SFRA Newsletter, 183, December 1990

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Swan Song

Bill Hardesty has just announced to me that Peter Lowentrout will be our next President, Muriel Becker will be Vice-President, Edra Bogle will serve as Treasurer, and David Mead has been reelected Secretary. Congratulations to these four!

And sincere thanks to Joan Gordon, Lynn Williams, Peter Hall, and Russell Letson for standing for office. I think it is fair to say that in our SFRA election (unlike many larger ones!) there was little “voting against” but only a choice between well qualified candidates, and I hope that each of them will consider running again. Many of us who later became officers were not elected the first time we offered to serve—I know this well, being one such myself. Although some people have commented about eliminating the two-candidate system, I endorse it as a healthy principle. Even in the case of an incumbent candidate who has performed well, the members have a right to a choice. It would be ironic if we adopted a “single party” system just as so many countries are embracing the freedom of choice.

Since it will be my responsibility as Immediate Past President to chair the nominations committee in 1992, I will welcome self-nominations from people who are willing to be candidates or suggestions from any member about another member who would be a good choice.

Thanks too, to Neil Barron, Tom Remington, and Bill Hardesty, who will be retiring from the Executive Committee at the end of December. Neil has put much enthusiasm into the membership drive, Tom has given our membership and financial records order and judicial oversight, and Bill has provided invaluable advice from his long service on the Executive Committee. SFRA has been indeed fortunate to have such dedicated volunteers to lead the organization.

Reflecting on SFRA’s accomplishments over the past two years, I am proudest of the beginning of the Pioneer Awards, first suggested by Marty Greenberg and brought to fruition under the committees chaired by Lynn Williams. And I hope that the adopt-a-scholar program will continue to develop after I leave office. Our efforts to clarify the organization’s tax-exempt status are not quite finished, but the process is now well underway. Other business of the organization will be passed along to the new Executive Committee at our first meeting of the new year.

Although we may be at war by the time you are reading this, I am optimistic that humanity will somehow work out our problems without destroying planet Earth, that we will come a little closer to a Great Society in
America despite the S&L crisis and the plight of the homeless, and that SFRA will continue to be a network of people seriously interested in the literature of the future. I'm very much looking forward to seeing you all in Texas in June for the 1991 annual meeting.

With the end of the semester, the holidays, and the end of my term as President fast approaching, I am preparing for a winter break on safari in Kenya, followed by a week of snorkling in the Seychelles.

My only serious regret of the past two years has been that I have not found time as SFRA President to write any fiction myself. Perhaps Africa will inspire me, as it has Mike Resnick.

Isn't it pretty to think so?

Elizabeth Anne Hull

Riding with E. T. and Kong

In Orlando, Florida, Universal Studios has spent over $600,000 on a theme park at which almost half the major attractions are based on SF, horror, and fantasy films. Universal Studios Florida has the same bland, Southern California appearance as its rival down the highway, Disney World-EPCOT Center-Disney/MGM Studios, but in keeping with its traditional association with horror, Universal is aiming at a less juvenile audience than Disney. Two of the attractions, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Art of Making Movies* and *The Phantom of the Opera Makeup Show*, carry warnings that "parental discretion is recommended for children under age 13," while small children are banned altogether from the *Kongfrontation* ride. 

The Hitchcock attraction trivializes and misrepresents Hitchcock's achievement. A medley of film clips, each only one or two seconds long, concentrates solely on violent and shock scenes from his movies. Longer clips present most of the shower murder from *Psycho* and 3-D versions of the scissors murder from *Dial M for Murder* and the bird attack from *Birds*. This mayhem is softened by a jokey presentation, including a live reenactment of the shower killing, with a volunteer from the audience as Mother.

The *Horror Makeup Show* also features very short film clips, a little information and lots of clowning. The *Ghostbusters* attraction is a tedious stage reenactment of the finale of the movie.

Two rides are the highlights of the park. Both the *E. T. Adventure* and *Kongfrontation* are brief but both are fully as spectacular as anything at Disney World. Guests accompany E. T. on flying bicycles from Earth, where he is pursued by government agents, to his own dying planet, which he must revive with his "magic and healing powers." Cheap Spielberghian mysticism abounds but the ride is sensational.
The long waiting lines for Kongfrontation thread through a gloomy reconstruction of a New York subway platform. Guests, called “evacuees,” are bombarded with cinema verité TV “newscasts” reporting Kong’s depredations in the streets above. At the end of the line, “evacuees” are put aboard an “aerial tramway” by staff wearing New York Transit Police insignia. Each tram car is attacked by Kong, who is attacked by a helicopter. In a final “newscast” the occupants of each car watch their own reactions to the attack on video instant replay. Judging by what I could see from inside the vehicle being pummeled, Universal’s Kong resembles Paramount’s 1976 creature more than RKO’s 1933 ape.

Kongfrontation was inoperative for much of the time for months after the park opened in June 1990. A Jaws ride has been shut down for major repairs and Universal has sued the manufacturer of the rides. A Back to the Future ride is promised for 1991.

A one-day ticket to Universal Studios Florida costs $29.00 for an adult and $23.00 for a child. It would take two days to see the whole park, including many non-fantasy attractions. When I visited the park on a weekday in October crowds were large and waiting lines stretched up to 40 minutes. However, press reports say that attendance has been well below expectations, due to the widely-publicized problems with the major rides, the recession and rising gas prices. Universal must be concerned that, in addition to these temporary difficulties, there may be a basic flaw in their attempt to attract adult visitors. Americans may be willing to pile the kids in the car and drive across country to see Disney World but not to smell King Kong’s breath.

Michael Klossner

Library of Congress Wakes Up Too Late to SF

The October Locus had a brief piece on plans by the Library of Congress to identify “a canon of authors and works essential to a thorough research archive of world science fiction.” The man in charge of this is Joseph T. Mayhew of the Hispanic acquisitions department, whom I wrote. His reply was brief and discouraging:

“Our largest problem is one of format. So many books of quality published in the fields of SF are not given either trade or hardback treatment. Mass-market only publications have not been considered worth cataloging and so we have considerable gaps. For example, we have less than 10 works by P. K. Dick available to researchers. Most of the mass-market paperbacks go to a warehouse in Landover (like unto the place at the end of Raiders of the Lost Ark) without being catalogued. I hope to make a major change in that, but it will take some doing.”
At this late date it probably doesn’t make much difference if LC attempts to improve its procedures. Libraries like UC Riverside, location of the Eaton collection, contribute their cataloging to the online cataloging database called OCLC, so you can, at a minimum, at least find out one or more libraries holding a wanted title. As the copyright depository LC presumably receives almost every piece of print and nonprint copyrighted in the US, but they don’t begin to catalog all of it or, I suspect, even keep all of it, since the total quantity is so immense. When Grof Conklin wrote his introduction to The Best of Science Fiction, 1946, he mentioned the Cellar Reserve Collection of Pulps, which even then had been creamed by thieves. I can imagine what the situation must be like now. LC’s efforts are too little, too late.

**Look! It’s Not a Bird or a Plane—It’s Color Microfiche**

More specifically, it’s 200 hunks of microfiche, each containing a complete issue of DC Comics, beginning with Action Comics, volume 1, number 1, in which Superman was introduced. Other superheroes featured include Batman, Crimson Avenger, Aquaman, Superboy, the Flash and Green Lantern. Due in January are some of the Marvel Comics family, such as Sub-Mariner and Captain America. The fiche are usually sold in sets of five for $29.99/set. The $1220 for the complete set (includes a $100 savings) is a small fraction of the market value of the originals. The publisher quotes a market price of $32,500 for the first Action Comics issue (eat your hearts out). You can buy a fiche reader for $210 or spend some time at your local library reliving your childhood. No sample, but you can get a color brochure from MicroColor International, 85 Godwin Ave., Midland Park, NJ 07432.

**A Bargain Not to Be Missed**

Walter Albert sent me a copy of the 26 October 1990 catalog of bargain books from Edward R. Hamilton, Falls Village, CT 06031-5000 and circled an astounding, amazing and astonishing offer. The standard guide (not index) to fantastic fiction magazines is Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Weird Fiction Magazines (Greenwood 1985), ed. by Marshall Tymn and Mike Ashley. If the original $95 price gave you pause, wait no longer, for it’s available for $9.95 plus $3 postage. Might be best if you phoned before sending your check, in case the word has gotten around. Send a gift SFRA membership with the money you’ll save. Or two memberships.

*Neil Barron*
Another SFRA Member’s Current Work in Progress

William G. Contento notes that he is working on an Index to all SF Magazines (with S. R. Miller & K. Johnson) and Science Fiction, Fantasy, & Horror: 1990 (with C. N. Brown).

Tom Remington

New Bibliography from NESFA Press


Recursive SF is that subset of the field where characters, setting, plot, etc., are in the SF community. These stories can be set at SF conventions, or have authors, editors, artists as characters. This bibliography contains almost 200 separate items, in author order, with notes on the recursive elements. There are cross reference listings by title and date of first appearance. The bibliography is available for $6.00, plus $1.00 postage and shipping (Massachusetts residents add 5% sales tax) from NESFA, Inc., Box G, MIT Branch Office, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139-0910.

NESFA

Pulphouse Publishing Announces Change

The critically acclaimed World Fantasy Award winning publication, Pulphouse: The Hardback Magazine, edited by Kristine Kathryn Rusch and published by Dean Wesley Smith, will produce its last issue in April 1991. Issue Twelve will be the end of the hardback format, finishing the set at 12 volumes, all limited to 1250 copies.

Then, starting in May, Pulphouse will lend its name, its award-winning editor, its publishing and marketing techniques, and its dangerous vision to a new publication: Pulphouse: A Weekly Magazine. The magazine will be in an 8.5 x 11 inch slick, perfect-bound format, will have about 40 pages of editorial content, using fiction (including serialized novels), non-fiction, and assigned columns, cover charge is $2.50. Subscription rates: 13 issues for $26.00 (First class, Canada, or overseas $39.00); 26 issues for $50.00 (First class, Canada, or overseas $76.00). Order from Pulphouse Publishing, Box 1227, Eugene, Oregon 97440.

Exciting News for Stephen King Fans

In his fall catalog, Donald M. Grant announces that the long awaited Stephen King novel, The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands, is now in production. Ned Dameron is illustrating King’s new novel. Order information will be available around the first part of 1991 from Donald M. Grant, Publisher, Inc., P.O. Box 187, Hampton Falls, NH 03844.
REVIEWS

Non-Fiction:

Considerably Less Than Cosmic


The premise of *Cosmic Critiques* is valid: those aspiring to write any form of literature should study well-known, effective examples. As Asimov explains in his introduction, writers need to do more than casually read such examples; they should “try to answer such questions as: ‘Now why did he say that in just that way?’ or ‘Why didn’t he make thus-and-so clear at this point, instead of letting the reader remain doubtful?’” Excellent questions, many of which are answered in Asimov’s introductions and Dibell’s post-story analyses.

The premise of this book goes farther, however; seeing science fiction as a literature of “ideas,” the creators have organized these ideas into ten “premises,” each illustrated with a story. Presumably, these premises cover the important categories of science fiction, or at least those that sell reliably. Writer’s Digest Books promises to “help your students get published.” Each of these stories has been published; by studying them, the creators argue, writing students should learn to create publishable stories.

Maybe. But only if those students have enough knowledge of science fiction to recognize that nine of the ten stories were written in the 1950’s and ‘60’s; that eight are seriously dated in tone, style, and topic; that seven are minor (and the major ones have been widely anthologized elsewhere, if not so clearly analyzed); that the “premises” on which these stories have been categorized are not basic ideas, which could be extrapolated from or speculated upon by an inventive student, but plot summaries, which cannot; and that science fiction is a genre in which imitation screams “amateur.” Students who recognize all this, and who also have talent and are willing to put in a lot of hard work, will get published. They would anyhow. Reading this book may actually put them at a disadvantage.

This leads us to speculate why Asimov and Greenberg, prestigious craftsmen both, have put their names on this work. On the theory that it is easier to teach a craft if the standards are not set very high? To pander to
teachers who neither like nor respect science fiction? One hopes not. Perhaps they wish to corner a double market: teachers of science fiction writing and teachers of science fiction literature. Cosmic Critiques should not be used this way, either; Dibell’s analyses of the stories are so thorough as to discourage the literature student from digging into the few that are worth the time, and most are not worth any time at all. Teaching science fiction as literature demands a top quality anthology, like The Science Fiction Hall of Fame or The SFRA Anthology. Teachers of science fiction writing should use nothing less.

Martha A. Bartter

Possible Solution to Mystery


Betty T. Bennett is famous as the editor of Mary Shelley’s letters in three volumes (Johns Hopkins). As she compiled the footnotes to volume I she was confronted by two mystery men, a writer called David Lyndsay and the husband of Mary Shelley’s friend, Walter Sholto Douglas. Buried behind Mary Shelley’s guarded references to these two characters lay a strange story that tells us much about literary and social mores in the early years of last century.

So what we have here is a report of clever investigation into that nineteenth century British world, with Bennett playing the detective. What she uncovers is a story of a transvestite, the eponymous Dods, illegitimate daughter of an earl, who posed as both Lyndsay and Douglas.

I find Bennett’s conclusions most persuasive: that Dods’ deception was prompted less from sexual motives than from a kind of necessity. As her friend, Shelley’s young widow, well knew, the difficulties for a female alone in a masculine world were manifold. The donning of culottes partly solved the problem. And the relationship with Mary Shelley was “non-erotic.”

The harshness of women’s lives—especially the illegitimate ones—is well brought out. So is the complexity of human nature when confronted by the complexities of social custom.

This is a striking tale of deception and desperation, ably unraveled, which will be of great interest to students of the period and of the Shelley circle.

Brian Aldiss
Of Limited Use


Librarians compile books for other librarians to use, like Biagi’s, a guide to nine genres of popular fiction and to the major creators of contemporary standard fiction for the use of public and school librarians who select fiction or who offer some form of guidance to readers. Librarians will find it of limited help, but there is little here for a reader wishing to expand his/her knowledge of a particular genre. Comparing its treatment of one genre with that of a similar book points up its lacks best.

Betty Rosenberg’s *Genreflecting: a Guide to Reading Interests in Fiction* (2nd ed, 1986) looks at six genres of popular fiction of which three are horror, science fiction and fantasy. Biagi considers nine, of which one is horror, the supernatural, and adventure, and another science fiction and fantasy. However, in the two page introductory overview to the chapter on science fiction, Rosenberg divides the genre into 27 sub-groups; in the fantasy introduction, she names 11 sub-genres. Biagi mentions seven sub-genres for science fiction and three for fantasy, all of which she drew from Rosenberg’s divisions.

Rosenberg devotes a full page to each sub-genre, discussing it as a type, and then listing a dozen to three dozen authors who write in it, with one to three titles for each author. Biagi merely gives us 22 pages science fiction authors in alphabetical order, and nine pages of fantasy authors. Under each name is a chronological list of titles in the genre.

