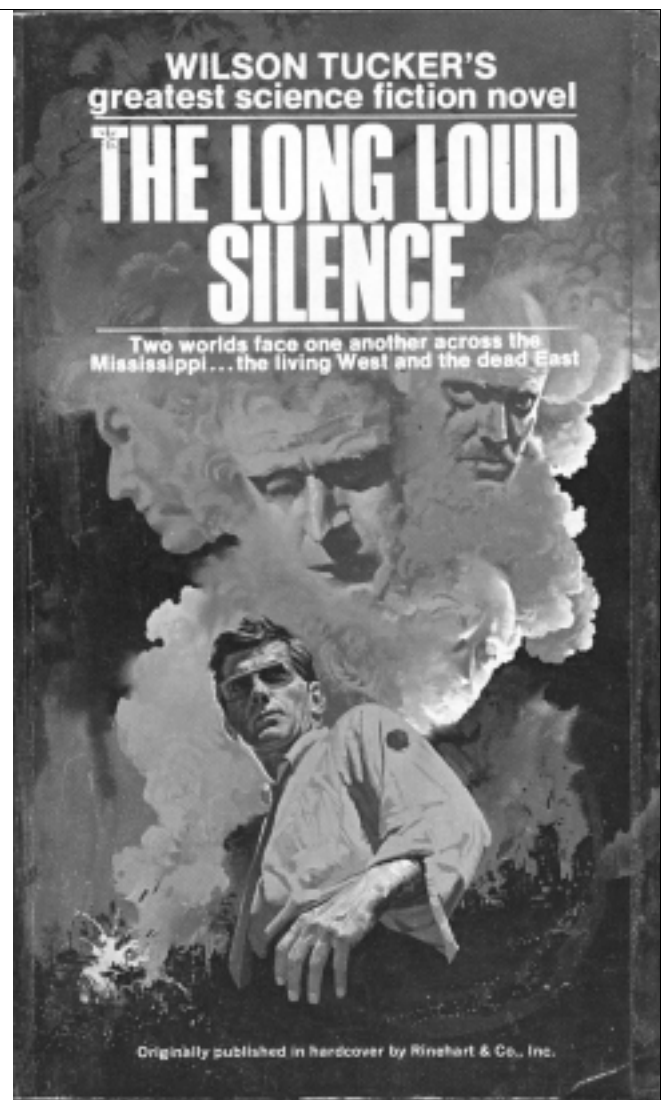
The City in the Sea tries to be an adventure story as well, although quite violent incidents pass over the reader like stray clouds. It tries to be a book of speculation about the future of a depopulated world, yet shows nothing about the transatlantic culture that has colonised the eastern edge of the North American continent. All we know is that women have assumed the power that men have traditionally assumed for themselves in our society until recent years. (Tucker's 1951 satire on reversed sex roles has its own point in 1975.) *The City in the Sea* tries to be several different types of novel, but it cannot make itself into any one of them or harmonise the differences between them. We never really want to find out what happens next, or what this society is like. An adventure novel relies on tensions generated by compulsions (such as pursuit). The people in *The City in the Sea* have set out on a quest, but they do not know their eventual destination and they don't care very much. *The City in the Sea* becomes a frieze of short adventures, framed within a bucolic, relaxed landscape, decorated by nice, vaguely ludicrous people. No element is more important than another, so, in the end, nothing is very important.

Why, after all, do we remember *The City in the Sea*? We don't remember so much the people, or the adventures, or even the magical end of the quest. Instead, we remember the 'slowly twisting streams', the tall grass, the open prairie, and the 'warming rays of the sun'. Here we find the beginnings of an image that dominates the rest of Tucker's science fiction novels: the image of the wide, empty prairies, miraculously freed from the polluting influence of industrialised humans. This is the landscape where a person, or a small group of people, can settle down, build a settlement according to their own specifications, and live free from the influences of armies, corporations and bureaucracies. The colours of this landscape glow more strongly in the book than even Zee's anxious, steadfast face, or Barra's ironical smile, or even the flight of the winged people. They are the colours of the landscape in which people should be allowed to live. In this first novel we find the questions that Tucker asks repeatedly in later novels: in what (physical) conditions can people best live? or, more generally, what is the best way to live? What is of most worth in life?

Ten years in hell

1952: *The Long, Loud Silence*

At the beginning of *The Long, Loud Silence*, Corporal Russell Gary wakes up, puzzled, in a hotel room in a provincial American town. He explores the hotel and finds dead bodies sprawled behind half-opened doors. Nobody else is around. Small bomb craters mark the street outside, but the damage looks too superficial to have killed the town's inhabitants. In the street, Gary surprises a prowler — a girl. She fights him, surrenders to him, and spends the night with him. Russell Gary and Irma Sloane guess that the 'bombs' did not contain explosives the germs of some plague, dropped on the eastern states of the USA by an unknown enemy. They take a car and soon find that



few other people have survived the plague.

Russell Gary has only one idea in mind: he is a corporal in the US Army, and it is his duty to rejoin the army. Apart from anything else, he feels like a deserter. He and Irma drive to the Mississippi River, looking for signs of remaining 'civilisation'. There it is over the river: the US Army, standing guard on the west bank of the Mississippi, preventing anyone crossing from east to west. They are not even interested in army stragglers, not even Russell Gary. To them, he is just Contaminated — cast off, left on the wrong side of the river, to be forgotten about and guarded against. The army has blown up all bridges across the river, placed trip wires underwater along the western shore, and now guards every possible point of crossover. Gary is warned back, and watches people being killed as they make the attempt to swim across.

Meanwhile, Gary has said a casual goodbye to Irma, the one person in this new world who might have helped him.

'Russell, you can't leave me.'

'Watch me,' he stated flatly.

'But Russell, what will I do?' She was frightened.

Gary brought his eyes from the opposite shore. 'Irma, I don't care what you do. There's the car, take it. Can you shoot a gun? There's ammunition and food to last you awhile.'

Like the Ancient Mariner, Gary has rejected the whole world in which he must now live. In particular, this incident is like the Mariner's shooting the albatross. Gary imagines that 'normal America', left intact on the western shore of the Mississippi after the attack, lies on the horizon like a Celestial City. Gary feels that he has been left behind in a kind of hell. He won't even accept the companionship of Irma in this hell; she might tie him back in it. He refuses to admit that he cannot stage a resurrection; he cannot cross back from a geographical 'afterlife' to the life he wants.

Russell Gary prowls the river bank and discovers most of the traps that separate him from the other shore. For the moment, he can find no way over. He meets the easy-going, likable Jay Oliver. In turn, both of them meet Sally, who agrees to share their company (and beds) equally, although she likes Oliver better. As winter approaches, they hike towards the south, and settle on the shore of the Gulf. At this point, *The Long Loud Silence* might have become another *Earth Abides*. (George Stewart's book was published at about the same time.) For the moment, we see the possibility that Gary and his friends might create a place of peace in what they still regard as hostile country.

The trio spent the mild winter months on a long, sparse sliver of land jutting out in the sometimes blue, sometimes green waters of the Gulf; it was a sandy island lying like an outstretching finger offshore from the mainland of eastern Florida and reached only by a wooden causeway . . . The white sandy slope of the beach continued underwater, forcing them to walk out fifty or seventy-five feet to reach a depth fit for fishing. The sea was clear and unruffled and so transparent Gary could see his feet dug in on the bottom.

I would have thought that an ideal way to spend the rest of my life after surviving a national catastrophe: paddling, fishing and enjoying the sights of the changing colours of the Gulf and the pleasant company. But it is not enough for Russell Gary: safety and comfort are merely diversions from his real aims. While Jay, Sally and he are fishing quietly, he can think only about the river barrier. How long will the emergency last? Possibly more than a year? Could he crawl across under the water, following cables that connected the two sides of the river? On and on, day after day. Sally announces that she is expecting a baby; she wants it to be Jay's, even if it isn't. Gary gives Sally a little wooden link chain for Christmas, and leaves the two in their haven. Spring reaches the whole continent, and Gary begins his trek back to the bridge.

In *The Long, Loud Silence*, Russell Gary rides a slow pendulum across the land of the dead. The second stroke of the pendulum pushes him into the company of a trio of amateur desperadoes who are also trying to cross the river. He tells them how to cross the river — information exchanged for a shotgun. But there is no way to cross the river without being killed. As he calculated, Gary is left with the shotgun and two of the trio are left leaderless. Indirectly, Gary has committed his first murder.

Again rejected by the river's defences, and disap-

pointed that the people on the other side do not rebuild the bridges, Gary finds himself in Wisconsin. One day it is autumn; the next day, the winter catches him without shelter or a home in the South. He sees two figures in the snow kill a boy; Gary kills the killers; the boy's rescued sister brings Gary back to her father's farm. It seems that Gary has found another haven. Will he stay there? What possible reason could he have for leaving?

The Hoffman family accepts Gary as a guardian. He does his job well. One night, a bell tinkles in the house, sounding an intruder alarm. Gary goes out to investigate. 'Down the slope a dark bundle of nothing lay on the ground. As he watched, a slow movement of an arm and a hand seemed to detach itself from the shapeless man, seemed to reach out probing fingers for the wires he had strung there.' Gary grabs a poker and sneaks up on the intruder. 'Immediately afterward, Gary thought to dispose of the body.' By this time, Gary has become so efficient a killer that he does not need to see his victim clearly. An intruder is no longer a personal threat; an intruder is simply a 'dark bundle of nothing', an arm and a detached hand, to be disposed of as efficiently as possible. Any stranger who meets Gary soon becomes just a body in the snow.

Gary throws the body on the ice in a creek, where the Hoffmans are unlikely to find it before the spring thaw, and returns to the house:

Just inside the year gate he hurled himself to the frozen ground and aimed at the yawning door, seeking movement within. The man's voice was low, soothing. It went on and on without variation. Gary frowned, jumped forward and halted again, listening to the voices. The voice stopped and some instrument struck three tiny notes.

The notes stirred his memory and he climbed to his feet, swearing softly to himself. The radio was still on . . . There was nothing, no other than himself.

This is the turning point of the novel. Gary has adapted to his environment, if not to his fate. He feels nothing for his hosts, but he protects them while they feed him. He might have stayed there; possibly, eventually, he might have realised his good fortune and enjoyed the company of the few people left alive and willing to trust each other. However, earlier in the night he had discovered that the Hoffmans' radio picks up stations from the western half of the USA. Gary returns to the house, having killed and expecting to kill again. A 'low, soothing' voice reaches out to him. Gary prepared for action. He hears the 'three tiny notes' over the radio. He begins to relax. The only stranger's voice he can accept is that broadcast voice from his dreamland over the river. Plenty of people over there; over here 'there was nothing, no other than himself'.

Gary goes some way towards recognising his position, but he does not make the same conclusion that we do. Gary does not realise that he is alone only because he has shut out, ruthlessly and efficiently, everybody who might have lived in his world. The voices from the radio are sirens' songs. He can no longer think of reconciling himself to this land. Lured

by the syrupy sirens, he must set off for the river again. His mind will give him no further peace until he finds a way over.

This time, the swing of the pendulum actually propels him over the river. The world beyond the river rejects him. Gary is faced with the one possibility that he had never allowed himself to consider: that the people from the east side of the Mississippi really are carriers of plague, and that the authorities on the west side had been quite correct to quarantine half a continent. Forced to flee, Gary feels himself kicked out of heaven. He must cross back from west to east:

The real silence lay on the other side, a silence so complete it was a tangible thing that could be held in the hand. A loud, hurtful silence . . . He had succeeded in crossing the forbidden river only to have his triumph hurled in his face, and now he was literally crawling back again with nothing left to him but his life, a naked and defenceless body returning to the dead silence.

In *The Long, Loud Silence*, Russell Gary keeps behaving in unexpected ways. He does not form a utopia in the wilderness, as we keep expecting. He does not have a mystical, Ancient Mariner vision when he lands back in his 'own' territory. Now that he realises that he has 'nothing left to him but his life', why won't he cut his emotional ties with the safe, civilised part of the continent? Why won't he accept the challenge of finding a new life in this empty land?

When looking at *The Long, Loud Silence*, I've used the terms 'heaven' and 'hell' as the two sides of the books' continental stage setting. I am not trying to get into theological arguments. I don't want to make speculations about the author's religious convictions or lack of them (my own feeling is that few SF writers other than Tucker have so little respect for religious trappings and dogma, and so much religious respect for human values). 'Heaven' and 'hell' are convenient colloquial terms to describe the extremes of human experience. 'Heaven', in Wilson Tucker's novels, is the way we would most like to live, and 'hell' is the way we would most not like to live. These are the two poles that enclose the worlds of Tucker's novels. In *The City in the Sea*, Tucker draws a very sketchy, rather dull map of a heaven. In *The Long, Loud Silence*, Tucker paints a more detailed, ambiguous landscape of hell. The setting of *The Long, Loud Silence* could also be a pleasant environment. It is not a scene from a horror movie; it is potentially a scene from a nature movie. Only the people are gone, and this is what Gary hates. This landscape, which could be a paradise, is a hell only because Gary thinks of it as such. He declares a state of war between himself and the world he must live in. It's not surprising that the world takes up the challenge:

He had to find something to eat.

Three days without food were aching his stomach with pain, causing his guts to rumble and ache . . . The plain before him was clear white and bright with fresh-fallen snow. Nothing moved across his vision . . . The hillside was barren of life or movement as he emerged into the open, and he rose to his knees the better to search the field below

and the rising slope of the hill behind him. A man had very nearly killed him there, three or four years before.

At the base of the hill Gary settled down against the white frozen ground, unmoving, unlistening, his taut nostrils held to the wintry air. There was nothing, no one beside himself . . . The snowy plain remained empty and silent, dead. An old concrete highway crossed the middle of it, crumbling away.

As in all of Tucker's novels, only the ending gives full meaning to the rest of the book. At the beginning of *The Long, Loud Silence*, Gary seems to be just an ordinary sort of bloke who has been trapped by a catastrophe. However, the catastrophe offered him the chance to choose his own new world (which I take to be the overall theme of most of SF's 'post-disaster' novels). This is the world that he chose. He has lost all those features that we call human. By the end of the novel, he lives quite alone, hunting food, killing all intruders, even other humans, who approach him. His reflexes have become like an animal's ('his taut nostrils held to the wintry air') and his mind as unsympathetic and opportunistic as a wolf's. Not only has he lost hope, but he cannot remember what hope is. The landscape itself is not hopeless; it is merely neutral. Humanity's concrete highways are crumbling, but 'the plain before him was clear, white and bright with fresh-fallen snow'. Other survivors might have found beauty here; Gary sees only his own hatred and isolation reflected back at him. Tucker himself has said that the original version of the novel finished with an episode of cannibalism. Compare such an ending with the current one. Who was the survivor?¹

The City in the Sea is a failure because, by and large, it describes only a heaven. *The Long, Loud Silence* is almost a failure because it describes only a hell. I think that Tucker set out to write a splendidly misanthropic novel (one in which he negates everything in the world he finds valuable in life by showing a man who rejects those values), and his editors did not allow him to finish the job properly. Alternately, we can become insensitive to the book because its author insists on banging our heads against a wall. On one level, *The Long, Loud Silence* is just a well-written adventure book; Gary captures Irma, Gary lets her go, troops fire on Gary at the river, Gary

1 Thanks to Bob Tucker for getting in touch with Ken Keller, who kindly sent me a copy of *Nickelodeon* No. 1, undated, 1975, which includes the intended last chapter, the 'cannibalism ending', to *The Long, Loud Silence*. There is very little difference between Chapter 13 of the book version and the intended Chapter 13. In the book version, Gary revives his intended last victim, who turns out to be the girl he had met ten years before at the beginning of his pilgrimage. In the original version, he doesn't. The girl has prepared a cooking pot for him; the last line makes it clear the actual use to which the cooking pot will be put. Will the original ending will finally make it into the book in some future reprint edition?

arranges to kill the oafish vagabond, kills an intruder here, escapes a mugging there. There are really too many scenes where nothing is happening except somebody hitting somebody else. Many pages of dialogue read like the script of a television show ("They're waiting for us there." "Who is?" "I don't know. Honest I don't. The whole damned army, I guess. We're just supposed to deliver these trucks." "Why? What's in them?" "Some gold. Gold bricks." "You're lying." Et cetera.) One character even says, 'Now don't get no funny notions.' After ambling his way through his first SF novel, Tucker sets such a brisk pace in his second that the reader feels quite out of breath.

The Long, Loud Silence shows that there are two Wilson Tuckers. Wilson Tucker No. 1 is a larger-than-life embodiment of Bob Tucker the person. We read about the world as he experiences it; the people he knows, the places and landscapes he likes to watch, the ideas he thinks about. This Tucker can write a page of dialogue that makes the reader want to step into the page and yarn the night away with the characters. We get to know the American midwest as well as Tucker knows it. This Tucker tells us about life as he would like to live it, and about the people with whom he would like to live it.

Wilson Tucker No. 2 is a Science Fiction Writer, devoted to the world of telepathy, lightning chases, time machines and dystopias. He gives shape to the worlds of our most violent, gaudy dreams. He knows his way around the actionscapes of the movies. He can write a thriller that makes us feel the knife in our own ribs. This is life as Tucker would not want to live it — which means that sometimes it is more accurate than the life of the novels of Tucker No. 1.

The two Tuckers do not always get along well with each other. In the early novels, they appear as opposites. *The City in the Sea* is the work of Tucker No. 1. So are (in general) *The Time Masters*, *Time Bomb* and *Ice and Iron*. *The Long, Loud Silence* is a world of Tucker No. 2 (and so are the worlds of *Wild Talent* and *To the Tombaugh Station*). The two Tuckers are reconciled only in *The Lincoln Hunters* and *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, which are his two most successful novels.

The Long, Loud Silence gives us too much of Tucker No. 2. Appalling catastrophe is followed by pages of uninteresting, comic-book dialogue, action adventure and strategy planning. The book has so much grinding *mechanism*, so much happening for the sake of happening. On other pages, we are encouraged to get to know people like Gary, Oliver and the Hoffmans. *The Long, Loud Silence* works because Gary is a walking metaphor. It would have been better if he had been a great person, instead of only a great monomaniac. We need to be able to see through and with Gary, as well as at him, Tucker could not, and would not let himself do that when he wrote *The Long, Loud Silence*. Perhaps he was afraid to live within and through the monster he had created. In this book, Tucker tries to write a genre thriller, yet break every rule of the genre. It is a daring book, pungent, cruel and refreshing. It is also too oppressive to come quite alive. If it had been the novel that Tucker had set out to write, *The Long, Loud Silence* would have been a great novel indeed, and not merely a notable second novel.

The time of their lives

1953: *The Time Masters*

'Gilbert Nash waited motionless in the rainswept darkness, a tall and lonely figure unseen and unsuspected in the drenched night.' Darkness, rain, a lonely figure and the tang of suspenseful awareness — in one sentence, Wilson Tucker blends all the flavours of *The Time Masters*. Here is our first meeting with Gilbert Nash, the man who might have overpowered the world, but who chooses to remain 'unseen and unsuspected' for all of his long life.

Gilbert Nash works as a private detective in the city of Knoxville, Tennessee. One of his clients has been murdered, only a few days after he had visited Nash's office. During that visit, Gregg Hodgkins had told the story of his mysterious marriage. Carolyn, his wife, had only just left him, after a relationship that Hodgkins had found very satisfying. A few days after Hodgkins has been found dead, Gilbert Nash waits near the house where the crime took place. He prepares to break in.

As he waits in the silence, Gilbert Nash thinks about his recently alive client. 'Hodgkins had helped to build the means of manning a starship on the incredibly long flight to Tau Ceti . . . Hodgkins deserved at least a small monument for that feat, but he wouldn't get it. He would likely get no public recognition at all.' Hodgkins had married a woman he loved but couldn't understand. After she leaves him, he realises that she had been retrieving scientific information from him during the whole time of their marriage. He had built a trap for himself, constructed from his own intelligence and passion. Now Nash wants to find Hodgkins' killer, as well as Carolyn Hodgkins, the widow. They could be the same person. But he cannot restore justice to the bewildered, anonymous man. The obituary would prattle only of the commonplace, the small gravestone would remain blank but for name and appropriate dates.' Gregg Hodgkins had been swept away in the river of time. Nash is left high and dry as impartial witness, as he had been throughout history.

But we, as readers, are allowed to be witnesses as well. We stand in the rain with Nash, and ponder the situation with him. As Nash breaks into the house, we move inside with him. Nash 'put his weight to the door. It was solid and unyielding. He placed his hands against one corner of the plywood and pressed in, gently easing the nails free of their grip. When a small space had been opened he reached through and turned the knob from the inside. The door opened to him. He stepped silently into the dark kitchen and closed the door behind him, pushing the plywood back into place. The house smelled of stale cigars, of musty unclean odours.' The 'blackened silence of the dead house' surrounds Nash and us. We listen with Nash's ears, feel with his fingers and peer into the dark. A few paragraphs make the world of Gilbert Nash into our world. We are off on an adventure of exploration, of both a world and a person.

Nash can find no traces of Carolyn Hodgkins in the house, although she has lived here with her husband for many years. It is as if she had never stepped inside. Nash can find only the scattered remnants of Gregg

Hodgkins's futile life, 'a few books on the bedside table, a rundown alarm clock, a layer of dust'. The police have already taken some artifacts. 'Nash seated himself in one of the overstuffed chairs beside a cold fireplace, laced his fingers together beneath his chin and contemplated the empty darkness. The steady fall of rain was the only sound.'

Gilbert Nash's most striking characteristic is his separation from the people among whom he lives. He lives in a small house on the outskirts of town, he sees few people, has no girlfriends and borrows innumerable textbooks from the local library. The Secret Service wants to know why Nash has never been born, officially. An observer describes him as 'constantly poised for flight . . . always alert for something'. Now Nash has entered a true 'heart of darkness'. He can find no clues. Nobody knows he is here. The darkness and rain shut the world out, or him in. They are comfortable, impassive companions. But still within the silence Nash listens for the unexpected.

'He stiffened in the chair, chopping off his thoughts, as the minute sound carried to him from the kitchen door.' The intruder's approach is betrayed by a series of tiny sounds. The door closes; 'soft, cautious footsteps' creep across the floor, Nash does not leap up in panic. he 'relaxed in the chair with a self-satisfied grin and let the footsteps go their way'. Now the scene has real suspense, because Nash has reacted in the way least appropriate to the heroes of thrillers. Like an Alfred Hitchcock, Tucker has snatched away a stereotyped experience and left in its place an experience filled with life.

The newcomer explores the house, every movement revealed by the sounds of stumbling:

'Hello.'

Her gasp was almost a scream, half smothered and quickly choked off as she remembered where she was. Again her light stabbed out, spotlighting him in the chair.

'Better put that out,' he advised her. 'Neighbors might see it.'

