SFRA Newsletter

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The SFRA Newsletter

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Oxford, OH 45056

Vice-President
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President’s Column

Science Fiction is popularly thought of as "the literature of the future." We all know that’s not really or universally true: think, for example, of Ursula Le Guin’s notion that SF is really a series of thought experiments about the present. Nevertheless, we do deal with the future in a lot of our activity.

These remarks are by way of introducing some thoughts about future events within SFRA.

Some of that future is predictable because it’s scheduled. The Newsletter issue containing the ballot for this fall’s election has already been mailed: God and the mails willing, there will be a new set of officers chosen by you about the time this column reaches you, and they’ll become the new executive committee in January. Also as I write, plans are being formulated for the next two SFRA annual meetings. As you may know, the 1989 meeting will be held on the campus of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, from 22 through 26 June.

But you probably don’t know that the Executive Committee has accepted a proposal for the 1990 meeting. I am pleased to announce that it will take place in Long Beach, California. The organizers and co-chairs for the program will be Peter Lowentrout and Christine Smith Lowentrout, who are readying what promises to be an exciting weekend on the Pacific. More details on both meetings will be forthcoming.

Meanwhile a Pilgrim Award Committee will begin work this fall to select the 1989 Pilgrim. Volunteers are always welcome for this pleasant-but-demanding task: if you’d like to be part of the effort this year or in the future, please write or call me.

None of these future events can be assured, however, unless the Association remains healthy and vibrant. So, please take part. When the 1989 renewal form arrives late this fall, send your payment right away. Make known your desire to serve on one of the Association’s committees. Plan to join the groups of members convening in Oxford and Long Beach.

The Executive Committee can only plan for the future; all the members have to be involved to make it happen.

--Bill Hardesty
The Heinlein Individual Meets His Maker

by M.H.P. Rosenbaum

"The years of a man's life are three score and ten, or by reason of strength, four score."

--Psalms 90

In Methuselah's Children (1958), there's a statement that's pure Heinlein: "A man could live a long time just by believing that he was bound to live a long time and thinking accordingly..." Well, eighty years is a long time, but not as long as he'd hoped for. Robert Anson Heinlein never intended to die.

He boasted of coming from a long-lived line, and his favorite fictional alter ego was the cantankerous but indestructible old coot. He toyed with solutions to problems that might crop up if everyone in fact lived forever, but it was clear he preferred endless complications in the here-and-now to anyone's conception of eternal other-worldly life. For the reader with a religious worldview, this was one serious flaw in his work. For the reader with high literary standards, there were others.

As a person with both religious and literary commitments, I must here confess to a somewhat shameful addiction: for years I have read every word of Robert Heinlein's I could get my hands on. I still own all his books; indeed, you can trace my financial history in my Heinlein collection, from the tattered paperbacks bought at Good Will stores in grad student days to the crisp new hardcovers I now succumb to because I can't wait till my name comes up on the library reserve list. Still I devour the volumes, usually in one sitting, gnashing my teeth and swearing that next time I will kick the Heinlein habit.

Suddenly, unless there's some posthumous tidbit for his literary executors to toss our way, there will be no next time. So it's possible to regain my temper and begin taking stock of a remarkable legacy.

Robert A. Heinlein, typically referred to as "the dean of science fiction," had an influence that went far beyond that of most popular writers. Not only did he impact technological civilization with the specifics
of -- and vocabulary for -- objects not yet invented ("waldoes," "waterbeds"), he also put his mark on a generation's spiritual quest. H. Bruce Franklin, in his Robert A. Heinlein: America as Science Fiction (1980), says that students of his at Rutgers in 1978 told him reading Stranger in a Strange Land (1961) had changed their lives; they spoke of the experience as of a religious conversion. Yet Heinlein's writing was marked by sloppy plotting, patchy development, and stilted dialogue.

To Sail Beyond the Sunset (1987), the last addition to the oeuvre, is a case in point. The story line consists of the narrator's reminiscences of a life beginning in the nineteenth century American midwest, progressing to the present period, then being abruptly dislocated to a distant planet in the far future. This is promising for a speculative fiction, but unfortunately the promise is unfulfilled. We are given very little in the way of alternate realities that might cast light on our own, or that might even simply stimulate the imagination. Instead, we are treated to a picaresque progression of unlikely sexual exploits interspersed with opinionated diatribes on religion, politics and modern society.

This is not a new experience for Heinlein readers. His writing career, as noted by Alexei Panshin (in Heinlein in Dimension, 1968) and others, was marked by distinct phases: the groundbreaking short stories of the 40's, the 50's novels aimed at an adolescent audience but containing some of his most memorable creations, followed by the more hortatory and socio-political books of the 60's and early 70's, finally shading into the vast self-reflexive texts of recent years which I, like many other critics, maintained were virtually unreadable. Yet I, like many other fans, continued to read them.

Give Heinlein his due. His women were among the first in fiction to hold advanced degrees in mathematics, to command in combat, to pilot spaceships. His men were shedding tears and professing love for one another long before male vulnerability became a cultural staple. His characters' names reflected a careful ethnic mix before this became a cliche, and one of his favorite tricks was springing on the reader late in a story the fact that a major character was not white.

But the most competent, independent of his women came all over kitthenish when a Real Man appeared. Similarly, the tenderest, most expressive of his men could only interact as comrades-in-arms in the earlier works, "co-husbands" in the later -- never in a serious, multi-faceted intimacy. And the very fact that the author could conceal a character's color means that he never attempted any real exploration of the internal implications of race for the individual.

Extrapolating from personal experience was both Heinlein's strength
and his weakness as a writer. His own wife of forty years was highly educated, his own friendships passionate, his own contacts varied. But where his experience was weak, he was not diffident about spinning a fantasy web of wishful thinking. Apparently, he never had children; however, this lack did not stop him from expressing, through his fictional spokesmen, opinions on child-raising ranging from the alarming to the laughable. In *Starship Troopers* (1960), public flogging of parents is adumbrated as the solution to juvenile delinquency; in *Time Enough for Love* (1973), it is solemnly decided that no baby should ever wake alone, with the result that the story's adults constantly take turns absenting themselves from group sex in order to sleep in urine-soaked beds (this enlightened future having evidently lost track of rubber pants) with a conveniently small number of age-matched infants.

Most peculiar, and perhaps most interesting from a religious point of view, are the contradictions in Heinlein's picture of "right" sex. His extreme discomfort with, and oversimplification of, sex have been noted by others (e.g. Ronald Sarti, in his essay "Variations on a Theme" in Olander and Greenberg's *Robert A. Heinlein*, 1978). His ideas of erotic play returned obsessively to a few tired fetishes, ranging from high heels to spanking, with a *pro forma* nod to a faddish bisexuality (soft-pedaled in the two most recent, post-AIDS books), and were generally dominated by a fascination with incest that often devolved into the disturbingly solipsistic. Once the censorship lid came off in the 60's, his books became distinguishable from soft-core porn only by their high-tech sellings and their air of earnest proselytizing. They manifested the logical and desperate conclusion of the sexual revolution: intercourse as apotheosis.

If Heinlein tended to equate sex with divinity, he treated institutional religion as the biggest con game in history. His books' religious leaders are either repressive tyrants out for money and power (*Revolt in 2100*, 1953) or genial hucksters (Supreme Bishop Digby in *Stranger*). The protagonist of *Beyond this Horizon* (1942), following the lead of *The God That Failed*, explicitly equates religious enthusiasm and revolutionary politics, "differing only in verbal tags and creeds"; in context, it is not a compliment. It also exemplifies Heinlein's besetting oversimplification of religious faith and its social manifestations.

Zadkiel Feldstein in *Magic, Inc.* (1940) is a magician's agent whose "religion prevented him from practicing magic himself, but... there was no theological objection to his turning an honest commission." This novella goes on to paint a tongue-in-check picture of a hell run along corporate lines, complete with a demon who turns out to be an undercover G-man. *Magic* was an early work (originally published as "The Devil Makes the
Law”), but its jokey treatment of the afterlife and the soul’s immortality was to persist throughout Heinlein’s work. Briefly in Stranger and elsewhere, and at great (and tedious) length in JOB (1984), the author introduced a childishly literal heaven, ala Mark Twain, in order to poke fun at it. In The Number of the Beast (1980), he solved the whole question of lives physical, metaphysical, and fictional by treating them all as equally valid and equally accessible to his characters, a conceit that was to prove literally crippling.

Heinlein’s own idea of heaven, clearly, was simply perpetual life (with planetary pioneering and time travel solving problems of population and nurture). Salvation, in his fantasy, consisted of an undifferentiated orgy punctuated by gourmet breakfasts. Its doctrine was defined in speeches laying down the law on every conceivable subject delivered by what Pan- shin has called “the Heinlein individual,” a beneficent if ornery avatar of the omniscient author.

Given this “Heinlein-ocentric” view of the universe, it is hardly surprising that love of God was virtually the only manifestation of that emotion Heinlein found invalid. To many Heinlein characters, the ultimate goal is physical intercourse with him/herself, technologically aided gender-shifting providing the apparatus for self-possession. If the Athanasian creed characterizes the incarnation as “not the conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but the taking of manhood into God,” Heinlein’s incarnate deities embody the reverse operation. “Thou art God,” his characters are everlastingly saying to each other in Stranger before eating each other up in one way or another.

As for the sacraments, they are represented in the ideal Heinlein world by the practice of personal hygiene. While a little of this gritty detail is refreshingly realistic, in Heinlein it borders on the obsessive. In the later novels, the author is unceasingly cataloging his characters’ excretory activities, describing their arrangements for bodily cleanliness in the sort of loving detail Thomas Wolfe used to described meals when he was starving in New York. Perhaps Heinlein at one time suffered from inadequate or unpleasant bathroom facilities, but I wish he’d just installed the plumbing he wanted and stopped haranguing us about it. As it is, he’s left us with a picture of the lavatory as the central shrine of modern secular religion - - the necessary purgatory that begins to be adored for itself (see especially Friday, 1982).

