Steam Engine Time 9

IN THIS ISSUE:
Stephen Campbell
Cy Chauvin
Ditmar
Brad Foster
Bruce Gillespie
Rob Latham
Gillian Polack
David Russell
Darrell Schweitzer
Jan Stinson
Frank Weissenborn
George Zebrowski
and many others

DECEMBER 2008

Steam Engine Time

Steam Engine Time **No 9, December 2008**, was edited by Janine Stinson (tropicsf at earthlink.net), PO Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626-0248 USA and Bruce Gillespie (gandc at pacific.net.au), 5 Howard St., Greensborough VIC 3088, Australia, and published at
http://efanzines.com/SFC/SteamEngineTime/SET09.pdf. Members fwa. Website: GillespieCochrane.com.au.
Print edition only available by negotiation with the editors; first edition and primary publication is electronic. A thrice-yearly publishing schedule (at minimum) is intended. All material in this publication was contributed for one-time use only, and copyrights belong to the contributors.
Next editorial deadline: 1 January 2009.

Illustrations: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen) (front cover, p. 3); Stephen Campbell (back cover); Brad Foster (pp. 59, 60, 62); David Russell (pp. 64, 66, 70, 72, 73).
Photographs: Lawrie Brown (pp. 6, 11); Leigh Blackmore (p. 7); Jean Weber (p. 8); *Locus* (p. 19); Reeve (p. 37); unknown (p. 40); Foyster collection (p. 50); Alan Stewart (p. 55); Gian Paolo Cossato (pp. 76, 78).

Contents

The cover: 'First Contact'

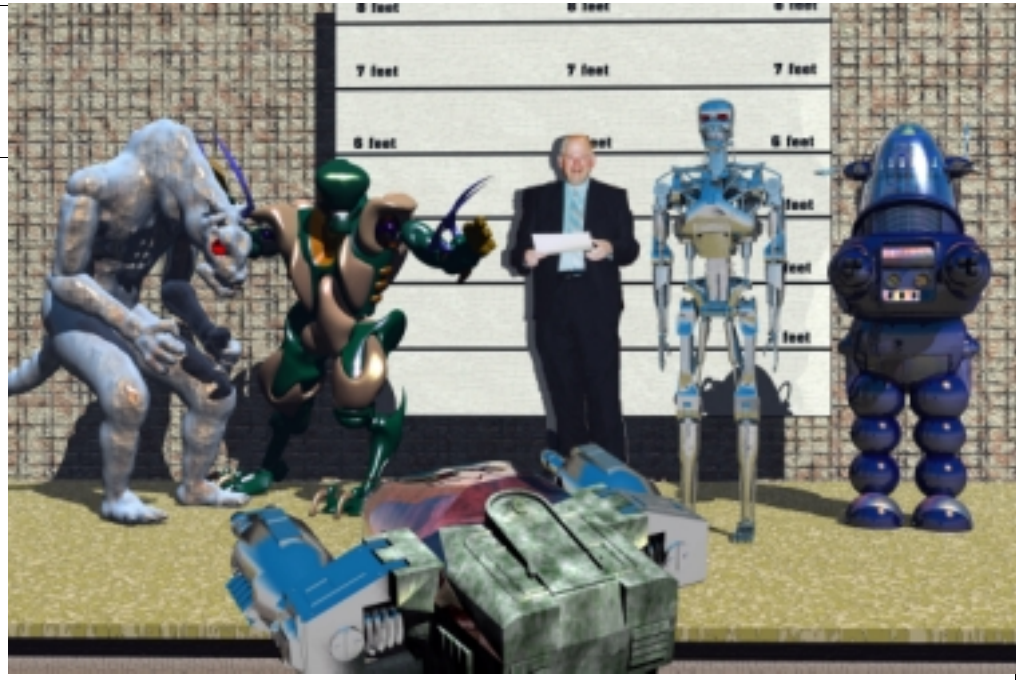
Australia in 1951 was a time of paucity for a fledging science fiction fan, especially if one was a schoolboy given a very minuscule amount of pocket money. Oh, there were comics, and Saturday afternoon movie serials, and some truly abysmal publications such as *Thrills Incorporated*, but the real stuff was, for such a person — and I mean myself — virtually unknown and out of reach. So when my friend Race Mathews told me that the school library had a copy of Groff Conklin's anthology *The Best of Science Fiction* it was as though the gates of paradise had swung open. Gates which have yet to close, though I suspect that when I am gathered they will, indeed, slam shut.

Looking at the contents of that book — just pulled down from my shelves — I am reminded of many stories which made the burden of the quotidian somewhat bearable, even if they would now not be as highly regarded as they were once. But some remain classics. for example, Heinlein's 'Universe', and Murray Leinster's 'First Contact' — two stories which I have read many times in the intervening years. It has become platitudinous to claim that SF of the 30s and 40s had characters which at best were two-dimensional, that motivation and emotion were non-existent or ludicrously unreal, and that it was the ideas which were of primary importance.

Well, the ideas *were* wonder-full in Leinster's yarn: the concept of a journey to the Crab Nebula over a few months' time, photographing the nebula as the spaceship, the *Llanvabon*, spiraled into it, and so generating a kind of time machine of the visual evolution of the nebula over four thousand years, was one which has never left me. One, indeed, which may have, along with many, many other SF stories, forced my choice of career into physics and science. But Leinster added the meeting of the Earth ship and an alien vessel which was also engaged in the scientific investigation of the nebula. It was this contact, and the problems involved which needed to be solved, that were the main thrust of the story. And here the lie is given to the myth of cardboard characters. The protagonist, Tommy Dort, was utterly believable, and his behavior was logical and understandable: the dilemma faced by the captains of both ships was of immense significance for the future of both civilisations.

The cover image, then, is my very belated tribute to 'First Contact'. Like all my graphics, it is *not* intended to illustrate the story, but is *inspired* by it. In the Hollywood sense of that word, this implies that the connection between the cover and the story is so tenuous that it might exist only in the imagination. But one *could* perhaps identify the foreground vessel as the *Llanvabon* and the distant one as the alien ship. At least the background is the Crab Nebula.

— Ditmar (Dick Jenssen), 2008



'Unusual Suspects (Bruce)' (Ditmar).

Meteor Inc.

Meteor Incorporated was established in August 2007 to accumulate cash donations and bequests until enough funds are available to:

- preserve and manage a collection of science fiction and fantasy memorabilia (books, magazines, fanzines, and electronic media) by acquiring premises and hiring qualified librarians/custodians; and
- provide a resource for research into science fiction and fantasy literature and culture.

This is a long-term project requiring ongoing cash donations from SF fans.

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Editorials

Jan Stinson

Battling the beast

The last several months, I've been at war with myself. I'm happy to report, however, that I've won.

In a nutshell, a combination of grief and depression got its mitts on me for a very long time, and it was my son's request to go back to therapy that made me realise I needed help again as well. Mental illness still carries a stigma in many people's minds, but I've never viewed it that way; while such illnesses are perhaps less responsive to treatment than other ailments, one has only to watch a few episodes of *House* to see that other types of illness can be just as intractable. I'm fortunate to have an experienced and caring therapist, family support, and doctors who understand what I'm experiencing.

So, we're on the road back to balance, once again. I feel more interested in writing, so perhaps some articles will result for future issues of *SET*. I make no promises.

Bruce Gillespie

Fun in Canberra

Some people believe that Bruce Gillespie cannot have fun. Others believe that Australians cannot have fun in Canberra. I have disproved both assertions.

In mid 2008, members of the Conflux committee asked me to be Fan Guest of Honour at Conflux 5, the annual convention held in Canberra, Australia's federal capital. This was the first time I had been asked to be a guest at an interstate convention since 1981, when I was a guest speaker at the Canberra SF Conference, held by Colin Steele at the Australian National University. During that visit, all I saw of Canberra was the airport, and ANU's buildings and rolling lawns.

Today, as in 1981, I can't afford to go to interstate conventions unless somebody pays me, so my gratitude to the Conflux committee is immense. They paid my fare, accommodation and convention fee. Whee!

Thursday, 2 October 2008
Bill Wright and I happened to be on the same plane when we travelled to Canberra. Phil Berrie, until then a stranger to both of us, picked us up from Canberra Airport. We both liked Phil a lot, but I didn't get to talk to him until the last night of the convention.

Phil gave us the whirlwind tour of Canberra, which is like a vast park with Very Famous Buildings poking up from the greenery. There's the National Library, fellers. And there's the National Museum. The War Museum's over there. And we're just passing all the embassies, at least one of which (the Chinese) is as big as a small city. Lake Burley Griffin! Great to see it at last. And the Carillion, sitting in the middle of the lake. Both Houses of Parliament, all part of a gigantic triangle that includes the War Museum at one apex. During our ride with Phil, I made a mental list of Places to See.

What nobody had told me about Canberra is its most attractive feature: the absence of buildings more than four storeys high. The height limit makes it seem a much more civilised place than any other major Australian city I've visited. Northbourne Avenue is the thoroughfare that bisects the city. The main retail area occupies the streets that circle the east of the hub. Canberra's pedestrian mall is much more effective than Melbourne's, and the centre has a much lighter feel than the oppressive Melbourne Central. I decided I would enjoy this city a lot.

The convention hotel, the Marque, was daunting at first. On Northbourne Avenue, about 200 metres from the city outskirts, it faces west and east. Unfortunately, I had a room on the west side, and the windows did not open. The October sun was strong in the afternoon. I had to ask the day manager to show me how to operate the airconditioner, which was desperately needed by mid afternoon. It took awhile to work out how the clock radio and phone worked. It looked like a mobile phone. I don't own a mobile phone. I don't know to operate one. Eventually I discovered how it worked, and phoned Elaine.

Phil and some other committee members arrived to drive Bill, me and other convention guests to the suburban restaurant where we would get to know each other. (Bill was not officially a guest of the convention, but the con committee treated him as one.) The food was uninteresting, but that night proved to be the only time I got to talk to most of the other guests, including Liz Gorinksi, just flown in at short notice from Tor Books in New York, Trudi Canavan and Paul Ewins from Melbourne, and Cat Sparks and Rob Hood from Sydney. That's the first time I've ever had a conversation with Rob; I hope it's the first of many. I got to talk to Donna Hanson, ace publisher from Canberra — and saw her very little during the rest of the convention. I'm told that Donna and her husband have a small child.

Friday, 3 October 2008

Friday was fully programmed with workshops. However, most of the interstaters were not expected until late in the day, and most of the locals were working. Since I had not been asked to appear on any of the workshops, I decided to explore. On that day I was a bit disappointed by the city centre, because I had not yet discovered the pedestrian mall, and did not yet know about Canberra Centre. I found the taxi rank instead. My driver was so overjoyed that I wanted to see the War Museum that he had almost told me the story of his life when we reached it.

I have ambiguous feelings about war, peace and Australian history, so I decided to see the War Museum for myself. It must be Australia's best-funded museum, founded in the 1920s as a memorial to those killed and wounded during the First World War, and gaining in importance after the Second World War. Its first exhibits were elaborate dioramas, three-dimensional panorama displays of all the major battles in which Australians were involved during the First World War. Later displays are based on photographs, memorabilia and large-scale dramatisations.

I joined one of the walking parties being guided through the museum. The guide, in his sixties or early seventies, was, I guess, a retired teacher or public servant. He could make his voice heard clearly over the background noise. His presentation was vigorous and dramatic: here's what Australian soldiers achieved during individual battles and campaigns (especially the more senseless campaigns of the Western Front and the wholly lunatic Anzac campaign in the Dardanelles (1915), a horrific loss that has somehow become the centre of Australians' war iconography); and here is what some individual soldiers did. Not too many statistics, except when Aussies had done something great, and not much about what soldiers from other countries were doing at the same time. He did include some of the recently available information about the efforts of the Turkish defenders during the Dardanelles campaign.

The guide pointed to displays of grisly photos and stories about the sufferings endured by Australian POWs at the hands of the Japanese during the war. He did point out that some Japanese camp commandants were less cruel than others, but failed to mention Japanese attitudes to the concept of prisoners of war. The Japanese had expected the Australians and British to fight to the last soldier or kill themselves rather than surrendering when Singapore was taken. The stark presentation of Australians' privations during the war was accurate, but the presentation also seemed designed to maintain old hatreds 60 years later. (The same guide failed to point to an exhibit featuring the liberation of the German concentration camps; the Jewish prisoners in those photos were just as emaciated as the Australian prisoners shown in the photos we had just been looking at.)

Anzac Hall includes in its exhibits fully restored Spitfire and Mosquito fighter aircraft and Lancaster bombers hanging from the ceiling. Every quarter of an hour visitors can watch a gigantic audiovisual presentation of some aspect of the Second World War. The one I experienced was of

Conflux 5 Opening Ceremony (l. to r.): Bruce Gillespie, Cat Sparks, Gillian Polack, Liz Gorinski, Richard Harland and Liz Argall (MCs), Karen Herkes (committee). Hidden: Jack Dann and Mark Shirrefs. (Photo: Lawrie Brown.)

a bombing raid by Allied forces on Germany during one night in 1944. The Imax-scale screens showed actual film shot during one raid, along with a very loud reconstruction of the sounds that the bomber pilots would have heard. The phrase that slipped into my mind while watching it all was: 'the fire next time'. The week's news had been dominated by 1929-style stock market falls, so I couldn't help wondering when Australians would again be involved in wholesale destruction of people and cities.

The commemorative area of the War Memorial is impressive. The name of every Australian serviceman or woman who has died in war is written somewhere on the walls of the Roll of Honour. The Hall of Memory is a vast dome, elaborately decorated with a six-million-bit mosaic.

I walked from the War Museum back into the centre of Canberra (Civic). It was further than I had expected, and the sun was hotter than expected. I was amazed to find that Civic is surrounded by block after block of public housing. Although renovated for a later, upmarket clientele, these two-storey flats appear to have been built for the public servants who were moved to Canberra after Parliament House was opened in 1927. I'm not sure where Canberra parks its mansions.

When I returned to the Marque Hotel, nobody seemed to be going out to eat, but I had to grab something to eat quickly. Phil mentioned that some restaurants could be found in the next street east of Northbourne Avenue. I discovered a pleasant-looking bistro called Delissio, which served one of the best risottos I've eaten. It served a D'Arenberg Shiraz by the glass: a wine so tasty that it could get me interested in wine again.

I rushed back for the Opening Ceremony. Here we experienced the full power of the Liz Argall–Richard Harland 'Dreaming' presentation. I'd never heard of Liz before, and I didn't realise that Richard enjoyed theatricals. I learned later that Liz is involved in 'phenomenon roleplaying', a type of competitive improvisational theatre sports. She and Richard set out to illustrate the convention theme of 'Dreaming', first by trying to hypnotise the audience to entering a trance that would last until the end of the convention, and then by introducing each guest with a set of elaborate jokey references. It's the best-researched introduction I've ever been given.

In honour of the Dreaming of the original inhabitants of the area, an Aboriginal dance company, comprising several adults and a group of children, presented an arousing combination of traditional and new elements of the corroboree.

All this talk of dreaming was a bit too much for me. I skipped the Great Debate, an event that's became the comedy event of each Australian convention, and lay down for a few moments before attending the launch of Jack Dann's new anthology of Australian writers, *Dreaming Again*. I wanted to attend this so I could put faces to many Australian writers who are still only names to me. I woke up at 2 a.m.

Saturday, 4 October 2008

On Saturday I woke to yet another typical Canberra spring morning: it was about zero Celsius outside, but would warm to 20 (70F) by late afternoon. As happened each morning, Ross Temple and I were the only con members at breakfast in the hotel's restaurant. I'd never met Ross before this convention. He's a New Zealander who's visited Australia for quite a few conventions, and he knows Melburnians such as Julian Warner and Murray MacLachlan.

I love hotel breakfasts, even though I had to pay for this one. (Breakfast used to be provided free to overnight hotel guests throughout Australia, but that practice has now disappeared.) Without any whiff of conscience or even feeling too full, I ate scrambled eggs and all the trimmings, plus cereal, some fruit and lots of coffee: far more than any breakfast I would ever eat at home.

My first panel was 'That's not science fiction: it's too good', with Dave Luckett from Western Australia as chair, me, Dirk Flinthart from Tasmania, and Lucy Sussex from Victoria. The defensive nature of the topic brought out all the old clichéd defences of science fiction that I've been hearing for forty years. Unfortunately, I don't have the moral authority and ringing voice tones of a George Turner to tell people, in detail, why they are talking crap. The generalities started with Dave Luckett's decrying of 'academic criticism's' defence of 'mimetic fiction' and 'their' hatred of narrative fiction. Dark Flinthart seemed to think that the only thing worth reading or writing was his own brand of narrative fiction. Ian Nichols (from the audience) and I tried to give some account of what academic criticism had actually been doing over the last sixty years, but to no avail. The only refreshing speaker was Lucy Sussex, who was just recovering from judging the *Age* Book of the Year fiction section for 2008. She said that most Australian novels are disappointing because their authors do not know how to shape a narrative: lots of 'beautiful writing' and characterisation, but usually with endings that collapse like badly cooked soufflés. (Lucy didn't say that; it was the image that came to my mind at the time.)

Ian and I, talking after the panel, agreed that some people actually read nothing but science fiction and fantasy, which seemed like scraping out half one's brain and throwing it away.

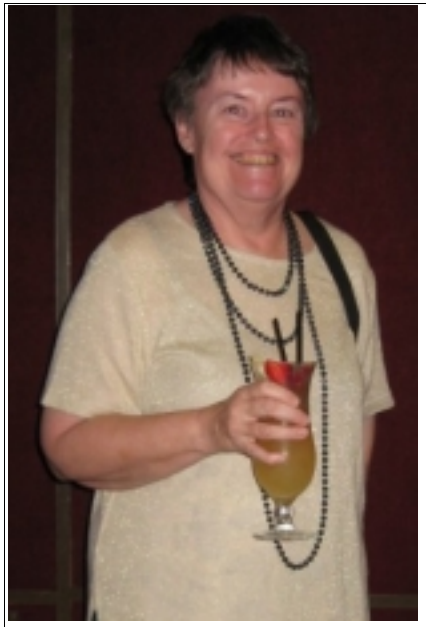
I had two hours before my next compulsory event, so I went walking around Civic, discovering the bits I had missed the previous day, including the Canberra Centre (a vast shopping mall with many of the same franchise names to be found in our local Greensborough Shopping Plaza, set in an airy, light-filled space) and the pedestrian mall itself. I didn't find any good CD stores, but I did stock up on things I needed for the fridge in my room, such as instant coffee and Coke.

In the afternoon, I quickly realised that the convention's only real organisational problem was its four program streams. With 150 people attending, the convention could well have got by with two streams instead of four. To judge from the small attendances at fannish events, most convention attendees were not interested in aspects of fandom, had little idea of its history or what it represents, and didn't want to know more. They had come to see the authors and (as Tom Lehrer once sang) genuflect, genuflect, genuflect. I and the other traditional fans felt a bit out of place. We might have got larger audiences if we hadn't always been programmed against the convention's big guns.

Given the small audiences, a gallant band, which included Bill, me, Rachel McGrath-Kerr (moderator) and a young lady whose badge said 'K. J. Taylor' found ourselves not particularly agreeing about the nature of today's fandom. K. J. Taylor knows only the world of blogging, which would have been good if she had offered a bit more information about how one enters this world. There was a bit of talk about fanzine production, apas and the like, but this is now ancient history, and nobody loves history anymore.

But there is always an exception: the CSFS Party. The Canberra Science Fiction Society was a bit pissed off when the Canberra Science Fiction Group, which stages Conflux, announced that it was the 'oldest SF group in Canberra'. The CSFS has been chugging along for forty years. During several of those years (in the early seventies), Leigh and Helen Hyde, CSFS's organisers, were active members of general fandom, publishing a fanzine called *Nini Hi'i*, and joining ANZAPA. When Helen tapped me on the shoulder on Saturday, I did not recognise her. The last time I remember talking to her and Leigh was in January 1973 in Brisbane, but perhaps they had also been at Aussiecon 1 in 1975. I don't know how Helen recognised me. I had no trouble recognising Leigh: he looks exactly the same as he did in the early seventies, but his beard and hair have gone grey.

Friends met for the first time at Conflux 5 (l. to r.): Leigh Blackmore, Danny Lovecraft, and James Doig (photo: Leigh Blackmore).



Jean Weber, in 1920s costume and holding a 1921 cocktail (Photo: Jean Weber.)

The birthday party was good fun, although I knew few of the people there. We enjoyed the giant birthday cake, and its icing. Somebody mentioned Ken Ward. 'Is Ken Ward still around?' I said. Yes; he now has a wife and child. The last time I saw Ken was in early 1977. He was one of the two people who left the shared household in Johnson Street, Collingwood, when I moved in with Elaine and her then partner Francis. (The other person who left was Roger Weddall.)

The 'mass book signing' was listed as a compulsory event for guests of honour. Not being a star author, I was surprised when a few people actually asked me to sign their Program Books. Later I got to meet Leigh Blackmore, a longtime Sydney fan who now writes fantasy poetry. I told him about the activities of Britain's Steve Sneyd, who specialises in SF and fantasy poetry. Leigh gave me a copy of *Spores from Sharnoth and Other Madnesses*, a book of Lovecraft-style poetry recently published by P'Rea Press in Sydney. 'P'Rea Press' proved to be run by Leigh's friend Danny Lovecraft (who had his surname changed by deed poll many years ago, so can claim to be the only Lovecraft in Australia), an enthusiastic small publisher who, with his wife Keri Arthur, was also at the book signing. I really enjoyed meeting them.

At the mass book signing, I found myself next to Jack Dann on one side, and Liz Argall on the other. It was one of the few occasions during the convention I was able to talk to Liz, who earns her living doing many things, including writing the scripts for graphic novels/comic books.

One of the reasons why Conflux continues to be successful is that it has already built up a set of traditions that bring back people year after year. One of them is the period banquet, researched and arranged by Gillian Polack. This year's theme was the Prohibition Era, New York, 1920s. The event: dinner, 29 February 1921, at the Hotel Gernsback, New York. Dishes included olives, stuffed eggs and nut and cheese relish for starters, beef soup, roast turkey, and a range of sweets, including sherbert, cheese, French Neopolitan ice cream and apple muscovite. Drinks were mainly cocktails, which one had to buy at the bar and bring into the dining room (as during Prohibition). This led to a long queue at the bar: the staff who were working that night took awhile to get into the swing of concocting the cocktails.

Most of the 1920s-style costumes were impressive. I don't do costumes, as you know; besides, I didn't have room in my case to bring anything special with me from Melbourne.

My only problem with the whole evening was hearing the other people at the table, although it was a round table and usually we could all have talked to each other. Bill got to talk to Phil, and I was talking to Jean Weber for awhile, until she turned to talk to the other people at the table. Then I could not pick up the conversation from the background noise. However, a gorgeous young lady on the other side of the table spoke clearly enough to tell us about her fabulous career in archaeology: first a master's, then a PhD, then off to Egypt and elsewhere to make all sorts of wonderful discoveries. As Jean said later, she couldn't quite see our new friend digging up bits of bone in the middle of the desert.

Bill had already invited quite a few of us to a late-night room party. I went to my room, changed, and lay down for a few minutes to wait for the official party starting time. Again I woke up at 2 a.m.

Sunday, 5 October 2008

During my whole month in America in 2005, I was not ill, except for an on-and-off cold that felled me for a day or two. When I got out of bed on Sunday, having slept badly, I bent over slightly to pick up something from the table — and felt a muscle at the base of my spine go sproing! Suddenly I could not straighten up, and was suffering considerable pain. I knew who could fix the problem: Colin my friendly chiropractor in Melbourne. But I was in Canberra, and committed to staying until Thursday. What to do?

I managed to hobble down the stairs to breakfast, and found that it was more painful to sit than to stand or walk. I couldn't walk down to Civic, because it was the only morning of the convention when it rained. I went back to my room and finished my notes for my Fan Guest of Honour speech.

At 10 a.m. I went to one of the few interesting panels that I was not prevented from attending because I was on some other panel. Cat Sparks, Trudi Canavan, Jack Dann and Kim Westwood were speaking to the topic 'Achieving the dream'. I sat down too late to find out exactly what 'the dream' was. Most of the panel was spent formulating and clarifying the concept. Trudi has had the greatest success (her publisher talks coyly of 'seven-figure advances' for her fantasy trilogies). She was the most interesting speaker, as she gave details of the tortuous road to success. Cat Sparks and Kim Westwood still have their day jobs. Cat has published quite a few anthologies and written some of my favourite Australian SF and fantasy stories of recent years (including a Ditmar winner this year). Kim has just had a novel published, although I didn't see a copy for sale at the convention. Jack Dann is well known, but he reminded us he has been on a roller coaster, alternating between great success (*The Memory Cathedral*) and general indifference (for instance, his best novel *The Silent*), with lots of anthologies (such as the new *Dreaming Again*) in between. The panellists agreed that actually getting a book published is a bit of a letdown; that's not the achievement of the dream. Cat put it best: the achievement of the dream is finding some way to keep writing! (Ditto for fanzine editing.)

For my Fan Guest of Honour speech, I had eight people in the audience. Fortunately, one of them was Leigh Edmonds, attending the convention because during the following week he would be starting a freelance history-writing job in Canberra. I was very grateful to Leigh for being there, as my talk was about the great moments of my life of poverty and obscurity (i.e. fanzine editing). He was able to remind me of various bits I had got wrong or out of order. At the end of the hour he gave me the cue to end: he said: 'August 1972: Syncon 2'. You'll have to read the talk to see how that was a perfect place to end.

I had only an hour's lunch break between my speech and Cat Sparks' Guest of Honour speech. I had been told that the bar would not be open for lunch, although the convention committee had been promised by the management that it would be. Meanwhile, a lunchtime meeting had been arranged to celebrate the memory of Clive Newall, longtime Melbourne fan who had died on the previous Wednesday. I wanted to attend the gathering. I needed to get some lunch before the afternoon's program. So I rushed off, found a service station that sold some sandwiches, and got back to the hotel when the meeting had been going only ten minutes. We all gathered in a circle of chairs, and people contributed their memories. We all agreed that Clive had been a 'very quiet person' who had done a lot behind the scenes, but who had never taken part in outrageous fannish activities.

Then I discovered that the committee had been able to persuade the manager to open the bar at lunchtime to serve bar food and drinks — sweet relief for many.

Cat Sparks's 'speech' was a slide show of famous faces in Australian fandom (not including me or Bill Wright — which only added to my feeling that, after forty years, I am still regarded as an outsider in my own field). She took only about a quarter of an hour to show the photos, so she moved her spot into the same room as the launch of Margo Lanagan's latest novel, *Tender Morsels*. Jack Dann launched the book so effectively that we all piled up to the table to buy a copy. (I was chuffed that Margo remembered me from when we were two of the four guests of honour at Continuum 4 a couple of years ago. Not that we got to talk during Conflux.)

So few people turned up for the panel on 'What are the most important issues for science fiction fans?' that we abandoned the traditional panel setup and drew up chairs in a circle. I wasn't sure that we had much to talk about until a girl with a British accent named (I thought) 'Jean' raised one problem being raised increasingly by British fans: should we fly? The point raised about the ecological cost of international jet flights is hardly an idle one. And, with global finances collapsing day by day on the news, will people from overseas be able to afford to visit Australia in 2010 for Aussiecon 4? There were few really active fans at Conflux, but we found we had a good proportion of them at our panel.

Several hours later, I finally saw 'Jean's' name tag, and apologised abjectly. Not 'Jean', but 'Gene'. I had quite forgotten that famous British fan Geneva Melzak ('Gene') now lived in Sydney with her partner Zara Baxter, so of course she was au fait with information about opinion in British fandom. Thanks, Gene and Zara, for joining ANZAPA (although you do have to produce your first contribution to become members).

Gillian Polack gave her Guest of Honour speech immediately after Cat's. Gillian is a researcher first and foremost, on a range of subjects; she's published a novel and some short stories; she writes reviews and criticism (including a contribution to this issue of *Steam Engine Time*);

she's a Cordwainer Smith fan; but she's not quite a fan in the sense I am. However, her deeply personal speech could only have been delivered by a fannish person at an SF convention.

I had an hour to relax slightly before climbing back behind a table for my last panel of the day. I can't remember much about 'What is the Place of Critical Writing in the Genre?' Ian Nichols was running the panel, and Gillian was there, and Jenny Blackford, and somebody else was added at the last minute, but I can't remember who. I tried to get over the point that, without high-quality criticism in the field, there are no high-quality readers — but I can't remember ever saying that. We talked about reviewing, as Ian reviews regularly for *The West Australian*, I've written a vast amount for my magazines, and Jenny writes for both *Cosmos* and *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, but we didn't really talk about *criticism*, did we?

Again, nobody actually invited me to join a dinner expedition. I walked down to Civic and found Gus's, a place with edible food.

What to do with the rest of the night? Usually I will run a mile to avoid author readings, but the Speakeasy sounded interesting. Nothing else was happening until the room party, and I needed something to take my mind off my damned back pain.

At the Speakeasy, audience members were invited to read from their own work. You would expect people to read from their short stories or forthcoming novels, but the most enjoyable performer was Ian Nichols, reading poems from a book he published some years ago. (You could always send me some poems, Ian, although I've never published poetry. I won't offer you less money than do most poetry magazines.) Dirk Flinthart seemed pleased with his own story, but to me it was just an action piece. I was inspired to read a few bits from my tribute to Tom Disch, just to prove that not every bit of writing has to be fiction. A wonderful young lady named Kathleen Jennings read a heartbreaking story made all the more effective by the author's serene, absorbed reading style. Remember her name: Kathleen Jennings.

For once I did not fall asleep early. I was afraid to lie down, for fear I might not be able to get up again. I joined the rest of fandom in the room of Juliette Woods and Damien Warman, who were representing next year's national convention in Adelaide. It was one of those pleasant room parties in which one gets to talk to all those people from Melbourne to whom one never says anything during the rest of the year. Sue Ann Barber and Trev Clark, campaigning during the convention for this year's GUFF race, were in great form. So was Adrienne Losin, who hadn't been sighted in Melbourne for several years, but was at Conflux. I talked a fair bit to Ross Temple from New Zealand. And to Paul and Trudi. And to Julian ... that would be the longest conversation I've had with him for awhile. Oh, lots of people. Let's get together in Melbourne occasionally.

Monday, 6 October 2008

Monday should have been rather depressing. It started badly. I had had great trouble getting out of bed in the night. I hit my toe one time, and another time had fallen against the side of the spa in my room. (I didn't use the spa, because there was no sign of power ventilation; without it, the room would have filled with steam.)

Maybe I should not have gone to the 9 a.m. panel on 'Have blogs and websites replaced fanzines?', since the topic of blogs was my *bête noire* of the convention. Lots of people seemed to communicate via blogs these days, but none would give away the vital secret of how to spread a message widely via blogs. Nobody ever emails me to tell me about a blog I should look at. Only one person promised any help — a pleasant young lady named Sandra Doig. Sandra said she can show me how to access the blog-access blogs — but she gave me an email address that so far has not yielded an answer. Sue Ann Barber explained just what fanzines are, and how they have formed the backbone of the fannish conversation for eighty years. Several of us gave the good word about efanzines.com, and Bill Wright handed around copies of *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* to those interested. I hadn't taken many copies of my own fanzines to Conflux (a) because I don't have many spares, and (b) I didn't want to be charged excess baggage, which did happen on my trip home. I gave a plug for ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association), the last refuge of fanzine publishers (27 of them) in Australia.

In the weeks before Conflux, I had asked the committee if they would allow Colin Steele to come in for one panel only, since he wouldn't be able to attend the rest of the convention.

If there is one person in Canberra who should be known as 'Mr Science Fiction', it is Colin Steele. Not only did he promote science fiction

constantly when he was Librarian at the Australian National University, but he has written a regular SF book review column for the *Canberra Times* for many years, and has been responsible for some fine conventions and conferences, such as the Speculative Fiction Conference in 1981 and the Word Festivals (to one of which he nearly lured Ursula Le Guin). I had arranged to interview Colin for an hour. We were given a slot at 10 a.m. on the Monday of the convention, after many people had already left for home. We had four in the audience, for the most interesting bloke in Canberra! Colin did not walk out in annoyance, as well he might have, but instead offered the most entertaining hour of the convention — a sparkling talk that started with his early career at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, which houses the papers of Brian Aldiss and James Blish, then moving onto the people he met there (with some nice stories about Australian writer and ex-fan John Baxter), and leading on to his days at ANU and the *Canberra Times*, and the people he's met there. Thanks, Colin.

At 11 a.m., when Bill Wright began his presentation about Meteor, Inc., we had two people in the audience. A few more people drifted in during the hour. How do we get the message to the people who should care? Obviously not by traditional means: by speaking at a convention where most people are young. It's only in your fifties and sixties that you suddenly realise that something dreadful might happen to your great collection of books, magazines, music, films and memorabilia after you die. Bill has set up an organisation that could, right now, build a collection and archive it if we had the money. Bill was trying to get over the double message: the need for such an organisation, and the need for donations to put it into effect. Would Bill have done better with a different time slot on a different day? Or has he merely not yet discovered the right communication method?

The convention had persuaded the hotel staff to open the bar again at lunch time. I bought a pizza and nattered to Danny Lovecraft and Keri Arthur, and to Shane Jaraiya Cummings and Angela Challis, whose Australian Horror Writers Association logo was noticeable all round the convention. Having three small press publishers sitting around a table talking about small press publishing felt just like the days during the 1970s when Carey, Rob and I of Norstrilia Press used to sit around swapping hard luck stories with Paul Collins and Rowena Cory from Cory & Collins. Since small press publishers still provide most of the interesting Australian SF or fantasy books, nothing much has changed since 1976.

Liz Argall and Richard Harland closing Conflux (photo: Lawrie Brown).

The only program items offered during the afternoon were five workshops, none of which sounded enticing. My back was still too sore to allow me to sit around for a few hours reading, so I went to the workshop on Grant Writing. Bill Wright was there, representing Meteor Inc., taking notes and asking questions that sometimes seemed not entirely to the point. Lucy Sussex's comments were rather more pointed, since grant writing is today an all-important part of academic life. Peter Strong, who made the presentation, provided clear and detailed information, adding up to one message: shape your application around what the provider wants to fund. Don't expect the funding organisation to change its rules to fit your requirements.

The Closing Ceremony was not quite as spectacular a theatrical presentation as the Opening Ceremony, but it had a lot of good feeling to it. Liz and Richard woke us collectively from our Dreaming, and the committee gave we Guests some nice presents, and we said good things about the committee and the people who attended the convention.

Conflux 5: final thoughts

The Dead Dog Party — eight people sitting around in the bar — summed up everything that was good about Conflux 5. Liz Gorinski told people her life story (which I didn't hear, because I was talking to some other people), then Liz Argall told her life story (most of which I didn't hear), then we got talking to Karen Herkes and Phil Berrie, two infinitely hardworking committee members we'd hardly talked to during the convention. Tamara, Karen's daughter, hovered around wheeling a huge plastic Dalek. Tamara had been the junior star of the convention; soon she will be running her own conventions. I finally got to talk long and

well to Gillian Polack. We all swore eternal friendship and wandered off into the night.

I said before the convention (in a questionnaire sent out by the committee) that the main reason for attending any convention is meeting people. And it was so. Not only did I have the great enjoyment of catching up with legendary fans such as Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown and Jean Weber, but I finally caught up with James Doig, whose essays have been appearing in *Steam Engine Time*, and had a good talk to Ian Nichols (usually we pass in the corridor at conventions and nod at each other), as well as Bill Congreve (who said he did not sell as many books as usual this year), and Maxine MacArthur (last nattered to at Convergence 1 at the beginning of this century), and Stephanie Smith (now working from the HarperCollins office in New Zealand), and Danny and Sharon, carrying around their wonderful new baby, and the many new friends I've mentioned during this account.

Thanks again to the convention committee for making it possible to attend the convention. I couldn't have done it otherwise, as there are so many expenses one can't budget for, not to mention all the books that had to be bought in the dealers' room (and bought for cash, as nobody was taking credit cards). If I ever have a really well-paid year, I'll be back.

Canberra fun continues

The committee gave me a chance to do the tourist thing around Canberra. On **Tuesday, 7 October**, Colin Steele took me out to his home in Hawker, he and Anna provided a wonderful lunch, and Colin showed me his vast collection of signed first editions of great books and told me many more tales of his days as a librarian and promoter of SF in Canberra. He also took me to Gaslight Books in Fyshwick, where I met the wonderful Gayle Lovett, to whom I could talk all day. (She wasn't able to leave the shop to attend the convention.) We also visited Clouston & Hall Academic Remainders, the bookshop that stocks, as remainders, books that other Australian bookshops are still desperately trying to get from the distributors.

That night I had a great meal with Leigh, Valma and Jean at the hotel next door to the convention hotel. If only we'd had an equivalent restaurant in our hotel! (Our hotel restaurant wasn't open on the nights of the Sunday or Monday of the convention.)

On **Wednesday, 8 October**, I alleviated my sore back by walking most of the day. I found the Explorer bus stop in Civic, took the trip to Parliament House, toured it, got on the bus two hours later, then went to Old Parliament House, which is much more interesting. The historical displays and guided tours in each House are excellent, but Old Parliament House evokes awe and wonder. How could all those people have fitted in there? Hadn't anybody heard of security? (No; Bob Hawke used to hang out the window of his Prime Minister's office and people used to hand the form guide to him on racing days. The form guide is still sitting there on his desk.)

Two moments of awe and wonder. A group of schoolgirls, sitting in the House chamber of Parliament House, acting out the dismissal of Gough Whitlam. From the looks of boredom on their faces, and the way they were scrabbling through the dialogue, the events were as ancient to them as the signing of the Magna Carta. But at Old Parliament House, I could walk up the low set of stairs from where the dismissal was read out in 1975, when Gough Whitlam announced: 'Well may we say God save the Queen, as nothing will save the Governor-General'.

I arrived back in Civic in time to see *Wall-E* at the new Dendy multiplex, then found Bill attempting to send emails in the hotel lobby back at the Marque. His day had been much more surrealistic than mine, as Bill's days often are — he had attended Floriade, paid $8 for a three-quarter-hour rowboat ride around Lake Burley Griffin, and somehow ended up at a science lecture on the campus of ANU.

On **Thursday, 10 October**, my plane was on time, and I arrived home in time to be welcomed by Elaine and five cats, then take the train into Carlton to see my chiropractor. It took three more visits to him and Paul, my masseur, to get my lower spine back into action, but those mighty miracle men did the trick. I also bought myself a much better office chair.

I vowed not to travel again — but Adelaide in 2009 is tempting. See you there, or in Melbourne in 2009 (Continuum 5) or 2010 (Aussiecon 4).

— Bruce Gillespie, 4 November 2008

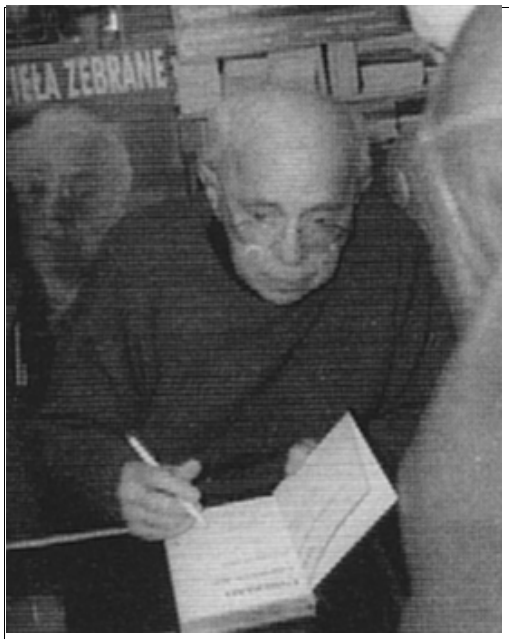
Standing up for science fiction: Stanislaw Lem (1921–2006)

George Zebrowski

[*brg* The non-fiction contributions of Stanislaw Lem had much to do with the success of my magazine *SF Commentary* during the 1970s. Franz Rottensteiner, then Lem's agent, translated for me many of Lem's best articles and selections from his gigantic theoretical book *Fantasy and Futurology*, still untranslated into English. Translated by Werner Koopmann, 'SF: A Hopeless Case: With Exceptions' (*SFC* 35/36/37), both in its *SFC* incarnation and in a later version in the book *Microworlds*, helped to precipitate the anti-Lem reaction that George Zebrowski describes in the article below. Despite Lem's falling out with Franz Rottensteiner, I recall with some fondness his letters to me. Lem's novels and collections stay on the shelf, including *Solaris*, one of my top 10 SF novels. A friend said to me in 1977 that Stanislaw Lem was the 'SF writer for people who did not read SF'. We SF readers also appreciated him.

George Zebrowski is an award-winning novelist, story writer, essayist, editor, and lecturer, best known for his novels *Macrolife* and *Brute Orbits,* among many others. His new book is *Black Pockets and Other Dark Thoughts,* a *Publishers Weekly* starred title.

This article appeared first in *Free Inquiry*, August–September 2006, Vol. 26. No 5, pp. 53–4. Published by the Council for Secular Humanism, PO Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226-0664.*]



Stanislaw Lem is signing the English language Easton Press, Masterpieces of Science Fiction Edition of *The Cyberiad,* translated by National Book Award nominee Michael Kandel, illustrated by Daniel Mroz, with an introduction by George Zebrowski.

Stanislaw Lem, the most celebrated writer of science fiction (SF) since Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, died in late March 2006. An exacting thinker and craftsman, Lem challenged his Western colleagues to live up to the potentials of science fiction by reexamining a debate over how to shape imaginative narratives that is as old as the genre itself.

I first learned about Lem in the late 1960s, when a seafaring friend of my parents hand carried several of Lem's books to me in New York City. At that time, it was difficult to get mail or money in or out of Poland. In the 1970s and 1980s, I reviewed nearly all SF that had been translated into English, including many of Lem's books, and was impressed by the authority with which he revisited SF themes and escaped the simplemindedness of earlier efforts.

We exchanged letters in Polish and English after I invited him, on behalf of the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA, then an organisation of a few hundred writers, now with well over fifteen hundred members), to accept an honorary membership. Together with other writers, I had proposed this not only to honour him, but also because Lem could not send money out of his country for a standard membership and because it might have been politically awkward for him if someone in the West paid his way.

But after a 'spun' version of his critical views on Western SF was published in Germany, a few Cold Warriors in the SFWA took action against him by revoking his membership. Clearly, this was motivated by discomfort with Lem's views; the technical ambiguities of his membership would never have come up otherwise. Harsher criticisms of SF had come from many writers and critics as far back as the 1930s, and most in the SFWA knew the difference between commercial SF and work free of ulterior motives. No one would have defended the view that Lem's acceptance of an honorary membership included the precondition that he should hold his tongue, yet the shameful way he was treated amounted to a belated enforcement of such a condition.