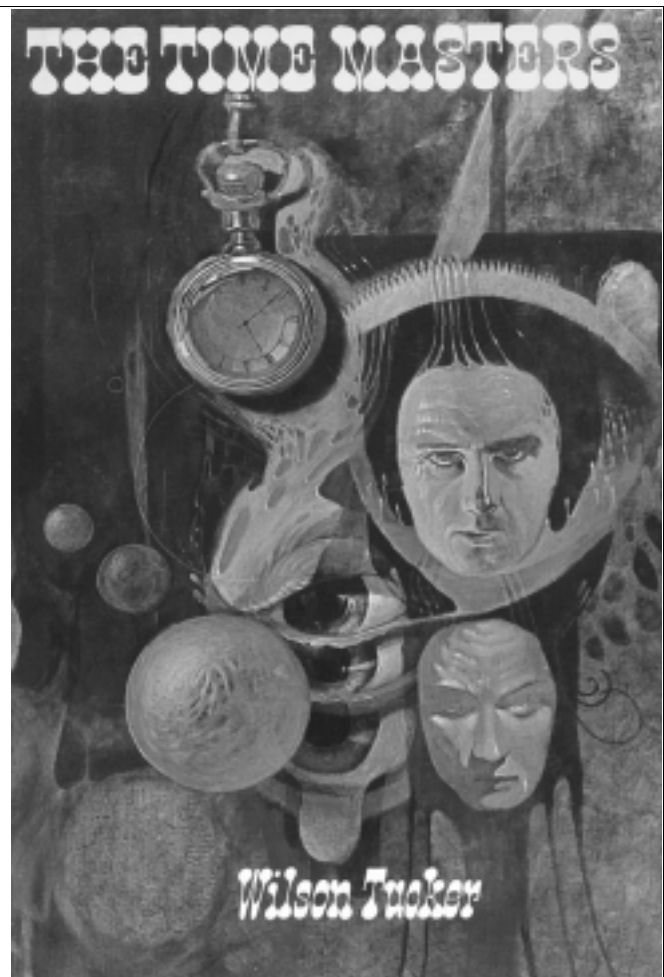
The light stayed on him a moment or two longer and blinked off. He could not see her at all in the new blackness, and knew that she could see him but dimly.

'What are you doing here?' she demanded in fright.

'Meditating.'

Which only goes to show that a few carefully placed words can be more effective than all the melodramatic posing of all the tenth-rate 'heroes' in science fiction. In a single moment, with a single word 'meditating', Gilbert Nash has frightened the woman intruder, begun to calm her fears and has given himself the powerful role of a mystery man with a sense of humour.

The room was enveloped in silence with the two people regarding one another as duelists, each struggling to see the other better in the almost nonexistent light. The rain was a background of continual sound to their duel. The verbal duel is fought out entirely in darkness. It is one of the great scenes in science fiction. Gilbert Nash's antagonist does not accept that he has power over her. She keeps trying to solve the



situation. Gilbert wants to understand a woman who can challenge him so disturbingly. The woman is baffled by his indirect answers to her melodramatic questions and exclamations ("don't move!" "But why not? I'm quite sure you are an attractive woman; you have an attractive voice, and I like the perfume.") Try as he might, Nash can find out little more about her than the bouquet of her perfume and the sound of her voice. In the dark, he holds out a hairpin to her. 'Fashion it into the horns of a bull, hold it over the flame.' Gilbert tries to push the situation off balance; he thinks that he has offered a dangerous challenge. The girl does not understand the challenge (and neither do we, until the last scene of the novel). Gilbert relaxes again. The girl in the dark is *not* Carolyn Hodgkins, as he had thought for a moment. He has not reached the end of his quest, but the girl's challenge offers him the possibility of a new quest. She refuses to shake hands with him before she leaves. "I'll find you," Nash called after her . . . "I shall always remember your voice, even when it has lost its overtones of fright . . . Oh, I'll find you."

Nash does find her again, of course. She is Shirley Hoffman, a staff member of the Secret Service force, and formally hired to keep track on Nash. The important sections of *The Time Masters* are, then, four long conversations: one between Nash and Gregg Hodgkins, two between Nash and Shirley Hoffman and the final encounter between Nash and Carolyn Hodgkins. The rest of the novel is so much cement between the gold bricks.

When they meet again, and after they recognise

each other, Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman share a meal at his house. He chooses the topics of conversation as if he were setting down the pieces of a jigsaw for her to solve. He sets Shirley Hoffman (and the reader) the task of completing the pattern of his own life. He chooses not to reveal it to anybody else. We guess the answers long before Shirley does, so we can take most interest in the progress of the encounter itself.

Nash describes himself to Shirley as an 'ambulant armchair archaeologist': 'I enjoy studying anything to do with people.' As he rambles on about one of his great interests, the fertility rites of ancient Crete, Shirley exclaims, 'You sound as though you *were* there.' Gilbert deflects the implications of this suggestion, but he does not reject it outright. Shirley does not pick up some of the clues that we catch immediately. 'It's a curious thing,' says Nash, seemingly at random, 'but do you know, you humans worship gold above knowledge?' If Shirley is only one of 'you humans', who is Gilbert Nash?

Nash tells Shirley his own story in the third person. He tells her the legends of Gilgamesh, the 'born adventurer' who sought immortality. His story, also giving details of a deluge, has survived on clay tablets. Nash talks around his subject and decorates the story until Shirley Hoffman begins to catch his drift. 'Did this adventurer, this Gilgamesh fellow, find his immortality?' Nash can only reply, 'He found what he was searching for. But it was much too late to save his life.' Perhaps Shirley has understood too much. We can almost hear the trace of wistfulness in Nash's voice.

At this point in *The Time Masters*, about halfway through, it has become a very strange book. Every new detail strikes us at an oblique angle. The obvious creaking of the suspense-story mechanism has disappeared. Tucker has already revealed all the details of the 'mystery'. The novel's Prologue, and other hints, show us clearly that Gilbert Nash is the surviving Gilgamesh, the legendary figure whose exploits have been recorded for at least 6000 years. We can guess that Carolyn Hodgkins is another of the people from space, 'shipwrecked' on earth in prehistoric times. We know that Nash has spent a long time searching for Carolyn, although we are not sure of the relationship between them. We know that Carolyn 'milked' her late husband's mind by telepathy so that she could find a way to ride the first starship from Earth, and so go home. We can already guess the action of the ending. So where has the suspense gone? What is the mystery still to be looked for and found?

We can guess that Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman are already half in love with each other. However, the night's cosy dinner does not lead to any predictable ending. Shirley makes playful hints, to which Gilbert replies, 'You'll also want to see my etchings . . . Honest, I do have etchings, and you'll want to see them.' In the book-filled comfort of the library, Gilbert tells Shirley the story of his life. He offers her the lure of 'two large loose-leaf volumes like scrapbooks and many folders and folios, all bound or wrapped in a sturdy material for maximum protection'. The volumes contain Nash's life set out, illustrated by archaeological discoveries. Drawing in his lure, Nash introduces Shirley to his world and self.

She was not aware of the passage of time, nor of the room, nor consciously aware of one record after another dropping onto the turntable to play itself out. Occasionally she would glance up with a start, turn to look about her, to look for Nash. Sometimes he would be sitting in the chair behind her, concentrating on a book, or again he would be gone from the room altogether without her knowing that the door had opened or closed . . . She vaguely realised the unwanted flush long had left her face, realised there was no longer that burning, creeping sensation beneath the skin of her cheeks. Instead there was something else she couldn't immediately identify and it was not confined to her face. A hungry, yearning something that seemed akin to the ancient people who were but inked lines on paper, a something that seemed to search for an outlet still hidden in an unidentified vacuum.

Tucker is a kind of magician of thought. We watch the way in which the magic of the pictures in Nash's books seeps into Shirley's mind and takes away all the details of the 'real world'. Nash has made himself into a conjurer, a stage director, a choreographer. His silence and unobtrusive presence in the room let her sink into the world of the people on the pages. Soon she can forget about the room. Soon she feels herself in that world, and so much closer to the person of Nash himself than anyone else has reached before. But she has no ordinary words with which she might understand her new feelings and thoughts. All she can find for now is 'a hungry, yearning something'. Nash has given her a new direction for her life, one that has, as yet, only a hidden outlet. She has not yet found the centre piece for the jigsaw puzzle that Nash has set her.

Shirley wakes from this dream world that has expanded suddenly to become her entire 'real' world. She has sunk back through ten thousand years of history; she looks up and sees, for the first time, that history embodied in the quiet man before her. 'Shirley Hoffman stood up . . . and stepped around the floor lamp to stand behind the second chair. Nash was deep in a printed page. Eagerly, boldly, she bent over him and locked his unsuspecting head in her arms. Then she kissed him, held him locked there for a racing eternity, unwilling to break the contact of their lips.'

In a conventional mystery or science fiction novel, that would have been *the* great moment of the book — the clinch. Instead, it is just a movement towards the solution of a more widespread puzzle. We see that leads Shirley toward that kiss — and suddenly we see what the kiss means to Gilbert Nash. Shirley has the last piece in her personal jigsaw puzzle — and sets down a whole new puzzle in front of Nash for him to solve. In her kiss, Shirley gives some of herself, her own mind, to Gilbert. Her kiss is, for him, a telepathic contact (a clue given early in the novel, but easily forgotten until this moment). Nash finds the completely unexpected.

'So long!' Nash exclaimed, still astonished. 'So incredibly long. I couldn't see the end at all.'

Now *there* is the climax of the story, ambiguous

and puzzling, but moving, because it introduces both Gilbert and Shirley to so many unexpected possibilities. 'Gilbert Nash speculated on the woman sitting beside him. It may have been a fantasy — pure imagination — but he wondered if he was entertaining his own granddaughter, ever so many times removed.' For what Gilbert finds in Shirley's mind is longevity — not the longevity of his own race, but certainly the long lifespan that could be expected by 'his own granddaughter, ever so many times removed'. When he met Shirley for the first time, Gilbert realised that she might be someone who could understand his position, that at last he might be able to break out of the interpersonal cage he has placed around himself. When Shirley kisses him, he knows that he has found such a person. 'So incredibly long. I couldn't see the end at all.' The tone of that marvellous line fits all of Tucker's most poignant novels. Gilbert Nash has waited about three hundred years (since his wife from the stars died on the Lisbon earthquake) for such a moment.

Slowly, Gilbert Nash shows Shirley why he is separated forever from the rest of Earth's people. He tells her the story of the may-fly. A may-fly lives its entire life in a day, while a human lives seventy years, while Gilgamesh has been alive already for at least ten thousand years. As he says to Shirley, 'May not something else look down upon you, see you vanish in a few hours?' Long-lived as he is, he is still dying. The spaceship that was destroyed in the Earth's atmosphere contained the only source of the substance that can arrest his ageing. After ten thousand years, he has found that substance again, here in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. It is heavy water. The treatment is too late for Nash, and he has decided to finish his life on Earth. 'Carolyn Hodgkins', however, is determined to go 'home' to ensure her immortality (so she has worked out how to operate the newly built starship; so she has found heavy water at the nearby atomic energy establishment). After years of hiding from the world, waiting for an extended death, Gilbert Nash has found unexpected hope. 'She was silent for a long while and he said nothing to break the silence, allowing her the privacy of her thoughts. He sat with his back to the fire and listened to the quiet house, listened to the stillness of the night outside.' Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman do not need to touch each other again this night; they are committed to a silent, passionate and intense love-making between harmonised minds.

Tucker is not finished with surprises, although he can present nothing that matches the surprises in the book's central scene. Shirley prepares to leave, and steps outside the door. 'I'll wait for you — or I'd never get home. And I'll bet you that I'm late for work in the — Gilbert!' Shirley screamed his name and shrank back, blocking the doorway. The idyll has ended in a moment. Shirley finds on the path the dead body of Cumming, one of the government agents who have been following Nash. Nash guesses that Carolyn has killed the agent so that Nash will be blamed, arrested and kept off her track. He disappears into the night, suddenly in pursuit of his quarry. *The Time Masters* picks up pace and loses momentum; the moment of meeting of minds has gone, and so has the real power of the book.

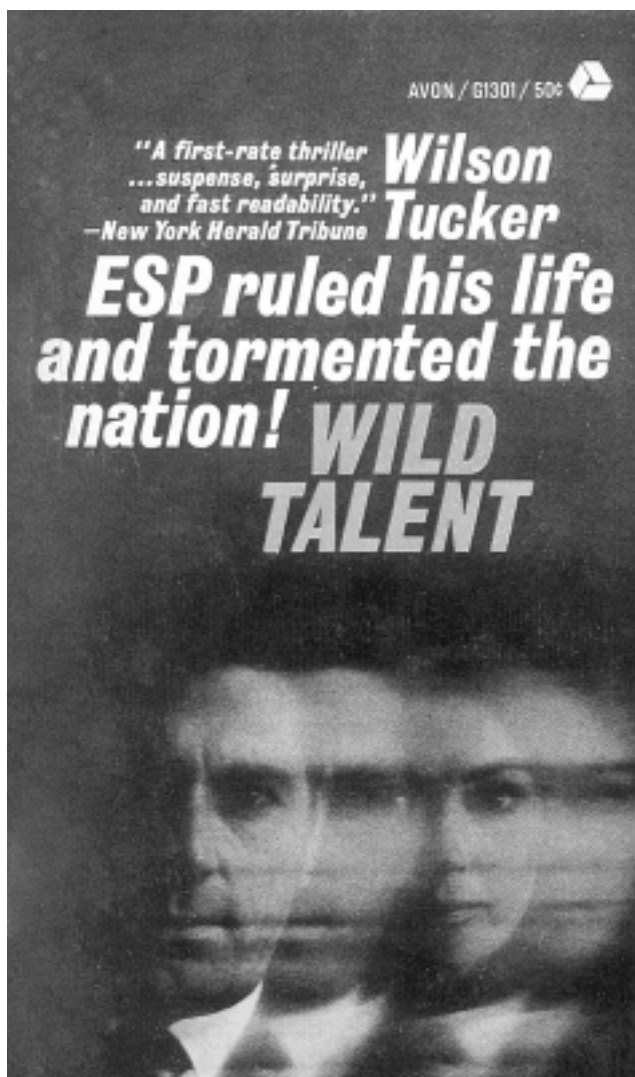
I have said already that the elements of suspense in *The Time Masters* are so much mortar between the gold bricks. But the book contains too much mortar and too little gold. *The Time Masters* is the first science fiction novel in which Tucker begins to show his great strengths as a novelist. It is also a novel damned by its commitment to the rules of its genre.

That's a pity, because *The Time Masters* is not very good as a suspense novel. We are told all the conventional clues early in the book. If Tucker had wanted to write a *real* thriller, think how he might have done it. He might have made us wait until the next-to-last line before we discovered that Gilbert Nash was Gilgamesh. The woman in the dark house should have turned out to be Carolyn Hodgkins. (When I read the novel for the first time, I was expecting Tucker to pull that trick.) If *The Time Masters* had been any sort of thriller at all, it would have turned up such 'surprises'.

Instead, the book has no real ending. It leaves the reader literally up in the air. Shirley Hoffman disappears altogether from the book when Nash dashes off to pursue Carolyn. It is really a very odd book. If it has any conclusion at all, we don't discover it until we read its sequel, *Time Bomb*. *The Time Masters* is a thriller without thrills, a suspense novel without much suspense or a cliffhanger ending. What does Wilson Tucker actually achieve in the book?

It's another case of the two Tuckers, this time both in the same book, and neither at peace with the other. Wilson Tucker No. 2 writes the book in the form of a thriller because he thinks that's how it should go. He includes dreary passages about the fumble-footed antics of the security agents because he thinks such episodes would improve the story. He breaks up his splendid meditative scenes with melodramatic interludes because he thinks that's how a thriller works. He huffs and puffs and blows his own house down.

Wilson Tucker No. 1 is not in the least interested in all these goings-on. He keeps trying to write a real novel — a moving book about the deepest relationships between people. In long passages, he succeeds very well, as I've tried to show. But the 'action' always gets in the way. It's not the same type of writing as the best passages of the book. 'A characteristic of [his] work,' as Stanislaw Lem has written about an SF author with ambitions greater than Tucker's, 'after its ambiguity of genre, is its tawdriness which is not without a certain charm, being reminiscent of the goods offered at country fairs by primitive craftsmen who are at once clever and naive, possessed of more talent than self-knowledge.' In *The Time Masters*, Tucker creates a situation of great pathos: a man lives for ten thousand years, but can find few companions during all that time, and must hide himself from the may-fly world around him. Tucker reveals this situation with considerable skill, and points towards a new, rewarding path for the life of this man. But Tucker tries to write in all sorts of dissonant, extraneous elements. His writing has charm, wit and precision. Yet he throws away the book for lack of self-knowledge. We can be glad that Tucker has improved a great deal since then. He has become far more than a 'primitive craftsman', has written several novels of high quality and, in two novels at least, has reconciled the 'two Tuckers'. But more of that later;



it's a pity that the whole of *The Time Masters* is so much less than several of its marvellous parts.

'They were all good friends, Paul, close friends'

1954: *Wild Talent*

During the late 1940s, Richard M. Nixon received much praise in the USA for his part in the interrogation and successful prosecution of Alger Hiss. Nixon and other members of the House Committee on Unamerican Activities accused Hiss, among other things, of having Communist sympathies and acquaintances. During the 1952 presidential election campaign, Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican nominee, received standing applause from huge audiences for his promise to find and dismiss all 'Communists' and their 'sympathisers' currently holding public office.

Film clips of these and similar events appeared in Emile de Antonio's film *Milhouse: A White Comedy*, which was shown again in Melbourne while I was preparing the notes for this article. As a cinema audience, we laughed nervously as we watched the macabre catapult of public sympathy that projected Richard Nixon, Joseph McCarthy and others in their chariot of anti-Communist vengeance. We saw the records of a long-ago public horror story — or so we

hoped. The word McCarthyism now has the same ring to it as Hitlerism. It couldn't happen again, of course.

Wild Talent is a book about the McCarthy era, and I think that it shows clearly why McCarthyism happened, and why it could happen again. Certainly, *Wild Talent* is a book that shows vividly what happened to the USA between the end of World War II and 1954, when the book was published. The blurb on my paperback edition says that *Wild Talent* is a novel about ESP, a 'first-rate thriller' with 'suspense, surprise, and fast readability'. Perhaps the heavy disguise of science fiction's formulas saved Tucker himself from the kind of public denigration that obliterated the careers of such figures as Dalton Trumbo, Pete Seeger and the Weavers for many years. *Wild Talent*, like many genre novels of the period, escaped the accusing finger of the House Unamerican Activities Committee, and today it remains a tense, claustrophobic view from inside the centre of a shut-in, blind era.

Paul Breen is an orphan who grows up in a small Illinois town. At the beginning of the novel, he is 'thirteen years old, he had seven dollars and fifty cents tightly wrapped in a handkerchief stuffed down in his pocket, and he was going to the Fair . . . Chicago was a hundred and thirty miles away and the bus fare was quoted at more than two dollars. That was too much. Paul waited in the railroad yards for the freight train that passed through every morning just before noon.' The 'Fair' is the Chicago World's Fair. The year is 1934. Paul Breen's journey of self-discovery has begun. So had Wilson Tucker's attempt to explore the way in which a whole nation's thinking can become solidified, mechanised and paranoid. For, as the first chapter shows (in a flash-forward sequence), Paul Breen will end his journey in 1953 when Colonel Johns points a pistol at him in a secluded room on a hidden country estate some miles from Washington DC.

The early chapters of *Wild Talent* are among the most vivid that Wilson Tucker has ever written. It's not difficult to see why. In his personal material in this issue of *SF Commentary*, Tucker admits that much of the first two chapters is autobiographical. We watch Paul's efforts to save the money he needs for his trip to Chicago, we travel with him and we roam around downtown Chicago after the visit to the Fair. Chicago of the mid 1930s comes alive as we watch it through the eyes of a resourceful kid determined to explore as widely as seven dollars fifty cents will allow him.

He knew he was in the Loop as long as he stayed within the shadow or sound of the elevated trains . . . Supper was taken at a restaurant bearing a price sign on the window. One of the dark and noisy streets beneath the elevated structure had many such eating places. Full meal, 35c. Complete dinner, 29c. All you can eat, 24c. Three-course dinner, 22c.

Paul Breen soon loses the illusions he had when he set out on his adventure. He eats at cheap places, watches pedlars selling trick paper clowns that seem to dance unsupported in the air, trudges past 'drunken or sleeping men in all the darkened door-

ways, some of them lying flat on their backs or stomachs on the sidewalk'. He sleeps at a flophouse, in a cubicle that 'appeared to be constructed of nothing more than heavy paper', with doors 'covered at the top with chicken-wire netting'.

Worse still, Paul Breen stumbles on the scene of a man being murdered in a side street. The bullet-wounded man staggers and sinks to the ground as Paul runs towards him. 'Get out of here, kid. Get going!' Just before Paul runs to find help, he realises that he knows the man's name (Mr Bixby, a Tuckerised name that appears in *The Time Masters* as well), his profession (Bixby is a secret agent from Washington) and exactly how he has been shot (by two men concealed behind an upstairs window). The experience of Bixby's death becomes Paul's experience; he feels a 'black horror' that 'seemed to dance and settle on the man's upturned face'. Paul scuttles through Chicago's streets, tries to tell a stranger about the incident, is not believed, and eventually falls asleep. In the morning, he writes a note to Washington (*anyone* in Washington). It says, 'I know who shot Mr Bixby.' He posts the note but does not attach his name or address.

Paul returns to the small Illinois town (presumably Bloomington, the setting for much of Tucker's life and many of his books), where he tries to forget about his adventure. He cannot tell anybody about it, and he can only wonder why so much information about the secret agent came to him in a moment. We met Paul Breen next when he is 'twenty years old', with 'a satisfactory and comparatively easy job, and . . . earning thirty-seven dollars a week, when he made a shocking discovery about himself'. While living a very ordinary life (he is an apprentice cinema projectionist, a job that the author himself held), Paul Breen discovers slowly that he has telepathic powers. He does not even know the word 'telepathy' until he hears it while watching a Boris Karloff movie at the cinema where he works. When he was at school, he passed his subjects too easily for the comfort of his teachers or fellow students. The girl across the street no longer wants to go out with him. 'He anticipated the girl's wishes a little quickly for her serenity and comfort, saw through her subterfuges and evasions.' After seven years, he begins to understand what had happened to him in Chicago; he had read the mind of the agent Mr Bixby.

However, Paul Breen does not realise that, remarkable power though it is, telepathy hardly gives wisdom to its possessor: 'with startling naivete, he wrote a second letter — this one addressed to the Bureau pointing out that his first had been unaddressed . . . He mailed the note later on that week in Peoria, where he had gone with a couple of friends seeking a good time. And as before, the letter was well sprinkled with fingerprints. His new-found powers of clairvoyance and precognition were conspicuous by their absence.'