Like goldfish in a bowl, his well-washed characters seem unaware of any world beyond themselves. They may dive through galaxies and swim the eons, but their loves are limited to their own immediate experience. Sex is good clean fun, good exercise, good for everyone, good with everyone. Religion is no fun, no benefit, does no one any good.
And yet Heinlein always held -- and held his characters to -- a stringent personal ethic. A political libertarian and a sexual libertinist, he nevertheless would not brook crossing some very conventional lines. Truth telling, loyalty, integrity, personal courage, and compassion are all hallmarks of the Heinlein hero/ine.

Rhysling, "the Blind Singer of the Spaceways" from The Green Hills of Earth (1951), gives first his sight, then his life, to save others. The hard-edged entrepreneurs in "We Also Walk Dogs..." fall silent before the beauty of the Chinese porcelain dish called "Flower of Forgetfulness." Matt Dodson in Space Cadet (1948) transcends human chauvinism to interact respectfully with an alien culture. Thorby in Citizen of the Galaxy (1957) refuses to profit from the trading of slaves. The heroine of Podkayne of Mars (1963) walks into a deathtrap to save a bad-tempered alien animal. All are evidently living out the philosophy contained in the words of the otherworldly "Gray Voice" in Time Enough for Love: "Morals are your agreement with yourself to play by your own rules."

The authors I return to again and again are those whose vision creates a world that seems to be a channel to the one we're all looking for: the world of peace and love, justice and mercy, true authority and true freedom. Creating such a world means bridging some hard contradictions, and perhaps the most amazing contradiction of all is that Robert Heinlein, for all his flag-waving jingoism and ludicrous social schemes, for all his superficial egalitarianism and half-baked elitism, actually created such a world.

As he himself said, in Expanded Universe (1980), of SF pioneer E.E. Smith: "[He] left us quite suddenly -- urgent business a long way off, no time to spare to tell us more stories." We can only respond, like the narrator of "All You Zombies" who has discovered that what had seemed to be other people was only other manifestations of him/herself: "I miss you dreadfully!"

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Warren Norwood Needs Help!

Warren Norwood, a North Texas University grad and a prominent figure at the recent SFRA Convention in Corpus Christi, has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. With the help of his wife, Gigi, family and friends he is determined to beat the odds and survive. His positive attitude will not eliminate mounting medical bills, however, and so a benefit fund has been established. If you would like to make a contribution, write a check to the Warren Norwood Fund and mail it to Joy G. Spiegel, 3750 W. 4th St., Fort Worth, TX 76107.

--Edra C. Bogle
GUNN MISFIRES:
Nicholls Still the Standard
by Rob Latham


What a dreadful disappointment this book is. Years in the making, featuring the work of over 100 contributors, and edited by Pilgrim Award-winning SF historian and critic James Gunn, The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction promised to supplant Peter Nicholls’ pioneering work of 1979 with its updated coverage of “the decade... [of] science fiction’s greatest growth, in readership, in general popularity, in financial returns, in scholarship, in new authors -- in practically every aspect by which changes in a genre can be measured” (as Gunn puts it in his editor’s introduction). The title itself seems to suggest that Gunn’s book has replaced Nicholls’ as the ideal one-volume reference for fans and scholars of the genre.

Well, it hasn’t. Not by a country mile.

Losses Outweigh Gains

Let’s begin by looking at some numbers. (For the figures that follow I have relied on Nicholls’ own enumeration in the introduction to his volume, while for Gunn’s book I have had to count, since the editor did not see fit to provide a quantitative summation. I thus cannot be positive that the figures for Gunn’s volume are absolutely accurate, but they are not off by more than a handful in either direction.)

Nicholls’ Science Fiction Encyclopedia had over 2800 individual entries; Gunn’s has about 960, for a loss of nearly 200%. Of these totals, Nicholls devoted 1817 to SF authors, editors, and critics; Gunn devotes 462. Nicholls had 362 entries on SF films and television programs, as well as related personalities; Gunn has 340. Nicholls ran entries on 207 different magazines and fanzines; Gunn runs six. Sixty entries in Nicholls’ book offered comment on SF artists and illustrators; 39 do in Gunn’s. You get the
picture. In no category, save for film, does Gunn's coverage even come close to matching Nicholls' -- this despite the fact that Gunn's book has to cover ten more busy years of genre production.

A useful innovation of Nicholls' encyclopedia were the 175 essays which offered broad historical discussions of significant themes in the genre. Gunn copies this practice, but with only 96 essays. Of these 96, about 60 reproduce, either by name or by content, themes featured in Nicholls' book. Of the 36 others, five are devoted to non-American SF -- British Commonwealth, France, Germany, Great Britain and the Soviet Union -- whereas Nicholls' encyclopedia ran separate entries for this material -- and also featured Benelux, Eastern Europe, Italy, Japan, Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal and South America. (Nicholls also didn't attempt to structurally distinguish British from American SF, as Gunn seems to by means of his running of a separate "Great Britain" essay. This distinction has some disturbing ideological implications which I'll discuss below.) Of the other 31 essays in Gunn's volume, three (on cyberpunk, SF poetry, and music/videos) cover material that has come into prominence since the time of Nicholls' book. The remaining 28 may be claimed as Gunn's real contribution to the revision of Nicholls' thematic canon, but considering that this revision has been purchased by a net loss of 115 entries, it hardly seems worth the price.

In his (really unhelpful) introduction, Gunn implies that some of the omissions of specific author and magazine entries might be due to their having been "brought together fruitfully" in the theme essays, in order to keep the size and, consequently, the price of the volume within reasonable bounds. But compared with Nicholls' unstinting coverage of individual material, Gunn's compression is far from fruitful. The loss of detailed information is extensive and deplorable, especially when it comes to the SF magazines. Only six major professional magazines receive detailed treatment in separate entries, all the rest being consigned to two theme essays: "Magazines, Limited Run" and "Pulp Magazines" (for a total of 600 lines of coverage). Nicholls, on the other hand, featured only two brief theme essays on magazines, but these were cross-referenced with his 207 separate entries, each deeply detailed. Gunn's book gives only a few major SF editors their own entries, cramming the rest into a theme essay ("Editors") of 352 lines, whereas Nicholls provided extensive individual coverage. I am not an expert on the SF magazines, but just casually perusing the two volumes indicates clearly the vast dimension of difference. In this area alone, the publishers would have done us all a greater service by simply reprinting Nicholls' encyclopedia unchanged (or, better, by funding a revision) instead of bringing out this anemic alternative.

Moreover, if Gunn had wanted to effect compression, why didn't he
exercise it on SF films? There are, as I have said, 340 film and TV entries -- in other words, 35% of the book. Nicholls still had 26 more, yet these comprised only 13% of his total. Now, it should be admitted that film is the one area where Gunn's coverage truly excels Nicholls', primarily because of the quality of his critics. The overall "Film" essay, by Brooks Land- don, is extensive and excellent, easily superior to Nicholls' own on "Cinema." The individual entries in Gunn, many of them written by Landon and Bill Warren, are generally better than those in Nicholls, most of them penned by John Brosnan. And Gunn provides good long entries on George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, directors who were only beginning to remake the genre when Nicholls' book was published. But I cannot understand why Gunn would allow so much space to the films at the expense of the literature, especially when Phil Hardy's superlative encyclopedia of science fiction movies (covering an international scene as compared to Gunn's general focus on British and American productions) was brought out in 1984 and is not soon likely to be excelled.

But then again, maybe I do know. Promised Land Productions, the book packagers who developed this encyclopedia, might have chosen to sell the book to a small or scholarly press -- the sort of venue which could be expected to allow the editor the workspace necessary to do the job right, since its publishing practices are not tied to the large market pressures that force a mainstream press book to make back its investment almost immediately. Instead, Promised Land chose to sell the book to Viking/Penguin, a major publishing house. Doubtless the packagers got a better deal economically -- they can expect that the book will be more widely promoted and thus will sell more copies -- but their readers have gotten a raw deal in terms of content. Clearly, the excessive space devoted in the book to movies is due to the fact that SF film is a much more widely popular medium than SF literature and thus can be expected to sell more copies of an SF encyclopedia to a mainstream audience. The three-page essay on music video -- five times as long as the next theme entry, on "Myth in SF" -- indicates the market the volume is geared for.

Promised Land's gain is the reader's and researcher's loss.

Organization and Execution

Though the obvious restrictions imposed by his publishers might tempt one to exculpate Gunn for his book's failings, it must be said that nothing can excuse this volume's general unreliability and disorganization. Like Nicholls' volume, Gunn's lacks a general index (though Gunn does promise a "checklist of all the entries pertaining to film and television" which was not included in my proof copy). Nicholls made up for this lack by an excellent system of cross-referencing that reproduced all names and
topics cited in individual entries in small capitals at each of their appearances in the text; he also provided references to related material in the form of “See also” notations at the end of entries. Gunn copies these conveniences, but the latter system of cross-referencing occurs, by my count, only seven times throughout his entire book. Given that Gunn much more than Nicholls relies on his theme essays to take up the slack of individual material, this is a pretty woeful showing.

Gunn is also not very helpful in his inclusion of bibliographic data. Nicholls’ author entries listed all novels and collections of SF and fantasy. Gunn, on the other hand, attempts to exclude fantasy works (for polemical reasons discussed below), and occasionally, in the case of more prolific writers, provides only a list of “Notable Other Works.” Also, Gunn does not specify what his cut-off date was for the exclusion of material; 1987 and even 1988 books are sometimes cited, sometimes not. For example, Gregory Benford’s Great Sky River is listed among that author’s works, while Michael Bishop’s The Secret Ascension is not, despite the fact that the latter was published one month earlier in 1987 than the former. Further, while Nicholls excluded reference to works that had not appeared by the time of his volume’s publication, Gunn sometimes lists titles which have only been announced: thus, the entry on Samuel R. Delany cites The Straits of Messina which, at the time of this writing, has not yet been published by Serconia Press, and that on Orson Scott Card lists the novel Prentice Alvin, announced but not published by TOR Books. This is a very misleading practice, as there is no sure guarantee these works will appear when scheduled (if they do at all). In sum, Gunn’s book is not all that reliable as a bibliographic resource.