Charitably, one might say that people with the power to enforce their wills lost their tempers and only embarrassed themselves by giving Lem some publicity In protest, famed author Ursula K. Le Guin declined SFWA's annual Nebula Award in the short-story category Incredibly, the quietly substituted second-place winner repeated a false charge against Lem at the awards banquet. I sat at the ceremony and spoke up, but was shushed.

Along with a dozen other writers, I protested Lem's ouster, and we documented the history in a scholarly journal. I hold the archival evidence, which includes one celebrated writer falsely stating, in print, that Lem had criticised Western SF in order to gain favour with Poland's communist government.

The officers of the organisation that had ousted Lem in Soviet style for his views soon found themselves defending an impossible position — so much so that 'The Lem Affair' is nearly unknown to the officers of today's SFWA, and those who had a hand in its confused and shameful motives have recanted, made their peace with Lem indirectly or in print, remained silent, or died.

As an American writer with feet firmly planted in a system of publishing that is now widely accepted as broken, I take heart from the fact that Lem won his case without protesting. His work alone prevailed. The issue was never about whether Lem was right or wrong; it was always about us: the officers who should have let his honorary membership stand and those who shut up about it. SFWA's recent online obituary for Lem glosses over the case. When corporate memory fails to inform itself and to repudiate past idiocies, it makes a new contract with past wrongs, and new silences rubberstamp them.

As Lem's stature increased worldwide, his personal history became more widely known — his work in the anti-German resistance during World War II; his Jewish background, which made charges of anti-Semitism

against him strange, to say the least; predictions of a Nobel Prize in *The New York Times;* and his house arrest during the Solidarity uprising — leading to the final collapse of the gossip that had styled him a stooge of his government. Lem left Poland for nearly a decade and became a darling of mainstream literati, who used him to denigrate science fiction in general. A giant is not well understood by distant blind men.

Lem sympathised with fantasy and speculated that, one day, intelligent life might even remake physical laws. He praised science fiction by Robert A. Heinlein, Philip K. Dick, and Ursula K. Le Guin, but he warned newer writers against wasting their talents on too little and betraying SF's inherently critical potential. Yet he said that we had turned our backs on thought and the dramatisation of the genuine and not easily solved problems of our struggle with knowledge. For Lem, SF without thought was unworthy. And even though he saw the need for escapism's guilty pleasures, he held with Isaac Asimov that SF was to be an 'escape into reality' — but there was far too little of that.

'It isn't possible to construct a reflection of the future with clichés,' Lem wrote in 1970. 'It isn't the archetypes of Jung, nor the structures of the myth, nor irrational nightmares which cause the central problems of the future and determine them. And should the future be full of dangers, those dangers cannot be reduced to the known patterns of the past. *That is the most important thing for a writer of science fiction.* But SF has meanwhile built itself into a jail and imprisoned itself within those walls, because its writers have not seemed to understand that the salvation of the creative imagination cannot be found in mythical, existential or surrealistic writings — as a new statement about the condition of existence. By cutting itself off from the stream of scientific facts and hypotheses, science fiction itself has helped erect the walls of the literary ghetto where it now lives out its piteous life.'

This plea for genuine SF has been made by every major writer in the field, but still seems startling because genuine SF is so rare. It is the ulterior motive of commerce that stimulates the recycling of previously successful genre materials into ever more trivial forms, considerable literary skills encrusting them so as to blind us to what is lost — and this is why Lem's criticism of Western SF was so infuriating. He did not denigrate writing for money, but he had no respect for those who claimed to be writing SF masterpieces of thought and foresight when they were writing fantasy by default.

But masterworks do exist and the contrast is stark, so much so that thoughtful readers sometimes do not see these works as science fiction. The choice for writers is clear; the result for gifted writers who take the recycling path, fatal. Choose, but don't claim to be in the other camp.

It is this condition of writers in market economies that stood behind the animosity toward Lem that was disguised by the quip that 'you don't insult folks who have honoured you' and hid behind the mask of manners ('his membership violated the rules').

I remain a member of SFWA, and have twice been honoured 'for service to my fellow writers', but I still think, as do many others, that SF needs better conditions for the dedicated writer who sees beyond money. Quite simply, SF should have the same freedoms as contemporary fiction, to be free of the adventure and melodrama models that only reflect today and yesterday. Some of this is being achieved among the smaller publishing houses, and by editors who now and then slip in major works, or who don't know the genre but know a serious writer when they read one.

Jules Verne wrote that the basis of the novel form might be 'transferred from the heart to the head', and this, to me, is the very heart of genuine science fiction, which only sometimes exists. It is a call to efforts of insight beyond the changeless mill of human quarrels that we see reflected in endless fictions whose greatness of insight has no effect, on fronts that might well affect the futures before us. Some SF has already done that, for better or worse; most has not. In his work and criticism, Lem knew the soul of SF, which seems too difficult a loyalty for commerce, which claims to lose money with it. But if SF has helped raise our awareness of futures, of the deeps of time and space around us and what we have of our still largely unknown selves within, then the economic blacklist of SF's best does not know what it exiles.

We have had our fabled great SF writer all these past decades, but despite his worldwide sales of 27 million copies in thirty languages, the commercial empires did not know how to sell him in English. His sales disappointed his second American publisher, one of whose people confessed to me that they couldn't let him go because he might embarrass them with a Nobel Prize. *Solaris* (1961, translated in 1970), his first international success, via French and English, was filmed by Andre Tarkovsky in 1972, a work compared to Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001:*

A Space Odyssey (1968). It was remade by director Steven Soderbergh, starring George Clooney, in 2002. My favourites among his thirty or more books of fiction and nonfiction are *The Cyberiad* (1967; translated, 1974) and *Fiasco* (1986; translated 1987). The world's press ranked him with Verne and Wells, recalling the leaps made by Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert A. Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Philip K. Dick, and Ursula K. Le Guin into the general culture beyond genre walls.

The Lilliputians who shot their arrows at Lem failed to blind him, because he wore clear and resistant glasses, lenses that are being polished by all of us whom he did not have enough lifetime to read, but who owe to his works, often unknowingly, because that is what happens to giants.

Note
The definitive documentation for 'The Lem Affair' may be found in *Science Fiction Studies*, Number 4, July 1977, offprints available.

Daniel F. Galouye (1920–1976)

George Zebrowski

[The following article was first published in the Program Book of Readercon 2008.]

I first met Dan at the 1967 World SF Convention in New York City. He mistook me for another writer at the art show, but we hit it off after the correction, and he later introduced me to a few of the well-known authors at the gathering, James Gunn and Harlan Ellison, among others. I was nearly ready to publish my first short story, which was to happen in 1969, but I was glum about it ever happening. Dan told me not to worry; he said that doubts were a good sign.

I had already read his major novel, *Dark Universe*, in the 1961 Bantam paperback, and told him how much I admired its originality. I had by 1967 seen most of his seventy stories, published from 1952 to 1970, prominently in Cele Goldsmith's *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, in *Galaxy*, and in various other magazines and anthologies. His story 'Sanctuary' was reprinted in Doubleday's *The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction*, edited by Anthony Boucher, that magazine's 1954 selection, in which the editor compared Galouye to Cornell Woolrich; Frederik Pohl picked 'Diplomatic Coop' for the fifth volume of his pioneering original collection *Star Science Fiction* from Ballantine in 1959. Many writers are skilful in retreading old ideas, but Dan stood out for his originality and thought; for his ability, as Pohl noted, to take an old idea and stand it on its head.

Dark Universe was a Hugo nominee in 1962, competing with novels by Clifford Simak, Harry Harrison, James White, and the winner, *Stranger In a Strange Land* by Robert A. Heinlein. Cele Goldsmith won the Special Award for editing *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. In her editorship from 1958 to 1965, she helped start the careers of as many notables as John W. Campbell ever did, among them Ursula K. Le Guin, Roger Zelazny, Keith Laumer and Thomas M. Disch. Although Galouye had been publishing stories since 1952, Goldsmith's editing, reflected in the Hugo Special Award, gave him a larger prominence. He had long been on his way, and wrote as much as any full-time writer even as he joined the *New Orleans States-Item* in 1956 as a reporter and copy editor, rising to associate

editor before retiring in 1967 because of failing health from injuries as a Navy pilot in World War II. The *States-Item* was the sister paper of the then and now celebrated *Times-Picayune*.

We corresponded erratically in the last decade of his life, and met again at a world SF convention in Boston in the early 1970s. He was down and a bit drunk at that poolside party on the hotel's top floor in a warm night, but I knew why. He had survived World War II, but, as he told me, only half a man had survived from his bomber crew. Head injuries left him with ever worsening neurological motor problems, which finally killed him in September of 1976. In one of his last letters to me he asked, 'Write one for me, George.' I dedicated my second novel to him and managed to tell him before he died.

We discussed writing during our several meetings, usually at a convention. He told me how much he disliked one of his publishers and so wrote a novel to break his option clause, with two weeks of typing whatever came. I don't recall which novel it was, but I never noticed any loss of quality; he could not write badly if he tried.

We disagreed about the Vietnam War, about which he became more ambivalent as it ended, but we liked each other, and preferred to talk about writing, so I refer you to his works, all of which deserve to be rediscovered by new readers. One of his novels was made into a movie, *The Thirteenth Floor*, in 1999, starring Armin Mueller-Stahl and directed by Josef Rusnak, from the novel *Simulacron-3* (Bantam, 1964), *Counterfeit World* in the British edition; it had also been filmed earlier by the great Rainer Werner Fassbinder for German television. The novel is a pioneering effort about the dangers of virtual reality, with much original thinking in it — for example, the idea that many virtual worlds might be created and lost, losing all knowledge of being virtual worlds. It was typical Galouye, taking old ideas about lost civilisations and amnesiac generation starships, as in Robert A. Heinlein's 'Universe,' and applying them to virtual realities. The scientist Richard Dawkins has recently said on the BBC that Galouye is one of his favourite writers.

Dan was like Rod Serling, in that he survived the world war and set out to write, and had a career of distinguished work as a writer and a newspaperman only to be cut short by illness; but it was his courage to write that was also distinctive, despite health problems and a routinely abusive publishing industry. Serling died at 49, Dan at 56. We're fortunate to have his stories and novels, and they will be rediscovered because too many of us have already rediscovered them for his work to be forgotten. Only the greedy uncaring of the publishing business can do that, and must not be permitted to do so.

One thing that Readercon people know is that there are at least several canons of SF works: the most fashionably 'recognised' works, the one hundred best, the award winners, the anointed; but for every such worthy work there are at least two or three less well known, even mostly unknown, that are the equal of the canonic works, at least, and maybe better. I've often thought of making a three-columned list of the canonic works and their side-by-sides, if only to make unjust fashion and intangible prejudices more visible; but suffice it to say that the history of SF, now nearly two centuries old and being lost like the virtual worlds of Dan's novel, is shot through with such works, obscured by the vagaries of publishing, by bad readers and critics — but mostly by a publishing industry that around 1970 bought up most of the family imprints and raised the sales/earnings bar so high that no author can leap it. Those that seem to leap it rarely do so without industry payola as soon as they begin to resemble a goose-of-golden-egg fame, and are killed by impossible expectations.

Dan Galouye was a too quickly lost friend to my beginnings as a writer, and insofar as I have struggled for originality and style, I am still writing one for him. I cannot help but wonder whether his novel, *A Scourge of Screamers*, was not expressing something of Dan's rage at the realities that had slowed him up. He fought his way through a post-war career that might easily have never happened. As I write this much too short appreciation, Frederik Pohl just said to me on the phone, 'Galouye's works must never be underrated.' Nebula Grandmaster James Gunn called him 'a talented writer and a nice man', qualities that do not always go together, given the thick skin that commerce forces too many of us to grow in direct conflict with the demands of good writing.

Science fiction and fantasy writing has one important feature: a close link, not always polite, between writers and readers. A poet I know once said to me that he never got anything from his readers, while mine wrote, complained, and praised. That is what Readercon is all about. Whether I will be present I do not know, as I write this; but if I am, you'll have a chance to come and say something important to me, as I did to Dan Galouye after reading *Dark Universe*.

What did he answer?

He smiled and said, 'Thanks.'

The works:

Dark Universe, New York, Bantam, 1961. London, Gollancz, 1962.

Lords of the Psychon, New York, Bantam, 1963.

Counterfeit World, London, Gollancz, 1964. As *Simulacron-3*, New York, Bantam, 1964.

The Lost Perception, London, Gollancz, 1966. As *A Scourge of Screamers*, New York, Bantam, 1968.

The Infinite Man, New York, Bantam, 1973.

The Last Leap, London, Corgi, 1964. (collection).

Project Barrier, London, Gollancz, 1968 (collection).

Note: the Gollancz editions are hardcovers; the rest are all paperback originals.

A true original: Thomas M. Disch (1940–2008)

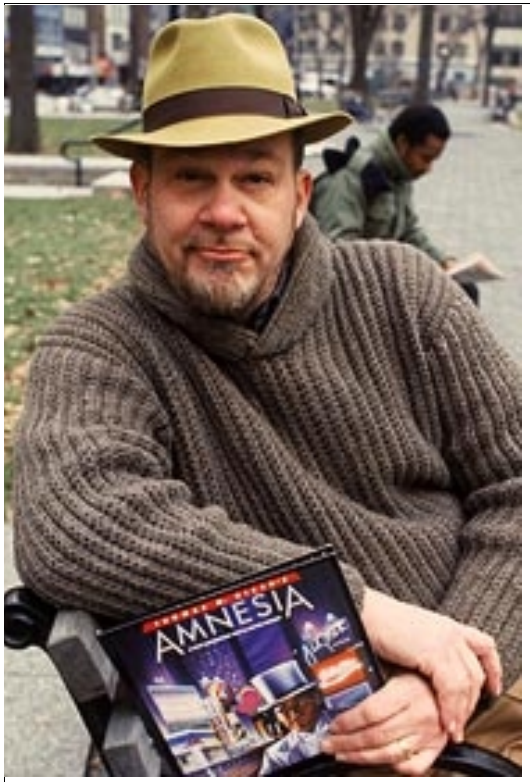
Bruce Gillespie (with help from Tony Thomas)

I

> Tom Disch was a true original, like Guy Davenport or ... who? There are so few. It's not that one agrees with everything such writers think and say (they can be, by their very natures, contrary and provocative). Rather, one admires the cast of mind that refuses to mince or recycle prepackaged notions and emotions. Tom Disch's novels and poems may be applied as touchstones against cant and mealy-mouthed self-deception. Vigilance will be much harder with him gone. (David Yezzi, *New Criterion*, September 2008)

It's easy to give a glib summary of what Thomas M. Disch's work was about. It was about questioning everybody's assumptions about everything, including our belief in the sanctity of life, love, hope and happiness. All-questioning should be the aim of science fiction, but usually isn't.

What was Disch's method? Usually humour; rarely laugh-out-loud humour, but an edgy, ironic conversation with the reader, story-telling that fits better within that ancient category of 'comedy', not 'tragedy'. Disch's best fiction steps into the caverns of tragedy, but usually draws back. He never quite believed enough in life to cling to it without question.



Tom Disch, 1986 (Photo: *Locus*.)

Why do we love reading Disch's work? Why do we re-read it? Because of his love of language: those elegant ironic lines in the poetry; those unfolding, spiky, self-questioning, sad, lyrical sentences of his prose. I reach randomly to Disch's books on the shelf and find that he was, among other things, the master of the first paragraph:

> Summer mornings the balcony would fill up with bona fide sunshine and Boz would spread open the recliner and lie there languid as something tropical in their own little basin of private air and ultraviolet fifteen floors above entrance level. Just watching, half-awake, the vague geometries of jet trails that formed and disappeared, formed and disappeared in the pale cerulean haze ('Emancipation', from *334*).

Disch was too much of the sceptic and ironist to commit himself to the viewpoint of his many memorable characters, but in *On Wings of Song* (1979) he comes closest to identifying with his protagonist, Daniel Weinreb. In the near-future world of this novel, 'flying' is a process of escaping from the body altogether, entering some other sphere of experience, but only if one can sing. Daniel cannot sing, so he cannot fly — but he does eventually learn the true value of music:

> [Daniel sees] the fountain of art; of song; of singing; of a process that renews itself moment by moment; that is timeless and yet inhabits the rush and tumble of time, just as the fountain's trumpeting waters are endlessly conquering the same slim splendid space. It was what Mrs Schiff had said about music, that it must be a warbling and willing to inhabit *this* instant, and then *this* instant, and always *this* instant, and not just willing, and not even desirous, but delighted: an endless, seamless inebriation of song. *That* was what bel canto was all about, and that was the way to fly.

So the next time someone at a party lectures you on the low quality of writing in SF, point him (it's usually a him) at a Disch book and tell him to stuff it.

II

At the August 2008 meeting of the Nova Mob, Melbourne's SF discussion group, I was scheduled to talk about the life and work of Michael Chabon (see my article in this issue of *Steam Engine Time*). Tony Thomas and I felt that it was also important to pay tribute to Thomas M. Disch, who died by self-inflicted gunshot wound on 4 July 2008. Both of us had done a bit of reading and thinking, but had had little time for writing, so we talked off the cuff for about three-quarters of an hour. Here is what I remember of what we discovered.

Tony placed his emphasis on his love of Disch's poetry and humour. Tony had printed all of Disch's famous blog, *Endzone*, which ends on 2 July 2008, two days before his death. I found it hard to read because of its bloggy bittiness, so I hadn't read it. Tony pointed out that Disch's brittle, brilliant humour remained until the end, but his blog also contained much bitterness. Disch spared no details of his illness (diabetes and other ailments that made it hard for him to walk), poverty (cooking a dahl to last four days), disappointment about his career (although three books were due out the month he died), desperate loneliness after the death three years ago of his partner Charles Naylor, and his hatreds. The reader can trace how every aspect of his existence accumulated into a giant ball of disappointment that eventually flattened him.

Disch's blog also contains many pieces of poetry. Few people are natural poets, rattling off lines like these day after day:

In Memoriam

to D-Con, with thanks

He went down the chute just now,
a paper towel for his shroud

and a big Premium cracker box
for a coffin. He had taken care
to come out from behind the oven
and die in plain sight. But
(a good feminist may ask) why
do I suppose he was a boy-mouse?
Might not the corpse as likely have been
a girl's? Well, I checked his genitalia
and he had the cutest little pecker
that ever incited a mouse to acts of love (21 June 2008).

or

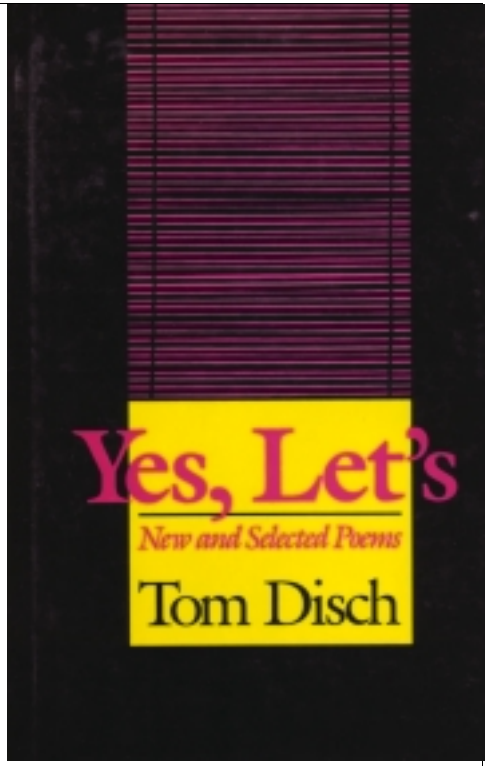
What I Can See from Here

I face east toward the western wall
Of a tall many-windowed building
Some distance off. I don't see the sunset
Directly, only as it is reflected
From the facade of that building.
Those familiar with Manhattan know
How the evening sun appears to slide
Into the slot of any east/west street,
And so its beams are channeled
Along those canyon streets to strike
Large objects like that wall
And scrawl their anti-shadows there,
A Tau of twilight luminescence
At close of day. I've seen this
For some forty years and only tonight
Did I realize what I had been looking at:
The way god tries to say good-bye (24 May 2008).

He wrote over a hundred poems, some bitter, some chatty, some ratty, some sublime, just to fill his blog! Doesn't that make one's own writing life — one's entire conscious life — seem just a bit redundant? But Disch kept playing with the idea of the redundancy of his own life. What could we have said to a poet who just kept staring into the abyss?

III

When I was first working in the offices of Macmillan in 1984, and was chatting to Alex Skovron, he mentioned that one of his favourite American poets was Tom Disch. I said that he was one of my favourite SF writers. Alex, who today is known as one of Australia's best poets, said that he had read a lot of science fiction when he was young, but had not made the connection between Disch and SF. Encouraged, I went looking for books of Disch's poetry, usually without success. Of the ones I have, my favourites are *Yes, Let's* (1989) and *Dark Verses and Light* (1991).



On Nova Mob night, I leafed through these books, finding many favourite poems:

As much as singing swimming
is essentially beyond
me. My torso doesn't turn
sideways in sync with my breath.
My vestigial legs in tow,
I paddle forward, slow

as a disabled steamboat, slow
as the clock on the swimming
pool wall. A will tow-
ing a whale. Ten laps and I'm beyond
caring what my laboring breath
sounds like ... ('Swimming', from *Yes, Let's*).

Amen, brother, amen. When swimming I can reach one end of a fifty-metre pool, but like Disch's 'disabled steamboat', I struggle to make the return trip. It's wonderful to find one's own experience of the world so precisely rendered by someone who can write much better than I can.

Both Tony and I are very fond of 'A Vindication of Obesity', a poem Disch

wrote for the *Times Literary Supplement* in the early eighties. I have a copy somewhere in my files, but haven't found it yet. Every older chap who feels himself to be obese would enjoy this poem.

Disch could be very funny about literary sacred cows:

A Bookmark

Four years ago I started reading Proust.
Although I'm past the halfway point, I still
Have seven hundred pages of reduced
Type left before I reach the end. I will
Slog through. It can't get much more dull than what
Is happening now: he's buying crepe de chine
Wraps and a real, well-documented hat
For his imaginary Albertine.
Oh, what a slimy sort he must have been —
So weak, so sweetly poisonous, so fey!
Four years ago, by God! — and even then
How I was looking forward to the day
I would be able to forgive, at last,
And to forget *Remembrance of Things Past*. (*Yes, Let's*)

I enjoy his overturnings of old clichés:

I think I shall never read
A tree of any shape or breed —
for all its xylem and its phloem —
As fascinating as a poem. ('Poems', from *Yes, Let's*)

Disch engages with every aspect of life, often with distaste, but more often with an acute sense of pleasure:

Only one thing is needed: to speak of matters elemental
Of sand and dust, in all their multifarious forms,
But especially as dunes (which are 'mountains

Recollected in tranquillity'), of anything as basic
As water, fire, earth, or air: to lift it up and say of it.
There! Behold! to take the old hurly-burly of the world,
Its cyclones, coral reefs, tarns, and railroad tracks,
And fold them into a single affirmation, one massive Yes ...
('High Purpose in Poetry: A Primer', *Yes, Let's*).

Tom Disch, like Australia's Philip Hodgins and Britain's Philip Larkin, has been one of those few poets who could write poems for people who think they don't like poetry. I trust that his death might lead to an event that evaded him during his life: a large anthology of his work published in London and readily available to Australian readers.

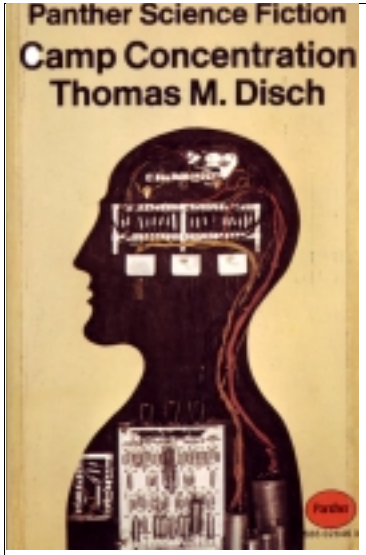
IV

I did not meet Tom Disch, but his life and mine seem to have become intertwined nearly as much as mine was with Philip K. Dick's. The main difference is that Disch never came to regard me as an enemy, although he fell out with many of his old friends towards the end of his life. (I never found out why Phil Dick scrubbed me from his list of friends.)

I began reading science fiction at the time of its lowest ebb: the early to mid 1960s. The average quality of the stories in *If* magazine was particularly mediocre, so it was with a great sigh of relief that I read in 1965 a novella called 'White Fang Goes Dingo', by newcomer (to me) Thomas M. Disch. His characters lived; as did his prose. Here was a fully aware writer, someone who saw things clearly instead of resorting to clichés. His viewpoint was delightfully pessimistic: as Brian Aldiss wrote at the time: 'A genuine pessimist of a new writer has come along, to delight us with an unadulterated shot of pure bracing gloom'.

I looked out for more Disch stories, not realising that many of them had already appeared in Cele Goldsmith's pioneering issues of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. I hadn't bought those magazines because they cost 2 shillings more per copy than *If*.

Disch moved to London in the sixties, along with many other American writers lured by the spirit of 'swinging London', and the advantage of living on the proceeds of a strong American dollar. Therefore my next encounter with Disch was in Britain's *New Worlds*, in the quarto-sized format that the magazine adopted in 1967. Disch took on the mantle of the 'New Wave' without sacrificing his by now formidable story-telling powers. Stories such as 'The Colours' were very impressive, along with stories that Disch was selling to other 'New Wave' publications, such as *Orbit* and *Quark*.



Nothing in these stories prepared me for the power of Disch's fourth novel, *Camp Concentration*, first serialised in *New Worlds*, then published in hardback in 1968. In 200 pages, Disch took on everything: American militarism of the sixties, experimental drugs, poetry, friendship, and inevitably, death. Or rather, resurrection. The book seems to assert that one must go through the valley of the shadow of death to find meaning in life.

I was also much impressed by Disch's novella 'The Asian Shore', first published in *Orbit 6*, and reprinted often since. I've often read this subtle tale of the internal transformation of a diffident American traveller into a Turkish national in Istanbul, and have written about it five times. In this story, transformation does not necessarily involve death, as it does in many Disch stories, but it reminds me that, for Disch, death is merely a form of transformation.

I cannot remember how I made contact with Tom Disch the man. Either directly or through his British publisher, I must have sent him a copy of the *SF Commentary* that contained George Turner's articles about his novel *334* and collection *Getting Into Death*, along with my own article about the same collection. In 1974 I received from him a copy of his poetry collection *The Right Way to Figure Plumbing* (Basilisk Press), inscribed: 'Gratefully for many comments and Commentaries. And in the hope of meeting sometime soon.'

Tom Disch and I never met. Elizabeth Hand did meet him, and wrote this tribute after he died:

> He had a wonderful speaking voice, fluid and seductive. He sounded like John Malkovich, and he looked a bit like Malkovich too, in his prime. I grew up reading Disch's work, starting with 'The Roaches' as a 12-year-old and devouring the novels as I got older. I first met him casually in the late 1980s, but only got to know him and his partner, poet Charles Naylor, during the last eight years or so — far too brief a time. Tall and physically imposing, in public Disch could project a slightly threatening aloofness, with his shaved head, impressive tattoos, bodybuilder's mass. The silken voice that emerged from that intimidating form made him seem even more dangerous, one of those wizards who is subtle and quick to anger.
>
> But then he'd dissolve in laughter and it would all suddenly seem to be a pose, a disguise, part of a vast elaborate joke that you were in on — maybe. He could be irascible, scathingly dismissive; he held grudges and burned bridges. In recent years he'd put on weight, which exacerbated other problems: diabetes, sciatica, neuropathy, depression. He had difficulty walking and was almost housebound.

Tom and I exchanged letters during the seventies. In *SF Commentary* 62–66, June 1981, I published my long article about Disch's best novel *On Wings of Song*. Disch sent me a list of his favourite novels read during 1980 (his No 1 was Gary Jennings' *Aztec*).

In the early 1980s, Disch began a monthly radio 'Letter from New York', broadcast on the ABC's *Radio Helicon* program about books. In his second 'letter', he included a greeting to his 'friends in Australia', including me. Richard Connolly, Disch's Sydney friend and producer of the program, snipped the greeting. A few weeks later, Connolly was moved to another program and I did not hear Disch's voice again.

Tom Disch was a difficult man to stay in touch with. I thought I had lost contact with him in the early nineties, but he had merely moved to his house in upper New York for a few years, without sending an address change. He returned to his New York apartment, and I regained contact. John Sladek, Disch's lifetime friend, and also a brilliant writer of SF and satire, had died. Chris Priest, Sladek's agent, allowed me to reprint 'Four Reasons for Reading Thomas M. Disch', Sladek's article about Disch's SF novels (*SF Commentary* 77). Until then it had appeared only in *The Stellar Gauge*, Michael Tolley and Kirpal Singh's 1980 critical anthology. That article remains the best piece written about Thomas Disch's work.

Tom suggested I reprint in *SF Commentary* 78 'The Gothic of Thomas M. Disch' (from *The Yale Review*), John Crowley's fine analysis of Disch's dark fantasy novels. Both issues can be found on efanzines.com.

The last message I received from Tom Disch was an email in November 2006:

> Your letter of 10 October was forwarded to my NYC address and got

here today. There is so much bad news I won't try and catch you up. Charlie died, my country house has been destroyed by mildew, and now it must be gutted and rebuilt so I can sell it. I've stopped writing novels, so don't worry about reviewing them. What I do write you can read at my blog:

tomdisch.livejournal.com

I tried your link for Steam Engine Time but got a window that said this page does not exist. I often feel that way myself.

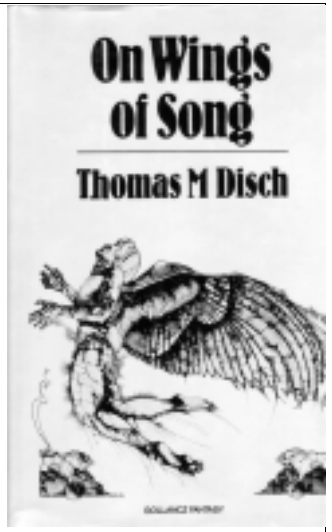
I didn't follow Tom's blog, and I should have, but even now I find it very painful to read. Tom Disch spent a long time carefully contemplating death before choosing to enter it.

V

SF readers, many of them, didn't like Thomas M. Disch's work much. As each book appeared, they called it 'gloomy', 'negative', even 'anti-science' (just like J. G. Ballard!) I see what they mean ... sort of. To dislike Disch on principle and give automatic praise to the works of some other writers, you would have to share many of the assumptions of the anti-Dischites. You would have to believe that fiction is provided as a sort of mushy baby food to comfort and cheer up its readers. You would have to believe that science and other types of knowledge are just branches of nineteenth-century positivist technology: that the only purpose of ideas is to give us faster cars and more exciting spaceships. You would have to believe that 'optimistic' is good and 'pessimistic' is bad. You would have to believe that characters do not die, but really do live happily ever after; that a writer should never depress readers or put a pin through the fluffy cloud of nothingness that comprises most modern thought.

I've heard it said that the function of fiction is to reveal the truth of human thought and behaviour. Even if that formula sounds too utilitarian, it includes the sort of science fiction that I would like to read: fiction set in a possible future (or an alternate present or even an alternate past), rather than in the present or the past. This formulation covers Thomas Disch's major three novels — *Camp Concentration* (1968), *334* (1973) and *On Wings of Song* (1979) — better than it covers the work of most contemporary SF authors, with the exception of Aldiss and a few others.

If an SF novel, set in the future, is also a 'real' novel, covering all the possibilities of human experience, it should include all the woes that can afflict humanity as well as the joys, all the dangers as well as the ecstasies, all the discomforts as well as the comforts. You would expect that, wouldn't you? But only *334*, of all SF novels, sets out to explore *everything* that might happen to a group of people living in a near-future New York. *On Wings of Song* is one of the few SF novels that seeks to suggest the shape of an entire future America by following one character's picaresque journey through it. *On Wings of Song* provides little reassurance to the reader, but endless entertainment.



The main function of the fiction writer is to write well. There is only one type of depressing writer: a bad writer. On this criterion, Disch cannot be a 'depressing' writer. As I've shown, Disch has been one of the great writers in our field for nearly fifty years because in his work we find wonderful, acerbic, funny, penetrating, lyrical sentences. Fiction as well written as Disch's always delights the reader, even if the reader hates everything the author has to say.

VI

Or is that true? A real problem with Thomas Disch's work hit me when preparing my notes for August's Nova Mob talk. His lifelong obsession with death leapt out at me with every book I opened. Why? What was the nature of the 'death' he made his life's companion?

Consider this rather pursed-lips judgment made by me, way back in 1969, in *SF Commentary* 3. I was reviewing Disch's British short story collection *Under Compulsion* (the nearest American equivalent being *Fun With Your New Head*):

Most of the stories are, therefore, circular arguments. They demonstrate the purposelessness and barrenness of the universe, but say nothing profound about the quality of life itself. Disch's attempts to penetrate life ... only re-open a few much-abused scratches on the surface. The metaphysics are good, probably defensible, but *not* infinitely repeatable.

The story in *Under Compulsion* that had really annoyed me in 1969 was 'The Squirrel Cage', but when I re-read the story now I can only think how brilliantly it summarised my own feelings about fate, the world and the whole damned thing in my early to mid twenties. The story's first sentence is:

> The terrifying thing — if that's what I mean — I'm not sure that 'terrifying' is the right word — is that I'm free to write down anything I like but that no matter what I *do* write down it will make no difference — to me, to you, to whomever differences are made.

The reader has entered the realm of Samuel Beckett, or even that of King Lear, if you take Disch's proposition far enough.

Especially in our twenties, many of us fear that the coming of death (which surely will happen before we are thirty!) will render our lives meaningless. Disch's idea of death is more comprehensive than that. As early as 1967, he wrote a very strange novel called *Echo Round His Bones*, whose main character is a ghost (the blurb says: 'it was as a ghost that he would have to try and save mankind from atomic destruction'). In *The Businessman* (1984), most of the characters are dead by the end of the novel. Disch's best short story collection is *Getting Into Death* (1973); the title story is about an old lady lying in a hospital bed facing certain death with the help of LSD, a tableful of books, and a ferocious enjoyment of every moment of life. In Disch's most elegiac story, 'Let Us Quickly Hasten to the Gate of Ivory', his main character wanders into the land of death ('more like a golf course than a cemetery').

Did Disch see death as an enemy or a friend? In *On Wings of Song*, people disappear from life for years, returning only when they are sick of 'flying', which seems to be a kind of ecstatic death. Daniel's main regret is that he cannot enter that realm by singing. Instead, he has to endure a near-future, despotic, Bible-beltin' future rather like the one that Bush and his probable successors have been building during recent years. There are worse things than ordinary life — this seems to be Disch's recurring refrain.

I would love to have discussed death with Thomas Disch, if ever I had met him. I'm sure he would run paces around any arguments I might have advanced for the non-existence of any life after death. Besides, nothing he might have said would have been as eloquent as this passage I just found by leafing through the *Getting Into Death* collection:

> It cannot be that the earth is man's only abiding place! It cannot be that our life is a mere bubble cast up by eternity to float a moment on its waves and then sink back into nothingness! Else why is it that the glorious aspirations which leap like angels from the temple of our heart are forever wandering unsatisfied? Why should the radiant brightness of human beauty be so swiftly taken from us, leaving the thousand streams of our affections to flow back to Alpine torrents upon our hearts? There must be a realm, somewhere, where the rainbow never fades!

So, Tom Disch, whose works have been such a valued part of my life, did you find this realm when you took the step into the unknown?

— Bruce Gillespie, 12 September 2008

Thomas M. Disch: A non-bibliography

Disch wrote or edited whole categories of works that I haven't even mentioned yet. The editions mentioned below are merely the ones I own, so the annotated list is by no means a complete bibliography. I'd liked to buy *The M.D.* and Disch's second critical book about poetry if anybody has copies for sale.

The anthologies

Disch was a master editor of anthologies mainly devoted to stories about the really horrible things predicted by 1970s authors about the approaching end of the world. Now it's all happening in the twenty-first century, Tom ...:

1971 ***The Ruins of Earth*** (Berkley; 287 pp.)
A combination of new and reprinted stories. My favourites include R. A. Lafferty's 'Groaning Hinges of the World', J. G. Ballard's 'The Cage of Sand', and Fritz Leiber's 'America the Beautiful'.

1973 ***Bad Moon Rising*** (Harper & Row; 302 pp.)
Disch's only all-original anthology. Includes Charles Naylor's 'We Are Dainty Little People' and Disch's 'Everyday Life in the Later Roman Empire' among my favourites, and several stories I didn't like (such as Harlan Ellison's 'The Whimper of Whipped Dogs' and Kate Wilhelm's 'The Village'), but which picked up prizes at the time.

1975 ***The New Improved Sun*** (Harper & Row; 208 pp.)
Both new and reprinted stories. My favourites include M. John Harrison's 'Settling the World', James Keilty's 'The People of Prashad' and Disch's own 'Pyramids for Minnesota: A Serious Proposal'.

1976 (with Charles Naylor) ***New Constellations: An Anthology of Tomorrow's Mythologies*** (Harper & Row; 192 pp.)
A less successful anthology of new and reprinted stories. The only stories I seem to have liked much at the time were Robert Sheckley's 'In a Land of Clear Colors' and Michael Conner's 'Extinction of Confidence, the Exercise of Honesty'. Whatever happened to Michael Conner?

1977 (with Charles Naylor) ***Strangeness: A Collection of Curious Tales*** (Scribner's; 309 pp.)
This largely reprint collection is one of the best anthologies ever to appear within our field. It could be considered the first 'slipstream' anthology. Disch and Naylor define these stories as 'tales of strangeness' or 'tales of unease': stories off the edge of SF, fantasy, dark fantasy, or magic realism. It includes several of my all-time favourite stories, ranging from Graham Greene's 'Under the Garden' to M. John Harrison's 'Running Down' to Italo Calvino's 'Where the Lines Converge'.

The collections

Disch's publishers on either side of the Atlantic disagreed about which of his stories should go in which collections. I won't bore you with the differences, except to list the collections that I own:

1966 ***One Hundred and Two H-Bombs and Other Science Fiction Stories*** (pb) (Compact Books; 192 pp)
which, with additional stories, was reprinted as:

1971 ***White Fang Goes Dingo and Other Funny SF Stories*** (pb) (Arrow; 192 pp.)
which includes two collaborations with John T. Sladek. The novella version of 'White Fang Goes Dingo' had its own life long after the publication of the novel version of the same story. I suspect there was an American edition of this anthology, with a yet different selection of stories, but I can't remember its name.

1968 ***Under Compulsion*** (hb) (Rupert Hart-Davis; 220 pp.)
This is the anthology that drew the attention of many Australians to Disch. 'Descending' is still picked as their favourite Disch short story by many readers; my own favourite is 'Casablanca', which ends the book. Other favourite Disch stories appearing here include 'Nada', 'The Squirrel Cage' and 'The Roaches'. The equivalent American anthology was ***Fun With Your New Head***, with a different selection of stories.

1973 ***Getting into Death: The Best Short Stories of Thomas M. Disch*** (hb) (Hart-Davis, McGibbon; 206 pp.)
which does not have quite the same list of contents as:

1977 ***Getting Into Death and Other Stories*** (pb) (Pocket Books; 224 pp.)
Favourite stories of mine appearing in both collections include 'The Asian Shore', 'Displaying the Flag', 'Getting into Death', and 'Feathers from the Wings of an Angel'.

1980 ***Fundamental Disch*** (hb) (Gollancz; 373 pp.)

It really is what it says, a touchstone collection of Disch's shorter works, so is worth hunting down. It includes perhaps too many stories from the early years and not enough from Disch's classic short story period (1969–75), but it should have been kept in print over the years.

1982 ***The Man Who Had No Idea: A Collection of Stories*** (hb) (Gollancz; 186 pp.)
If there has been a later collection of Disch stories, I haven't heard about it. The only four-star stories here are 'Concepts' and 'Understanding Human Behaviour'.

The criticism

During the late sixties and early seventies, one of the great features of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* was its book review column, when Disch was a contributor, as well as Joanna Russ. Two finer forensic reviewers/critics have never worked elsewhere in the prozines. Over the years Disch has been a reviewer of almost everything else, especially music and theatre, but the only collections of his criticism and reviews that I own are:

1995 ***The Castle of Indolence: On Poetry, Poets, and Poetasters*** (Picador USA; 229 pp.)
I must confess this is a pleasure I am still waiting to taste. Looks fabulous. Dipping into it reveals that Disch took issue with almost every trend in American poetry over the last half-century. Back-cover blurb writer Harold Bloom describes Disch as 'one of our mere handful of accurate critics of contemporary poetry'. This book has a sequel, which I don't own.

1998 ***The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World*** (The Free Press; 256 pp.)
At the 1999 Hugo Awards ceremony held in Melbourne at Aussiecon 3, I was very pleased to receive on behalf of Thomas Disch his only Hugo Award for this volume. In it, Disch takes issue with many sacred cows (the world of SF being a gigantic sacred cow ranch), with chapter subtitles such as 'Science Fiction as a Religion' and 'Science Fiction as Military Strategy'. As he has done many times over the years, Disch consistently takes science fiction to task for failing to grow up.

2005 ***On SF*** (University of Michigan Press; 271 pp.)
A bumper collection (as they say) of Disch's collected articles about SF over his whole career. Unfortunately it does not include a selection from his *F&SF* reviews, in which he wrote some of his best non-fiction.

The novels

1965 ***The Genocide***s (pb) (Panther; 188 pp.)
Disch's first novel, in which the aliens eliminate the human species, with thoroughness and some humour. When he reviewed the book, Algis Budrys didn't forgive Disch for the lack of a happy ending, and Disch never forgave Budrys (see Disch's blog). In taking the end-of-the-world novel to its logical outcome, Disch did say 'up yours' to the whole of SF establishment.

1966 ***Mankind Under the Leash***/***The Puppies of Terra*** (my edition uses the *Puppies* title: Pocket Books; 159 pp.)
This hasn't survived as well as 'White Fang Goes Dingo', the novella that begins it. Disch's take on the alien-enslavement-of-humanity theme.

1966 (as 'Cassandra Knye', with John Sladek): ***The House That Fear Built*** (Paperback Library; 160 pp.)
Published as a potboiler gothic. I've never read it, so cannot tell you if these authors stomped all over the gothic genre.

1967 ***Echo Round His Bones*** (Berkley; 144 pp.)
A very peculiar book, seemingly designed to alienate scads of readers, about a character who is dead for most of its pages.

1968 ***Camp Concentration*** (Panther; 158 pp.)
Disch's first masterpiece, telling of Louis Sacchetti's season in hell: a political prison camp that experiments on its inmates in

much the same way as the CIA actually experimented on unknowing victims during the 1960s. Through Sacchetti's diary we watch how the experiment changes the main character's life and consciousness.