I have said already that *Wild Talent* is one of the books of Wilson Tucker No. 2, the Tucker who pays most attention to writing a 'good thriller'. Further, *Wild Talent* resembles *The Long, Loud Silence* closely because it is also about a season in hell. 'Magical' telepathic powers merely give Paul Breen the power to narrow the range of his own life, and nearly to destroy it. His road to hell is paved with every good

intention. He is a nice, ordinary guy. He tries to be as helpful as possible. Military intelligence officers find him when he joins the army during World War II. They question him, and give him a vague assignment. Before they release a projectile like Paul Breen, they want to find out the nature of the weapon.

At first, Paul knows only that he can read the minds of people he has actually met. He consents to talk to spies and to follow their minds as they set out for 'enemy' countries. Paul is such a *nice* person — he is not even so impolite as to pry into people's minds for other than professional reasons. He is quite content to form part of a powerful spy ring whose only modern counterpart would be the CIA. Breen follows instructions because he is a loyal soldier. He falls straight into the post-1940s McCarthyist trap — if he fulfils his role, he is merely doing a good job and remains so much (unique) cannon fodder; if he questions his role at all, he can be called a traitor. Caught in this Catch-22 of an entire era. Breen becomes a long-distance killer who is more efficient and less discriminating than all the mythical 'enemies' he is supposed to be fighting.

Wild Talent includes Tucker's only died-in-the-wool villain, Slater (unless we count Russell Gary, the protagonist of *The Long, Loud Silence*). Slater uses Breen as part of the man-and-paper machine that is America's post-war bureaucracy. His mechanical, fastidious efficiency represents American xenophobia during the late 1940s and 1950s. When reading the book, try crossing out the word 'Slater' when it appears, and write in 'America'. When he is within mindshot of Breen, Slater manages successfully not to think about large areas of his life and work. Slater chooses Karen, an amenable young woman, to make Breen's life comfortable, but only so that Karen can discover as much as possible about Breen's private life. Slater attempts to buy Breen's loyalty by giving him his own expense account ('just like the Manhattan project'). Towards the end of the novel, Slater moves Breen to a fortified mansion in Maryland, outside Washington. The mansion has 'bulletproof glass in the windows and a high stone wall around the estate'. Snipers patrol the walls and all staff members act as spies on each other. When everyone is on guard against The Enemy, each person is the other's enemy.

Wild Talent also includes several of Tucker's most likable characters (with such Tuckerised names as Carnell and Conklin). Conklin and Carnell become friendly with Breen, their 'colleague'/captive, so Slater sends them overseas. They are killed before they can return to America. Paul falls in love with Karen, so she is sent away. An assassin nearly succeeds in killing Breen. The story hurtles towards the final encounter between the hero and the villain. The Enemy is really in the next room.

Paul Breen is the only character who is nobody's enemy, so he is everybody's. 'You will be the most hated man in the world', he is told near the beginning of the book. He need not have been anybody's enemy or friend. Paul Breen chooses to walk into Slater's trap, as surely as Slater sees a way to set it. When the army discovers the sender of the mysterious Bixby telegrams, 'Paul decided to tell them the truth and let the consequences come as they may.' Paul is honest,

upright and, in this situation, a fool. From the beginning of the novel, he loses his battle against the big battalions because he does not realise that the fight has begun. As soon as he shows that he can read the thoughts of other people, the Secret Service works out its plan to manipulate his ability and take away his freedom. 'I believe that an older man in your place would never have permitted his discovery,' says Conklin, trying to warn Paul of the danger to come. "But I'd like to help," Paul declared. "Help what?" Conklin said flatly.'

After he is wounded by the would-be assassins, Paul loses his powers for a week or so. What would you or I have done? Placed in a similar situation, I would have pretended to lose my powers completely. The army would have booted me out, poor but free. If Slater had tried to kill me to prevent me giving away information, I would have used telekinetic power (as used, once, by Breen) to escape.

But Breen has one great handicap — his sense of duty. Breen *knows* that Slater's purpose is 'to remove or eliminate that which he can't fully control'. Yet Breen agrees to form the central point of a 'spynet supreme'. In Slater we see a reflection of Joe McCarthy and that opportunistic steel trap, the young Richard Nixon. In Breen we find a reflection of all decent-living American patriots, from Dwight Eisenhower to the most enthusiastic of his supporters during the 1950s. Without Breen's compliance, Slater would have remained a nasty, minor spy with unfulfilled megalomaniacal ambitions. Without Slater and the military machine, Breen would have stayed just the kid next door, the kind of bloke who does just a bit better than his friends and has strange, convenient premonitions from time to time.

The point of *Wild Talent* is that Paul Breen is the kid next door. He is not a literary descendant of the Saint or a forerunner of James Bond. He is no harassed, tweedy little Leamas, burdened by guilts that only self-sacrifice can alleviate. Tucker has taken an average midwestern country kid (at least partly himself), given him a few superpowers and let him live out his rather badly directed life. Paul is the same type of person as the voters who kept on supporting the McCarthyites and Cold Warriors during the 1950s. But if we had been brought up in the America of that time, would we have acted differently? (We didn't; Australia had its equally dreary Menzies era.)

But if Paul Breen is a real person, he will stand up and step out of the pages of the book. Certainly, *Wild Talent* is a thriller, a story with a heart-stopper surprise on every second page, clues that point towards a mysterious, rousing ending, lots of action and a bit of sex; a story that is both surprising and inevitable, and scampers through its escapades with lots of gusto. But if Paul Breen is one of the masks that hides the author's face, then Tucker cannot help showing the personal style of the man. In other words, Tucker cannot help writing a love story.

She was a blonde, natural blonde of a rather dark shade . . . she wore a magnificent bronzed tan . . . She said her name was Karen and that she did not mind in the least his awkward dancing or frequent missteps. Paul liked that much of her . . .

Slowly, as though he were opening the door into

a dark room, he inquired into her thoughts, seeking only to find the directions expected of him.

He fumbled, nearly stepped on her feet again, and stopped.

'I'm sorry — I really am. Are you sure you want to go on?'

Karen lifted her face. 'I'm not complaining. Now let's try that last one again. Use the pressure of your hand on my back to guide me. Ready?'

Karen was an agent and had been planted on him.

Paul Breen has two obsessions — his own ESP power, and women. The book implies that he knows equally little about both. In Washington, Karen seems to accept him instead of treating him as a freak. She puts up with even his inexpert dancing. Paul enjoys the new experience, but he need not accept any girl's affection at face value. He can peep inside her mind and find out what she really thinks about him. She is 'an agent and had been planted on him'. Such a consideration need not spoil the evening. Paul clowns his way through the awkward dances, and entertains Karen. She stays the night. Soon she moves in permanently, because she wants to. As soon as Slater finds out, he reassigns Karen to overseas duty. His action breaks into a loving relationship that is open, affectionate and creative. During the last scene between them, Karen and Paul look over the recent pattern of their lives, and see how Slater has separated Paul from all the people who have shown him affection. Karen is the last to go. 'They were all good friends, Paul, close friends,' says Karen. Perhaps more clearly than he does, she sees the whole depleted, sterile situation. Paul has met, known and is leaving that scarcest of all people — a woman who can love him and understand him and his unique situation.

Karen is a marvellous person, someone we see created in front of us. But why does she not appear in the last part of the novel? Why does Tucker lead Paul Breen into falling in love with somebody else? To me, this is the real mystery about *Wild Talent* — and I'm not sure that Tucker realised that it is a mystery or that it needs to be solved.

Notice the way in which Martha Merrill makes her entrance into the novel:

And the other apartment?

There had been an odd something about the bedroom. Retracing his steps he again crossed to the bedroom and poked about. And then he had it. Flinging open a closet door, he found an array of feminine clothing . . .

A 'visitor' was already in residence . . .

He heard water running in the bathroom of the connecting apartment. *She* was in . . . How did one invite a total stranger to dinner — and in the privacy of his rooms? . . . Paul walked across the room. He rapped on her door. The small noises from the other side stopped.

'Yes?' Her voice was soft. He liked it.

'I'm having dinner sent up for two. Join me?'

'Why, yes, thank you. I'll be there in just a moment.' There seemed to be a smile in her voice.

There! See how simple it was? He waited. She

moved about behind the door. He put his hands in his pockets and tried not to be nervous. She neared the door, paused with one hand on the knob. Paul saw the knob turn and jerked his hands from his pockets. The door opened and the girl stepped through, smiling prettily. Paul stared at her.

He exclaimed, 'Jehoshaphat!' A borrowed word.

Martha Merrill said, 'Hello, Paul. You evidently remember me.'

Nobody but Paul Breen (or, at least, nobody but a Tucker character) would see the situation in this way and act the way that Paul does. Each tense step, indicated by some sound, movement or gesture, intensifies the situation for us as well as for Paul. We are inside Paul in his new room at his new 'home', the prison-mansion in Maryland. He has found all the electronic bugs. He dare not dismantle them, but he notices a curious echo when he talks, as if some person is listening to the security agent who is listening to Breen (who has placed his telepathic 'bug' on every person in the mansion he has passed). Paul stalks the room, looking for anything out of place. He crosses the bedroom and pokes about. He flings open a closet door and finds feminine clothing. This must be the clothes of his 'visitor' — the well-paid lady, promised by Slater, who would cheer up his isolated nights.

Breen cannot accept the situation in an offhand way. He is not so accustomed to a wide variety of women that he can accept anyone automatically as a whore. He is shy. He cannot decide how to introduce himself. He orders dinner for two, in his apartment. He paces the floor, trying to work out the situation. The reader notices that Breen has stopped considering his ESP talent for once. He has entered a situation that has forced him to fall back on his ordinary human faculties. He hears water running in the connecting apartment. How to invite *her* to dinner? What if . . . ? Who is . . . ? The woman herself resolves the situation. She pauses, one hand moving the other side of the knob of the door. Slowly, the knob turns, Paul jerks his hands from his pockets, and the girl enters.

Immediately, Paul Breen recognises the face in front of him. It is the face of the woman he least expected to see again — Martha Merrill. He caught one glimpse of Martha one day at the Washington government office where she was working as a telephonist. Paul had been so struck by the fact that he had asked about her name. The same day, she had disappeared from the office. Now she enters the apartment like some magic princess sprung up from a dark pool in the woods. In fact, she is a magic princess, powerful, mysterious, devious, and describing to Paul unexpected plans for this future. Like him, she is a telepath. Unlike him, she can control her powers and has set out to find one of the world's few telepaths for a husband. At the end of the novel, after an exciting last-ditch shootout with the heavies, the magic princess and the humble stable lad escape into a happy-ever-after. For all its bleak tidings of great suffering, *Wild Talent* turns out to be a charming fairy-tale after all.

All this is very peculiar. Karen was the agent planted by Slater, and his to take away. She can love

Paul, but the story implies that she could never stay with him because she lacks his telepathic powers. She disappears at the appropriate time — the last of Paul's friends to be eradicated by Slater. She is the good, wholesome American girl whose purity is violated by the paranoids and the xenophobes. For people like her, the USA of 1953 had no fairy-tales or last-ditch rescues. On the other hand, Martha Merrill gives Paul the freedom he cannot give himself. She rescues him from prison and takes him eventually to — literally — a desert island of the West Indies. As the enlightened alien, the foreigner, she is the only person strong enough to save the true native son from the fever that rots the homeland. Fortunately for Paul, he falls in love with her as well. Too bad for Karen.

But, if I may play being author for a moment — why didn't Paul escape from the army early in the book? You know the formula: the army would have chased the insidious telepath; Paul would have grabbed a gun, hidden in the backwoods, fought everybody singlehandedly and still married Karen at the end. I suppose every SF reader has read *that* book; it would usually be called something like *Paul Breen: Telepath* and appear as one side of an Ace Double during the mid 1950s.

Then there could be Version II of *Wild Talent* itself. In this version, Paul would have waited nervously. The door knob would have moved, the door opened, and in would have walked Karen. She would have been a telepath all along. She would have escaped miraculously from Slater's net and returned to her own true love. Another equally happy ending.

But, as in most of Tucker's books, the main character has two love stories in the one book. In each case, the main character can convince a pleasant, sexy woman to love him within a satisfactory relationship. Towards the end of the novel she disappears, to be replaced by an enigmatic, powerful woman. No matter how ordinary or easy-going they might appear, Tucker's main characters cannot follow an easy path to love. In *The Time Masters*, Gilbert Nash leaves Shirley Hoffman high and dry at the end of the novel, and pursues the mysterious woman he hates. In *The Long, Loud Silence*, Russell Gary cannot accept the paradise on the Gulf, the easy relationship that Sally offers. He waits ten years until he meets Irma Sloane again. In *Wild Talent*, Paul Breen loses Karen altogether. She is the epitome of the nice girl, the one you would most want to settle down with. She is the loser. He undergoes a metaphorical death and ascends into the arms of his telepathic angel.

This probably reveals little about Bob Tucker, the person. But the pattern is quite clear in the novels of Wilson Tucker, the novelist: the only relationship worth having is the one you must go through hell to reach. In the long run, the cuddly girl next door is the one least likely, even if she likes you. That makes life difficult for Tucker's main characters, and often nearly breaks the backs of his plots. Yet Paul Breen is another of the creatures of Tucker No. 1, the man who writes about people he knows. If Paul Breen, like other Tucker characters, represents much of Bob Tucker the person, when why must he go through all hell for the lady in the end? In other words, as Tucker becomes a better writer (and the structure of *Wild Talent* is quite an improvement on the previous SF

books) he places more of himself into the books, yet makes them less and less wish fulfilments. In *Wild Talent*, the situation is a metaphor for its times. Paul Breen is himself a representative of all the Mr Nice Guys of that era. Yet how can he also be a representative of Tucker himself, including the idiosyncratic double view of the heroines? There's a gap there somewhere. It's not until *The Lincoln Hunters* that we find a disappearance of the gap between the metaphors, the situations and the people. At *that* point, Tucker becomes the artist that all his earlier books point towards.

Small matters

1955: *Time Bomb*

Large matters do not initiate such events; small ones are the beginnings, and the small things are already in our daily lives.

I'm always interested in speculating about how or why a book was written. Not the Deep, Significant Reasons, but simply the first images or sounds or memories that might have provided minute starting points. I guess that Wilson Tucker found the starting point for *Time Bomb* in an image of the time bomb itself:

It was an unpainted metal cylinder, lying half buried in the muddy water of the pond, a nondescript broken thing with a skelter of dull black rods and broken wiring spilling out of its open end. It looked as if it had been simply thrown there. Patches of rust had long ago taken root on the exposed length of its body . . . The end had once been closed off, but now the lid or the top was missing . . . Danforth knew he had found it.

Ignoring the mud, he dropped to his knees to peer into the interior of the drum. He jerked up instantly in shock and found the boy watching him.

'I coulda told you that cat was there, mister.'

What could be more nondescript than a dead, skinny cat found lying, skewered by a bit of wire, in the remains of a cylinder, in a muddy field? But nondescript relics and objects considered valueless by other people are the cornerstones of Tucker's novels. The more that such an object insists on its own unimportance, the more that it hides from the investigator, the more interesting it is likely to be. The simplest objects leads in the most unexpected directions.

Who made this humble time bomb? Probably this is the next question that Tucker asked himself when writing the book. What *kind* of person could invent such an object and let it crash into an anonymous field, to be found by just the right person?

He was a slow and plodding man, seemingly far older than his middle years. Contentedly he rocked on the porch, now and then absently stroking his hopelessly old-fashioned moustache and nodding at some inner memory, some private thought. The neighbourhood children sometimes laughed at him and his moustache, made fun of his plodding

habits, but he pretended not to notice them . . .

[He lived in] a small white cottage off on a side street of a highway town. Not a bustling laboratory, not a gigantic factory, nor a government bureau. A peaceful town, an overlooked cottage, and a human being looked upon by the townspeople as an old man — a junkman . . .

No one in town had thought to describe the man's eyes . . . At first glance they were a startling blue if the man were angry or watery blue if he were aged — which he was not. Those neighbors of Theodore Mays hadn't been too observant. He was not old, but hurt; not aged or infirm, but bent . . . his body, even when reclining in the chair as now, was not crooked with years but with distress.

As I've said already, Tucker is most concerned to ask such questions as: what is of most value? and, how best can we live our lives? Theodore Mays is Tucker's idea of a good man. He is someone who can wait, contentedly rocking on the front porch of 'a small white cottage off on a side street of a highway town'. He does not call attention to himself, except for his reputation in the town as a harmless eccentric. In fact, he is a secret hero, overlooked by everybody. He is a person who has suffered and endured. 'He was not old, but hurt; not aged or infirm, but bent . . . not crooked with years but with distress.'

Theodore Mays is a time traveller. In the year 2000, he invented a time machine. His two brothers attempted to travel backwards in time. They died in the attempt. Theodore Mays succeeded, but the experience of time travel has warped his body. Mays has travelled backwards from a horrifying future, one of 'bloodshed, blackness and despair . . . Not long ago I saw New Year's Day in the twenty-first century . . . it wasn't celebrated.' Mays has returned to assassinate the leader whose quarter-century rule has degraded life for most Americans. Mays builds time bombs — bombs that travel through time and space to assassinate groups of leaders of the Sons of America movement. Mays' final target is 'Ben' himself.

All this is the seed of a good book, even if the seed idea is one of those zany, paranoid political notions so peculiar to science fiction. How best can Tucker make a novel, grow a tree, from this seed?

First, attach an 'if' to the original idea. Mays cannot succeed in assassinating Ben until he can find some way to place the 'lure' near Ben to attract the homing device of the time bomb. Mays will succeed only if he finds such a person.

Second, give shape to the person to whom everything will happen. He must be someone who won't turn Mays into the police. In fact, let him be a policeman.

Lieutenant Danforth has no first name that we discover in the book. He is a bachelor or, more precisely, entirely a loner. Only his landlady knows what he is like when he is at home. Danforth is always alert, always on guard. He learns most when he stands still and looks around him. He listens to sounds that other people consider unimportant; he notices details of the weather, the shapes of houses and the relationships between roads, railways and sky. He works best in darkness and rainfall. 'The darkness was desired and welcome', we read in chap-

ter 2. He goes to investigate the scene of a house that had just been destroyed by a bomb (killing several executive members of the Sons of America, including Danforth's boss, the chief of the Bomb Squad). Danforth notices that 'the rain beat down on the rubble and steam rose from it'. Danforth is the only person who notices the clue that 'each of the six bombings had occurred at night, each was timed to one a week, and now he realised that each had happened on a rainy night. Only on rainy nights.'

Rain is only one of the clues that tickle Danforth's preoccupied mind. More than anything else, Danforth is a detective. When he looks and listens, every detail of the landscape becomes a clue. He asks questions of the two people who were walking beside the governor's mansion just before the house exploded. Red Boggs (yet another Tuckerisation) cannot give Danforth any useful information. Barbara, his fiancée, is more sensitive. 'Lieutenant', she says, 'have you ever heard the whisper of a boat moving through the water? A large boat skimming along the river? It was like that . . . just before bricks began falling in the streets.' Danforth can only be puzzled. 'Whispers. Night, rain, radiation, whispers', and so summarises the hushed, expectant tone of the whole book. But he has the clue he needs. The 'whispering' is the simultaneous motion through space and time of the time bomb.

Danforth is not the sort of detective who relies on those mysterious, sourceless hunches that so afflict the heroes of many science fiction books. His great talent, shared by the author, is to see things just as they are, right in front of him. So much so that *Time Bomb* sometimes reads like a *nouvelle vague* French novel of the early 1960s. The police use a chronocamera to take a photograph of the scene of the bombing just as it happened: 'The dogs popped onto the screen. They ran for the house, furiously barking. They had almost reached it when the structure disintegrated.' Such information yields no easy answers. Someone suggests that the dogs act out of 'premonition'. But they might have been barking at something in the air. Or they might have been just senseless puppets. Danforth needs more evidence to give meaning to the surrealistic time picture.

Small pieces of information and minute insights based on meticulous observation lead Danforth slowly and inevitably towards Theodore Mays. At times, Danforth does not seem even keen on solving the puzzle; he enjoys too much savouring the scent of newly uncovered information. The pace of the book follows the pace of the man. No melodramatic sudden revelations here; 'Training and experience demanded that everything be neatly tied together, and now intuition insisted that these things he knew *were* tied — in some haphazard fashion.'

Danforth claims nothing more for himself than his professional competence. 'He was no rabid satellite, no politician's man.' The politicians and the police department finally dismiss him for failing to prevent an unpreventable crime. Besides, anybody who's anybody is becoming one of Ben's Boys (in this respect, *Time Bomb* shows much the same political situation as we find in *Wild Talent*). Until he loses his job, Danforth insists that he is only a humble cop: 'The professional face. The public has come to expect the

stumbling, unimaginative policeman. The result of watching too many erroneous telecasts, movies and talking books. So to produce from them the desired responses, they are met with a stumbling, unimaginative face. That's mine. What lies behind yours?' Elsewhere in the novel, one character tells Danforth, 'The only difference between you and the rest of these cops is that you are polite. So far, anyway.'

Danforth's strength and his weakness is that he is a professional person as well as a professional face. He has no life other than his work. In many passages, he is stumbling and unimaginative. When presented with the same clues as Danforth receives, the reader outguesses the cop every time (or maybe we've just read more SF books than he has). But his implacable sense of duty makes him into an unstoppable bloodhound. 'Now I tell you,' says Mr Ramsey, the Secret Police's resident telepath, talking about Danforth's dismissal, 'that while I am personally sorry it happened, I think it will be to our advantage that it has . . . I think you will prove infinitely more valuable outside the police department than in it.' Danforth does not storm out of the police force in a huff, as I would have done in a similar situation. Given the chance to continue the case as an unofficial investigator, his only concern is to solve the case, and to keep flying the flag of his own personal integrity.

Integrity is the word that best summarises all of Tucker's main characters. Sometimes integrity is sour and destroys itself, as in Russell Gary (*The Long, Loud Silence*). Sometimes it is merely flamboyant and flinty (Kate Bristol in *To the Tombaugh Station*). It takes its most admirable, persistent form in the shapes of Lieutenant Danforth, Benjamin Steward (*The Lincoln Hunters*) and Brian Chaney and Arthur Saltus (*The Year of the Quiet Sun*). In the main characters of *The Time Masters* and *Ice and Iron*, this quality is transformed into an almost supernatural quality of creative stubbornness.

In Tucker's novels, integrity has nothing to do with egotism. When Mr Ramsey tells Danforth that his continued investigations might help to prevent civil war in America, Danforth cries out, 'I'm not that big . . . I can't stop a revolution or a civil war!' Danforth knows his place in the world. He has the wisdom of modesty, the willingness to limit himself to the area that fits him. Mr Ramsey replies, 'Large matters do not initiate such events; small ones are the beginnings and the small things are already in our daily lives.' Surely this is Wilson Tucker's credo about reality and writing. The novel starts in small things, the bits and pieces wrapped in an old tank, lying in a field. It proceeds through small people. Seeds grow into trees; trees can push their way through concrete. 'Just barely enough is enough,' as Philip Dick once wrote. It's not a credo of reassurance; it is a statement of necessity. Push open a door too violently and it will slam back in your face; try to jump the walls of heaven and you will only fall back to earth, flat on your face.