Both concentrate on twentieth century authors whose work appeared after 1940. Both omit authors whose work appeared for the first time in the last two or three years, but Biagi appears to omit more.

Biagi refers her user to seventeen texts and bibliographies printed between 1976 and 1989 in the science fiction and fantasy fields. Rosenberg devotes a page or more to each of a dozen special topics: anthologies, bibliographies, encyclopedias, criticism, magazines, associations and conventions, awards, and more, just for science fiction. Similar topics, as wide in coverage but not identical in subject, are discussed in the fantasy chapter.

Biagi will be of most value to a small public or school library which needs to strengthen its collection of particular genres. Probably equally helpful is its identification of a few contemporary writers of major fiction (not genre) from countries other than America and Britain.

*Paula M. Strain*
Social Satire, Film Criticism, and Amusement


In a review of *Joe Bob Goes to the Drive-In* (1987), I wrote that the book was unindexed because “Joe Bob figures indexes are for wimps.” *Back to the Drive-In* includes not only an index but also a humorless introduction by the editor of *Cineaste*, who announces soberly that “although Joe Bob does occasionally stray into Archie Bunker territory, he is no bigot.” Has Joe Bob turned wimp?

Fortunately these aberrations are clearly the work of a faint-hearted publisher. A glance at the text shows that all is as it should be. Briggs still wages war on “Roger the Wimp and Siskel the Simp.” His summaries of exploitation films are still so detailed they almost make it unnecessary to see the film. “Monster sex. Rear-wheel head crushing. Dope-smoking toxic waste haulers. Little-old-lady crowbar bashing. Nautilus lead slicing. Gratuitous gay hairdressers.” (*Toxic Avenger*, 1985). He still has a sharp ear for such dialogue as “You are much too beautiful a girl to let yourself be broken into food for the royal dogs.” (*Barbarian Queen*, 1986).

Almost every other page records (under the heading “Communist alert!”) the death of another drive-in theater somewhere in Middle or Southern America. To keep up with the movies, Briggs had to buy a VCR and a satellite dish. “I sold out,” he confesses. A and B movies have become less and less distinguishable, so Briggs covers big-budget movies starring Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Gibson, Norris and Bronson. Briggs’s social satire may be less sharp than in the first book, but he still delights in skewering such Texas institutions as Baptist conventions, college football scandals and (an old favorite) the Miss Texas Pageant. His film criticism is a source of reliable information for those who like B-movies and amusement for those who don’t. For public libraries.

*Michael Klossner*

Trivial Pursuits


There is something wonderfully obsessive about books like *Universal Horrors*. Genre films seem to inspire fans such as Bill Warren, whose two-volume *Keep Watching the Skies!* (McFarland 1982, 1986) assays American SF films from 1950-1962, and Donald F. Glut, whose numbingly inclusive...
The Frankenstein Catalogue (McFarland 1984) exemplifies the form, to spend countless hours rooting through libraries and studio vaults in search of absolutely every scrap of information about films of decidedly dubious merit. Universal Horrors gives this treatment to a clutch of 85 films produced by the Universal Studios horror mill during the period that spans the Great Depression and the Second World War.

From 1915, when “Uncle” Carl Laemmle established Universal City in the San Fernando Valley, to 1946 when the studio merged with International Pictures, Universal ground out countless films, including such genuine classics as Edgar Ulmer’s The Black Cat (1934) and James Whale’s The Bride of Frankenstein (1935). The influence of Universal’s horrors persisted through the post-war SF/horror giant critter features, the Hammer cycle of the late ’50s and early ’60s, and the AIP cheapies of the ’60s—right up to 1968, when George Romero’s Night of the Living Dead and Roman Polanski’s Rosemary’s Baby changed forever the ground rules for cinematic horror.

From 1930 onward, Universal rode a roller coaster of economic and artistic misfortune. Perpetually on the brink of economic collapse, the studio by the forties had begun to lose its great horror writers, directors, and stars. Universal produced its last great horror film in 1941 (George Waggner’s The Wolf Man); by 1946 the best it could muster was the cliche-ridden House of Horrors. Among its other accomplishments, Universal Horrors chronicles this depressing downward spiral.

They’re all here: the multi-film saga of Frankenstein, already exhaustingly surveyed by Glut in The Frankenstein Legend (Scarecrow Press 1974) and by Gregory William Mank in It’s Alive (Barnes 1981), and those of Dracula, the Mummy, the Invisible Man, the Ape Woman, and Sherlock Holmes; the Inner Sanctum and Crime Club series; and the war/horror, haunted house comedy, and horror whodunit sub-genres. The authors’ highly elastic definition of “horror” embraces mysteries, espionage thrillers, costume fantasies, period melodramas, “spooky house mysteries,” and straight whodunits with faint horror overtones. Few are classics; most are dreadful. Fortunately, Brunas et al. know this and bring no such pretense to their essays on such movies as Life Returns (“cheap and dismal”), Jungle Woman (“glum, boring”), and The Missing Guest (dismal”). Each essay is marked by wit, level-headed commentary, and a torrent of trivia: not just plot summaries, but details of production, casting, marketing, make-up, budgeting, alternate titles, scheduling, script versions, reviewer’s responses, and biographies of major and minor stars spiced with selected interviews and performance critiques, plus about 140 photos. But, of course, immoderate completeness is precisely the point.
In time, many of these films will be lost to the vicissitudes of studio carelessness and film stock degeneration. So, in spite of its excesses, *Universal Horrors* is, for a certain audience, indispensable. Casual readers interested in Universal’s horror cycle may prefer the brevity of Carlos Clarens’ *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (Putnam 1967) or Leslie Halliwell’s *The Dead That Walk* (Continuum 1988); those seeking critical analyses might favor S. S. Prawer’s *Caligari’s Children* (Oxford 1980) or James Twitchell’s *Dreadful Pleasures* (Oxford 1985). But if you’re a fan (or run a library with a large film collection) you absolutely must have this book. It’s pricey—but isn’t a book that features a full-page photo of Rondo Hatton worth it?

*Michael A. Morrison*

**Growth of a Myth**


In September 1823 Mary Shelley went with her father to see a play at the English Opera House titled *Presumption!: or, The Fate of Frankenstein*. “I was much amused,” she reported, “and it appeared to excite a breathless eagerness in the audience.”

We may think Mrs. Shelley easily pleased when we read Peake’s fustian script of *Presumption* and see what liberties he took with the novel. This we can now do; Forry includes the texts of seven pre-1931 dramatizations. There have been over ninety dramatizations of the novel, all of which simplify (as they must), most of which are travesties. There were fifteen between 1823 and 1826 alone—from which it appears Shelley’s impoverished widow received never a penny.

Forry presents a history of the adaptations and examines the way in which the legend of Frankenstein spread, escaping from within the pages of Mrs. Shelley’s marvelous book to become a general point of reference and a myth. It ascended from near-pantomime to political allusion and then to wider application. He mentions Gladstone’s and Mrs. Gaskell’s references to the monster, and could have included Dickens in *Great Expectations* and Eugene O’Neill’s in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*—and many others, I suppose.

The nineteenth century is a time of gross traduction of the original. Against the whole sense of the novel, alchemy is invariably used to animate the corpse; electricity enters only in a movie farce, *The Last Laugh*, made in 1915. Almost always the alienated creature is dumb, stripped of its
Shelleyan eloquence, to serve either melodrama or slapstick; Abbott and Costello have always been meeting the monster. The slow appreciation of the latter as a creature of initial innocence and sorrow (as its maker intended) may be paralleled by society's dawning acceptance of lunatics as not to be excluded from the compass of human compassion. Exotic scenery, weird events, gypsy dances, proposals of marriage, and "sacrifices to mass appeal" hold the stage. We have come only slowly to a deeper reading of the original.

The volume's research, which the author generously admits owes much to earlier bibliographers such as Glut, is enlivened by a number of reproductions of playbills, portraits, cartoons, and so on. It is an absorbing and instructive compendium, essential to students of Mary Shelley—or, indeed, anyone with an interest in the growth of myth.

A recognition of the relevance of Frankenstein has come with the development of science and the decline of organized religion. As Forry's scripts demonstrate, psychology (feminist concentration on themes of bereavement in the novel) has taken over from what was mere hokum. Here is a scrap of dialogue from Henry M. Milner's Frankenstein; or, the Man and the Monster, performed in 1826:

Frankenstein: What do I behold? Emmeline Ritzberg! Lost, guilty, cursed wretch! Thy cup of crime and misery is full. Hell yawns for thee, and all the victims now surround thee, calling down heaven's vengeance on thy head.

Rant, rant, rant—the stage a pulpit.

Brian Aldiss

Unique and Useful Gothic Study


Inverso persuasively demonstrates that major contemporary European and American dramatists have found effective ways of bringing the world view implicit in the Gothic tradition in fiction to the stage and thus give playgoers experiences similar to those found in Gothic narrative.

Inverso draws upon brief analyses of Gothic classics from Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe through Matthew Lewis, Charles Maturin, and Mary Shelley to Henry James and Oscar Wilde. Depending heavily on the best scholarship and criticism, including the work of Patrick Day, Rosemary Jackson, David Punter, and Judith Wilt, Inverso constructs a useful anatomy
of Gothic themes and techniques. She then shows how these themes and techniques appear in a number of plays from the 1960s and 1970s.

She characterizes the Gothic thematically as the representation of a cosmos minimally without support for human ideas of order and usually actively inimical to such order. She argues that while 18th and 19th-century drama often made use of Gothic plots and conventions, most plays of these centuries proved unwilling or unable to bring true metaphysical anxiety or terror to the stage. Then, in four chapters, she examines the means by which anxiety and terror are produced in contemporary plays. These include: multiple acts of narration, as in the play within the play, that frustrate closure and leave the viewer lost in a labyrinth of stories; the division of characters into tyrants and mobs whose identities move through reversals and exchanges; the creation of Gothic space on the stage, in which the stage, like the Gothic house, becomes a place of entrapment that destroys the characters; and the exploitation of terrifying relations between on stage and off stage space.

Inverso offers Peter Weiss's *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (1964) as the paradigmatic NeoGothic drama. Among the other dramatists in whom she finds the Gothic impulse are Harold Pinter, Peter Barnes, Sam Shepard, Samuel Beckett, David Halliwell, Eugene Ionesco, and Tom Stoppard.

This is a unique and useful study, calling attention to a relatively unnoticiced branch of Gothic literature. Inverso's pulling together of Gothic characteristics makes her volume a good introduction to recent scholarship. Furthermore, this book is suggestive for those interested in permutations of the Gothic in film.

Terry Heller

Analysis of Lovecraft's Ideas


S. T. Joshi is a leading authority on things Lovecraftian; this, his fifth book on Lovecraft, testifies to his scholarship. *H. P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West,* seems less interested in fictions than philosophy, however, which may discourage readers anticipating interpretations and/or criticism. The first half presents Lovecraft's philosophical development as expressed in metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and politics—the latter delving into oft-repeated
charges of Lovecraft’s racism and bigotry. Based on extensive quotations from Lovecraft’s letters, as well as from Nietzsche, Ernst Haeckel, Hugh Elliot, and others, this section defines Lovecraft’s emerging cosmicism, his debt to Classicism and 18th-century neo-Classicism, his increasing awareness of Einsteinian relativity, and related topics. Dense, heavily documented, frequently more advocacy than criticism, the section nonetheless presents extensive evidence for Joshi’s conclusions.

The second part, The Fiction, repeats the structure of the first, relating metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and politics to Lovecraft’s stories. Rather than lengthy discussions of individual works, however, such as occur in Joshi’s earlier H. P. Lovecraft (Starmont, 1982), we here find thematic discussions, with references to specific stories scattered throughout. The text is clearly intended less as a quick guide to particular stories than as a unified discussion of the philosophical thought underpinning all of Lovecraft’s fictions.

The text is well documented, with extensive footnotes, a fairly comprehensive and current bibliography, and an index. Its major faults seem to lie in the extent of quotation, which frequently disrupts the sequence of Joshi’s points, and in his apparent advocacy of certain of Lovecraft’s conclusions. For example, the text frequently diverges from defining Lovecraft’s atheism to disproving religion in general. Lovecraft’s materialism becomes a touchstone in the study: “The materiality of all the entities in Lovecraft’s fiction—however anomalous that materiality may at times be—is the trump card for the assertion of a unity between Lovecraft’s philosophy and his fiction....even the most titanic of his ‘gods’ (if that is what they are) are material after a fashion” (83). Joshi’s concern for justifying this stance occasionally leads him into errors of omission; earlier, he notes in parentheses “the notion of many ancient philosophers—the Epicureans among them—that the soul is material; but since no religion has adopted such a view it need not enter into the argument” (23); he fails to take into account the explicit tenet of at least one religion that “There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter....”

In other matters, Joshi is careful to discriminate between fact and assessment. He frequently recognizes his limitations with such phrases as “I suppose” and “I have a feeling,” which lend the text a sense of tenuousness but at the same time avoid drawing firm conclusions where none are appropriate. Readers more interested in Lovecraft’s ideas than in his fictions, and prepared for explicit and technical discussions of philosophical points, will find this study valuable.

Michael R. Collings
Crusader and Cartoonist


Kane created Batman, Robin and several of the *Batman* villains. He drew, but did not write, many of the *Batman* comic books from 1939 to 1966. Unhappily, his account of the early years of the comic book industry and of his marginal involvement in the *Batman* film and television projects is thin and anecdotal. Kane says that he dislikes the work of many of the other artists who have drawn *Batman*, but he only hints at why. His most interesting recollections are of the many influences that inspired his early work. *Batman* was based on both the silent swashbuckler film, *The Mark of Zorro*, and drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, while The Joker was derived from Lon Chaney’s character in the silent horror film *The Man Who Laughs*. Vicki Vale was modeled on Marilyn Monroe, who Kane knew slightly. He lists many other popular culture icons of the 1920s through the ‘40s that had an impact on his invention of the world of Batman, from horror and gangster films to B movie serials, Busby Berkeley musicals and newspaper comic strips.

The main value of *Batman & Me* is the many well-reproduced illustrations, including samples of Kane’s pre-Batman work, dozens of his black-and-white renditions of the superhero and his world and 48 pages in color, comprising three complete stories from the early 1940s. For large pop culture collections.

*Michael Klossner*

Early Morris


This study of the poetry of William Morris covers his work from his early post-Oxford days to his publication of *Love is Enough* in 1872. During this period Morris produced an extended body of romance and fantasy based on fairy tales ("Rapunzel"), Greek literature (The Fall of Troy), Arthurian legend (*The Defence of Guenevere*, Froissart, Icelandic saga, and other medieval sources. The major work of the period was *The Earthly Paradise*, a collection of twenty-four narrative poems set in a frame-story imitative of Chaucer. The focus is not on the literary quality of the work (much of it is
rather bad), on his use of his sources, or on his relationship with the pre-Raphaelite movement, but on what it reveals about his psychological development. Kirchhoff believes this is a great deal. His general thesis is that Morris suffered from an inadequate masculine self-image caused partly by his loss of his father at thirteen, his inability to bond satisfactorily with other males during his adolescence, and his later unsatisfactory relationship with his wife, who carried on an extended affair with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. After 1872 he ceased to write romances, and when he returned to them in the last decade of his life, he had become "a new kind of man," one who had come to know himself.