1969 (with John T. Sladek) ***Black Alice*** (W. H. Allen; 240 pp.)
I suspect there is more Sladek than Disch here, as Sladek's later fiction showed that he had more of an interest in crime fiction than Disch had.

1969 ***The Prisoner*** (Ace; 188 pp.)
The set-up of Patrick McGoohan's *The Prisoner* TV series — a prison-world from which nobody can ever be sure that he or she has escaped — was rather like that of Tom Disch's short story 'The Squirrel Cage'. No wonder he felt free to take on this commercial job in 1969 (the copyright is assigned to Incorporated Television Co. Ltd., not the author). It's an entertaining novel in its own right, republished in Britain by NEL in 1980, and possibly still in print somewhere.

1973 ***334*** (MacGibbon & Kee; 201 pp.)
There's nothing else like it in SF. It comprises six novellas or short stories, some of which (such as 'Angouleme', the subject of a book-length study by Samuel R. Delany) are famous in their own right. Yet the whole is much more compelling than any of its parts, filled with characters trying to survive in a vast, near-future New York. Many passages of great Disch prose can be found here.

1975 (as 'Leonie Hargrave') ***Clara Reeve*** (Hutchinson; 442 pp.)
A fine historical novel in its own right (set in 1850), with a twist ending that might well have been the inspiration for Ruth Rendell's/Barbara Vine's novels of the 1980s. Reading it is all the more delicious for knowing Disch wrote it.

1979 ***On Wings of Song*** (Gollancz Fantasy; 315 pp.)
I've talked enough about this novel already in my main article. Disch invested all his skills into this magnificent book, but it failed in America.

Hence he started writing the 'gothic romances':

1984 ***The Businessman: A Tale of Terror*** (Harper & Row; 292 pp.)
I gave this four stars when I read it, but don't remember it with any affection. A lot of people are murdered during the action, but stay around as ghosts.

As a result, I haven't read the following, but you can find an excellent account of them in John Crowley's article in *SF Commentary* 78:

1994 ***The Priest: A Gothic Romance*** (Millennium; 310 pp.)

1999 ***The Sub: A Study in Witchcraft*** (Knopf; 285 pp.)

Chapbooks

Disch published a number of chapbooks, including children's stories, the most successful of which was ***The Brave Little Toaster*** (but I don't own a copy). Filmed by Disney, its rights sale provided (I assume) Tom with his last glimmer of worldly success. The other chapbooks I have are:

1986 ***The Tale of Dan De Lion*** (Hot Chocolate Books; 26 pp.)

1987 ***The Silver Pillow: A Tale of Witchcraft*** (Mark V. Ziesing; 48 pp.)

1991 ***Haikus of an Ampart*** (Coffee House Press; 15 pp.). Poetry.

Poetry

I've talked a lot about Disch's poetry. Here's the list of the volumes I've been able to find:

1972 ***The Right Way to Figure Plumbing*** (Basilisk Press; 75 pp.)

1989 ***Yes, Let's: New and Selected Poems*** (Johns Hopkins University Press; 112 pp.)

1991 ***Dark Verses & Light*** (Johns Hopkins University Press; 124 pp.)

1991 ***Haikus of an Ampart*** (Coffee House Press; 15 pp.)

The amazing adventures of Michael Chabon

Bruce Gillespie

[*brg* First delivered as a talk to the Nova Mob, Melbourne SF discussion group, on 6 August 2008.

This is not the Michael Chabon talk I had promised to myself to give. In 2007, my supply of paying work dried up in June, and I had none from July to November. If that had happened in 2008, I would have been able to deliver a talk based on re-readings of all of Chabon's fiction, plus readings of his three anthologies and anything I could find on the net. By the time I sat down yesterday, 5 August 2008, to write, I had had time only to reread *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. I enjoyed the comments by Nova Mob members about *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* at the July meeting, but I still had had no time to re-read it.

Thanks to Alan Stewart for a copy of Chabon's *Werewolves in Their Youth*. Thanks to Slow Glass Books, I've been able to read *Maps and Legends*, Chabon's recent collection of essays.

Yesterday I heard Ramona Koval's talk with Michael Chabon on the ABC Radio National's *Book Show*. It was first broadcast last December, when *Gentlemen of the Road* was released.

I had not yet had the opportunity to read the *Locus* interview with Chabon, because the August issue had not yet arrived.

I felt so unprepared that I was tempted to read to you the *Wikipedia* entry on Michael Chabon. It is a fine piece of work, much better than any overall essay that I might have written, but the entry does not say what I would want to say, so here are my own inadequate thoughts.*]

Michael Chabon.

I

Just over seven years ago, Dick Jenssen gave Elaine and me his spare copy of Michael Chabon's novel of 2000, *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. Soon other friends began recommending it, and the reviews were uniformly favourable. I discovered it to be one of the few great novels of the last twenty years.

When I was in San Francisco in March 2005, I was at the last party of Potlatch, but went to bed at about 12.30 in the morning. A few people were left in the hospitality suite when a bloke wandered in, tied to himself a little piece of paper on which was written the name 'Michael Chabon', and began chatting to those were there. The people to whom I was talking next morning knew that Michael Chabon was one of the few major American writers who knew about the science fiction world, but nobody had imagined that he would actually turn up to an SF convention. I don't know whether he's attended any since.

Why, then, the buzz about Michael Chabon in science fiction circles, when he has only ever written one SF story, 'The Martian Agent, A Planetary Romance' (*McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales*, 2002), and one young adults fantasy novel, *Summerland*?

It's because *he* knows about *us*. Lots of well-known literary writers have a vague notion of science fiction, but they call it 'sci-fi', and associate it mainly with movie and TV SF. Almost universally they deride the quality of the writing in SF, without having read much of it, and say that many of our best writers, such as Vonnegut and Crowley and Le Guin, are not SF writers at all — because they write well. As Dustin Hoffman once said on the commentary track for an SF film in which he was appearing, the film couldn't possibly be SF because it had 'ideas' in it.

In the first essay is his collection *Maps and Legends*, Chabon describes how he broke out of the world of today's literary fiction and rediscovered the wider world of genre fiction.

> As late as about 1950, if you referred to 'short fiction', you might have been talking about any one of the following kinds of stories: the ghost story; the horror story; the detective story; the story of suspense, terror, fantasy, science fiction, or the macabre; the sea, adventure, spy, war, or historical story; the romance story. All these genres and others have rich traditions in America, reaching straight back to Poe or Hawthorne, our first great practitioners of the form. A glance at any dusty paperback anthology of classic tales turns up important genre work by Balzac, Wharton, Conrad, Graves, Maugham, Faulkner, Twain, Cheever, Coppard. Heavyweights all, some considered among the giants of modernism, the very source of the moment-of-truth story that, like Homo sapiens, appeared relatively late on the scene but has worked very quickly to wipe out all its rivals ... 'Genre' short stories were published not only by the unabashedly entertaining pulps, which gave us Hammett, Chandler, and Lovecraft among a very few other writers now enshrined more or less safely in the canon, but also in the great 'slick' magazines of the time: the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire*, *Collier's*, *Liberty*, and even the *New Yorker*, that proud bastion of the moment-of-truth story that has only recently, and not without controversy, made room in its august confines for the likes of Stephen King ...

> 'Genre' absorbed the fatal stain of entertainment. Writers — among them some of our finest — kept turning out short stories of post-apocalypse America or Arizona gunmen or hardboiled detection. But they could no longer hope to see their work published in top-drawer literary magazines, and in the meantime the pulps and the slicks alike dried up, blew away, and stopped publishing short fiction entirely (*Maps and Legends*, pp. 18–20).

So how could Michael Chabon discover this truth, whereas it still escapes most literary writers in America, Britain and Australia? Because he earned his credentials in the narrow world of literary fiction, then became disillusioned with it:

> [It] has rules, conventions, and formulas of its own: the primacy of a unified point of view, for example; letters and their liability to being read or intercepted; the dance of adulterous partners; the buried family secret that curses generations to come; the ordinary heroism of an unsung life.

As Chabon summarises it, the ruling literary genre is 'the contemporary, quotidian, plotless, moment-of-truth revelatory story'. And who better to describe it than Michael Chabon, because in a general way that describes the sort of fiction he wrote in his first four books: his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988); his first short story collection *A Model World* (1991); his second novel, *Wonder Boys* (1995), which was made into a film; and his second collection, *Werewolves in their Youth* (1999). In between were several side projects, including a novel called *Fountain City*, which he abandoned after it had reached 1500 pages. These books give little inkling of what was to come in his next novel, *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000).

Chabon was very successful with his first four books. *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, which tells of several young people growing up and having a wild old time in Pittsburgh, was a great success, as was *Wonder Boys*, also based closely on his own experience of doing a degree in creative writing. In *Wonder Boys*, one of the funniest books I've read for awhile, Chabon splits his literary persona into three: an older writer who is still trying to finish a 1500-page novel; a success-hungry young writer in his writing class; and writer's agent, a shady trickster and liar who was played all too accurately by Robert Downey Jr in the film version. The short story collections are often populated by such characters as the shady Robert Downey Jr character, who will rip off anybody given half a chance, and moves with ease from one woman to the other; a more innocent young Jewish bloke, always on the point of divorcing or being divorced by an elusive and beautiful young Jewish woman; and the father-figure. For example, the second half of the *Model World* collection is a set of stories, first published in *The New Yorker*, about a boy and his father, who is about to leave home. Michael Chabon's own father divorced his mother when Michael was eleven.

Despite the seeming predictability of the subject matter, these books are hardly boring, because from the first sentence of his first novel Chabon has been an able writer of fine English prose sentences.

Take the first sentence of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*: 'At the beginning of the summer I had lunch with my father, the gangster, who was in town for the weekend to transact some of his vague business'. The novel turns out not to be about gangsters, but one of those turbulent, life-changing summers that affect people at a certain young age before they go on to better things.

Even better is the first story in the 'Model World' sequence that forms the second half of the *Model World* collection: 'One Saturday in that last, interminable summer before his parents separated and the Washington Senators baseball team was expunged forever from the face of the earth, the Shapiros went to Nags Head, North Carolina, where Nathan, without planning to, perpetrated a great hoax'.

Many writers can start their stories with arresting sentences, but few people can keep unfurling them, page after page, as Chabon can. *Wonder Boys*, his second and funniest novel, is full of them, creating an atmosphere of breathless excitement, a feeling that anything can happen at any time.

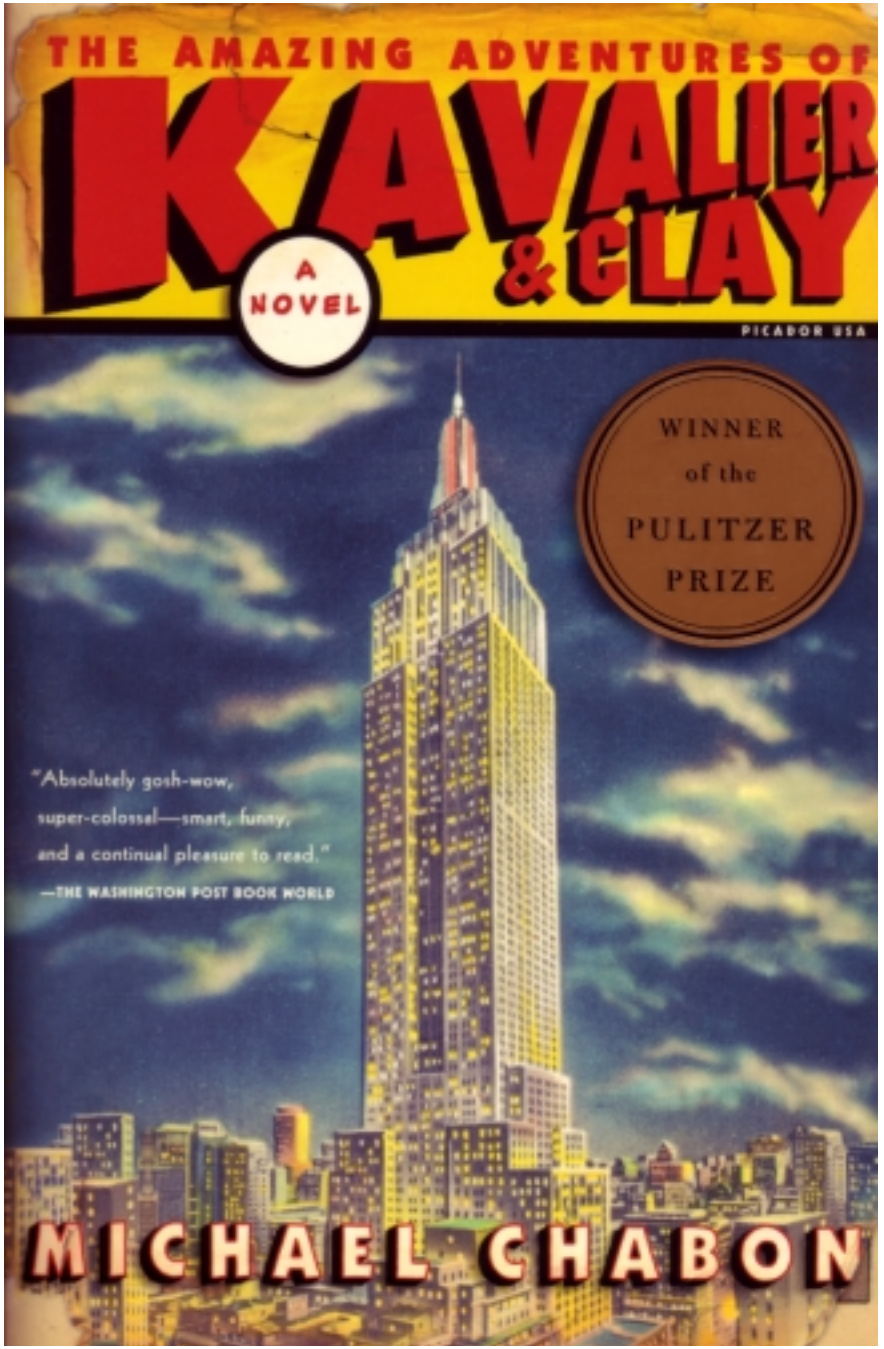
When his second collection *Werewolves in their Youth*, appeared, Chabon is still a paid-up, and paid-well member of the *New Yorker* literary fiction club. Despite the teasing title of the collection, these stories do not deal with supernatural events. The best story, 'Son of the Wolfman', is about a couple whose lives seem to be in ruins after Cara, the wife, is attacked by a 'wolfman': a grossly hairy rapist. At first Cara, the wife, is going to have an abortion, but then decides not to. Her husband Richard, who was never able to father a child with her, recedes from her affections,

and eventually leaves the house. The suspense of the story, built very effectively, arises from the question: will he return home in time for the birth? If so, will the couple find a way to reconcile? Since Chabon is a vivid writer of vivid characters, the solutions offered are neither easy nor comfortable, but the story is satisfying.

In the last story in the collection, Chabon offers us 'In the Black Mill, by August Von Zorn'. Von Zorn is a fictitious Lovecraftian writer, long since dead, whose story forms part of the background of the novel *Wonder Boys*. In 'In the Black Mill', Chabon shows us his ability to imitate genre writers' styles perfectly — in this case, the Lovecraftian style. The story is not strictly fantasy, since it does not relate any supernatural events.

In reading a fair amount about Chabon and his career, I was searching for some deciding event that propelled Chabon out of the literary ghetto into the ambitious sphere occupied by *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. I found no description of a eureka moment in Chabon's biography, but I did find this in his *Wikipedia* entry:

> *Washington Post* critic Jonathan Yardley ... argued that, in his works to that point, Chabon had been preoccupied 'with fiction explorations of his own . . . It is time for him to move on, to break away from the first person and explore larger worlds'. Chabon later said that he took Yardley's criticism to heart, explaining, 'It chimed with my own thoughts. I had bigger ambitions.'
>
> Shortly after completing *Wonder Boys*, Chabon discovered a box of comic books from his childhood; a reawakened interest in comics, coupled with memories of the 'lore' of his Brooklyn-born father had told him about 'the middle years of the twentieth century in America ... the radio shows, politicians, movies, music, and athletes, and so forth, of that era', inspired him to begin work on a new novel. In 2000, he published *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, an epic historical novel that charts sixteen years in the lives of Sammy Clay and Joe Kavalier, two Jewish cousins who create a wildly popular series of comic books in the early 1940s, the years leading up to America's entrance into World War II. The novel received 'nearly unanimous praise' and became a *New York Times* best seller, eventually winning the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Chabon reflected that, in writing *Kavalier & Clay*, 'I discovered strengths I had hoped that I possessed — the ability to pull off multiple points of view, historical settings, the



passage of years — but which had never been tested before.'

Why then is *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* much grander and more interesting than other historical novels? And why are science fiction people as interested in this novel as they are in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007), which tells of an alternative past and present?

II

I am not a reader of comic books, and haven't been since the age of 12, when I gave away a vast collection, having decided that I had stopped being a child, so should abandon childish things. I kept all my *Uncle Scrooge* comics, the ones that later proved to have been written by Carl Barks. I still have them, as well as the *Mad* magazines I bought during the late 1960s and early 1970s — but nothing else. I've never been tempted to return to comic books, or graphic novels, their later incarnation, because I don't like that style of artwork.

So why was I swept along by *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*? Because Michael Chabon loves comic books, because he takes them seriously, and never in the novel does he patronise the world of comic books or his characters who are involved in comic book publishing. Chabon has obviously carried out a huge amount of research into both comic art and comic book production methods in prewar New York. His two main characters, Joe Kavalier, who has just arrived from a Nazi Europe that is just about to destroy his whole family, and his New York cousin Sam Klayman, who later shortens his name to Clay, are dedicated to making a career in comic art. When the novel begins, DC Comics is already selling millions of copies per issue of *Action Comics*, which introduced Superman and Batman, and the industry was entering its greatest boom period.

Why is this novel not merely about a few people living their lives at a particular place in a particular time? What gives it an extra, magical quality?

Michael Chabon wants to infuse as sense of heroic legend — the kind of heroism that he finds in superhero comics — into historical reality. I was never excited by superhero comics, for the obvious reason that if your hero can do achieve anything he wants to do, where's the interest in the story? Also, comic superheroes were then merely crime fighters, built of muscles and super powers. Not much brains or wit there. Chabon doesn't claim much more than these qualities for the comic book characters written and drawn by Kavalier and Clay, but he infuses his characters' lives with the sense of epic heroism that they are trying to put into their comics. So Joe Kavalier is not just another immigrant escapee from the Prague ghetto. Instead, he has made himself an escapologist. Inspired by the exploits of Harry Houdini, and taught by a master magician in Prague, he stows away from Prague inside the coffin carrying the famous golem of Prague to safety. He escapes from the golem's coffin as soon as possible, and by the most circuitous route, eventually reaches New York. We wait for most of the novel for the golem to catch up with him. In New York, he and his writer cousin Sam hit daydirt when they invite a new comic character, The Escapist. And then their troubles begin — and the story becomes ever deeper and richer.

Why, then, am I discussing the book with people who are mainly interested in science fiction? Because for almost every reference to the world of comic books and their creators, the SF reader could substitute 'science fiction' and 'science fiction writers'. We know this because several SF authors, especially Fredrik Pohl in his book *The Way the Future Was*, have published memoirs about the same prewar period in New York. Here's a quotation from Damon Knight's *The Futurians*, which would have been our *Kavalier & Clay* if he had written it as a novel (*The Futurians*, pp. 92–3):

> 'It had hot water, but no heat,' [Richard] Wilson said. 'Dave [Kyle] was going to art school, and I guess he got an allowance, but he didn't have spending money. We learned to smoke pipes at that time. And we always had a pack of cigarettes, but we smoked them very sparingly . . . We tried baking once, but forgot to put in the yeast, and it turned out to be a thing about an inch thick. It was like a huge petrified mushroom; we used it as a doorstop.
>
> 'Another time it was quite cold and we decided to steamheat the place. We turned on the hot water in the shower and the steam came out into the apartment, and kept coming lower and lower until it was below head level, and we would shout to each other through the fog — which was fine; it was nice and warm, until it began to rain.' ...
>
> The financial situation was, as usual, dismal: 'Checks long due have still to put in their appearance. As a result (a) the Base is a week behind in rent (b) meals have been infrequent and lacking in perspective (c) laundry remains undone (d) outlook on life in general is not as

sunny as it might be (e) certain people by the name of F. Orlin Tremaine are being thought nastily of.'

Compare this with the beginnings of the Escapist empire in *Kavalier & Clay*. Joe Kavalier and Sam Clay have concocted the *Escapist* comic book, and are hoping to sell it and make their fortunes. They have promised to deliver a 68-page comic book in a week to the novelty goods firm that is just about to become Empire Comics. They have no space in Mrs Kavalier's tiny apartment. Joe is very good at breaking into apartments, so he and Sam invade Palooka Studios, the apartment occupied by three other comics artists and their girlfriends:

> The actual current occupants of Palooka Studios, Jerry Glovsky, Marty Gold, and Davy O'Dowd, came home around ten, with half a roast chicken, a bottle of red wine, a bottle of seltzer, a carton of Pall Malls, and Frank Pantaleone. They walked in the door boisterously quibbling, one of them imitating a muted trumpet; then they fell silent . . . They were surprised to find, when they came upstairs, that Palooka Studios had been transformed in a matter of hours, into the creative nerve centre of Empire Comics ...
>
> 'How did you get in here?' Jerry said.
>
> 'Your girlfriend let us in,' Sammy said. '*Rosa*.' (*Kavalier & Clay*, pp. 138–9)

The similarity between the two milieux is startling. Most SF writers who would become famous as Golden Age writers during the 1940s were teenagers. They lived in each others' apartments, while they tried to sell stories for anything as low as a quarter of a cent a word to pulp magazines that were often edited by their friends. For instance, Frederik Pohl did his first editing stint when he was nineteen. The result was that a whole of ambitious writers occupied apartments with such as names as the Ivory Tower, the Base, or the Raven's Roost. Like the successful comics artists, such as the creators of Superman, they were still in their teens.

From late in *Kavalier & Clay*, here is Joe Kavalier's ode to comic books (p. 575):

> Joe loved his comic books: for their inferior color separations their poorly trimmed paper stock, their ads for air rifles and dance courses and acne creams, for the basement smell that clung to the older ones, the ones that had been in storage during Joe's travels. Most of all, he loved them for the pictures and stories they contained, the inspirations and lucubrations of five hundred aging boys dreaming as hard as they could for fifteen years, transfiguring their insecurities and delusions, their wishes and their doubts, their public educations and their sexual perversions, into something that only the most purblind of societies would have denied the status of art. Comic books had sustained his sanity during his time on the psychiatric ward at Gitmo. For the whole of the fall and winter following his return to the mainland, which Joe spent shivering in a rented cabin on the beach at Chincoteague, Virginia, with the wind whistling in through the chinks in the clapboard, half-poisoned by the burned-hair smell of an old electric heater, it was only ten thousand Old Gold cigarettes and a pile of *Captain Marvel Adventures* (comprising the incredible twenty-four-month epic struggle between the Captain and a telepathic, world-conquering earthworm, Mr. Mind) that had enabled Joe to fight off, once and for all, the craving for morphine with which he had returned from the Ice.
>
> Having lost [everything], the usual charge leveled against comic books, that they offered merely *an easy escape from reality*, seemed to Joe actually to be a powerful argument on their behalf. He had escaped, in his life, from ropes, chains, boxes, bags, and crates, from handcuffs and shackles, from countries and regimes, from the arms of a woman who loved him, from crashed airplanes and an opiate addiction and from an entire frozen continent intent on causing his death. The escape from reality was, he felt especially right after the war — a worthy challenge.

All you have to do is substitute 'science fiction' for 'comics' in this wonderfully lyrical passage, and the events of a favourite Golden Age story for 'Captain Marvel Adventures', and you find unravelled the secret of all our souls: the reason we stay with our favourite reading matter.

I've already read the passage where Joe and Sam meet the friends they need to come into the project. They have no possibility of delivering the promised comic book in the time without them. The girl Rosa, who was glimpsed naked in bed by Joe when he broke in, seems to disappear from the story. When he meets her again at a party held for Salvador Dali in the New York Village, they become lovers. Meanwhile, *The Escapist* has been sold to the new company, Empire Comics, but Joe and Sam have signed such a ruinous deal that it takes them several years to make any

money out of their creation. This is exactly what happened to many SF writers of the time, who sold entire novels for peanuts, only to have those novels become classics in book form in the 1950s, with no further royalties to the writers.

The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay is an epic novel about many things, including creativity, magic and escapism. Chabon has an ability to unfold one great yarn after another. But what makes these stories plausible? Why is this *not* a superhero story? Why is it in fact much closer to SF's few great novels set in the near future, such as Tom Disch's *On Wings of Song* and *334*? The answer is: because of Chabon's complete lack of sentimentality. Yes, he loves comic books, and he tells with great gusto the story of their best years, but he does not hide the difficulties of those years. Most of the plot turns on the fact that Joe Kavalier loses all of his family back in Europe during the Nazi years; it takes him some years to reconstruct his life in the face of this brutal fact. Sam Clay, in turn, is doomed to remain the perpetual sidekick until near the end of the novel. He hides his own homosexuality from everybody, including himself, marries and acts as a father to another man's child, and takes jobs he hates in order to square up to his responsibilities towards the people he loves. In the process, he almost loses his own soul.

Chabon's fiction works because his characters face up to the consequences of their actions. There is nobody to ensure their good fortune, although things eventually do work out well, sort of. There is none of the Heinleinian quality of so much science fiction — that kind of story where the main character cannot help succeeding because the author has decided from the beginning that that is how the story will turn out. In Chabon's *Wonder Boys*, for instance, the main character, Grady Tripp, realises full well that his disastrous actions will lead to disastrous consequences. He goes ahead anyway, observing himself rolling down the highway to hell, but without self-pity. This is rather different from the film version, starring Michael Douglas, Toby McGuire and Robert Downey Jr, a glum piece the portrays the main character as relentlessly self-pitying.

In his first four books, Chabon stays with the Jewish milieu that he knows, so the casual reader comes to wonder whether anybody in America is not Jewish. In *Kavalier & Clay*, the world of comic books is largely the world of immigrant Jews, some of them recently escaped from Nazi Europe, and some them the children of people who arrived before World War I. Relentless ambition is the only way to overcome poverty, but Chabon is fully aware of the damage to their personalities that people can make while achieving their ambitions.

The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay is a great love story. Rosa and Joe are separated for years, yet the slow coils of the plot bring them together. Sam Clay's one venture into gay love is not so fortunate, but one feels that at the end of the novel he might also escape and break out of the box that encloses his life.

Chabon uses the term 'breaking out of the box' to describe what he is trying to do. The image of the golem, the magic figure sent in a box from Prague to New York, pervades the book. Sam Clay, by name, is the clay man — the Golem — but one feels that the Golem is also old Europe, transported to America and set free there. When you want a subject for your next article for *Steam Engine Time*, or PhD thesis, compare Chabon's last essay in *Maps and Legends* with the way he uses the golem imagery in *Kavalier & Clay*.

What makes the book great, though? What I love about the book are the *sentences*, those great rolling sentences and paragraphs, some of them nearly a page long. They don't stop you in your tracks like Marcel Proust's. Instead, they put you on a roller coaster that allows you to feel the full joy of life. They are never merely decorative or lyrical; they are what the story is made of. I've already quoted Chabon's ode to comic books. Also, take a look at his ode to New York as seen through the eyes of a newly arrived immigrant (p. 181). Or read chapter 6 of Part IV, in which the Escapist's arch-enemy, the Saboteur, nearly brings Joe's life to an abrupt halt. Equally hilarious and breathtaking is chapter 15 of the same part, which tells of Sammy's one disastrous attempt to join the gay community. Since New York is a major character in the novel, let me finish with Chabon's ode (p. 516) to that greatest of all cities:

> Tommy's loneliness had found a strangely happy expression in the pitch and rumble of the LIRR trains, the stale breath of the heat blowers, the warm oatmeal smell of cigarettes, the sere featureless prospect from the windows, the hours given over entirely to himself, his book, and his imaginings. He also loved the city itself. Coming to and leaving Cousin Joe's, he would gorge himself on hot dogs and cafeteria pie, price cigarette lighters and snap-brim hats in store windows, follow the pushboys with their rustling racks of furs and

trousers. There were sailors and prizefighters; there were bums, sad and menacing, and ladies in piped jackets with dogs in their handbags. Tommy would feel the sidewalks hum and shudder as the trains rolled past beneath him. He heard men swearing and singing opera. On a sunny day, his peripheral vision would be spangled with light winking off the chrome headlights of taxicabs, the buckles on ladies' shoes, the badges of policemen, the handles of pushcart lunch-wagons, the bulldog ornaments on the hoods of irate moving vans. This was Gotham City, Empire City, Metropolis. Its skies and rooftops were alive with men in capes and costumes, on the lookout for wrongdoers, saboteurs, and Communists. Tommy was the Bug, on solitary patrol in New York City, soaring up from the underground like a cicada, hopping on his mighty hind legs along Fifth Avenue in hot pursuit of Dr. Hate or the Finagler, creeping unnoticed as an ant amid the hurrying black-and-gray herds of briefcase-carrying humans, whose crude mammalian existences he had sworn to protect and defend, before at last dropping in on the secret aerial lair of one of his fellow masked crime-fighters, whom he sometimes dubbed the Eagle but who went more generally, in Tommy's fancy, by the moniker Secret-man.

— Bruce Gillespie, 5 August 2008

New Worlds and the New Wave in fandom:

Fan culture and the reshaping of science fiction in the sixties

Rob Latham

[First published in *Extrapolation*, Vol. 47, No 2 © 2006 by The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, pp. 296–313.]

In the August 1970 issue of the *SFWA Forum*, a publication circulated to members of the Science Fiction Writers of America, Harlan Ellison remarked that the controversy over the New Wave, which had consumed the field during the late 1960s, seemed to have been 'blissfully laid to rest'. There never was, he claimed,

> any real conflict among the writers. It was all a manufactured controversy, staged by fans to hype their own participation in the genre. Their total misunderstanding of what was happening (not unusual for fans, as history ... shows us) managed to stir up a great deal of pointless animosity and if it had any real effect I suspect it was in the unfortunate area of causing certain writers to feel they were unable to keep up and consequently they slowed their writing output.[1]

Leaving aside the fact that this analysis obscures Ellison's own prominent role — and that of other professional authors and editors such as Judith Merril, Michael Moorcock, Lester Del Rey, Frederik Pohl and Donald A. Wollheim — in fomenting the conflict, it does raise the interesting question of precisely how fan culture was implicated in the furious debates of the period, a question virtually ignored in most scholarly

Brian Lewis's cover for the novella version of J. G. Ballard's 'The Drowned World' in Carnell's *Science Fiction Adventures*.

writing on the New Wave. If we cannot agree with Ellison's indictment of SF fans as 'clueless trouble-makers avid for unearned egoboo',[2] the onus is on us to produce a more compelling narrative of contemporary fandom's participation in perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most rancorous, dispute in SF history. This is the task I have set myself here.[3]

A useful way to begin would be to determine how, where, and when the New Wave conflict originated. Much has been written on the New Wave as a significant historical moment in the development of the genre, but the bulk of this coverage has tended to focus on the published fiction and to ignore the institutional matrix within which these writings emerged — the complex network of relationships linking writers with editors and fans, as well as with one another.[4] Science fiction is, or certainly was during the 1960s, a fairly small world, and the ongoing give-and-take among the scene's various players deserves more careful scrutiny, especially when one is dealing with a period of such upheaval, when the network sustaining the genre was tested severely. New Wave fiction, and the occasional expressions of opinion (pro and con) about the subject that appeared in professional publications, was merely the most publicly visible crystallisation of a rhetorical and ideological struggle taking place in face-to-face encounters at conventions, in the letter columns of fanzines, and in various other sites of subcultural exchange.The recent research I have done into fanzines of the 1960s[5] shows that the New Wave debate had two main stages: from 1964 to 1966, it was principally a British phenomenon, focused on the value of J. G. Ballard's early fiction and the effects of the editorial changes Moorcock was wreaking on *New Worlds* magazine; it then migrated to the United States (with the 1965 WorldCon, held in London, being the main vector of transmission), where it burgeoned into a running series of disputes relating to the overall worth of genre SF and the editorial taboos constraining its production. In the process of this trans-Atlantic exchange, the generational commitments and interpersonal rivalries dividing the field's various factions hardened into ideological fault lines, with longstanding differences recast in the form of a vast struggle between Old and New Waves. (For example, lingering anxieties regarding the influence of the so-called Milford Mafia — the graduates of the annual Writers Workshop founded by Merril, Damon Knight and James Blish in 1956 — were readily folded into the gathering denunciations of New Wave elitism and pretentious 'artiness'.) The fires of controversy were fanned, in both Britain and the United

States, by self-appointed spokespersons for, and unofficial ringleaders of, the separate blocs, with the fallout evident in the pages of fan and professional publications, in convention speeches and panel exchanges, in the adjudication of literary awards, and indeed in just about all the major business conducted within the genre during the remainder of the decade.

Not everyone during this period was a partisan in the conflict, obviously, and the debate itself did not quite encompass all the developments — the various institutional setbacks and renovations — that came to form 1960s SF. But so widespread and inescapable was the rhetorical gunfire that even those who did not feel strongly about the Old vs. New split were either forced to adopt defensive postures to avoid collateral damage or else to make desperate, placating gestures of the 'can't we all just get along?' variety. The lack of neutral ground became an even more pointed problem as the conflict began to be mapped onto broader social divisions, such as the strife between the youth counterculture and the so-called Establishment, an extrapolation that accelerated as the decade advanced.[6] This essay cannot possibly tackle all of these developments, so I would like to focus on the initial phase of the battle in Britain and the first glimmerings of its emergence in the US. Above all, I want to show how an attention to fan writings about the conflict can contribute to a more thorough anatomy of this crucial episode in SF history.

In the professional SF magazines, the first glimmerings of the New Wave are generally considered to be the guest editorials written for *New Worlds* by Ballard in May 1962 and Moorcock in April 1963. Starting with the November 1961 issue, editor John Carnell had invited prominent authors to give vent to their views about the current state of SF, and a number of them responded with boldness and sometimes outright pugnacity. Looking back from the vantage of the late 1960s, one can see Ballard's and Moorcock's pieces as the first volleys in the polemical offensive they would launch once the latter gained control of the magazine and installed the former as his resident visionary. Ballard's editorial, entitled 'Which Way to Inner Space?', is the better known of the two, staking out fresh terrain for the genre in the softer sciences of psychology and symbology, and thumbing its nose at the tradition of 'space fiction', which is scorned as outmoded and 'invariably juvenile'.[7] The basic contours of later clashes between Old and New Waves are prefigured in this brief, elliptical essay. Moorcock's editorial, 'Play with Feeling', was if anything even more harshly negative in its assessment of the contemporary field. A relentless attack on 'lazy writers or bad writers or downright stupid writers who find it impossible to stimulate the mind and the emotions at the same time', the essay called for an infusion of 'passion, subtlety, irony, original characterisation, original and good style, a sense of involvement in human affairs, colour, density, depth, and, on the whole, real feeling' in order to combat the dismal glut of 'boys' stories got up to look like grown-ups' stories' that presently prevailed.[8] This stern verdict was not unfamiliar to British fans who had heard Moorcock's comments at conventions or read some of his many fanzine articles. The August 1961 issue of Eric Bentcliffe's *Bastion*, for example, had featured an essay by Moorcock that offered similar views, though he couched them not as the opinions of a single disillusioned reader but rather as the collective judgment of attendees at that year's EasterCon, where the dire state of most magazine SF was purportedly a topic of widespread discussion. Chastising the timidity of SF editors and the poverty of imagination of most of its authors, Moorcock demanded a more forthright, 'speculative' engagement with the contemporary world: science fiction desperately needed 'new approaches, new angles and fresh treatment, and the standard of writing ... must continue to aim higher'.[9] Once again, looking back at these comments, one can see a clear foreshadowing of the editorial program Moorcock would follow when he came into power at *New Worlds*, an approach that would roil and divide the field. What becomes evident when researching the fan culture of the period, however, is that the views expressed in his *Bastion* article, while contro-

Michael Moorcock as many saw him during the sixties. (Cartoon by Reeve.)

versial, represented, if not the general consensus Moorcock implied, then certainly the attitude of a substantial fan faction. The way Moorcock framed his article indicates the cohort he saw himself addressing — serious fans who were more concerned with the literary quality of the genre than with the social pleasures of fandom itself. At the outset, when describing the dissatisfaction allegedly voiced by conference members, he expressed mock astonishment at 'this virtually unheard of phenomenum [sic] of fans discussing SF over almost an entire Con'[10] — sober conduct by contrast with the usual revelry of room parties, costume balls, and celebrity mixers. The essay closed with a plug for the British Science Fiction Association, 'which may play an important part in helping to establish the new climate' required to stimulate serious engagement with SF and thus revitalise a moribund genre.[11]

The BSFA, founded at the first EasterCon in 1958, initially had a two-pronged agenda: to promote the serious discussion of science fiction and to draw more readers into the ranks of fandom. As Rob Hansen has shown in his history-in-progress of British fan culture, these twin purposes were potentially in conflict, and by the early 1960s, the cracks in the BSFA membership had begun to show: those who wanted the organisation to follow a 'sercon' path, raising the level of critical dialogue about the genre, disapproved of the cliquishness of the 'fannish' faction, who saw the BSFA primarily as a recruitment tool, while the latter group resented the former's intellectual snobbery and hostility to time-honoured subcultural rituals.[12] Moorcock himself for a time tried to straddle this divide, adopting a raffish and Rabelaisian persona at conventions, yet also campaigning for higher standards in the writing and criticism of SF. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he not only edited fanzines (such as *Tarzan Adventures* and *Ergo Ego*) but also, briefly, the BSFA journal *Vector*. Yet when push came to shove in the later 1960s, Moorcock repudiated fannish attitudes in favour of the avant-garde agitprop of the reborn *New Worlds*. In part, the fannish/sercon schism marked a generation gap between Old Guard fans and a fresh cohort who, in the words of Jim Linwood, 'didn't much care for [the] stodgy, middle class, middlebrow fandom of the time' and were as interested in 'discovering and debating the merits of William Burroughs, Jim Ballard, and Phil Dick at the same time as those of the Stones, Beatles, and Dylan'.[13] This younger cadre found its voice in zines such as Pete Weston's *Zenith* (later *Speculation*) and Charles Platt's *Point of View* (later *Beyond*), both of which debuted in November 1963, and whose policies were not only clearly sercon but militantly so — especially in the case of Platt, who seemed to take a perverse delight in goading and humiliating Old Guard fans. Despite obvious differences in editorial taste and temperament, these two zines were lumped together in Linwood's review column in the January 1964 issue of *Les Spinge*, where the term 'New Wave' was invoked to describe their mutual aspiration to a more serious, quasi-professional posture.[14] The tone of the review was sarcastic, mocking the perceived elitism of the editors' intellectual stance; according to Weston in his recently published autobiography, 'we were both convinced that the fannish "Establishment" had just declared war. For Charles it confirmed his preconceived opinions, and he fired the opening shots in what became a battle against perceived fannish wisdom.'[15]

Hansen's history-in-progress and Weston's memoir do admirable jobs of tracking the resultant fallout, and I refer interested readers to those sources for a more thorough account. What is of interest to me here is that a split within early-1960s fandom lies at the root of the first usage of the term 'New Wave' within SF circles. Moorcock's growing alignment with New Wave fandom was made clear in the editorial he wrote for the July–August 1964 *New Worlds*, the second under his editorship, which commented on that year's EasterCon, at which 'younger BSFA members, many of whom had a Calvinistic zeal to "reform" the SF scene and make sure it talked about SF and nothing but', terrorised the Old Guard. While Moorcock's sympathies were clearly with these earnest insurrectionists, he was still enough of a fan to mention with seeming approval the 'off-programme card games, parties and impromptu activities ofa somewhat unrestrained nature' that transpired during lapses in the stimulating debates.[16]

Given the provocative nature of the other editorials Moorcock was writing for the magazine — not to mention the polemical pieces he was commissioning from Ballard and the tart reviews he was penning under his 'James Colvin' pseudonym, roasting Old Guard favourites like Robert Heinlein — it was soon clear that *New Worlds* was staking out positions far removed from the mainstream of fannish opinion, more in line with a sercon commitment, evangelical in its intensity, to renovate the field. Despite occasional efforts to patch up (or paper over) the differences between the two factions,[17] the split was growing bigger and more bitter by the day, stoked by persistent sniping inthe New Wave zines, expecially *Beyond*. When Platt shortly began to publish fiction in *New Worlds*, and

especially when he became the magazine's designer in August 1965, the association of the journal with the New Wave faction in fandom was all but complete.