Wilson Tucker does not *say* all this, of course. Tucker is more likely to support the sentiment behind Camus's statement, 'As soon as a man, through lack of character, takes refuge in a doctrine . . . it multiplies like Reason itself, and assumes all the figures of the syllogism,' The great strength of Tucker's writing is his refusal to formulate abstractions to 'explain'

what happens there. (It is also its great weakness since for so long it deprived Tucker of the ability to gauge accurately the strengths and weaknesses of his own writing.) Tucker's characters do not base their actions on *reasons*. They follow the inclinations and paths that seem necessary to them. They are good people because they are steadfast people. In Tucker's characters I admire most just this quality of steadfastness (perhaps because I have so little of it myself). Danforth expects only to do his job: he will follow the path to the time bombs until he can go no further. At the end of the trail he expects to arrest a man, prosecute him and solve the crime. Too bad that such a solution will only aid the Sons of America movement. Too bad that he has an uneasy feeling because the trail to the quarry has become too easy to follow. Already he realises that the quarry has become the hunter. The fisherman has begun to reel in his catch.

Now we have the idea, the inventor and the hunter. In an ordinary mystery novel, that would be enough. Solve the mystery and finish the story. But *Time Bomb* is a novel, not just a mystery story. It needs a dilemma as well, something to touch the heart, not just satisfy the curiosity.

From the large bottom drawer [Mays] removed a roll of wiring and two batteries, from another drawer a carton of rods. A dozen tiny transistors were carefully packed away in cotton padding. Mays selected two and laid them on the blueprint. From his pocket he pulled the tobacco can, emptied its contents in a drawer corner and slowly refilled it from a Mason jar containing dirt . . . And finally he brought up a soldering iron, plugged it into a baseboard receptacle and handed the iron to the astonished Danforth . . .

'Pitch in,' he ordered. 'Follow the diagram. I'll look to the traps and find something to put in it.'

'Me?' Danforth knew his mouth was hanging open.

'You.' The moustache was quivering as though a laugh was concealed behind it . . .

'Do you know what I've done?' Danforth asked him. The initial shock of surprise had not yet worn away.

'I reckon I do. Where did she fall?'

'In a pasture pond — a few miles south of Springfield.'

Which brings us right back to the fallen time bomb in the lonely field. Danforth has it with him in the back of his car when he visits Mays. The last thing he expects is to build and fire his own lure. Danforth's trail does not end with Theodore Mays and a neat solution to the puzzle. It ends when he finds himself setting the bait to lure himself, a bait that points him towards his own destiny and death.

When Danforth meets Mays on the porch of the neat little house in the obscure street, he recognises the bond between them. Danforth is the only person who discovers Mays's scheme, because he is the only person who has the temperament or ability to follow the clues to such a man. Mays is glad to accept and teach the kind of person who has the patience to find him. As Danforth and Mays confront each other, Mays skips one step ahead of his interrogator ('Are there

any weapons in the house?') 'No, sir.' 'None at all? Of any description?'). A time bomb leaves behind no evidence that it ever existed, so Danforth cannot arrest Mays immediately, as duty demands. 'I fired [the bombs] with gladness in my heart,' declares Mays, when Danforth accuses him of murder. Mays shouts out his hatred of 'the blackest traitor this country ever knew' who 'is on his way to the White House'. Danforth is caught when Mays shows him the twists in his own body and describes the history of the next twenty-five years. For some time, Danforth has been able to ignore the world around him, a world in which most people have accepted the Hitlerian ravings of Ben's Boys. He has been so faithful to his job that the maniacs around him have expropriated his easy-going, rational world and have thrown him out.

Now Mays gives Danforth the chance to perform his last duty. Danforth will wrap rare earths around himself, as a homing device for the time bomb. At a political meeting, he will rush up to Ben and give a Judas kiss. As he embraces the demagogue, the time bomb will find its target and explode. The explosion will kill both Danforth and the blighted future that Mays has already lived through. Mays will ride the time bomb himself. Nobody will ever know who killed Ben, or how, or how that assassination changed history.

Nobody, of course, except Mr Ramsey (the telepath who follows Danforth's investigations) and Gilbert and Shirley Nash. I've mentioned already that *Time Bomb* is a kind of sequel to *The Time Masters*. *Time Bomb* has much the same serene surface and intense depths as has *The Time Masters*; it also proceeds in a series of conversations, and Gilbert Nash and Shirley Hoffman (now Shirley Nash) reappear. They are important people to Danforth, but not very important to the plot, which is why I haven't mentioned them before. Now twenty years 'older' than they were in *The Time Masters*, and living quietly in the country, they have become accidental witnesses to Danforth's self-discovery and turning aside of history. In the magnificent last scene of the novel, the Nashes stand beside a 'useless monument' set in the middle of a street, an epitaph 'already marked for extinction, its valuable space needed for ever-increasing traffic'. In the last line of the book, Nash says, 'A man has the right to spend a few minutes with an old friend.' Danforth and Mays succeeded in their mission. The apocalypse did not arrive. Everybody (except, of course, the two martyrs) lived happily ever after.

But did they? Do they? The story of Danforth's fate is very moving, and one of Tucker's finest achievements. I just can't believe that it solved anything. The situation is almost the reverse of that in *Wild Talent*. There, Paul Breen finds happiness for himself and the world jogs on, more or less on its normal suicidal, homicidal even keel. In *Time Bomb*, Danforth sacrifices himself and the world improves. I don't believe it. The situation sounds almost as silly as something from A. E. Van Vogt. Remove the Sons of America and some equivalent of Republicans for Nixon would replace them. Liberate Portugal, but political catastrophe strikes Chile or the Philippines. Tucker is still cooking the experiments and twisting the equations to suit Tucker No. 2. The thriller writer in Tucker must

have his way; the book must have a neat conclusion, and a neat conclusion is just what is the least likely outcome. Meanwhile, the book slips out of control in another way: it's nice to meet the Nashes again, but they are so unnecessary to the whole book that I had to go to some trouble to drag them into the discussion. In this book, Tucker presents some of his finest characters, and presents some of his deepest insights about what it is to be human. But neither deep insights nor a good story do a good novel make. The struggle goes on; *Time Bomb* is the best of these novels so far, but it is still not wholly satisfying. Still we must wait until *The Lincoln Hunters*.

Sky-gazing

1958: *The Lincoln Hunters*

'Well, sir, if a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he will end in certainties.'

They were living *now* and he was among them.

'It is like a tree whose trunk is embedded in the last twenty pages, and whose branches extend backward in time to the book's beginning.' This is how I describe *The Year of the Quiet Sun* in the article, written in 1971, that follows this one. This current article is like a series of footnotes to the earlier piece, so I feel free to apply the same metaphor to *The Lincoln Hunters*. Published twelve years before *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, *The Lincoln Hunters* is much closer to it in quality than to *Time Bomb*, published three years earlier. Like *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, *The Lincoln Hunters* is a sturdy tree of a book — solid, living, yet all one kind of thing. And we must know the ending (the tree trunk) in order to see the significance of the beginning.

The foliage

Mr Peabody 'ambled now across town in a warm, brilliant and sun-splashed morning, pleased with himself and pleased to be alive in the spring — the natural beginning of the new year. Peabody had long since passed the century mark . . . The younger generations . . . rode even the shortest distance . . . they clung to their dinky little electric cars, which were everywhere.'

Mr Peabody lives about six hundred years in the future of our own time. The day is pleasant over Greater Cleveland, people enjoy lives longer than our own, and Mr Peabody is a man with a mission, enjoying his walk in the sun. Of course, Mr Peabody is a rather old-fashioned gentleman, and he goes about his affairs in a roundabout way. He even walks, doffing his hat to passing motorists. But, like everybody else in this society, Mr Peabody is used to comfortable living. He is accustomed to people obeying him when he offers the correct amount of money:

'I am now interested in a matter of a lost speech,' [Peabody] said. 'Quite literally, the speech was lost to posterity . . . If it is possible, Mr Whittle, I would like to have that speech.'

'My dear sir, nothing is impossible to the craftsmen here at T-R. Or almost nothing . . .'

Local research was T-R's secondary function, keyed to perfection. The Time Researchers had the answer to almost every question, and were as important to daily life as the news dispensers . . . Time Researchers served the world, for a fee, never declining a reasonable (and potentially profitable) request.

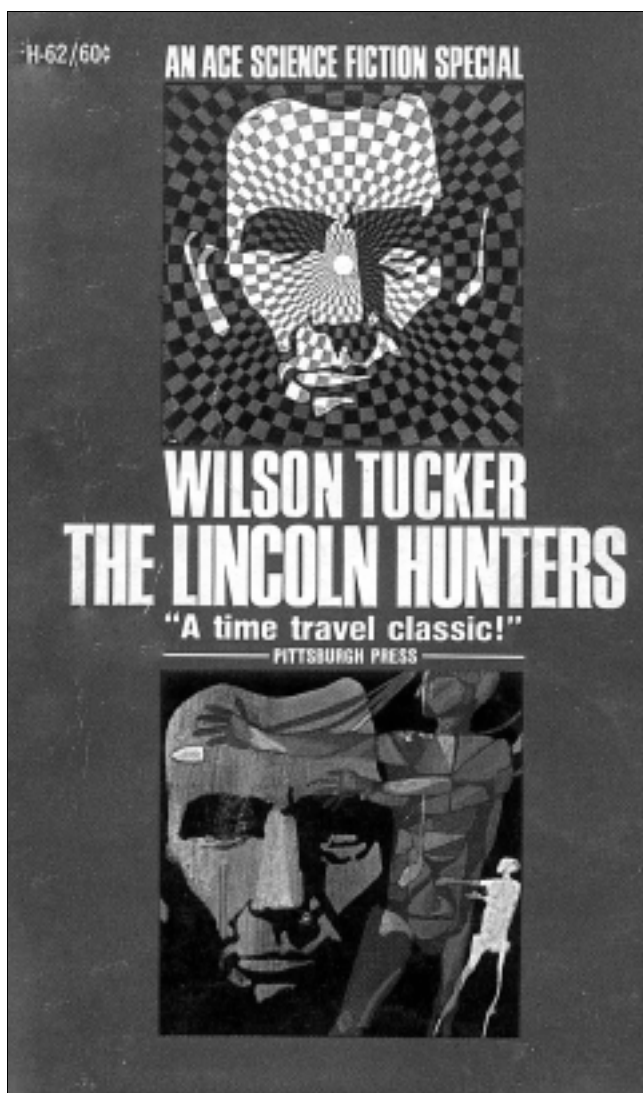
Finance, above all, plunged into its accustomed role with a quiet eagerness. Finance was already busy padding expenses.

The Time Researchers organisation reflects the political, social and economic complexion of the era. Time Researchers has two functions: to gather detailed information about the past, and to send its people back into time to observe the events of history. Both activities yield a considerable profit. The organisation prides itself on satisfying its customers, especially rich, eccentric customers like Mr Peabody. Mr Peabody pays his money and T-R guarantees to record for him the 'lost' speech (because never written down) that Abraham Lincoln is reported to have delivered in 'Bloomington-Illinois' on May twenty-ninth, 1856.

For its part, T-R guarantees efficiency. 'My dear sir, nothing is impossible to the craftsmen here at T-R. Or almost nothing . . .' Immediately, the 'great marble beehive' of Time Researchers begins work, reducing the whole of past time to a matter of 'time-curves', 'idiomatic tables', costumes and background information. T-R is run by the fussy Whittle and 'bright young men' who are 'neat, clean' and wear 'the immaculate white coveralls which were the uniforms of their profession'. Vacuum drafts clean the T-R building. It's such a pity that all of T-R's employees must do their work so well because they endanger their own lives if they lose their jobs:

The government labor squads supplied the most efficient answer to the unemployment problem . . . A man or woman without a job — and without the prospects of obtaining one — was promptly conscripted into government service . . . For the females, conscription meant one thing or another, some pleasant and some otherwise. For the males, it meant the remainder of a lifetime of forced labor, doing those things the government wanted done at the least possible expense. It wasn't called slavery, because the New Constitution prohibited slavery . . . There were no paroles or pardons, no visitors, no mail.

These 'bright young men' have good reason to stay neat and clean and brighten their helpful smiles. Slavery (given the euphemism of 'unemployment') exists because it lets the whole society work better. You stay employed as long as nobody questions your efficiency or your loyalty, or as long as you pat the right boss on the shoulder. Get sacked and you disappear into limbo. The people who stay behind don't care much or can't allow themselves to care much. Their physical needs are provided for. Get bored and the government provides such elaborate diversions as the imitation park 'equipped with a tiny



artificial lake, facsimile swans, soft music emanating from concealed speakers in the shrubbery, and a romantic's idea of park benches.'

The world of *The Lincoln Hunters* was created after a political event remembered as the Second Revolution. An Emperor has taken control of America and introduced anxious horrors into its life. 'The Second Revolution,' says Mr Peabody, 'destroyed much that was noble and good in our heritage. Meaning no disrespect to the Emperor or his ancestors, of course.' 'Of course,' replies Mr Whittle. 'I am sure the Emperor regrets these things.' Later in the book, Evelyn warns, 'Ben, you must be more careful. Mr Whittle is quick to notice disrespect.' The state itself, of course, runs on money, not the loyalty of people. Sentimentality or cynicism — take your pick. A totalitarian regime runs on both. It cannot withstand any attacks from sceptics. The Emperor's world works because it challenges nobody to think, and expects everybody to trust the rulers; it tells people what to do and how to do it. It's a heaven on earth for most people — but if, like Benjamin Steward or Bobby Bloch, you don't fit in, to hell with you.

The branches

The Characters are the people Time Researchers sends back in time to retrieve lost objects and information:

They were the anonymous people who did research in the field, more or less anonymously serving such clients as Amos Peabody. They were a tight, clannish group, and they belonged to a guild . . .

The Characters were the runners, the legmen, the adventurers who performed the field work. They were jealously proud of their jobs. Among their number were actors and would-be actors, writers and artists, linguists and librarians, political hacks, students of the physical sciences, salesmen, sleight-of-hand artists, athletes, hunters and trackers, anachronistic soldiers of fortune, and bums. The Characters had but three things in common: a ready willingness to risk their lives for monetary reward, a certain sly talent for survival, and the ability in the field to pass as genuine characters — whatever the time or place.

Of course they are 'jealously proud of their jobs'; they face the threat of the slave labour camps if they lose those jobs. But they are not people who fit easily into their society. They form a 'tight, clannish group' of such thinking, unconventional people as actors, writers, artists, students, 'sleight-of-hand artists' and unrepentant bums. All of them constantly risk dismissal. They guarantee their safety by doing their jobs well; they are actors, able to imitate the people of the eras they visit, and can pretend to be servile at home.

Benjamin Steward is both the most reliable and most detached of the Characters. He is a 'lanky, slow-speaking and slow-moving individual'. His 'amiable face, like his clothing and his manners . . . was nondescript. He and his habits belonged to no particular age, reflected no particular pattern of life . . . Benjamin Steward gave the appearance of being perpetually at peace with the world, seemingly unmoved by it and caring little or nothing for it . . . He was tall, appallingly thin, with unkempt hair and an unhurried metabolism. He was somewhat out of step with [the] world, and admirably suited to his job . . . His voice hinted at sly mockery. It was difficult to judge the Characters correctly; they frequently behaved as if they belonged to another species — or to no species at all.'

This is Evelyn's view of Benjamin Steward; she sees him as others see him and not, perhaps, quite how he sees himself. Benjamin Steward does not fit within his own world. He is 'lanky, slow-speaking and slow-moving' while his contemporaries are content, sleek and slick. He is content to look nondescript while others around him strive after conventional styles in flamboyance. He looks 'at peace with the world' while others reflect the vague anxiety caused by living in a totalitarian age. Mostly he is 'out of step with the world' in an age that has striven to put everybody in step. He mocks people who expect deference.

Evelyn is half in love with Steward, but she does not claim to understand him. She watches him with the same detachment as he watches others. The job in hand is Lincoln's lost speech; Evelyn gives the instructions to him and tries to brush off his mocking asides ("Maidens, like moths, are caught by my glare." "I am not a maiden, Benjamin." "Most surprising. Then beware of me."). Evelyn tries to keep the company flag flying and everything shipshape. 'I wish you luck, Benjamin. Remember our motto.' 'Our

motto', says Benjamin, 'is for the birds. But thanks, Evelyn.' Even a simple aside like that might betray them. Benjamin chooses to take the risks, while Evelyn protects herself with the kowtowing excuses that are the standard language of the people of this era.

Benjamin Steward has asked Evelyn to marry him every year for the past six years. She keeps putting him off. Most of the time, Evelyn offers merely a formal brushoff. 'I have thoroughly enjoyed our dates, as you call them, but I anticipate nothing beyond that.' 'Dating was fun', she thinks to herself, 'but [Steward] was also the Character most frequently discussed in the higher echelons of the company, and that troubled her. She knew, if he did not, that his continued usefulness and future employment hung in a precarious balance; any day or any field trip could be his last.'

Benjamin lacks other important pieces of information: 'I've known you for six years and you have always been Evelyn — just Evelyn. Don't you have a family name?' At first Evelyn tells Benjamin that her full name is Evelyn Kung Fu-tza. She tells him that she would not want to marry a Character: the risks are too great. Suddenly Evelyn speaks with passion; for the first time in six years the two of them discuss the matter most often on their minds. Benjamin pays more attention than usual; 'he hadn't known *this* Evelyn at all.'

'Evelyn Kung,' he said pensively. 'Maiden name.'

'Yes Benjamin . . . I am a widow' . . .

'Evelyn — *one of the Characters?*' . . .

'My husband's name was Sam Wendy. I think you have already guessed that. We kept our marriage a secret; not even the people at T-R knew. And I will be grateful, Benjamin, if you do not mention it now. It is over.' . . .

For six years he had worked with Evelyn Kung, and for the last two of those adventurous years he had haphazardly courted her — never dreaming she was first Sam Wendy's wife and then his widow . . . He wondered if he could ever ask her out again? Could he knowingly date the widow of the man whose death was on his hands?

So who, really, are Benjamin Steward and Evelyn Kung? Benjamin Steward is a man who goes his own way but does his job to the best of his ability. He feels himself to be a one-time failure: he failed to rescue Sam Wendy from the Roman gladiators. Evelyn Kung is Sam Wendy's widow. She is somebody who might well hate Benjamin Steward, but she doesn't. She will not marry him, either. Benjamin Steward did not kill Sam Wendy, but the company did (it refused to spend extra money to rescue one of its Characters). Sam Wendy does not separate Benjamin and Wendy, although that's what they both think; they are separated by their perceptions of the world they share. Evelyn is willing to put up with the world's injustices; Benjamin is not. Benjamin has become a rebel without realising it. Already he had separated his affections from the era to which he returns after each mission. Only the hope that he might marry Evelyn has kept him loyal. Now Evelyn has cut herself off from him, and so has separated Benjamin from the

world. But where could somebody like Benjamin Steward find a better world to live?

Sliding down the trunk

[The time machine was a] thin bullet, manufactured of glass and steel [which] rested on a cushioned dais. This was the stepson of H. G. Wells's bicycle . . . The activating machinery was tightly packed beneath the webbed flooring — or most of it was. The leftovers were stuffed in at either end, just beyond reach of the head and toes. The conveyance resembled a peculiar vacuum table, bullet-shaped, filled to overflowing with its components. All in all, it was a deliberately designed, minimum-sized package built for just one purpose. Economic reasons and little else dictated its design.

The structure and purpose of Time Researchers is a model for those of the Emperor's era, and the time machine is a model for them both. 'Manufactured of glass and steel', the time machine represents a traveller's dream that goes back to H. G. Wells. It contains mainly machinery, and fits in a human passenger as almost an afterthought. 'Economic reasons and little else dictated the design.' It is, above all, well designed, a bullet designed to penetrate the past, but gives no benefits to its builders other than money and information. 'There is no need to conceal the missile after you have vacated it', hears Benjamin Steward, as he inspects the vehicle, 'this model will automatically maintain itself a millisecond out of phase for so long as the door is not locked from the inside.' Every detail is pinned down; all problems, it seems, allowed for. Plug in the last piece of the machine — a person named Benjamin Steward — and off we go.

'Damn all engineers!' cries out Steward, as the time bullet lands back in 1856. The vehicle has landed underwater. The engineers, the smug paragons of efficiency, have made their first mistake. There are plenty more to come. Steward staggers out of the vehicle, tucks the 'bullet' under some roots beside the creek where he has landed, and sets off across the grassy plain towards 'Bloomington-Illinois'. He finds that it is not a primitive village, as T-R's information sources described it. It is a thriving frontier city and, as soon as he steps inside the place, somebody recognises Steward. He looks at a local newspaper and finds that he has been deposited one complete day later than scheduled. He is forced to carry out a survey expedition for a project that he has already undertaken! The T-R organisation has made a very serious mistake, one that poses unknown dangers. Worse still, Steward finds that the project team to arrive the day before has already muffed part of its assignment. The single strand was as thin and as fine as silk thread. Many dozens of feet of it lay on the ground, hopelessly entangled with debris. It glittered in the sun . . . The wire was from a pocket recorder, the kind of recorder he and his crew would carry into the hall to capture Lincoln's speech . . . Something had gone (and still would go) ominously wrong.'

After four hours, Steward returns from the preliminary survey. Accompanied by Dobbs, Bonner and

Block, he prepares for the major project. He has become worried by a sense of impending doom. The Time Researchers organisation is thunderstruck by their own mistakes, of course, and apologises. However, its technical mistakes look minor beside the personal problems for which Steward feels responsible. He feels the pain of emotional separation from Evelyn, and the reminder that he has already caused the death of a Character. One of his crew members faces disaster of a different kind.

'Now, what's with Bloch? What were you trying to tell us in there?'

'The labour squads seized his brother this morning,' Dobbs answered quietly.

'Oh, *hell!*' Steward was thunderstruck.

Bobby Bloch, the Character, is close to losing his own job. He drinks too much; he fools around on assignments; he's an erratic actor who could never fit within this conformist society. His brother, a person much like him, has now been sent to the slave-labour camps. Bloch disappears from the building and is found, asleep, in the toilet. Steward feels responsibility because he asked that Bloch should be included on the trip. Now Bloch has turned into just another sign of doom.