Although Kirchhoff is solidly grounded in both pre-Raphaelite literature and in psychology, I wonder whether a study like this really adds a great deal to our understanding of either Morris or the wider issues of Victorian poetry. No doubt there is sexual symbolism in Morris's poetry, but this is scarcely a new idea. Kirchhoff's interpretations may be perfectly correct, but far too many of them are unsubstantiated by any specific evidence drawn from Morris's life or writings. He concludes, for example, that Morris did not complete Scenes From the Fall of Troy because his happiness in his marriage had made writing dramatic poetry "no longer a satisfactory experience"(114). Perhaps so, but isn't it just as likely that Morris quit because he realized the work was a failure as literature?

This study will nevertheless be of interest to students of Victorian literature and of the psychology of fantasy, and for large academic libraries. The book itself is handsomely produced, as befits its subject, the founder of the Kelmscott press.

Lynn F. Williams

For a Limited Audience


The editors claim that this thoroughly researched and annotated edition of Poe's short prose was designed to be "readable, attractive, and accessible to a general reader or student, but would also be useful to a scholar or specialist" (xi). Unfortunately, the presentation of the material serves only to annoy the scholar and confuse the general reader, for there is no clear organizational structure.

The book is divided into 15 sections, or groups of tales, each preceded by a preface and followed by the notes to all the stories in the section. The tales are admittedly grouped arbitrarily, but the existence of a preface to each
section leads to the expectation of a coherent discussion of the basis on which a grouping was created and of the relationship of the tales within the section to one another. However, the first preface, introducing a group of visionary sketches, doesn't even discuss them in the order in which they appear in the text. Other prefices attempt to set groups of tales in context, but the reader never knows whether to expect a discussion of theme, of tone, of genre, of Poe's use of symbolism, or perhaps of the tales' connections to Poe's own life. The bulk of most prefices is taken up with brief, unconnected commentaries on the individual works contained in the section.

Also annoying is the decision to group notes not at the foot of a page or the end of a story for easy access, but rather at the end of a section. The many cross-references to other tales within both the prefices and the notes are not indexed. Not even the place and date of publication of a tale are found without a struggle.

The volume includes a general introduction to Poe's life, work, and personality, and is handsomely designed, with useful maps and photographs interspersed throughout the text. The thorough annotations will answer any question one might have about any reference or allusion. However, the editorial content resembles a cut-and-paste job which requires the researcher to flip constantly from section preface to tale to notes for information.

This is an easy-to-read, one-volume edition of the tales themselves; however, neither the scholar, who will be frustrated by the ungainly arrangement of the annotations, nor the student, who will often find the prefatory material ponderously written, will welcome the apparatus that accompanies the text. Only the specialist seeking arcane references might find this book a worthwhile addition to his collection. Recommended for larger public and university libraries only.

Agatha Taormina

Screenplays - One Horror, One Comedy, One SF


Universal Studios has been associated with fantastic films from Dracula (1931) to Darkman (1990). Riley's and MagicImage Filmbooks' Universal Filmscripts Series has concentrated on Universal's Frankenstein films, of which Son of Frankenstein (1939) was the third and Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein (1948) was the last. This Island Earth (1954) is the first
Universal SF film in the Magiclmage series. Each volume includes a reproduction of the typewritten shooting script of the film (the script of This Island Earth has many changes in the barely legible handwriting of screenwriter Franklin Coen); many black-and-white illustrations including the film's original pressbook, far more elaborate than today's press materials; and a well-informed chapter of about 20 pages of "production background." The production essays in the Frankenstein volumes are slightly revised chapters from It's Alive!, Gregory Mank's 1981 book on the Universal Frankenstein series. The production notes by Robert Skotak on This Island Earth concentrate on the film's innovative special effects.

The availability of most important films on videocassette has reduced the usefulness of the continuity script, which is simply a transcript of the final release version of the movie. More valuable to film students are preliminary and shooting scripts. Most films go through several script versions, often by different writers, before filming begins; further changes are almost invariably made during filming and editing. By comparing different scripts to each other and to the final form of the film, students can try to pinpoint what changes were made by each of the many people involved, not only writers but also directors, producers, actors, editors, studio executives and censors.

Each of the scripts reproduced in these volumes is apparently the final shooting script and is dated a few days before actual filming began. Nevertheless the script for Son of Frankenstein by Willis Cooper bears little resemblance to the film as released. Cooper's work was virtually discarded by director Rowland V. Lee, who rewrote constantly as he filmed. Lee added Ygor, Bela Lugosi's character; he removed all the Monster's dialogue at the request of Boris Karloff, who always preferred a mute monster. The Abbott and Costello script by Frederic Rinaldo, Robert Lees and John Grant is much closer to the film, but several gags were added during the filming, thanks mainly to the improvisational talents of Lou Costello. The most famous exchange in the movie is not in the script: Wolfman, in anguished upper-crust voice, "You don't understand. When the moon is full, I turn into a wolf." Costello, with Brooklyn accent, "Yeah, you and twenty million other guys."

Because of the careful planning needed for elaborate sets, props and special effects, the shooting script for This Island Earth is very similar to the film, except for several dialogue changes. Even in this case, descriptions in the script can reveal the filmmakers' attitudes more clearly than the film itself. For instance, Coen writes of the hero, "his manner combines the thoughtfulness of a highly successful nuclear scientist with the openness of a well-integrated young man." The pressbook also repays study. Universal was concerned that hard-headed 1954 audiences considered science fiction too fanciful and assured them that This Island Earth had "a believable plot (for a science fiction yarn)."
Each of these books can be recommended for a different reason. *Son of Frankenstein* offers the most grist for the academic mill, due to the great differences between film and script. The *Abbott and Costello* film is by far the best film of the three and is usually considered one of the most successful horror comedies ever made. *This Island Earth* is the most historically important; it was one of the first films to present a sympathetic alien, warfare in space, an alien planet and the destruction of a planet. All three books belong in serious collections.

*How to Read Genres*


Despite its unfortunate title, which the author admits is offensive and says he regrets (but sticks with anyway), *The Aesthetics of Junk Fiction* is the most insightful and provocative study of popular genre literature since John Cawelti’s 1976 *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance.* Roberts acknowledges his debt to Cawelti, particularly in reference to the type of bestseller that Cawelti called the “social melodrama,” but his approach is quite different, and he is able to take advantage of the work of many researchers who followed in the footsteps of Cawelti’s pioneering work. What will come as the most pleasant surprise to students of science fiction is that Roberts—almost alone among general-purpose theorists of popular fiction—seems quite comfortable and familiar with the genre, citing fanzines and *Locus* along with primary texts that reveal considerable experience in teaching the genre.

Whereas Cawelti focused largely on the use of narrative formulas and tropes in popular genres, Roberts directs his attention instead to the ways in which readers approach these genres—and this leads to another unfortunate case of peremptory labeling. He classes readers into “serious readers,” “plain readers” (who read bestsellers), and “paperback readers,” and classes fiction as canonical, serious, “plain,” or “junk,” using the latter term almost interchangeably with “paperback.” He then argues that “the serious writer usually has to settle for fame alone; the plain writer, for money alone; and the writer of junk fiction, for love alone” (p. 32). Much of this already seems indefensible—exceptions to Roberts’s global pronouncements seem to scream for attention—but Roberts is building a case worth listening to, and it’s worth bearing along with him.

Essentially, his case is this: reading in popular genres consists of what Roberts calls “thick reading,” which is a way of saying that people who read science fiction (for example) tend to read a lot of it, and that “every story in every popular genre is referring deliberately or unconsciously to every other
story in that genre” (p. 60). This explains why even “serious” readers can enjoy a popular genre once they know the rules, and why a popular book in an unfamiliar genre can seem incomprehensible or trite. “Readers who are following a genre are creating maps of that genre which they are continually redrawing as that genre changes” (p. 226). “Literary” fiction, on the other hand, constitutes another kind of “bookscape,” which Roberts astutely describes as “a learned bookscape that is prepared by experts for the profit and pleasure of amateurs” (p. 233). “The expert loves learning, but the amateur loves literature” (p. 234).

An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction is full of such quotable lines. The theory behind them may remind some of Samuel R. Delany’s “protocols” for reading science fiction, but unfortunately Roberts seems unfamiliar with the criticism of Delany (whose name he misspells “Delaney”), or with much other recent science fiction critical theory. Nor does he make much use of earlier forms of reader-response criticism. He does invoke C. S. Lewis’s notions of escape and the different kinds of readers, and makes much use of Janice Radway’s 1984 study of romance readers, so he is not theorizing in the dark by a long shot. He seems a bit overdependent on a few key sources, however: he not only invokes Radway to explain a genre he himself apparently has trouble with, but supports his assertion that science fiction writers play off each other’s ideas by quoting the same passage from William Tenn three times!

Apart from science fiction and romance, Roberts is strong in dealing with hardboiled fiction, adequate in discussing westerns (which are a special case in that they seem to constitute a weakening genre), and less sure of himself with classic mysteries and “social melodramas.” He almost entirely ignores horror and fantasy, which seem to be much more vital genres today than the western, and he often overlooks the kinds of commercial and marketing constraints that shape the kinds of fiction being published. When he wants to show how science fiction changes its notion of a classic, for example, he cites readership surveys from 1952 to 1975 without considering such factors as the turnover in readership, the availability of texts in reprint, or changing demographics.

Roberts writes in an engaging, clear manner, and his frequent neologisms—“thick reading,” “superorganic source,” “genre allergies,” “exclusivists,” “bookscapes,” etc.—are either self-explanatory or well-defined in the text. There is much to argue with in the book, and I suspect that much of the book is deliberately couched in terms that will generate arguments—which after all is what criticism should do. I only hope that this ingenious and often brilliant study will reach a wide enough audience to get a good tussle going.

Gary K. Wolfe
The best essay in this collection is Brian Aldiss' "What Should a SF Novel be About?" His eminently readable—and doubtless fun to hear—criticism of contemporary science fiction makes the point that the new, widespread "metropolis" of modern SF begins with publication of *Dune World* in *Analog* in 1964-65. The New Wave, academia, and the "closed nature of the SF field" with its powerful influence of readers on writers have been significant factors in its growth. While pointing out that "SF is no longer simply men's action" and insisting that a good story is still necessary, Aldiss calls for concern with broader matters: real emotion, real thought, greater plausibility, real life, and, above all, treatment "sharpening our understanding of reality." In the near future commercial SF will be about fantasy, "the easiest thing to write for authors who know or care nothing about the world," and America, "an American Empire in the Stars." He concludes that SF is growing closer to the mainstream but that if SF retains its independent spirit and continues to refine its intrinsic character rather than its outward trappings all will be well.

I found several other essays interesting: Leonard Heldreth's "Fantasy as Criticism in Forster's Short Fiction" makes an excellent case for Forster's use of fantasy as a vehicle for opposing those characteristics of contemporary society that Forster found most hateful. Leo Daugherty, "The Response of Wonder: Science Fiction and Literary Theory," looks at the question of why great science fiction is not recognized as great literature and finds at least a partial answer in the traditional academic teaching of values. Brooks Landon, "The Insistence of Fantasy in Contemporary Science Fiction Film," demonstrates the necessity for understanding the presence of fantastic elements at both thematic and structural levels as basis for a sound critical approach to SF films.

Other essays deserving of special mention include Colin N. Manlove's discussion of "The Elusiveness of Fantasy," the best of those dealing with theories of fantasy; Jill Milling's excellent study of "The Ambiguous Animal: Evolution of the Beast-Man in Scientific Creation Myths"; Patricia M. Burnham's illustrated discussion of "Gender Issues in American Angels"; Lloyd Worley's "Joyce, Yeats, Tarot, and the Structure of *Dubliners*"; and Carl Shaffer's on "Exegeses on *Stand on Zanzibar's* Digressions into Genesis" all provide especially interesting insights into the works considered.
As the editor’s preface aptly points out, the 25 essays of this collection “are a small sampling of the various shapes that the fantastic can take.” The essays consider a great variety of texts from several languages and demonstrate a wide range of subjects, some, however, so specialized as to be of interest only to limited groups of specialists. Nevertheless, the general level of scholarship is high, and the collection presents a good picture of the state of academic criticism of fantasy when the conference was held in 1986.

Arthur O. Lewis

SF Author as Critical Reviewer


There are many science fiction reviewers, and some are critical of the genre as a whole, but there are only a few who aspire to critical analyses of specific works and authors. Spinrad’s thesis is that only a science fiction novelist (“working artist” in his terms) can take the proper critical approach to science fiction, since only such an artist properly appreciates the tricks of the trade, and can use them appropriately in criticism. With this view, he attempts to join a small but distinguished company. Algis Budrys certainly qualifies for this role; his current column in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction shows his talent. Earlier, the late James Blish (writing as William Atheling, Jr.) provided one of the best examples of this kind of critical talent.

In fact, a comparison of this book with Budrys’s Benchmarks (1985), and Atheling’s The Issue at Hand (1964), and More Issues at Hand (1970) shows many similarities. However, where Blish used the name of Atheling for his critical work, in order to avoid the comparison of his own fiction with that which he was analyzing, Spinrad never hesitates to use his own work as example. In fact, more than a few of the 13 essays in this book, most of them reprinted from Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine, refer to Spinrad’s own novels, and seldom to their detriment (although he does admit to a faulty ending to The Solarians). There’s really nothing wrong with using one’s own work as example—the author may be the best source of knowledge as to what’s wrong with his own work and how it happened, as Spinrad’s introduction points out. However, one should apply the rule consistently. Instead, using Card’s Ender’s Game and Speaker For The Dead, for instance, Spinrad bemoans the “missing” book between them (a book he believes should have been written, instead of the last chapter of Ender’s Game, and then interprets what Card meant to do, thereby violating the
principle just stated. In this case, he ascribes Ender's guilt to some "psychosexual subtext" in the novel—stating that, since Ender was tricked into genocide, he has no reason to feel guilt for that act. Another person might assume that the extermination of an entire race, unwittingly or otherwise, would be sufficiently traumatic to create a feeling of guilt, and that Card might have written with that assumption.

Most reviewers and critics assume that they should read a work in its entirety before venturing an opinion on it. In the first essay, Spinrad admits that he's violating this principle by mercilessly devoting seven pages of scathing denunciation to a 441 page book—after reading only the first 60 pages. His explanation is that it is an incredibly bad book which received good reviews because the reviewers had no conception of what good science fiction is like which Spinrad, as an experienced writer, can immediately recognize. But Spinrad is again inconsistent. In the essay on Philip K. Dick, for instance, he excuses Dick for writing several very poor novels (one was written as a novella around a cover painting, later blown up into a novel just to make money) because an editor had a title and wanted someone to write a book around it. Note that he doesn't try to say that the books were not bad, but he excuses the author because the books were written in a hurry, to make money, and tosses that explanation off in a couple of paragraphs. One would expect a similar treatment and understanding in the case of both authors. In spite of these inconsistent treatments, the book as a whole presents a unified theme, with some excellent material: an essay on Science Fiction Versus Sci-Fi (with the exception noted above on Card's works), a discussion of Books Into Movies, and an essay on The Hard Stuff. The essay on the Emperor of Everything, with its two page generic plot outline is one of the best pieces, even though it once again castigates Ender's Game (things Spinrad doesn't like may appear several times in different essays).