The emergence of Moorcock's magazine as a professional platform for the views of a fresh generation of fandom was acknowledged by Christopher Priest in an article in the March 1965 issue of *Zenith Speculation*, where *New Worlds* was identified as a 'New Wave prozine' (the first reference to the journal, in print, as a 'New Wave' publication). According to Priest, the magazine, under Moorcock's editorial hand, 'has lost its retrograde potboiling', moving 'consciously and deliberately' toward a more mature and sophisticated approach, featuring a number of talented young writers who seemed willing to experiment in their work — though he admitted to finding Ballard's serialised 'Equinox' (a.k.a. *The Crystal World*) 'tedious and wearying'.[18] This final judgment is significant since it was precisely by means of relative verdicts on the worth of Ballard's fiction that the Old vs. New Wave split gathered steam during the 1960s, precipitating the debate across the Atlantic in the wake of the 1965 WorldCon. By the end of 1965, Old Guard fans like Ian McAuley, in an article entitled 'The New Establishment' in *Zenith Speculation*, were blasting the 'snug little coterie' ensconced at *New Worlds* in terms evocative of Ballard's 1962 manifesto: 'plugging the "inner-space" jazz for all its worth', Moorcock and company seemed intent on valorising stories 'obscure to the point of unreadability'.[19]

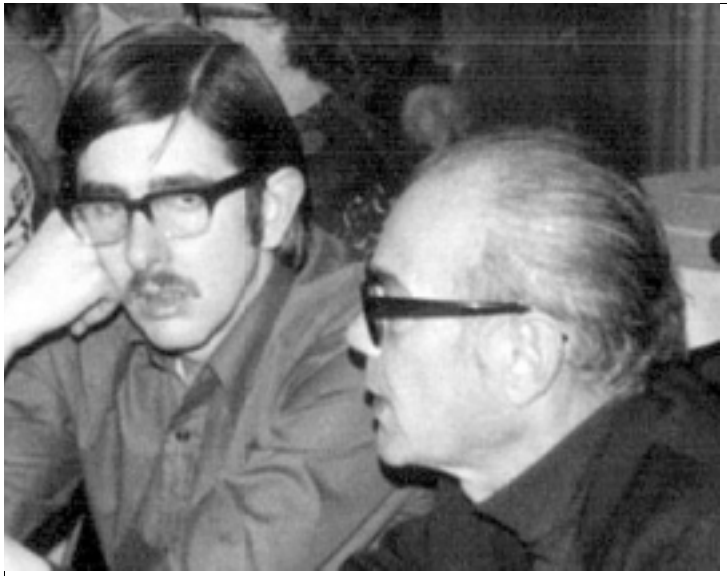
This specific line of attack had begun in 1964, in response to the publication of Ballard's 'The Terminal Beach' in the March issue of *New Worlds*, one of the last under Carnell's tenure. Carnell was initially dubious about publishing this difficult and fragmentary tale, but eventually acquiesced,[20] and the story was immediately embraced by the New Wave fans. In an article in *Beyond* in April 1964, Peter White praised Ballard's ambitious adaptations of Surrealist techniques, in 'The Terminal Beach' and other stories, and his 'carefully, and coolly, constructed' personal mythology.[21] This was like a thrown gauntlet to the Old Guard fans, who responded with scorn. Some, like Donald Malcolm, sought to distinguish between Ballard's intelligent and interesting early works, familiar to those who 'read *New Worlds* before it fell from grace', and 'The Terminal Beach', which 'bored me stiff'; others, like Graham Hall, dismissed all of Ballard's fiction as the emanations of 'the most obscure literary talent since Joyce (I don't count William Burroughs as talent)' — yet another crack at Ballard, who had saluted Burroughs in the first Moorcock-edited issue of *New Worlds*.[22]

In 1966, when Ballard began to publish his radical 'condensed novels' in *New Worlds* and elsewhere, and Moorcock took to promoting him as the inspirational centre of an experimental movement destined to transform the field,[23] the anti-Ballard sentiment hit a fever pitch. In an article entitled 'The Drowned Plot (of J.G. Ballard)', published in the January issue of *Zenith Speculation*, J. P. Patrizio lambasted the author as an incompetent stylist and second-rate philosopher who was fundamentally ignorant of science, while Waldemar Kumming's essay 'The Reign of Ballardry', in *Vector*, labelled him an 'anti-SF' author who used the iconography of the genre 'only as casual props ... treated with carelessness and contempt'. Kumming's opening made clear the literary–political stakes of the debate: Ballard's work,

> we are told in no uncertain terms, is The New Wave. This is SF finally coming of age. This is the Discovery of Inner Space as opposed to oldfashioned and reactionary outer; and if you admit to not liking the stuff overmuch, then it's obvious that your small mind is still trapped in the bogs of stone-age SF.[24]

Traditional fans made it clear that they were not going to take this sort of avant-garde posturing from their old nemeses Moorcock and Platt, who had mutinously managed to commandeer the flagship of British SF.

While Ballard himself remained serenely above the fray, issuing the occasional mandarin comment via intermediaries, the *New Worlds* editorial conclave was actively working within fandom to counteract the Old Guard assaults; their efforts were seldom geared to smooth ruffled feathers, however, and had the effect rather of exacerbating the conflict. In a letter to *Zenith Speculation* in December 1964, Moorcock, responding to a negative review of the first few issues of his *New Worlds* by Terry Jeeves (which had disparaged Ballard's *Equinox* as 'fascinating twaddle'), went so far as to threaten 'fisticuffs' as 'the only way of getting some sense' into one so 'thick, thick, *thick*', someone who has been nursed on a '30-year diet' of pulp SF and who thus 'can't be expected to recognise or appreciate caviar, even when it's presented to himin a porridge plate'. What is particularly interesting about this letter, aside from its sheer truculence, is that Moorcock proceeded to draw a firm distinction between his own position and the 'New Wave' view represented by *Zenith Speculation*, which he derided as 'reactionary rather than radical in its



Peter Weston, editor of *Zenith/Speculation*, and James Blish, during the early 1970s.

approach to SF'.[25] Clearly, despite the growing starkness of the Old vs New contrast, there were still divisions within each faction, and Moorcock and Platt, from their professional vantage at *New Worlds*, were eager to claim the mantle of cutting-edge radicalism from Weston and his stable of amateurs, who had more mixed literary tastes and held less rigidly ideological views of the field.

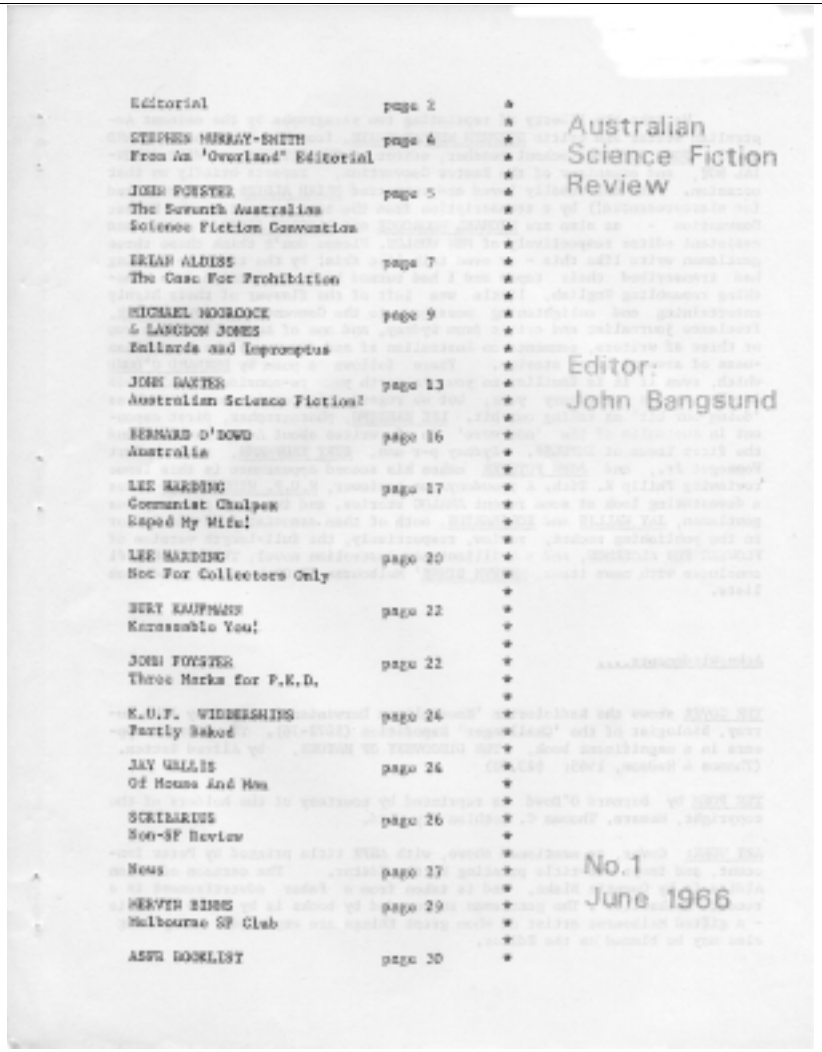
Over the course of 1965 and 1966, this jockeying for position continued, with the *New Worlds* crowd subjecting *Zenith Speculation* to a merciless barrage of criticism and Weston's columnists returning the favour in the form of often harsh, but occasionally laudatory reviews of the magazine. The October 1965 issue, for example, contained a letter from Moorcock condemning what he took to be the zine's unwillingness to fully reject the pulp tradition ('the sort of thing you are enthusiastic about is sensational, juvenile, and ... repellent to any intelligent and literate adult who happens to pick up a book or magazine containing this sort of rubbish'[26]), and the April 1966 issue featured a long response to Patrizio's attack on Ballard, in which Moorcock defended the author's 'symbolic dramas of ideas'.[27] Meanwhile, Weston continued to adopt an even-handed approach, which clearly infuriated the *New Worlds* group,who seemed to be itching for a fight (especially Platt, who persistently bearded *Zenith* columnists in scathing letters, some of which Weston refused to publish).[28] The October 1966 issue of *Speculation* ('Zenith' now dropped from the title) contained generous praise of recent issues of *New Worlds*, written from 'the Outer Darkness, from where *Zenith* the magazine and its attendant horde of editors & contributors ha[d] criticised "New-style British SF"' in the past, and the January 1967 issue lauded some of Moorcock's own *New Worlds* fiction, while remarking on his 'bafflingly inconsistent' attitudes, since he campaigned so stridently for experimental SF yet was still able to write old-fashioned adventure stories.[29]

Eileen and Peter Weston, Bath, 2001.

British zines like *Speculation* weren't the only ones subjected to Moorcock's broadsides during this period. Responding to a two-part study ofhis 'Elric' stories that appeared in the American fanzine *Niekas* in 1963, Moorcock took the opportunity to talk up Ballard and William Burroughs and to disparage pulp stalwart Poul Anderson, whose talent had been 'ruined' by a lifetime of writing hard SF.[30] (In a rather prophetic comment, a letter writer inthe subsequent issue remarked that, given Moorcock's view of 'what a deadend science fiction is', one could only look forward 'with trepidation to his editing of *New Worlds*'[31]). An even more blatant effort at rabble-rousing occurred in the first issue of John Bangsund's *Australian SF Review* (June 1966), where Moorcock and *New Worlds*' Assistant Editor Langdon Jones (another earnest youngster recruited from the realms of fandom) engaged in a dialogue whose purpose was clearly to seed the New Wave debate down under. Somewhat condescendingly 'talking for the benefit of Australians', the pair anatomised the current controversy in Britain, which Moorcock claimed represented not a 'destructive civil war' but rather 'the birth pangs of a

new and betterkind of sf'. For his part, Jones upped the polemical ante even further: 'Make no mistake about it, there is a war going on ... The law, simply put, is *Change or Die*'.[32] Both praised Ballard as the intellectual spearhead of an emerging 'renascence' in SF, leading John Foyster to respond in subsequent issues with a savage two-part denunciation of this phony 'new Messiah'.[33]

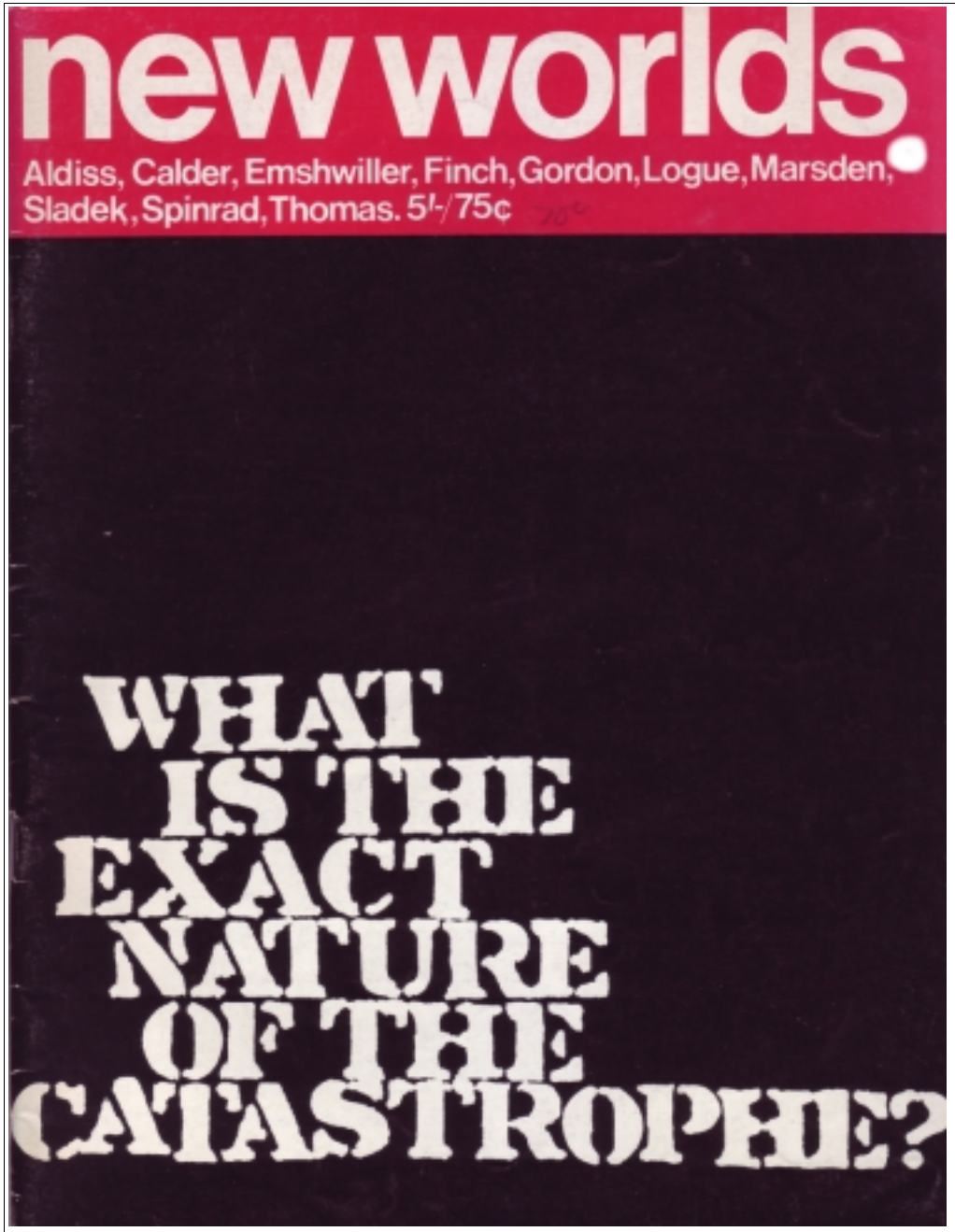
By this point, the fires of the Old vs New dispute had jumped the Atlantic, thanks less to Moorcock's evangelising than to the influence of the 1965 WorldCon, held in London over the weekend of August 27–30. Until that time, because *New Worlds* lacked a stateside distributor, the majority of American fans had gotten little sense of the transformations the magazine had undergone since Carnell's departure. But all this changed in January 1966, when Judith Merril — who had attended the '65 WorldCon and who would soon move to London to join forces with the *New Worlds* group — reported glowingly on the British scene in her review column in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. Remarking on a palpable 'feeling of excitement, a ferment of interestand creative energy ... such as has not been felt on the American scene for almost fifteen years', Merril proceeded to lionise Ballard for his ambitious deviations from SF convention and to salute Moorcock's editorial and social leadership at the helm of *New Worlds*.[34] Her August 1966 column was given over to a rather fulsome survey of Ballard's work to date, which Berkley Books had been bringing out in the US over the past few years (thanks largely to the efforts of their SF editor Damon Knight, who would, like Merril, soon find himself at the centre of the New Wave storm in the states). It was Merril's June column, however, where she raved about a young writer's first novel, that sparked the first serious backlash from the American Old Guard.



Contents page of the first issue of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, June 1966 — with the New Wave controversy already highlighted.

Thomas M. Disch's *The Genocides* was a bleak tale of alien invasion clearly geared to infuriate the hard-SF crowd who, steeped in John Campbell's staunch species-centrism, could hardly be expected to abide humanity's systematic extermination by an implacable extra-terrestrial race. While for Merril the novel was a wise and compassionate tale, filled with deeply human characters facing terrible privations, to Algis Budrys, the review columnist for *Galaxy* magazine (writing in the December 1966 issue), it was, for the discerning reader who 'takes hope in science and in Man', a work of 'unrelieved trash, ineptly written, pretentious, inconsistent and sophomoric', filled with a horde of 'dumb, resigned victims'. Budrys preceded this scathing attack with a hymn of praise for Heinlein's latest effort, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, 'a book about strong personalities doing things about their situation', valiantly battling the one true enemy of the heroic soul, 'inertia'. By way of transition to his discussion of *The Genocides*, he lambasted Ballard's disaster stories, which he saw as the model for Disch's novel in their unrelieved pessimism and fatalistic resignation; in Ballard's tales, characters 'have cut [themselves] off from the entire body of scientific education', and rather than struggling against imminent catastrophe, they 'sit and worship it'.[35]

In an implicit response to Merril's rave about the British scene in her January column, Budrys acknowledged 'the science-fiction renaissance currently going on in England', but the tone of his remarks made it clear



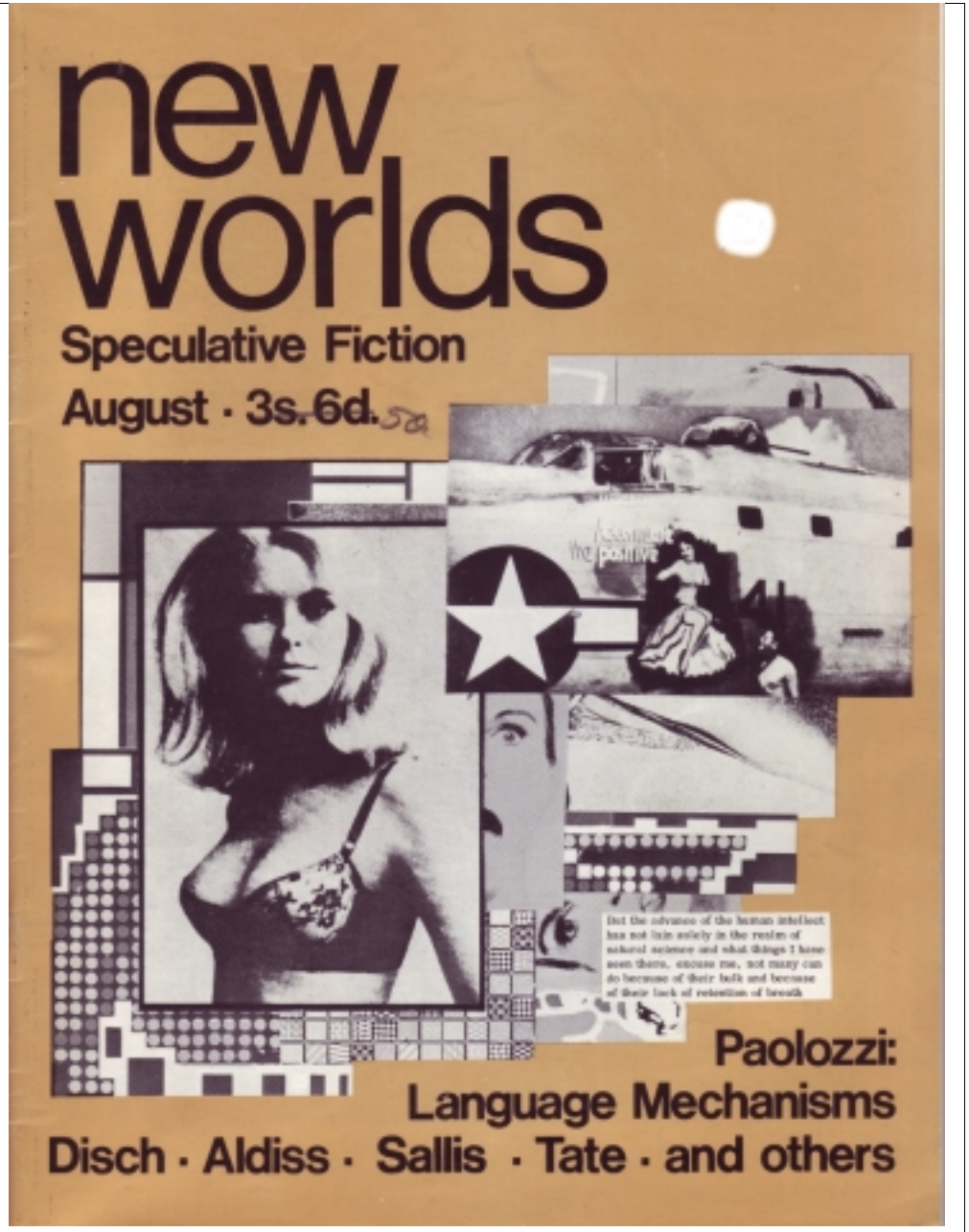
The cover of *New Worlds* 182, July 1968.

that he viewed this development with some scepticism and no small degree of alarm. If the literary model for ambitious young writers such as Disch was Ballard, 'the master of the inertial science-fiction novel',[36] then the tradition of heroic achievement and dedication to scientific progress represented by Heinlein and his ilk was in danger of being eclipsed. And Budrys' column was clearly designed as a counterattack on behalf of these beleaguered Golden Agers. Frederik Pohl joined the crusade with his editor's column in the July 1967 issue of *If*, where he bemoaned the 'damned dull' experiments of the *New Worlds* crew and put in a word for good, solid adventure stories.[37] Merril herself would return fire in her November 1967 column, a stout defence of 'The New Thing' in SF against 'the gadget-and-gimmick ideas of the golden age',[38] which in her view had run their course. Thus, by the end of 1967, the battle lines over the New Wave in the US were starkly drawn, and like the positions staked out in Britain, the combatants were seen as a militant faction championing (or mimicking) Ballard on the one hand, and a silent majority favouring traditional hard SF on the other.[39]

While the rhetorical parries of Merril, Pohl and Budrys filled the pages of the professional magazines, American fanzines during 1966 and early 1967 began to pick up the scent from their British counterparts. In some cases the trans-Atlantic crossover was quite direct: the August 1966 issue of Bill Donaho's *Habakkuk*, for example, contained an article by British fan George Locke entitled 'Britannia Rules the (New) Waves', which excoriated Moorcock's *New Worlds* for its alleged lack of professional standards. 'Ballard and the other writers following in his footsteps have been conning science fiction for years,' Locke asserted. Far from being serious artists trying to push SF in fresh directions, instead they were writing what amounted to 'highly stylized, sometimes evocative fan fiction, but still fan fiction', and 'Mike Moorcock is publishing a fanzine for them'. Lacking substantial plots, characters or themes, as for instance one might find in the work of a solid professional such as Keith Laumer, the stories in *New Worlds* were essentially 'Bradbury-type mood pieces' written by pretentious neophytes.[40] It was a clever and cutting line of attack, with some degree of truth in that, as we have seen, many of the writers and editors who came to form the *New Worlds* stable had cut their teeth in New Wave fandom; as Locke pointed out, Langdon Jones's first professional sale to *New Worlds* — 'Stormwater Tunnel' in the July–August 1964 issue — had originally appeared in his own fanzine, *Tensor*, in 1963.

Unsurprisingly, the *New Worlds* cohort responded with outrage, with Platt attacking Locke personally in *Habbakuk*'s February 1967 issue as 'dumb, reactionary', of 'poor mind' and 'feeble and pitiful imagination': 'Here is the small-minded cry of the illiterate masses, yearning for simple entertainment, scared of anything that remotely tries to stretch the mental abilities of the audience. One can only view such protests with contempt.'[41] Meanwhile, Terry Jeeves, likely still smarting from Moorcock's threat to punch his nose, wrote in to say that he had cancelled his subscription to *New Worlds* due to the 'utter rubbish' currently being purveyed by 'the Ballard/Jones/Moorcock axis'.[42] Indeed, this letter column offered a virtual recap of the New Wave conflict as it had played out in Britain during the past few years, featuring many of the original participants (Platt, Jeeves, Aldiss) and a number of bystanders, some of whom complained about the caricatures and distortions on both sides. Two British fans, Charles E. Smith and Bob Parkinson, offered plaintive notes of common sense that could barely be heard above all the shouting, with the former claiming that there 'should be room within the field for both [Ballard's and Laumer's works] and many other stories as well' and the latter remarking that Ballard and Heinlein were not so dissimilar in that both were highly talented writers whose heads had been turned, to their detriment, by all their sycophants and epigones.[43]

Meanwhile, in the same letter column, prominent SF figures in the US, such as Damon Knight, James Blish and Donald A. Wollheim, began to line up on respective sides of the struggle in their responses to Locke's essay and also to an article by Greg Benford (appearing in the August 1966 *Habbakuk*) that had similarly taken on 'the British school', along with putative stateside variants such as the artsy 'Milford axis' and the mode of hyper-emotional allegory pioneered by Harlan Ellison.[44] Indeed, by the middle of 1967, American SF authors who had begun their careers in the 1950s — Knight, Blish, Budrys, Merril, Pohl, Ellison and others — were finding it increasingly difficult to avoid partisan alignments in the developing New Wave war, in part due to the goads of fanzine columnists and feature writers, but also because of their own abiding aesthetic commitments (which in many cases extended back to their apprenticeship as fans themselves). The point I wish to emphasise here is that it is impossible to determine who was leading and who being led when forces began to mobilise on both sides of the Old–New divide, since the relationship between pros and fans was not unidirectional but complementary, linked by various mechanisms of feedback and mediation, such



The cover of *New Worlds* 174, undated 1967.

as fanzines and convention meetings.

1967 was also the year the New Wave hit the US convention scene, with the WorldCon in New York featuring a panel on the topic, where Ellison defended the movement against Theodore Sturgeon's demurrals. Ellison had already begun to align himself with the SF rebels in his Westercon Guest of Honor speech the previous year in San Diego. Entitled 'A Time for Daring', the speech was an indictment of the conservatism of magazine SF, which was 'leaching the vitality out of our best writers', whose talents were being crushed by generic conventions and taboos. Speaking as 'an emissary of the open mind' — and adapting some of Moorcock's polemical techniques — Ellison saluted William Burroughs and other 'mainstream' talents (e.g., Kurt Vonnegut, Anthony Burgess) as serious artists who could be true to their visions because they avoided the editorial shibboleths of the genre's gate-keepers.[45] Perhaps in response to Ellison's talk, and certainly in response to his 1967 anthology *Dangerous Visions* (which sought to circumvent the magazines' stranglehold on SF by inviting writers to pursue their unfettered visions), Lester Del Rey, Guest of Honor at the '67 WorldCon, delivered a speech entitled 'Art or Artiness?' that stoutly defended genre SF against the encroaching avant-gardists. 'The deepest fault I find with much of the new writing,' he argued, is that

> It is totally, completely lacking in even the slightest trace of originality, while it claims to be something new and revolutionary. It has borrowed almost every cheap trick from the mainstream as taught today, and has simply imported those tricks to science fiction. The characters, messages, plotless stories and attention to failure and uglinessare not new, but merely something old and borrowed ... They haven't even been reshaped enough to make them fit properly into science fiction, but have been tossed in by the lump.[46]

By this point, the battle was fully joined, with the American Old Guard roused to a defence of the homeland against the barbarians from across the pond massed outside the genre walls.

The irony is that *New Worlds* during this period was having serious problems, its publisher threatening to fold the magazine after its distributor went bankrupt in the summer of 1966. Thanks to the efforts of Brian Aldiss, the journal was kept alive by a grant from the British Arts Council, which provided a stipend to support printing costs.[47] This timely intervention not only affirmed that Moorcock's efforts to improve the standards of SF writing were being recognised by the literary establishment, it also allowed him to expand the scope of the magazine, transforming it into an impressive-looking slick with an editorial purview that included the contemporary arts, cutting-edge science, and (counter)cultural politics. With the July 1967 issue, the freshly reborn *New Worlds* appeared, and the New Wave seemed to have fully come into its own.[48] The traffic between Britain and the US also picked up, with young American writers like Disch and Norman Spinrad publishing their most ambitious work (*Camp Concentration* and *Bug Jack Barron*, respectively) in the large-format *New Worlds*, sparking further controversies on both sides of the Atlantic, and Merril continuing to beat the drums for change in her well-intentioned (but abominably titled) anthology *England Swings SF*, published in the US in 1968.

But these are developments I have no room to canvas here. Instead, I would like to close by briefly discussing a talk Moorcock gave at the 1967 EasterCon in Bristol, where he looked back on the New Wave struggle in fandom and forward to the future of the revamped *New Worlds* (a mock-up of which he reportedly brandished at the audience). Entitled 'The New Fiction', the speech marked, in essence, a total rejection of genre SF in favor of 'speculative fiction', a mode of writing that was attuned to radical social transformations and that demanded 'entirely fresh techniques ... in order to do justice to the subject matter'. While SF had long harboured native 'evolutionaries' whose goal was the reformation of the genre from within (such as, presumably, the Milford Mafia in the US), Moorcock threw in his lot instead with the 'revolutionaries', those who issued incendiary 'proclamations and manifestos', who rejected piecemeal reform in favour of wholesale transformation, and who ruffled Old Guard feathers with 'their insistence that their path is the only one, their wild dismissal of all that has gone before, and their wild claims for their own achievements'.[49] In short, Moorcock was waving an airy goodbye to the field as the refurbished *New Worlds* hoisted sail for the sunnier climes of the 1960s avant-garde. The irony — some might say bad faith — of this performance was that it was entirely fannish in execution, capitalising on Moorcock's longstanding role as British fandom's court jester. Reading the speech in sober print can hardly give a sense of the original occasion, since, according to witnesses, Moorcock was either roaring drunk or brilliantly simulating drunkenness, gurgling scotch straight from the bottle as he comically pretended to misplace

pages and misconstrue his own meanings (or those of his purported 'ghostwriter', whom at one point he threatened to fire for forcing him to recite such gibberish). As Weston remarks in his memoir, 'The audience was probably far better entertained by this hamming than by a formal and reasoned talk about science fiction', although he acknowledged that Moorcock 'became remarkably lucid for the questions about the future of *New Worlds* that followed'.[50] According to most accounts, Moorcock was the life of the party at the convention, wittily parrying Old Guard claims that Ballard had stolen stream-of-consciousness from Joyce, purchasing and then tearing up an Ace paperback '[w]itha devilish snarl of "I hate this bloody awful book"', and entertaining children at Judith Merril's room party by uncannily imitating a Dalek from *Dr Who*.[51] New Wave champion or not, the man clearly still knew how to make an ass of himself in the traditional fannish manner.

The reason why I emphasise the performative nature of Moorcock's speech is that it highlights the distance between all the stern New Wave rhetoric about transcending genre conventions and the time-honoured subcultural realities of fandom, which demanded a playful mockery of sercon pretension. Even delivering his most arrogant speech at the moment of his greatest professional triumph, Moorcock couldn't help but obey this time-honoured code. And, indeed, as the large-format *New Worlds* blossomed and then struggled over the next few years, he continued to attend conventions and to write sometimes scathing, sometimes self-mocking pieces for fanzines, as did Ellison, Spinrad and other New Wave champions in the US.[52] The point here being that the combatants in the Old vs New Wave war, for all their differences, were united in their commitment to mutual engagement and provocation, which far from threatening to destroy the genre actually served to enrich it. Indeed, fan writing of the late 1960s and early 1970s attained an argumentative sophistication hitherto unseen, and convention panels became sites of lively disputation.[53] Moorcock's rambunctious misbehaviour at conventions eventually climaxed at the 1970 EasterCon in London, where his drunken coterie disrupted a speech by an attending Member of Parliament and threw a glass during a poetry session that cut John Brunner's shin. 'Why,' Weston plaintively wondered, 'had Moorcock become the Scourge of Fandom, when he used to be the life and soul of the party at conventions? Had the experience of editing *New Worlds* changed him in some profound way, his avowal of the new wave alienated him from his previous values?'[54] What I would suggest instead is that Moorcock was merely adapting his well-established fannish persona for the purposes of his new-found avant-garde posture, and that this sort of jockeying was nothing new in fandom, extending back to the Futurians in the 1940s (and forward to the cyberpunks in the 1980s).[55] In other words, while the New Wave was unquestionably a radical disruption in the traditional forms of SF writing, it was also a reinvigoration of many of the conventional modes of fan discourse and interaction. The New Wave controversy was not, contra Ellison's self-serving claim, a mere fannish concoction, but it cannot be understood in its full dynamics without careful attention to the ways that fans, in fitful collaboration with SF authors and editors, helped to frame, articulate, and sustain it.

Notes

1 Harlan Ellison, Letter to the Editor, *SFWA Forum* 15 (August 1970): pp. 27–8; the quotations are from p. 28.

2 Egoboo is a term of fannish provenance referring to the flattering acclaim — the egoboost — accruing from publicly visible fan activity (or 'fanac'). For a guide to such jargon, see Donald Franson's *A Key to the Terminology of Science-Fiction Fandom*, originally published by the National Fantasy Fan Federation in 1962 and available online at http://fanac.org/Fannish_Reference_Works/FandBook/Fand-Book.html.

3 This essay is also part of a larger study I am conducting on New Wave science fiction, portions of which appeared in the following venues: 'The New Wave', in David Seed, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Blackwell, 2005); '"The Job of Dissevering Joy from Glop": John Clute's '*New Worlds* Criticism', in Farah Mendlesohn, ed., *Portals: A Festchrift for John and Judith Clute* (Baltimore, MD: Old Earth, 2005); and 'A Young Man's Journey to Ladbroke Grove: M. John Harrison and the Evolution of the New Wave in Britain', in Mark Bould and Michelle Reid, eds., *Parietal Games: Nonfiction by and on M. John Harrison* (Liverpool: Science Fiction Foundation, 2005).

4 Colin Greenland's *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), for example, which remains the only booklength study of the subject, is basically a work of literary criticism that focuses

closely on the fiction of the *New Worlds* cohort rather than the editorial operations of the magazine or the debates within contemporary fandom about the transformations it was bringing to the field. Roger Luckhurst's fine discussion of the New Wave in his recent book, *Science Fiction* (London: Polity, 2005), does place the movement within an encompassing social milieu, seeing it as an expression of 1960s concerns and attitudes (see Chapter 7), but he is not particularly interested in local cultural trends within the genre itself.

5 This research was conducted during 2004–05 at the following sites: the Mike Horvat Collection at the University of Iowa; the Science Fiction Foundation Collection at the University of Liverpool; and the J. Lloyd Eaton Collection at the University of California at Riverside, which houses the Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz fanzine collections. I am grateful to a number of persons for their assistance: Sid Huttner, Director of Special Collections at the University of Iowa library; Kathryn Hodson, Reader Services Liaison at the UI library; Andy Sawyer, curator of the Science Fiction Foundation Collection; George Slusser, curator of the Eaton Collection; Darian Daries, Department Coordinator of Special Collections in UC–Riverside's Rivera library; Sara Stilley, Reference Assistant and supervisor of the reading room at UC–Riverside; and Hal Hall, curator of the science fiction collection at the Cushing Library at Texas A&M University, who supplied me with xeroxes of some rare items. I would especially like to thank Mike Horvat for making his collection of fanzines available for scholarly use through his recent donation to the UI library. My research was conducted with the generous assistance of a Faculty Scholar Award from the University of Iowa, a travel grant from the Center for International Programs at UI, and an editorial stipend from the journal *Science Fiction Studies*. For a discussion of the methodological problems involved in researching fan writings and fan culture, see my 'Fanzine Research: Some Sercon Musings', in *Science Fiction Studies* 31:3 (November 2004): pp. 487–97.

6 For example, the specter of 'Chicago' — the ruthless suppression of dissent by police forces during the 1968 Democratic Presidential convention — was invoked by both sides in the debate as evidence of the intolerance and authoritarian tendencies of their opponents. In a letter published in *SF Review* in January 1969 (#29, pp. 44–5), John J. Pierce, probably the most visible — and voluble — polemicist against the New Wave in the United States, compared the 'New Wavicles' call for unity' with Mayor Daley's mobilisation of truncheons, while M. John Harrison, the Books Editor of *New Worlds*, launched the following condemnation of Old Wave author Robert A. Heinlein in the September/October issue of *Speculation* (#24, p. 31): 'One could forgive the rotten prose, forget the whole sordid bag of "professional" gimmicks, even regard his blatant crypto-Fascist militarism with a certain amount of amusement, if it were not for the tragic receptivity of his audience — their adolescent *need* for this sort of comfort ... [H]ow many little plastic models of himself has Heinlein created, and each one primed to zip out and implement the savage bipolar creed? The answer is Chicago.'

7 J. G. Ballard, 'Which Way to Inner Space?', *New Worlds* 118 (May 1962): pp. 2–3, 116–18; the quotations are from p. 3.

8 Michael Moorcock, 'Play with Feeling', *New Worlds* 129 (April 1963): pp. 2–3, 123–7; the quotations are from pp. 3 and 123.

9 Mike Moorcock, 'Blast Off—1960', *Bastion* 1 (August 1961): pp. 13–18; the quotation is from p. 16.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 13. This is probably the place to acknowledge the fact that fanzines, being the amateur productions that they are, are often riddled with misspellings, typos, grammatical errors, and other solecisms. Rather than insert a welter of [sic]s in the quotations that follow, I will correct the more obvious mistakes to facilitate easier reading.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

12 Hansen's history-in-progress, entitled *Then*, is archived online at the following sites: *Ansible*'s UK Science Fiction Fandom archive (http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Then/Index.html) and *Fanac*'s Fan History Project (http://fanac.org/Fan_Histories/Then/). The term 'sercon' (sometimes 'sericon' in Britain) refers to a 'serious and constructive' engagement with SF: see Franson, *op cit*.

13 Quoted in Hansen, *op cit.*, Chapter 6.

14 Jim Linwood, 'The Fanalytic Eye', *Les Spinge* 12 (January 1964). Linwood has acknowledged that he borrowed the term from contemporary cinema culture, where it referred to the trailblazing work of

young directors like Godard and Truffaut, who were breaking with an Old Guard of traditional narrative filmmakers: see Hansen, *op cit.*, Chapter 7.

15 Peter Weston, *With Stars in My Eyes: My Adventures in British Fandom* (Framingham, MA: NESFA, 2004), p. 49.

16 Michael Moorcock, 'British Science Fiction Convention—1964', *New Worlds* 143 (July–August 1964): pp. 79–81; the quotations are from p. 80. Moorcock's lingering fannishness was mocked by Platt in his own review of the 1964 EasterCon published in *Beyond*: 'Michael Moorcock, assisted as always by his London group of hangers-on, spent the evening crooning and bellowing into a microphone, revising the Bible, climbing over the roofs and generally making a nuisance of himself' — a snide portrait that inspired a caustic riposte from Moorcock denying he was the centre of a clique and tweaking Platt for his puritanical dourness (see Weston, *op cit.*, p. 70, where Platt's article and Moorcock's letter in response are quoted). The irony here, of course, is that Platt would soon join Moorcock's coterie at *New Worlds*, becoming the in-house scourge of Old Wave conservatism.

17 Perhaps the most poignant and visible such effort was legendary Old Guard fan Walt Willis's move to revive his 'Fanorama' column from the 1950s prozine *Nebula* in Weston's *Zenith*, where his gestures of goodwill toward the New Wave faction were contemptuously rebuffed (see Weston, *op cit.*, pp. 80–1, 87–9, 97–8). Moorcock's own rare and sketchy efforts to patch things up with traditional fandom included an abortive plan to set up a London clubhouse (see Hansen, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7).

18 Chris Priest, 'New Wave—Prozines', *Zenith Speculation* 8 (March 1965): pp. 9–11; the quotations are from pp. 9 and 11.

19 Ian R. McAulay, 'The New Establishment', *Zenith Speculation* 10 (October 1965): pp. 15–16; the quotations are from p. 15. In a brief letter published in the subsequent issue (#11; January 1966, pp. 35–6), Moorcock attacked McAuley's 'naïve view' of the field and 'sparse knowledge of literature'.

20 Carnell's doubts about the experimental turn in Ballard's work — and about the New Wave generally — were expressed in a taped talk he sent to the Melbourne EasterCon in 1966, which was transcribed as 'The Science Fiction Market' and published in *Australian SF Review* 2 (August 1966): pp. 4–10.

21 Peter White, 'J. G. Ballard', *Beyond* 5 (April 1964): pp. 25–8; the quotation is from p. 27.

22 Donald Malcolm, Review of 'The Terminal Beach', *Vector* 28 (September 1964): pp. 26–7; Graham Hall, Letter to the Editor, *Vector* 29 (November 1964): p. 44. See also Beryl Hehley's review of 'The Terminal Beach' in the June–July issue of *Speculation*, which complains about Ballard's 'inscrutable' symbolism 'which few readers can understand' and which seems to call out for 'a psycho-analytical interpreter' (p. 33). Ballard's profile of Burroughs was published as 'Myth-Maker of the 20th Century', *New Worlds* 142 (May–June 1964): pp. 121–7.

23 Michael Moorcock, 'Ballard: The Voice', *New Worlds* 167 (October 1966): pp. 2–3, 151. Ballard's 'The Assassination Weapon' had appeared in the April 1966 issue, while the March *Impulse* (formerly *Science-Fantasy*) ran 'You and Me and the Continuum'.

24 J. P. Patrizio, 'The Drowned Plot (of J.G. Ballard)', *Zenith Speculation* 11 (January 1966): pp. 10–17; Waldemar Kumming, 'The Reign of Ballardry', *Vector* 40 (1966): pp. 3–7; the quotations are from pp. 7 and 4.

25 Michael Moorcock, Letter to the Editor, *Zenith Speculation* 7 (December 1964): pp. 12–15; the quotations are from pp. 13, 15, and 12. In the following issue (#8; March 1965), Brian Aldiss wrote in to ironically applaud 'the thrilling spectacle of Moorcock and Jeeves bleeding and dying for their beliefs' (p. 24).

26 Michael Moorcock, Letter to the Editor, *Zenith Speculation* 10 (October 1965): pp. 29–30; the quotation is from p. 29.

27 Michael Moorcock, 'The Drowned Plot (of J.G. Ballard): A Reply', *Zenith Speculation* 12 (April 1966): pp. 11–13; the quotation is from p. 11.

28 Forty years later, the wounds still stung, as Weston's comments in his memoir indicate: 'Enough! I was fed up with all the nastiness, was sick of the very sound of Charles Platt's name. I was in fandom

to make friends, not enemies' (*op cit.*, p. 119).

29 Pete Weston, Untitled Review Column, *Speculation* 14 (October 1966): pp. 40–2; the quotation is from p. 42; Weston; 'Paperback Preview', *Speculation* 15 (January 1967): p. 33.

30 Michael Moorcock, Letter to the Editor, *Niekas* 8 (March 1964): pp. 16–21.

31 Charles and Marsha Brown, Letter to the Editor, *Niekas* 9 (September 1964): p. 56.

32 Michael Moorcock and Langdon Jones, 'Ballards and Impromptus', *Australian SF Review* 1 (June 1966): pp. 9–13; the quotations are from pp. 12, 9, and 10.

33 John Foyster, 'A Note on J. G. Ballard: Some Recent Short Stories', *Australian SF Review* 8 (March 1967): pp. 5–15 (the quotation is from p. 5), and 'A Note on J. G. Ballard: Three Novels', *Australian SF Review* 9 (April 1967): pp. 3–11.

34 Merril, 'Books', *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 30:1 (January 1966): pp. 39–45; the quotation is from p. 39.

35 Algis Budrys, 'Galaxy Bookshelf', *Galaxy* 25:2 (December 1966): pp. 125–33; the quotations are from pp. 130, 127, and 128.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

37 Frederik Pohl, 'Wiped Out', *If* 17:7 (July 1967): pp. 4–5; the quotation is from p. 5.

38 Judith Merril, 'Books', *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 33:5 (November 1967): pp. 28–36; the quotation is from p. 30.