It also isn’t fully reliable with regard to important dates. Clearly, despite Gunn’s claim that “Every effort has been made to supply birth and death dates for author entries,” those efforts have in fact been somewhat sketchy. Thus, Robert Heinlein, who died in May of this year, shows a death date of 1988, while Clifford Simak and Lin Carter, whose deaths preceded Heinlein’s, are still alive by Gunn’s account. It isn’t as if Gunn didn’t have access to this information, since his acknowledgements page cites the newsmagazine Locus, which extensively covers author deaths in the genre.

Finally, the book contains inconsistent information in different entries — information that a rigorous job of editing would have normalized. For example, in Gunn’s entry on the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, it is correctly indicated that this organization’s scholarly conference was moved from Houston to Fort Lauderdale beginning in 1988. However, if one checks the general “Scholarship” essay penned by Thomas D. Clareson, this move is not mentioned, and Houston is still
given as the conference site. Furthermore, while we’re on the subject of Clareson’s essay, that author refers to *Fantasy Review* magazine, edited by conference founder Robert A. Collins, as the “journal” of IAFA, a status it never held (it was a semiprofessional magazine); the new *Journal on the Fantastic in the Arts*, which is the true organ of the association, is not mentioned. Even worse, *Fantasy Review* is discussed as if it still “serves the academic community as an annual review of both fiction and non-fiction,” when in fact it ceased publication over a year ago (in favor of an annual “yearbook” volume to be brought out by the Meckler Publishing Corporation).

**Theme Essays**

One significant difference between Gunn’s and Nicholls’ practices when it comes to theme entries is that Gunn has commissioned a high percentage of his essays not from SF critics and pedagogues but from practicing SF writers. I must register here my general disapproval of this practice, primarily because SF writers have obvious professional interests in the promotion of their native material. Gunn’s permitting A.E. Van Vogt to write the entry on “Serials” is understandable in that this author virtually invented one of the major forms in the genre, the “fix-up” novel; Van Vogt’s discussion is rather good, but surely there is some kind of conflict of interest involved when the author of the entry has several works in the form currently in print. It should be admitted that Brian Stableford, a British SF writer, wrote a large number of the theme entries in Nicholls’ book; but Stableford is an academic sociologist who has also produced major non-fiction works on the history of the genre. Stableford also provides material for Gunn’s book, but so do Poul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, Mike Resnick, etc., etc.

Another effect of this commissioning of active SF writers to produce genre commentary is that these figures often have axes to grind. Probably the most embarrassing ideological fallout to issue from one of these theme entries comes from Orson Scott Card’s discussion of “The Mainstream.” Earnestly wrong-headed, Card fumbles out a potted history of twentieth century literature, roundly criticizing something he calls “modernism” while gazing with constant paranoid suspicion over his shoulder at some conspiracy known as “the academic-literary community.” Against the “intense realism and flat-affect of Virginia Woolf, the calculatedly incomprehensible language games of James Joyce, the stodgy angst of Henry James” and all their dire progeny, Card champions “such plainsong storytellers as Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Larry Niven.” He does not mention himself, but he might as well. This is not the book’s happiest moment.
But there are a few of them, sometimes provided by the genre writers. Two of the theme entries which clearly excel similar ones in Nicholls are Greg Bear’s discussion of “Biology” and Pamela Sargent’s of “Women.” These articles show two fine, disciplined intelligences at work; they offer broad historical matter combined with superlative critical insight. Since these two themes -- biology and women protagonists/writers -- are ones which have come to dominate the genre since the time of Nicholls’ book, their excellent representation provides the best argument Gunn can muster that his volume’s coverage of the literature truly surpasses its predecessor’s. Actually, Gunn’s theme essays are generally good, but they cannot make up for all that has been lost.

Editorial Presence and Integrity

Let’s get back to the numbers. I haven’t counted, but I am willing to bet that Nicholls wrote nearly half the overall entries in his book, including coverage of many of the most significant authors and subjects in the genre, whereas Gunn contributes a total of 50 (or 5%) on such odds and ends as hack writers John Jakes and Otis Adelbert Kline and TV ephemera like My Favorite Martian and Mork and Mindy. Of the crucial theme essays, Gunn penned only five (on cryogenics, the future of SF, intelligence, radio, and the social sciences) and contributed to another (on time travel) -- for a total of 6%; Nicholls, on the other hand, wrote no less than 58 of his volume’s theme essays (or 33%) and contributed to six others, including such essential topics as anti-intellectualism, communications, conceptual breakthroughs, crime and punishment, entropy, ESP and psionic powers, fantasy, forcefields, gods and demons, heroic fantasy/swords and sorcery, humor, imaginary science, messiahs, metaphysics, paranoia and schizophrenia, perception, politics, satire, sex, supernatural creatures, taboos, technology, and weather control -- all of which have been omitted entirely from Gunn’s volume as specific entries.

In all, those listed as editors on the title page of Nicholls’ book (Nicholls, general ed.; John Clute, associate ed.; Malcolm Edwards and Brian Stableford, contributing eds.) provided 138 of the theme entries, or 79%, whereas Gunn and Stephen A. Goldman (associate editor of the volume) contributed altogether only seven, or 7%. Again, I haven’t counted, but I am willing to wager that Nicholls’ four editors were responsible for well over two-thirds of the total entries in his book, compared to Gunn and Goldman with 16%. If all these quantitative discrepancies were made up for by a significant improvement in quality, one could easily forgive them; unfortunately, they are not. Moreover, while Nicholls’ presence in his book was, for good or ill, quite obvious and pervasive, Gunn’s is more surreptitious; however, it is no less endemic a structuring presence,
which makes its disguised aspect somewhat troubling (more on this shortly).

It should be pointed out here that Stephen Goldman's name has been omitted from the book's cover and title page; I had to read Gunn's acknowledgements to realize that Goldman is, in fact, the associate editor. I also, by counting the appearances of his byline throughout, realized that he is the book's chief contributor, with 105 entries (or 11%, more than twice Gunn's contribution). Given this, I would hope the title-page omission was simply a printer's oversight; however, the fact that Goldman is presently an associate professor of English at the University of Kansas, where Gunn is a full professor and director of the Center for the Study of Science Fiction, does serve to raise unfortunate political questions -- questions only fuelled by the fact that one of Goldman's entries (an entry, I might add, just a line or two shorter than the one the book devotes to John W. Campbell) provides a slavishly detailed discussion of Gunn's own contributions to SF writing and criticism.

Even while conceding that the traditional notion of the encyclopedia as a purely neutral catalogue of data is largely a myth, and that any process of selection implies criteria of evaluation which are open to debate (a point frankly admitted in the introduction to Nicholls' volume), one ought still to expect some degree of editorial sensitivity to the dangers implicit in this scenario. In Nicholls' book, entries on friends and associates -- editors and other contributors -- were rigorous and brief (in the case of Nicholls' entry on himself, also wittily self-effacing); those on writers and critics whose ideological orientation differed significantly from the vaguely New-Wavish slant of the volume's editors, were always of judicious lengths and almost unfailingly scrupulous and fair (so much so that no less an "Old Wave" light than Isaac Asimov predicted the book would "become the Bible for science fiction fans"). Nicholls' introduction spent four dense, careful pages being "quite frank about what is in [the book] and what is not"; one has only to examine the many entries to see that he did, as he claims, "err on the side of generosity" when it comes to the inclusion of disputed material.

In marked contrast to all this, Gunn's book is involved in the dubious activity of slighting ideological opponents and touting favorite sons. This involvement is expressed not only in a general critical bias, but also in specific instances of quite obvious puffery, including the overlong entry on Gunn and others such as the one on SF author Bradley Denton. Denton, who has produced only a few short stories and one novel since he entered the genre in 1984, surely oughtn't to have taken up ten lines of the valuable space Gunn claims is in such short supply -- and he probably wouldn't have, but for the luck of being a former student of Gunn's at Kan-
sas (the writer of the entry, Ned Huston, is currently one as well). This literary nepotism, combined with Gunn’s pervasive ideological bias, both compromises the editor’s image of integrity and undermines his book’s general reliability as a reference tool.

Gunn’s Ideological Bias

To his credit, Gunn does attempt to make his own ideological animus clear in his introduction, but the muddled terms of his argument keep shooting his efforts at definition in the foot. (There are some rather lame remarks about genre “protocols” that smack of reader-response theory, but they so reverently privilege the author as ultimate source of textual meaning that they sound more like cabalism than Wolfgang Iser.) Still, anyone who has read enough of Gunn’s criticism — including especially his history of SF, *Alternate Worlds* (1975) — can get a handle on his general orientation; indeed, Thomas Clareson, in his entry on SF scholarship, manages to peg Gunn perfectly when he says that “one senses he considers SF a literature of ideas and prefers the work influenced by John W. Campbell.” This conclusion is borne out by a careful comparison of the space devoted in Gunn’s encyclopedia to Campbell and his authors and that devoted to the literary movement which sought to openly challenge his influence in the genre: the British New Wave of the 1960’s.

Proceeding from the general to the particular is illuminating in that it draws out Gunn’s bias most forcefully. The theme entries on the “Golden Age” and the “New Wave” (written by SF authors Barry N. Malzberg and Richard A. Lupoff, respectively) are of almost identical length, suggesting the equal significance of both movements to the history of the genre. But if one turns to entries within these broader rubrics, a different pattern emerges. Campbell himself receives 93 lines of comment and the magazine he edited, *Astounding/Analog*, 62; on the other hand, Michael Moorcock, arguably the most important figure in the genre since 1960, is limited to an inexcusable 32 lines and his magazine, *New Worlds*, to 30. The most recognizable names from Campbell’s stable, Robert A. Heinlein and Isaac Asimov, receive 178 and 134 lines, respectively; those in Moorcock’s, Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard, 103 and 56. Further, even minor figures of the Campbell years, from George O. Smith to Christopher Anvil, get reasonably substantial entries, while minor *New Worlds* writers get either tiny squibs (Barrington J. Bayley) or no individual entries at all (M. John Harrison, Langdon Jones, David I. Masson).