Although Spinrad's critical commentaries don't equal those of Blish/Atheling, Blish is gone. With this book, Spinrad shows that he's worthy of sharing the laurels with Budrys. This book should be in the library of any serious student of science fiction.

W. D. Stevens

Plato and More

Although one would not think it possible that there is anything new to say about More's use of Plato's *Republic* in his *Utopia*, Starnes takes a fresh approach. His brief monograph is a detailed and perceptive study of the ways in which Book I is both indebted to and critical of Plato. The focus is on More's interpretation of Plato rather than on the *Republic* itself, but in the course of this close reading he makes a number of interesting points which illuminate both books.

Starnes' general thesis is that More intended his book as a rewriting of the *Republic* in a form relevant to his own day and his own readers, which included both other learned Renaissance humanists like himself and the less-educated reading public. More, he believes, knew exactly what he was doing in *Utopia* and as the prefatory verses and letters indicate, his sixteenth century readers thought they understood it. It is modern readers who find the work confusing and ambiguous. In rewriting Plato, More intended Book I as a criticism of his ideas from a Christian point of view. Book II then shows Christian Europe what it *could* learn from Platonic thought. Where the two books differ is in their realism: *The Republic* is entirely theoretical, whereas *Utopia* supplies a truly practical answer to the desperate political and economic problems of sixteenth century Europe.

Though short, *The New Republic* is compact and densely written, with extensive annotations. Although it is too specialized for the general reader, it is strongly recommended for academic libraries and More specialists.

*Lynn F. Williams*

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**Stover Overheats**


Having just finished writing a volume for Twayne, I'm acutely aware of the innate problems with the series. At a maximum of 150 pages and with an editorial charge to cover as much of the assigned author's work as possible, it's difficult to find room for in-depth analysis. Further, there's the question of audience. Should the book be written for other scholars, students, the general reader, or some impossible combination of all three? Despite the difficulties, however, various Twayne authors have done excellent work. I've been particularly impressed by David Mogen's *Ray Bradbury* and Charlotte Spivack's *Ursula Le Guin*.

Leon Stover's first book in the series, *Robert Heinlein* (1987), was published to mixed reviews. His volume on Harry Harrison, I'm afraid, is far from an improvement. The book is divided into eleven chapters, the first an
oddly slanted and essentially extraneous history of science fiction that doesn't even mention Harrison until its closing paragraphs. Chapter Two mixes a rambling, first-person account of Stover's own friendship with Harrison with a basic biography. The remaining chapters divide and discuss Harrison's work in a haphazard fashion. Some use theme or genre. For example, there are chapters on stories that work variations on the ideals of the Enlightenment, on time travel and parallel worlds, on humor and parody, and on "science-fictionalized horror sociology." Harrison's Captive Universe, his Stainless Steel Rat series, and his West of Eden series all rate chapters of their own. Two miscellaneous chapters survey everything that didn't fit somewhere else, including mainstream fiction and such trivia as a Harrison-ghosted Saint novel and his coffee table book Spacecraft in Fact and Fiction.

Stover's first-hand knowledge of Harrison's life and philosophy are the best thing about this book and his information on Harry Harrison the internationalist, the Esperantist, and the technocrat should be useful to any understanding of the author's work. Occasionally valuable are his discussions of the scientific background to the stories. Unfortunately, Stover, whose training is in anthropology, doesn't really know how to analyze a literary text. His method consists essentially of beginning with an extensive and not entirely relevant discussion of a given work's philosophical antecedents, following this with Harrison's ideas on what he was trying to do, and ending with a bit of plot summary. Moreover, he seems intensely hostile to professional critics, taking every chance available to throw jabs at the Science Fiction Research Association, book reviewers, and all those he sees as guilty of slighting Mr. Harrison's work.

That Harry Harrison is a talented writer is undeniable, but Stover's claims are overblown. Captive Universe, for example, is an excellent novel but not the literary masterpiece that Stover proclaims it, despite its selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club; nor is it obviously better than Heinlein's Universe or a number of other explorations of the spaceship universe theme. Harrison's West of Eden novels do develop a wonderful premise in great depth, but the books, far from being the instant classics Stover proclaims them, are plagued by serious problems of characterization and pacing.

Stover's own book has other problems, too, not the least of them a glaring factual error: the author's statement that Robert P. Mills was the founding editor of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (he was the managing editor). Also bothersome are his odd attempts to define early science fiction as little more than an outgrowth of the socialism of St. Simon, his casual digs at feminism and religion, and his rather silly claim that Harrison's Starworld describes "the only realistic space war ever fought in
science fiction.” Finally, Stover’s prose style is at times virtually unreadable. What are we to make of a statement like “The humor of this scene arises from a disconformity with the usual technical locutions used by science fiction writers to fancy up the by now banality of their nomenclature for the time machine as a standard piece of furniture,” or “Only with the novel, it is the reader who is waiting for the next line of happening,” or, for that matter, “McCulloch lays dying”?

Stover spends a lot of time criticizing the sf literary-critical establishment for overlooking Harry Harrison as a writer of considerable skill and importance, and there’s probably some truth to his claim. Unfortunately, this book seems unlikely to improve Harrison’s standing.

Michael M. Levy

Socialist SF: Charting Terrae Incognitae


Part of the “Ungar Writers’ Recognition Series—Science Fiction/Fantasy,” this is a translation, by Jenny Vowles, of Wuckel’s *Science Fiction: Eine Illustrierte Literaturgeschichte* (1986). Bruce Cassiday provided additional material and the American adaptation for the English-language version.

Wuckel arranges his book’s 20 chapters under five larger headings. “Beginnings” defines science fiction and explores pre-twentieth-century sf. (Like many European critics, Wuckel differentiates science fiction from fantasy and considers utopian/dystopian works to be sf.) “The Industrial Revolution and Its Reflection in Fantasy” takes us from the nineteenth century through World War I. “The Growth of Science Fiction After World War I” stops about 1950, while “Science Fiction in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century” is self-explanatory. The book ends with a section on “Themes, Subjects, Motifs in Modern Science Fiction,” but “modern” here means only up to about 1980. An important feature of the chronological sections that form the heart of the book: Wuckel often alternates chapters on “western” sf and “socialist” sf.

The book mingles information and interpretation/evaluation. On the information side, a typical chapter might include an historical overview of the era being treated, general remarks on sf trends, mini-biographies of the important authors, micro-contexts for and brief summaries of their important works, and lists of other influential authors and their works. On the interpretive side, Wuckel is a thorough-going Marxist critic.

This is a handsome, bedsheet-sized book (8" x 10 1/2"), with two columns of large, easily read type on each page. It averages about one black-
and-white illustration per page. Most (60%) of these illustrations are author portraits, book covers or dust jackets, and still photographs from sf movies or plays. Other kinds of illustrations include interior illustrations from novels or magazines, magazine covers, movie posters or advertisements, and title-pages for novels.

Wuckel's strengths and weaknesses are interrelated. On the one hand, he provides a not-very-difficult introduction to a consistently Marxist reading of sf, plus a fully detailed orientation to non-Anglo-American sf, both of which might be useful to some American readers. On the other hand, to those same American readers, the Marxism leads to some odd judgments, and the chapters on American sf are disappointing (error-ridden, too: Heinlein's Time Enough for Love, for instance, is attributed to Robert Silverberg [p. 209]).

In addition, the book needs an index; the section headings and the chapter titles—on the contents page and in the text—ought to be numbered (the chapter titles are numbered, by the way, in the notes); and the chapters in the final section are too brief and merely repeat material already covered.

The Illustrated History of Science Fiction can be compared to a spate of similar books that appeared roughly 1975-1980. It is definitely an improvement on a work with similar theoretical biases, Franz Rottensteiner's The Science Fiction Book: An Illustrated History (1975). It is also much better than David Kyle's fannish A Pictorial History of Science Fiction (1976). The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1977), edited by Brian Ash, though mainly a collaboration rather than a single-author work, has less on sf history, more on sf themes, and very much more on fandom and media than Wuckel does. A useful pro-Anglo-American hard sf antidote to Wuckel is James Gunn's Alternate Worlds: The Illustrated History of Science Fiction (1975). Finally, Brian W. Aldiss's Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction (1973; revised with David Wingrove and retitled Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction in 1986) has no illustrations but treats basically the same material, with the exception noted below, in much more depth. (See also Robert Holdstock, consultant editor, Encyclopedia of Science Fiction [1978].)

Still, Wuckel provides an English-speaking audience with convenient, detailed, and fairly up-to-date information about East European and Soviet sf, better on this subject than Aldiss and even better than what appears in the finest overall treatment of the sf field, The Science Fiction Encyclopedia (1979), edited by Peter Nicholls.

Todd H. Sammons
A Sociological Exploration of Abuse and Sexuality


When Anthony describes a tale told by one of *Firefly*’s characters as “a story of love and sex and death” (287), he provides a key to the novel; a few pages later, he amplies that key: “...there was another theme which came into many of the stories: youth” (290). Ostensibly a horror novel, *Firefly* functions best, not in evoking monsters, but in anatomizing particular social ills: “This novel addresses more than peripherally the problem of abuse,” he states in the “Author’s Note” (383). Indeed, this is more clearly the focus of the novel than any putative interest in horror *per se*.

In general, contemporary horror insists that readers be initially convinced of the reality of the characters, places, and situations into which the irrational intrudes. Yet for all his efforts at verisimilitude—“the setting for this novel is my home” (383)—this narrative never quite convinces. His characters are glyphic rather than individualized; each has a secret to be deciphered that becomes the entirety of that character. Often, the secret has to do either with sexual inabilities or with memories of physical or psychic abuse. The narrative is intercut with stories from re-created Greek myth, parables of sexuality, and sociological case studies. The stories explicitly define points the narrative might be expected to communicate indirectly. This bluntness of presentation intensifies when characters engage in long intellectual assessments of emotional or physical problems, defeating any sense of incremental horror.

While capable of creating horrific images—witness, for example, “On the Uses of Torture” (1981)—Anthony seems less interested in sustaining such images over the length of a novel. An earlier attempt *Shade of the Tree* (1986), veered from overt horror to visionary SF. In *Firefly* (which includes a cameo appearance by Shade’s Josh Pinson and family), a similar attempt results in an indictment of social horrors: wife abuse, child abuse, impotence, marriage for security rather than for love, the irrational shame of victims of abuse, and others. The monster—the firefly itself—is present only by implication through most of the novel; and its presence in the final 50 pages seems more a necessity of plotting than a commitment to horror. The monster is flat and largely uninteresting except insofar as it has assumed the personality of Anthony’s central character O’tone/Jade/Nymph.

If there is a monster in *Firefly*, it is not a physical creature but rather the psychological monster of human sexuality. The novel focuses insistently on sexuality. The monster traps its victims with extremely potent pheromones; any character exposed to the monster’s traces becomes sexually excited. The
majority of the episodes deal, not with the search for the monster, but with the search for sexual wholeness and wellness. The texture of narrative ranges from almost prissily social correctness to an explicitness that verges on the pornographic.

_Firefly_ is not one of Anthony’s strongest works. It seems structurally fragmented, stylistically disunified, and generically unfocused. Theme overshadows narrative and characterization, making the work interesting as a sociological exploration of abuse and sexuality, but less effective as a novel.

_Michael R. Collings_

**But Seriously, Folks . . .**

Asprin, Robert. _Phule’s Company._ Ace, NY, 1990, 232p. $3.95 pb. 0-441-66251-x.

The title is clever; the cover is promising. That’s as close as Asprin gets to the advertised humor in his latest effort.

Willard Phule, self-made multimillionaire and heir to Phule-Proof Munitions, is “courtmartialed” from lieutenant to captain and shipped off to command the Omega Company, stationed on a remote planet. The Space Legion’s hopes of Phule being quietly forgotten vanish as he and his rag-tag company become the toast and envy of the galaxy.

Phule is clever, confident, commanding, and ultimately unconvincing. He does everything right the first time. He is always in control; he talks or buys (usually both) his way out of every situation. He manages not only to solve all problems but turn most of them into profitable business deals. Such perfection is hard to believe.

The Omega Company, so named because they are considered the worst of the worst, is quickly transformed into a top-notch unit by Phule’s leadership and money. The young captain instills pride and confidence in his troops through example. He buys his legionnaires the best equipment and remodels their base into a plush country club. The company, so inspired and outfitted, is then able to hold its own in a contest against the Regular Army’s elite Red Eagle unit.

The pace of the book is slow, dragged down by frequent and largely unnecessary explanatory passages. The comedy is sparse and stiff at best. There is no suspense; the perfect solution to each problem presents itself immediately, usually before the end of the paragraph and always before the end of the chapter. The major conflict of the story, an alien invasion, begins and ends within the last thirty pages of the novel. This incident instead of showcasing the troops’ new teamwork abilities, serves only to glorify Phule.
further as he single-handedly diffuses the situation—and turns a profit.

Things are not what they seem in this book. Phule is not a fool, the Omega Company is neither inept nor stupid, and this story is not funny. Asprin, however, will have plenty of opportunities to try again as Phule seems to be yet another exhaustive series.

Jeanette Lawson

[A less favorable review appeared in Issue 179, July/August. BH, Ed.]

**Experiment in Apocalyptic Horror-Fantasy**


In just a few short years Clive Barker has risen to near the top of the heap of quality writers of horror and fantasy fiction. Not yet thirty years old, he has taken his followers through a series of stories, novels, and movies virtually unmatched for their variety and their experimental daring. What next, in the world according to Barker, his fans ask each time a new work appears?

*The Great and Secret Show* is another experiment, this time in apocalyptic horror-fantasy of the kind done so well by King in *The Stand* and McCammon in *Swan Song*. Armageddon begins in the Omaha post office where Randolph Jaffee, mad at himself and at a world in which his desires for power and greatness are constantly frustrated, is set to the seemingly tedious and useless task of sorting out and destroying now useless mail. To pass the time he begins to read this mail and soon he discovers that the world may not be what it seems, that there are secret powers and forces within the world and a cult, the Shoal, that seems to know something about them. His discovery of a mysterious medallion soon leads to murder and his urgent quest for the Art and all that it might bring—becoming an Artist and remaking the world itself.

Jaffe travels the nation finding bits and pieces of the puzzle of the Art here and there in random places until finally he discovers Kissoon who holds a key to the Art as he hides in the loop, a loop in time and space. Eventually, Jaffee meets Fletcher, also in search of the Art, who, thanks to too much dope, has fallen from grace in the world of science. Their marriage of the occult and the scientific, their falling out, and their spectacular struggle for supremacy unleash forces which suck first a town, then the world into a psychic and cosmic battle for the control and destiny of mankind.