39 These specific lines of struggle — New Wave vs Golden Age — were developing in Australia as well, due in no small part to the exporting of British and American viewpoints. We have already seen Moorcock and Jones cheerleading for the New Wave faction in the June 1966 issue of *Australian SF Review*, a call to arms that summoned an angry response from Ted White in the January 1967 issue (#6), which proclaimed that the Golden Age wasn't dead but that Moorcock was 'doing his damnedest to kill it off with his encouragement of his young writers to abandon story content, credible characterization, and adherence to plot' (p. 30). In subsequent issues, Moorcock, Platt, Merril, Blish and others would continue the argument. For his part, White would become one of the most vigorous anti-New Wave partisans in the US, a campaign he would keep up through his voluminous fanzine writings (such as his 'Trenchant Bludgeon' column in Richard Geis's *Psychotic*) and in his editorial policies at the helm of the prozines *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, which he took over in 1969.

40 George Locke, 'Britannia Rules the (New) Waves', *Habakkuk* 2:2 (August 1966): pp. 40–5; the quotations are from pp. 45, 41, and 42.

41 Charles Platt, Letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): pp. 45–6.

42 Terry Jeeves, Letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): pp. 50–1.

43 Charles E. Smith, Letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): pp. 57–8; Bob Parkinson, Letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): p. 60. Smith was a member of Group '65, a London cadre of fan filmmakers; Parkinson was one of the founders, with Jim Linwood, of the NotFans, a group based in Nottingham, and briefly co-editor of their zine, *Jetstream*. See Hansen, *op. cit.*, Chapters 6 and 7.

44 Greg Benford, 'New Trends in SF and All That Jazz', *Habakkuk* 2:2 (August 1966): pp. 32–9.

45 Ellison's speech was published as 'A Time for Daring' in *Algol* 12 (March 1967): pp. 27–34; the quotations are from pp. 33 and 34. Ellison's alignment with the *New Worlds* crowd was not exactly tight, however, as proven when he generally concurred with Ted White's denunciation, during a panel at the '67 WesterCon, of the 'experimental crud' Moorcock was then publishing (see Alex Eisenstein, 'Compost Heap', *Trumpet* 5 [April 1967]: pp. 4–7; White's remark is quoted on p. 7). The *New Worlds* crew, for their part, were not big fans of Ellison either, as witness Moorcock's dismissal of *Dangerous Visions* as only 'a slight development of the established forms' of the genre (see Robert E. Toomey, 'Michael Moorcock: An Interview', *SF*

Review 34 [December 1969]: pp. 7–15; the quotation is on p. 13). The basic contrast here is between Ellison's attempts to reform the field by expanding its range of content — overcoming taboos against the representation of sexuality, for example — and Moorcock's efforts to develop revolutionary new forms of expression; this is a contrast that, broadly speaking, marks a difference between the British and American New Waves.

46 Del Rey's speech was published as 'Art or Artiness?' in *Famous Science Fiction: Tales of Wonder* 8 (Fall 1968): pp. 78–86; the quotation is from p. 82. When Old Guardfan Sam Moskowitz and John J. Pierce founded the 'Second Foundation' in 1968 to battle the New Wave incursion, Del Rey was elected 'First Speaker' — terms borrowed, with his consent, from Isaac Asimov's *The Foundation Trilogy* (the notion being that the Second Foundation would preserve the treasures of Golden-Age SF during the period of New Wave darkness). For more details, see Pierce's editorial 'Prospectus' in the first issue of his fanzine *Renaissance: A Semi-Official Organ of the Second Foundation* 1:1 (Winter 1969): '1. I plan to write about the Second Foundation, and the militant anti-New Wave position staked out by Pierce, in a follow-up article.'

47 For background on the crisis and its resolution, see Aldiss's 'Within the Reach of Storms', which was published in the UK in *Vector* 42 (1967; pp. 5–11) and reprinted in the August 1967 *SFWA Bulletin* (#3:4; pp. 9–11), and also Moorcock's Introduction to *New Worlds: An Anthology* (London: Flamingo, 1983): pp. 9–26.

48 For a contemporary review of the large-format *New Worlds* as the apotheosis of New Wave experimentation, see Lee Harding's 'The New SF' in *Australian SF Review* 13 (December 1967): pp. 11–13. 'Moorcock shows us the way to a new sf', Harding argues, 'cross-fertilized with twentieth-century fiction in a way few of us ever thought possible' (p. 11). This notion of regenerative cross-pollination offers a more positive spin on Del Rey's claim that the New Wave merely recycled avant-garde tricks from the literary mainstream.

49 Moorcock's speech was published as 'The New Fiction' in *Speculation* 16 (Autumn 1967): pp. 7–11; the quotations are from pp. 10 and 8.

50 Weston, *With Stars in My Eyes*, pp. 159–60.

51 For reports on Moorcock's behaviour at the con, from which these details have been culled, see Pete Weston, 'The Speculator, at the Convention', *Speculation* 16 (Autumn 1967): pp. 2–6 (the source for the 'bloody awful book' quotation [p. 3]); Mervyn Barrett, 'A Bristol Non Report', *Australian SF Review* 10 (June 1967): pp. 89–94; and Phyllis Eisenstein, 'Americans in Bristol: A Somewhat Report on the EasterCon, 1967', *Double: Bill* 17 (1967): pp. 19–22.

52 Perhaps the most revealing piece Moorcock wrote for the zines during this period was the first instalment of his short-lived column for *Speculation*, entitled 'Now It Can Be Told' (#19; September 1968; pp. 57–64), which favoured fans with an insider's view of the fractious and exhausting business involved in keeping *New Worlds* afloat. (For an even more tongue-in-cheek peek behind the editorial curtain, see Charles Platt's 'An Editor's Day' in *Science Fiction Review* 39 [August 1970]: pp. 17–18.)

53 See, for example, the transcript of a 1969 Eastercon panel — featuring Carnell, Platt, Brunner, Dan Morgan, George Hay and Edward Lucie-Smith — published as 'There Ain't No Such Thing as the New Wave' in *Speculation* 23 (July–August 1969): pp. 5–11. The concurrently scheduled Minicon (in Minneapolis) also mounted a New Wave panel, which included the unlikely triumvirate of Clifford D. Simak, Gordon R. Dickson and Charles De Vet.

54 Weston, *op cit.*, p. 215. See also pp. 189–90 for a report on the glass-throwing incident.

55 Indeed, it's entirely possible that longstanding social and personal divisions among the Futurians may help to explain the divergent positions the group took during the New Wave debates, with Merril, Blish, and Knight lined up in favour and Pohl, Wollheim, and Asimov opposed.

J. G. Ballard and the New Wave: An Australian viewpoint

Bruce Gillespie

ASFR critic John Foyster, revealing his critical teeth.

[First published in Earl Kemp's *eI* No 13, April 2004.]

James Graham Ballard was born in 1930, so he will be 74 this year. He was born in Shanghai and interned in a Japanese civilian POW camp during World War II. This became the background of his novel *Empire of the Sun* (1984), his bestseller, filmed by Steven Spielberg.

His first stories were 'Escapement' and 'Prima Belladonna' in Ted Carnell's *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* in 1956, which was eight years before Michael Moorcock took over *New Worlds* and changed *Science Fantasy* into *Impulse*.

Ballard always said his main influences were Surrealist painters and early Pop Art artists. The main themes and images of his stories were of deserted landscapes and wrecked technology, that is, near-future decadence and disaster. The imagery was not that much different from what we find in the early works of Jack Vance. Ballard's early successes included 'The Waiting Grounds', 'The Sound-Sweep' and 'Chronopolis'. 'The Sound Sweep', about a chap who goes about sweeping up sounds in a vacuum cleaner, still reads well.

In 1962, Ballard began to use the phrase 'inner space' about his work: his famous quote about his own work was: 'the only truly alien planet is Earth . . .' '"The Voices of Time" (1960) is his most important early story, an apocalyptic view of a terrible new evolution faced by the human race' (*SF Encyclopedia*, p. 84).

In 1966, John Foyster expressed a slightly different view:

> I cannot really comprehend what all the 'inner space' is about. Doubtless some kind soul will be able to take up six or ten pages of a future issue of this magazine explaining it to me in simple terms and then I too shall be able to grovel at the feet of the master . . . If 'inner space' as opposed to 'outer space' is simply an investigation of the character's psyche then why not say so, and admit that it is only an attempt to join the mainstream, and not sf (*Australian Science Fiction Review* (first series), No 5, December 1966, p. 16).

Ballard began a series of stories set in a decaying resort called Vermilion Sands, where, as David Pringle puts it, 'poets, artists and actresses pursue perverse whims', which was another way of saying that the motives and actions are often just a little incomprehensible.

His first novel, in 1962, was *The Wind from Nowhere*, based very much on the British disaster novel model made so popular in the 1950s by John Wyndham. In fact, each of the three early novels fits that category — British disaster novel — except that the source of the worldwide disaster is not particularly well explained, and the explanation doesn't matter

much. In *The Drowned World* (1962), the world heats up and the seas rise, but the explanation for the physical action is not what interests Ballard. What is really different about this book is that the main character, Kerans, welcomes the disaster. Instead of heading north, as the rest of humanity has done, he travels south towards the equator, into a region of steadily increasing heat and wateriness.

What's different about Ballard? The language, first and foremost. Quiet, steadily advancing sentences, almost no overt climaxes or melodrama until late in the book, with the emphasis on the thoughts of the main characters. Ballard is not concerned about what is happening, but about how the characters react to what is happening. What is different about Ballard's characters, though, is that they experience everything as intensely as possible, and make that experience into a work of art. Ballard put himself directly counter to everything that had happened in SF until then, and especially against the very dull landscape of SF during the early 1960s. The point of life, the Golden Age writers seemed to say, was to solve problems and overcome adversity. Ballard's characters, by contrast, take to adversity like a duck to water, and try to make things more difficult, not less difficult, for themselves.

The extraordinary thing about Ballard's career is that he sold his short stories at all. E. J. Carnell, by then the only English SF magazine editor and Britain's most powerful SF agent, was, from all descriptions, not a man who cared much about art. He was an old-time fan who liked a good old-fashioned story, yet he published every Ballard story that, as Ballard's agent, he couldn't sell to an overseas magazine. In his magazines *New Worlds*, *Science Fiction Adventures* and *Science Fantasy*, he continued to publish Ballard stories regularly. He was also publishing some very intense and literary stories by Brian Aldiss. Between the two of them, Ballard and Aldiss showed up most of the other British SF authors of the time as being a bit pallid.

By the early sixties Ballard began to acquire not just readers in Britain but disciples. Those disciples overturned the old money-changer and took over the temple. At about that time Ballard's 'The Terminal Beach', an almost completely surrealistic mood piece, appeared. More than anything, it signalled that Ballard was writing stories quite different from anything that had ever appeared as science fiction. Coincidentally, Nova Publications sold Carnell's magazines — or rather, they proposed to drop them altogether — but a group centred around Michael Moorcock bought

New Worlds 178, the first issue to be banned in Australia — because it published the first episode of Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*.

them. In 1964, Moorcock, in a series of editorials for *New Worlds*, proclaimed the magazine was setting out in a bold new direction. Ballard was the prophet of the new direction, and Moorcock was his disciple.

As Australia's John Foyster noted some years later, 'Who will believe that he is Gabriel when he has already been assured by a close friend that he is Ghod?' Ballard seems to have taken Mike Moorcock's crusading editorials more and more to heart, and decided to boldly go where no SF writer had gone before. Fortunately he had already published, *for Carnell*, most of the stories for which we best remember him.

The rest of Ballard's career is the story of moving away from SF, then returning to it. He rode with *New Worlds* during its most experimental period, that is, from the end of 1967 — when it was the first SF magazine to change to quarto size and feature a wide range of pop and surrealistic artwork and photography — to 1969, when Ballard began to be adopted by British literary people. He published in the little magazines, such as *ambit*, and stopped appearing in *New Worlds*. In the meantime, he began writing what he called 'condensed novels', that is, stories in short segments with odd, emphatic little episodes that, for most readers, did not add up to much. Such pieces included 'The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race' from 1967, and 'Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan' from 1968. At the same time, however, he was still writing Vermilion Sands stories, such as the superb 'The Cloud Sculptors of Coral D', by now for a newly available American market. During the sixties Frederik Pohl published some of the dullest fiction ever produced by the human mind, but he also published Cord-wainer Smith and Philip K. Dick, and he introduced J. G. Ballard to America.

Ballard's later directions included very successful dips into straight realism, such as his wonderful *Empire of the Sun*, in which his prose becomes very readable and he tells convincing stories.

Ballard and the New Wave

Every age has its New Wave. Since the New Wave that we're talking about, there seem to have been several in the arts in general — especially in pop music in the mid 1970s, and in SF in the 1980s (the cyberpunk movement). All new waves share the same characteristic — they kick against the former practitioners of the genre, the golden oldies, the old farts, the fuddy-duddies — no matter how good or bad their work actually is or was. The new kids on the block must fire shots at the older guys.

The term New Wave (*'nouvelle vague'*) comes from French cinema in the early 1960s, and its ideas were formulated not by film-makers but by film critics. François Truffaut, Jean Luc Godard and the other main film-makers of the French New Wave began as critics writing for the magazine *Cahiers du Cinema*. The old farts against which they were reacting were rather unlucky, for they included film-makers such as Jean Cocteau and Jean Renoir, who are now seen to be much more interesting and adventurous than most of the New Wave directors.

In science fiction, the real push for a new wave came from the writers who gathered at the Ladbroke Grove home of Michael Moorcock. They were the people who took over *New Worlds* in 1964. They hated not only most of the writers that Carnell had been publishing, but also all the Golden Age writers the Americans held up as models for good SF. Clarke, Asimov and Heinlein were particularly denigrated, as were most of the writers of their generation. The only exception that Moorcock mentioned was Alfred Bester. The writer he really liked was British surrealist Mervyn Peake (the 'Gormenghast' trilogy).

The English New Wave was stridently anti-American, but paradoxically it depended for most of its vigour on a whole group of Americans who had moved over to Britain in the 1960s to take advantage of a strong dollar. Pamela Zoline, John Sladek, Tom Disch, James Sallis and Judy Merril were all living in London at the time. Judy Merril, the only one of them who already had a reputation as an SF writer, was promoting what she called the 'new thing' in her review columns in *F&SF* and in the stories she selected for her annual *Year's Best Science Fiction* collections.

So what was the New Wave all about? More than anything it was a feeling, an itch to scratch, an acute need for good writing and new, non-technological ideas about the future. The New Wave writers also had the feeling that the new university-educated group of young people in Britain would form an audience for a new SF that was at least as well written as the literary fiction of the period. It was believed that they would flock to *New Worlds* and make it a best-selling magazine. For thirty years the older generation of American SF writers had been saying: why won't the literary establishment recognise how good SF is? The New Wavers said in reply: because you old guys, publishing for the pulp magazines, didn't

write very well — the writers for *New Worlds* are as good as any of the authors reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

There were many peculiar results of this debate. One was that the only New Wave writers who delivered the goods were people such as Ballard and Aldiss, whose careers were well established before Moorcock took over *New Worlds*, or writers like Tom Disch, Roger Zelazny and Samuel Delany, who were already making a splash in America before they began to publish in *New Worlds*. All *their* first stories had appeared in *Amazing* and *Fantastic* when they were edited by Cele Goldsmith, so she should be known as the founder of the New Wave. The best pieces of fiction during the heyday of *New Worlds* were Tom Disch's serialised novel *Camp Concentration* and several of his best short stories, such as 'Casablanca'; Brian Aldiss's serialised novel *An Age* (later released as *Cryptozoic!*) and many of his best short stories and novellas, especially the *Barefoot in the Head* stories; and some of J. G. Ballard's weirder stories, including those that were incorporated into the novel *Crash*.

How successful were the masthead New Wave writers, the writers whose works were praised beyond belief by Moorcock? When I looked at Langdon Jones's website, I discovered that he has settled down to a quiet rural existence somewhere in England, and has written little since the early 1970s. All his stories are collected in one collection, *The Eye of the Lens*, which is very good and probably now unobtainable. James Sallis disappeared, then turned up back in America as a mystery writer. John Sladek went his own merry way, with hardly any financial success during the rest of his life, but at least he kept being published. He had a belly-laugh sense of humour, a welcome and rare quality in the pages of *New Worlds*. M. John Harrison, the only writer of the time who was really influenced by J. G. Ballard, has had some successful mainstream novels and collections and short stories, but has only recently received universal acclaim for the novel *Light*. Harrison is the last New Waver: a very arty and artful writer, sometimes compelling and sometimes impossible to read. Giles Gordon, another New Wave writer I liked very much, stopped writing, became Britain's most successful literary agent, and died in 2003.

Christopher Priest, as a young fan, is credited as having labelled the New Wave as such in Peter Weston's fanzine *Zenith* (later *Speculation*). Priest did not really start his writing career until the New Wave was almost over, yet today he is one of the few writers who demonstrates the qualities the New Wavers claimed for themselves: a genuine love of words and fine writing, and an eye for brain-twisting plots that are intriguing and memorable. *The Separation*, his most recent novel, won the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the BSFA Award in Britain.

Whatever happened to the New Wave? In America, it was quite extraordinarily hated. Isaac Asimov preached a mighty thunderous sermon against the Old Wave some time in the 1969 or 1970, but I've never actually come across the piece he wrote. It must have been in the *SFWA Bulletin*. Brian Aldiss never forgave him for what he took as a personal attack on himself, whereas Asimov was obviously covering his own back, and probably didn't know an Aldiss from a Disch. After all, if the New Wave actually caught on, who would read old fuddy-duddies like him?

The situation could have been very bad for writers like Asimov if readers had started buying New Wave novels in large quantities, but that didn't happen. Within a year or three, the Old Wave writers had arisen like mighty phoenixes. In 1973, Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* became the first SF novel to make to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. Shortly after, Heinlein's *Time Enough for Love* also made it to the top, followed by Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*. For the first time, SF writers could make real money from writing SF. That one fact alone changed SF more than all the sermons from New or Old Wavers.

All the battle about New Wave versus Old Wave took place in the letter columns of the great fanzines of the time, especially in Richard E. Geis's *Science Fiction Review*. Harlan Ellison appointed himself as the guru of the American New Wave, and published in 1967 the collection *Dangerous Visions*, following it with *Again Dangerous Visions*. The problem with both anthologies is that many of the stories were not nearly as adventurous as Ellison claimed, and most of them were badly written. You can see this for yourself by buying the re-released *Dangerous Visions*. Since then, Ellison has made himself a laughing stock by failing to produce *The Last Dangerous Visions*, some of whose stories were first bought thirty years ago, and many of whose authors have died since selling stories to the collection. Nothing that was dangerous in 1970 would be thought of as dangerous now.

The real hero of the American New Wave was a quiet, unassuming man with a dry wit, who was in 1969 known as one of America's best writer for fanzines. Terry Carr was then working as an editor and dogsbody at

Ace Books, under the mighty thumb of Donald A. Wollheim. Wollheim didn't like New Wave, and said so in letters to fanzines, but he allowed Terry Carr to begin publishing the first series of Ace Specials. These little paperbacks, with their fabulous Leo and Diane Dillon covers, featured the most experimental and daring manuscripts that Carr could find. R. A. Lafferty was one of his first discoveries, and *Past Master* became quite a success. So was Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a novel that was very literary without owing anything to the British New Wave. That one novel made the Ace Specials essential buying. Joanna Russ's novel of the time was *And Chaos Died*. One of the last of the first series of Ace Specials was Brian Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head*, filled with Joycean puns and surrealistic landscapes.

The New Wave and me

I bought the first of the issues of *New Worlds* to be issued in the larger, more pictorial format, and I stayed with the magazine as long as possible. Every time Merv Binns sold me a copy at McGill's Newsagency, he complained about the magazine: 'I don't what they're doing these days. I don't know why people are reading this rubbish. But if you really want a copy, I can get it for you.' *New Worlds* was a shared secret among the Australian SF fans who thought of themselves as really in the know.

Suddenly one day Merv said: 'I can't get *New Worlds* this month. It's banned.' Horror! I had just begun publishing *SF Commentary*. The same week as *New Worlds* was banned from entering Australia I received a letter of comment and a subscription from an Italian reader called Gian Paolo Cossato, who was living in London. I must have mentioned the *New Worlds* ban in my letter to him, because by airmail a couple of weeks later Gian Paolo sent me the banned issues of *New Worlds* in a plain brown paper envelope.

What was all the fuss about? I never could work that out. Our censors were very peculiar in those days. A serial called *Bug Jack Barron*, by Norman Spinrad, featured, according to the Chief Censor, one scene of horribly reprehensible explicit sex, so the censor banned the five issues of *New Worlds* in which the book was serialised. Within two or three years, the paperback version of the book was imported and was sitting on the front counter at Space Age Books.

In reading *Australian Science Fiction Review*, I had already discovered that its main critics, John Foyster, John Bangsund and Lee Harding, were as fascinated by the peculiarities of *New Worlds* as I was. John Foyster was so incensed by *New Worlds* and Mike Moorcock overpraising Ballard that he wrote a series of long articles about Ballard's work, sometimes praising him and sometimes exposing him as an emperor without clothes. It was the constant sanctimoniousness of *New Worlds* that got under Foyster's skin. As he asked a number of times: what is there in the prose to demonstrate that an average New Wave story is better than a good story by Henry Kuttner or Robert Sheckley from the 1940s or 1950s?

By 1975 the New Wave was dead. Those hotshot British literary types proved not to be interested in a literary SF magazine. Arts Council grants kept *New Worlds* going until the beginning of 1971. When the grant was withdrawn, the magazine disappeared. It was revived as a paperback quarterly for three or four years, and David Garnett kept trying to revive it yet again in the 1990s. The puff had gone out of the soufflé. The only real achievements of the early years of the seventies were a series of stunning stories by Keith Roberts, some brilliant pieces by Josephine Saxton and M. John Harrison, and a regular column of startling, word-drunk critical essays by a new bloke called John Clute. He exuded literary flash, and he seemed like a New Waver, but in the end he proved to be interested in the whole field of science fiction, and has outlasted the New Wave.

In America, the Ace Specials died in the early seventies, Harlan Ellison turned to writing film scripts instead of promoting the New Wave, Judy Merril moved to Canada and never published another word of science fiction or about science fiction, Roger Zelazny stopped writing experimental fiction and churned out the abysmal Amber series, and Samuel Delany turned out a book called *Dhalgren*, the first page of whose quarter million words I nearly managed to read. American Old Wavers triumphantly preached the coming of the Permanent Wave, and we all went back to sleep again. Well, not quite. Up in Canada, William Gibson was quietly working away at a novel called *Neuromancer* while publishing articles in other people's fanzines. In terms of unreadability, *Neuromancer* was for me the ultimate New Wave novel, but it was called cyberpunk. A *new* New Wave had started. We're probably due for another one.

— Bruce Gillespie, July 2003, February 2004 and September 2008

Two ordinary families, with children

Cy Chauvin

[*brg* Cy Chauvin and I have been publishing each other's work since 1971. I nearly met him once. He was stepping out of a lift at Torcon 2, the Toronto worldcon held in 1973, and I was stepping in. We said 'hi' to each other, and didn't see each other during the rest of the convention. Mutual friends, including Irwin and Wendy Hirsh, say that Cy is really worth talking to. One day…*]

In the August 2008 *F&SF*, Chris Moriarty writes that 'These days if it's not noir, it barely feels like it's sf at all.' I thought how right he must appear to many readers and how pervasive this 'noir' influence has become. It might also explain my lack of interest with much current sf. Moriarty explains that 'noir' is a stylistic trick, yet a fashionable style influences content. It seems that in these later years, what I want to find are more stories about alternatives to the kind of life and culture that we have now. Not impossible utopias (in which no one has a choice as to what a 'good life' might mean to them), but a better future offering multiple choices to its inhabitants. I want an *alternative* to obvious present trends, or an alternate way of seeing the future: the visionary aspect of science fiction that seems to have been forgotten as writers parody the genre and outer space and even the future itself.

Cy Chauvin at Denvention, the 2008 worldcon in Denver (photo: Alan Stewart).

And perhaps, infected with a terrible hubris that I have myself criticised in the past, I think that what we imagine influences the kind of future that becomes reality. If no one cannot imagine a better world, how can one ever happen?

Or perhaps I have simply become bored with a shared authorial vision that has been run into the ground.

The idea for this article actually came to me nearly a year ago when I read **Fritz Leiber's** short story **'A Nice Girl with Five Husbands'** (1951), and realised that it had many of the same qualities as a story I had read many years earlier, **'Nobody's Home', by Joanna Russ** (1972). But it took me until recently to fully realise what appealed to me so much about the stories, besides their uncanny parallels.

Leiber starts his story out in a fantasy mode, although he uses science fictional terminology: 'Just as there are winds that blow through space, so there are winds that blow through time. A very few time winds are like the monsoon, blowing at fixed intervals first in one direction, then another.' He offers no explanation for the phenomenon, and there is no time machine; it is merely a means to convey Tom Dorset to the future, so he can met Lois Wolver, of the Wolver family. He meets her almost immediately after the time wind blows him into the future, although he never completely realises or accepts that he is in the future.

Lois is an attractive woman wearing a playsuit 'rather like a Grecian tunic', and her first words to Dorset are: 'Do you think a woman can love just one man? All her life? And a man just one woman?' She could be taken as a tease. But Dorset takes her comments seriously, and replies: ' I sometimes wonder if it's possible for anyone to love anyone', a rather dark thought.

The first clue to Dorset that this might be the future are some transparent 'digitals', high-ankled transparent moccasins with magnetic zippers (no

Velcro — that's in our, alternate future) that Lois slips on after she burns her feet on the hot desert sand. And then she talks about her five husbands — and their 'kwives' or co-wives — and takes him off to meet her 'group'! The group has agreed to make today a holiday, and so is clothed (rather than naked), although the garb seems to Dorset expensive and revealing no one is dressed similarly. The house is an adobe ranch house with a 'roof like fresh soot' (later revealed to be sun power cells), but the focus is still on the people. A group of children run naked around the house and surround Dorset and offer him greetings in a couple of languages. Excited by a new face, the children take Dorset and show him their toys, projects and pets, which range from the silly (a squabbit — a cross between a squirrel and a rabbit, with white fur, eating carrots and nuts) to model spaceships. Are these 'your' children, Dorset asks one husband, and is corrected: 'our children', he replies.

Dorset is invited to share a meal with the family (where the children play music on recorders), and he admires the artwork on the walls, and finds it was created by the entire family, rather than a particular individual artist. He is told what they do: 'Jock is an uranium miner, Rachel an algae farmer, and I'm a rocket pilot' (p. 186). He feels overwhelmed by their intelligence, and when he says he's an artist, they ask him what else does he do?

'"They make me feel rather no good,"' he tells Lois, 'and then admitted, "but in a way I'm more attracted to them than any people I've met."' It may not be possible to tell if the people in Leiber's future are more intelligent or simply more knowledgeable than those today. But one thing is clear: intelligence and knowledge *are openly valued*.

The story ends with Dorset being blown back by the 'time winds' to his past without ever quite realising or perhaps believing in this future (the year is 2050). Could it be that Leiber presented it this way because he couldn't quite believe in his future either, or thought his audience couldn't, and so wrote it with this humorous tongue-in-cheek quality? (The intended audience for the newly introduced *Galaxy* magazine at this time was a wider, more general public than that the sf magazines had generally reached before, according to Horace Gold in 'Gold on Galaxy', pp. 13–14, in *Galaxy: 30 Year Retrospective*, 1980.) It is interesting to note that Leiber's more famous dark vision, 'Coming Attraction', also appeared in *Galaxy* just the year before, and is just before 'Nice Girl' in his collection *A Pail of Air.* That story is presented without any attempt at humor or lightheartedness. But we are more willing to believe in the worst of our futures. (There is no word for a 'better future', just the impossible 'utopian', perfect world.)

Joanna Russ's story 'Nobody's Home' I read upon first publication in 1972. She does not use any traveler from the past to acquaint us with her family, but simply plunges into it, like the matter-transmitter device in the story that 'jumps' people from one location to another, and is part of the delightfully disorientating effect the real future might have on someone from the present. (Although I think a matter transmitter is nearly as much an item of fantasy as Leiber's 'time wind'.) The matter transmitter also seem an expression of the freedom the people have in this future.

Jannina (no last name given; it seems a matter of politeness not to give last names) lives in a family household of 18 adults ('two triplets marriages, a quad, and a group of eight'). She fastens on a computer helmet to clean house, order food and supplies, and attend to legal matters. She consults a wrist-banded chronometer with computer functions, which she uses to check messages from family members (was there e-mail in 1972?).

This family also doesn't wear clothes at home (not even on holidays), and their house is foam-built, with curving walls, and is located on the foothills of the Himalayas and has an 'living and swimming room' and indoor courtyard with a garden.

The children greet Jannina with humor and an elaborate game, which is complicated enough that we understand these children are highly intelligent and knowledgeable too. When someone apparently unknown arrives through the trans-matter portal, a woman named Leslie Smith, she makes an apparent error in manners by introducing herself by name. Jannina and the others talk in Finnish, and start to compose a round of verse, each adding a word at a time: 'The / red / sun / is high, / the blue'. (And this is an in-joke for the reader, since Russ has taken this line from Samuel R. Delany's essay, 'About 5,750 Words' in *The Jewel Hinged Jaw*; this is the famous line he uses (adding one word at a time, just as the family does) to show how words change our perceptions of meaning, that style vs substance is meaningless in reference to language.) (Leiber's story also has a hidden message like this: a rhyme that a girl recites while skipping rope, 'Gik-lo, I-o, Rik-o, Gis-so', is revealed at the story's

end as four equations expressing Einstein's generalised theory of gravitation. But Leiber thankfully reveals this to the reader, rather than leaving it to him or her to ferret out. I can't even type the actual equations here because the unusual typography has no computer keyboard equivalents.)

It is gradually revealed that Leslie Smith has arrived to join the family. But she is 'stupid', or rather is what in our time would be considered average intelligence. Joanna Russ is perhaps more convincing than Leiber in potraying her character's extra-intelligence (or rubs our noses in it), but it is also one of the playful effects of the story. Leslie Smith has been unable to fit in elsewhere, and joined and 'divorced' a number of families in her desire to be happy. She does not wish to live by herself. She has no particular interests or skills, and has 'overpaid' her tax labour (work). In our past, she would have been a good worker, but in this future there is tax labor only. Other labor is voluntary.

Jannina at one point earlier in the story thinks to herself that she is 'extremely grateful to be living now, to have so long to go before her death. So much to do!' (p. 64) This is an emotion and feeling rarely expressed by characters, I think, in any type of fiction, yet Russ makes in convincing and genuine. It is, perhaps, one of those emotions best expressed by science fiction. (Jannina is 70, although she is busy transporting herself around the world with friends; it seems she can expect to be to be at least 150.) Another member of her household is Old Al, 'his white hair, a rarity'. Janina asks what Old Al has been doing that day, and he says working. '[This work] was a private project. Most interesting things are.'

At what is the climax of this story, Jannina listens to a creation myth that Ann, one of family members she has known the longest, says that she tells all her children. It explains how pain and death came into the world. Jannina starts to cry, she says not for herself but for her godchild; she doesn't want him to suffer pain and death. Yet the story's acknowledgment of this pain and death — and the problem with Leslie Smith fitting into a society where the average intelligence is much higher than her own — makes this story startling real. Russ is stamping her foot and telling us this isn't a fantasy about an utopia (literally 'no place' or 'a place that does not exist'), but science fiction that realises the limits of the possible. (Terry Carr, who included the story in his *Best SF of the Year #2*, called it a 'utopia where science and rational life styles have all alleviated all mankind's ills except the human condition itself'. A 'rational life style' — what an intriguing comment; but the world was less conservative in the 1970s.)

Leiber's character Dorset is a bit wistful, having lost his glimpse of the future (I don't think it was it just for Lois), while Russ's Jannina is more practical and self-assured: she accepts that this is what she has to do to get on, and will set about to do it. (Although admittedly, the situations of the two are different.) In these visions of the future, life seems distinctly better, people are more intelligent and have access to more knowledge, yet the authors don't preach to us. The chaos present is the simple chaos of a good life, more input. There is higher technology but it is an engine that the people drive, rather than one that drives them, and it has enhanced the humanity of the future.

There is a 21-year gap between Leiber's story and Russ's,* and there has been an amazing 35 years from Russ's vision to our present. Has anyone presented any similar better futures in the interim? Or have those fickle time winds simply failed to blow in our direction?

— Cy Chauvin

* It seems certain that someone will ask whether Russ read the Lieber story first. Does it matter? She most likely read it at some time — she reviewed a couple of Lieber novels favorable in *F&SF*, and her character Alyx made cameo appearances in two of Leiber's 'Fafhrd & the Gray Mouser' stories. But whether 'Nobody's Home' was written in direct response to 'A Nice Girl With Five Husbands' is another question entirely.

(**First publication:** 'Nice Girl with Five Husbands', in *Galaxy*, April 1951; reprinted in Leiber's collection *A Pail of Air*, 1964. First publication: 'Nobody's Home', in *New Dimensions #2,* 1972; reprinted in Russ's collection, *The Zanzibar Cat*, 1983.)

Letters of comment

[Late letters for *SET*s 6 and 7:]

ANDREW DARLINGTON
Spa Croft Road, off Manor Road, Ossett, West Yorkshire WF5 OHE

It was great to read your tribute to the excellent Sydney J. Bounds, and I was delighted, when it was brought to my attention (by Steve Sneyd) that you'd quoted a chunk of my own piece about Syd in the issue. Philip E. High died around the same time: another fine writer of that same unique period of UK magazine SF, and another guy I had the greatest affection and respect for.

You might be interested to know that Philip Harbottle recently produced a new — and final — issue of his *Fantasy Adventures*, made up of several previously unpublished stories by both Bounds and High (www.cosmos-books.com or www.wildsidepress.com). way of respectfully 'clearing up the backlog' of tales and tributing both writers in the same issue. It's unfortunate that, having finally stumbled across your magazine, you're now on the point of taking it out of print format and into cyberspace. My contacts in the print realm seem to be reducing alarmingly, or all migrating to websites: there seem to be very few lit-mags left. Or perhaps I've been looking in all the wrong places? Hence my own attempt at doing something along those e-lines, basically shoving a load of my old stuff, plus things that never got into pent in the first place, online where they can be accessed by anyone for free.

17 July 2008

[*brg* Andrew Darlington has been a famous name in British fandom for at least forty years, but he hadn't heard of *Steam Engine Time* until Steve Sneyd sent him a copy of the Syd Bounds tribute. I'm not sure what Andrew publishes these days.*]

STEVE SNEYD
4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield,
West Yorkshire HD5 8PB

[*brg* I've been attempting to decode Steve Sneyd's own letters about recent issues of *SET* and my apazines. His letters are usually written in an amazing amalgam of abbreviated sentences and long asides. The first of the following letters is typed, but the others are in handwriting that is nearly incomprehensible (but not quite). Hence the delay in including them in the letter column.

Steve also publishes the only handwritten fanzine, *Data Dump*, the only fanzine (as far as I know) primarily dedicated to SF and fantasy poetry. A summary of *Data Dump*, of all issues from 101 on, can be found at http://www.booksmusicfilmstv.com/Data-Dump.htm. A catalogue of publications of Steve's Hilltop Press can be found at http://www.booksmusicfilmstv.com/Hilltop-Press.htm.*]

[*SET* 7:] Enjoyable cross-technology dogfight cover by Ditmar.

Re Jan's reactions to my letter in *SET* 7: I can make a trivial assertion of personal taste without cross-referencing, for further exploration by other readers, to other artists inside and outside SF who have explored the same trope. Unsourced or unexpanded statements seem to be mere 'gas and gaiters' to your co-editor, which leaves me wondering how obvious something has to be not to need footnoting: I'm reminded of a joke. An alien asks an Earthie, 'Is that the sun or the moon?' The Earthie, being a Zen-tinged hippy, replies, 'Dunno, man, I'm a stranger here myself.'

As your co-editor has closed off discussion on the future of space exploration, the next remark is pointless locwise, but I can't resist being amused yet again by the Americacentric assumption that the only alternatives are US public or private enterprise. OK, the European Space Agency sticks to unpersonned missions, but China has plans for a Moon

colony, plenty of money and advancing technology, and if it teams up with Japan and India, both with active space programs, I would guess odds high on the first Lunar settlement being Asian. (I'm going on BBC World Service reports on all the spacer activities of all three.)

Re Alan Garner's *Elidor*, my reaction is twofold: (a) that he didn't, at least in the edition I have, acknowledge his unmistakable source for a number of plot elements, such as the over-the-church football hunt, to the 'Morayshire Ballad of Childe Rowland' collected by Robert Jamieson in the eighteenth century. As Garner was writing for children, it's understandable that he bleached out various elements, such as, for example, Roland's serial killing of all encountered, on Merlin's advice, on his way to rescue his sister and brothers; but the borrowing should have been sourced, if only as a line on the Acknowledgments page, where Garner does quote the famous *King Lear* line re Childe Rowland; (b) that Garner introduces, gratuitously to me, from an entirely different kind of earlier story, an element such as the unicorn, which is a picturesque creature utilised in the romance rather than the ballad/folktale tradition. (Try your damnedest to find a unicorn in any collection of Northern ballads, and then turn to collections of medieval romances, where they will find said one-horned wonder, not omnipresent by any means, but certainly readily findable.)

Re *Thursbitch*: this is an actual place. The book, to me, had agendaed, cardboardy characters, and the bull cult as presented is too Mediterranean to ring true in its northern location, but the place itself is a wonderfully presented character. (The source for these opinions is myself, namely a lengthy review of 'Thursbitch' in *Monomyth Supplement* No 20, March 2005; for back issues write to D. J. Tyrer, Atlantean Publications, 38 Pierrot Steps, 71 Kursaal Way, Southend on Sea, Essex SS1 2UY.)

Sources re remarks re *Elidor*: the version of 'Childe Roland' collected by Robert Jamieson appears in *IIIustrations of Northern Antiquities, From the Earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian Romance*, by H. W. Weber, R. Jamieson and W. S. (Walter Scott), John Ballantyne, 1814 (in the UK it can be consulted using interlibrary loan). P. H. Jacobs' retelling, which differs mainly in putting the blame for her carrying away onto Ellen herself, for going widdershins (counterclockwise; the witch way) round the church, first published in his *English Fairy Tales*, 1890, was reprinted in *The Hamish Hamilton Book of Other Worlds*, ed. Roger Lancelyn Green, Hamish Hamilton Children's Books, 1976, and in Joseph Jacobs, *English Fairy Tales*, Puffin Books, 1970, and various reprintings. The folklore expert Katherine M. Briggs, in her *A Dictionary of British Folk Tale, in the English Languages*. Part A: *Folk Narratives*, pp. 180–4, Vol. I, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, accepts the overall authenticity of the tale as Jamieson collected it, while noting his ornamenting of description, analyses motifs and parallels elsewhere (I'll spare you details of my own published articles on the topic).

PS: That anthology of Japanese SF stories in translation is edited by Gene Van Troyer and Grania Davis: *Speculative Japan*, 2 volumes, Kurodahan Press, 2007. As I recall, Von Troyer moved to Japan soon after editing the SF poetry special of the *Portland International Review*, or after his stint as co-editor of SFPA's *Star*Line*, by the early 1980s.

20 September 2007

More on Alan Garner: First, a more precise location for Thursbitch: ESE Bollington, Cheshire, ENE Macclesfield ditto, WNW Baxton, just north of

Shining Tor (ordnance survey grid reference SJ 993 752).

Also, Mow Cop is not an actual castle, but an eighteenth-century Gothic folly, a mock castle. It was built by Randle Wilbraham in 1750. Wilbraham was the local squire, and had it built to improve the view from his own dwelling, Rode Hall.

It does seem to have been a lost opportunity by Alan Garner, instead of aiming at the child market with *Elidor*, blanding the story and introducing sub-Tolkien and romance elements, to have tackled its real darkness at an adult level, as he did with *The Owl Service* and *Thursbitch*. The power of the Jamieson situations affected me enough to cause me to twice attempt the story as long poems. The first (done as half of the creative writing pastiche of my dissertation for a Poetry MA at the University of Huddersfield) thrust a contemporary individual into the island setting of the Danish ballad ('On the Case of Rosmer Hafmond'; in *Fire*, and as a chapbook from Opossum Holler Press). The second attempted to voice, as an old drink-sodden exile, Rowland attempting to (mis)recall the 'heroic' adventure of his youth ('Child Roland to the Dark Tower Come', *The Dark Tower* anthology, Atlantean Press, 2006).

20 September 2007

[Re *SET* 8:] I lucked onto a more recent reprinting of the 'Childe Rowland' tale that Garner drew on for the start of *Elidor*. It is the Wordsworth Classics edition of *English Fairy Tales*, illustrated by Arthur Rackham (1994). Maddeningly, it does not source its versions, but is clearly based on the Joseph Jacobs version, not that of Robert Jamieson, as it omits the Arthurian link and includes the element of blaming the sister (who has become Burd Helen, not Burd Ellen) for her kidnap because she'd gone widdershins round the church. Knowing of this reprint might help anyone interested in comparing Garner's treatment with his source, as it is more likely to be found that the 1970s Puffin edition, let alone the nineteenth-century original Jamieson and Jacobs volumes.

In fairness to Margaret Atwood, she did in fact publish an article a couple of years back accepting that she *has* written SF.

Dr Allen's comments on *Sirius* (quoted in James Doig's article) point to a very perceptive critic (it's interesting that he was a poet too).

1 July 2008

E. D. WEBBER
25 Kintyre Close,
Hamlyn Terrace, NSW
2259 (CoA)

Thanks for the copy of *Steam Engine Time*, as well as asking about my health.

First, I may be taken for a Luddite for saying this, but I'm not looking forward to your going online. Phillip Adams once told me that there must be something sexual about my still using a typewriter, but it really has to do with how we read something on paper instead of viewing something on a screen. Reading, like the writing before it, is an activity, whereas viewing something is entirely passive. The news in a newspaper as opposed to watching it on TV is a case in point.

[*brg* Part of the reason why Steve Sneyd has been keeping in touch with me assiduously over recent years is that he wants to make sure I don't strike him off the list of people who receive the print editions of my magazines. Every reader should take the same attitude: you need only ask to receive the print edition— but you need to keep in touch.*]

As for my health, considering that the world is a lot more unhealthy than I am and getting sicker, I'm quite glad I'm pushing 70. You may not have known it, but I'm also a health writer, notably with Stephen Leeder on

'Medicare and its Discontents' in *Healthcover*, alas now deceased, and my central issue has been that our health system should be patient-focused rather than doctor-centred, and the best way to do that is via a 'smart' Medicare card. Hence it's interesting that in all the media verbiage about IT health of late there has been no mention of TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights), which I see as pretty sci-fantastic. You may not know it, for instance, but Big Pharma is already using the Genome Project to copyright human genes.