At about this point in the book, the patterns become rather more complicated than in any of Tucker's previous SF novels. The *formal* pattern of the book is that Steward faces great danger from two sides. If he continues with his mission, he knows that at least some part of it will fail. Worse, any mistake of his could lead to Bobby Bloch's slavery. If he stays behind, he faces only the continued coolness from Evelyn and the possibility that he might lose his own job and freedom. The *emotional* pattern of the book is that Steward is scared silly of the second mission, but he wants very much to return to the era of the USA, 1856. When he briefs the other members of the expedition, he can't help telling them about 'sky-gazing'. 'Watch out for that sky — it'll send you.' (I know what he means; surely there is no dome of sky larger than the prairie sky of Tucker's area of Illinois.) Steward thinks of his first impressions of the prairie when he stepped from the bullet at the start of the first survey:

The sound of gently running water was his introduction to the world of 1856, and it was a pleasant sound. The crisp, almost cold spring air which followed was equally pleasant . . . The air was new; air he had not breathed before . . .

Obedying an impulse, he sat down on the dew-wet grass and spread his hands, letting his fingers curl about the tufts of grass. The sod was cool and refreshing. He wished that he could fully recall a phrase which lingered on the rim of his mind — something about being homesick for dirt. He was that . . . A sigh of contentment escaped his lips. This was living.

This is what Benjamin Steward is really seeking — a way of living. Here is the heart of the book, hidden from the gleaming machines, artificial bird calls, economic parameters and clean, white-coated men of

the world of the next millennium. *The Lincoln Hunters* shows how Benjamin Steward reaches out for the life he really needs. Like many of Tucker's novels, it tells how a good man finds a true heaven. But, unlike those early books, it does not show a good man reaching that heaven by otherworldly means. First he must live the anonymous life to which he is committed, and live it in its truest, most fragile way. It is all very well to feel the sod and breathe in the pure air and fall in love with the world of 1856. But neither Steward nor the reader can expect to stay in it.

The second expedition goes well at first. The Characters saunter across the prairie and enter the bustling town of Bloomington, Illinois. 'The downtown thoroughfares were congested with excited, loud-talking men and not a few women . . . The noisy mobs surged to and fro along each downtown street, seemingly going nowhere — but determinedly going, nevertheless. Collectively, they were possessed of the notion that to remain still was to stagnate; they would miss the elusive excitement. Movement and disorder, motion and sound were the decrees of the day.' Steward has entered a world that is quite the opposite from his own. His own era is one of stagnation, where nothing moves but the electric cars and the machines that power the air-conditioning. Nothing is loud or bustling; nobody is going anywhere. The twenty-fifth-century world is entirely safe — if you conform to the rules. The nineteenth-century world is exciting, but anything might go wrong.

The Lincoln Hunters breaks many of the patterns of Tucker's previous SF novels because it contains few scenes that are obviously more important than others. For the first time, Tucker gives significance to almost every word and page. Yet it is obvious that the author wants us to feel strongly that we are sitting in the auditorium of the Major's Hall in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1856. Abraham Lincoln's speech is a very important scene in the book:

Abraham Lincoln's eyes and spellbinding lips were alive in an otherwise worn and homely face. The eyes were feverish reflections of an inner turmoil, an immense unrest; and the mouth was not a part of his mundane body but instead a detached, verbal reproducer of some mighty battle being fought in a corner of his mind. Lincoln did not speak with the brilliant, rangy syntax of Herndon, nor did he rely on the rabble-rousing tactics of Lovejoy. His style, manner, and delivery were indisputably his own; his words and thoughts were simple ones, forcefully delivered.

Again, here is Tucker's idea of a good man. As we sit in the front row with Steward, we see before us the external evidence of a great mind and spirit, one whose values and presence impress Steward and the author. Here is Steward's new world in person — the 'feverish reflections of an inner turmoil, an immense unrest' compared with the moral bankruptcy of Steward's era; 'the mighty battle being fought in the corner of his mind' compared with the soft answers by which Steward's compatriots turn away the mechanical wrath of their government; the individual style compared with the collective; simple words and thoughts, forcefully delivered, compared with the

stereotyped jargon of the Time Researchers. Lincoln represents justice, liberty and that controlled passion that has no place in the cramped mechano-paradise of the twenty-fifth century.

Abraham Lincoln's speech works so powerfully on his listeners that even the official newspaper reporter puts down his pen to listen. That's why the speech was never recorded. Steward's pocket recorder whirs away, but Steward has lost all interest in the job in hand. For the moment, he has become a citizen of Bloomington, totally committed to the 'just cause' expounded by Lincoln. He is so attentive that he forgets to keep an eye on Bloch. Suddenly he remembers his task. He looks around briefly. No Bloch at the back of the hall. He looks back. His inattentive action must have caught Lincoln's notice. 'He found Lincoln's eyes locked with his', just for a moment. After the meeting ends, Steward, Bonner and Dobbs stumble outside with the rest of the crowd. Lincoln asks to speak to Steward, who gives a weak excuse for his inattention. Steward is hooked by the charismatic future president — but Bloch has now disappeared from the building.

Bobby Bloch is, of course, a Tuckerism. Bloch, the person, was a great friend of Bob Tucker the person. 'Bloch', the character, does not resemble the real-life person at all. Nevertheless, Steward does resemble Tucker a lot. In *The Lincoln Hunters*, Benjamin Steward risks his own life in order to find his missing friend. This may be partly a tribute from one real-life friend to another — but certainly it springs up convincingly from the life of the whole novel. Steward must find Bloch to save his own neck — the Emperor's regime won't tolerate another expensive failure. Steward must find Bloch to save his own conscience — he cannot face the prospect of another Character left for dead, such as Sam Wendy. But, most importantly, Steward must find Bloch because, if he doesn't, the regime's time police will. Steward refuses to desert Bloch: 'We'll carry Bobby, and that's that.'

The second half of *The Lincoln Hunters* is a circular pilgrimage. Bobby Bloch is an infuriating person at the best of times, but now he has slipped the leash of good sense altogether. Obviously, he became drunk on the town's festive oversupply of spirits. But surely somebody has noticed him, especially as he quotes Shakespeare when drunk! Nobody has. The Characters return to their agreed rendezvous, a hitching rail just outside town, but Bloch is not there. Bonner goes 'home' in the time machine, taking with him a temporary covering story and the wire that was the original object of the expedition. Dobbs stays at the rendezvous, while Steward walks back into town:

He plodded the streets east and west, north and south. Setting caution aside, he explored the alleys. He stumbled across the vacant lots, looking under trees, probing the shrubbery, and inspecting the heaps of refuse which local citizens insisted on dumping on such lots. He poked among the stacks of lumber and piles of brick of half-completed buildings; rummaged through the uncompleted houses, and pried into the seemingly deserted shacks which littered the town. Steward looked into the many livery stables . . . walked out to the railway depot . . . found — and entered —

two houses of ill repute . . . was quickly but politely ushered out of a gambling hall when it was discovered he had come only to gape, not to play . . . At this late hour he knew the business district of the town as thoroughly as a map maker.

This passage of prose shows how much Tucker has improved as a writer between all his earlier SF novels and *The Lincoln Hunters*. Here Tucker brings to life all his themes in the pattern of objects and sentences, as well as bringing to life the objects themselves. Nothing is simply inserted for decoration or verisimilitude, as happens in passages of the earlier books. Steward is seeking Bloch; the passage creates the rhythm of his panicked walking; we see that he is willing to go to any lengths to save his friend. Steward has pinned on himself the responsibility for finding Bloch, so the quest takes on the pattern of Steward's thoughts. In turn, this pattern shows Steward's deeper pre-occupation: how to come to terms with the gap between the world he loves, this one of 1856, and the world to which he is bound? We trudge with Steward as he walks down every street in the town. He gets to know every inch — not just the Major's Hall, where the spectacular speech was given, but also 'the vacant lots', 'under trees', through 'stacks of lumber and piles of brick of half-completed buildings'. Steward would never see these in his own time, where all signs of construction have been hidden, or else nothing is being built. People don't walk anywhere in Steward's era (the first chapter of the novel tells us this, so that all the walking in the later parts of the book will have extra point), but Steward trudges onward. No horses are left in the future, but Steward examines the livery stables here in 1856. The 'houses of ill repute' of 1856 have turned into the deadly game houses of the twenty-fifth century, where the losers risk their lives rather than their virtue. Here in 1856, all is construction and growth and possibilities. Steward, still tied to his own time, can do nothing but examine it and trace out a map over its surface. He wants to become part of *this life here*; until he finishes his quest, he is like a perambulating ghost, a 'map maker'.

Steward comes close to panic after he has searched the town. Time has nearly run out. When he made his first survey, he entered this world at dawn on the next day. Already the night is half over. 'No field man was permitted to closely approach a previous target date covered by himself . . . Two like objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Two like objects, meeting in the field, did not collide. One simply cancelled out the other.' Steward risk meeting himself and so cancelling out himself. As the night wears on, Steward looks in the face of his own imminent death, and not just at the probable fate of Bobby Bloch.

No luck in the town. Back to the hitching post. Dobbs goes home, prepared with a convincing tale that might still save Steward and Bloch from future punishment. Just before he leaves, Dobbs thinks of one last possibility: 'Did you look in the jail?' 'Jehoshaphat, no!' Back to town. Bloch has been at the jail during the night, very drunk and quoting nothing but Shakespeare. He has left already.

Steward gives up. He returns across his beloved prairie, beaten. The first signs of dawn are in the sky, so he has about ten minutes left before he goes home

or cancels out himself. He takes a 'last, lingering look at Mr Lincoln's marvelous sky. Earth, sky, sight, sound, smell — heady stuff. A world of fire and energy and force . . . a world of brawling and enthusiastic people . . . They made and unmade governors and presidents with gusto, elected and tumbled congressmen with relish and delight, supremely confident of themselves and their destinies . . . Steward stood erect on the creekbed, letting the water course over his knees. He sucked in a mouthful of cold morning air. Mr Lincoln's lucky world.' Surely this is Tucker's eulogy to the world he loves best himself. More strongly than in any of his previous books, the author's spirit tumbles out in the words of the main character. Steward's decrepit world is not very different from Tucker's world of 1958; both worlds are mocked by Lincoln's land, still uncrushed by highways, railways and conformity. Here is Tucker's prose poem about the life-giving aspects of his own world which he can see disappearing around him. The people of the 1850s are so confident that not even the Civil War will be able to shatter that confidence. At this point in time, Steward has no confidence left, but only panic. But he can still take pleasure in what he thinks he has lost: a friend, a job, and 'Mr Lincoln's marvelous sky'.

At the lowest point of despair, Steward turns around, looks at this land for the last time, and sees 'a solitary Indian grove with a column of smoke rising above the trees'. It had been there when he had 'landed' for the first time. A dog is barking madly in the distance. Steward leaps from the water, forgetting his shoes and socks. He runs towards the grove. There, sitting in a tree, completely drunk, spouting Shakespeare to a tribe of Indians gathered below him, is the clownish figure of Bobby Bloch. Steward grabs Bloch and starts running with him towards the creek. 'Miserably short of the goal, the Character suddenly realised he was done . . . A heavy, rocklike object fell into the waters of the creek with a resounding splash.' Here is the other Steward, right on schedule. Steward lies down in the grass: 'he closed his eyes and sobbed for breath, awaiting oblivion.'

The other trunk

The Lincoln Hunters has a highly satisfying ending. Steward does not disappear. The *other* Steward does; the Steward who has, in his own memory, already spent four hours surveying the town of Bloomington on the wrong day. 'He was content to lie there, uncaring and unmoving.' How better to appreciate the true sweetness of life than to have looked death right in the eye? How better to experience rebirth into a new world than to have died, literally, in the old one? Heaven and hell cannot be separated, as Tucker tried to do in previous SF novels; one is always part of the other; one can always turn into the other at any time; Steward must go through the one to reach the other.

I've said that *The Lincoln Hunters* is like a tree. Steward begins among the foliage, the people of his world. He is a man of his own world, although separated from it by temperament. He loves Evelyn, a woman who chooses consciously to stay 'up there', seven hundred years in the future. Each person is a branch of the trunk of time; but the time machine

allows people to slide back down the trunk. Nobody at Time Researchers realised that time might have more than one trunk, or even an infinite number. Since Tucker (wisely) provides no explanation for the physics of the book's ending, I assume that Steward No. 1 still exists in his original world. Steward No. 2 is here, forced onto another trunk, perhaps to help take the tree toward a finer future than he came from.

The ending is miraculous, yet correct. The book is always true to itself. Time Researchers itself gave Steward the chance to reach a better world. 'The engineers at last possessed a kind of grim, demonstrable proof of their theories . . . They had no way of knowing the theory was only half right, that under a particular set of circumstances only one of the duplicates ceased to exist . . . Because of faulty planning, a shoot had gone askew; because a field man failed to observe the tolerance limits, a cancellation had been effected. A Character had finally, witlessly succeeded in erasing himself. Put that on the company books and raise the ante to the client.' Not that Time Researchers would care much. The organisation has its tape of Lincoln's lost speech, a convincing story from Bonner and Dobbs, and it has lost no money. The secret triumph is all, and only, Steward's and Bloch's. Like Chaney of *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, he is a 'hidden hero', whose success can be known only to himself.

Here, at last, Tucker No. 1 and Tucker No. 2 are not in conflict. The craftsman has become an artist. Certainly, Steward is Tucker, in the sense that he represents everything that Tucker finds most valuable — the hidden hero, the modest man who endures all for duty or for the sake of a friend, the person who can relieve an intolerable situation with a quick joke, the person who seeks the simple, unaffected, harmonious life.

But Steward is also entirely a man of the novel; he does not step out of it and make awkward, uncharacteristic gestures, as do many of the characters in Tucker's earlier SF novels. the novel wouldn't exist if Steward had not taken the trouble to be just himself; to endure through difficulties; to test his strength against time itself. Steward travels in a time machine that, again, is not just a gimmick but, as in *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, part of the metaphor itself. The 'science fiction bit' is no longer tacked awkwardly onto the novel, as happens sometimes when Tucker gives superpowers to characters. The time machine allows Steward to face up to himself and discover where his true values lie. 'I am rich beyond the dreams of avarice,' he says at the end of the novel, as he walks back toward Bloomington. The world ahead of him is dangerous and foolish, with a Civil War four years in the future. Yet Steward has a standing invitation to meet Abe Lincoln in his offices. Bloch plans to join the 'Booth-Willoughby Players', who just happen to be passing through Bloomington.

And Evelyn? Well, Tucker has done it again, hasn't he? He's left the poor woman to get along by herself. There must be *some* dark secret here. Perhaps there's an entirely different essay still to be written about 'The Science Fiction Novels of Wilson Tucker'.

Epilogue

1960: *To the Tombaugh Station*
1970: *The Year of the Quiet Sun*
1974: *Ice and Iron*

To the Tombaugh Station is a very skilful book, just as well written as either *The Lincoln Hunters* or *The Year of the Quiet Sun*. It is the only Tucker SF novel where the characters travel into space. However, it is as much of a social comedy as (although immeasurably better written than) *The City in the Sea*. Two characters, a man and a woman, are stuck in the small cabin of a spaceship, there to fight the Battle of the Sexes. *she* is an insurance agent, trying to discover whether one of the employees of the space transport company was murdered and, if so, by whom. She thinks the ship's captain did it. *He*, the ship's captain, can't shake off the persistent nuisance of this woman. Their 'duel' finishes in a crash landing of Aldissian irony. It might be hard to find a copy these days.

This whole article is a sort of footnote to my original remarks about *The Year of the Quiet Sun* ('Where We're Arriving', next article). My mistake in that article was thinking that Tucker had always written so well. As I've tried to show here, Tucker went through a long struggle before he could write satisfactory novels in which the suspense mechanism grew naturally out of the rest of the book. Apart from that, I did not realise how much of a struggle Tucker had to endure before he could finish the book itself (see p.). Rarely has time been better spent. An interesting point that strikes me now is that in *The Year of the Quiet Sun* it is Saltus, rather than Chaney, who most resembles the traditional 'Tucker character'. Look back at the story and you will see that Saltus is the joke, Steward-type character who endures until the end in his own, anonymous way. By contrast, Chaney is a somber figure, an escapist (literally) and a johnny-come-lately (by about half a century). But then, nobody in Tucker's earlier novels comes alive quite as vividly as Kathryn van Hise in *The Year of the Quiet Sun*.

Ice and Iron (Tucker's original edition, not the revised Ballantine edition) deserves a long review, which Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell give it on page . *Ice and Iron* is another step forward from *The Lincoln Hunters* and *The Year of the Quiet Sun*. Highsmith is an undiluted Tucker character — a person whose main interest is in knowledge rather than action. He performs a remarkable feat: using the methods of archaeology, he manages to fit together a picture of the future that closely resembles the actual future that Tucker presents in accompanying isolated, impressionistic, flash-forward images. At the end of the novel, we know no more than Highsmith does, but Highsmith has constructed an accurate map of the future. This is more of a triumph of the imagination over adversity than we find in any other Tucker novel — after all, this 'hero' is so 'hidden' that he does not even know that he has succeeded! (The 'improvements' in the Ballantine paperback edition robbed the book of this central point.)

Let Robert Bloch — the non-fictional one this time —

have the last word:

Tucker offers, with disarming simplicity and direct narration, a clean and lucid narrative approach. He writes fluently and forthrightly, employing few polysyllables and avoiding terminological trickery in an effort to dazzle or display specious erudition. His characterisation is completely honest; the human beings are human throughout. Tucker's work is to science fiction what Graham Greene's 'entertainments' are in relation to the average whodunit.

Tucker is best when he is true to himself and goes his own way. May he keep going; may his books keep improving. Science fiction has no writer like him.

— Bruce Gillespie, July 1975

Return to the prairies of heaven

1981: *Resurrection Days*

Resurrection Days, Tucker's last published novel, is a return to the territory of his first SF novel, *City in the Sea* — the prairies of midwest America. It also returns to the subject of his first SF novel — the encounter between a future state of women warriors and a fairly ordinary male.

Owen Hall, the main character, is a comedic version of the author as he was in 1943. That's when Hall died in an accident. He's resurrected somewhere in the far future, long after our own system of dates has been discarded. In the future society, women warriors round up seemingly lobotomised males, also resurrected, using them for labour. Seemingly cut off from the rest of a future America, the town is surrounded by a circular moving walkway, which in turn is surrounded by prairies stretching out over the horizon. The people of the town fear the prairies of heaven, much as Russell Gary does in *The Long Loud Silence*.

To Owen Hall, this world seems to offer the same possibilities for freedom as 1850s America does to Benjamin Steward in *The Lincoln Hunters*. That is why he cannot understand the puritanical, unadventurous world in which finds himself. He escapes, is captured, frees himself, leads the town's troops a jolly chase, and convinces one of the women that there is a better world out there.

Resurrection Days is a highly readable romp, as well written as anything else Tucker has done. Like the hero of many other SF novels in which a solitary male is placed in an all-female society, Owen Hall expects that a group of man-less women will be overjoyed to make his acquaintance. They are not. They want to turn him into the same kind of walking vegetables as the town's other males. So Hall goes off to find his own new world.

As in many of his SF novels, Tucker warns against closed minds and bureaucratic societies. Warnings appear as chuckles, though, and the plot is mainly helter-skelter adventure. *Resurrection Days* is one of the few convincing SF comic novels.

— Bruce Gillespie, January 2004

The science fiction

1976 introduction:

'This piece about *The Year of the Quiet Sun* was written some time in September or October 1971, and appeared first in *SF Commentary* 24, November 1971. Of all the articles I have written, this is my favourite, not only because it is the article in which I came closest to expressing exactly what I intended when I began, but because readers of *SFC* seem to agree that it is the best thing I've written. Also, the article has made me a lot of good friends, including Bob Tucker himself. With this in mind, I have reprinted this article (with some amendments) as the centre of my own thoughts about Tucker's work. I hope that it wears well.'

2003 introduction:

Despite the predictions made in *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, we reached the year 2000 without a race-based American revolution or Chicago disappearing beneath a mushroom cloud. The new millennium looks forward more to futures such as the ones Tucker sketched in *Time Bomb* and *The Lincoln Hunters* than to those predicted in *Quiet Sun*. Nevertheless, *The Year of the Quiet Sun* reads as well as it did in 1970. And my time machine has worked better than I ever could have imagined in 1971.

Bruce Gillespie

Where we're arriving

Last weekend was very pleasant. The sun took control of Melbourne's weather and, as happens here, summer came abruptly. (Some years we get spring as well, but not often.) As the temperature rose, the surfaces of cars and roads began to glitter. Moisture began to disappear from the ground and the leaves of the trees. The cat roamed in the garden instead of sleeping in the living room. Heated air muffled street sounds.

Our house, made of solid brick, stays cool for several days during a heatwave. I closed down most of the blinds, opened some windows and settled down to finish my review notes on *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, by Wilson Tucker. My parents had gone out, so there was no noise around the house. The sound of car tyres subsided to a soft hiss. Bruce Gillespie was at peace (as Tucker might say).

During the previous two weeks, I had received the welcome and long-delayed news that *SF Commentary* 21 has arrived in the USA, only four months after it was posted. (*SFC* 22 arrived on the same week, of course.) In one mail, I received letters from Damon Knight, L. Sprague de Camp and Brian Aldiss. A few days later I received very long letters from Philip José Farmer and Hank Davis. Very quickly I lost that familiar 'why bother?' feeling. During the same fortnight I had rediscovered films after losing a lot of my enthusiasm during 1969 and 1970. (Elia Kazan's *The Arrangement* converted me back to film fandom.) At long last I had begun to write reviews again — perhaps there's a chance of finishing the Brian Aldiss critique, after all. Forty letters written within a few weeks. Mail flooding in (including 500 pages of APA-45) . . .

And, like Brian Chaney, I began to notice the effect of travelling by time machine.

At the end of 1968, the Education Department of Victoria sent me a letter asking me to report to 'Ararat High and Technical School' on the first Tuesday of February 1969. After a frantic month during which I arranged accommodation in Ararat (and typed all the stencils for *SF Commentary* No. 1), I arrived at the 'Ararat High and Technical School'. My arrival rather puzzled the administration. Halfway through the day I found out that the Ararat Technical School was now a separate institution within the same buildings, and they found out that the Education Department had sent me to the Technical School.

Things never picked up after that. They only got worse, so I shall draw a curtain over the two years that followed. Occasionally I peek behind that curtain, but usually I hope to take advantage of Freud's observation that we forget the most painful experiences of our lives. Like Philip Dick's electric ant, I've tried to snip 1969 and 1970 out of the ribbon of my life. But what happens if two years disappear so abruptly?

On the first day that I began my new job at Publications Branch in February 1971, I stared unobtrusively (I hope) at one of the women who joined the Branch at the same time. About two hours later I finally asked her if she attended Dip. Ed. tutorials with me in 1968. Cautious recognition followed. Since 1968 she had married, had taught in Technical Schools for two years and enjoyed it, and had entered the Branch to 'try something new'. She had cashed her two years well; she had changed, but almost imperceptibly, and for the better.

The time machine worked well, in this case.