Again, if the issue were merely quantitative, it could possibly be made up by superior critical assessment. But alas, much of the coverage is not only suspect, it is sometimes frankly contentious and often airily dismissive. The entry on Moorcock, though generally laudatory, starts off with
a crack about his hacked-out heroic fantasies (produced, it should be said, often under difficult conditions to keep the New Worlds experiment afloat) which reads like an editorial intervention; clearly, the entry has been so assembled as to imply that Moorcock is primarily a fantasist and thus not worthy of extended coverage in an SF encyclopedia. Moorcock’s brilliant science fiction is glossed over with a remark about its “ironic wit”; there is no discussion of its seminal speculative content, the implication being that the author is all style and no substance. This is not to imply a criticism of the entry’s writer, Douglas Barbour; it is rather to question the logic of attempting to cover the career of one of the most prolific if not protean talents in genre literature in the space of two brief paragraphs.

The entry on Ballard is even more disturbing, written as it is by Goldman who, clearly sharing much of Gunn’s ideological bent, could hardly be expected to appreciate a writer who has so boldly and openly set the Campbellian tradition on its head. Thus, there is much made of Ballard’s “submissive characters” and “despairing images” which supposedly converge with the literary “mainstream’s sense of unavoidable disaster.” Appropriately, William Burroughs is invoked (though, inappropriately, that author receives no entry in the volume), but again only to raise the issue of “style” — Ballard then is a chic, pessimistic ironist threatening the integrity of the genre’s affirmative ethos. This, presumably, explains “the reluctance of traditional SF readers — who have grown up with characters who fight the odds, even if they fail — to embrace Ballard’s work.” The general implication of Goldman’s article, with its invocations of Burroughs and “the French antinovelists,” is that Ballard is more a “mainstream” writer than a science fiction writer — this despite the fact that Ballard has produced forceful, even moving, defenses of the genre as the most significant imaginative tradition of the twentieth century, citing as precursors H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov as well as more experimental fictionists. It is hard to view this essay as just an unfortunate assignment, since the contributors’ page shows that a more balanced and sympathetic — as well as more obviously qualified — writer was available in Peter Brigg, who has published an entire book on J.G. Ballard.

**Distorting the Genre**

These two articles merely suggest the dimensions of the larger problem: Gunn’s encyclopedia will provide a distorted view of the genre to naive or ill-informed readers. (And if an encyclopedia isn’t designed to inform readers, what can its purpose be?) The fact that the book is being issued by a large mainstream press makes its bias truly alarming, in that one can reasonably expect — especially given the fact that Nicholls’ volume is out
of print in this country -- that Gunn will become the standard authority for casual readers interested in SF.

I suppose it could be replied that at least important figures like Ballard and Moorcock are duly noted, however briefly, and their major works listed for further review. Lupoff's theme essay even closes with the suggestion that the SF genre, willy-nilly, will not be able to ignore the achievements of the New Wave. But if one attempts to pursue this influence throughout the encyclopedia, one is met by systematic silence and evasion. I have already mentioned the omission of many New Wave names; readers are thus deprived of detailed reference to some of the bravest and strangest SF works ever published, from M. John Harrison's *The Centauri Device* and Langdon Jones' *The Eye of the Lens* to David I. Masson's *The Caltraps of Time* and Mick Farren's *The Texts of Festival.*

A few of these works are very briefly cited in the curious general essay on "Great Britain," so one might conclude that Gunn was forced to omit this material in more detailed form for reasons of space. But I must say I think this ghettoization of British SF is unpardonable on any account, especially considering that Gunn allows Clare son's complaint, in his "Scholarship" essay, that the "British origin" of Nicholls' book "influences some of the entries." Considering that Nicholls' coverage of American SF (which is included in the body of his compendium, not shuffled off into some "foreign" section) is actually more complete than Gunn's, such a remark really backfires. (To give a single example, American SF writer Jo Clayton, who had produced only one novel by the time of Nicholls' cut-off date, got an entry in his book, whereas now that she has written more than a dozen volumes, and has a substantial fan following, Gunn omits her.) Moreover, the notion that the full run of New Wave Britishers have been vanquished from ken due to space considerations does not account for the fact that lengthy individual entries celebrate the productions of British hard-SF hacks like J.T. McIntosh, James White, Colin Kapp and E.C. Tubb.

Coverage of the so-called American New Wave is slightly more responsible, with relatively long and fairly intelligent assessments of the work of Samuel R. Delany, Thomas M. Disch and Joanna Russ (though the entry on Delany seems to have been penned by a ghost: the initialled byline is not identified in the contributors' list). However, when one compares the space accorded these figures with that provided for more high-tech American writers of the same period -- writers who may be seen as continuing the Campbellian tradition of hard-SF plotting and heroic action -- one can again notice the perspectival skewing. Delany, possibly the best American SF writer of the last twenty years, receives 103 lines of comment, or ten less than star-wars shill Jerry Pournelle. Thomas M. Disch -
who, it should be pointed out (since Goldman's entry doesn't), is not only
a fine writer but also the editor of the best series of theme anthologies ever
published in the genre (The Ruins of Earth, The New Improved Sun, etc.)
-- gets 71 lines, to Larry Niven's 110. Joanna Russ is accorded twenty fewer
lines than Ben Bova. And again, lesser lights in the American New Wave,
like Jean Mark Gawron, Joe L. Hensley and James Sallis, have disap­
peared completely; this neglect cannot simply be due to the fact that their
work is out of print and forgotten, since Gunn is careful to preserve the
names of Campbellian second-raters like Dean McLaughlin and Joseph
L. Green.

Contemporaneity and Competence

When it comes to SF writers who emerged during and since the mid-
70's -- the area where Gunn's book can most reasonably claim to excel
Nicholls' -- there is a similar ideological skewing, but here it is com­
pounded by what can only be described as editorial ignorance. In his in­
troduction, Gunn outlines the criteria for selection of such recent figures:
"authors who... promised, at this early stage in their careers, to de­
velop a body of work." Now this is a somewhat suspicious standard, in that it
presumes Gunn and Goldman are in a privileged position to determine
the future of genre writers. In a sense, they are, in that inclusion in their
encyclopedia may be seen as a boon denied to other fledgling talents. And,
as might be expected, one can discern a pattern of bias in their selections.

The "big name" authors of the period -- the ones who have been singled
out for awards by fans and peers -- are adequately represented, regard­
less of identifiable ideology: e.g. Michael Bishop, Gregory Benford, David
Brin, Edward Bryant, Octavia Butler, George R. R. Martin, Vonda M. Mc­
Intyre, Kim Stanley Robinson, Connie Willis, Gene Wolfe, etc. The so­
called "cyberpunk" writers are included too, probably because their
ceaseless ideological self-promotion makes them difficult to ignore (espe­
cially for an editor so alert to ideology as is Gunn). Thus, there are
reasonably astute entries on William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Ruck­
er, John Shirley, Pat Cadigan and Walter Jon Williams, as well as a theme
essay on cyberpunk written by SF author John Kessel (once a target of
cyberpunk attacks for his purported "humanism," though Kessel --
creditably -- does not really allow this to influence his discussion).

Unfortunately, writers not so generally recognized or so clearly as­
associated with a coherent ideological paradigm must rely for inclusion on
Gunn's and Goldman's sharp eyes -- and we have already seen the blind
spots affecting their vision of the genre. Hard-SF authors like Jayge Carr,
Rob Chilson, Joseph H. Delaney, James P. Hogan, Donald Kingsbury,
Barry Longyear, Jack McDevitt, Mike McQuay, P.J. Plauger, Stephen
Robinett, Stanley Schmidt, Charles Sheffield, Steven G. Spruill, Andrew M. Stephenson, Harry Turtledove, Vernor Vinge, William F. Wu and Timothy Zahn (many of whom have been discovered by and steadily featured in Analog, and one of whom, Schmidt, is its current editor) appear in separate entries, while more experimental, New-Wavish figures like A.A. Attanasio, Sharon Baker, John Calvin Batchelor, Michael G. Coney, M.J. Engh, Karen Joy Fowler, Lisa Goldstein, Russel M. Griffin, Marc Laidlaw, Josephine Saxton, Carter Scholtz, David J. Skal, Robert Thurston, Robert Charles Wilson and Nicholas Yermakov, do not. Of course, the work of the writers on this second list is of quite variable significance and quality, but then so is that of the first group; for what conceivable reason have the former been featured while the latter have not, unless it is the stricture of Gunn’s literary ideology?

Or could it be merely ignorance? That seems possible, since even the representation of the hard-SF contingent shows some curious ellipses. Where, for example, is Jeffrey A. Carver? Gary Kilworth? Michael Kube-McDowell? Hilbert Schenk? J. Neil Smith? To include Robert L. Forward -- a scientist dabbling heavy-handedly in fiction -- and yet omit from detailed mention these other writers, all of whom have much greater literary merit, seems inexplicable save for general ignorance of their work. Moreover, one of the most intriguing developments of the last decade is the emergence of women writers operating in the Campbellian mode, a refunctining of that typically all-male ethos that has had some fascinating results. Surely Gunn could have better represented these authors, especially since it would have provided some defense against the traditional charge that hard SF is sexist and appeals exclusively to adolescent males. But although Joan Vinge and Jayge Carr are featured, the volume is silent on Lois McMaster Bujold, Cynthia Felice and Sheri S. Tepper (save for their being briskly ticked off on the list that closes Pamela Sargent’s discussion of women writers). It would seem as if, in their representation of the contemporary period, Gunn and Goldman have merely treated us to an airing of their personal tastes, rather than a careful review of a complex scene.