For the obvious reason of my being an American expat, I found Jeff Hamill's letter most interesting. At the risk of being thought cynical, I thought the last American movement of the left was when Upton Sinclair's Socialist Party got 10 per cent of the vote in 1910 and/or when he took a shit; take your pick. Still, what's all the more interesting about it to me is that he doesn't mention God and/or that Vico's theory of history seems to be coming true in our time, let alone that democracy and monotheism are inherently incompatible. Yes, I'm going to write him about that as well as compare American notes in general.

19 September 2007

I had said I have multiple sclerosis, because it's close enough to demylineation disease of the brain, and a lot shorter. Put another way, the mainframe is fine but sometimes the extensions are out of whack.

I'm impressed that you're aware of TRIPs, and you probably know as well what GATT is, though nobody in the media has been fearless enough to report it as such: a corporate bill of rights. A dissenting view by a US Supreme Court judge back in the 30s was that 'corporations are Frankensteins in our midst' and it should not go unnoted that Frankenstein has many names.

It's refreshing to hear that there are still independent minds in America, and I quite agree with you that what the West Coast should do is simply drop off from the rest of the continent. That's what a lot of us were trying to do during the academic sixties, as a matter of fact, and in effect what I was trying to do when I took the latter option of 'love it or leave it' and opted for Australia. Yes, I too hope for an ongoing correspondence with Jeff Hamill.

30 September 2007

[*brg* I know a bit about TRIPs because of Fran Baum's *The New Public Health* (4th edn, 2007) (Oxford University Press Australia), which I indexed. Baum covers a large range of world health issues. The book includes a photo of the cooperative housing project in which Roman Orszanski lives in Adelaide.*]

SHERYL BIRKHEAD
25509 Jonnie Court, Gaithersburg, MD 20882

Ah, I see your financial constraints. I think (I have not yet done my taxes — computer problems and the records are on a zip disc that became corrupted. I plan to spend this weekend trying to rebuild information enough to prove how much money I did not make.) I may have managed to make it into the red for 2007 — time will tell. My medical bills have jumped dramatically even though there is nothing seriously wrong. Now both a dermatologist and a cardiologist are involved in supervising and making sure there is nothing wrong — to the tune of healthy medical bills.

Health issues aside, I am not sure whether I am ahead or behind in the financial arena. All that medical stuff just to complain about the costs here, so you can feel a bit better that you do not have to also cough up at least $300 a month just to pay for insurance.

[*brg* I could pay similar amounts for private health insurance in Australia, but I can't afford it, and I know that even the most expensive level of insurance does not pay full benefits. Many of us hoped that the return of a Labor government in Australia would lead to the full resurrection of our Medicare system, but I don't see much sign of that yet.*]

The Chandler Award looks awesome — another round of congratulations!

I about as apolitical as one can get. I am a registered Independent, which means I cannot vote in either party's primary election to select their candidate. I am sitting on the sidelines and watching to see what the final fallout is as November looms closer. Would it be (ahem) unpolitic to say things can't get any worse? The economy has taken a nosedive just as soon as the local taxes were increased dramatically, to reflect huge increases in housing values — so we watch the values plummet and still try to find the money to pay the tax bills, as assessments are now vastly overinflated.

As I age (gracefully, of course), I wish I had spoken with my mother about how she felt. Now I can appreciate that the calendar age and the age 'felt' bear no resemblance to each other. I tend not to spend too long looking in the mirror, because then I cannot deny that what my brain is saying is not what the rest of me is saying.

For now, at least, my Mac simply will not let me access most electronic zines. If I ever win the lottery and get the new Mac, faster connection, and a color laser printer, then things will be back to normal and I'll have all the zines available to me. Until then, every now and then I pick a zine I'd like to see and give it a try. I usually quit after 15–30 minutes when there is still not much in the way of download. When I look at the cover of *SET* I realise how much I would lose in trying to print in black and white.

Thanks for letting me see *SET.* I totally understand the need to go electronic, but it looks as if I am going to be lost in the technological wake!

[*brg* So yes, Sheryl, we will keep sending you the print edition of *Steam Engine Time*.*]

I must, a bit sheepishly, admit that I am one of those not reading much science fiction these days. I have not gone over to the dark side of novels; my problem is much more insidious! As books have gotten more expensive, I have had to stop buying them. I figured that the public library could fill in the chasm, but they were not buying much, and they were at least two to three years behind the times. Since I didn't really have all that much time to read anyway, I began listening to books on tape when driving, because that *was* when I had a slot of spare time. I gave up very quickly, only less than one chapter into my first audio book, because it was horrible. I tried a fantasy book, and it was much better, then went on to listen to all the 'Harry Potter' books in audio format. So far I have not actually listened to any SF book — but every few books (mysteries and such) I drop back and look for SF to listen to.

The first SF stories I read were E. R. Burroughs' John Carter series. I was reading the Tarzan books and just kept going down the shelf of his writings.

[*brg* The same goes for me, because the Burroughs books were in the children's section of the library. I read all the John Carter books and most of the Tarzan books by the time I was eleven. When I joined fandom at the age of twenty, I was astonished to find that adults were also interested in them.*]

The first book I can remember buying was one of the anthologies — I still have it on my shelves. Until about five years ago, even though not buying SF, I would make it a point to buy the 'Best of...' or whatever anthology I could locate that had the most of the Hugo nominations. Those anthologies melted away, and toward the end it seemed that when comparing books by different editors, each had little in common with the next — I would need to buy both to get a reasonable number of nominated stories. I stopped even looking. I still read, but not that much, and still have high hopes for the audio format.

I sincerely hope that Terry Jeeves can utilise the Internet/computer to explore the world of e-zines (the world I am currently unable to access) — with the capability to increasing type size if necessary and saving your last spot with the touch of a key. All of fandom wishes him the best.

22 February–3 March 2008

[*brg* Terry Jeeves's wife Val died more than a month ago. While she was very ill he had to move into other accommodation. With considerable help Terry has now been able to move back into his

house. Sandra, Terry and Val's daughter, emailed his friends on 14 September: 'Dad went home Tuesday; four carers are going in and out to look after him, and I hope it works out okay for him. He might even be able to use his computer again if all goes well. He can now sit in his favourite seat and admire the view ... Mum's funeral was as good as could be — lovely tribute; Keith Jeeves read a short poem by Joyce Grenfell and they played Mum and Dad's favourite song at the end ('A Summer Place' by the Percy Faith Orchestra). Everyone cried but me! Lots of family and friends travelled miles to be there, and adjourned to a hotel for tea and nosh (as dad would call it) It was good to spend time chatting about mum; I still feel she's looking after me. Hopefully, now Dad is home he'll feel a bit better.' Thanks, Sandra, for your emails.*]

[*SET* 8:]

DAVID LAKE
7 8th Avenue, St Lucia QLD 4067

Thank you for publishing my long comments on Pullman etc. The point I want to make to all your readers is that we should quarrel less about the merits of texts. I don't say Rowling 'is bad'. She is just not what I want. I was quite young when I first heard the Latin tag *De gustibus non est disputandum* ('there is no disputing about tastes'). True in food, true in drink, true in literature.

I have just had a fierce spat in a group I go to on Thursdays. We have been reading the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who for me is tremendous. Now they are going to read *Don Quixote* in English translation. I have told them that I will drop out. I'll be dead from natural causes before they finish, and I fear some of them will be dead from boredom. The convener of the group said to me, somewhat fiercely, that some Spanish academics had called *DQ* 'the greatest novel ever written'. I said there was no such thing as 'a greatest novel'. I have read all of *DQ*, and after the first three chapters I was bored out of my mind. Same slapstick joke in every chapter! And Cervantes was flogging a dead horse: the tales of romance that sent the Don mad were going rapidly out of fashion in 1605. Still, he is apparently great for some readers.

2 June 2008

[*brg* Elaine tried reading *Don Quixote* some years ago, was thoroughly bored, and gave up. I've never read it. I've never read a persuasive argument in support of its elevated status in world literature.*]

My health is good, and my main unhappiness is not having enough interesting things to do or books to read. Still, this week I am reading an atheistical book of essays, *Philosophers without Gods*, which I find mainly cheering.

I have just finished reading the paperback of Ursula's *Powers*, the last of her trilogy of the Western Shore. I am glad it is the last. I found the second book depressing, and this one even more so. I think it gave me an unpleasant dream last night. And at the end, there is no revenge for all the sufferings — the hero gets away, that's all, and goes to a university.

We don't need yet another tract against slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe did that very adequately 150 years ago. And if Ursula wants to write about city-states and slaves, why not do a historical novel about the Greeks or Romans? The strange 'powers' in her trilogy are not very useful, so one could do without those. A really great novel about Athens in the fifth century BC was Mary Renault's *The Last of the Wine*. That had sone pretty unpleasant bits, but it did have a very good ending: not entirely happy, but satisfying.

I recently heard Ursula in a radio interview talking about her latest novel, *Lavinia*. This is a variation on the second half of the *Aeneid*. That should give her plenty of scope for a feminist slant on a nasty war. But she'll have to improve on Virgil. I find the second half of the *Aeneid* a dead bore... and in it *Lavinia* doesn't get a single line to speak. Ursula said that Virgil wrote about wars but didn't like them. I agree. But I feel that Homer had the same attitude. The *Iliad* is wonderful, but also terrible. However, its ending, though tragic, is very satisfying. I will read *Lavinia* when it comes my way.

10 November 2008

YVONNE ROUSSEAU
PO Box 3086, Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5000

Thank you, indeed, for online *SET* 8! I had no great difficulty in

downloading this on my dial-up but adequately RAMmed laptop computer (after which, I saved it among my documents), so no need, I think, to send me a printed edition in these current hard times. But thank you, as ever, for being willing to do this.

I've already skimmed (that's my true flaw when confronting an ezine) and enjoyed the electronic version — and wonder whether, on page 31, it is possible to replace 'sub-stance' with 'substance' (where you are replying to David Lake about the Dust of *His Dark Materials*). And I was very pleased to find Franz Rottensteiner among the locs again.

2 June 2008

ANDY SAWYER
Science Fiction Librarian, Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library, PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA

I'm looking forward to reading *SET*. This will be a historic document. So far, I've been extremely slack on reading things published online. Sure, I download them, but then I never actually get round to reading them, because when I'm sitting at a desk in front of a computer, I'm working. Then the other weekend a friend told me about the hundreds of books on his palmtop. I've tried reading stuff on my palmtop but never through any of the downloadable software packages you could use. The one I've been able to install isn't that good, but it's kind of workable and I managed to get through the interesting Zebrowski piece on the bus this morning. The software screws up the formatting a little (I think because it's converting the PDF format to its own way of thinking) and I'm sure compared to the actual ebooks you can get nowadays it's primitive, but it does have a capacity to make notes, which might be useful.

I see I've noted Cy Chauvin's comments about why an English writer would write Westerns (the world of the Western was a suitable imaginary world for an audience who'd of course grown up with images of the Wild West from the movies). When I worked in public libraries I had a 'Western' section, and noticed the age (and increasing age) of the borrowers: you very rarely got young men, or women of any age, reading them, and I haven't seen a western novel for years.

3 June 2008

FRED LERNER
81 Worcester Avenue, White River Junction, VT 05001

This isn't a letter of comment, but rather an expression of puzzlement. I finally managed to download and print out *SET* 8, and was pleased to see my letter therein. But I didn't understand your reply. 'I presume you are publishing a paper about your discovery somewhere!' What discovery? The discovery was made by Evans and Wall — and they published a book about it, the one whose review I mentioned in my letter.

The only thing I ever wrote about the history of the short story was in the first chapter of *Modern Science Fiction and the American Literary Community* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1985), and there I was only tracing the origins of the science fiction magazine to the all-story pulps and its predecessors the dime novel and (before that) the story papers. My very brief discussion was distilled from Mary Noel's *Villains Galore: The Heyday of the Popular Story Weekly* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), Albert Johannnsen's *The House of Beadle and Adams* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), and Merle Curti's article on *Dime Novels and the American Tradition* (*Yale Review* 26: 761–78, June 1937). There's probably been more recent scholarship published since I did my dissertation research thirty years ago.

A good starting point would be http://www.sharpweb.org/, the website of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading & Publishing, which offers a host of links to other online resources. Which I shall need to consult in the course of preparing the second edition of my book *The*

Story of Libraries: From the Invention of writing to the Computer Age, which is due at Continuum by the end of November. I'm adding a chapter on information science, updating the rest of the book — and totally revamping the chapter on 'Libraries of the Future'. A lot has happened since 1998.

6 June 2008

CY CHAUVIN
14248 Wilfred, Detroit MI 48213

It will take a while to get used to the new electronic format, and I'm disappointed that you and Jan wrote such short editorials, but I'm sure you will hit your stride in the new medium. I'll send a real letter of comment later (and still hope to do one on No 7), but wanted to send you an acknowledgment that your email and *SET* was received. Is this a new e-mail address for you?

[*brg* Yes, but the old email address still works.*]

A couple more short stories to recommend: 'The Lincoln Train' by Maureen McHugh. An alternate history story, but with more of an emotional point than any of the other alternate history stories I've read (except for *The Man in the High Castle*). It's also interesting that there doesn't seem to be any reason for it to be an alternate history (I'm not fond of them) until the point near the end where she twists things and you suddenly realise why, and she has such a good reason for, much better than in most sf. I saw this same feat in the one novel I read by her: I think she may be comparable to Joanna Russ.

The other one is an oldie: 'Artifact' by Chad Oliver from 1957. It's about the discovery of an arrowhead on Mars, and later the tracking down of some caveman-type people who paint elaborate paintings on the walls of their caves below the permafrost. I thought Oliver had such a nice touch with this story, and it seems more 'real' even if science has passed it by. Curiously, it was an original story published his own short story collection (never appeared in any magazine). I don't suppose you'd be lucky enough to find it in Australia: I don't know how I was lucky enough to find it here. It makes me wonder how many more gems might be hidden away? There is probably a need for someone to reprint a new variety of past sf, rather than the same old 'classics'! 7 June 2008

[*brg* Cy was kind enough to send me a photocopy of an Anne Tyler story, 'A Woman Like a Fieldstone House'. Only 15 pages long, it reads more like a mini-novel than a short story.*]

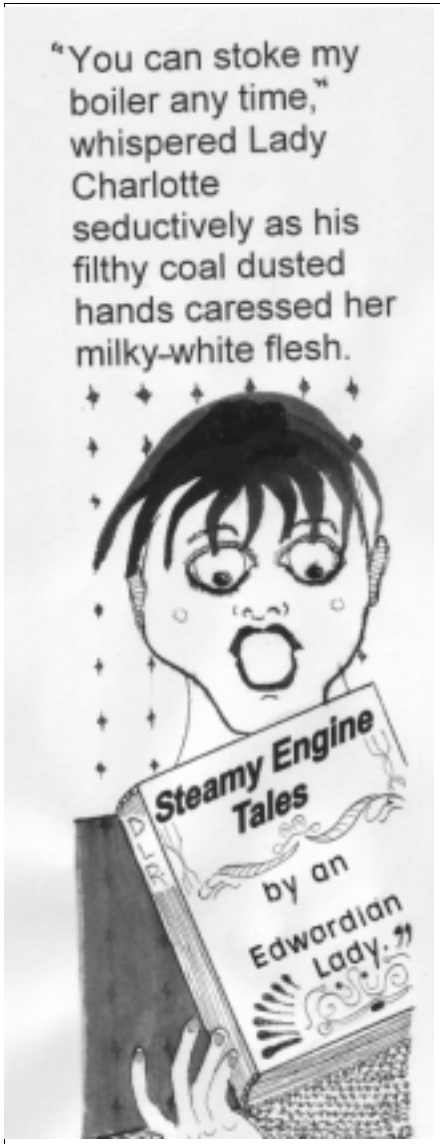
Yes, isn't it a wonderful story? It's a Tyler novel in minature; it was almost overwhelming at my first reading, but she has such a sure, light touch. The story appeared in an original anthology, actually, called *Louder Than Words* (1989). The stories in this anthology were all donated, with the proceeds from the book going to benefit an organisation that helps those who are homeless. I received the book as a gift sometime in the nineties. Something made want to reread the story, and then your issue about short stories made me think of it again in reference to you. (Did I mention before that you were the one that led me to read Anne Tyler?) I thought I read a reference to other Tyler short stories (pre-first novel) on the dustjacket of a very old copy of one of her earlier novels, but I could be wrong. I have never seen a mention otherwise.

17 July 2008

[*brg* How did I discover Anne Tyler's novels? Tom Disch listed *Morgan's Passing* as No 2 on his list of favourite novels read during 1980. In 1982, *Time* reviewed *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* favourably, during the time when *Time* still ran several pages of fine book reviews. My own favourite Anne Tyler novel is *Searching for Caleb* (1976, which I bought in the early eighties). I thought she was beginning to repeat herself in recent novels, until I read and much enjoyed *A Patchwork Planet* (1998). From the fact that no Tyler short story collection has appeared I assume that she writes very few short stories.*]

The note you attached to a previous e-mail, 'Write something about Thomas Disch', makes me realise how out of it I am at times: I didn't realise until attending the Hugo Awards presentation that he had died! And I didn't find out until later still the cause. (It still seems so hard to believe.) *On Wings of Song* is my favorite Disch novel (although I haven't read *The MD* or any of the later ones), and 'The Man Who Had No Idea' among the short stories (a peculiar choice, perhaps).

Some upbeat news: the NESFA press editions of Cordwainer Smith have sold over 10,000 copies in hardcover! Indeed, the woman in charge said that Smith's sales are actually subsidising the costs of publishing some



of the other books. Who would have imagined that?

19 August 2008

[*brg* Well, Cordwainer Smith is the best SF writer, isn't he? NESFA Press took the trouble to reprint all of the Smith stories in one volume, *The Rediscovery of Man*, and has never allowed a paperback to be released.*]

PAUL VOERMANS
23 Delaware Street, Reservoir VIC 3073

It's a fine and fun thing you're doing, publishing comment past the bite size. I have a conflicted relationship with fandom, but perhaps in the past I thought that was a different conflicted relationship to the ones I have with almost any other group. Perhaps the more coherent I see any group, the less I want to be a part of it. I don't see fandom that way any more, and the things I see as useful and even beautiful in sf, as differentiated from other literature, remain.

I agree with Lem that the cliché can be an enemy, but in writing the new novel, one that will not — at least in the first edition — be published as sf, though I'm happy to say sf is what it is. I found that my collaborator's allergy to all things worn and commercial balanced my dramatic instincts, born of what Broderick calls the 'megatext' and years of theatre practice. The creative tension between her attitude and mine has produced a novel better than either of us could have wrought alone. I hope!

Anyway, you'll find out in October, all things going smoothly. It's the first novel I've taken to this point in something over fifteen years, so I'm pretty excited. It's Jill Sparrow's first novel, if not her first book, so she's very nervous! And excited too. We were very much aware that people might see a novel with overt political content as a turnoff, but in sf that's one place in which it's acceptable, I think, and there are tropes that have tumbled down the generations specifically evolved to tease out the politics in daily life, in progress, even in politics.

When writers more famous for other fiction get political they often go slipstream. How effectively you can do that with an uncritical adoption of sf clichés, I'm not sure, though some writers are more subtle than others may allow credit. But these clichés exist because they appeal to some powerful tendencies and desires and fears in us and used knowingly they can connect our emotions with the questions we need to be asking.

Those unfamiliar with sf's history of collaboration often ask how you can write a novel with another writer, but this tendency, too, is part of the exteriorising — I might say the socialisation — of its meaning. In that process, many things are smoothed out, but also many things are avoided, such as the gaucheries of the self-taught, more interior process of the lonelier genres of fiction.

It's easy for me to me to talk about harnessing tropes knowingly, having had the luxury of spending many years writing a novel while supported by other things. But even the most commercial of writers of sf, I would argue, has a greater awareness of, for example, the notion that a post-holocaust novel could well be about the desire just to be left alone, or that the fear of being eaten by aliens who want to serve man is just the other side of wanting to eat them (greens notwithstanding). They almost certainly won't agree amongst themselves, but they're aware of the arguments, more keenly than, say, spy writers have to be in order not to come off as laughable to a sophisticated sf community.

Jill and I hope not to be laughed at by the politicos or by the sf community, we're both insiders with all the ambivalence with our communities that comes with it. And that's part of what's fuelled this novel. But we'll see, perhaps both groups will laugh. Perhaps everyone will get a giggle!

5 June 2008

[*brg* As I probably said in an email, I'm looking forward to your

forthcoming novel (although I've heard nothing yet about a launch date), as, I am sure, are quite a few people in the Australian SF community. Best of luck for the relaunch of your writing career.*]

LLOYD PENNEY
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

Jan, *SET* 8 is mostly your show this time, is it? I miss *Peregrine Nations*, so I hope I will see shadows of it here. Once again, Bruce, congratulations on your MacNamara Award. Canadian fandom doesn't seem to have this kind of tradition beyond the Aurora Awards, or even the Sunbursts.

My loc on *SET* 6: the employment at Publicis/Optic Nerve didn't last, and I was offered employment at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. They kept me just shy of three months, and let me go and hired someone else at a reduced pay to save money and balance the budget.

I still cannot find sufficient work in publishing, even though I have about 12 to 15 resumés out. I have another job to apply to this morning. The competition must be something fierce. My resumé seems up to scratch, so I think the problem is that I have some experience. Too many companies would be happy if all their employees could be unpaid interns, and few seem to want anyone with experience. I am thinking about taking some training to go into technical writing, but paying for the training is another thing.

On *SET* 7: I didn't win that Aurora Award I was nominated for, but it was nice to be on the ballot again.

On *SET* 8: On George Zebrowski: Publishing is the industry I've been in on and off; mostly off these days. It sits bloated on the detritus of its writers and readers, and in some cases, its suppliers of paper and ink. It is a proud industry, offering the clerisy (presumably those who can afford a $12 paperback) proof of their education in book format. In doing this it sets itself apart, and in many ways, is more proof that the emperor has no clothes. As much as I feel the arts are important, publishing seems very self-important. The problem is that publishing also provides me with the books I love. It's a real love–hate relationship. I want to be a part of it, but I don't like what I see of it.

I hope Zebrowski is wrong when he says that SF exists primarily as entertainment and children's fiction, but he seems to be right. SF provides the ideas for popular movies and YA novels, and the media make SF out to be childish and for children, and insulting those of us who enjoy it. We can write what we want to read, but will we buy it? Perhaps we get the publishing industry we deserve.

I see other readers have a similar feeling about publishers and what gets published these days. All the more reason that I think I shall spend the rest of my days finding good stuff from the sixties, seventies and eighties in the few used book stores that remain. I feel more and more squeezed off from my passion, and, as always, money is the great separator.

Robert Elordieta mentions the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy. I have *The Golden Compass* (movie re-title) in paperback, and saw the first movie. The box office was so bad on *The Golden Compass* that I rather doubt more movies will be made. On the other hand, the second 'Narnia' movie is doing well.

I couldn't afford the Robinson 'Mars' books when they first came out, but was lucky enough to find all three secondhand, so I read one after the other. A marvellous story. Should we ever get to Mars within the next 100 years, if we haven't killed ourselves in the meantime, it's a cautionary tale for our descendants to remember. For me, a very good read.

You must see *Wall-E*. We did, and it was great.

30 June 2008

RICK KENNETT
PO Box 118, Pascoe Vale South VIC 3044

It appears you found my email address in the end, and thank for the link to *SET* 8. The ironic thing is that your message went into my spam box whereas at the same time a spam email landed safely in my inbox. May Bill Gates fall off his money pile and do himself a mischief! Perhaps it's just as well my address was lost in May, as that was when my spam filter went quite peculiar and started deleting incoming emails it shouldn't have — while still letting spam safely through to the inbox. May Bill Gates's wallet give him a hernia!

Ah, an article by Barbara Roden, aka Bwana Barbara of the Ghost Story Society in Canada, whose book-publishing arm Ash Tree Press produced

my co-authored collection *472 Cheyne Walk*. She went through a bit of a scare a couple of days ago when her husband Christopher had a minor heart attack. Or at least a cardiac blip. He's back home now, possibly with meds.

James Doig is also a member of the Ghost Story Society. He and I — there might be a third — are the only antipodean members. I hold the distinction of being their most distant geographically member.

I understand you're ever so slightly indirectly responsible for my missing Ditmar. As you might know I won one for best short story at Easter. Zara Baxter accepted it for me, and Justin Ackroyd was asked to bring it back to Melbourne with him, but his bags were loaded down with Bruce Gillespie's Peter MacNamara Award. So Zara brought it back with her to NSW. And that's basically the last I've heard of it. Apparently she then rushed off overseas, leaving my mantelpiece bare of anything but my dog's cremation urn. Humph!

6 July 2008

[*brg* When I met Zara at Conflux a few weeks ago, she said that she has been able to send you your Ditmar. Your experience is nearly as frustrating as Joe Haldeman's taking four years to receive his 1976 Ditmar Award (Best Overseas Fiction for *The Forever War*). It remained in my desk drawer, because I did not have an address for the Haldemans. When Joe and Gay visited Melbourne in 1980, I was able to present it to him over dinner.*]

ALAN SANDERCOCK
2010 Desmond Drive, Decatur GA 30033

Some personal updates: you probably remember my daughter as a small toddler — or only just beyond that stage at the time. Maria is now (as I write this) winging her way across to London for a three-week European vacation. She graduated from Boston University a year ago and has recently finished her first year of teaching grade 7 and grade 8 middle school in apparently what is the poorest school district in the nation. She's living in Hartford, Connecticut and working through this two-year 'Teach for America' program. It's a very tough job, to say the least.

I'm still working for Georgia State Government and thinking that I might just be able to plan on retiring at some point, although the US economy is probably not going to be too kind to any of us in the next few years.

Jane recently moved from her job in the US Department of Agriculture, to a position at the Center for Disease Control, in which she manages budgets for the bird flu pandemic preparedness program of the Global Health Division. She's excited about heading off for a meeting in Cairo in a month or so.

My other news is that I've finally decided to become an American citizen. I had thought that I might have my certificate in time to vote in the elections this November, but now I'm realising that even though I have my Green Card, security background checks may be causing delays.

One last comment about a great sf movie. Make sure you see *Wall-E*. It's one of the best Pixar movies, and it also happens to be a great little (90 minutes) sf movie.

8 July 2008

ROBERT ELORDIETA
20 Custer Circle, Traralgon VIC 3844

Great front cover by Dick Jenssen: I like old sailing ships and fortifications.

Jan has done some nice changes to the layout of the efanzines.com version. I look forward to seeing what other changes Jan has in store for us.

George Zebrowski's article was a real eye-opener for this reader about the book publishing world. I'm glad as hell that I'm not a author. The things that they have to put up with the major publishers is unbelievable.

I've finally read the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy by Philip Pullman. It was an interesting read.

I've never read the books that were reviewed but the articles about them were interesting. I've heard of *Red Mars*, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*.

13 July 2008

[*brg* By now you've probably heard that Kim Stanley Robinson will be one of our Guests of Honour for Aussiecon 4, August 2010.

The others are Shaun Tan and Robin Johnson.*]

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON
2414 Elendil Lane, Davis CA 95616

Thanks for the copy of *Steam Engine Time* with the nice omnibus review of my Mars books by Frank Weissenborn. Please extend my thanks to Frank if you can. I appreciate it very much.

29 July 2008

LYN McCONCHIE
Farside Farm, 12 Ngamoko Road, RD11, Norsewood 4974, New Zealand

I was amused to see Cy Chauvin's comment that 'he still felt amazed that a writer in England would chose to write westerns'. In fact one of the most prolific of western writers was English, a man who had been (as I recall) a K9 handler in the war, and subsequently, amongst other occupations, a postman in peacetime, but who was a passionate afficionado of all things western, knowledgable on weaponry, customs and garb of the times, and wrote western novels, both of the period and also set in modern days. I refer of course, to J. T. Edson. I'm uncertain how many of his western books were published. I can only say that I know of at least eighty, and believe there were more. In some ways his idealisation of characters was unrealistic — a fault shared with a number of his contemporaries — but he did know what he was talking about when it came to facts, and his book were always entertaining and sold very well over the decades they were published.

Why do SF writers 'explain too much'? Ray Wood could blame some of that on editors and/or publishers who often insist during revision that a casual reference be more fully explained.

It is asserted that 'there aren't that many big books about the future, novels that seriously predict what the world will be like in 2032 or 2057'. No, there may not be. But note an entire series of smaller works that do this in a specific area and do it very well. They are set in an American city's police department in the late 2050s, and they are solidly believable. This is the 'In Death' series by J. D. Robb. Don't disdain them, because the author is, in reality, Nora Roberts who writes romance novels. I dislike her work under her real name as much as anyone who has little time for that genre. But the 'Death' series is clever and well written, with interesting characters and a background set fifty years in our future that rings true. I have the series, and find that it gives so believable a vision of what life in a major American city will be like by then, that it sweeps me into it over and over again. This series is a crossover between SF and police procedurals, and reads well as either. If you don't wish to pay full price for an initial volume than pick up a secondhand one.

13 July 2008

[*brg* Thanks, Lyn, for telling me about an author I've never heard of, but who seems to be writing the sort of SF I would enjoy very much. Maybe some web page will tell me where the series starts.]

DARRELL SCHWEITZER
6644 Rutland Street, Philadelphia PA 19149-2128

Thanks for the actual paper copy of the new issue. I can understand that these are expensive to produce. I would say, 'find a way to lower production costs', but I suspect that wouldn't do you all that much good. What is likely to kill the fanzine as we know it is postage costs. The days of mass mailings of free fanzines to anybody the editor thinks might be interested are surely over. Such mailings have to be very carefully targeted.

The result is going to be, of course, that if one of your contributors becomes sufficiently famous, as Roger Zelazny or Philip K. Dick have since their fanzine-writing days, copies of *SET* will become immensely valuable, this being exaggerated by the extreme rarity of physical copies. I hope you have squirrelled away a few extras for yourself. Of course, as something becomes too valuable, you sometimes have to part with your last copy, which can be heartbreaking. (The solution: make yourself a full two-sized xerox facsimile first.) I know one fan publisher, now in his seventies, who finally had to part with the last set of a mimeographed item he published in the early 1950s, because it had become worth several thousand dollars.

[*brg* Thanks to long-time subscriber and luncheon-of-commentator Derek Kew, I have a second set of *SF Commentary* and *The Metaphysical Review*. I won't be parting with either that or the main set. I have very few spare copies of most of my

fanzines. However, your comment reminds me to compile a complete index of *SFC*, *TMR*, *SET* and efanzine.com's *Scratch Pad*, one of those nice little jobs for my endless hours of spare time.*]

Anyway, if *SET* is the equivalent of a retirement community where old-time fanzine fandom gathers for one last fling, it's at least a worthy one. There are a *lot* of names in this issue that I have been seeing in fanzines since the early , but they are very much worth a look, the more so if you like a good mystery as well as work in our genre seventies. If only you could get a LoC from Harry Warner Jr via ouija board, you'd be all set.

E. B. Frohvet wonders who wrote what in the Kuttner/Moore collaborations. The answer is that even they did not know after a while. One would work all night, leave the story in the typewriter, and go to bed. The other would get up, look at it, and continue it. *Fury* has been published as by Kuttner alone, but, famously, John Campbell responded to a letter in *Astounding* with 'You've been reading C. L. Moore' while the serial was running. It was published under the Lawrence O'Donnell pseudonym, which was often used by Moore. You will notice that some O'Donnell stories are in the Gnome Press edition of *Judgment Night*, which bears the Moore byline alone. Yes, indeed, 'Vintage Season' is in *The Best of C. L. Moore*. The Gallagher stories were published as by Padgett, generally a Kuttner pseudonym. But it is very clear that no one really knows, and Kuttner and Moore didn't even know.

To Andrew Weiner I will point out with grave and reactionary alarm that 'non-functional word patterns' seem to be creeping back into SF again, usually under the guise of 'literary fantasy' or 'interstitial writing' or 'slipstream.' Writers with lit-mag backgrounds or those who aspire to be like them tend to lack any storytelling ability at all. I am seeing a *lot* of stories in the current magazines that have no discernible dramatic structure or tension, character development, idea or anything that could conceivably connect with human emotions at all. They seem to be conceptually timid, sterile exercises in form, which is what 'experimental fiction' usually is. Sometimes I wonder if I've just lost the ability to enjoy fiction, but then I turn to something good and I see this is not the case at all. I reread much of Gene Wolfe's *The Island of Dr Death and Other Stories and Other Stories* recently because a friend claimed it was full of *Orbit*-style nonfunctional word patterns. I challenged him to find one. I couldn't. I will admit I still can't make sense out of 'Alien Stones', but there is a lot of great stuff in that book, including the title story, which was from *Orbit*.

[*brg* What I liked most about Gene Wolfe's *Island of Dr Death* collection is that most of the stories did not reveal their secrets until the *second* reading. Your friend might have read the book only once.*]

But we are in one of those periods where it is possible to get published

in SF without having the skills to write narrative, rather the way that inept art students say, 'I guess I'll become an abstractionist because I can't draw.' The result will be the same as before. Readers will run away in droves. There will be a radical change in cover styles (probably back toward realistic imagery) to reassure readers that this isn't one of *those*.

One of the more lamentable results of the collapse of the New Wave was that it forced such artists as Leo and Diane Dillon and Paul Lehr out of our field. There was a distinct New Wave 'look', which readers had been conditioned to avoid. Take a look at the covers of the Berkley editions of *Orbit* or *The Best from New Worlds*. That's a 'New Wave look'. It was totally dead by the end of the seventies.

The usual strategy for the reader in such a period is to read novels, because it is very hard to get a non-functional word-pattern *book* into print. I can only think of three from the New Wave era, Aldiss's *Report on Probability A*, Alan Burns's *Babel* and Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*. The Burns book is now forgotten. The other two are legends of unreadability.

[*brg* Quite a few Australian SF fans took to *Report on Probability A* when it first appeared. This prompted affectionate parodies by both John Bangsund ('Probe on Reportability A') and Leigh Edmonds, and a brilliant review by John McPharlin.*]

Actually there was much that I admired from the New Wave era, a lot of it at book length. Even Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* proves to be a rich work if you ease yourself into it. Books like Disch's *Camp Concentration* and Brunner's *Stand On Zanzibar* (both of which appeared whole or in part in the Moorcock *New Worlds*) are of course classics. I wrote favourable reviews of them at the time. I also wrote a favourable review of *Bug Jack Barron*, another *New Worlds* serial, which actually drew a rebuke from J. J. Pierce. Admittedly *New Worlds* ran very thin at times, but there was usually something admirable in any given issue. I never took Pierce's stance that the New Wave was detrimental on the grounds it was pessimistic or anti-science or anti-Campbellian or whatever. For me it was always a question of content or no content. The verbal equivalent of the abstract painting done to disguise the fact that the artist can't draw, I have no patience with, even in poetry. I have always edited that way. I don't allow myself to be snowed under.

[*brg* As art historians take pains to point out, all the great 'abstract' painters were brilliant practitioners of drawing and colour application, as can be seen from their early drawings and paintings. They just got sick of realism, and wanted to do something more exciting. Much the same can be said of SF's more adventurous writers — they needed to explore that further territory, off the map, where few readers want to follow.*]

What is happening today can't be targeted so easily. But let me venture a prediction: the New Weird is going to crash and burn. The writers who came *into* the movement already formed, like China Miéville and Jeff Vandermeer, are going to survive and continue to prosper. Obvious talents like Kelly Link and Holly Phillips will be fine. But a lot of the others are going to lose readership. The 'movement' will be over, and those who cannot tell emotionally engaging stories will no longer be able to sell their work. The style of cover art will shift radically, as it does periodically, in order to create a distance from what has gone before.

A little more about anthologies. I am finishing up another one, with Greenberg, for Pocket Books, called (at present) *Urban Werewolves*. The topic is something that requires no imagination from the publisher's sales force or from the buyers for the big bookstores, but those people seldom look *inside* the book. I find that you can still have a good deal of freedom and ambition inside such a book, as long as the material ostensibly stays on topic. The one narrative strategy that does not work in such a context is the 'Surprise! He's a werewolf!' story. This forces the writers to be more creative. I'm quite happy to have some really first-rate stories by Peter S. Beagle (a novelette), Gene Wolfe, Lisa Tuttle, Ian Watson, Holly Phillips, Holly Black, Carrie Vaughn, Gregory Frost, Tanith Lee, and many others.

[*brg* Please consider sending *Steam Engine Time* a review copy. I can't remember seeing your previous anthologies listed in Justin Ackroyd's *Slow Glass Catalogue*, so I must rely on you to point to sources for your books.*]

I continue to work toward *Darrell Schweitzer's Book of Good Stories*, but I admit that right now such a proposal would lack a viable marketing angle.

Can *Alternate Historical Vampire Cat Detectives* be more than a matter

of time?

On the subject of SF bestsellers (p. 16), this is a matter of baby boomer demographics. The literary establishment pretended SF didn't exist during the fifties and sixties, for the most part, and in those days (fortunately) paperbacks tended to stay in print for long periods of time. This meant that a whole generation of readers grew up on the Signet Heinleins and various editions of *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the paperbacks of the 'Foundation' trilogy, the Ace edition of *Dune*, etc. These books sold well and steadily, but 30,000 copies a year for 10 years (just to make up numbers) will not get you on the *NY Times* Bestseller List. But if you sell 300,000 copies in a month, you definitely will.

By the middle 1980s, most baby boomers were in their thirties. They could afford to buy new hardcovers. Thus, when *Foundation's Edge* came out from Doubleday, a large number of people bought it in hardcover all at once, and presto! a bestseller. This happened again with *Dune* sequels, 'Riverworld' novels, etc. It is a very similar phenomenon to the bestsellerdom of *The Silmarillion* or T. H. White's *The Book of Merlin*.

Unfortunately the baby boomer demographic has passed. Most books do not stay in print continuously anymore anyway, so it is no longer possible for that kind of a slow and steady build to yield a sudden payoff. I know how proud Tor was to get Orson Scott Card on the bestseller list: the first SF writer there in something like seventeen years. The downside of all this is that the field's corporate masters, now seeing that SF bestsellers are possible but not really understanding how they were achieved, now divides books up into 'bestsellers' and 'failed bestsellers'. Anything seen as a failed bestseller is flushed out of the system, which is why we have lost so much diversity in the past twenty years, and why so many things which used to be routine in mass-market paperback (a story collection by a midlist author, most reprints, an R. A. Lafferty or Avram Davidson book) would be unthinkable in today's publishing environment. It is why we have the phenomenon of the post-novelist, a writer (usually elderly) still active, still writing well, but unable to sell novels anymore and restricted to short fiction. I will not name names among living writers, lest my comments become self-fulfilling, but certainly Lloyd Biggle and Charles Harness were in that condition late in their careers. The publishers *knew* how well a book by one of these writers would sell. They knew these writers could not be made into bestsellers. Therefore they were eliminated.

In many ways we had a lot more freedom back about 1970, when any book with an SF cover sold about as well as any other book with an SF cover, and it didn't much matter what was in them. Of course this led to a lot of sloppy writing and bad books, but it also led to a lot of quirky stuff that is no longer possible outside of the small press.

16 July 2008

SIMON BROWN
somewhere in Thailand

Thank you for sending the May 2008 issue of *Steam Engine Time*. I was a little mystified why a correspondent as slack as me would warrant a

copy, but reading through it came with some surprise upon Gillian Polack's review of four of my novels.

As an author, the temptation with such articles is to accept readily all the nice things written about you and ignore the rest. Of course, it's the worst thing you can do, because you risk falling into the trap of believing your own image of yourself as a brilliant and even mercurial writer and never listening to saner, more objective voices that in the long run can do you the most good.

By the end of Gillian's piece, mostly I was flattered that anyone would spend that much time *thinking* about my books. It's a writer's dearest wish that every reader spend hours contemplating what they have written, but when it actually happens it always comes as something of a shock. More importantly, Gillian raises some interesting points. I don't always agree with her, but therein lays the opportunity for some self-examination.

16 July 2008

PS: We're moving in a few days to live in Thailand for about four years (my wife got a job there as a teacher); this email address will still be operating, but I'm afraid I won't have much time to do anything except packing, signing forms, getting inoculated, moving and then unpacking and settling into a new life for a few weeks to come.

DAVID RUSSELL
196 Russell Street, Dennington VIC 3280

[Artwork submitted for *SET* 9:] The 'Siege Engine Time Warlord' cartoon is the one I was hoping you'd run as a back cover for *Steam Engine Time* 9, primarily because, having spent time drawing such a detailed 'toon, I'd have hated to see it reduced in size so that the details couldn't be seen.

It occurs to me that instead of being greedy and asking for a second back cover, I could simply ask that you not reduce the 'toon in size, when/if you use it as an interior illo, thereby freeing up the back cover for the twice-bumped artwork of Stephen Campbell to feature more prominently.

In some websites on the net they have thumbnail versions of pictures that at a click of a mouse button you can enlarge. Why not do this for the electronic version of your zine and keep the artists happy?

[*brg* The e-version of *SET* is not a website, i.e. it's not written in HTML — that is, a set of nested files designed for interactivity — but is a PDF — a file suitable for downloading and printing. While looking at *SET* on efanzines.com, all the reader needs to do is to go to the 'View' menu in Adobe Acrobat and 'Zoom In' for a better view of any piece of art.*]

[*SET* 8:] Thank you for sending me *SET* 8 and for using the artwork I've sent. There's a slight problem that probably only Sheryl Birkhead and I noticed, since we're the ones mistakenly credited with work the other has sent in. The corrected web version of *SET* should read: 'Illustrations, Sheryl Birkhead: 19, 24, 28; David L. Russell: 11, 15; Tom Sutton: 22'.

Who is this Tom Sutton, I hear you ask? He's the person who drew the lamp that you ran on page 22. I saw an interview with him in *The Comics Journal* conducted by Gary Groth, and on page 99 of the February 2001 (No 230) issue, there was an illustration featuring the lamp for a visual adaptation of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* by Tom Sutton; there was also a human-sized cockroach lying on its back in a bed.

The illustration was in black and white in *TCJ*. When I copied the lamp, I used colour to reproduce it, using metallic Pentel Hybrid roller pens to make the image stand out from the buff-coloured envelope I put it on. When you cut the Sutton lamp off the envelope to scan it on your computer you neglected to include the '© Tom Sutton' that ran to the left of the scanned lamp, I guess for reasons for space.

I'm usually pretty careful about crediting artists when I reproduce their work (to keep my hand in or to work out how they achieved a particular effect, or simply to make an envelope less boring for its recipient). I offer as proof of this the 'When Literary Panels Turn Ugly' cartoon I drew for *SET* 8. It features a T-shirt design, partially seen in the 'toon, that is credited to its creator Jim Mueller, admittedly in writing so small it almost requires a magnifying glass to read, but hey, when I drew the 'toon it was much bigger. You didn't reproduce 'Literary Panels' in the size it was submitted to you — which provides a nice segue to comment on Janine's seeming editorial stance on graphics: 'You vill keep 'zem small.' Aaaargh! No!! Hissy-fit conniption-fit draw 'em to fit.