Several weeks later, I was travelling home by tram. As usual, I was reading vigorously (and, if you don't know what a vigorous reader looks like, observe me sometime). Appropriately enough, the book was some volume or another by Proust. I happened to glance up. A face was smiling guardedly at me, a face ringed by a beard that hadn't been there two years before. 'My ghawd,' I said, or words to that effect. Perhaps I even said 'hello'. The inscrutable face belonged to one of my best friends at university. I lost track of him completely during 1969, mainly because neither he nor I is a particularly good letter writer. By the beginning of 1971 I had no idea where he lived, or how I could get in touch with him, provided I could be bothered. Only accident had made this friendship survive.

I met my friend a few times afterward, but we had very little to say to each other. He'd bought a lot of records in two years (mainly pop and blues, which he used to scorn) and I bought a lot of records in two years (mainly classical, which I had discovered only in 1968). So what? Neither of us had changed very much. The time loop had closed, the time machine had dumped us both in 1971, but we were still talking about the same subjects in the same way. In most encounters of this sort, the earlier and the later images overlap to form a stereoscopic picture that is more interesting than the two original images. The time machine did not work in this case because, in a way, no time had passed.

When I was at university, I met quite a few girls who were interesting, or attractive, or both. I met one of these girls more often than most. We might begin to talk about films (and I was really a film fan then), or some other subject of mutual interest. Sometimes the conversation would proceed to the point of 'Have you seen? No? Well, you ought to see . . .', and only later would I hit myself over the head and realise that I should have asked if I could *take* her to see . . . But I was painfully shy (or stupid) (or both) (and still am), and I didn't choose the right moment (and never do), and besides, I lived at Bacchus Marsh and I never stayed in town at nights anyway, and I didn't have a car (still don't) and . . . By the time I had debated all this inside my own head, I was sitting alone.

I saw her a few times after that. She worked during the summer vacation in a café in Melbourne and, the last time I spoke to her, she was going to do her MA. Exit me to Ararat; exit the lovely lady to the graves of academe.

I came into the Editor's office one Friday morning and found that he was talking to somebody who looked vaguely familiar. A few minutes later, I found out that the interviewee, who would begin work on the next Monday, was my wistful acquaintance of two years before. On the next Monday, I had a chance to talk to her . . .

. . . and I found that the time machine had broken down altogether. I tried to place the new image over the old image, and the picture made no sense at all. She had started MA, but had dropped out, no reason given, and all questions evaded. She had taught for about a year, but had dropped out, no reasons given, and all questions evaded. Her manner is far more guarded than I remember. Lots of other details didn't match. It was like meeting a different person, a twin maybe. It seems that time has rasped her very badly while it has, in the long run, treated me well. My blank years may have been her lifetime; but I don't know and I'm puzzled.

Three encounters; three skips in time; three effects of the time machine, or rather, the relationship between people's different time machines. The uninitiated might think that the time machine is science fiction's most fanciful and 'impossible' invention; for me, the time machine is SF's most pervasive and coherent image, the point where the literary field comes closest to our own lives. Look what Wilson Tucker does with a simple time machine, for instance.

The Year of the Quiet Sun (by Wilson Tucker; Ace SF Special 94200; 1970; 252 pp.; 75 cents) is about a time machine, and it *is* a time machine. Or, to choose another metaphor, it is like a tree whose trunk is embedded in the last twenty pages, and whose branches extend backward in time to the book's beginning. While we read the book, we slither down the branches toward the ground. We know that we are falling faster and faster, but we don't see the ground until we hit it. When we crack our skulls against the end of the book, we find an image of ourselves carved in the bark of the tree. Or, like Alice in Looking-Glass Land, and like Brian Chaney in *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, we head forty years into the future in order to find out about ourselves in the present.

(Now, a warning. If you don't know *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, don't read on. Go away and read it quickly.

Then come back to this article.)

Tucker writes most of the book from the viewpoint of Brian Chaney. He is the main branch of the living organism that is *The Year of the Quiet Sun*; he travels in its time machine, and *is* its time machine. The other 'branches' are Kathryn van Hise (called Katrina during most of the book), Gilbert Seabrooke, Major William Moersby and Arthur Saltus. The height of the tree stretches from 2000-and-something backwards to 7 June 1978, when the action of the book begins.

On the book's first page, Brian Chaney sits on a Florida beach, recovering from his recent trip to Israel. He thinks about his past and present, and does not care much for either. Kathryn van Hise, from the 'Bureau of Standards', walks up to him. The leggy girl was both alpha and omega: the two embodied in the same compact bundle,' writes Tucker, and few readers would guess that this is not merely an ordinary

pop fiction cliché. However, if you have read to the end of the novel (and, as in many matters, you must know the end before you can see the significance of the beginning) you will realise that Tucker's first sentence is quite precise. Kathryn appears at the

beginning of Chaney's 'new' life, and meets him at its end. The reader must also notice the reference to the Book of Revelation: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rev. 22: 13, RSV).

I've pulled down the blinds. The tired afternoon sunlight illuminates my book, touches my typewriter and spreads a beam of heat over the wall opposite. The temperature inside my room rises into the middle 60s. I begin to wonder: if Tucker makes a religious reference so early in the book, does he have some religious or mythical framework for the whole book? Does Tucker want to give Kathryn van Hise the status of the angel in Revelation? If so, what is Brian Chaney's position? Is he a St John figure? No, anything but. Tucker's book has none of the thunderclap-and-umpteens-angels flavour of Revelation. Tucker's prophecy proceeds by means of tiny details and delicate steps.

From its beginning, its alpha, this book puzzles me greatly. Tucker announces that his simple words and sentences bear a huge weight of meaning. I must sift every sentence and weigh every word. 'We have seen a sign, and his name is Wilson Tucker.' But *The Year of the Quiet Sun* does not read that way; it does not hit us over the head but insinuates its human meaning into us in a very quiet way.

I shake my head, give up these speculations, and fetch another cup of coffee.

During the first chapter, Tucker almost makes Chaney sound like a Campbell-hero. Kathryn wants him to join the 'Bureau of Standards'; Brian objects to offices 'cluttered with top-heavy bureaucrats speaking strange dialects'. Kathryn tells him, 'You were selected' (sound rather like a Van Vogt superman-story). She offers him a bribe: the Bureau wants to make a *physical* survey of the future. Tucker writes that Chaney 'felt as if he'd been hit'. This sounds very familiar and hackneyed; like any time-travel book written during the early 1950s.

However, I had read the whole book when I reread the first chapter, so I knew that it got better. I realised that Tucker laughs at some of Chaney's opinions in this chapter, as well as supporting some of them. 'When Chaney realised that the girl was coming at him, coming for him, he felt dismay and wished he'd had time to run for it.' The contrast between Kathryn's beauty and her official position and manner disturbs Chaney. In the first chapter Tucker shows us (although the casual reader may be excused for missing the point) that Chaney will not face the consequences of his actions. Chaney has written a book that gives a complete, and controversial, translation of the first two scrolls of Qumram. However, he refuses to admit to himself that he is now a celebrity whom many people might hate. He spends so much energy escaping from this facet of his life that he nearly misses the new open door offered by Kathryn. As Tucker says in the last chapter, Chaney won't 'open the doors' in front of him.

As soon as I began to look at the second chapter, I found that I could not write sensibly about the early part of the book without referring to the last few chapters. *The Year of the Quiet Sun* is so good because every section relates to every other part. As Tucker projects his time machine backwards and forwards in time, he ties time together into one knot. Or, as I've said before, he creates a time machine of his own. In one sense, the novel depends upon one sentence; in another sense, that sentence depends upon the rest of the book.

If you want to understand the book at all (on your second reading) you must know that by the end of the book Chaney has become stranded in the year 2000-and-something. (All clocks have stopped, so nobody knows what year it is.) In the first half of the book,

Moresby, Saltus and Chaney go forward two years and find that Chicago has split into a black section and a white section, divided by a fifteen-mile-long wall. Moresby then goes forward to 1999, where African-American guerrillas kill him. Saltus reaches 2000, from which he barely escapes with his life. Chaney goes forward to 2000-plus, from which the Time Displacement Vehicle cannot push him backwards.

On the day before the three men carry out their missions, they gather beside the swimming pool inside Elwood Station. Saltus and Katrina swim in the pool. Chaney and Moresby sit separately by the side of the pool. Gilbert Seabrooke, the project's director, comes down to the side of the pool and sits beside Chaney. This is the first time that the two have met. Chaney makes a snap judgment: 'Seabrooke's pipe jutted out straight to challenge the world. He was Establishment.' As usual, Chaney's snap judgment is liable to correction. At first, Seabrooke speaks in double talk: 'I make it a practice to explore every possible avenue to attain whatever goal is in view.' He regards himself as a 'practitioner of science' battling it out with the Senate subcommittee in charge of the project's funds. However, although Seabrooke talks glibly, he fears the future more than Chaney does. Chaney, translator of the strange *Eschatos*, denies the disturbing pictures shown in the ancient manuscript. Seabrooke's views are consistent, and as hard-headed as possible without giving way to despair. By contrast, Chaney says, 'I can predict the downfall of the United States', but adds airily, 'I mean that all this will be dust in ten thousand years . . .' At the same time he reminds Seabrooke:

'Worry about something worthwhile. Worry about our violent swing to the extreme right; worry about these hippy-hunts; worry about a President who can't control his own party, much less the country.'

Chaney's two statements do not match up. His facts should show him clearly that by 1978 the United States is well on its way to disintegration. But he assures Seabrooke that the USA might endure 'at least as long as Jericho'!

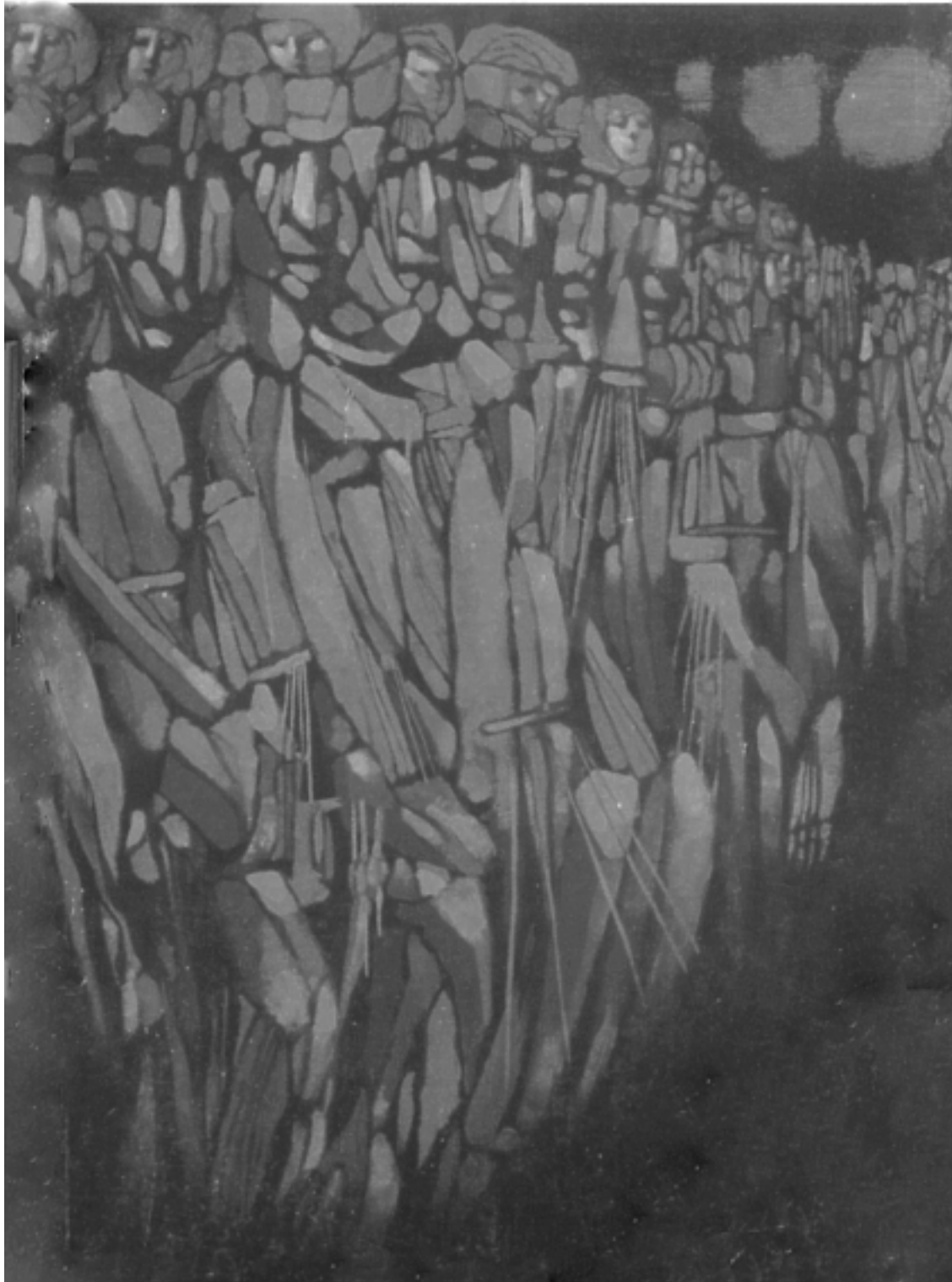
Chaney does not have his mind fully on the problem. Out of the corner of his eye he watches Katrina



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THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN

by WILSON TUCKER



and Saltus swimming in the pool. 'Chaney looked at the woman's wet body and felt something more than a twinge of jealousy.' Saltus claims all of Katrina's attention while Chaney tries to listen to Seabrooke. The project's head tells how nine men died when a TDV returned to its exact time of launching. 'It was an incredible disaster, an incredible oversight, but it happened. Once.' Chaney becomes suspicious, and questions Seabrooke's certainties, until finally the project head can say that 'every phase of this operation has been researched so that nothing is left to chance'.

Through Chaney's eyes, Tucker has already shown the reader that everything has been left to chance, among other things the 'certainty' that the USA has a future. Nobody notices the one fact that eventually dooms the project: that the TDV must have a power source at both ends of its journey. Like the most important clue in a mystery novel, everybody knows all the relevant facts, but nobody can quite guess their meaning. Like any device, the time machine is no better than its builders. Tucker shows us that the builders have committed *hubris*. They express certainty about matters that only time itself can reveal to them. Either they want the Answers (which a conservative extrapolation of the events in 1978 can give them) or they want to travel through time and face the risks. Only one man proves equal to the task, but he cannot provide any Answers for the world of 1978. Having slipped through the net of time, he cannot wriggle back again.

In the pool scene, Tucker appeals to our own sense of remembered time. The sun shines, the pool sparkles, a beautiful woman and a lively man chase each other around the pool, Chaney looks on jealously and thinks nobody notices his discomfort, while Seabrooke spells out the end of the USA in matter-of-fact statements. This scene is not the calm before the storm, as I thought when I first read the book, but part of the storm itself.

The sounds of this scene echo throughout the rest of the book. when Moresby steps out into the embattled world of 1999, he notices that 'the pool was drained, the bottom dry and littered with debris':

The next-to-last time he'd seen the pool . . . Katrina had played in the blue-green water wearing that ridiculous little suit, while Art had chased her like a hungry rooster, wanting to keep his hands on her body. A nice body, that. Art knew what he was doing. And Chaney sat on the sun deck, mooning over the woman — the civilian lacked the proper initiative; wouldn't fight for what he wanted.

Although Chaney had thought that nobody noticed him by the pool-side, Moresby had been watching him keenly. Major Moresby regards Chaney contemptuously as 'civilian'. When Moresby crosses twenty years of time, he must immediately call upon all his military skills. William Atheling Jr has warned authors not to change viewpoints within a novel, but Tucker does so successfully. During this section, Tucker changes his viewpoint from that of Chaney to that of Moresby. However, he judges Moresby just as effectively as he sizes up Chaney during the rest of the book. Moresby

can call on nothing but his military skills. He dares too much. As Moresby remembers the pool incident, he brushes off Chaney as a man without 'the proper initiative'. Moresby shows too much initiative, too much certainty in the face of the completely unknown. In the world of 1999 he dies for his efforts. Chaney loses a great deal in 1978, but he continues to live in the twenty-first century.

When Saltus emerges in the year 2000, he finds only an 'eerie silence'. The barracks have burned down, someone has taken supplies left for the time travellers, and bodies lie in the snow. Saltus sets out on his 'survey' in a jaunty manner. Into the tape-recorder he gives Chaney some good old-fashioned Republican American advice: 'You'd damned well better shoot straight if you have to shoot at all. Remember *something* we taught you.' When Saltus passes the swimming pool it is:

Nearly empty: a half dozen long lumps huddled under the blanket of snow at the bottom, lumps the shape of men . . . Saltus turned away, expelling a breath of bitter disappointment; he wasn't sure what he had expected after so long a time, but certainly not that — not the bodies of station personnel dumped into an uncovered grave.

He remembered the beautiful image of Katrina in that pool — Katrina, nearly naked, scantily clad in that lovely, sexy swim suit — and himself chasing after her, wanting the feel of that wet and splendid body under his hands again and again . . . And Chaney! The poor out-gunned civilian sat up on the deck and burned with a green, sulphurous envy, wanting to but not daring to. Damn, but that was a day to be remembered!

Dead bodies in the pool replace the glittering water, the two swimmers and their watchers. In the year 2000, Saltus only has the memory of Katrina, although in 1980 he finds out that he will marry her in the years between 1978 and 1980. He also remembers the 'poor out-gunned civilian', still the man to whom he condescends. Saltus and Chaney form a firm friendship in the early part of the novel, but the soldier always presumes that he can kick around the scholar. In fact, the scholar outlives the soldier and, in a very ambiguous way, outmanoeuvres him. By the end of the book, all the soldiers have killed each other. The only knowledge that remains rests within Chaney's head — his knowledge of the ways in which the ancient tribes of the Negev Desert survived in the middle of desolation.

When Chaney emerges from the TDV, he finds that all the electric power is off. The station is in complete darkness. He explores a desolate world. A headstone rests in the ground. Its inscription reads 'A ditat Deus K'. Someone has tied skulls to the station's gatepost, warning away all intruders. when Chaney looks at the swimming pool he sees:

A few inches of dirty water . . . — residue from the rains — together with a poor collection of rusted and broken weapons and an appreciable amount of debris blown in by the wind: the pool had become a dumping ground for trash and armament. The sodden corpse of some small animal floated in a

corner. A lonely place. Chaney very carefully put away the memory of the pool as he'd known it and backed away from the edge.

This passage shows Tucker's extraordinary attention to detail. Why did the pool 'become a dumping ground for trash and armament'? Because the destruction of the whole world took place in the air around the pool. But even so much violence leaves few fragments. What is the 'sodden corpse of some small animal' that 'floated in a corner'? Might it not be the last remainder of the human bodies that lay in the pool when Saltus saw it? What is the 'memory of the pool' that Chaney so carefully 'puts away'? The same memory that Moresby and Saltus recalled with gusto. At this point, Chaney cannot face the memory of the steps he should have taken.

I could explore this book for several thousand words more. *The Year of the Quiet Sun* is a living, trustworthy book. Tucker has considered every line and detail; he has imagined every scene fully and weighed every word.

But where does he place the full weight of the book? Where does the time machine actually arrive? What lies at the base of the 'tree'? I'll go back to the last meeting between Katrina and Chaney. Compare the whole of the rest of the book with these lines:

He said: 'When this survey is completed I want to leave . . .'

Quickly: 'Is it because of something you found up there? Has something turned you away, Brian?'

'Ah — no more questions.'

'But you leave me so unsatisfied!'

A moment of silence, and then . . . 'Ask the others to be here at ten o'clock in the morning for a final briefing. We must evaluate these reports. The probe is scheduled for the day after tomorrow.'

'Are you coming downstairs to see us off?'

'No, sir. I will wait for you here.'

Again Tucker shows his ability to convey the greatest possible meaning in the smallest possible number of words. Of course there is something that Chaney found 'up there' — he found out that Saltus marries Katrina sometime between 1978 and 1980. However, Chaney determined the direction of that future in 1978, as he sat by the poolside while Saltus wooed Katrina. And shouldn't he have shown some reaction when Katrina cries out in deliberate ambiguity: 'But you leave me so unsatisfied!?' Chaney misses the point of the conversation, although the reader does

not. Because he misses the point of the conversation, he must go thirty or forty years into the future so that he can meet Katrina again. Chaney says only, 'I wish you luck, and I'll think of you often in the tank.' (What *do* you say in such a situation? Katrina sees which future Chaney has chosen, or rather, failed to choose. She addresses him again as 'Mr Chaney' instead of 'Brian'. She gives her farewell, 'No, sir. I will wait for you here.'

And when Brian Chaney steps out of the TDV in the year 2000-plus, he finds that Katrina has kept her word:

The aged woman was sitting in her accustomed chair to one side of the oversized steel table . . . As always, her clasped hands rested on the tabletop in repose. Chaney put the lantern on the table between them and the poor light fell on her face.

Katrina.

Her eyes were bright and alive, as sharply alert as he remembered them, but time had not been lenient with her . . . The skin was drawn tight over her cheekbones, pulled tight around her mouth and chin and appeared fallow in lantern light. The lustrous, lovely hair was entirely gray. Hard years, unhappy years, lean years . . .

Katrina waited on him. Chaney struggled for something to say, something that wouldn't sound foolish or melodramatic or carry a ring of false heartiness. She would despise him for that . . . He had left her here in this room only hours ago, left her with that sense of dry apprehension as he prepared himself for the third — now final — probe into the future. She had been sitting in the same chair in the same attitude of repose.

Chaney said: 'I'm *still* in love with you, Katrina.'

Katrina has waited her entire life, she has endured the decline and fall of her world, she has brought up her two children under the worst possible conditions, and she has seen her husband die. No heat, light or time remains in the station. From the past comes a man who might be a ghost; a man who lacks the experience of forty years' continuous disaster, a man who has not changed at all. But finally, thirty years too late, he does show that he has changed. Not much, but enough. He says the words that he would have said in 1978; he realises the meaning of his time journey; for once, he observes carefully the scene in front of him, places his image-of- Katrina-past over the image of Katrina-present, makes the right judgment, and says the right words.

But, you might say, there are no time machines. *That's* part of the book's significance, as well. As Chaney explores the deserted station, he reflects that but for the time machine 'he would have plodded along in his slow, myopic way until the future slammed into him — or he into it'. *That's* us; we're the people unblessed by Time Displacement Vehicles, busily walking myopically towards the brick wall of the future. Isaac Asimov puts it more bluntly: the present world outlook reminds him of the tale of the man who fell off the Empire State Building; as he passed the tenth storey, he said, 'Well, I've fallen ninety storeys and I'm all right so far' (*F&SF*, May 1969, p. 99). But Tucker has not written the book in order to warn us about certainties that should strike the readers of any newspaper. He has written about time-travelling, rather than The Future; about saying and doing the right things and words at the right time. *The Year of the Quiet Sun* is about ourselves. *That's* all. *That's* enough.