SF and Fantasy

Problems of editorial judgment must also be raised when it comes to Gunn’s treatment of the intersection of SF and fantasy, a blending of genre traditions that has grown increasingly marked in the last few decades. Nicholls, in the introduction to his encyclopedia, recognized this trend when he said that “the readership of fantasy overlaps substantially with that of sf... [and] many fantasy writers have been important influences within the sf field.” These facts led him to provide long theme essays on
fantasy in general, and heroic fantasy and sword and sorcery in particular, as well as substantial individual entries on Dunsany, Lovecraft, Cabell, Robert E. Howard, and Clark Ashton Smith, along with many more contemporary figures, from Tolkien to Shirley Jackson to Thomas Burnett Swann -- all this despite the fact that Nicholls obviously believed that fantasy could be, at least in principle, firmly distinguished from SF. Gunn, on the other hand, spends a peremptory paragraph in his introduction attempting to radically distinguish fantasy from SF on the basis of the rationality of their separate treatments of discontinuity and change, and the relative causalities involved in their separate world-makings. As a typical example of their crucial difference, Gunn cites the following: “the SF character travels by spaceship, say, or by time machine; the fantasy character falls down a rabbit hole or passes through a door in a cupboard.” Thus, fantasy “for reasons of definition, has been excluded” from his encyclopedia.

Now this is old stuff, going back, again, to John W. Campbell, who edited a “sister” magazine (the sexist metaphor is pertinent) to Astounding, called Unknown, in order to siphon off the more “fantastic” stories among his submissions, thus isolating the two genres and consequently protecting SF from contamination. It also allowed Campbell, in Unknown, to virtually pioneer a genre of whimsical oddments that tended to reduce fantasy literature to childish romps and frolics, or else to quirkily “rationalize” its fantastic elements as untoward effects of science. Gunn operates by assuming the ultimacy of this isolation and reduction, in essence disparaging fantasy as “irrational.”

The Campbellian reduction was really only countered in the genre (the appearance of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction in 1949 and the popularity of Ray Bradbury in the 50’s being the exceptions that proved the rule) with the enormous success of paperback editions of Tolkien in the 60’s, as well as that decade’s general reaction against starry-eyed technophilia in the various back-to-nature and ecology movements. Since the 60’s, genre SF has seen an influx of elements of high and heroic fantasy that has confused the borders of definition Gunn wants to strictly maintain; it has also entertained a more cynical view of technology’s social purpose, a view which found its most vocal articulation in New Wave pessimism and in feminist SF’s critique of phallic technocracy. While in the past a few unique talents like Fritz Leiber had challenged the isolation of SF and fantasy, the last twenty-five years have seen the emergence of writers whose work clearly straddles the genres, from Michael Moorcock, Ursula K. LeGuin, Harlan Ellison and Samuel Delany to Piers Anthony, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Kate Wilhelm and Ian Watson. An even more recent development has seen the resurgence of
weird or dark fantasy in genre literature, a development which has bred further generic confusion in the work of Steven King, George R.R. Martin and K.W. Jeter.

What these trends suggest is that someone with Gunn's ideological orientation is simply unsuitable to edit an encyclopedia that proposes to provide responsible and comprehensive coverage of the contemporary SF scene. The average "science fiction" magazine today, from Isaac Asimov's to Omni, and the average SF publishing line, from the newly established Foundation Books (named for Asimov's classic novel series) to the various paperback houses, feature work that, by Gunn's criteria, is clearly fantasy, yet it is billed and sold as SF. This year's Nebula Award-winning novel, presented by the Science Fiction Writers of America, was Pat Murphy's The Falling Woman, a work of fantasy by almost any definition. Scholarly work in the two genres proceeds side by side in the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts and -- despite Gunn's claim to the contrary in his entry on IAFA -- also in the Science Fiction Research Association (as a glance at the stated specialties of many of the members listed in its directory clearly shows). In fact, Campbell's surviving progeny Analog has come to be seen by most fans, writers and critics as something of a dinosaur in its attempts to resist this confluence of genres, publishing SF with (allegedly) rigorous scientific credentials. (But really, traditional science fiction conveniences like "hyperspace" are as "irrational" as fantasy's "rabbit holes.") Today Campbellian hard SF has become merely one sub-genre among many, yet this is precisely the form Gunn wishes to foreground and champion as the essence of the genre. The result is that his book's "coverage" is not descriptive, but prescriptive; not comprehensive, but exclusionary and normative.

Further, the generic confusion I have detailed does not permit Gunn to be totally consistent in his efforts to exclude fantasy. His coverage of the pre-Campbell years forces him to include C.A. Smith and Lovecraft (the latter lamely defended by Darrell Schweitzer as a "science fiction" writer), as well as Lewis Carroll, William Hope Hodgson, A. Merrill and others. Robert E. Howard, who is cross-referenced in the entry on Lin Carter (who himself ought to be absent from the volume for purposes of consistency), does not in fact appear -- thus providing more specifically empirical evidence of editorial inattention.

A different sort of inconsistency plagues Gunn's coverage of the post-Golden Age period. For example, if Jerome Bixby and Robert Bloch, two 50's talents who prefigured the endemic generic drift of the contemporary scene, are allowed into the book, where are Charles Beaumont and Gerald Kersh? If Mervyn Peake is here, where is Tolkien? If "literary" fantasists like Borges and Nabokov are featured, how can a host of others, from
Kafka to Angela Carter, be excluded? And if recent genre writers whose work is more obviously fantasy of some stripe than it is SF (at least by Gunn's narrow definition) -- writers like Robert Asprin, David Bischoff, Damien Broderick, Suzy McKee Charnas, John Crowley, Robert Holdstock, Lee Killough, Katharine Kurtz, Tanith Lee, Elizabeth Lynn, Anne McCaffrey, Thomas F. Monteleone, Andrew J. Offutt, Tim Powers, Susan Schwartz, Christopher Stasheff, Craig Strete, and Lisa Tuttle -- are permitted entries, then what conceivable reason can there be for casting James P. Blaylock, Gregory Frost, Charles L. Grant, R.A. MacAvoy, Robert Stallman, Peter Straub, and countless others into the outer darkness? Why are many fantasy films and illustrators listed along with their SFnal counterparts? The effect of all this is often a slapdash patchwork of genre materials. Since Gunn seems generally so intent on his narrow ideology, he could have done a much better job of prosecuting it.

Finis

I have focused, in my more detailed criticisms, on literary issues of the last twenty years because this is my genre specialty, and because one of the major claims this book makes toward supplanting Nicholls' volume is its coverage of this material. However, I am confident that critics with a deeper background in SF art and illustration, or pre-Gernsbackian sources, or the history of the SF magazines, will be able to find similar gaps and inconsistencies in Gunn's record. Anyone who owns Nicholls' encyclopedia, supplemented by Neil Barron's most recent edition of The Anatomy of Wonder, has a much broader and more detailed account of the history and state of the genre than Gunn's volume provides. The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction is, alas, already old news.

Rob Latham

1989 Clarion Workshop

The 22nd Clarion Workshop in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing will be held June 25 through August 5 at Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Writers-in-Residence will be Tom Disch, Karen Joy Fowler, Octavia Butler, Spider Robinson, Kate Wilhelm and Damon Knight. For applications or further information write Albert Drake, Director, Clarion '89, Holmes Hall East, Lyman Briggs School, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI 48824-1107. Deadline for applications is April 3, 1989.
The Shape of Films to Come

By Theodore Krulik

August 1988 -- Magic lives! and it lives side-by-side with reality, influencing reality, bending reality to meet seriously with the magical. This is true for two summer movies that have shown themselves to be big box-office hits, and they are hits for good reason: they are good films. Both films find their source in fantasy, in magic, but both are grounded in the hard-edged world of reality.

In "Big," starring Tom Hanks, and "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" with Bob Hoskins, the real world rubs elbows with fantasy. They are special movies because they shine through a rather blase summer of big budget sequels and rehashes that has become a sad trend that hints at the dearth of fresh ideas out there in Movieland (wherever that is).

"Big" is directed by Penny Marshall (Laverne of the TV series "Laverne and Shirley"), written by Gary Ross and Anne Spielberg, and produced by Robert Greenhut and James L. Brooks. Although it is a rehashed idea used disastrously by Dudley Moore and George Burns in other movies in the past, the idea of a boy's mind in an adult body works remarkably well with Tom Hanks's character. An important factor is that "Big" drops the parallel-plot line of following two characters: a boy in an adult body and an adult in a boy's body. But much of the credit must go to Hanks who delivers a convincing 13-year old with all of the ingenuousness of youth in the body of an adult who is a stranger to himself.

The magical element in "Big" that initiates the storyline is a fortune-telling machine named "Zoltan." Twelve-year old Josh makes a wish that he wants to be big, and the device, a moving, devil-like head, lights up and opens its mouth, then puts forward a card that reads: "Your wish has been granted." Josh notices, however, that Zoltan was not plugged in when it granted his wish. Hence, the fantasy element. Josh wakes up the next morning, goes sleepily to the bathroom, sees an adult face staring back at him, blinks, washes his face, looks again, looks behind him, looks behind the mirror, and is instantly alert with fear.

A large part of the fun in watching "Big" is in the reactions of Tom Hanks as the suddenly adult Josh. He sees and acts with the natural ingenuousness of a 12-year old. His reactions are true and natural as he tries to explain to his "mom" that he is really her son and he winds up being chased by her with a kitchen knife because she views him as an intruder in her home. His relationships with people in the real world are genuine given his unusual circumstances. At first, he seems an intruder,
a child-molester in fact, to his best friend, but the adult Josh convinces him of his real identity by chanting a secret ritual song they share. Some of the best moments of the film are the little, child-like actions he takes, such as dancing with his boss, played by Robert Loggia, on a "walking piano keyboard" in a toy store, or jumping on a trampoline in his new apartment with his girlfriend, a promiscuous status climber at his job. While he endears himself with some people at his job, he makes enemies of others. We see also, the subtle tug-of-war building up between his boyhood friend and the woman he begins to romance from work. The movie works so well because the writers (and probably the director) worked out many possible permutations of what Josh would do and what might confront him in the real world. The results are satisfying, except that I would have loved to have found out what happened back at his job once the adult Josh disappeared.

"Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" comes from Steven Spielberg's stable, with a screenplay by Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman, and directed by Robert Zemeckis. It cleverly leads the audience into its fantasy-connected world by opening with a standard cartoon short that, up to very recently, was a staple in movie theaters. The cartoon is a typically frantic potpourri of virtually fatal accidents to Roger Rabbit, but at its conclusion, the director yells "Cut!" and steps into the cartoon set to talk to Roger and Baby Herman. Reality suddenly intrudes upon a cartoon, and then our whole perspective become topsy-turvy. Live people interrelate with "Toons," as they are referred to, and a real-life street becomes a hodge-podge of human and Toon activity.