Sometimes a fan artist likes to use a bit of space to help get a highly detailed, elegant, sophisticated idea across to the more literary fans, who doubtless as a show of solidarity with their artistic brethren will limit themselves to only two column lengths worth of words in their future articles and locs in *Steam Engine Time*.

I've drawn a cartoon for possible inclusion in the next issue, which I've limited to only 52 mm width — which is exactly how wide one of your columns is in the print edition of your fanzine. I had to get a ruler to measure the width to make sure it'd pass the strict teensy tiny artwork decree. Sigh ... the lengths I go to get my artwork seen.

Conduct a quick Q&A with your readers to see how many of them have magnifying glasses in their possessions, just so we artistic types know how detailed we can be in our work.

It was lovely to get some compliments for the work I've done in previous issues from Brad W. Foster and Chris Garcia.

I've enjoyed Mr Foster's work in *Thyme*, *Ethel the Aardvark* and *File 770*, as well as *Holier Than Thou*, for years. I saw a copy of his 1988 *Elegant Ladies*, Vol. 1 for sale in Minotaur Books back when it was located in Bourke Street in Melbourne. I paid cash for it (and when you mostly get contributor's copies of fanzines with an artist's work in many of them, paying cash is the highest compliment!), and I doubt there's been a six-month period gone by during the years since that I haven't taken it down from its place on my reference shelf to marvel at the complex and extraordinary detail he put into those pictures.

So, if Mr Foster would like some of my work for a project he's putting together, I of course will happily send some, when or he decides to begin it.

George Zebrowski's Campbell Conference talk was the second most depressing thing in *SET* 8. (The most depressing thing was the 'Draw small' edict.) I expect other letters of comment will concentrate mainly on the article and the shabby way authors are treated. I'm not an author, so only as a reader have I been 'unallowed' to read the best that a comfortably well-off phalanx of writers would have produced in an alternate world where publishing conglomerates treated writers fairly.

I agree with Janine about having the locs at the front of the zine, because I find they jog my memory of what the previous issue was about.

If Eric Lindsay gets 111 more addresses on his computer to add to the 555 he's already got, I reckon a portal to hell will open up and swallow both Eric and his computer. I'm fairly sure I'm one of the 66 who don't have an email address with Eric, but who nevertheless used to get *Gegenschein* in paper form when he produced it that way.

Many thanks to Thomas Bull for being so generous with his hard-earned money and financing *SET*s 6 and 7. Fandom, I'm sure, is grateful.

11 August 2008

[*brg* Thanks for your contributions to this issue. I've tried to scan them as carefully as possible.

I suspect that Jan's reply would be much the same as mine: our

first obligation is to the shape of the fanzine as a whole. Everything has to fit. There is no way we can devote large spaces to a piece of filler art unless some large space opens up for it. Articles and letters also have to become parts of the whole. I suggest saving your highly detailed art for exhibition, and developing a much less detailed style, based on the flow of lines — as can be seen in most magazine or newspaper cartoons. As for cover art: I must admit Dick Jenssen (Ditmar) has the front cover for as long as he wants it. Back cover art should be drawn in portrait proportions (longer than wider) to fit the space available.*]

GIAN PAOLO COSSATO
Cannaregio 3825, Calle Fontana, 30121-Venezia, Italy

I think I owe you at least three answers and corresponding apologies. So I will make it long. I do not seem to realise how fast the time goes by (but my 'Might drop you a line in one or two years' time' got me covered, I surmise). And my monthly visits to the hospital for the ailments already described make me even more forgetful.

I was ushered onto the world in May 1942 in time to enjoy the twilight of fascism and its consequences. I have vague memories that my house used to accommodate first German officers, then English and Americans, not to mention the refugees from the nearby Istria escaping Tito's armies. At the time my house was bigger that the one I live in now (same address but half the size) and the law (of whoever was in charge at various times) required to put it at everybody disposal (for free, of course). In 1946 my father was forced to sell half of it to repair the remaining, which had been half reduced into a pitiful condition, just like after a stampede. Sad times. But there is a small bright thing which has remained sculpted in my mind. A few days after the liberation, my father took me to what is now known as 'the Bridge of Liberty' (Ponte della Libertà). A New Zealand brigade had just arrived with tanks or jeeps (not sure; I was three) and one of the soldiers gave me a bar of chocolate (was it really chocolate?). Today I still remember the taste of that bar (the reason I like chocolate so much?).

It is nice to discover, going through the issues of *Steam Engine Time*, that some people I have known long ago are still active ('alive' would not have been delicate, I guess). I remember a 'spaghettata' (a giant spaghetti party) in Billy Pettit's house in 1966 or 1967. Being the only Italian there, I was asked to cook the spaghetti and the tomato juice needed as a worthy companion. My task was facilitated by an Australian girl (part of the very numerous company), whose grandparents were Italians, and therefore had some intimate knowledge of the dish in question. It was a success and had the blessing of two authors that frequently showed up for such events: Ken Bulmer and Ted Tubb.

I agree with Billy Pettit's observations about hard drives and recording media in general. One of my Lacie (a 250 gig) went dead just few weeks ago after four years, more or less, of faithful service. All data were already backed up but it makes you wonder. A while ago I had found an article in a specialised magazine in which Lacie hards were not to be considered reliable as longtime storage. I do not know about DVD duration, but at least you can make many copies at acceptable cost (double layers especially). And it seems that Pioneer has a 500 gig Blu-ray (20 layers) in the making.

Franz Rottensteiner: More than three decades have gone by since I met him for the last time shy of one. In Budapest in 1972 we were both invited by the Hungarian government in relation to the first Eurocon in Trieste. That's were I met my future wife. We have a store full of books (mostly fantasy and science fiction), which we already sell through E-bay as 'Libreriasolaris'. We do not sell DVDs because of a rather complex and costly paperwork required on items with VAT sold outside Italy. Even inside the EU if you have a VAT code. Inside the EU, a private person has not that problem.

I appreciate the hard copy of your magazines, but should it be of some small advantage feel free not to send them. Just notify me when they become available on line.

My daughter has finally graduated with a resounding 110 *cum laude*. It helps but she had plenty of work even without it. And she has also completed the specialised course for English/Hungarian at the Budapest University. Now she's planning to wrap up another one at the Antwerpen University (which she partly did) for Dutch to English to Italian to Hungarian or a mixture of them. I tend to get confused. She speaks Swedish, but not professionally, and manages some German, which she studied while working in Berlin.

Here, as in the rest of the globe, inflation, stagnation, recession or any

Gian Paolo Cossato's LibrariaSolaris, Venizia

If ever you are visiting Venizia (Venice), and want to find a bookshop or DVD shop in a picturesque spot by a canal, look for Gian Paolo Cossato's LibrariaSolaris shop in the Canneragio. (**Top:** two views of the exterior; **bottom left:** the nearby canal; and **bottom right:** interior of the shop.)

other '-ion' for that matter are rampant. People have very little money to spend. Italy is particularly hit because of our dependence on oil. Nuclear was dropped many years ago after a referendum in the emotional wake of Chernobyl. But now there is some rethinking. We buy energy from France, nuclear, of course. They have 49 or 50 reactors, and some are sitting just across the Italian border, making laughable our decision to ban them for fear of what might happen. And Switzerland and Slovenia have also reactors a few kilometres away. Besides, the reactors in Slovenia have been built with the help of Italian firms that could not build them in Italy. Narrowing it all down to the book trade, there is an average decrease in sales between 40 and 50 per cent. Even the big chains are getting the jitters. As for alternative energies, in my country when you propose to a local community to exploit the wind and build accordingly, the answer is 'nice, but not here; it spoils the landscape', an answer that more often than not is given by the representative of Verdi, the Green Party. It might be the reason why they disappeared completely from parliament during the recent election along with the extreme left, but are still present in the local administrations (perhaps not for long).

[*brg* Total book sales in Australia increased by 7 per cent last year, and have risen each year for some time, despite the GST (= VAT) burden placed on books for the first time in 2001. Australian book distributors receive a sort of protection in current law, a protection that is now threatened yet again by a parliamentary committee. However, most people I know buy most of their overseas books on Amazon.com, so Australian bookshops must be doing something right. Melbourne's independent bookshops, such as Readings and Brunswick Street Bookstore, keep their customers, despite competition from the book chains and Amazon..*]

You might have heard a lot about Berlusconi (the actual head of our government), and some of the things are true. But if you take the rubbish problem that was festering in Naples and surrounding region for more than a decade reported by practically every single paper and magazine around the world, it must be recognised that in two months he solved it. The previous Prodi government, a ragtag coalition of centre-left, extreme left and green, had not been able to solve it because of the continuous bickering among them and, to top it all, the local regional administration was made of the same parties as the Prodi government. Any proposal to use strength was regularly defeated by the extreme left and the greens, which considered it a return to fascism (be it to expand official landfill or build waste disposal-producing energy). This gave to the 'camorra', the local mafia, ample room the carry out their business without interference, creating unofficial landfill where everything went in without any control at the cost they decided. Berlusconi's coalition, being of a more compact nature and having ample margins in term of numbers, decided to use the army. The landfill became military zones and so the camorra, at least in that area, could no longer have the upper hand. Incinerators are finally going to be built (mind you, they exist in most parts of Italy) under army supervision.

Recently myself and some of my remaining relatives (a dwindling number, unfortunately) have been working on a project consisting in putting together al available records of our families and transferring it all on CD or DVD, starting with the family tree. We have managed to go back to 1870 with original documents (wills, burial sites, property acts, etc.), lots of pictures, letters and postcards. It includes a particularly interesting epistolary between members of our families, who in 1917–18 had to leave Venice for fear of an Austrian invasion and bombing. Imagine a bombing done by plane at that time, but so be it: it was a scary novelty. Part of the family went to the northern cities of Ferrara and Cremona, part to Naples in the south. This forced them to communicate with a certain regularity. I found the collection among my mother's papers, and have scanned it and distributed to the family. A cousin of mine is OCRing the content. It has to be done with patience. What comes out is a slice of the life during the First World War.

Another set of letters concerns an uncle of mine who spend five years as a civilian prisoner in Tanganyika (he had a shop of radio material in Addis Ababa, was captured by the British and ended up there), who almost lost one eye when he developed a fever. This is enriched by drawings of the prison camp done by one of his inmates, drawings that he managed to smuggle out.

About the picture I first sent you. The bookshop does not appear in it, perhaps because, seen from outside, it does not look that great. The shop is just behind the kiosk. This time I have enclosed the picture of it and what you see from the door. The trouble is that when you take of photo of Venice all the ugly details tend to stand out more than they would should you cast just a casual glance. The rather cavernous photo with shelves full of books chaotically stashed is part of our 200 square

meters store (not connected with the shop) — what we put on E-bay, and probably what you would be eager to explore should they be in English.

A last note about my endeavours. I have a book who belonged to my father's brother, a mining engineer who died in 1928 because of pumice poisoning. He was working side by side with the miners under his supervision. Back to the book: a history of aviation published in 1910, 286 pages with drawing and pictures of all the flights that took place till that date. There are also the names of the aviators who went into the air. I have started to scan and OCR it. I do not think there are many copies around, and the author is rather famous in its own way: Francesco Savorgnan di Brazzà. Does Brazzaville (Congo) ring a bell? He founded it and apparently there should still be a statue there to honor his memory.

18 August 2008


GLI AEROPLANI DI POMPEIANO PINAUD 33

Fig. 47. Valerio Pinaud sul suo biplano.

Fig. 48. Aeroplano Pinaud.

PS: I have belatedly realised the Francesco Savorgnan di Brazzà is not the founder of Brazzaville. The founder is Pietro, an older relative. Less glamour, but the book and its author stand all the same.

JERRY KAUFMAN
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Seattle WA 98125

Thanks very much for sending *Steam Engine Time* 8 and some apazines. I enjoyed reading them, but the thing that made the biggest impression was the letter from Barry Gillam. I haven't seen nor heard about him for many years. I was for years in the 1970s a member of CAPRA, the Cinema Amateur Press Association, and Barry was another. His zine there, *Annie Laurie Starr*, taught me as much about the art of film as any of my college courses. I think he also wrote some pretty interesting things in sf fanzines, but the CAPRA material's what's stuck with me. Hail, Barry.

I hadn't realised you were in CAPRA at the same time I was — if you were, I've entirely forgotten.

17 August 2008

[*brg* Tim Marion, the shyest New York fan of them all, found Barry Gillam in the phone book and arranged a lunch with him, which led to Barry getting in touch with me. Not even Moshe Feder was able to do that, although Moshe tried in 1999. Not that Barry wants to rejoin fandom, or even write much about anything. A pity. I'm sure he's just as brilliant as ever, but he seems pleased enough to catch good movies whenever he can. He used to do magnificent reviews for *SFC*. Like you, I really enjoyed his contributions to CAPRA.*]

With all the best intentions in the world, we have not yet gotten around to creating a PDF version of the most recent *Littlebrook*. We might even have another paper issue out before we do. (All major fannish efforts have come to a stop, because we're dealing my mother's worsening health and increased need for care — we're trying to find either a nursing home, or what's called here an 'adult family home', for her remaining time.)

18 August 2008

GREG PICKERSGILL
3 Bethany Row, Narberth Road, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire SA61 2XG, Wales

I was thinking of *Steam Engine Time* just now while tracing the route that one might have been able to take between Haverfordwest and Brecon before someone decided railways were a bad thing. That was clever of them, wasn't it.

brg and *SET* received safe and well and appreciated here some time back, momentarily set aside while I grappled with the consequences of having a Notifiable Disease. Thank you, of course, for them; I do appreciate the printed copies a great deal and will indeed do something

to compensate you. Do you or any of your close cronies locally have anything so 21stC as a Paypal account, I wonder?

SET is always a pleasure, as it is so much fun to see grown-ups talking about science fiction as if it mattered. Yes. I am indeed aware that there are websites that do the same, but you know we have our funny little ways here and cleave to such as *SET* to remind us why and how science fiction has been is and may yet be an important part in our lives. I can't say I have read the lead article by Zebrowski yet, for the simple matter that I don't know that much about him other than he wrote some not very good books a long time ago and I wonder whether his opinion about anything is interesting. But then logic tells me that if you, brg, thought this was good enough to print, then it obviously must have some heat and light within. I will deliberately leave the issue on the boxes of *F&SF* in the corridor outside the kitchen. (That's a good thing, by the way. It joins copies of *New Scientist* and *Computer Shopper*.)

[*brg* George Zebrowski speaks for himself very well, as you will discover from the articles in this issue of *SET*. He's a novelist and anthologist, as well as a polemicist. We've been corresponding since the early 1970s, because of our mutual interest in the work and opinions of Stanislaw Lem, and we both like a lot of other writers. George's *Synergy* anthologies included work from such authors as Brian Aldiss, Ian Watson, James Morrow, Charles Harness, Rudy Rucker, Howard Waldrop, Marc Laidlaw, James Tiptree Jr, Paul Di Filippo and Pamela Sargent.*]

And just to set your minds at rest (because I Know You Care) my Notifiable Disease was merely (hah!, how little that conveys of the pain and suffering!) an infestation of campyllobacter, contracted no doubt because of eating corned beef sandwiches while cutting up chickens. I have since improved my food hygiene regime, as once was enough, thank you. After diagnosis and being informed of my ND status I was rather dreading an invasion of public health police in bunny-suits who would probably have evicted us on the grounds that the house was not suitable for human habitation, but instead all I got was a nice telephone conversation with a woman from the department who told me to wash my hands more often. Quite sweet really.

20 August 2008

RAY WOOD
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Thanks for the packet of magazines. Like many of your readers, I too prefer them on paper. I especially prefer them when I consider how many websites that I knew more than a decade ago have since disappeared, and I can no longer get at their contents. Having paper copies on my bookshelves at least guarantees me permanent access to them. Digital is far too ephemeral a medium compared with paper.

I was surprised at the many comments on 'Imagination and Science Fiction', and enjoyed reading them all. I don't claim to be an expert on SF, as your readers probably all are, and so it's great to be corrected by people with a vastly greater SF expertise than mine.

But there are two points of fact I'd like to comment on.

1. **Damien Broderick** says:

> In 1948, in Broken Hill, the twelve-year-old Ray 'discovered *Astounding*', and then *Galaxy* when it started a couple of years later. How the hell did he manage this trick?

And he continues about his difficulties in finding those magazines in Melbourne.

I'm sorry; I didn't give enough detail. I lived in Broken Hill until my family moved to Adelaide at the start of 1947. So I discovered *Astounding* in Adelaide, not Broken Hill. I saw the magazines at a friend's home, and borrowed them (he later gave them all to me). They were the British editions.

Shortly after, I found that what we used to call a 'corner shop', on my bike route home from school along the Kingswood tram line through Parkside, sold them new. So I asked the family that owned it to put one aside for me for over a decade after that.

I also found a bookstall in the Adelaide Arcade, running between the then Rundle Street (now Rundle Mall) and Grenfell Street, that sold second-hand copies of *Astounding*, and I rapidly bought back issues from there as well. (I think that the bookstall moved around within the Arcade a couple of times through those years.) I did buy issues of *Astounding* at

that Arcade bookstall dated as early as March 1933 and up to May 1940, but they were all original US editions.

I bought back copies of *Unknown* too, both earlier US editions and later British editions. I didn't buy them new, though, since it'd ceased publication several years before. But back then I did buy new the British editions of the SF magazines *Super Science Stories*, *Startling Stories*, *Planet Stories*, and *Thrilling Wonder*.

I've just examined my 1940s and 1950s copies of *Astounding*, and find that all the way back to the August 1940 issue they are British editions on which the British price was overprinted with a white roundel marked 'Price in Australia', and later 'Price in Australia and New Zealand'. The *Super Science Stories*, *Startling Stories*, *Planet Stories*, and *Thrilling Wonder* magazines also have similar overprinted Australian prices (all 1/6, which would be 15 cents today), except that they were in triangles.

Those *Thrilling Wonder* price triangles, however, make me wonder if they were after all added later on, since they're not solids like the others, but are transparent. And the cover art is all that's underneath them, not a British price at all.

That the British editions of those SF magazines were imported into Australia for up to two decades, and that they were either overprinted with Australian prices or produced that way in England in a special print run, certainly suggests that they were widely available new, and all around Australia, from the early 1940s.

Of course I know nothing about the availability of SF magazines in Melbourne in Damien's time. All that I can say is that I never had any difficulty buying those magazines in Adelaide. It was the same with *Galaxy*, which came out in a British edition, appearing at the start of that magazine's life in that same corner shop where I bought *Astounding*. The people there showed a copy to me, and asked me if I wanted them to put it aside for me as well. Which I did.

I imagine that the reason we started getting the British edition of *Astounding* in Australia in 1940 was to do with the war. The British then desperately needed to spend all that they could on munitions from the US, and were hardly likely to spend it on US science fiction magazines. So it would have made sense for them to publish their own edition instead.

And I suppose that once there was a British edition, the reason why we in Australia could buy only that, and not the original American edition, right up to the early 1960s, is explained by the agreement then in place that the US had the right to the North American publishing market, and Britain to the British Empire market. Neither would publish books and magazines in the other's region in competition. It meant that as long as the British kept sending their edition of *Astounding* to Australia, the US wouldn't send their own. (I forget the name of that trade agreement.)

These British editions of *Astounding* were much briefer than the American, so that many stories were left out. And they usually came out only every second month or so until the very early 1950s.

This would have been because of the severe paper rationing in the UK during the war and for quite a while after it, while Britain was still struggling to recover.

Though I have no idea if you could get *Astounding* in Broken Hill when I lived there, I'd be surprised if you couldn't have. The Broken Hill mines were world leaders in mining and smelting technology. Broken Hill's Technical College, even much earlier than my childhood, was a world-famous institution, especially for mining engineering, metallurgy, and so forth. There were American engineers working in Broken Hill from very early times. (The American engineer and future US President, Herbert Hoover, spent time studying mining in Broken Hill.) How often has *Astounding* been described as a 'magazine for retired engineers'? So I'm sure that there would have been many technically trained people in Broken Hill who'd have made certain that they got their *Astounding*, and that there would have been enough of a demand that Broken Hill newsagencies would have stocked it. Broken Hill had a population of around 30,000 from quite early (34,757 in 1915; 31,351 in 1954; 29,000 to 30,000 in my time there).

Damien also points out that there were earlier James Blish *Cities in Flight* stories, 'Okie', and 'Bindlestiff'. But because I got only the British editions of *Astounding*, and also have a few gaps in my collection of that time, I didn't see them, and never have. (My collection is complete up to today from only June 1952 onward; the few gaps are earlier than that.) But I did read another early *Cities in Flight* story, 'Bridge', about the invention of the spindizzy. However, that was very parochial; it was set only inside our solar system, and therefore remote from the setting of 'Earthman,

Come Home'.

As I did say in my article, 'I've never been a fan of SF, nor have I ever regarded myself as a fan, nor have I ever attended any SF conventions'. I don't claim to be any expert on SF at all. I am merely someone who read a lot of SF between 1948 and the mid 1960s, as I also said. And I was trying to give from an outsider's point of view one reason why SF came to disappoint me in the end.

I was interested that Damien mentions the Nova SF Novels paperback of *The Weapon Shops of Isher*; I still have my copy of that publication.

2. **Tim Marion** says:

> Ray makes yet another mistake when he insists that 'fans' are 'fanatics' and are therefore unreasonable (although I'm sure he is being a bit tongue-in-cheek there). 'Fan' can also stand for 'fancier', which is a much more reasonable appellation.

Yeah, sure, 'tongue-in-cheek' is right. But I wasn't saying that fans are 'unreasonable'; I was merely noting the word 'unreasoning' in the *Macquarie* definition. However, I was not inventing an etymology for the word 'fan', but quoting the one that you'll find in dictionaries. My copy of the *SOED* says simply: 'Fan ... orig. U.S. 1889...[abbrev. of FANATIC]'. My copy of *The Macquarie Dictionary* says: 'Fan... [short for FANATIC]'. However, my copy of *Webster's* isn't so blunt: 'Fan... [prob. short for fanatic].' So Tim could take refuge in that 'probably'.

29 August 2008

DOUG BARBOUR
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James Doig took us back to a time (and temperament) it's difficult to comprehend any more. Stapledon's *Sirius* seems such an ordinary fiction now, so lacking in any sexual scandal, in the midst of even YA fiction that goes so much further, while its true scandal remains beyond or above the kinds of minds that are out to censor anyway (a Sarah Palin type would want to censor it without really understanding why it would bother her; but then she'd probably be against good science or science-fictional writing because it would undermine what she knows to be true, the Bible literally interpreted).

I have never quite understood why so many were turned off by the 'experiments' of the sixties, but I can accept that Sturgeon's Law applied there, too. It seems to me that the general level of writing in the best contemporary SF is way beyond what it used to be. I've been reading some well-thought-of fiction recently, and what struck me was that, in terms of style and depth, it was no 'better' (however we define such a term) than the best SF&F I'm reading. I tend to get more of the 'real' I want in fiction in the latter a lot of the time. Moreover, in so-called literary fiction, it's the novels and stories that break with straight realism in some way or another that tend to excite my admiration and delight. I am not only occasionally re-reading works I still love, but also reading a lot of new work in all fields, including poetry. In retirement, I just don't have to read 'theory' unless I want to, so I can indulge in Walter Benjamin, whose beautiful thinking does translate, but can ignore a lot of other stuff.

Given the chapters of theses I have to read this week, and the ongoing reading of many manuscripts, I'm really busy, and can't keep up with all the reading I might otherwise do. As you can see from the Stephenson review I've attached to this letter, I've just been enjoying his *Anathem*.

Material, the most recent 'Culture' novel by Iain M. Banks, is also a fine one, and I have now completed the 'Farthing' trilogy by Jo Walton, which is a very fine and deliberately pertinent alternate history.

Lots of good stuff out there, as far as I'm concerned, even if many publishers seem to want to publish almost nothing but vampire and werewolf romances (although I actually really like good vampire fiction, such as Barbara Hambly's *Renfield, Slave of Dracula*, a sly reimagining of the original).

5 November 2008

TOM WHALEN
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Many thanks for *SET* 8, which I received in July when I was paying tribute to Disch by going back to *The Genocides*, *The Puppies of Terra*, *Camp Concentration*, *334* and *The Word of God*. *334* held up the best for me — stands in as a great portrait of NYC in the early seventies.

I was going to write something up, but then to honor another of the freshly dead, I went back to Algis Budrys's *The Falling Torch*, *Rogue Moon* (*The Death Machine*), *Michaelmas* and *Hard Landing*. And then David Foster Wallace killed himself, and two of my mentors died — George Garrett and James Crumley — and then we were in the Alps for a week.

A happy marriage to see featured in the same issue an article on Stapledon and one by George Zebrowski. GZ's account of the state of things is, for all intents, flawless. I was pleased with his praise of Stanley G. Weinbaum, as I have been for years with his support of Charles L. Harness.

October 2008

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Brad Foster; **John Hertz** (his note to *SET* 7, written on the back of an envelope containing issues of his superb little fanzine *Vanamonde*, was lost in the pile for awhile: 'Glad to see applause for Dickens' masterpiece *Bleak House*, from which we can learn much'; of *SET* 8, John notes that the Ditmar cover is 'particularly handsome'; and that 'Plummer and Kaufman both note how our profuse awards are largely for SF that promotes something: the bane of art'); **Paul Anderson**; **Helena Binns** ('I was able to look at the electronic version of *SET* 8 after letting my Adobe Acrobat Reader upgrade itself from 6 to 6.03 and 6.04'); **Ned Brooks** ('Odd that we never actually met in 1975. [At Aussiecon 1] I was probably hanging out mostly with Ken Ozanne and Eric Lindsay and Keith Curtis. And Al Fitzpatrick — I get frequent e-mails from him'); **Thomas Bull** ('That's quite an article from George Zebrowski. I'm glad you arranged for it to precede the letters of comment'); **Kirsty Elliott**; **Tom Feller**; **Chris Garcia** ('I met Steve and Sue Francis this weekend and got to hear about their DUFF trip to Australia'); **Brian Hades** ('I've emailed Bill Congreve [at MirrorDanse Books] and he is interested in looking at Adrian Bedford's next manuscript (*Time Machines Repaired While-U-Wait*) with the possibility of a co-publishing deal. Thank you for the introduction, and I'll let you know how things progress'); **Howard Hendrix**; **Dick Jenssen (Ditmar)** (who sent a whole raft of corrections to the draft version of the electronic version of *SET* 8; as far as possible, they were taken into the final version, and the same corrections incorporated in the print version); **Carol Kewley** (who is offering to contribute artwork); **Paul Kincaid** ('Has the copy of my book arrived? I know Roger was sending some to you. I'll be interested to hear your comments'; yes, Paul, but I wouldn't have known about your book without an email from **Mark Plummer**. I did have to pay $A50 for it; a review will appear soon); **Alisa Krasnostein** (still seeking a reviewer of *SET* 8 for the AsIf website); **Remy Lechevalier**; **Mark Linneman**; **Mariann McNamara**; **Gillian Polack** ('I completely forgot [that during Conflux] I was going to offer you a walk around the bits of the Australian National University that Paul Linebarger would have known. What we need is someone who is a good photographer and then I walk with them and show them which buildings are old enough for him to recognise' — next time, Gillian, next time); **Barbara Roden** ('Christopher and I are the proprietors of Ash-Tree Press, in addition to running the Ghost Story Society and editing its journal, *All Hallows*. I also do some writing in my spare time (I will have my little joke!), and have a collection of supernatural/weird fiction out from Prime Books next fall)'; **Trish Smyth**; **Taral Wayne** (who will be Fan GoH at next year's world convention in Montreal; see Taral's advertisement in this issue: 'I've had to put the price for the Glicksohn disk up to $20 US or Canadian. The greenback fell so much relative to the loonie that I couldn't take the hit. The offer to donate a buck each to TAFF is expired as well. I'll be sending all of about $18 to TAFF any day now'); **Frank Weissenborn** (who offered me a DVD of Neil Young's recent movie *Heart of Gold*, but of course I'd bought it already; which led to an email exchange about Neil Young CDs and films; Frank also promised to 'respond to George Zebrowski', and after reading the reviews in *SET* 8 will try to find Simon Brown's *Winter* and Dan Simmons' *The Terror*; also 'I have just read Judith Buckrich's George Turner bio; we must get together to talk about George; he's worth it'); and **Casey Wolf** ('I have hopes of releasing a book of short stories this fall'; of *SET* 8 she writes: 'What a scrumptious cover, and loads of lovely inside; thanks'; her book *Strange Creatures and Other Stories* (Wattle & Daub Books) has arrived recently.)

Review articles

Geoff Ryman's realities

Gillian Polack

The Warrior Who Carried Life
St Martin's Press; 1994 (first publication of novella: 1985)

The Child Garden
Gollancz SF Masterworks No 61; 0-575-07690-9; 2005 (first published 1989); 389 pp.

'Was . . .'
Gollancz SF Masterworks No 43; 0-575-07669-0; 2005 (first published 1992); 456 pp.

When we read fiction, we want to be caught up inside the story and see the people as real. We want to feel suspense and emotion. Writers use a vast array of techniques to achieve all this. Some of those techniques appear to be coolly and clinically applied, and some appear in a novel almost organically: that moment when readers feel that writing technique has met writing capacity to carry emotion.

Some writers use more emotive material to carry the reader over that threshold and rely less on pure technique. Some seem unconcerned with the emotional side and use an Asimovian display of pyrotechnics to carry the reader along. Whichever the method, the effect sought is the experience of the new and the wondrous.

Ryman challenges such assumptions by pushing them just a little further and turning tales into fables.

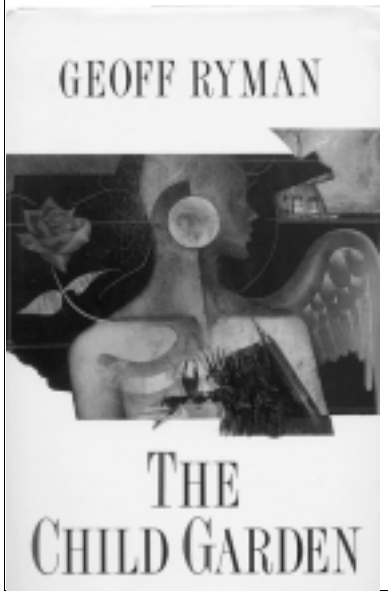
The treatment of the development of learning and its effects on society in ***A Child Garden***, for instance, makes an intelligent reader stop and think about the nature of education and where it actually comes from. So Ryman is interested in new ideas.

He also uses purely emotive themes to trap us into the conflict and drama of the piece: love, exclusion, lust, children, parental hate. His novels don't need some further bridge to carry that enthusiasm or sadness or excitement to the reader when he is writing at his best: the sophistication of his use of the emotive, the technical and the novel means that his worlds are very much alive. Even when his world building is incomplete (as with his treatment of the nineteenth-century American education system in *'Was ...'*), his edifices do not collapse. This is why Ryman is one of the more extraordinary writers currently working.

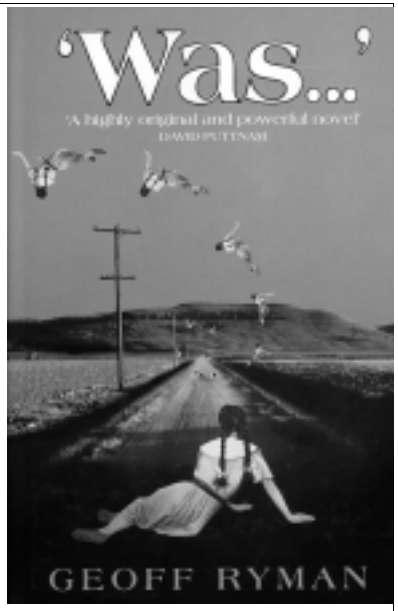
From the very first pages of *A Child Garden*, I was caught up in his narrative. Milena has a marvellous universal quality. As the book progresses, it becomes obvious that the very quality that makes Milena resemble us, unwilling to reduce her individuality, places her apart in her own society. This takes the reader, with Milena, into the unknown. Ryman's narrative is extraordinarily convincing. He immediately makes one want to barrack for Milena's individuality and the different forms it takes, as at the opening of the novel, when we learn that she can boil cutlery into a strange warped shapes to make it pristine, before we understood why she should fear viruses, although we know from the novel's earliest moments that Milena will not be a comfortable person to know. She resembles the annoying relative who always comes to dinner.

Likeability is un- important: Milena is one of us. This automatically makes the other characters into 'them', unless Milena herself identifies with them. So her friends become tolerable, and everyone she doesn't want to know remains out of our world. Therefore, in questioning Milena's beliefs and assumptions, we find ourselves questioning our own beliefs and assumptions, even those we have never previously considered. In this way Ryman draws us into accepting his views as normative, then taking us into an exploration beyond our comfort zones.

Ryman opens worlds. He leads us into a changed universe, and forces us to accept that its truths have an effect on how we lead our lives. One of the ways he does this is surprising. He gives us back a perception of children and teenagers. They are not, however, the children and teenagers we expect in fiction.



Many speculative fiction writers for adults either ignore people until they reach full adulthood, or simplify them, or turn them into narrative objects. Ryman writes each of his child characters as a separate person. He thinks in terms of whole lives, with the child as much a part of that life as the adult. He focuses on the obsessiveness and antisocial behaviour of some teens to draw out his wider themes. This is how I see Milena, as a universal who inhabits the particular.



In ***The Warrior Who Carried Life***, the main characters are also young, although this book does not set out to be a realistic narrative. Its setting, unlike that of *'Was . . .'*, for instance, shows not even the veneer of realism. From its beginning the book has a heightened sense of drama, giving the sense that the protagonist, Cara, is an actor in an allegory. Therefore Cara bears the hopes and fears of humankind rather than the specific hopes and fears of a teen girl. Ryman does not bring her down to ordinary size, but makes her narrative the core of the fable, part of the allegory.

'Was . . .' is almost entirely about patterns of life and the long-term changes that take place in human beings. None of the adults — including Dorothy and Judy Garland — seem to be full and complete characters until we know the complete pattern of their lives. Dorothy as an old woman, for instance, reflects the young Dorothy, and shows how she came to be who she was.

All three of the major players are literally players: an actor–musician, an actor, and a pure musician who has been despised and unrecognised. They are all, both literally and metaphorically, actors on the stage of life. Their childhoods are key parts of their resonating performances, moulding them and dictating their adult behaviour.

'Was . . .' has certain specific problems because of thoroughness of its method. I am not convinced that we need to follow Dorothy through all the foulnesses (drama became melodrama) that make her the person she becomes. The detailing of cruelty after cruelty became numbing rather than enlightening.

Ryman is more successful with his portrayal of the person who becomes Judy Garland. We see why a child turns to self-destructive behaviour, reasons that cannot necessarily be blamed on the parents (though Ryman does his share of blaming): Judy is the diametric opposite of Dorothy. Dorothy needs to be left alone and to fade away. She will take drastic measures to ensure that she doesn't attract positive attention. Judy needs that attention. Charisma needs food. This is the price of being

a player.

The fact that I can analyse Ryman's characters (not just his adult characters) in this way demonstrates the depth of Ryman's work. His interconnection of craft and cleverness and soul means that his main characters live independently of his creation, even when they are allegorical. That he is capable of doing this with children and teenagers is an important aspect of how he makes his worlds come to life.

His societies are complete, not comprised merely of the protagonist and his or her goals. Given how self-centred many of his characters are, this is an achievement. Ryman makes his protagonists the centre of his created worlds (even his America is a created world); by making his worlds self-centred and by making his tales depend so very much on the development of the lives of his protagonists, Ryman brings them to allegorical life, full of wider meanings. The world is bigger than the worlds described — he knows it and we know it — but his characters couldn't care less. This is why *'Was . . .'* and *The Child Garden* have more emotional depth than *The Warrior Who Carried Life*. By attaching us to a particular person and giving that person a complete childhood full of idiosyncrasies, Ryman makes us forget the limitations of the framework within which we are reading. He grows our reading, by shrinking it.

At some stage while reading each of these books, I found myself wondering why it was so important to me to think of Ryman as a speculative fiction writer. His narratives, in many ways, rise above genre limitations. It is important to claim him, for myself and for every other writer who says that genre is the place we write: the quality of our writing is only limited by our own abilities. I would like to think of speculative fiction writers as repre- sented by the best of us (literary fiction does this; why not us?) and Ryman is definitely among the best.

— Gillian Polack, 2005

Michael Moorcock's multiverse:

The Second Ether Trilogy

by Frank Weissenborn

Books by Michael Moorcock referred to in this article:

The Sleeping Sorceress: An Elric Novel (Futura Science Fantasy 0-704-31069-4; first published 1970; this paperback edition 1977. 160 pp.)

Blood: A Southern Fantasy (Millennium 1-85798-236-3; first published 1994; this paperback edition 1995; 273 pp.)

Fabulous Harbours (Millennium 1-85798-312-2; first published 1995; this paperback edition 1996; 228 pp.)

The War Amongst the Angels: An Autobiographical Story (Orion 0-75281-079-0; first published 1996; this paperback edition 1997; 301 pp.)

At fifteen Michael Moorcock was in Soho playing bass and banjo in skiffle groups that included Jet Harris, Peter Green and Charlie Watts.

By sixteen he was earning his living as a writer and editor.

In his twenties, his magazine *New Worlds* championed J. G. Ballard, M. John Harrison, James Sallis and many other remarkable writers of the so-called 'new wave'.

As guitarist and vocalist, he performed regularly with Hawkwind, worked with Robert Calvert, and recorded with his own band, The Deep Fix.

He has received several major literary prizes, including the *Guardian* Fiction Prize and the Nebula Award and a platinum disc.

A Londoner, spending parts of his year in Texas, Europe and Africa, he is increasingly involved with organisations dedicated to bringing health, education and economic self-sufficiency to people in the developing world[1] (Introductory blurb, Simon & Schuster).

Introduction

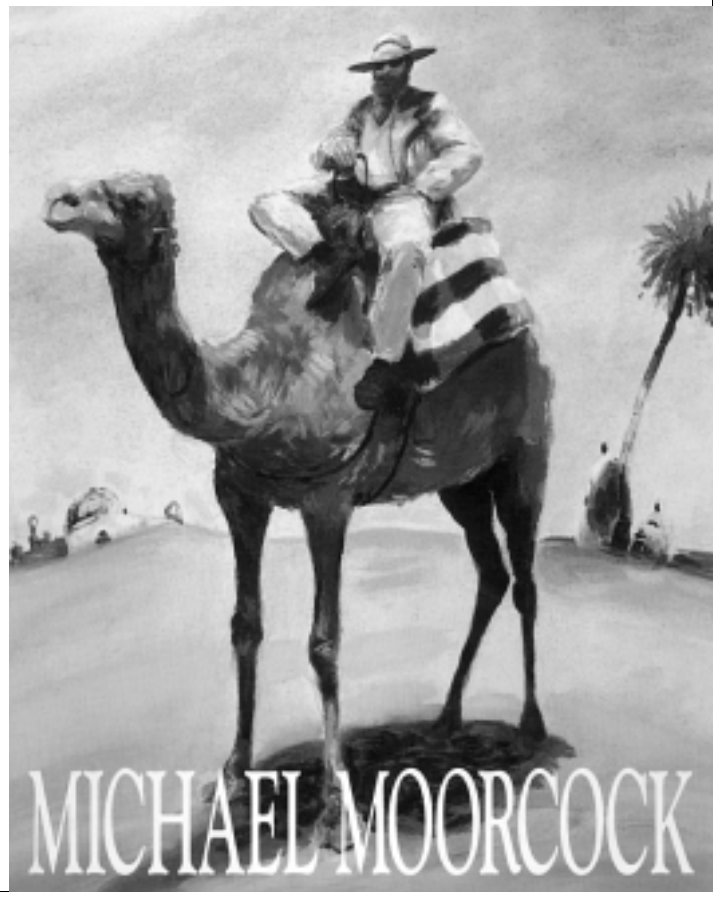
Born with a pen in a hand and an endless ream of paper in the other, Michael Moorcock has written a lot. And even this can be considered an understatement. A figure of over 200 books has been mentioned, but probably only because people have lost count. It seems it was his destiny to write.

In an author profile written for one of his earliest works, *Blades of Mars* (Moorcock, then writing under the pseudonym of Edward Powys Bradbury), it was stated that Moorcock was born in 1924,[2] spent some time in the Far East developing a strong interest in ancient Sanskrit literature, then was to have good fortune strike.

The demise of two elderly relatives in 1955 was to leave him with a private income, thus allowing him further travel to Europe, Africa and then America, and the freedom to write. His interests were revealed to fall under the genres of detection stories, westerns and weird thrillers, and soon enough he was come upon the profound revelation that he would probably never stop writing and was most likely to die with a pen in his hand.

Sadly, because of this statement by Moorcock, some cruelty has been directed at him by non-fans. They would wish his death via penmanship to have arrived sooner rather than later. This is totally unkind. There is no denying Moorcock's compulsion to write at all costs. He has a lot to say, and more than one way to say it.

We should give him his due. For over 50 years, he has remained an undeterrable experimental author — unafraid of critics, a master of reinvention and transmogrification, on any day liable to take on the aspects of a broad-shouldered, sword and sorcery hero suffering the pangs of an existentialist crises, or next, take on the role of a gender-bending albino mulatto, in the guise of Jerry Cornelius, with tendencies to over-indulge in chocolate chip cookies and Bell's Scotch whisky.



Where did it begin for me?

I was to discover Michael Moorcock in 1977, found in a remainder bin of a Perth book store. The book — purchased for a dollar — was a Quartet Books reprint of *The Sleeping Sorceress*, the third instalment, or near to third, or maybe the fourth, depending on who you ask — Moorcock

himself probably unawares — of the 'Elric of Melibone' sword and sorcery fantasy. It begins:

> In the sky, a cold moon, cloaked in clouds, sent down faint light that fell upon a sullen sea where a ship lay at anchor off an uninhabited coast.

I was hooked. Elric became my hero, as he did for many, and the melancholy, sword-swinging, sometime drug-addicted, soul-stealing albino prince today still remains one of Moorcock's most beloved and enduring creations. Unfortunately, however, over the years, as with many of Moorcock's protagonists, Elric has suffered from being stretched too far and for too long over too many books, diluting much of the essence of the personality, lost, as many Moorcockians might say, to the multiverse. This is one of the chief criticisms directed at Moorcock, one which he himself is aware of, but he addresses the issue in satire of his own work, and thus, I feel, we should here follow the ethic of forgiveness.

Further criticism

Many are daunted by Moorcock's seemingly inexhaustible output, covering not only fantasy, but also mainstream. New readers just wouldn't know where to begin. Pick up the wrong book — one not suited to the reader's taste, or one of his poorer works — and often the immediate response is to class him as a writer not worth reading.

To approach Moorcock more fairly, greater empathy is needed. Prospective readers must simply sample further. Moorcock is by nature philosophical and a deep thinker, and to give him further credit, he draws from a metaphysics well very much his own. He is a total original.