— Bruce Gillespie, October 1971

The science fiction

Introduction:

I've already introduced Lesleigh. **Hank Luttrell** has remained a bookseller for many years in Madison, Wisconsin, but at the time this article was written, he and Lesleigh were famous mainly for their editorship of *Starling* and their multiple contributions to fandom throughout the late sixties and early seventies.

Ice and Iron appeared before I had written 'Hidden heroes', but at the time there seemed no easy way to fit it into the pattern of that essay. Therefore I was very glad when Hank and Lesleigh sent me this review.

Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell

Tucker's two futures

Reviewed:

Ice and Iron
by Wilson Tucker

(Doubleday/Science Fiction Book Club; 1974; 181 pp.
Victor Gollancz; 1974; 181 pp.; £2.50)

Ice and Iron is a challenging book. To some readers, it may seem to be a book without an ending. Certainly the book has no conventional ending where everything is explained down to the last detail, and everyone lives happily ever after. On the contrary, much is left unexplained, and the characters are left much as we found at the beginning of the book. But this does not make *Ice and Iron* an incomplete novel. Wilson Tucker has succeeded in detailing a remarkable glimpse into two futures: the near future, in which even the most competent and resourceful characters are doomed to defeat by the advancing ice of a new glaciation; and far distant future in which a typical cycle of human history repeats itself.

Tucker uses alternating chapters to explore the two futures. In the 'Ice' segments, Fisher Yann Highsmith and a group of very stubborn men and women camp on the edge of an advancing glaciation, studying the incredible debris that the glacier seems to rain down on them. Invoking the ever-confounding Charles Fort, Tucker ties in the second, far distant future, where a primitive hunting culture is being conquered by a technologically superior culture.

One of the most striking things about *Ice and Iron* is the description of North America as the next glacial episode begins. Tucker uses the idea, held by many people, that we are not yet out of the 'Ice Age', that the glaciers will come again to cover half of North America. Using only a few characters and a very limited situation, he manages to convey much of what his future glaciation might be like. Canada has joined

the US and its people have been resettled on land purchased from Mexico. The land that makes up Canada today is almost completely covered by the ice. People have come to accept the new glaciation, although it is still an overwhelming experience for the main character when he sees the glacier for the first time. However, in the un-iced portions of the continent life goes on, people settle in their new homes, and they have 'glow parties' to say farewell to the towns that are being abandoned to the ice. Tucker manages to convey the picture of a civilisation that is in the process of decline, using parties and drugs to help blot out the ever-present reality of the ice bearing down on their world.

Ice was destruction and death; the moving wall was an instrument of calamity. The real glaciation was a dark, burgeoning grey-black blanket of ice and mud and stone pushing down out of the Arctic refrigerator and overrunning the adjoining states. Uncounted villages and towns were ground beneath it while uncounted cities were standing empty, awaiting their turn.

While one can quibble with Tucker's picture of the physical changes wrought by the ice — for example, he ignores the plight of coastal cities finding themselves further and further inland as the sea level drops because of the amount of water tied up in the glaciers — his picture of the society facing this glaciation is frighteningly well done.

The most frightening part of the book is the realisation that such glaciation may very likely occur. There's no real reason to think that we are done with the Pleistocene Ice Age. Although modern geologists refer to the period we are now in as the Holocene, many think we are actually in an interglacial era and that the ice will begin spreading again. But perhaps the thought shouldn't be all that frightening. *Homo*

sapiens is a product of the Pleistocene glaciation. Most current theories on the how and why of hominid evolution emphasise the importance of adaption to the changing environmental characteristics of the Pleistocene. Fluctuations in the environment were not confined to the northern areas that suffered under the advancing and retreating ice, but occurred also in the tropics, subject to alternating wet and dry periods. The tropics is where man first evolved, mainly in response to these fluctuations. *Homo sapiens* was the first primate to learn to live with the ice, as Neanderthal man was able to live in Europe during the last glacial advance. It was the stimulus of the changing environment characteristic of the Pleistocene that made us what we are today.

Another effective aspect of the novel is Tucker's reconstruction of the thoughts, actions and goals of a number of primitive hunters, and their reactions to the advancement of a hostile group of women from the south, armed with a science as irresistible as the glacier itself. Just where the women are from, and how their advanced technology developed, and why their culture seems to have placed women in the role of soldier and explorer are never explained, since the viewpoint is always that of the primitive hunter. To the hunter, the situation is clear — the women are the enemy. To the reader, the pattern is also clear — it bears a striking similarity to the taking of this hemisphere by Europeans.

This novel is not a conventional science fiction adventure in which the hero fights to save the world from a natural disaster, and pulls a magical solution out of a technological hat. Fisher Yann Highsmith and his associates are only observers, as is the rest of mankind, while the ice advances out of the north. Even Highsmith's social life reflects his helplessness, as he tries to express fondness for the librarian and finds that she has devoted herself to spending her life watching the ice grind down the land that once was her home.

The most dissatisfying aspect of this book is the incredible use of the theories of Charles Fort. It is remarkable that Highsmith is able to reconstruct as much as he does from the scattered artifacts and



ICE & IRON

a new science fiction novel by

Wilson Tucker

author of **THE YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN**
and **THE TIME MASTERS**

bodies. He is able to learn almost as much from this debris as does the reader from the 'Iron' segments of the novel. Much is left to the reader's imagination — the eventual fall of current civilisation, the rise of the Amazonian group, the derivation of the hunters on the glacial plains of the future. Perhaps some readers will not enjoy doing so much work on their own. But Tucker gives a tantalising supply of clues with which to work. Still, the reader is left with the unpleasant feeling that things just don't stick together, that the two parts of the book cannot be reconciled. But Tucker has cautioned the reader with his opening quote from Robert Louis Stevenson: 'Ice and iron cannot be welded.'

— Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, 1974

Philip Stephensen-Payne and Denny Lien

The works of Wilson Tucker: Bibliography

Editor's introduction: I had intended to reprint **Denny Lien**'s bibliography from the first edition of the Tucker Issue. Denny is a librarian from Minneapolis, a man who knows how to use a computer to search for information and generate bibliographies when people need them. When I wrote about the upcoming Second Edition on the Internet, **Philip Stephensen-Payne**, a well-known bibliographer from Britain, offered to send me the current electronic version of his Tucker bibliography. Therefore I've used the layout of Phil's version rather than the layout used in the first edition.

I discovered that the two bibliographies nicely complemented each other, but that there were gaps in both versions. I've tried to fill those gaps from information I have. There are still enormous gaps that we cannot cover, such as Tucker's innumerable contributions to other people's fanzines over the last seventy years; and any scholarship on Tucker's works apart from articles that have appeared in *SF Commentary* or *Banshee* (see the end of the list).

All corrections and additions should be sent to me, Bruce Gillespie, at the snail mail or email address given in the colophon. I will send on all such information to Phil and Denny.

Awards

- 1970 HUGO AWARDS: Best Fan Writer
- 1976 JOHN W. CAMPBELL MEMORIAL AWARD:
The Year of the Quiet Sun
- 2001 (1951) RETRO-HUGO AWARDS:
Best Fanzine: *Science Fiction News Letter*

A. Stories

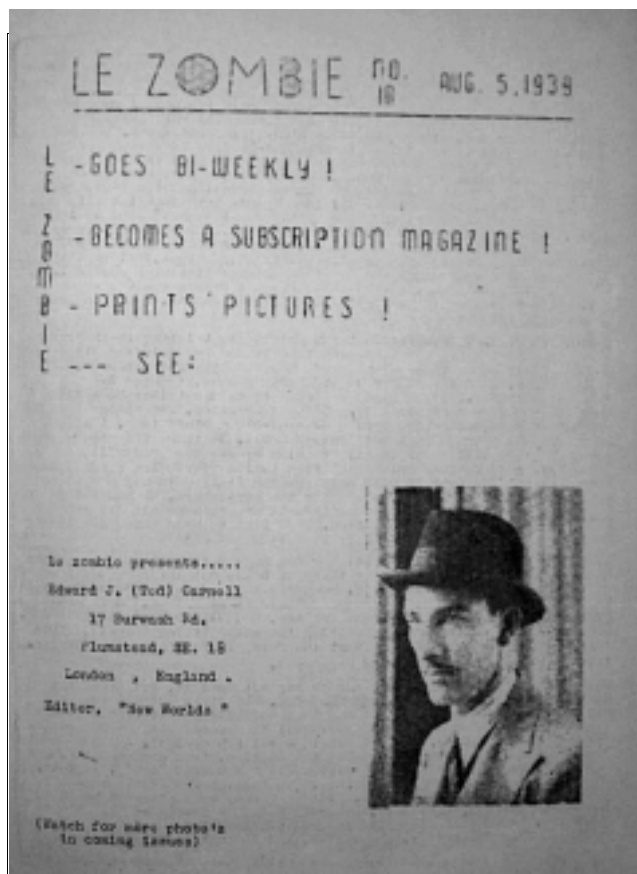
- A1 'Able to Zebra' (short story)
Fantasy & Science Fiction Mar. 1953
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury* and
in *The Best of Wilson Tucker*
- A2 'Drown or Die' (short story)
Crack Detective Jan. 1943 (as by Sanford Vaid)
- A3 'Exit' (short story)
Astonishing Stories Apr. 1943
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury* and
in *The Best of Wilson Tucker*
- A4 'Gentlemen — The Queen!' (short story)
Science Fiction Quarterly, Fall 1942
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury*
- A5 'Home Is Where the Wreck Is' (short story)
Universe, No. 5, May 1954
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury*
- A6 'Interstellar Way-Station' (short story)
Super Science Stories May 1941
- A7 'The Job Is Ended' (novelette)
Other Worlds, Nov. 1950
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury* and
in *The Best of Wilson Tucker*
- A8 'King of the Planet' (short story)
Galaxy, Oct. 1959; No. 76, Nov. 1959 (UK)

- collected in *The Best of Wilson Tucker*
- A9 "MCMLV" (short story)
(also published as "MCMLIX") in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury*
- A10 'Miraculous Fluid' (sss)
Astounding, Apr. 1943 ('Probability Zero' department)
- A11 'The Mountaineer' (short story)
Fiendetta (fanzine), Vol. 2, No. 1, Dec. 1953 (as
'Mountain Justice')
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury*
- A12 'My Brother's Wife' (short story)
Fantasy & Science Fiction, Feb. 1951
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury* and
in *The Best of Wilson Tucker*
- A13 'The Near-Zero Crime Rate on JJ Avenue' (short
story)
Analog, Apr. 1978
- A14 'The Other' (short story)
Super Science Stories Jun. 1944 (Canadian) (as
by Sanford Vaid)
- A15 'The Princess of Detroit' (short story)
Future Fiction, Jun. 1942
- A16 'Prison Planet' (short story)
Planet Stories, Fall 1942
- A17 'The Recon Man' (novelette)
If Jan. 1965
- A18 'The Street Walker' (short story)
in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury*
- A19 'That Mysterious Bomb Raid' (short short story)
Astounding, Jul. 1942 ('Probability Zero' department)
- A20 'Time Exposures' (short story)

- Universe 1*, ed. Carr, Ace, 1971
collected in *The Best Of Wilson Tucker*
- A21 'To a Ripe Old Age' (short story)
Fantasy & Science Fiction, Dec. 1952
basis for *The Long Loud Silence*
collected in *The Best of Wilson Tucker*
- A22 'To the Tombaugh Station' (novelette)
Fantasy & Science Fiction, Jul. 1960
basis for *To the Tombaugh Station*
collected in *The Best of Wilson Tucker*
- A23 'The Tourist Trade' (short story)
Worlds Beyond, Jan. 1951
collected in *The Best Of Wilson Tucker*
- A24 'The Very Old Badger Game' (short story)
excised material from *The Long Loud Silence*
Nickelodeon, No. 1 (fanzine), July 1975
- A25 'The Visitors' (short story)
The Nekromantikon (fanzine) No. 5, mid-year 1951
- A26 'Voices at Night' (short story)
The Nekromantikon (fanzine) No. 5, mid-year 1951
- A27 'The Wayfaring Strangers' (short story)
Fantastic Worlds (fanzine), Fall 1952
collected in *The Science Fiction Subtreasury*

B. Fiction books

- B1 *The Best of Wilson Tucker* (C-9: 'To the Tombaugh Station', 'To a Ripe Old Age', 'King of the Planet', 'Exit', 'The Tourist Trade', 'My Brother's Wife', 'The Job Is Ended', 'Able to Zebra', 'Time Exposures')
Timescape (US pb) 1982
- B2 *The Chinese Doll*
Rinehart (US hb) 1946
Oxford (Can hb) 1946
Black/Detective Book Club (US hb) 1947 (with *Two Clues* by E. S. Gardner and *Overdue for Death* by Z. H. Ross)
Cassell (UK hb) 1948
Dell (US pb) 1949
- B3 *The City in the Sea*
Rinehart (US hb) 1951
Clarke, Irwin (Can. pb) 1951
Galaxy Novels (pb) 1952
Nova Novel (pb) 1955
- B4 *The Dove*
Rinehart (US hb) 1948
Cassell (UK hb) 1950
Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1948
Cassell (UK hb) 1950
- B5 *The Hired Target*
Ace (US pb) 1957 (bound with *One Deadly Dawn* by Harry Whittington)
- B6 *Ice and Iron*
Doubleday SFBC (US hb) 1974
Gollancz (UK hb) 1975
Ballantine (US pb) 1975 (last chapter revised)
Arrow (UK pb) 1977
- B7 *Last Stop*
Doubleday Crime Club (US hb) 1963
Hale (UK hb) 1965, reissued 1967
Lancer (US pb) 1971
- B8 *The Lincoln Hunters*
Rinehart (US hb) 1958
- Doubleday SFBC (US hb) 1958
UK SFBC (UK hb) 1961
Ace (US pb) 1968
Coronet (UK pb) 1980
- B9 *The Long Loud Silence* (based on 'To a Ripe Old Age'; excised material published as 'The Very Old Badger Game')
Rinehart (US hb) 1952
Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1952
Doubleday SFBC (US hb) 1953
Lane SFBC (UK hb) 1953
British Publishers Guild (UK pb) 1953
The Bodley Head (UK hb) 1953
Guild (UK pb) 1953
Dell (US pb) 1954
Lancer (US pb) 1970
- B10 *The Man in My Grave*
Rinehart (US hb) 1956
Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1956
Black/Detective Book Club (US hb) 1956 (with *Burden of Proof* by Victor Canning and *Borrow the Night* by Helen Nielsen)
Macdonald (UK hb) 1958
- B11 *A Procession of the Damned*
Doubleday (US hb) 1965
Doubleday (Can. hb) 1965
Hale (UK hb) 1967
Lancer (US pb) 1971
- B12 *Red Herring*
Rinehart (US hb) 1951
Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1951
Cassell (UK hb) 1953
- B13 *Resurrection Days*
Timescape (US pb) 1981
- B14 *The Science Fiction Subtreasury* (C-10: Introduction, 'The Street Walker', "MCMLV", 'Home Is Where the Wreck Is', 'My Brother's Wife', 'Gentlemen — The Queen!', 'The Job Is Ended', 'Exit', 'The Wayfaring Strangers', 'Able to Zebra', 'The Mountaineer')
Rinehart (US hb) 1954
Bantam (US pb) 1955 (as *Time-X*)
- B15 *The Stalking Man*
Rinehart (US hb) 1949
Black/Detective BC (US hb) (with *Deadly Duo* by Margery Allingham and *The Gun in Daniel Webster's Bust* by Margery Scharf)
Cassell (UK hb) 1951
- B16 *This Witch*
Doubleday (US hb) 1971
Gollancz (UK hb) 1972
Panther (UK pb) 1974
Arrow (UK pb) 1975
- B17 *Time Bomb*
Rinehart (US hb) 1955
Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1955
Doubleday SFBC (US hb) 1955
Avon (US pb) 1957 (as *Tomorrow Plus X*)
- B18 *The Time Masters*
Rinehart (US hb) 1953
Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1953
Startling Stories Jan. 1954 (abridged)
Signet (US pb) 1954
New Worlds Sep.-Nov. 1955
Doubleday SFBC (US hb) 1971 (revised edition)
Lancer (US pb) 1971 (slightly revised and up-



Thanks to Keith Stokes for making available on the Internet past and recent issues of *Le Zombie* (address in Toni's article).

- dated)
 Gollancz (UK hb) 1973
 Panther (UK pb) 1974
- B19 *To Keep or Kill*
 Rinehart (US hb) 1947
 Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1947
 Lion (US pb) 1950, reissued 1956
 Cassell (UK hb) 1950
- B20 *To the Tombaugh Station*
 Ace (US pb) 1960 (bound with *Earthman, Go Home* by Poul Anderson)
Fantasy & Science Fiction Jul. 1960 (abridged);
 British edition Nov. 1960
- B21 *The Warlock*
 Doubleday (US hb) 1967
 Hale (UK hb) 1968
 Avon (US pb) 1969
- B22 *Wild Talent*
 Rinehart (US hb) 1953
 Clarke, Irwin (Can. hb) 1954
 Doubleday SFBC (US hb) 1954
 Bantam (US pb) 1955 (as *Man from Tomorrow*)
 Michael Joseph (UK hb) 1955 (adds about 5000 words)
 Sidgwick & Jackson SFBC (UK hb) 1956
 Avon (US pb) 1954
 Coronet (UK pb) 1980
- B23 *The Year of the Quiet Sun*
 Ace (US pb) 1970
 Hale (UK hb) 1971
 Arrow (UK pb) 1972
 Gregg Press (US hb) 1979
 Clarkston Borealis (US tpb) 1985 (as *Three in Time*, with *The Winds of Time* (Chad Oliver) and *There Will be Time* (Poul Anderson))



C. Non-fiction books

- C1 *The Neo-fan's Guide To Science Fictton Fandom*
 Mafia Press (ph) 1955
- C2 *The Really Incompleat Bob Tucker* (collection of
 fanzine articles edited by Dave Locke)
 Robert and Juanita Coulson (ph) 1974

D. Fanzines edited by Bob Tucker

In parallel with his writing career, Bob Tucker has been a very active fan and has edited a wide range of fanzines (all under the name of Bob Tucker). The following is as complete a list as currently available of those that he edited. Note that, in most cases, Tucker also wrote a large amount of the material contained in the fanzines as well.

- D1 *The Bloomington Newsletter/ Science-Fiction Newsletter*
 (29 issues from 1945 to 1953)
 as *The Bloomington Newsletter*:
 No. 1, Dec. 1945; No. 2, Feb. 1946; No. 3, Mar. 1946; No. 4, Apr. 1946; No. 5, Feb. 1947; No. 6, Sep. 1947; No. 6, Sep. 1948 [sic]; No. 8, Feb. 1949; No. 9, Apr. 1949; No. 10, Jun. 1949; No. 11, Aug. 1949; No. 12, Sep. 1949; No. 12A, Oct. 1949; No. 14, Dec. 1949
 as *The Science-Fiction Newsletter*: No. 15, Apr. 1950; No. 16, Jul. 1950; No. 17, Oct. 1950; No. 18, Dec. 1950; No. 19, Mar. 1951; No. 20, May 1951; No. 21, Jul. 1951; No. 22, Oct. 1951; No. 23, Jan. 1952; No. 24, Mar. 1952; No. 25, May 1952; No. 26, Jul. 1952; No. 27, Autumn 1952; No. 28, Winter 1952/1953; No. 29, Summer 1953

- D2 *D'journal*
Six issues (plus 1 unfinished issue) from Spring 1935 to 1939.
- D3 *Faneuscard*
First 12 issues, starting 3 Jul. 1943, of a fanzine printed on penny postcards. Continued to No. 163 by other editors.
- D4 *Fanzine Yearbook*
Five annual issues, 1941–45, last one entitled *Fanzine Index*.
- D5 *Gnome Press Presents . . . the Science Fiction World* (with Robert Bloch)
Six issues of the Gnome Press newsletter.
Vol. 1 No. 1, Aug. 1955; Vol. 1 No. 2, Feb. 1956; Vol. 1 No. 3, Aug. 1956; Vol. 1 No. 4, Fall 1956; Vol. 1 No. 4 [sic], Feb. 1957; Vol. 1 No. 5, Spring 1957
- D6 *Indian Lake: There I Went*
One-shot in 1953.
- D7 *Invisible Stories*
One-shot in 1939.
- D8 *Le Zombie*
(67 issues from 1938 to 2000)
No. 1, Dec. 1938; No. 2, Jan. 1939; No. 3, Mar. 1939; No. 4, Apr. 1939; No. 5, May 1939; No. 6, May 1939; No. 7, May 1939; No. 8, Jun. 1939; No. 9, Jul. 1939; No. 10, Aug. 1939; No. 11, Aug. 1939; No. 12, Sep. 1939; No. 13, Sep. 1939; No. 14, Sep. 1939; No. 15, Oct. 1939; No. 16, Oct. 1939; No. 17, Nov. 1939; No. 18, 2 Dec. 1939; No. 19, 16 Dec. 1939; No. 20, Dec. 1939; No. 21, Jan. 1940; No. 22, Jan. 1940; No. 23, Feb. 1940; No. 24, Feb. 1940; No. 25, Mar. 1940; No. 26, Mar. 1940; No. 27, Apr. 1940; No. 27–2, Apr. 1940; No. 28, May 1940; No. 29, Jun. 1940; No. 30, Jul. 1940; No. 31, Aug. 1940; No. 32/33, 9 Oct. 1940; No. 34, Nov. 1940; No. 35, Dec. 1940; No. 36, Jan. 1941; No. 37, Mar. 1941; No. 38, Apr. 1941; No. 39, Jun. 1941; No. 40, Jul. 1941; No. 41, Aug. 1941; No. 42, Sep. 1941; No. 43, Oct. 1941; No. 44, Nov. 1941; No. 45, Jan. 1942; No. 46, Apr. 1942; No. 47, May 1942; No. 48, Jul. 1942; No. 49, Sep. 1942; No. 50, Nov.–Dec. 1942; No. 51, Jan. 1943; No. 52, Mar. 1943; No. 53, May 1943; No. 54, Sep. 1943; No. 55, Nov. 1943; No. 56, Jan. 1944; No. 57, Apr. 1944; No. 58, Jul. 1944; No. 59, Nov. 1944; No. 60, Sep. 1945; No. 61, Jul. 1946; (No. 62 not published); No. 63, Jul. 1948 (reprinted as *DNQ* No. 30, May 1980), No. 64, 1 Jan. 1955; (No. 65 not published); No. 66, 31 Dec. 1968; No. 67, Dec. 1975; No. 68, Oct. 2000 (Internet distribution); No. 69, Nov. 2000 (Internet distribution)
- D9 *Nova*
One-shot in May 1939.
- D10 *The Planetoid*
Two issues, December 1932 and January 1933.
- D11 *Science Fiction/Fantasy Advertiser*
Three issues in 1939, the first one entitled *The Science Fiction Advertiser* and the other two entitled *Science And Fantasy Advertiser*.
- D12 *Science Fiction Fifty-yearly* (with Robert Bloch)
One-shot in 1957.
- D13 *Science Fiction/FAPA Variety*
Eleven issues from 1939 to 1944, under a vari-

ety of names:

No. 1 = *Sci-Fic Variety*

No. 2–No. 7 = *Science Fiction Variety*

No. 8 = *S-F Variety*

No. 9–No. 11 = *FAPA Variety*

- D14 *Yearbook Of Science, Weird And Fantasy Fiction*
Three issues in 1938 and one in 1939.