This is a powerful book, powerfully written, with strong and diverse characters and exciting and terrifying imagery—wiz, the lad, Quiddity, the Nuncio, and the Great and Secret Show itself. There is sufficient sex, sadism, perversity, and violence here to satisfy any fan of Barker who has become
well known for his ability to blend these ingredients into a satisfying mix. But there is also and above all love, powerful and ultimately redemptive for those lucky enough to find it and strong enough to keep it in a world in which evil lurks so near the surface. *The Great and Secret Show*, for all its fantasy and horror, is a very real and a very human novel in which the very worst but also the very best in man is vividly detailed.

This is a very complicated novel and also a very long one—perhaps just a bit too complicated and a bit too long. It tends to bog down just a bit in the middle, but my advice is not to give up. Not to put it down for any great length of time, for if you do you will get lost. Read it carefully and read it diligently and you will be rewarded at the end. The Show is well worth the effort. Indeed, it may just blow you away.!

_J. T. Moore_

**First Novel Woes**


Brizzolara is someone to watch for in the future. In *Empire's Horizon*, unfortunately, he has tried to write the Great American SF Novel. One reads interminably to follow the interweaving of the complicated yet familiar plots of which there are just too many. The major one is of Martin Cain, a holofax journalist who is seeking redemption for an understanding of why he is still alive after his earlier wartime experiences. A second is of the humanoid rebel Hara, who is trying to bring together, through common worship of the moon, the native Dhrin and Khaj, age old enemies on the planet Darkatha—a Dune-like planet on which water is a premium and quakes common; a Darkover-like planet with a red sun whose people had forgotten their origins; and a planet where the Darkhani fly Pern-like dragons. Another subplot follows the Terran military governor whose second in command is trying to oust him. Then, among others, there's a Nortonesque boy seeking his father; Spanish missionaries of the Church of the Universal Blood trying to convert the natives from their worship of Mother Darkath or of Father Sun; and most pulpish of all, strange lights on the moon suggesting alien beings.

Brizzolara was so careful in his details, it could have worked in spite of his tendency to overuse similes. But, to compound the problem of his many plots and sub-plots, he structured his novel so that in almost every one of the twenty chapters a reader was required to shift to different plot lines as many as five times. I began to despise the three stars that symbolized the switch. And as the novel progressed, I also began to question why Brizzolara chose
to have the Terran rulers be representative of an Hispanic Empire and a Catholic religion. I kept waiting for Inquisition-like practices which never came.

So pass this one by, but watch for the next one. I feel sure Brizzolara will avoid these beginner’s problems in his next action-oriented space opera.

Sybil B. Langer

Thresholds of Change


Displacements and transformations figure highly in this collection of speculative poetry and short fiction by critic Michael R. Collings, focusing the reader’s attention at the threshold point of changing epistemological states.

The first section of Collings’ book is highlighted by the short story, “Wer Means Man,” a chilling tale of physical and psychological transformation with an unusual twist. Constructed entirely without spoken dialogue between characters, the work effectively tracks the relationships of man with the animal kingdom, with nature, and most importantly, with himself.

The center of the book’s second part is “A Pound of Chocolates on St. Valentine’s Day.” Using a style reminiscent of H. P. Lovecraft, Collings demonstrates his adroitness with the more traditional aspects of the genre by tracing a heritage of witchcraft passed down through a family line. Sinister in the extreme, this story lends a new interpretation to the “realistic” elements of heredity and environment.

The third and final part of the book is composed entirely of poetry, showcasing Collings’ ability with the form. In such poems as “Star-Pilot’s Funeral,” “Incubus,” and “Succubi,” Collings achieves fully the task indicated by the book’s title, since the shorter form allows him to concentrate at once on the shifts and ruptures which make up “dark” transformations while at the same time engaging the reader into the resulting psychological consequences.

Joseph M. Dudley

Humorous Fantasy


For those who seek fantasy laced with humor, Dalkey’s novel is the choice. Set in the far distant past, it employs today’s phrases and alludes to
contemporary conveniences. A sorcerer does not have a telephone answering machine, but he does have a door that shimmers golden-letter messages and asks the caller to wait for the tone. Each person possesses a given number of “bites of memory;” people are propositioned with offers they can’t refuse; and the Gray Guild has for its motto “You break it, you bought it.”  

**Truisms:** “Most people need all the compliments they can get,” and life’s path is strewn with the alliterative Deserts of Despair and Rivers of Ridiculousness, with only occasional glimpses of the Mountains of Majesty. **Puns:** It presents a “Home for the Incurably Dead,” a dragon called “the Book Wurm,” and a court chronicler named Master Danrathernot.  

After the transformation of the first-born son into a bird and then a wolf, and the abdication of the second son (who never wanted to be king anyhow), the youngest son, destined to be king, proves himself by killing a dragon and numerous other heroics. In a seemingly hopeless situation, trapped by a monstrous dragon in her cave, he and his entourage, like Dorothy in Oz, want to go home. Since they have no red shoes to click together, they successfully wish upon a star that shimmers rather than twinkles: Shimmer, shimmer little star/Come and get us, here we are.  

By the last chapter, things are back to as normal a condition as is possible at Castle Doom, with its equal opportunity sentries, in Sagamore. Abderian, the youngest son, is king; the curse-mark has disappeared; the founding King Sagamore, in life a jester, in death a skeleton risen from a midden, has been properly buried; and Abderian, twice a father, is finally married and looking forward to living happily ever after. A true comedy and fun.  

*Mary Ann Lowry*  

**Savor Sparingly**  

This anthology collects for the first time fourteen stories about dinosaurs from disparate sources. Many famous authors are represented, including Arthur C. Clarke, Brian Aldiss, L. Sprague de Camp, James Tiptree, Jr., and Harry Turtledove. With the recent resurgence of interest in the various species, the idea of such a collection on dinosaurs seems timely.  

The collection itself is uneven. Many of the stories inevitably center around time travel and hunting, some more comically than others. Aldiss’ sardonic ‘Poor Little Warrior’, de Camp’s ‘A Gun for Dinosaur’, and Tiptree’s wonderfully scatalogical ‘The Night Blooming Saurian’ deal with humans exercising their machisma on these splendid beasts; Sullivan’s ‘Dinosaur on
a Bicycle’ revises the convention, with the time traveler being an extremely Victorian saurian. These stories work essentially on plot and point of view, while Turtledove’s delightful ‘Hatching Season’ explores human-saurian relationships with his usual fine descriptive eye. Bryant’s ‘Strata’, Farber’s ‘The Last Thunder Horse West of the Mississippi’, Waldrop’s ‘Green Brother’ and Ten’s ‘Dinosaur’ deal with more complex levels of the human psyche, using the dinosaurs as symbols, among other things, of other vanished civilizations, times and mores.

Perhaps inevitably, there is an elegaic tone to a collection with this focus. Yet, although individual stories stand out, overall this collection itself is more to be sparingly savored than eagerly devoured.

Tanya Gardiner-Scott

Love and Death at the (Postmodern) Freakshow


*Geek Love* is one of those books which Claude, who owns the Nebula bookshop in Montreal, assured me I’d better read if I had any pretensions to keeping up with fantastic literature of the more—choose any or all of the following—bizarre, extreme, postmodern, intellectually stimulating, radical, hip, off-the-wall, ex-centric, etc., kind. Since Claude is a real lover of fantastic fiction and knows whereof he speaks, when he recommends I listen, and I’m rarely disappointed. Certainly, I wasn’t disappointed with *Geek Love*, although it’s by no means a perfect work (but then, so few things in life . . . ). Like more “big books” than we’d care to admit, *Geek Love* simply goes on for too long; it also lapses finally into a kind of pretentious and rather sentimental apocalypticism. I’m afraid you’ll just have to read it to get what I’m trying to say here; I really don’t want to give away too much of its truly weird and wonderful plotline in this review.

Briefly, however, *Geek Love* is the history of a circus family narrated in the first person by Olympia Binewski, the bald albino hunchback who is considered the most ordinary of the Binewski children, all of whom have been conceived—in more ways than one—expressly to play their parts as freaks in Binewski’s Carnival Fabulon. Dunn’s horrifying and yet blackly humourous premise is that these children are the outcome of homegrown experiments in human engineering. Lily Binewski ingests massive quantities of drugs in various combinations suggested by her husband during each of her pregnancies and the results are both repulsive and, as skillfully developed during the course of the novel, perversely attractive, from Arturo the Aqua Boy, the Carnival’s biggest draw, to Electra and Iphigenia, the beau-
tiful Siamese twins, to Fortunato, whose perfectly ordinary appearance proves to be catastrophically deceptive, to Olympia herself, so disappointingly "normal" by the standards of this so abnormal family.

Olympia's account of life in her literally freakish circus family and of the increasingly complex and horrific events which eventually destroy it provides only one strand of Dunn's narrative and is already a story in the past tense as the book opens; in the present tense, Olympia secretly watches over both her now nearly helpless mother and her daughter, Miranda, while supporting herself (and them) as Hopalong McGurk, the Radio Story Lady. Not surprisingly, this second story-line, for all that it contains some very bizarre elements of its own, simply can't match the sheer fascination of Olympia's memoirs of life in Benewski's Circus Fabulon.

One of the main attractions in Geek Love is Dunn's penchant for radically undermining concepts of the "normal," as her perverse cast of characters acts out family life and love in a setting which has become paradigmatic of the atypical and the eccentric. Lil's attitude toward the production of her offspring demonstrates the ironically weird rationality at work in so much of this book: "What greater gift would you offer your children than an inherent ability to earn a living just by being themselves?" The other side of Dunn's coin, however, is a sensitive exploration of the emotions which compel all of us in our relationships with other human beings. From this perspective as well, she blurs the boundaries between normal and abnormal, since in the contested territories of love and dependency, jealousy and hatred, distinctions between what is normal and what is not always threaten to dissolve into meaninglessness.

Like Tod Browning's 1932 film masterpiece Freaks, to which it inevitably invites comparison, Geek Love is intensely uncomfortable and occasionally horrifying; it is also beautifully written, very intelligent, and almost always entertaining. As far as I'm concerned, it probably should have won the National Book Award for which it was nominated.

Veronica Hollinger

Action-packed Adventure


Gate is just the kind of action-packed adventure story that provides an entertaining and thoughtful reading experience for the science fiction enthusiast. That its protagonist is female influences that experience only slightly, and then as a distraction because of the plot resolution: a problematic love-story ending. Ignoring this minor distraction, one can follow the
ethical and cultural struggles of Theodora, a student from a seemingly more enlightened planet, Pyrene, who has been inadvertently abandoned while vacationing on the planet, Ivory.

The cultural conundrum which distresses Theodora, an anthropology student and also the first-person narrator, rests in the relative ability/inability of an individual to accept and work within the ethical structure of a culture other than that of her own. As a student of anthropology, one assumes that is an explanation for Theodora's survival. On the narrative level, it is the emblem which disguises her sensitive, basically successful integration into Ivorian culture where magic works and where assassination is a cultural norm. If the reader finds this a bit too convenient, as well as reminiscent of other sf novels written by women in the last couple of decades, s/he will be accurate. This is, however, not a condemnation. Rather, I'd say that the novel is obviously within a lineage of such explorations, more successful than some and less than others. It is also very entertaining. Theodora adjusts to difficult financial and personal conditions, using each to increase her knowledge. One does wonder at the maturity of purpose which would allow an individual cut off totally from her own culture to still embark upon a research project, the collection of local oral legends, with such calm dedication and confidence. Theodora's behavior in the face of cultural dislocations is somewhat incredible.

Gates shares another plot element with several relatively recent novels. Theodora is hired in the position of retainer to a powerful, ruling house of Ivory. Thus, like protagonists of Joan Vinge's *Catspaw*, Elizabeth Lynn's *Sardonyx Net*, and Kathy Tyers' *Crystal Witness*, she finds herself manipulated by and then sincerely drawn into the dilemmas of her masters. Were it not for a fascinating extrapolation of the cultural forms which might arise from basic facts of Ivorian culture that differentiate it from our own, the novel might slide into triteness. These include limited magic, aristocratic rule and ritual assassination, and a fatalistic religion that borrows heavily from Zen Buddhism of the Taoist flavor. That it does not is a tribute to the author's imagination and her characters' vitality. Lovers of adventure, of alien cultural extrapolation, of the scientific method as applied in cultural anthropology, will all enjoy this story.

Janice M. Bogstad

Varied & Gripping Lyrical Studies

As in her other collections, Emswhiller presents a varied and gripping set of lyrical studies in *Verging on the Pertinent*. Each of the seventeen stories is a virtuoso performance in language and thought. Most are at once tongue-in-cheek and symbolic exposes of the human condition, and many are reminiscent of Kafka, but a Kafka with a light and witty touch, who shortles playfully as s/he plunges us into a grim reflection on, for example, man’s inhumanity to woman. While Emswhiller’s *topoi* are reminiscent of Kafka, her style and sense of humor conjure up Calvino’s *Cosmicomics*.

I have tried to pick a favorite story, and am unable to do so. The work opens with “Yukon” in which a woman leaves the human brute she started out with and chooses instead a male black bear, winters with him and then finds a third, more satisfying partner. Even the titles of her stories alone are intriguing: “Mental Health and Its Alternatives,” “There is no God but Bog,” “What Every Woman Knows,” “The Futility of Fixed Positions,” “Queen Kong,” and the title story, “Verging on the Pertinent,” a sassy, irreverent gloss on the absurdity of positions assigned to ‘remarkable’ women to set them apart and deny the potential of all women as full people. All of Emshwiller’s stories rely on suggestion, resonance and symbol. We all know what she’s talking about although she never says it. I am especially, viscerally, fond of ‘Queen Kong’, where the ironic pose of the narrator shifts from the male to female positions at will. This comment about a large woman is typical, and typically evocative: “They are against all elegances, and no wonder, when even seeing them at a distance or simply in silhouette is unnerving. But the potential of large women! The huge, unrealized potential! Their great longings, their colossal grudges, their long-term memories, their rage! No wonder they deny all art . . . deny all civilizations and try to convince their tiny, more discreet sisters to join them.”

I suppose it is possible to misunderstand Emshwiller. One can be taken aback by the bald, almost gallows humor which cuts to the core of ambiguities that make up women’s attitudes towards themselves and the cultures which encase them. One can never quite determine which of the speaker’s statements should be taken ironically and which are authoritative. Emshwiller’s grace, technical virtuosity, insight, humor, depth rest in the narrators who never settle on a single or simple political position and therefore reflect this ambiguity of intent. It is one that we shall perhaps not escape until culture is organized along another matrix than that of sex. The stories are delightful for their artistry on all levels and examples of the best that the short story as an art form has to offer. You owe it to yourself to read this book.