Mainstream Moorcock

Jeff Gardiner, in his publication *The Age of Chaos: The Multiverse* writes of Michael Moorcock, 'If the two main themes of the New Worlds' writers were psychology and sexuality, then nowhere was this more powerfully explored in Moorcock's *Behold the Man*.

The work today is regarded as an SF masterpiece, and reissued as book number 22 in the series of SF Masterworks by Millennium/Gollancz. Gardiner goes on to write:

> The protagonist of *Behold the Man* is Karl Glogauer, a twentieth-century Jew whose fantasies confuse religious icons with sexual obsessions. Throughout the novel, Glogauer's mind becomes as fragmented as the text itself. After discovering that time is nothing to do with space — it is to do with the psyche — he choses to go back in time to meet Jesus Christ. Glogauer is at first forced to reject his own identity and take on the mantle of the Messiah himself, after being shocked at discovering that Jesus of Nazareth is merely a gibbering imbecile. In a schizophrenic passion, Karl Glogauer entered Christ and Christ entered Jerusalem. As he acts out the role he begins to enjoy the self-importance of becoming Saviour of Mankind, and Glogauer's motive is a very real need for some kind of personal identity.

Moorcock himself states in *Death Is No Obstacle*, 'I hope to suggest to the reader that we all share some responsibility for the world's ills'. And I guess here he is saying that, whether Christ was real or a myth, salvation is our own responsibility. Further, who has authority over us — ourselves, or those who seek to guide us? However, Moorcock's primary output lies in his fantasy.

Where are we today?

Behold the Man was published in 1969. Thirty-eight years later, critics might say Moorcock has covered no new ground since 2000's *King of the City*. Others would argue that he is a literary chameleon, capable of rebirth in a new guise at any time, words once more sparkling off the page. This is my belief: that he is always capable of digging deeper, drawing fresh marvels out of his bag of literary tricks, as he did in 1995.

That year saw the publication of *Blood: A Southern Fantasy*, the first of a triptych of novels, known as The Second Ether Trilogy. The later two works are *Fabulous Harbours* and *The War Amongst the Angels*. The literate quality of these works is patchy, but certainly with *Blood*, the best of the three, and the most experimental, there is no doubt as to the worth of Moorcock the writer:

> The heat of the New Orleans night pressed against the window like an urgent lover. Jack Karaquazian stood sleepless, naked, staring out into the sweating darkness as if he might see at last some tangible horror which he could confront and even hope to conquer.

And on the opening page:

> The vision of a sunlit bayou, recollection of an extraordinarily rich perfume, the wealth of the earth. He remembered the yellow-billed

> herons standing in the shadows, moving their heads to regard him with thoughtful eyes before returning their respect to the water: the grey ibises, seeming to sit in judgment of the others; the delicate egrets congregating on the old logs and branches; a cloud of monarch butterflies, black and orange, diaphanous, settling over the pale reeds and, in the dark green waters, a movement might have been copper-head or alligator, or even a pike. In that moment of silence before the invisible insects began a fresh song, her eyes were humorous, inquiring. She had worked for a while, she said, as a chanteuse at The Fallen Angel on Bourbon Street.

This is writing rich in colour and metaphor — certainly poetic — and sets the tone for one of Moorcock's most accomplished metaphysical works. Let us diverge a bit.

In writing the Second Ether Trilogy, Moorcock has had long experience. Even from the very beginning of his career, Moorcock appears as if fully formed. It is immediately evident in the opening sentence of *The Golden Barge*, Moorcock's first completed novel:

> Right at the top of the city, in the centre, there was a cathedral where blind children wailed among lightless and forgotten galleries.

Written in 1958 when Moorock was nineteen — after he had abandoned work on an earlier piece titled *The Eternal Champion* — but never submitted for publication at the time, it nevertheless shows a writer in possession of what defines the best of artists, judgment: the innate ability to know good from bad. It can only be regretted that in the publishing world of today this is so often overlooked for the sake of finding the next blockbuster — millions of dollars made and then the author forgotten — but for Moorcock the year was 1958. The fifties had seen the Beat Generation, and the sixties were to arrive bringing Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, hot on the tail of Timothy Leary, the father of LSD, and in the case of science fiction, the birth of the New Wave.

Moorcock's *The Golden Barge* was his first serious attempt — or first successful attempt — at more literate New Wave fiction rather than his earlier output of pulp and adventure storywriting along the lines of writers such as E. R. Burroughs and H. Rider Haggard. In the case of the *The Golden Barge*, Moorcock took things a step further, claiming his influences as Mervyn Peake and Bertolt Brecht, of all people.

The plot concerns itself with the grossly deformed Jephraim Tallow's discovery of a golden barge upon a river. He follows its course, believing that at its journey's end he would discover the purpose of his existence. In an introduction to the novel's eventual publication in 1978, M. John Harrison writes:

> Moorcock's passionate belief is in humanity and in the individual. This book is a plea that both should resist the pressure to be become ordinary and institutionalised. It should be read for its Goya-like horrors and its flashes of mercy; and for its final rejection of cynicism. Tallow comments at his journey's end, 'I know the truth ... I know it ... I don't need the barge.'

We are here to understand that Tallow accepts himself for what he is, that there is no need for him to feel himself a freak outsider. And it is here that we should come to understand a defining trait in Moorcock's make-up: his integrity in keeping to his central theme — the human condition and our eventual death — of which the Second Ether trilogy is a fine example.

The work is deeply immersed in the struggle of human fate, and our need to understand it. One of the protagonists, the Rose, states, 'We're playing for the power to change the human condition.' The Second Ether Trilogy treats much of the human condition as a gamble and gambol, or frolic, all played out in Moorcock's own version of chaos theory.[3] No surprise.

Moorcock is tuned into popular science and its writers. One such, James Gleick, was to identify the importance of one question for chaos theorists: 'In a universe ruled by entropy, drawing toward greater and greater disorder, how does order arise?' Moorcock is asking the same question.

Interviewed on his references for *Blood*, he was to state, 'Chaos theory is a distinct help in that it provides a logic system, which means you can develop fiction more readily. The more tools you've got the more you can structure something.' James Gleick also explains, 'Life sucks order from a sea of disorder', which can perhaps be interpreted as meaning that chaos theory sees patterns emerge within scientific irregularities.

In *Blood*, set in the near-future Mississippi, or perhaps the present or past, depending on how one views time — Moorcock himself is doing back flips here as much as anyone else — the world has become unstable because of natural entropic pull, causing ultra-reality to leak violently

from the Biloxi Fault, and time to be measured by 'degrees of deliquescence'. This leads to a gradual dissipation into nothingness as a natural state, and the question becomes one of what is to happen to our main characters.

Of these there are four: Jack Karaquazian, Colinda Dovero, Sam Oakenhurst and the Rose. Each is a jugaderos, or gambler, playing the game of time, a form of role-playing that allows the players to make decisions affecting their own destinies, and therefore allowing them the existential notion of having the freedom to choose their own future, and in doing so affect the whole multiverse. The expanding Fault, however, causes too much disruption, and erodes the code on which the jugaderos base their lives.

Of the four principal characters, Colinda disappears gambling on a patch of colour for her own. Jack vows to find her. He and Sam then move west to the notorious Paul Minct, a dissolute Whitey, and towards the fiefdom of the ruthless Michinoix — or chaos engineers — and the Rose seems everywhere and nowhere.[4]

The Second Ether Trilogy as non-trilogy

There is no question that Moorcock has a tendency to recycle his characters, reinventing them and moving them back and forth in time and through the multiverse. As some might think, this is not through lack of imagination or his limitations as a writer, but a creative decision in world-making — or, in the case of Moorcock, his creation of the multiverse — a cosmology of multilinked universes through which his protagonists can travel back and forth, assuming alternate character traits in keeping with the changed world they find themselves in.

The Second Ether Trilogy, perhaps more so than any other of Moorcock's works, brings a number of these characters into play, not just the central heroes. In fact, about the only person who doesn't seem to show up is Jerry Cornelius, and I could have misremembered here. What is clear, however, is that any attempt at listing the number of main characters and explaining each one would take up this entire article, so I won't begin.

At the conclusion of *The War Amongst the Angels*, is written:

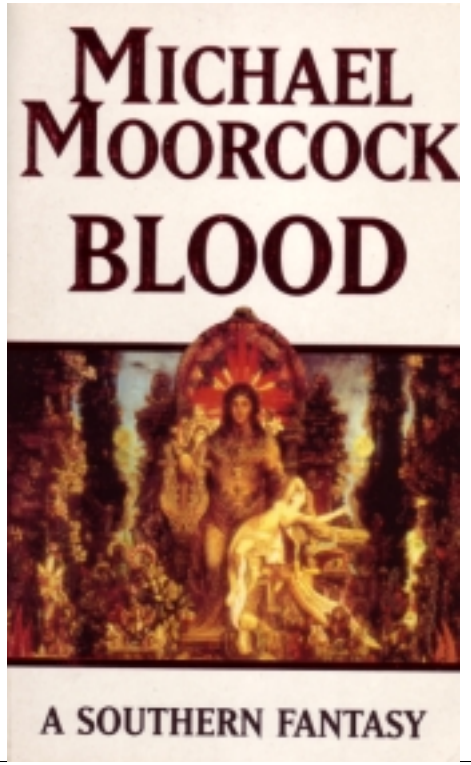
> The end of an autobiographical story by Michael Moorcock of London, Las Cascadas & Lost Pines.

Anyone even half familiar with Moorcock will have no doubt about this. The conclusion is a clear statement of intent, and seen in this light the trilogy becomes a sheer delight to fans, particularly so *The War Amongst the Angels*. Narrated by the Rose, on page 17 of the trade paperback we read:

> Now I am inclined to be known again by my given names of Margaret Rose Moorcock, but the story of my translation was a long and complicated one. I still use my poor Texan cousin Michael's name for most of my fiction.

This one sentence alone is layered thick with irony, entwining a created protagonist as the writer of the creator's own fiction. And by no means does it stop there. On page 21 we read:

> Towards the end my uncle Michael lost control of his visions and was helpless before their unending complications. In his middle years he took it into his head to raise exotic herds in Texas and bought himself a spread known as the Lost Pines Ranch.



On page 22:

> His tall, angular, poorly coordinated body would move mysteriously about the house, casting long, black shadows everywhere.

And on page 29 and 30:

> My cousin [Michael] wrote a number of Dick [Turpin's] adventures involving his constant conflict with the Universal Transport Company. My cousin also helped continue the memory of Robin Hood, Billy the Kid, Buckskin Annie, Strongbow the Mohawk, Karl the Viking, Buck Jones, Hereward the Wake, Sam Bass, Kit Carson, Olac the Gladiator, Tom Mix, Jet-Ace Logan, Jesse James, Sexton Blake, Wulf the

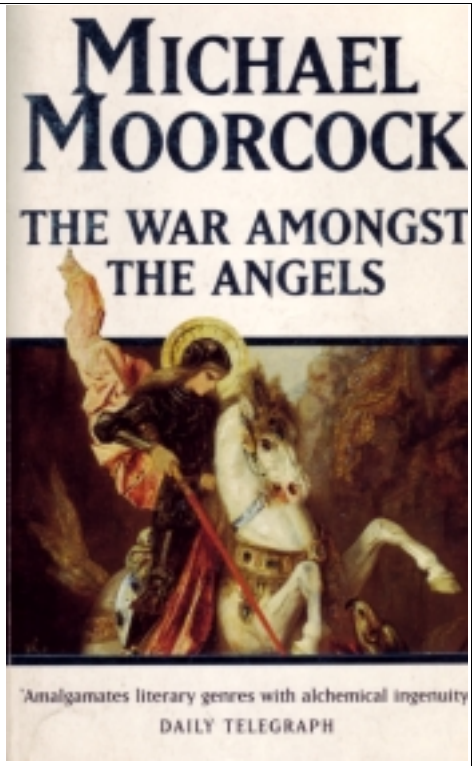
Briton, Tarzan of the Apes and a dozen other stars of the screen and strip, before burning himself out on twenty different serials a week, eventually having a mental breakdown in the course of which he attempted to tell each editor the entire continuing plot of every serial in case, as he suspected, he was murdered by one of his own inventions. He had decided that they were turning against him. They were unhappy, he thought, with his increasing self-parody or, as they put it, unacceptable recycling.

Here we are reading Moorcock at his very best, aware of his own foibles, aware of his fans, and most of all, aware of current publishing demands.

There is no question that in today's age of 'the thicker the book the better, and the more sequels the better', and better still, the possibility of movie tie-ins and a merchandising franchise, Moorcock has been forced to adapt his writing to some extent, to remain contemporary: a ridiculous demand when one considers that nothing should ever be merely fashionable, but endurable and long-lasting, especially so with art. However, the Second Ether Trilogy is not the kind of trilogy expected in modern SF or fantasy.

Like many of Moorcock's novels, such as the Colonel Pyat quartet — *Byzantium Endures*, *The Laughter of Carthage*, *Jerusalem Commands* and *The Vengeance of Rome* — the Second Ether novels are in fact manuscripts written by someone else, or, in other words, not Michael Moorcock, he merely having discovered them lying forgotten upon a shelf, covered with dust and cobwebbed, at which time he sought the rights to publish. In the case of the Second Ether Trilogy, the manuscripts are the property of Edwin Begg, or the Clapham Antichrist as he is often nicknamed, of whom much is revealed in *Fabulous Harbours*, the second book of the trilogy.

In the story, set in part during the mid to half quarter of the twentieth century, the Clapham Antichrist is a fallen vicar. Beginning his career at the age of twenty-four as vicar of St Odhran's, Balham in South London, Begg was to preach a shocking message urging Christians to act according to their principles and sacrifice their own material ambitions to the common good. Investigated by disapproving church authorities, he was soon labelled a Tolstoyan, and further considered as the Arch Enemy of British Decency, Proud Mocker of all religion and Hitler's righthand man.



In the introduction to *Fabulous Harbours* — really an anthology of stories about Beks and Beggs, a type of post-Van Vogtian fixup — Moorcock himself writes, 'I take little credit for what is good or interesting about these stories. They were told to me, mostly at second hand, by Edwin Begg ... This book is, the reader will see immediately, no direct sequel to the events in *Blood*, though it refers to the same characters and concerns. Neither can I promise a return to the conventions in the final novel of the sequence *The War Amongst the Angels*. Whereas Edwin Begg's world is pretty familiar to the average Londoner, the world of Ulrich von Bek is, I would guess, familiar only in fiction. The disappointed hopes of the post-war years have created many social reforms, but have failed to achieve what almost all reform movements promise to do: restore a perfect past to a perfect present.

I believe our visions reveal our motives and identities. I also believe that one day our visions of a perfect society will be subtle enough to work. Here, for the time being, is a vision of some imperfect world that is somewhat better than our own, perhaps the best we can hope for if we survive the next couple of centuries.

Michael Moorcock

Lost Pines,

Texas

March 1995

In *The War Amongst the Angels* he writes:

This book is dedicated to the memories of Harrison Ainsworth, who

celebrated the English highwayman in Rockwood, Captain Marryat, author of *Japhet in Search of a Father*, one of the best comic picaresques of the early nineteenth century, and George Meredith, author of *The Amazing Marriage*, perhaps our finest moral novel in English, and Gerald Kersh, author of *Fowler's End* and many other outstanding novels of London's low-life.

At the end of the trilogy, where does that leave us? I was left breathless keeping up, but somehow, apart from understanding Moorcock's self-satire, I got smart enough to realise that the highwaymen referred to in *The War Amongst the Angels* weren't holding up horses and carriages, but London's modern tramway system.

Angels in Texas

The war referred to in *The War Amongst the Angels* is one of Moorcock's oldest themes: the battle between the forces of order and chaos. It has preoccupied Moorcock for the length of his career, beginning with the Eternal Champion, his earliest protagonist, of whom one thing can certainly be said: death for him or her, a true gender bender, seems an improbability. I suspect that Moorcock wears the hero on his shoulder like a parrot, always talking. We hear endless stories. But it appears that Moorcock has had a plan all along. In *Angels* he explains:

> The only thing the public likes better than Novelty is repetition. I've built a career on that principle. The more repetition you include in your work, the more carefully you ration on the novelty, the more successful you are. I've been doing the same act for thirty years. There's talk of making me a Dame next year.

It appears that Moorcock sees evil angels in Texas. There is a war on between order and chaos, and Moorcock has the solution. Build a tramway system across Lost Pines, employ the highwayman, fight the evil angels, somehow resolve the war. But who wins? It's anyone's guess. I never worked it out, though Moorcock seems to have some idea. His reading of chaos theory suggests that chaos becomes 'plurality', and law 'singularity'. What does this mean? Let's see if we can work it out. It's all explained on page 38:

> The singularity's mighty engineering success, in which they encompassed their universe in a globe of superwoven carbon, is proof, they tell us, of their own righteous triumph, the long-sought-after Conquest of Entropy ... The Chaos Engineers are creatures who have chosen to play the game of time against a background of colourful instability, a reality ever in flux, barely touched by law, where they learn to survive and thrive through self-control, mental exercise and trusting to chance.

So everything's clear as mud. Perhaps it is that Moorcock has gone off the rails like the trams in Lost Pines. The Rose explains once more:

> My Uncle [Michael] was somewhat less grounded in reality than my father. His appearance had not improved. His hair and beard sprouted at peculiar angles, his clothes assumed unlikely folds and bulges and there was generally an air of a hastily made sketch about him.

Funny stuff. Sadly, however, the Second Ether trilogy can best be described as patchy. The best of the three books is *Blood*, and you can probably stop there, unless you were a fan, feeling the need to digest all of Moorcock's oeuvre — as I have tried to do. But parts of *The War Amongst the Angels* represent Moorcock in fine form, so, to do it justice, I'd like to finish with a paragraph from there.

> Jack took the first Number 14 tram going north, crossing Westminster Bridge in the white dawn as the city emerged darkly from her silence and the cold, agitated Thames slapped against the spans, making him shudder, his thin coat admitting the cold. In those days, when England was still trying to recover from the War and endured an endless austerity economy, the world was generally colourless. It was as if the bombs had obliterated most of the spectrum, somehow absorbing that energy as they expanded their own. What little colour there was came from the theatre. The screens were all black and white, as was much of the print. Colour was suspect. It had come too vividly and for too long from the sky. Londoners embraced grey like a comforting blanket. It was as much as they could stand. Colour represented levels of energy their nerves rejected ... It was dark. The gaslight warmed the

thickening fog. It was 5:45 pm.

Conclusion
Like many naturally gifted artists, Moorcock's output is extraordinary. And with this comes a price. Much of his work is flawed. But anyone looking to criticise Moorcock too heavily should be careful. Moorcock has a love for his work that should not simply be seen as self-indulgence. To be dismissive of him as an important an influential writer of both the twentieth and twenty-first century must be considered an act of naïvety and foolishness; you might as well be saying the same of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. For me, without Michael Moorcock's writings, my life would be poorer. This is the love I have for him, and a compliment I would give to anyone who sees their place in life as one of servitude to the human condition. Thanks again, Michael. Live long and prosper. We are all of the same humanity, and you the most human of all.

Appendix
The main focus of this paper has been on Moorcock's Second Ether Trilogy covering the years 1995 to 1996. But because we are covering a fifty-year career, it would be quite possible to have an open discussion on such topics such as:

- Moorcock's early years
- The New Wave
- Moorcock as musician
- Moorcock on the internet

Note: In the following I've drawn heavily on Jeff Gardiner's *The Age of Chaos: The Multiverse of Michael Moorcock*.

Moorcock: the early years

1 While at school he was already typing fanzines, such as *Outlaws' Own*, *Book Collector's News*, *Burroughsania* and others.

2 His first jobs were all in London, and included being a messenger for a shipping company, then an office boy for a management consultant firm, allowing him to print fanzines on the office equipment.

3 Aged seventeen, he became the full-time editor of *Tarzan Adventures* and was writing comic strips for *Kit Carson* and *Billy the Kid*.

4 Aged twenty, he left his employer to become a full-time writer, and largely adopted a bohemian lifestyle which can only be described as one of sensuality and excess: he drank and travelled a lot.

The New Wave
It's pretty much agreed that Moorcock's main impact in the field of SF has been his editorship of *New Worlds* magazine from 1964 on; it becoming the flagship for the so-called New Wave of Science Fiction in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1963 (Vol. 43, issue no. 129), then editor E. J. ('Ted') Carnell invited Moorcock to contribute an essay, now famous, about the current state of science fiction. Moorcock's main criticism of SF at the time was that it lacked 'passion, subtlety, irony, characterisation, style and an involvement in human affairs. It was also to lack, colour, density, depth and, on the whole, real feeling from a writer'.

The new territory to be explored became known as inner space, a termed coined by J. G. Ballard in *New Worlds* 118.

In 1963, Moorcock was invited to succeed Carnell as full-time editor of *New Worlds*, which he continued to do until 1974.

New Worlds was to champion writers such as J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, Thomas Disch, John Brunner, M. John Harrison, Samuel R. Delany, Gene Wolfe, Harry Harrison, Robert Silverberg, Christopher Priest and Robert Holdstock.

Moorcock as musician
In the fifties and the sixties there was a strong link between SF and rock 'n' roll, Moorcock playing guitar and banjo with a skiffle band called The Greenhorns. And he was to sing and play guitar with various other bands.

The 1970s saw Moorcock involved with London's Ladbroke Grove psychedelic scene, where such stars as David Bowie, Marc Bolan and Jimi Hendrix hung out. He joined the cult band Hawkwind, led by Robert Calvert, his contributions being heard on Hawkwind albums such as *Warrior on the Edge of Time* (1975), *Choose Your Masques* (1980), for which he wrote lyrics, and *Live Chronicles* (1994).

He has also contributed lyrics for the heavy rock band Blue Oyster Cult, and Moorcock's novel *The Winds of Limbo* inspired Pink Floyd's 'Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun'.

Moorcock's own band The Deep Fix is named after one of his early stories, and mentioned in the Jerry Cornelius novels as well as in *King of the City* (2000), and the band was to cut the 1975 album *New World's Fair*, and release the cassette *The Brothel of Rosenstrasse* in 1992, named after Moorcock's novel.

Moorcock on the internet

The extent of Moorcock's popularity is demonstrated by his worldwide following, led by an active appreciation society, The Nomads of the Time Streams.

Moorcock has his own website.

Outtakes

It's a big mixing pot, or cauldron, and it's just a matter of tossing in the ingredients.

There are two Michael Moorcocks: the literate novelist, and the popular writer of fantasy. The literate Moorcock is an inspiration in literary craftsmanship, coming from a man drawing on fast resources of knowledge and experience, and millions upon millions of redrafts.

Moorcock is more than a good writer. When he works on it, his work is singular and fresh.

For those of us still unawares, life is a struggle against entropy, this is what Moorcock is trying to teach us.

— Frank Weissenborn, 2007

Going to hell with slide rule in hand: Hard science theology:

Some thoughts on Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's Inferno

Darrell Schweitzer

[First published in *Studies in Fantastic Literature*, and will appear in Darrell's forthcoming book *The Fantastic Horizon* (Wildside Press).]

I

Two statements, one so obvious as to be cliché, the other perhaps

eyebrow-raising:

> There is an essential difference between narratives intended as science fiction and those intended as fantasy.
>
> Virtually all science fiction is religious to some degree, whether the author likes it or not.

Allow me to explain, perhaps demonstrate.

Science fiction, we are often told, is a literature, not merely of ideas, but of rational ideas. The way we tell science fiction from fantasy is by the presence or absence of the attempt to understand whatever strangeness the narrative may present. This is a yes/no, on/off switch. It is the difference between the unknown and the unknowable. Science fiction rejects the latter, as a matter of policy.

Sure, any fantasy or supernatural motif can be grafted onto science fiction if the author makes a pretence of explaining it. Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* is about genuine, bloodsucking, only-out-at-night, must-be-staked-through-the-heart vampires, but they are science fiction vampires, because their condition is caused by a disease, as the hero somewhat implausibly discovers while squinting at vampire blood through a microscope. This is of course gobbledygook, but no more or less so than most time machines, faster-than-light drives, or immortality pills. The important thing is that Matheson's vampires are placed within the realm of human understanding. They are part of the natural world. This inevitably makes them less frightening, because they can be overcome if someone studies them and learns their weaknesses. It is a tribute to Matheson's narrative intensity that they still remain very frightening indeed.

But Stoker's Dracula remains frightening, even if Van Helsing makes noises about 'occult science', because the Count represents a supernatural evil, which perverts and transcends natural law, and can never fully be comprehended. Unknowable. Lovecraft's cosmic menaces are at their best when they approach this quality, but less impressive when displayed and labelled like something in a museum exhibit.

For this reason, fantasy horror is easier to do. It is much easier to make the unknowable and possibly limitless frightening. Science fiction horror, though possible, is far more difficult, because you have to scare within a set of rules the readers (and the characters) know that somebody, somewhere is capable of understanding.

Of course most science fiction, and a good deal of fantasy, is not concerned with horror. It is concerned with awe, what we call the Sense of Wonder.

The difference, then, is not so much the subject matter, but the narrative attitude toward the subject matter.

Terror and religious awe are very closely related. According to all available reports, persons visited by gods or other supernatural beings tend to show symptoms of abject fright. Some even drop dead if they don't shield their eyes from a direct view of the Presence. Saith the Prophet (Isaiah): 'Woe is me, for I am undone. For I come from a people of unclean lips, and mine eyes have seen the King.'

What is the basic subject matter of religion, any religion? It is the place of mankind in the universe. How did we get here? Where are we going? Who and what are we in the first place? Eschatology is the consideration of mankind's ultimate fate. Until the last couple of centuries, it was the exclusive domain of religion. But nowadays, as SF critic John J. Pierce used to tell us at great length, it is the subject matter of science fiction. 'Eschatological romanticism' was his avowed creed back in the days of the Second Foundation, when he was out to save SF from the menace of the New Wave.

Religious texts such as the Bible purport to provide answers to the above questions. When those answers are taken as absolute, when everything you need to know is revealed in the Sacred Writing, there is no room for speculation. There is no science fiction in a theocracy. In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. Period. A frivolous story of some years back, in which our universe proves to be the effluent of an extra-cosmic flush toilet, would have earned its author an *auto da fe* in the sixteenth century.

More seriously, Olaf Stapledon, in such works as *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*, offers a hypothetical alternative to the standard version of our destiny. He has influenced any number of writers since, most notably Arthur C. Clarke. No winged, hosanna-singing heavenly hosts at the science-fictional End of Days, unless, perhaps, they are battery powered. Of course the difference between science fiction and a religious text is

that the science fiction writer doesn't claim to have the truth. He is writing fiction, not divine revelation. As long as the prevailing religious orthodoxy doesn't rule so firmly as to preclude speculation, science fiction can rush in and grab a chunk of Sacred Territory.

It does so in a science-fictional way, which means through the mode of rational materialism. The characters in the story may not comprehend all the mysteries placed before them — any more than the hero of Lem's *Solaris* ever does — but there is at least the implication that somebody, with sufficient effort and maybe a bit of brain enhancement if necessary, could. We can even have a science fiction story about God Himself, as long as there is that knowing wink from the author to the effect that, yes, even the Almighty is bound by the laws of the universe, however yet-undiscovered some of those laws might be.

Now it becomes possible to have genuine science fiction on subjects once monopolised by theologians.

II

Larry Niven's novel *Inferno*, first serialised in *Galaxy* in 1975 and published as a book in 1976, is still, a quarter of a century later, one of the most interesting attempts by science fiction to take up the subject matter of religion and probe it in the manner of a mineralologist examining a strange rock.

The story starts fannishly. A hard-science type science-fiction writer, Allen Carpentier, gets drunk at a science fiction convention, falls out a window to his death, and wakes up in the vestibule of Dante's Hell, just across the River Acheron from the First Circle. This is the not-too-uncomfortable domain of virtuous pagans, who kept the commandments but never knew God. But, as Carpentier learns, the only way out is down, through the center of the Inferno. Our hero is led on his journey by a poor man's Vergil, a bulldog-faced Italian named Benito, a.k.a. Benny . . . you know who, though Carpentier doesn't figure it out until halfway through the book.

The prospect is immediately disconcerting to the agnostic Carpentier:

> Scary. It would mean that there was a real God, and maybe Jonah was swallowed by a whale in the Mediterranean Sea, and Joshua ben Nun stopped the Earth's rotation for trivial purposes (pp. 24–5).

It gets even scarier when Allen and Benny meet a five-hundred-pound woman, so condemned forever because she helped ban cyclamates and doomed thousands to fat, who explains, 'We're in the hands of infinite power and infinite sadism.'

But our hero refuses to believe this is the genuine Hell, and keeps trying to think in science-fictional terms: it's really an artifact, perhaps an alien amusement park for creatures who get their kicks torturing humans. Throughout the first few circles, there is some evidence to support this, including a super planetarium in the territory of the virtuous pagans (and scientists?), but nothing is conclusive.

The result is that, as *Inferno* progresses, the ideas and attitudes of science — and science fiction — collide head on with those of traditional fantasy, and with theology. The situation is either rational, and therefore science fiction, or it is not. The book's growing ambiguity irritated a lot of critics when *Inferno* first came out. They, like Allen Carpentier, wanted a comfortable science fiction novel.

Because he tries to rationalise everything, Carpentier sees a different Inferno than did Dante. Consider the following description of red lights flashing on the tower before the City of Dis. This is from John Ciardi's translation of the *Inferno*, which was used by Niven and Pournelle:

> Returning to my theme, I saw we came
> to the foot of a great Tower; but long before
> we reached it through the marsh, two horns of flame
> flared from the summit, one from either side,
> and then, far off, so far we could scarce see it
> across the mist, another flame replied (Canto VIII).

When Carpentier reaches the same point, he remarks:

> Red? Ruby? A laser! Not magic, just a laser signal from an old stone tower. Far out in the murk there was a flash of light, blinking, the same color as the signal (p. 66).

This sort of thing goes on for half the book, as long as Carpentier remains convinced that the Hell he travels through is the product of natural, finite beings who can be dealt with. His efforts come to a glorious (or perhaps inglorious) climax when he builds a glider, launches it off a cliff in the vicinity of the Sixth Circle, catches a thermal updraft over the City of Dis,

then reaches the winds of the Second Circle (where Dante observed the doomed lovers, Paulo and Francesca), with the ultimate intent of flying clear of the enormous funnel of Hell.

It doesn't work. The glider collides with too many souls amid the winds, picks up a passenger (a former space shuttle pilot) and eventually crashes just beyond the wall of Dis. Benito had told Carpentier that the glider wouldn't work, but he insisted on trying it anyway.

From this point on, Carpentier's rationalism is on the defensive. Eventually it collapses altogether.

III

Niven and Pournelle did their homework well. Of course, as would obviously suit their purpose, they borrowed selectively from the *Commedia*. They didn't retell everything. They begin where Dante was in the middle of Canto III, already inside Hell, so we never see the famous inscription: ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE. Abandoning all hope is precisely what Allen Carpentier never does.

In Niven and Pournelle's book, the first recognisable set piece from Dante is the crowd of the unthinking, those who never concerned themselves with questions of good and evil. They run after banners that they will never catch. This may keep them fit, but it's certainly a frustratingly dull way to spend eternity.

Then Carpentier moves across the Acheron, past the virtuous pagans, to the place of judgment, where Minos assigns the damned their stations. Dante's Minos told you what circle you were bound for by wrapping his tail around his body that many times. But in Niven and Pournelle he picks the damned up with the aforesaid appendage and puts them where they belong. The tail can apparently stretch, Plastic Man style, to infinite length, without considerations of mass and gravity. Carpentier, who is still thinking like a science fiction writer at this point, is certain it's done through hyperspace.

After that, the main similarities between the version of 1300 and that of 1975 are in the geography. Niven and Pournelle follow Dante closely most of the time. They even manage to make the layout of the Inferno easier to comprehend than it is in the original. They go into great detail in the Eighth Circle with its many subdivisions. The most immediately obvious differences are in the modernisations: self-driven automobiles raging across the plain of fire, soldiers with machine guns replacing the centaur archers who prevent the wrathful from escaping the lake of boiling blood, and so on.

Very few of Dante's actual characters show up. Carpentier asks his guide why they don't meet all the medieval Italians Dante did, and Benito's only explanation is that one tends to notice one's own contemporaries and countrymen. Thus Allen keeps seeing twentieth-century Americans.

The Divine Comedy was a scandalous book when it was written. Dante put his enemies, political opponents, literary rivals, and even some of his friends in Hell, not to mention several popes of recent memory. He devoted much space to satirical comments. To get the same effect, Niven and Pournelle had to select people their readers would recognise without a barrage of footnotes, though of course in time, their book will date as Dante's did and (if it is still read centuries hence) require just as much explanation.

Some examples: A Hell's Angel motorcycle gang member among the sodomites. Aimee Semple MacPherson (the radio evangelist of the 1920s whose career collapsed in scandal; the inspiration for Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*) among the religious hypocrites. American senators who put party line ahead of their country's welfare in the frozen lake at the center of Hell, among the traitors.

Even as Dante made jabs at the poets and poetry of his time, Niven and Pournelle talk about science fiction. In a section decidedly not in the original, Allen and Benny come to a place outside the city of Dis where the proud are locked in their gaudy tombs and discover that of none other than Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

Carpentier is furious to see Vonnegut so well memorialised:

> *Him*. Why him? A science fiction writer who lied about being a science fiction writer because he got more money that way. He wrote novels in baby talk, with sixth-grade drawings in them, and third-grade science, and he knew better. How does he rate a monument that size? (p. 115).

There's even a neon sign overhead, blinking on and off: SO IT GOES.

L. Ron Hubbard turns up in Pit 6, Circle 8, among the religious hypocrites, as a human face mounted on a body of 'flopping fist-torsos and forelegs and hands, a tremendous unmatched centipede'. Of him we are told:

> He founded a religion that masks as a form of lay psychiatry. Members try to recall previous lives in their presumed ancestry. They also recall their own past lives ... and that adds an interesting blackmail angle, because those who hear confession are often more dedicated than honorable (p. 206).

And among the grafters we find someone already well on his way to being forgotten:

> He hardly counts anyway. He stole a few hundred bucks from a friend who needed an eye operation (p. 172).

This refers to a certain fan and sometime magazine editor who became agent for a British science-fiction writer in the early '70s, but started dipping into his client's funds. When the affair went public, he confessed all in the pages of *Science Fiction Review*.

How unfair. He was actually a good editor. But as the fat lady said, whoever runs this place has no sense of proportion. And probably doesn't read science fiction magazines.

Finally, the ultimate in-joke: Is Allen Carpentier supposed to be Philip José Farmer, who is most famous for his Riverworld series, in which all of humanity is raised from the dead along an enormous river? There is one specific clue. We are told that Allen Carpentier added the 'i' in his name to make his byline more exotic, even as Farmer added the 'José' for the same reason.

There are undoubtedly more in references, some perhaps only comprehensible to members of Los Angeles fandom. Remember, this was the same Niven who starred a good bit of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society in 'Or What About Chocolate Covered Manhole Covers?'

IV

On a more serious, thematic level, Niven and Pournelle's *Inferno* differs greatly from its namesake. The first half uses the techniques of science fiction, trying to render Hell comprehensible. But after the glider crash, Carpentier's scepticism gradually erodes into belief, and the supernatural, as opposed to the superscientific, takes over. Past this point the book is unabashedly religious fantasy, on the order of C. S. Lewis or Charles Williams.

On the order of Lewis, certainly. When I interviewed Niven in 1979, he said that you have to read Lewis's *The Great Divorce* in order to fully understand *Inferno*. (He also added that those who wanted this to be a proper science fiction novel will have to be disappointed.) Pournelle also mentioned Lewis in an interview in *Science Fiction Review* #16. He and Niven wanted to soften Dante's theology a bit and make it more like that of Lewis. So they did, and their *Inferno* doesn't work like Dante's at all.

The main idea they have taken from Lewis is that Hell is not permanent. It is more of an extended, elaborate, and painful Purgatory, in which sinners enmesh themselves. In *The Great Divorce* they recede deeper and deeper into Hell out of sheer orneriness. If they could just let go of the sins that landed them there in the first place. Thus, in a sense, all mortal sins are sins of pride: the delusion that a mere human being could commit a sin meriting the attention and wrath of the creator of the universe for all eternity.

Dante's Hell, on the other hand, is a place of divine and justified retribution. It is quite straightforward and has no other purpose.

Carpentier, halfway removed from his rationalist stance, toys with the idea that Hell is a counterbalance to Heaven in accordance to some cosmic moral law. Maybe so, but Dante's sinners get out only under the most extraordinary circumstances. The Roman emperor Trajan (as is told in Dante's *Paradiso*) was redeemed by the prayers of later Christians, who admired him. Christ himself spent much of Easter weekend rescuing Old Testament figures in what the Middle Ages called the Harrowing of Hell. But certainly, in Dante's view, it was not possible to escape under one's own power.

In Niven and Pournelle, damned souls slip from one niche to another. Devils aren't very bright and sometimes they don't notice. Benito (Mussolini) really belongs in the lake of fire in the Eighth Circle, along with the evil counsellors, but he got loose, not once, but twice, the second time when he is pushed back into the lake by the self-righteous Carpentier when he finally figures out who his travelling companion is.

Allen is briefly caught among the men-lizards of the pit of thieves, but escapes.

By the end of the book, we discover that this does not happen because of diabolical (or divine) sloppiness. There is a reason. Once Allen has accepted Hell on its own terms, he concludes that the place is a violent ward for the theologically insane, the equivalent of painful shock treatment. A psychiatrist gives him the paradigm he needs: a catatonic, placed in a hotbox, yelled for help, the first words he had uttered in thirteen years, and thus was no longer catatonic.

That's one theory, anyway. Satan, when we finally meet him embedded in the frozen lake at the centre of Hell, agrees with the fat lady. As Allen and Benito climb down his leg on the way out, the Devil has a request and a message for God:

> 'Will you tell Him that He could learn morality from Vlad the Impaler?' (p. 233).

In any case, this is certainly not the infinitely just and merciful God of traditional Christianity. Our intrepid authors grapple with problems which have vexed theologians for centuries. If God is infinitely just, how can he be merciful? If he is infinitely merciful, then how can he damn anyone? The fat lady would say that eternal damnation proves her 'infinite sadism' theory, since no human crime goes on forever. The idea that it is only presumption on the part of the sinner that makes damnation possible comes from both Lewis and from *Jurgen* by James Branch Cabell (a favorite of Niven), which has a comic sequence in which the hero, arriving in Hell, relieves the overworked devils by telling them that, no, he doesn't require them to torture him at all, thank you very much.

The ultimate solutions offered in Niven and Pournelle's *Inferno* are clever, and about as good as writers can do when reaching toward what may be (in the theological or fantasy sense) unknowable. One works one's way out of this Hell. Benito, having conducted Allen Carpentier and several others through Hell, now is able to leave, climbing up a long tunnel into the unknown, possibly toward Dante's Mount of Purgatory. Carpentier, who, as Norman Spinrad suggests in the introduction to the Gregg Press edition, may be in Hell for the same reason Mussolini was, for moral indifference, now finds a purpose. He takes over Benny's job.

So maybe God isn't infinitely sadistic after all, but is benevolently trying to straighten sinners out by painful but necessary methods. We never know. Answers aren't provided. This isn't a science-fiction novel, for all it speaks the language of science fiction much of the time.

It never was a science-fiction novel either, not even in the opening chapters. It just sounded like one. One could not fairly describe *Inferno* as something that began as honest science fiction, then copped out into fuzzy-minded fantasy, though some of Niven and Pournelle's disappointed readers might say that. The authors' purpose was there from the start. It is rather startling, considering the rest of their output. *Inferno* is nothing less than a deconstruction of the science-fiction method, an examination of its limitations. By the time Benito Mussolini is climbing past the Devil's backside, up a long tunnel through the core of the Earth, nobody worries about how such a structure could hold up under the gravitational pressures involved.

The result is their most profound and least popular work.

V

But just how serious are Niven and Pournelle about all this? There is certainly an element of play in *Inferno*, the sort we see in Niven's fiction often enough. But this is more than an elaborate game. One gets the impression that it may have begun that way, but that the authors, as honest writers, began to seriously grapple with the implications of their material.

Niven mentioned in the interview I did with him that the idea for the book had been with him for years before he was able to write it. Finally he managed to get it out of his system. I asked him why it had such a grip on him. 'It's a neat fantasy,' he replied. He'd read Dante (the Ciardi version) in college, and it struck him as 'neat'. Then he started 'day-dreaming in class ... I started wondering what I would do in Dante's *Inferno* if I couldn't call on any angels. There was nothing but *deus ex machina* every step of the way in *Inferno*. Suppose I didn't have a guide at all? How would I get out? That was fairly exciting daydreaming.'

But he never managed to write the novel until he began to collaborate with Pournelle, 'who had the theological background I needed. So I talked him into it, and it grabbed him the way it grabbed me, very rapidly. When we actually started writing, we spat it out in about four months, and in some ways these were the strangest four months in my life. I had more fun in terms of imaginary experiences, and went through more pain, again in terms of the imaginary, and Jerry couldn't stop writing any more than I could. We had to get out of that place.'

When Niven started writing, he didn't realise that there was any difference between science fiction and fantasy approaches. That took a while, and when he did, he knew he didn't 'have a head for fantasy'. It took 'several years to develop one'.

Inferno shows him (and Pournelle) in an advanced state of development along those lines. As the tone of the book shifts in the latter half and the facade of rationalism breaks down, I think we can see it all becoming more than just 'a neat fantasy'. Spinrad argues in his introduction to the Gregg Press edition that this very seriousness saves the novel from being 'a hideous pornography of pain'. His contention is that the story's meaning hinges on the redemption of Mussolini, the change from the morally indifferent to the responsible. Certainly as we get deeper and deeper into the infernal depths, the book takes on an increasing degree of meaning. It deals with mysteries, in the religious sense. Is the creator of the *Inferno* exactly what the fat lady said he was? Even the 'extended purgatory' explanation is never made wholly convincing.

What Niven and Pournelle's *Inferno* is telling us is that when we get down to the really serious questions, to eschatology, then all the platitudes, glib answers, and shallow short cuts of the sort that produced Allen Carpentier's glider won't work. They fail as quickly as the glider did, because there are short cuts. Mussolini tells Allen that the only way out of Hell is through its depths, and slowly he comes to accept that.

Had the book stayed a science fiction gimmick story all the way through, it would have been a copout. This may tell us something about the limitations of science fiction, at least in the specific area of eschatology. Certainly it tells us something about why *Inferno* had to become something else in order to become more than a cheap trick.

I remember how someone described *The Great Divorce* to me once. 'It's true,' she said. 'It touches reality.'

All joking aside, so does *Inferno*, at least fleetingly, as do the blind men in the Hindu fable who touch the elephant.

Stay away from windows at convention parties.

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— Darrell Schweitzer, 2008

Steam Engine Time 9

December 2008

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