E. Publication-length tributes to Wilson/Bob Tucker

- E1 *Banshee* No. 9, August 1974 ('Special Bob Tucker Fund Issue'); ed. Mike Gorra
'C'est Moi' by Mike Gorra
'I Remember Lemuria, and Bob Tucker, Vaguely' by Dave Locke
'The Purple Pastures' by Terry Carr writing as 'Carl Brandon'
'Night of the Quiet Sun' by Andrew J. Offutt
'Artist's Ego' by Terry Austin and Randy Bathurst
'One Afternoon in Toronto' by Jodie Offutt
'Winged Victory' by Arnie Katz
'A Nose by Any Other Name' by Terry Hughes
Folio by Eric Mayer
'I Went to a Westercon, or, I Shoulda Said' by Charles Burbee
'Tuckergroupie' by Susan Wood
'The Life and Legend of Wilson "Bob" Tucker' by Dean A. Grennell
'The Last Fetid Breath' by Mike Gorra
Front cover art by Ross Chamberlain; back cover art by Randy Bathurst; other line art by Terry Austin, Randy Bathurst, Brad Balfour, Sheryl Birkhead, Terry Jeeves, Jay Kinney, Bill Kunkel, Tim Lucas, Jim McLeod, Joe Pearson, Bill Rotzler, Marc Schirmeister, Al Sirois
- E2 *SF Commentary* No. 43, August 1975 ('The Tucker Issue'), edited by Bruce Gillespie
Editorial by Bruce Gillespie
'A Touch o' Tucker' by Ed Connor
'Bob Tucker interviewed by Paul Walker'
'The Mysterious Wilson Tucker' by Lesleigh Luttrell
'Hidden Heroes: The Science Fiction Novels of Wilson Tucker' by Bruce Gillespie
'Where We're Arriving' by Bruce Gillespie
'Tucker's Two Futures' by Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell
'The Works of Wilson Tucker' bibliography by Denny Lien
Cover photo by Helena and Kelvin Roberts

F. Tucker scholarship

A big blank here! Anybody want to research this category? Bruce Gillespie's 'Where We're Arriving' first appeared in *SF Commentary* 21 in 1971; the other known Tucker scholarship is contained in the two publications listed above, and in the magazine you are holding.

— Philip Stephensen-Payne and Denny Lien, 1975/2003

This is *not* the letter column in reply to recent issues of *SF Commentary*. It presents some of the responses to the original version of 'Where We're Arriving' (*SFC* 24) and the first edition of the Tucker Issue (*SFC* 43).

In reply . . .

Bob Tucker (Heyworth, Illinois):

7 January 1972

I am delighted with your commentary on *The Year of the Quiet Sun*. Had you disliked the book my reaction would have been the same: your ability to read between the lines, plus an ability to understand what was *not* being said, makes you a sensitive reader to be prized by any writer. Speed readers and surface readers are a burden, because they refuse to take the necessary time to read anything thoroughly, but yet they criticise because they think something is missing from the story. I will not quibble or quarrel with anyone who honestly dislikes a story; there can be many reasons for disliking any story, and a subjective opinion is usually the most lasting one. My quarrel is with those who dislike a story (or an idea, or a proposal) after only a surface inspection and a snap subjective appraisal.

Quiet Sun was written three times, over a period of almost three years. That, I think, accounts for the careful attention to detail that you found. The first and second versions were rejected by this editor and that, including Terry Carr, who finally accepted the third version. Each new revision uncovered loose ends and flaws I hadn't seen before, and each revision enabled me to shape the ending toward the beginning. The very first page was the last one to be written, except for mainor changes Terry Carr wanted after he had the manuscript in hand. When the ending was finally reached, I realised what should be said on the first page. And I am ever so pleased that you understood the quiet references to alpha, omega and the gravestone. I am learning not to shout in novels, to gain a better overall effect. What I re-read E. E. Smith, for example, the shouting offends me.

And as you have probably surmised, *Quiet Sun* was written as a love story. Fandom may hang me by the thumbs for that confession because fandom believes itself to be too sophisticated for love stories, but I'll stand by it. I will also stand by a device I used that many American readers have denounced as a trick. The protagonist's colour-of-skin means absolutely nothing to the story until the future slams into him two-thirds of the way in; he was hired for his own honest skills and abilities, for his knowledge, and his colour played no part in it until colour was forced upon him when he collided with the future. I detested the very idea of pinning a big black label on him in the first chapter — that kind of writing is for youngsters and bigots. I tried (but failed) to cause him to think and react like a black man; he was so thoroughly a part of the white world that he had to be *told* why certain field operations were forbidden to

him. But alas, many American readers still did not realise what was happening. Speed readers, I guess.

26 January 1972

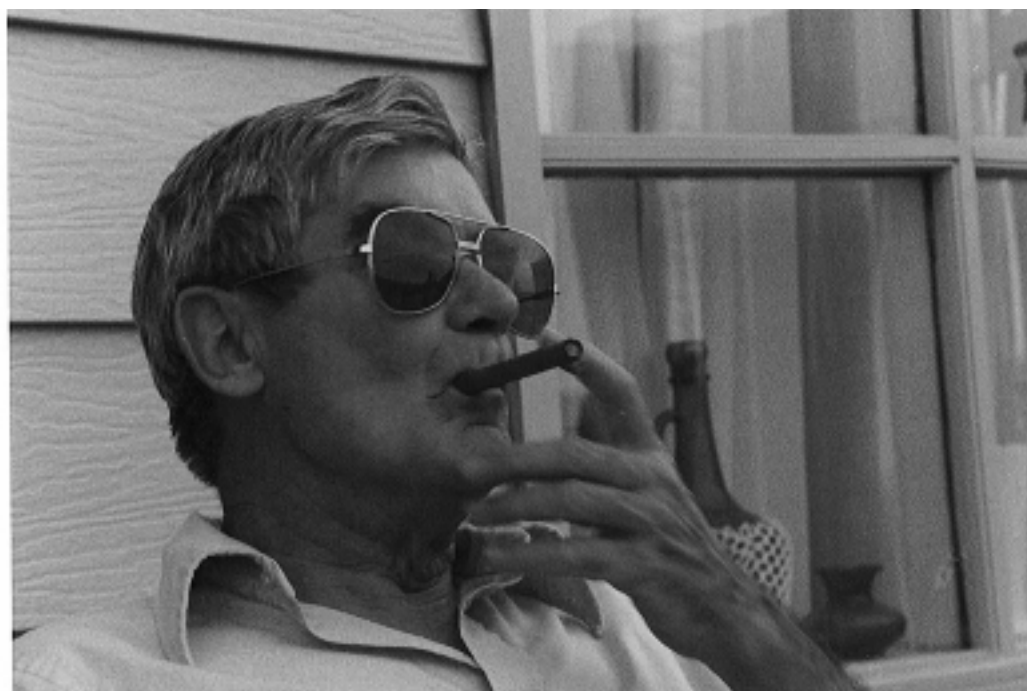
It is difficult to say what is the religious background of *Year of the Quiet Sun*, if any. No open and above-board religious significance was intended, other than I wanted the protagonist to be interested in scrolls because I am deeply interested in scrolls; and of course that interest permitted me to give the man a reason for half retreating from the world because the world (the newspaper part of it) treated him so poorly after misreading his book. And for story purposes, it also permitted the project director to misread him, and it worked in smoothly toward the end when the protagonist discovered himself involved in the end-of-the-world situation that paralleled, in some few respects, the scroll he had translated and labelled fiction. This last was one of the minor revisions Terry Carr asked for: he wanted more forceful symbols inserted into the end, symbols that directly sprang from the scroll in chapter 5.

Ordinarily I care very little for symbolism in books and stories, as distinct from ideas and gadgets that will have a meaningful turn later to advance the plot. I wasn't aware of inserting much symbolism into *Quiet Sun*, although some reviewers have said the book is chockful of them. But, for Terry, the final chapter was revised to include the lab building that resembled the white temple in the moonlight, the barbarians' failure to bring it down, and a greater emphasis on the figure with the feet of clay coming forth twice from beneath the temple. Earlier points, such as the rupturing of the fence and ice on the rivers (and others) were included early on simply to make points in plot development.

I admire Terry Carr; I think him a brilliant editor and I regret his departure from Ace. He had his weaknesses like all of us, his blind spots, and he has taken unwarranted criticism from some fans because he saw some books differently than they; fans are too quick to point to imaginary flaws, but they really mean to say they wouldn't have written a given book in the same manner an author wrote it. I guess fans are in a rut. They want the same fiction presented in the same old ways, at the same time crying for something new. Bob Shaw offered an exciting new twist to *The Palace of Eternity*, but how did the fans accept it? They wanted stock space opera.

Speaking of the scroll and the symbolism again, nothing in the novel comes from the Bible or the scrolls except those obviously references to Revelation and Daniel, etc. The scrolls Brian Chaney translated are wholly fictitious. To my knowledge, there is no

Tucker before
he gave up
cigars (1980s?).
(Photographer
unknown; from
the collection of
Toni Weisskopf.)



such thing as another translation of Revelation that differs from the historical one, while the other scroll, the Eschatos document, is purely imaginary.

I've been following the story of the real scrolls since the first announcement of their discovery, and have been fascinated by them. Archaeology is my great weakness, the one science liked above all others, and during the past quarter-century or so I've read numerous religious and semi-religious books dealing with biblical archaeology and geography. I also enjoy reading various Bible commentaries to find how religious authors treat legendary people and places and events. From all this, it occurred early on that good fictive use could be made of the scrolls. The matter of the Nabataean cistern — and photographs of it — come from fact: Nelson Glueck's *Rivers in the Desert* (Grove Press, New York, 1960). I have a persistent habit of doing this: all manner of historical and archaeological facts are worked into my novels as part of the background, sometimes historically true and sometimes altered just enough to fit into the plot.

Gollancz will publish a mystery-adventure novel this year, *This Witch*, which uses the same technique. The plot is the search for the treasure of Solomon, lost now for 1900 years since the Roman Tenth Legion sacked the Temple (yes, that same Temple) in Jerusalem about 70 AD. The plot turns on the different locations of Jericho throughout history, and how it was rebuilt first in this location and then another one; the treasure site must be located in relation to the location of the town in 70 AD. And again the scrolls serve as part of the background: real scrolls this time, copper scrolls that were actually discovered in one of the caves. Those copper scrolls were an inventory of the lost treasure, but I treated them as a subterfuge to mislead the Romans.

All this is much more fun than cops and robbers stories set down in dirty old American cities using dirty old backgrounds already dull.

I'm sending you a copy of *The Time Masters*, but it will likely be a month or so before you receive it. This

version was updated for Bob Hoskins at Lancer, because the original was some eighteen years out of date: Cape Kennedy didn't exist when it was written. Gilgamesh is in it, but not as a symbolic legend or anything of the kind; he is simply the still-living protagonist. And you will find a typed page of manuscript in the back of the book which completes the story: the printers lost the last page, causing the book to end in mid-air.

5 June 1975

I am discovering again that you and I think alike in many ways. This was shown by our mutual satisfaction with *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, and now shown again with *Ice and Iron*. I thought the *Ice* book was complete, finished, and was satisfied with it, but I've found only one reviewer who agreed with me — other than you and Hank and Lesleigh. The new ending was supplied to Judy-Lynn del Rey for the Ballantine edition because the sale depended on it and I wanted the sale. I didn't push her to learn if she would buy it even though I refused a rewrite; I didn't care to take that chance. When she asked me if I would supply a new ending, I revealed myself for the craven commercial hack that I am. I guess.

The revision consists of three pages somewhere in the middle of the book, each of which points toward the new ending, and then a complete rewriting of chapter 13. The woman who was found dead and frozen on the Regina street is now found alive and taken back to the base hospital. She is questioned, she makes friends with Jeanmarie, she reveals that Mexico is the home of the invaders, and finally she and the old warrior (Seventeen) start the war all over again. Following that chapter, I've added a new one from the *Iron* viewpoint, a chapter detailing the adventures of a scribe who is sent from Mexico to the ice frontier to write an account of the conquest of that frontier. And then a final, short chapter is added, closing the base and sending the personnel elsewhere.

I trust *this* version will satisfy the carpers who want everything spelled out for them.

The Gollancz edition of *Ice and Iron* is the same as the Doubleday edition, because Judy-Lynn and her request for a revision had not happened when the London sale was made. Arrow books have bought the paperback rights and they won't publish until next year, so they may choose the Ballantine version. I don't know yet. (And speaking of British paperbacks, I was absolutely crogged by the cover of the Panther edition of the *The Time Masters*. It was symbolism, I suppose, but beautiful symbolism.)

Lesleigh told me about the mystery article she was doing for you, but I don't remember her saying it was for a special Tucker issue. Thank you, sir. We have made strong impressions on each other, you and I. As I've said in several interviews and while sitting on convention panels, I write mystery novels for money and science fiction books for fun. My early books *were* mysteries, or private-eye novels, but in the last dozen years I've concentrated on the adventure novel. They are cast as mysteries, or suspense books, to take advantage of the Doubleday Crime Club image and organisation, but in reality *Last Stop*, *Procession of the Damned*, *The Warlock* and *This Witch* are adventure novels masquerading as mysteries. They are also fun to write, but not the same kind of fun as science fiction. I think my present-day real-life writer-hero is Peter O'Donnell and his 'Modesty Blaise' books.

To the Tombaugh Station was a minor book, but certainly not intended as such. I put everything I can into each book I write, but my best efforts fifteen years ago weren't enough. A drastically cut-down version of this book appeared in the American and British editions of *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, but they weren't much to read; they were gutted and revised to fit magazine standards. Oblique references to the heroine's vagina were deleted. And 'toilet' was changed to cubicle.

20 May 1976

What a pleasant surprise *SF Commentary* No. 43 is! And what flatterers your contributors are. The issue builds up my ego in a way that is almost embarrassing, but the saving grace is/are the criticisms directed at several books.

I'm thankful for those criticism, for the exposure of weaknesses in plotting or narration, because in several instances I was not aware of them until you or Lesleigh pointed them out. Mind you, I'm aware of poor books and bad books because I've had years to find out, but I wasn't so acutely aware of my shortcomings as a writer; I was not always aware of just where a story went wrong, and why. I don't agree with you on some points (I don't think Karen should reappear in *Wild Talent*) but until now I wasn't aware that I was doing the same thing to several women characters.

Lesleigh pointed out something very much like that; she pointed out a few strong females and a number of less-than-successful female villains. Perhaps I should leave women out of my books until I understand them better, and cause them to act in a more rational manner — or bookish manner. I probably won't do that, mind you, but perhaps I should.

[*brg* The trouble with writing a long article is that I felt committed to finding patterns in a whole set of books. These patterns are intriguing to me, but could look like naysaying to the author. In 'Hidden Heroes', I was fascinated by the odd attitudes of many of the main male characters to women, rather than any failure of characterisation of the women characters themselves. Most of the women characters jump off the page, fully alive — then the main male character misjudges them.]

The magazine was received with cries of joy and glee, and I thank you for it. I also took a gentle ribbing from Jackie Franke and Larry Propp. Last weekend the three of us drove out to Kansas City together and both Jackie and I had received our copies. She took hers along for others to read, and some did read it, and I got the ribbing. But I ignored the scoffers; I only let them shine my shoes and touch my ring.

Malcolm Edwards (London, England):

(20 January 1972)

The Year of the Quiet Sun is a good novel by one of the best SF writers around — and one of the least talked about. I'm glad that you appreciate some of his qualities. Maybe we can start the Wilson Tucker Fan Club. Have you read his other books? *The Long Loud Silence* is superb. Unflinchingly pessimistic (presumably why it's not so popular), my only complaint about it is the way that Tucker brought it 'up to date' for the recent Lancer edition. I suppose that it was necessary for commercial reasons, but the situation, credible for 1955, did not really fit 1971. The others are good too — *Wild Talent*, *The Lincoln Hunters* and *The Time Masters* — though not quite in the same class.

Why, I wonder, didn't you make any but a passing reference to the *midrash*? As you say, every sentence bears a huge weight of meaning, so you cannot dismiss it as just archaeological window-dressing (as most critics seem to have done). You shy away from the possibility of a religious framework for the book, but don't these texts, and the part that they play, provide just such a framework? I hadn't noticed that the first sentence was a hidden reference to Revelations, but that is a clue, a very clever one, that points in two directions: to the part that Kathryn von Hise plays in the book; and to the part that the book Revelations plays. Cheney's discovery is controversial because, since the Eschatos is so obviously fiction, this implies that the same is true for Revelations. But, by the end of the book, the prophecies have come true. The sky is swept clean. So the Eschatos is, in essence, accurate prophecy. What then of Revelations? I'm not sure whether this implication is significant, or merely playful; but certainly the book does carry this meaning. One of the most rewarding things about the book, in any case, is the way that Tucker works in this material, careful never to overstress its meaning; a considerable advance in technique over the similar material in *The Time Masters* (much the same advance in treatment as Alan Garner made between *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Owl Service*, to quote an example).



Bob Bloch, Bob Tucker, Dean Grennell, presumably in the late 1940s or early 1950s. (Photographer unknown; from the collection of Toni Weisskopf.)

Phyrne Bacon (Gainesville, Florida):

(20 December 1971)

I enjoyed 'Where We're Arriving'. As I write more and more letters I begin to realise that one of the exciting things about life is that little bits and pieces of memory turn up in relation to other things. And some writers can use that sort of mosaic material — the present filled in with bits of memory from the past. I always think of Pangborn in that connection. I guess I noticed its use first when I read *Davy*.

But you seem to talk in terms of superimposed images of the same person seen at different times. In my comments on *Report on Probability A*, which I sent you, I mention my distress that someone doesn't pay for the meal. It is just the sort of temporal baggage that I brought to the book. But in reality, you could pick almost any situation or object, and I could free-associate from that starting point. That was one of the strong points of *The Year of the Quiet Sun* — the swimming pool. The people who saw it remembered it from earlier, and the reader remembered it from many times. From a girl, from trash, from bodies, from a little water . . . they were all there simultaneously — or rather, there was a quick succession of memories. Someone said that we are timebinding creatures. When I think of tools, I think of my father as he sharpened his hoe; I cut my finger on it when I tried to imitate his testing its sharpness. I think of the carpenter that Mother hired to do some cabinet work for her. I loved to watch him saw. I wanted to be a carpenter when I grew up. I think of the boy on stage crew at my high school who could make nails sing when he hammered them. I think of sawing a limb off our plum tree last spring and the sawdust being so pink (Buck Coulson said that it was still damp). I remember the men who came to fix our refrigerator and didn't have any spin tights — I could hardly believe that — just tiny wrenches.

But that is the way that almost everything is. What do you think of when I say the word 'book'? Can you

remember books? Different kinds of books? And *when* you saw them? Where you bought them? Where you sold them? Whenever you read about someone doing something, don't you also remember yourself doing a similar thing? Or imagine yourself doing the same thing? Wasn't that really what I did when I felt embarrassed because the character had not paid for his meal? Sometimes the most wonderful part of a story is the way that it parallels closely something that I have felt or done or dreamed or hoped.

Robert Bloch (Los Angeles, California):

(11 September 1976)

Far too many people in fandom seem to take Tucker's talent for granted — largely because (unlike others I could name, and so could you) he has not devoted himself to the promotion of his own work. So it's good to know that you and your contributors have presented him as the full-fledged professional writer he is: a far better one than many of the self-serving minor ripples of the New Wave who humbly admit their genius.

Immediately upon his return from Aussiecon last year, Tucker had dinner with us here — Frank Robinson and Walt Liebscher were also present — and he spoke long and glowingly of his Australian visit. There's no doubt about it being one of the highlights of his life — and according to all reports, he has just scored another triumph as toastmaster at this year's MidAmericon. I gather he's smooother than ever.

Brian Aldiss (Oxford, England):

(29 September 1976)

Have you noticed that ninety per cent of coincidences are pleasant? I've had a whole string of them recently and they've all been good. Here's a good one for which you are directly responsible: I get back from the First

World Science Fiction Writers Conference late Monday evening. On Tuesday morning (that's yesterday), in comes the Tucker Issue of *SFC* . . .

Why is this a coincidence? As you my know, I'm Chairman of the John W. Campbell Award for this year. We had great trouble in finding the novel of 1975 to give the award to; although there were great things in '74, and this year fine books are arriving from Shaw, Priest, Moorcock, Coney, Amis and others (just to name UK writers), last year suffered from drought. In the end, the judtges agreed that we would bestow a second and third prize but no first. Hugos and Nebulas go out every year, irrespective of uneven merit, but we decided pretty unanimously that we regarded this as an unnecessary levelling process. So Second Prize went to Silverberg's *The Stochastic Man*, and Third Prize to Bob Shaw's *Orbitsville*. Instead of First Prize, we instituted a Retrospective Award, which should go to a novel of great merit published not more than ten years ago which was overlooked because there were flashier novels around that year, or which still quietly demands to be drawn to the attention of readers.

As you can imagine, claimants are many. Poor novels by Heinlein and Clarke are liable to get awards out of hero worship rather than any lit. crit. impulse. Yet, when Tom Shippey and I lit on Wilson Tucker's *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, the response from the other judges was immediate and, in Dublin, at the banquet last Sunday night, we bestowed the prize on that fine


novel. It was a great occasion, as all present will surely agree, and Tom Doherty, the popular new publisher of Ace Books, collected the award, beaming with delight and promising to deliver to Tucker as soon as possible in person. (You may recall that the novel was one of Terry Carr's Ace Specials in 1970, the year *Ringworld* was nominated for Hugo.)

So your issue No. 43 may have been two years late: it could hardly have been more timely!

James White
(Belfast, Northern Ireland):

(8 October 1976)

Ever since I became involved in fandom in the late 1940s as an illustrator and later as a writer on *Slant* and *Hyphen* I have envied my friend Walt Willis his trip to America chiefly because it enabled him to meet Bob Tucker in the flesh — or rather, if Walt's description is accurate, in the tall, range, wriggle of skin and bone. I would still very much like to meet him someday, but the interview, editorial matter, bibliography and the detailed and comprehensive reviews and discussion of his person and his work in *SFC* 43 has left me feeling that I now know Bob Tucker personally. This is quite an achievement on the part of your contributors and yourself. My congratulations and thanks.



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