The main character, a human private eye named Eddie Valiant, played by British actor Bob Hoskins, makes the gritty side of life come together with the antic Toon side. The movie's plot is a near parody of any number of mystery films of the 1940s, but strikes me as being most like Bogart's "The Big Sleep." Besides the marvelous rapport the human actors create with the Toon characters, there is some near-undefinable SUBSTANCE that is drawn into the Toons. That is, somehow, the two-dimensionality of the cartoon figures has been drawn with an added depth. The remarkable technical feat in this is demonstrated by the Toons' handling of human clothes, doors, and fine movements. At one point, Roger is about to sit in the untouched chair of Valiant's deceased brother. When Eddie stops him with a snarl, the Toon's fingers are seen to leave streaks in the dust on the back of the chair.

What amazes an audience initially is the substantiality of the Toons and the ease with which interact with real things. But a truly phenomenal scene occurs when Eddie Valiant drives his real car into Toontown. Everything has reversed itself: Eddie must react to a cartoon landscape
where nothing reacts the way it would in real life. As we enter with Eddie into this weird landscape, we feel slightly sinister undertones. There is something claustrophobic in going into Toontown, and besides, the accidents common to Toons that leave them unscathed could prove deadly to a human.

In thinking about these films as take-off points for discussion in a science fiction class, we can look at the fantasy elements as mere devices for examining human behavior. We could marvel at the technical expertise of "Roger Rabbit" and Tom Hanks's ability as an actor to carry off the necessary boyishness in "Big," but these are beside the point. Both films handle relationships between characters that we care about, and they do that by exploring the age-old SF thought of "What if---?" Bob Hoskins gives real depth to his Eddie Valiant character, who hates Toons for personal reasons, but finds himself helping them nevertheless. Great care was given in scripting "Big" to what the adult Josh might do in a variety of situations.

--Theodore Krulik

N. B.

By Neil Barron

Due about summer 1989 from Garland Publishing is a companion to *Anatomy of Wonder, Fantasy and Horror Literature: A Critical Guide* (working title) is designed to be the most current, comprehensive and critically rigorous guide to English language primary and secondary materials yet published. The structure roughly parallels *AOW*. Five chapters are devoted to fantasy, one of them emphasizing fantasy (and some horror) written for young adult readers; four to horror fiction, from Gothics to the latest original paperbacks. The research aids portion will critically survey fantasy/horror publishing, reference works, history and criticism, author studies, film and TV, art and illustration, magazines, and library collections. A final chapter will include not only a core collection checklist but lists of awards, organizations and series. A theme index is being considered to supplement the author and title indexes.

The 13 contributors reviewed one another's preliminary lists of books to be critically annotated, and their work was supplemented by knowledgeable outside readers to insure a balanced and comprehensive selection. If any members have little-known favorites they think might be overlooked, I'd welcome details. Particularly welcome would be informa-
tion about any libraries you know of which have "significant" collections of fantasy and/or horror literature, including author collections, manuscripts, letters, illustrations, etc. Alternatives to the working title shown would also be welcome.

Contributors to the guide will receive extra income as a result of the generosity of the Atlanta Worldcon, Inc. committee, who gave a $5,000 grant to be distributed to contributors to supplement the royalties I could afford to share. The 1986 Worldcon had a $90,000 surplus, which is being given for "projects to promote the appreciation of science fiction and fantasy art and literature" -- to quote the announcement in the December 1987 Locus (page 5), which provides full details as to how to apply. How much money remains to be distributed I don't know, but you can find out by writing: Worldcon Atlanta, Inc., Attn: Jim Gilpatrick, Suite 1986, 3277 Roswell Road, Atlanta, GA 30305. Include an SASE for a reply.

Nuclear Texts and Contexts Debuts

An occasional newsletter, tentatively set to appear in September and January, Nuclear Texts and Contexts serves as an interchange of scholarship and teaching about nuclear war and related issues. The initial eight page issue dated Fall, 1988, is available from co-editor Paul Brians [English Dept., Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164]. The first two issues are free; the third issue will be modestly priced. Brians is the author of Nuclear Holocaust: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984, an outstanding study. He is assisted on the newsletter by Jean Kittrell of Southern Illinois University. The publication is concisely edited and information-rich.

Kansas SF Collection Profiled

The Spring issue of Books and Libraries at the University of Kansas [328 Spencer Library, Univ. of Kansas, Lawrence KS 66045] is devoted to the SF holdings of the Spencer library, especially those in the Department of Special Collections. Ann Hyde, curator of manuscripts, wrote the issue.

The library's SF collections began in 1968 with a $10 gift from an alumnus to be used to buy SF. Two decades later the collection is among the larger public holdings, with about 6,000 hardcovers and paperbacks, and runs of the major magazines, acquired by gift, purchase and deposit. There are manuscripts by James Gunn, Lloyd Biggle, T. L. Sherred, Cordwainer Smith, Lee Killough, Algys Budrys, A. E. Van Vogt and Joan Hunter Holly. Theodore Sturgeon's and Frederik Pohl's papers have been promised. The collection also includes 300 tapes from the SF Oral History Association, selected archives of the SFRA, SFWA, and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, scripts by various hands for Gunn's Im-
mortal television series, several hundred foreign language books deposited by World SF, and books given by the SFWA to one of its regional depositories.

The Gunn, Biggle and Killough archives may be consulted only with permission of their owners. Write the Department of Special Collections, address above, for additional information.

--Neil Barron

**Hal Hall's Indexes On Sale**

Back issues of the Borgo Press paperbound editions of Hal W. Hall's Book Review and Research indexes are now on sale. All the volumes listed below will go permanently out of print two months after this announcement appears in the Newsletter.

The issues available are:


*Science Fiction and Fantasy Research Index*, Vol. 1 ($1); Vols. 2, 3, 4 ($3 ca.).

For one or two volumes add 90 postage; for three or more add $1.25. Send checks to Hal W. Hall, 3608 Meadow Oaks, Bryan TX 77802.

--Hal W. Hall

**Eleventh Annual J. Lloyd Eaton Conference**

The 11th annual Eaton Conference will meet at the University of California, Riverside, 14-16 April, 1989. The theme of the meeting is "Styles of Creation: Aesthetic Technique and the Creation of Fictional Worlds." Papers should focus on matters of style, language, and narrative and descriptive technique in fantastic and speculative fiction and art in general. Papers of 10-15 pages (20 to 30 minutes for oral delivery) are solicited from scholars taking all approaches to the subject, considering works from all branches of fantastic literature. In addition, sponsors are especially eager to have submissions from students of aesthetic techniques who have not before concentrated on works from these genres. Papers may concentrate on single works, deal with groups of works, or argue theoretical positions. **Deadline for papers is 15 November 1988.** For further information contact: George E. Slusser, Eaton Collection, P.O. Box 5900, University Library, University of CA -- Riverside, Riverside, CA 92517; or phone: 714-787-3233 or 787-3398.
September Paperbacks:

ABBEY, LYNN. Unicon & Dragon. $3.50. Avon, from the Avon trade paper. Fantasy.
ADAMS, ROBERT. Stairway to Forever. $3.50. Baen Books. Fantasy.
ADAMS, ROBERT, MARTIN H. GREENBERG, and PAMELA CRIPPEN ADAMS, ed. Robert Adams' Book of Soldiers. $3.95. Signet. SF -- anthology.
BORTON, DOUGLAS. Manstopper. $3.95. Onyx Books. Horror.
BROOKS, TERRY. The Black Unicorn. $4.95. Del Rey, from the Del Rey hardcover. Fantasy.
CAIDIN, MARTIN. Four Came Back. $2.95. Baen reissue from Bantam. SF.
DANN, JACK and GARDNER DOZOIS. Dogtales!. $3.50. Ace Books. SF and Fantasy -- anthology.
deCAMP, L. SPRAGUE and CATHERINE CROOK deCAMP. The Incorporated Knight. $3.50. Baen Books. Fantasy -- humorous.
DEWEESE, GENE. Star Trek: The Next Generation: The Peacekeepers. $3.95. Pocket Books. SF.
DICKSON, GORDON R. The Last Dream. $2.95. Baen reissue. Fantasy -- collection.
DICKSON, GORDON R. and HARRY HARRISON. The Lifeship. $2.95. Baen reissue. SF.
FARREN, MICK. The Long Orbit. $3.95. Del Rey. SF.
GREEN, SHARON. The Thief and the Warrior #1: Mists of the Ages. $3.95. DAW Books.
GUILLUL, SHEILA. Greenbriar #2: The Crystal Keep. $3.95. Signet. Fantasy.
HAIBLUM, ISIDORE. The Mutants are Coming. $3.50. Del Rey. SF.
HICKMAN, STEPHEN. The Lemurian Stone. $3.50. Ace Books. Fantasy.
HUGHES, ZACH. Life Force. $3.95. DAW Books. SF.
JONES, DIANA WYNNE. Witch Week. $2.95. Alfred A. Knopf. YA --
Halloween.

KILIAN, CRAWFORD. *Rogue Emperor*, third in the Chronoplane Wars. $3.95. Del Rey. SF.

----- -----. *The Empire of Time*. $2.95. Del Rey reissue.

----- -----. *The Fall of the Republic*. $3.50. Del Rey reissue.

LEIGH, STEPHEN. *Doctor Bones #1: The Secret of Lona*. $3.50. Ace Books. SF.


----- -----. *The Fire Sword*. Avon reissue.


McLOUGHLIN, JOHN. *Toolmaker Koan*. $3.50. Baen, from the Baen hc. SF.


ROBERSON, JENNIFER. *Sword-Singer*. $3.95. DAW Books. Fantasy.

----- -----. *Sword-Dancer*. $3.50. DAW reissue.


SILVERBERG, ROBERT. *Up the Line*. $3.95. Del Rey reissue. SF.

SIMAK, CLIFFORD D. *Why Call Them Back From Heaven?*. $3.50. Avon reissue. SF.