*Janice Bogstad*
Tedious Time-Travelling


In Book One of this increasingly lifeless series (The Cross-Time Engineer), Conrad Schwartz was time-transported accidentally to 13th Century Poland, where he invents the Industrial Revolution 500 years early, using his scientific and technical knowledge to prepare Poland for the Mongol Hordes’ assault. With a little help from mysterious time-travellers and some special horse-like Big People, Conrad works miracles, inventing among other things Playboy Clubs (#3-*The Radiant Warrior*) and powered airplane flight (#4-*The Flying Warlord*). In *Lord Conrad's Lady*, Conrad finishes off the Mongol Hordes, reorganizes Eastern Poland politically, legally and economically, rejects coronation as King of Poland, and destroys the entire Order of Teutonic Knights of the Cross with poison gas artillery shells.

The writing here is superficial and sketchy, consisting of nearly lifeless summary passages from Conrad’s Diary, interspersed with sections from his wife Francine’s petulant Journal and confused “Interludes” about the sybaritic time-travellers who observe Conrad’s progress trans-temporally. Conrad itemizes much too superficially unbelievable military victories (Mongol millions killed, stripped, beheaded and buried in two or three pages), extraordinary technical innovations, and supposedly profound moments of self-doubt, while his estranged wife fulminates about his lack of political ambition. And only the author knows what the time-travellers are up to.

In a way Frankowski suffers from an embarrassment of riches; he’s gotten so many things started that he hasn’t time to really explore or develop anything in much detail. Consequently, *Lord Conrad’s Lady* offers shallow characterization and stunted emotional development, little meaningful explanation of complex social or political processes, and almost no plot; everything is skimmed over and episodic. It is as if the author, tired of writing, or overwhelmed by his task, were just padding out another section of his plot outline, injecting a little dialog here and a little introspection there *pro forma*. Which is too bad, because the technical and historical material has wonderful potential and deserves better, deeper, slower treatment than it is getting. Not Recommended.

David Mead

All of Life Is But a Trial

After a book as fine as Godwin’s *Waiting for the Galactic Bus* slipped through the consciousness of the sf world with barely a ripple, no better fate could be imagined for its sequel. *The Snake Oil Wars* garnered a few reviews and no acclaim, not even making the Nebula preliminary ballot of 54 novels.

Those who like their satire dark, mordant, and lively will search out these books nevertheless. In *Bus* Godwin created an Earth whose humanity has discovered an afterlife only analogous to the heaven and hell promised them, presided over by ancient and yet juvenile aliens far too secular to be God and the Devil. In *Wars*, the non-Devil moves Topside from Below Stairs to take over the role of non-God, a move too packed with theological significance for the hysterical and calculating fundamentalist believers to allow to go unattacked.

With the afterlife pictured as a perpetual 20th century America, Godwin spins out the only possible thread: he lets the lawyers take over. The Wars of the title are vast and many but most prominently represented by a super-Scopes trial, opposing world views of secularism and democracy against fundamentalist theocratic belief. In place of Darrow and Bryon, Godwin digs deeper into the past to pull out disguised (yet obvious from first mention) champions, avatars of their respective points of view. From their clash we get wit and theater, triumphant faith and saving doubt, media hype and humble benevolence. The protagonists suffer; we have mighty fun.

Though he plays fair to both sides, Godwin leaves no doubt of his own sympathies at any point. He is but one of a recent stream of sf writers (others including James Morrow in *Only Begotten Daughter* and John Kessel in *Good News From Outer Space*) to correctly identify the hypocrisies of fundamentalist religion as the greatest evil threatening our culture. Readers, who must always be on the side of absolute freedom of thought, should rejoice at these furious blows, as necessary and courageous as anti-McCarthyism was a generation back. Those who violently disagree will still find much to ponder in *Wars*, if only about life in late 20th century America.

Though the issues are even larger than in *Bus*, this book’s scope is somehow smaller, possibly because all characters have been subsumed to satiric types. And Godwin has yet to create a strong human female to buttress his collection of great men of history. No matter. These are small flaws in a vastly enjoyable book, guaranteed to have you turning pages through a series of delicious moments, not least the one in which Yeshua, he who is known as the Christ, takes the stand—on the devil’s side.

*Steve Carper*
Pleasurably Fast Read


Take a pair of cops, one male, one female, who also happen to be married, a dark, dangerous city with vampires, werewolves and magicians. Add to this a blend of lovers and politicians, sex and power, name the cops Guards, give thumbnail sketches of the characters (combined with vivid visual description), and we’re off to the fantasy equivalent of a T.V. drama. We quickly find our bearings, identify with the characters, and are swept along skillfully and enjoyably at a level, predominantly of plot, to solve the murder mysteries confronting Hawk and Fisher.

The novel works well as a pleasurably fast read, as it is competently written, with some powerful descriptive moments. The characters are appealing, their worldliness offsetting the honesty of Hawk and Fisher, who are striking in themselves. I have to admit that I could not put the book down once I had started it. Green does what he does with the conventions well. Watch for more Hawk and Fisher adventures shortly.

*Tanya Gardner-Scott*

Latest Wild Card Entries


This far into a series, readers pretty well know whether or not it’s their particular cup of tea. The real question that arises for them is, does the new work maintain the level of entertainment that first hooked them in the earlier books of the series?

Insofar as the “Wild Cards” series is concerned, the answer’s a definite yes. If you’ve liked the earlier books of this new sub-genre dealing with superheroes in prose form, then you won’t be disappointed with the latest entries.

*Ace in the Hole* follows along the lines of the previous books in that it’s what editor Martin calls a “mosaic novel”: short stories are woven together to form one overall, multi-perspective viewpoint novel. This time out the main focus is a presidential convention and features the writing of Stephen Leigh, Victor Milan, Walton Simons, Melinda M. Snodgrass, and Walter Jon Williams.
Dead Man’s Hand is a change of pace in terms of presentation as it’s a full-length collaborative novel by Martin and John J. Miller. The story here centers around a murder investigation, primarily involving the Ace P.I., Jay Ackroyd, and Yeoman, the vigilante Bowman who has been framed for the murder.

At this point in the proceedings, it’s hard to say whether you can read these two books on their own, or whether you should go back and start at the beginning of the series. Since “Wild Cards” is one of the best shared world series going, I’d advise the latter course, simply because the series is too good to merely sample.

Charles de Lint

Short Story Collection


The heart of this collection of short stories is the previously unpublished long novella (short novel?) that gave the book its title. “Blue World” features a love triangle made of the unlikely grouping of a porn star, a Catholic priest and a serial killer. It would have been all too easy for this to result in a kind of Movie-of-the-Week romantic shocker mush and it’s to McCammon’s credit that not only does he refrain from taking the easy route, but he does so by taking us down a couple of roads we never expected—and if we had, might not have wanted—to travel down.

For “Blue World” is an intense bit of fiction that engages the reader so quickly that it takes an effort to remember that we’re only reading a story. There’s violence, but it’s neither glorified (a la “Splatterpunks”) nor prettied up; there’s frank sexuality, and again the same holds true. And then there’s the priest who is basically, for all that he’s a full-grown man, an innocent who must suffer a crisis of faith.

McCammon has written “fun” books—those with an entertaining B-Movie sensibility like They Thirst or the more recent Stinger, and they are, indeed, great fun to read—but what he’s really going to be remembered for in the years to come is for the depth, sensitivity and understanding of human nature that pervades his more serious work such as Mystery Walk, Swan Song, Mine and this novella, “Blue World.”

Which isn’t to say he should stop having fun with books like The Wolf’s Hour. I think it’s great that there’s room in one writer’s career to write in as many different styles as he or she wants. And McCammon’s definitely got more than one style, as is evinced by the wide range of other stories collected here.
Besides "Blue World", there are four more pieces original to the collection. They range in style and quality, but the price of admission is money well-spent just for the reprint of "Nightcrawlers" and the superb title story.

Samuel Key

Absurdist Humor


It sounds somewhat pretentious to call Frederik Pohl an existentialist, absurdist writer; moreover, it sounds rather grim. The World at the End of Time is neither pretentious nor grim, but it does reflect an absurdist view of the universe (run, or at least organized by Wan-To, an egocentric and rather childish cosmological being), and a cheerfully existentialist view of mankind. Pohl gets us to "the end of time" without magic tricks (well, not many, anyhow), inventively using Wan-To as the machina rather than the deus.

As usual, Pohl's people are believable, fully realized human beings: not always quick on the uptake, not always at their best, but ready to keep on keeping on, coming through in the clutch in remarkable and moving ways. Viktor, whose life really does reach from tomorrow to time's end (or near enough), is neither a hero nor an anti-hero; he's an ordinary human, with stupidities, skills, emotions, determination, bravery, fears, memories and forgetfulnesses. He's remarkably attractive for being so apparently usual; maybe it's the way he copes with his most unusual circumstances. For Wan-To intervenes (quite carelessly) in human affairs, cutting Viktor's little colony not only from Earth, but from time itself, and the surviving humans have to cope with effects beyond any rational cause. Clearly, the universe is absurd, and Pohl shows one (possible, playful) reason why.

Pohl's craftsmanship shows in this book, mostly by its unobtrusiveness. Parallels between Wan-To's ignorant, careless disregard of cosmological ecology and our treatment of Earth are pointed up by further parallels between Wan-To's situation and Viktor's. Human perseverance under unfavorable circumstances, without any promise of ultimate reward, becomes innately valuable. Pohl's moral choices mesh seamlessly with a vigorous plot; he leaves them for the reader to ponder without heavy-handed authorial intervention.

The World at the End of Time is also remarkable for the amount of sheer hard science—astronomy, physics, genetics, cosmology, etc.—packed into a readable, comprehensible package. Few science fiction novels today rest
on such a solidly scientific base without obviously lecturing the reader. Pohl pulls it off, and more power to him!

Martha A. Bartter

Sword and Sorcery Vitality


King Kull, Bram Mac Morn, Solomon Kane, Cormac . . . . The greatest of Robert Howard’s larger-than-life heroes is Conan, the Cimmerian, the mighty swashbuckling warrior. Conan is by no means an ordinary barbarian, a savage. In this latest rendition of the adventures of Conan, a priest who serves the Ancient Ones recognizes Conan as sharing the nature of those “men who had become legends and centers of entire myth-cycles.” The priest reflects that “Rare indeed was the true barbarian, and rarest of all was such a man who was willing to leave tribe and clan behind to carve his own way in the world.”

After years of pastiches, primarily by Lyn Carter and L. Sprague de Camp, where a reader was never sure which portions were from Howard or not, it is relaxing to read John Maddox Roberts’ totally new Conan adventure. Roberts follows the Sword and Sorcery formula to perfection and, by so doing, reinforces and invigorates the Conan myth. Conan here comes closer to a model of a folk hero. He lives by his particular ethical code as he upholds the “good” in the ageless battle between the power of light and that of darkness. In Howard’s young world, Hyboria, newly born after the cataclysm of the sinking of Atlantis, the seventeen year old Conan journeys from northern Cimmeria southward, following the slavers who had killed the entire clan Conan had been living with. Mad Kalya of Aquilonia joins Conan as both seek revenge, Conan against all the criminals with Taharka of Keshan, Kalya against Taharka’s second-in-command, Axandrias, who had put a dagger through her larynx when she was a child.

Conan’s plan to defeat Taharka is “to challenge him, fight him and cut him down. That is simple,” he says, “and the spirits of my friends will be satisfied.” Little does Conan know, though, that both he and Taharka had been chosen to be the contestants in a battle to determine whether the Ancient Ones would reestablish a reign of evil. Thus, as Conan and Kalya travel across Hyboria, the priests interfere to influence the result. The Sword and Sorcery formula, of course, tells us that the hero, though he may temporarily be overcome and may permanently lose his lover, will ultimately conquer.

Roberts plots carefully. There are no loose ends. The reader travels with Conan over a vast site, crossing magical rivers, facing supernatural forces,
foreseeing Conan's future in an illusionary mirror, loving, killing, and fighting. *Conan The Bold*, though undeniably part of a series, can stand alone. As a result, a first time reader of Conan will find the characters well developed and will understand Conan's balanced fierceness of revenge and honor. For readers familiar with Conan, this adventure fits perfectly into the canon.

*Sybil B. Langer*

**Eighth Sword Volume**


The eighth volume in Saberhagen's Sword series (three Swords books, five Lost Swords) brings the focus of the narrative back to Adrian, the son of Prince Mark of Tasavalta. Twelve-year-old Adrian, believed to be retarded in the first *BOLS*, has the genetic potential to be a great magician, but he must use his wits as well as his magical gifts to survive the attacks of the Master Wizard Wood. When Adrian and his fellow student in magic, Trilby, enter the City of Wizards, Wood confuses them with spells and sends his wraiths to destroy them. In the ensuing fight, in which geographic regions are confused, Mark becomes lost somewhere in the jungle, and the rest of the book traces his adventures to return to his family. A parallel plot describes the attempts by General Rostov and the wizard Karel of Tasavalta to recover the stolen sword Woundhealer and to secure the other magical sword, Coinspinner. The plots come together at the end as the major characters enter the city of Bihari.

The book has several strengths. Prince Adrian is developing into an interesting character, especially for those who encountered him as a blind epileptic child in an earlier volume; his magical abilities are great enough to save him when massive force is required but not refined enough to aid him in routine adventures, so he is not a little superman. Also, his male hormones are beginning to flow, and he doesn't turn away when he accidentally sees Trilby swimming nude. Another strength is the return to the narrative of three of the more memorable characters from the previous books. Wood, the evil wizard who extends back through the entire series and into Saberhagen's "Broken Lands" trilogy, functions well as a villain, although he seems to have little psychological depth other than greed for power. The most powerful figure on the other side, the Emperor, appears briefly to speak to and approve of his grandson, Adrian. (As the Lost Swords series winds down, will we see an ultimate confrontation between these two master wizards?) One of my
favorite characters from the earlier series, the dog god Draffut, returns in a new form, as he performs his penance for accidentally killing a human being. The return of these characters pulls Coinspinner's story back toward the mainstream account of Mark, his family, and the excursions into other locations with other major characters). Among the new characters, Buvrai is an enjoyable scoundrel whose compulsive gambling and generosity toward Adrian make him more distinctive than many of the other series characters.

The best new element is the City of Wizards, a city outside of time and space which opens into widely separated geographical regions. Nothing in this city is quite what it appears to be, and its magic aura extends over great distance. Like the Swords concept, the author has developed an original and flexible idea, and the City will probably reappear in future volumes.

Saberhagen’s plotting ability remains strong, and he continues to provide little touches that tie the magical elements to a more earthly world and give his stories a distinctive quality. For example, Prince Adrian, escaping down a river in a canoe, has fled the City of Wizards without his clothes, and he creates a magical spell to tan his naked body so that he will not blister in the hot sun. The ingenious ways in which Coinspinner brings luck to its owners are also inventive and amusing. On the negative side, the rapid switches in point of view in the last third of the book are sometimes dizzying to the reader, while the concluding confrontation in the big casino of the Red Temple is almost anticlimactic. The ending remains completely open with most of the major characters intact and the two magical swords lost in the confusion. Deconstructionists will especially appreciate the novel’s last line: “There was no way to be sure.”

Readers of the previous BOLS will not be disappointed in this one, and new readers will not be confused for long if they start with Coinspinner’s Story. Recommended.

Leonard G. Heldreth

Time Travel, Ghosts, and Idaho


As with many first novels, Music’s strength’s are inextricably entwined with its weaknesses. Its slow evocation of setting in the Idaho mountains sets a solid foundation of reality for a ghost story, but also creates such glacial plot development that frustrated knowledgeable readers will always be twenty pages ahead of the characters, waiting for them to catch up. The real pleasures of accompanying an author into a comfortable private world sour when he offers no explanations whatsoever for the hundreds of questions that
that world evokes. Smith's obvious love for his characters is marred by his unwillingness to allow them to prove themselves to us, so that he has his first person narrator take instant likes and dislikes to others and never be wrong. In fact, we are constantly told events rather than shown them, contributing both to the book's rich settings and seeming endlessness.

Modern marketing realities dictate that books be summarizable in a sentence, but to precis its plot beyond saying that it marries a ghost story with a time travel yarn would make Music sound overly ludicrous. Suffice it to say that you never learn why the R.M.S. Titanic, so prominently depicted on the cover, is in the story at all, let alone why half the book is set there.

Smith is one of those authors tagged with the label of "promising". True enough. He is a more than adequate, if not inspired writer, and can handle characterization and setting better than most first novelists. What he needs—control and seasoning and sensitivity to readers' needs—he will probably one day acquire. But this sadly means that Music should be read only by those more interested in promise than accomplishment.

Steve Carper

Warmly Human Anti-fantasy


This is a strikingly well-executed novel. No Tolkien clone, Queen's Gambit Declined is a thematically fresh, intelligent and warmly human fantasy. Snodgrass (and her editor Brian Thomsen to whom she dedicates the book) took risks in bringing out Queen's Gambit Declined, and in truth the paperback's jacket blurbs are unlikely to make this novel leap off the bookstore shelf at you: "Fighting for his land, a young European prince must face danger, adventure—and a cunning master of the black arts." Accurate, perhaps, but hardly revealing of the pleasures within.

The novel is an historical romance researched with a scholar's skill, a fantasy with elements of the quest and the supernal battle of good and evil, and by the author's own account, an anti-fantasy with some thematic elements as likely to please science fiction fans as anyone. The young Prince William Henry of Orange, in 1668, not yet in his majority, lives a precarious existence in The Hague under the close control of his governor Jan van Gent and the Raadspensionary Johan de Witt. Denied the Stadholderate of Holland by the Perpetual Edict and de Witt's pro-French plans, William is still a possible rallying point for opposition to secret French plans to reduce the threat to French commerce and power that the Netherlands represent.
Prodded by van Gent to go off on a hunt, William is about to drink a poisoned stirrup cup offered by a French emissary when a marvelous white horse appears, the cup is upset and, giving chase, William finds himself abroad in the realm of a Goddess. There his task is set him: with the assistance of the Goddess, he must oppose his cousin Louis XIV who is the human channel for a transdimensional demon infesting Cardinal Mazarin, and he must close the demon’s portal into this world. The Goddess, of course, has her own plans for our world, plans which will be complicated by her having to use as her channel a Dutch prince committed to science and reason, a prince who had not forsworn his Christian religion. Thus begin William’s adventures; gathering companions and magical talismans and opening himself to the power of the Goddess, he readies himself for the conflict to come.

This too quick summary of the novel’s preliminaries does it a disservice, but to go beyond them would do the potential reader a greater disservice, and I will not do so lest I spoil even an instant of your pleasure with this book. What follows is one thumping good tale in which deftly rendered action is balanced by a clear-sighted meditation upon freedom and happiness in human life, and a deep concern for the roles played in our cultures and our hearts by reason, intuition and faith. These thematic elements are tucked into the action, arise out of it, almost seamlessly. But then, the times Snodgrass so ably breathes life into once again were those in which science was still not far from magic, those in which faith warred with reason. *Queen’s Gambit Declined*: most highly recommended for demanding readers of science fiction and fantasy, and of possible use in the classroom to spark formal and substantive discussions of genre.

*Peter Lowentrout*

**Alternate History Series**


The Draka are descended from the losers in the American Revolution, who fled to South Africa. Here they bred and planned, and created a world where they dominated not only Africa, but Europe and Asia as well. Only North and South America, Britain, Australia, and India haven’t fallen under the yoke.

This is a curiously familiar world with a different history. Hitler was defeated when the Draka allied with the rest of the world, but now the Draka are the terror of the world. Seeing themselves as the master race, all other
peoples are simply potential slaves and the Draka are ruthless in subjugating them.

This story is set in 1947, but a different 1947 than we have known. America is trying to infiltrate Draka-occupied Europe even though the US is not officially at war. There are a number of sub-plots and a wealth of characters; sometimes too many to keep straight. The Draka dialect, used extensively, becomes an annoyance. However, given the grim tone of the story and the descriptions of rather horrifying violence, the annoyance is minor.

This is obviously part of a much longer series. It will appeal primarily to fans of war stories, and to those who like to see alternate history settings meticulously worked out. It is well written, but its bleak tone will give it a limited audience.

W. D. Stevens

Vintage Vance


This is the third book in the Lyonesse series. It is worthy of its predecessors, Suldrun’s Garden and The Green Pearl, which is to say it is vintage Vance and very good indeed. It would help to have read the first two books in the series. However, Vance inserts short synopses, as well as a few grotesque trivia for our delectation, at strategic points to tell the reader enough to make this book intelligible by itself.

Faithful readers will recall that Prince, later King, Aillas loved Princess Suldrun, who presently bore his child, to the extreme annoyance of her father, King Casmir. Suldrun died; the child was taken by fairies, who left a changeling in its place. Aillas eventually recovered his son Dhrun, and they are contending with Casmir for dominance over the Elder Isles, more at Casmir’s instigation than otherwise. But what of the changeling?

She is now known as Princess Madouc. She is nine years old as the tale begins. Casmir acknowledges her as his granddaughter, but some of the questionable circumstances of her supposed birth are widely known. The real circumstances of her birth are not even suspected, except by the very few who know Dhrun’s history.

Vance keeps the story of power politics moving briskly, juggling factions and personalities without a slip as he takes them through a maze of treachery and self-interest. But this is Madouc’s book. Eloise and Madeleine, move over! Here is a heroine as tough and determined as you are, who overcomes far greater perils!
Madouc is one of Vance’s most convincing characters. She thinks like a child, she acts like a child, but Vance never patronizes her. The courage and ingenuity she shows in her running battle with her dreadful maids in waiting deserves our greatest respect and admiration as much as that which Aillas showed when he was a captive. Her search for her true identity compels our sympathy and support. Is she a tomboy? Yes, and more power to her!

As usual, Vance’s stylized prose and the baroque details which only he seems able to produce are what make this book a winner. They transform themes that have been subjected to innumerable leaden treatments into literary gold. I suppose that there may be people who are not delighted by these features; if so, they have my deepest sympathy.

This book is recommended for everyone. Don’t worry about the edition and the price; there will be trade, paperback, and book club editions eventually, although it may take a little while.

William M. Schuyler, Jr.

A Modern Hercules Myth


This fine novella takes the myth of Hercules’s Twelve Labors and plunks it down in 1920’s Mississippi. In those days, a convict’s labor could be purchased by a plantation owner, which is how Houlka Lee, a short, thick, powerfully determined man who deeply fascinates the young black narrator, I. O. Lace, comes to be charged with performing impossible tasks for the crooked and corrupt Boss Eustis, working for two dollars a month and keep.

If you know your mythology, you’ll have a blast figuring out how Waldrop adapted the original characters, names and labors to a largely non­fantastic, historic setting. (Start with the original names “Iolaus” and “Eurystheus;” proceed by noticing the gates of horn and ivory, and the ferryman’s fee of two pennies each.) If you don’t know your mythology, you’ll thank those old Greek and Roman boys for coming up with the resonant plot outline that Waldrop weaves a rich tapestry of great storytelling, of eccentric characters and an incisive portrait of the post-WWI South, around. More than a year later I still get pleasurable shivers remembering how Houlka managed to retrieve the monster fighting dog from Pluto Dees, Royal Kleagle of the K.K.K., accompanied by a black boy and surrounded by two thousand Klansmen. It’s even more impressive than the original. And, a year later, I’ve almost forgiven Waldrop for breaking off the story of the Great Checker Match before the punchline. . . .
The book is handsomely designed, with cover and interior graphics by Arnie Fenner; it fleshes out the size of the book without making it look padded. Pick this one up if you possibly can. 1989 was a good year for novellas, and this might be the best of them.

Martha Soukup

Feminist Horror Novel


Shipwrecked on a deserted island off the Burma coast, the young girls in Marianne Wiggins’ John Dollar prove to be proper colonials undone by Mother Nature. The time is 1918, that is, the waning days of the Great War. Great Britain rules the Far East; just the same, Wiggins’s young ladies, once turned loose in the island jungle, quickly discard their manners and revert to savagery.

An intellectually stimulating literary work, John Dollar addresses numerous feminist concerns, including the rights of women to seek a life and destiny of their own independent of men and the mores of society. It is also a fairly gruesome horror novel featuring extended scenes of cannibalism.

Captain of the ill-fated ship that carried the girls, title character John Dollar, now crippled and helpless, finds himself thrust into the role of an island Christ figure. Several of his charges eat Dollar’s living flesh in order to survive. Dollar, it seems, has lost all feeling below the waist.

A bold writer, Marianne Wiggins is more concerned with literary experimentation than a smoothly flowing narrative and well-developed characters. Though somewhat reminiscent of William Golding’s classic Lord of the Flies, Marianne Wiggins’ John Dollar is not merely a “copy-cat” tale of survival and savagery with a cast of girls instead of boys.

Allowing for the debt owed to Golding and his 1955 novel, John Dollar is both off-beat and fascinating in its own right. A good choice for serious late-20th century readers with a bent for something different.

James B. Hemesath

Thought Provoking/Entertaining Novel


A Matter of Oaths boasts the imprimatur of two important names in science fiction—C. J. Cherryh and Locus. The blurb by Cherryh on the front cover reads “Fast-paced and inventive . . . It held my attention to the end.”
and on the back cover the book is proclaimed, "A Locus Recommended Book." I’m happy to say that this novel lives up to the promises on its jacket. Wright’s novel is one of the most engrossing stories I have read in years.

The novel begins with prefatory material explaining the Guild of Webbers, "a direct link between mind and machine." This interface is far more positive than that of cyberpunk, however, and Wright’s characters, in marked contrast to those of cyberpunk science fiction, are likeable and appealing. The hero has been mindwiped for some unknown treason and the plot follows him as he wins friends aboard an influential ship and eventually discovers his true identity.

While the plot is straightforward enough, it is Wright’s skill as a writer and her ability to create believable and engrossing characters that makes this book such a rarity. In this regard, her work deserves to be compared to that of C. J. Cherryh, who is famous for creating vibrant and compelling characters in a similar setting, that of conflicting space empires. Like Cherryh, Wright also depicts alternative sexuality as a logical and accepted part of future society. The hero falls in love, not with the female captain, who is quite attractive, but with the Web Master, one of the most powerful men aboard the ship. Their relationship causes difficulties when Rafe, the hero, has problems in the Web because of his past identity, which creeps up on him in stressful moments. This tension and the question of previous memories that gradually reemerge raise the larger issues of ethics and identity that make the novel thought-provoking as well as entertaining.

Robin Roberts

JUVENILE

Non-Fiction

The World of C. S. Lewis


The Land of Narnia is Brian Sibley’s homage to C. S. Lewis. Sibley, a writer and broadcaster known for Shadowlands: The Story of C. S. Lewis and Joy Davidman, seems to have written this appreciation of Lewis and his works because he, Sibley, enjoyed the Narnia books when he was young.

Not only is The Land of Narnia being promoted for the young reader, Sibley wrote the book as if he were talking to a young reader (Harper sug-
gests an age for the audience of 10+ years). “Do you remember when you first read one of the stories about Narnia and which one it was?” That sentence, of course, occurs in the preface, but throughout the main text Sibley’s attitude toward his subject remains the same. He calls Lewis by his nickname, Jack, and refers to others by their first names as well. While this may make Lewis more approachable for young readers, Sibley’s familiarity seems contrived on occasion and may put off older readers.

The book opens with a biographical section on Lewis’s early life, discusses from Lewis’s own accounts his inspirations for Narnia Books, summarizes the Narnia series, comments on some of the characters and episodes, analyzes the Christian “deeper magic” in the books, and concludes with the remainder of the biographical account. Sibley includes quotations from Lewis throughout the volume; and there are sketches and maps by Pauline Baynes, the original illustrator of the Narnia books. The illustrations range in size from marginal drawings to full-page plates, and there are photographs of Lewis and other people and places important to him.

*The Land of Narnia* is not a scholarly work, as its audience suggests. There is no detachment. Sibley is obviously a fan; and this book is an appreciation and not a critical analysis or evaluation. As an appreciation, *The Land of Narnia* is quite good. Sibley’s discussion of Lewis and his works should delight a young reader, giving a more thorough awareness of who Lewis was and how the Narnia works were a part of his life.

This book should be considered for larger children’s departments and could be given to a young reader traveling for the first time or returning for another visit to the Land of Narnia.

* C. W. Sullivan, III

**Fiction**

**Time-Travel Fantasy Weak, Unconnected**


John Bellairs, best known for his “gothic” novels for young adults, has won much popularity and publishes prolifically. In *The Trolley to Yesterday*, however, he departs from his usual format, writing a time-travel book for the pre to early teen group. He owes several large debts to H. G. Wells, as well as smaller debts to other authors.

The fact that this book is quite derivative in places is not in itself, of course, a damning criticism. But good writers in any genre are not usually
quite as obvious about their borrowings as Bellairs is in this novel, which weakens the enjoyment of the reader who knows the originals. Perhaps most teens will not recognize the borrowings, but surely it benefits them more to read the originals and experience good writing.

The novel is not well-written. The plot is loose with irrelevant subplots which interrupt the text and make the writing seem jerky and disconnected.

The central character is flabby. The Professor's character is alternately mysterious and absurd, completely unpredictable, even in his supposed unpredictability. He is intelligent enough to fix and use a time-travelling device, yet he is unable to get himself or the boys out of most of the jams he gets them into. Indeed, he seems unable to even consider the potentially harmful effects of tampering with history. In fact, he rushes in like the mindless cavalry to save Constantinople from what he ought to know, as a history and time-travel scholar, is its inevitable fate. Thus, the thought behind the novel and behind the central activities of the Professor, the prime mover of the action, is very sloppy.