STAMEY, SARA. *Win, Lose, Draw*. $3.50. Ace Books. SF.


----- -----. Ballantine/Del Rey commemorates the 50th Anniversary of *The Hobbit* by reissuing their entire line of Tolkien paperbacks.


WILLIAMS, TAD. *Tailchaser's Song*. $4.50. DAW reissue. Fantasy.

Trade Books:


-- Martin A. Schneider
Feedback

Barr-Bashing?

Editor:

Re: the three-times-longer-than-others review of Prof. [Marlene] Barr’s book [in #157] -- isn’t it sufficient to say “the author makes incautious generalizations, fails to make necessary distinctions, omits consideration of authors like LeGuin and Lessing, and produces a book of very questionable merit; not recommended”?

While “man-bashing” is counterproductive, its very over-generalized nature renders it fairly innocuous. Fifteen hundred words of “Barr-bashing” depriv'es all of us of at least two other reviews.

--Rosemary Arbur

[Ed. Note: We made a special effort to find a qualified reviewer for Barr’s book: Ka Tresca is associate professor of philosophy, a specialist in ethics, and a prominent figure in Women’s Studies. Moreover, our goal in this newsletter is not to provide bite-sized reviews, but substantial discussions; we felt Barr’s book, even in its failures, was important enough to merit detailed criticism. Future issues will carry reviews of similar length when we feel they are warranted.]

MLA Special Session

Editor:

Would you be kind enough to insert the following notice in the SFRA Newsletter?

Jean Kittrell of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville will be chairing a special session at the December 1988 Modern Languages Association meeting in New Orleans entitled “Nuclear Texts and Contexts.” Paul Brians and H. Bruce Franklin will be among the presenters, both reading papers on women authors of nuclear war fiction.

--Paul Brians

Performance vs. “The Paper”

Editor:

The annual meeting of SFRA last July in Corpus Christi was one of the best I’ve ever attended, and it is the excellence of that conference that’s gotten me thinking about problems with contemporary scholarly meetings (and, indirectly, with graduate education). Unsolicited and perhaps arrogantly, I offer some analysis and advice.
I kept getting the feeling there was some Platonic ideal of "The Paper" that the presenter would have presented, given world enough and time. "The Paper" got in the way of presentation -- i.e., what you can actually say to an audience in twenty minutes. This obsession with "The Paper" is silly to start with, on theoretical grounds. No one is going to do a "definitive" work; even the best criticism needs to be redone as times change. On practical grounds, either the members of your audience have copies of your paper during your talk, or they don't. If they do, you don't need to waste time telling them you're skipping around in it and don't want them to try and read along. If they don't have a copy of your paper, they're not much interested in its structure as it lies there in your hands; they just need a clear presentation of the argument.

In the hope that participants at future conferences might spend less time on "The Paper" and more on their presentations, I have some specific suggestions. (1) Participants should know fairly early just how much time they will have for presentation, and (2) once that time limit is established, panel chairs should hold participants to it. Readers must time their presentations and cut as necessary. (3) Participants should also rehearse their presentations, preferably in front of people who are competent to advise them on delivery. A paper is a paper, but a presentation is a performance and ought to be fairly professional. Finally, (4) participants should cut apologies and everything else inessential. A live performance is a luxury item nowadays, justified less by its excitement (will the performer screw up?) than by the opportunity it allows for interaction with the audience.

This last point is important. Let's say Godzilla ate your computer, and you were mugged at the airport and had even your notes stolen. A live performance is still justified. Sit down and talk with us. You've spent days or weeks or months or years working on a topic of interest; you've got something to tell your audience, and maybe some members of your audience have something to tell you.

Nobody expects you to do a definitive job on a topic in twenty minutes. If you've got a lot more to say, put it in writing. Have full copies of "The Paper" available, or arrange to mail them to anyone who wants one. Meanwhile, let's talk, a presenter-to-audience conversation; that, indeed, is the main reason why we bother to meet at all.

--Richard D. Erlich
[Notes. Last issue's expanded front matter forced the last-minute elision of non-fiction reviews, including my frequently promised -- and frequently delayed -- review of Larry McCaffery's *Postmodern Fiction*; that material appears here. This issue begins what we hope will be a more timely and comprehensive review section, covering all major non-fiction and selected fiction titles published this year. We also hope to include, each issue, one long review-essay on a major title; the current issue inaugurates this feature with my review of James Gunn's *New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Readers of this newsletter are encouraged to contact me if they have suggestions for subjects for future review-essays -- especially ones they would be willing to write for us themselves. --Rob Latham]

**Non-Fiction**

**Delany's Masterpiece?**


I am grateful to Chip Delany for writing this book. I've known him since a Milford Conference long ago. We've read *The Einstein Intersection* in my science fiction classes. I've read or looked into such critical works as *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*. Yet, until I got into this autobiography, Chip had been an enigmatic alien to me, his world vaguely intriguing but also vaguely sinister.

Here, in this disarming autobiography, Delany invites us into that world. Neither the style-conscious magician of symbol and myth we know from his fiction, nor the erudite intellectual of his deconstructionist criticism, he writes plain but vivid and compelling prose, revealing himself as a human being we can like and understand, sharing the experiences of a very bright and literate gay black kid growing up in New York, educating himself, discovering varieties of sex, becoming the fine literary craftsman that Chip Delany is.

We meet his parents, proudly independent upper-class black New Yorkers. Chip writes with a warm affection of the gifted poet Marilyn Hacker and their years of marriage, brightening the book with her quoted poems. With startling honesty, he describes his homosexual inclinations and adventures. He shares the toil and pain and joy of learning his literary
craft, his first novel published when he was twenty and six books sold by the end of the volume, when he is twenty-three and leaving for Europe to see Greece and begin The Einstein Intersection.

Some may be appalled or offended by his amazing candor, but more should be fascinated by this dazzling glimpse of a sensitive young artist awakening to life in the sixties. The book strikes me as a major achievement. If Delany has written anything destined to endure, I think this is it.

—Jack Williamson

Appreciating Levin


Although Ira Levin’s fantasy and science fiction output has been small, it has also been influential. It’s arguable that Rosemary’s Baby, published in 1967, primed the pump for the success of William Peter Blatty’s The Exorcist and the books of Stephen King, and it’s undeniable that The Stepford Wives and The Boys from Brazil helped make horror fiction marketable in the mainstream. Thus, Douglas Fowler has every reason to be enthusiastic about his subject, but his insightful study of Levin’s five novels and stage work seldom substitutes adulation for analysis.

The only debatable points in Fowler’s assessment are occasional digressions that tend to make Levin sound like he is doing more than he does, and that he’s the only author doing it. For example, Fowler’s second-chapter discussion of horror fiction as “play” (fiction whose sole purpose is to gratify a taste, without reflecting the real world or attempting to be didactic), doesn’t illuminate Levin’s work better than it does the work of any other horror or thriller writer, and would have been better if integrated into studies of individual books. Presented as the perspective from which to view all of Levin’s fiction, it fails to explain the streak of feminist satire that runs through his 1973 novel The Stepford Wives. Fowler’s defense of the much-criticized ending of Rosemary’s Baby leads him to compare it to less “skillful” stories like Lovecraft’s “The Dunwich Horror” (the ending of which he seems to have misread) and Machen’s “The Great God Pan”, to which it bears only a passing resemblance. Fowler also tends to read Levin’s plot twists as emblems of unconventional genius when, really, they are the signs of a good thriller writer who knows what the form will bear.

Fortunately, Levin’s competence as a craftsman is what emerges from this book, and Fowler’s thorough dissection of the novels makes you want to go and read them yourself.

—Stefan Dziemianowicz
A Marvelous Compendium


Editor McCaffery's mammoth volume provides a near-encyclopedic introduction to the complex problematic of "postmodernism" in contemporary literature. Excellently organized, the book opens with McCaffery's fine introduction, which lays the theoretical groundwork for the collection, followed by a series of well-conceived "Overview Articles" on essential topics and problems posed in and by postmodernism as both a literary and philosophical movement; then comes an alphabetically organized compendium of biographical/critical discussions of major postmodern figures. The book closes with a "Selected Bibliography of Postmodern Criticism" which, while not as thorough as similar bibliographies contained in works such as Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction* or Ihab Hassan's *The Postmodern Turn*, does, when combined with the bibliographies that follow the overview articles and individual author entries, give a useful survey of its intricate subject.

The interest of the volume for scholars of SF can be discovered in McCaffery's general conclusion that postmodernism has mounted a vigorous and sustained critique of realism in literature -- a critique which has often valorized and empowered "paraliterary" forms like SF, for which "mimesis was never [a] guiding concern". McCaffery's discussion focuses attention not only on those "mainstream" authors who have borrowed themes and strategies from traditional science fiction (e.g. Burgess, Calvino, Pynchon, Lessing, etc.), but also includes individual discussions of major SF authors. McCaffery takes the late Philip Dick as paradigmatic of the convergence of interests between SF and postmodernism in his exploration of themes of "metaphysical ambiguity, the oppressive nature of political systems, entropy, [and] the mechanization of modern life". Also, the volume features an overview article called "The Paper World: Science Fiction in the Postmodern Era", written by Welch D. Everman, which analyzes the metafictional self-reflexiveness of contemporary SF through intelligent discussions of J.G. Ballard, Samuel Delany, Thomas Disch, Philip Farmer, Stanislaw Lem, Gene Wolfe, and Roger Zelazny. Everman's analysis centers around the notion that SF "is a literature of absence... rooted in and dependent on the language that makes the impossible possible" -- an emphasis which places it in opposition to the mimetic concerns of "mundane" realism, and thus squarely in a postmodern universe.

Authors of genre SF featured in individual entries are Ballard, Gregory
Benford, John Brunner, Delany, Dick, Ursula LeGuin, John Varley, Wolfe, and Zelazny. Generally, the discussions are good (George Slusser's on Delany being excellent), though in some instances, as with Brian Stableford's entry on Dick, the critic doesn't seem fully aware of what is expected of him -- namely, exploring the author's specifically "postmodern" concerns. One might wonder what Benford and LeGuin are doing here, when more obviously postmodern figures like Michael Moorcock and Joanna Russ have been omitted, but the volume makes up these lacks by usefully indicating the SFnal interests of many non-genre authors, from Thomas Pynchon to Don DeLillo to Raymond Federman. In sum, this book is of exceptional value not only to SF scholars intrigued by the dawning implications of the postmodern movement but also to mainstream scholars only now coming to awareness of the centrality of SF in the postmodern ethos. To both groups, Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide is highly recommended.