The boys' characters are equally inadequate. Johnny oscillates, for no evident reason, between loyalty and concern for his elderly friend and weak mindedness when goaded on by his rambunctious friend, Fergie. He is the sort of nonentity who spends almost all of his time reacting rather than acting. Since he is initially set up as the protagonist of the novel (which position the Professor assumes), his blandness weakens the novel. His friend Fergie is a much more effective character, but he is the stereotype of an obnoxious, loud-mouthed, insolent, ill-mannered, ill-behaved youth. It is impossible to say whether or not Bellairs is endorsing his character as "cute" or showing him up to be the little horror he is, because there are never any effects of Fergie's behaviour shown. Therefore, both child characters lack purpose or focus. Perhaps they are included simply to tell the Professor's story and to complicate the action by tagging along with the Professor so that he becomes responsible for their lives as well as his own.

Overall, the book is not worth the time it takes to read it. Its only good point is that there is nothing particularly offensive about the novel, other than that it may encourage sloppy thinking.

J.R. Wytenbroek

Warning Label Needed


This book should have a warning label to the effect that it should not be put down until it is finished, for if one does put it down, it becomes difficult to pick it back up. Such truth in advertising, however, would obviously not
help sales except among literary masochists or the idly and foolishly curious.

Seriously, folks, this is a bad book—slow moving, poorly plotted, fairly predictable (except for the ending itself), and with shallow and uninteresting characterizations. The publisher tells us that it is a “striking blend of fast-paced psychological thriller and modern Gothic,” but this is simply not true. It is, rather, a generally dull story of repressed adolescent sexuality, a lack of communication between generations, and parental indifference. Indeed, with some work this might make a pretty good young adult novel of the pains and pressures of growing up.

Sixteen year old Virginia Blackie does have her problems. She has yet to have a menstrual period or a boy friend. As if this were not enough, she must live with her ego-centered, actress mother, Petra, and her step father, Sandy, neither of whom cares much about her. Not even her father, Derek, who claims to love her, can spare much of his time to be with her or otherwise assist her. Her only human friend is Rod who, unfortunately, is quite a few years older and gay. But at least he and his companion Dino care about her.

Since she cannot communicate well with the real and human world, Virginia creates a fantasy world, a fantasy lover who gradually (very gradually) becomes dominant in her life and in the action (such as it is) of the book. The action shifts quickly and confusingly back and forth from the London town houses where Virginia, Petra, and Sandy live to Maiden’s End, the historic and apparently haunted new home in the country which Sandy purchases, much to everybody’s distress. Actually, the action does not shift quickly for there is very little action at all. What does shift is the scenery, back and forth, back and forth, until the final appearance of and confrontation with the dirty old man of Virginia’s psychic vision at Maiden’s End and then her triumphant return to London with Petra, Derek, and Rod when she suddenly realizes “the unlimited possibilities of her occult powers.”

Does the ending sound confusing? Well, it is, but if you read the book carefully and never put it down until you have finished it you might be able to follow and understand it. If you even care. There are some interesting discussions of psychic powers, a long but obvious discourse on the nature and meaning of death, a number of typos, and many (too many) interjections by the author which seek to make clear what a character means—interjections which are clearly unnecessary and very obtrusive. Also, people go to the bathroom more in this book than in any other book I have ever read. Is this significant or is it merely the water in England? I’ll leave that interesting question to be answered by anyone else who chooses or who has to read this book.

J. T. Moore

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Concerned More with Family Conflicts than Ghosts


Family conflicts and a ghost who turns out to be more familiar than spooky are the plot elements of this young adult novel. During a summer vacation at her grandmother’s cabin in the Canadian north, the teen-age narrator, Lizzie McGill, searches for escape and identity on nearby, deserted Rain Island. With the help of a pair of Alice-In-Wonderland glasses that she finds there, Lizzie is able to spy on scenes from the past.

But in this story the things that go bump in the night have more to do with family squabbles than with the supernatural. The mystery of Rain Island is less interesting than the heroine’s confrontations with a new stepfather, a disgruntled brother, and an emotionally unsettled mother, all in a narrative complicated by Gran’s illness though lightened by Lizzie’s budding romance with Alex Bird. However, while Lizzie herself may be haunted by Frances Rain, the reader’s imagination is never really caught.

Nor is Alex Bird’s, for that matter. Commenting on his matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation, Lizzie says: “Wat more could a person ask for? You tell a guy that one of the ghosts you’ve been watching . . . dropped a parcel; and he helps you look for it.” But a reader could ask for more. Some measure of skepticism, a natural incredulity about the existence of ghosts whom he could not see (the glasses don’t work their magic for Alex) would add piquancy to the unraveling of the central plot.

This novel won a Young Adult Canadian Book Award and was runner-up to the 1988 Book of the Year for Children Award. Its merit is in the sensitivity with which the realistic portion of the story is presented and the strong and independent female characters. How a broken family can be repaired is a concern which surely disturbs the minds of more young readers than does a fear of ghosts, and Buffie’s story offers a reassuring scenario to meet that concern. But the reader in search of a ghost story that might cause some shudders around a campfire should look elsewhere.

Marcia Holtzman
The Dance of Life


Betsy James’s writings are an intricate weaving of fantasy and folklore. The magic of her writing is that she avoids traditional story lines and presents new variations on old themes. James’s young adult fantasy, *Long Night Dance*, is an excellent example of her new abilities.

*Long Night Dance* is set in a time when everyone lives in clans (the red haired Hill women, the Seal people, the Downslope people) who have a strong connection to the animals and the land around them. Only the Upslope clan’s pristine lifestyle prevents them from having a connection to nature. James uses this setting to develop a feminist tale where one young Upslope woman learns to depend upon herself through what Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory*, states is necessary for freedom: “critical knowledge or one’s self, one’s community, and the world.”

The plot involves the coming of age of sixteen-year-old Kat. She is the red headed daughter of a “scandalous” marriage between a Hill woman and an Upslope man. The Upslope people believe that anyone who is not exactly like them is evil. Thus, Kat knows nothing about her dead mother, including her mother’s name. Like all Upslope women, Kat’s life is controlled by a dominating male (her father), and she is destined to move from being her father’s daughter to becoming her husband’s wife. This is her destiny until she befriends a young man from the clan of the Mytic Seal people who are said to bring either luck or storms.

The plot and the language usage in this novel make it more than ordinary. First, instead of creating the usual adolescent tale of boy meets victimized girl, boy saves victimized girl by marrying her, James has Kat save her own life through knowledge she gains while dancing in the Long Night Dance. Second, while using a language level that is appropriate for a young adult audience, James does a commendable job of using the stilted language of the Upslope people to illustrate the non-rhythmical movement of their lives. Furthermore, her description of the Seal people’s synchronization with the seasons and the elements presents a haunting image of a people who have surrendered their lives to nature.

*Long Night Dance* is constructed like a dance with first steps, side movements, back steps, and leaps to develop the story of Kat’s self-discovery, knowledge of her community, and knowledge of the world around her. Young adults will find the steps in this novel easy to follow. Moreover, the steps illustrate that for one to dance, a partner is not always necessary.

Demetrice A. Worley
Well Crafted Stories


The short story is a marvelous art which can, at its best, grab the reader’s attention with a level of intensity that a novel cannot sustain. All of the stories in Jones’ anthology of scary stories live up to that ideal. *Hidden Turnings* is ostensibly for a Y.A. audience, but really only in the sense that Jones is thought of as exclusively a Y.A. author. The stories may not have the same kind of, often gratuitous, sex and violence that we come to expect in fantastic fictions of the latter twentieth century. This alone might have them classified as Y.A. What they do have is craft. The twelve stories, most of which are by recognized authors in sf and fantasy, such as Lisa Tuttle, Diana Wynne Jones herself, Emma Bull, Douglas Hill, Roger Zelazny, Geraldine Harris as well as others, all fall within the definition of The Fantastic a la Todorov, and none of them are formulaic. Today, the fact that they also fall outside of the penchant for “Shared World” anthologies sets this work apart.

All of these stories have some disturbing twist to wrest the reader into the realm of the fantastic. Several are related by a narrator who claims to be going off to do what’s in the narrative after the story is over, such as “Dogfaeire” by Garry Kilworth and Tuttle’s “The Walled Garden.” There are those like Zelazny’s “Kalifriki of the Thread” where a seeming mortal outwits an immortal devil. There is a Mr. Death story with a musical twist and Jones’ own “The Master” where a normal veterinarian treats a very super-normal animal. They were so well done that I had not one favorite but several.

Janice Bogstad

Dust Jacket Attracts Children


From Daniel Horne’s enticing bulldozing dust jacket on this mythical fantasy, one would expect as enthralling a beast fantasy as was Murphy’s Dragonbards Trilogy. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The plot has potential for the upper elementary age group; a young boy, David, is thrust into the world of Meryn by the powers of the medallion he wears. The Black Hound Medallion, one of which has fallen into the hands of the evil Balcher, is the Tolkienesque Ring which decides the battle of good and evil. Yes, battles are fought and the wicked Degra oppose the hero, but nothing happens that is really exciting. The story is dull, the characters far from enduring, and, worst of all, the events lack credibility. One simply doesn’t care what happens in the end.

Glen Edward Sadler
Pratchett’s Childworld


This is a departure of Pratchett in that this, and the intended sequels have been deliberately written for children—as opposed to the Discworld books which, though written for an adult audience, have been appreciated by all ages from the very young to the very old. *Truckers* is still recognizably a Pratchett novel and can be enjoyed as such. The difference is that it leaves out the haphazard puns and wordplay that delightfully infest the Discworld. For this book he has created a new sub-culture. The names are tiny aliens and live in crevices of the Store. God is Arnold Bros (est. 1905), evil is represented by the monster, Prices Slashed!, and their guardian angel is Bargains Galore. They have lived in the Store for generations. When a small group arrive from Outside (a place which does not exist) and discover that the Store is to be demolished most do not believe. It is the task of Masklin, the Outsider, and Gurder, the new Abbot of the Stationary, to overcome prejudice and interdepartmental strife, to convince the names to steal a lorry, and to look for a new home. Imagine being four inches high and trying to drive a fully-laden truck and you have an idea of the potential of the scenario. If anything, there is not enough of the truck driving, but the book is a lot of fun. Children everywhere will enjoy it.

*Pauline Morgan*

An Involving Book


This horror tale looks slow-paced, but like the wilderness rivers within it, once you’ve stepped into its deceptively lulling current, you can’t get back out again. Two boys venture into the Tennessee wilderness during the Depression, searching for a legendary clam-bed, said to be full of pearls. The legends tell of lost Native American treasure, of terrifying spirits and of a powerful whirlpool that can suck down anything. The boys hope that the tales of pearls are true, and that the rest is false.

This book moves forward in a way to create suspense, but not a direct anticipation of events. The worst is possible from the start, but somehow the tension manages to rise throughout the book. One reason for this is that Riddell reveals the worst through folklore and dreams early on. We know that these stories are mostly embellished, but that is all we know. We are forced to deal only with what the boys are doing, and what nature is doing...
around them, while we become more and more interested in what we are not seeing.

It is difficult to say whether this is psychological or supernatural horror. There is a strong supernatural element, but it works through the psyche and through the forces of nature. The less we see of the supernatural, the more real it becomes. The last third of the book, however, twists into yet another direction as the fear of the unknown and the imagined are replaced by a fear of the known and the real. Riddell gives us an involving book in all these aspects.

Camille Allen LaGuire

Not the Musical Oliver


“If you do not behave yourselves you will be locked in irons for a week and fed on crumbs and water. Any money saved on your keep I shall send to the Fund for the Dissemination of Divine Knowledge in the Foothills of the Ganda Ganda Territories,” said Reverend Slipper to the orphaned and abandoned children in his care as he arranged a sumptuous catered affair to honor the Governors’ Visit. Naturally, the children, with the exception of Mrs. Padlock’s pet Percival, would have not a scrap. So in true Dickensian fashion, the poor orphans, spurred on by the efforts of the orphan hero, Johnnie Rattle, who eventually rattled Reverend Slipper into insanity, revolt.

This short novel looks back to the workhouse in *Oliver Twist* and to the school in *Nicholas Nickleby* run by the ignorant sadist, Wackford Squeers. Yet, after Reverend Slipper and Mrs. Padlock buy the robot Archibald from the Useful Machine Factory Ltd., Parchment House seems more like Mr. Gradgind’s school in *Hard Times* where useless facts are drummed into the children’s heads from morning until night. Archibald is programmed “to pour forth hours of gibberish which the children tried vainly to copy down.” Naturally, the children must continue preparing to become Missionary Orphans for the Empire and continue servicing the myriad technological devices used only by the Worthies in charge: “the Doughnut extruder, the Soothibooths, the Feather Dusteroo, the Whizzibars—not to mention the Kleenukwik, the Vizibox, and the Birdsong and Proverb Broadcaster.” This is the extent of the science fiction.

The remainder is a treat for upper elementary, nine to thirteen year old readers who enjoyed the language of *Winnie the Pooh* or *The Phantom Tollbooth*. It would be helpful as well if the readers saw beyond such slapstick events as that of the turkey flying from the table. Surely some few may...
recognize the irony in mistreatment for the purpose of developing dedicated missionaries. Some readers may even question whether the orphans and abandoned children were right in shouting, "This empire stuff is rubbish."

Only time and the youthful readers themselves can judge the worth of *Parchment House*. The science fiction is negligible. The humor (rather humour) is a delight.

*Sybil B. Langer*

**Predictability Excused**


Seventeen year-old Melissa, after hearing reports of a prowler on her street, Fear Street, awakens to see a stranger in her room, a stranger whose face she cannot see, who brings in cold air, appears and disappears with ease, and as she finds out in a subsequent ghostly manifestation, wants to kill her. Although no one believes she is being stalked by a ghost, Melissa continues to be threatened and finds herself forced to accept the reality of the ghost. Her doting father, pleased he is rich enough to give her all he didn't have as a child, tries to cheer her up, but he's sure she's just sensitive. Her ultra-normal mother forgets things, has little sense of humor, and believes (or tries to convince people) that any aberration from normalcy is a result of being overtired. Melissa's boyfriend, Buddy, almost loses her: she resents his remark about her new car, his desire for hugging and kissing when she has a problem, and his total disbelief in the existence of Paul, the ghost who wants to take revenge upon Melissa for having killed him.

Melissa never killed anyone, and the ghost's memory is sketchy. Thus, to save her own life, she volunteers to help him, to fill in the gaps in his memory. As Melissa tries to solve the mystery, the two become quite fond of each other. Not only does the ghost's venom for rich girls fade, his total nature changes for the better. However, the frightened Melissa remains as she was—a slightly skinny girl—yes, concerned about her clothes, friends, and dates but also a girl who is no snob, who is responsible, caring, and, in a teenage way, valiant.

If this novel were for an adult market, I would have to say, without giving away the resolution, that the foreshadowing was too obvious. Why does Daddy show Melissa his silver pistol on page six? Assuming Melissa did kill Paul, why doesn't she remember having done so in the past? But it's as intended—a teen-age novel that allows the reader to feel Melissa's fright and confusion, that is well-crafted, interesting, and, most important, fresh.

*Joanellen Blakeley*