--Rob Latham


"Wells is the Prospero of all the brave new worlds of the mind, and the Shakespeare of science fiction," argues Brian Aldiss in Billion (and Trillion) Year Spree. I agree. Wells has been the subject of uncounted reviews, articles and books since 1895, when four of his many volumes were published, one of them The Time Machine. Scheick, an English professor, and Cox, a librarian, have usefully surveyed a large mass of material about Wells, "but excluded most solely descriptive or enumerative items, reviews of secondary works, film reviews, undergraduate honor and M.A. theses."

The guide begins with Wells' own writings, fiction and non-fiction, in book form. Contents of original collections are shown, but not all the collected editions, such as the 1924 Atlantic edition or the 1927 short stories collection. The core of the book is the 3,019-item secondary bibliography, from several reviews of The Wonderful Visit (1895) to David Smith's H.G. Wells, Desperately Mortal (1986). One-third of the pieces have been published since Wells' death in 1946.

The arrangement is by year, then by author, with an index to "authors, editors and translators of articles and books on Wells as well as any writers mentioned in the abstracts." The annotations range from ten to 250 words, averaging about sixty to eighty words. They are purely descriptive but sufficiently detailed to judge the relative importance of the items described.

I checked several sources and found most items listed. Some fanzine articles listed in Hal Hall's Science Fiction and Fantasy Reference Index;
1878-1985 were omitted. Zamiatin's long essay on Wells is cited, although not Zamiatin's 1970 collection *A Soviet Heretic*. The essays in the two editions of Smith's *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers* aren't cited. But almost all the significant English language scholarship, and some of the foreign, is here.

The lamentable weakness of this study is its indexing. The index provided is complete as far as it goes, but it doesn't go nearly far enough. It would have taken relatively little effort to have prepared an index to articles and books about individual works, themes in Wells, general biographies, etc. Such an index would have required an extra five to ten pages, a trivial number which would have added negligibly to the book's length and cost. Cox, a reference librarian, should have known better, as should Scheick. It's seemingly minor things like this which separate merely useful books from essential ones. Recommended for larger libraries and Wells scholars.

--Neil Barron

**A Readable Guide**


This is #44 in the Starmont Fantasy and Science Fiction Readers’ Guide series, edited by Roger C. Schlobin. Zahorski follows the standard format, though both the typesetting and the prose are far more readable than average; there's an opening chronology, a brief life, separate chapters for Beagle's three novels, and chapters on his short fiction, movie and television scripts, and non-fiction articles and books. There are also annotated primary and secondary bibliographies, plus an index.

Zahorski's account of Beagle's often nomadic early career is the most entertaining part of the book. The chapters on the major novels (*A Fine and Private Place, The Last Unicorn* and *The Folk of the Air*) begin with background sketches, and proceed into extended plot summaries, punctuated and/or followed by interpretive and occasionally critical sections. The best of the chapters is the first, which includes disquisitions on humor, character, style and the uses of ambiguity in the narrative. Least effective is the last, which is dominated by plot summary, very engagingly presented, but short on critical perspectives. Zahorski's précis of *Folk of the Air* is both detailed and interpretive, so that it gives the impression of a “frame by frame” audience response -- a reader may well feel he has “seen the movie” whether or not he has read the book. The interpretation is designed to excite an appropriate admiration of the author, of course, but I have misgivings about this approach to criticism.
Treatment of the shorter works, which is proportionately fuller in critical interpretation, seems better balanced to me. Of course, the brevity of Beagle’s “canon” is in direct contrast to the size of his critical reputation, so perhaps some padding was justified to fill out the book.

--Adrian de Wit

Fiction

Away from Anthropocentrism


The vision that Asimov over the years has implanted in his fiction is not as simplistic and human-centered as his critics have often maintained. Now the clever doctor has published the sixth book in the Foundation series that began with the long serials in Astounding during the 40’s and that now, in the 80’s, is being tied in, through a group of new novels, with his robot books of the 50’s. Asimov calls this new novel the “first” Foundation novel, although he acknowledges that it is the last written. Not only is this publishing history complex, but also the future history of Galactic Empire, of decline and fall and revival through the two Foundations led by Hari Seldon’s psychohistory, fits together to form a vast jigsaw puzzle. Neither Asimov nor his fans ever want to see this puzzle fully completed, yet the new large piece does offer a significant background sketch, having to do with Seldon himself and his early life on Trantor.

This planet at the center of the Galactic Empire is one of the heroes of this novel, just as primitive Earth haunts the later robot novels; and Asimov fully satisfies our hunger for more information about this Malthusian monstrosity he first tantalized us with in the original trilogy. But the really significant effect here, I think, is the characterization (or lack thereof) that Asimov provides for Seldon; in this feature, the novel seems to offer a bold challenge to critics who have charged the author with simplistic writing.

More than any of the earlier Foundation stories or the recent syntheses of Galactic Empire and robotics, Prelude seems to openly abandon the usual expectations of a human story or novel of character. Not only are central characters other than Seldon virtually immortal robots, but also the best passages in the book are those about epistemology, methodology, and the celebration of accumulative partial knowledge. Asimov’s text is rich in speculation about Seldon’s original theories of psychohistory and of the power of accumulating data. Here is a dramatic climax that seems to me much better than, and much different from, any of the human
climaxes in the book. Seldon’s girlfriend, who may or may not be human, concludes to him at a tender moment: “We have found something far better. We have history.” In other words, what Asimov depicts here is the notion that we cannot have grand, anthropocentric revelation. Therefore, small bits of partial knowledge, though often frustrating in their incompleteness, must satisfy us; and this flawed sort of story, filled with the author’s continual futuristic trivia that reminds me of the historical trivia in a novel such as Pamela, must satisfy us as readers also. Such is the vision of hard science fiction.

--Donald M. Hassler

Collaboration is Flawed But Readable


Two of the best writers in the SF field have collaborated in this story of the aftermath of earthwide catastrophe. In the near future, the world is divided into four major parts: the AfrAsian, the European States, the PanMack Consortium (the Americas: four unequal fiefdoms, plus control of the Lagrange Habitats in space), and the Eighteen Undersea Cities, which trade oil, minerals, and food to the rest of the world. There is no love lost between the violent, constantly quarreling “Lubbers” and the “Webfeet” of the oceanic Cities, a major difference between them being their attitudes toward science. Those on land use science to create better weapons and consolidate power, whereas those in the sea power their homes with thermal springs, study the archaeology of the underwater realm, develop new pharmaceuticals from aquatic flora and fauna, and train squid to handle agricultural machinery.

When PanMack scientists use a nuclear explosion to break up a comet headed for Earth, the resulting rain of debris knocks out electronic communications, ionizes the ozone layer, and creates deadly storms. Most of humanity is wiped out, and the few survivors -- the Lubbers dominated by brutal, warring Mack lords and the Webfeet eking out a difficult existence in a much changed world -- are challenged by the previously unknown alien menace of the “Eternal” (an entity which bears some resemblance to “HE” of the authors’ Cuckoo saga). The foreground story involves two lovers from the undersea city of PanAtlantica, separated by the catastrophe, and a small number of PanMack citizens of various ranks; this story is flawed by passages (especially near the beginning) detailing antecedent action that reads as if it might be part of a juvenile series, by interpolations about the mysterious -- and inadequately described -- Eternal, and, above all, by too many stock, wooden characters. Depending on one’s point of view, the ending is either still another, yet greater cata-
strophe with even fewer survivors than the first, or miraculous escape to a new beginning.

The earlier collaborations of Pohl and Williamson have received mixed reviews from critics; certainly, both writers have written better individually. Nevertheless, their joint efforts (the Starchild trilogy, the Cuckoo saga, and even the juvenile Undersea adventures) have always been both provocative and readable, and this latest effort, though flawed, is no exception.

--Arthur O. Lewis

The Invisibility of Women


Speculative fictions taking as their subject the shape of future life for women can be (and have been) variously classified: some see the future as generally pleasant, some as unpleasant, and many, many works view it ambiguously, seeing a price connected to possibilities of growth and validation for women. Of late, two trends have emerged: the examination of our historical or mythological past from the point of view of its female participants (cf. Marion Zimmer Bradley's The Mists of Avalon and The Firebrand), and the exploration of some sort of post-catastrophe (technological, ecological, or sociological) future in which extreme forms of patriarchy have been empowered and women reduced to the status of vessels and chattel (as in Suzette Haden Elgin's two volumes of The Native Tongue and Margaret Atwood's A Handmaid's Tale).

Tepper's novel clearly draws upon all these tendencies. It is set in a post-catastrophe future in which women live in cities, having children, maintaining the crafts and the arts, overseeing agriculture and the production of goods and services, with men, except for a peace-loving few, living outside the cities in garrisons, serving as guardians and warriors motivated by glory in battle. On first view this society seems patterned on the Greek city-state of Sparta, with some variations. Localities are named after women -- Marthatown, etc. -- but women's apparent status is low. Male children must be turned over to the garrisons at age five, and are allowed only holiday visits to their female relatives. By age fifteen the majority of boys choose to remain in the garrisons and not return to the cities through "the women's gate" (whence the novel's title).

A reader familiar with the tradition of this sort of SF narrative is not surprised to see that all is not what it seems and that the world of women's experience encompasses far more than what is noticed by the men continually bound up in their war games. The key SF concept is lodged in an increasing number of non-violent men who choose to return to the cities
and an increasing proportion of city-dwellers, both male and female, who are endowed with paranormal powers; the narrative vehicle for this concept is the gradual unfolding of the reason for this phenomenon in the life of a strong female character, Stavia, as she grows up, learns to separate her illusions from reality, and discovers what sacrifices women have chosen to make in the pursuit of a goal for human society as a whole. As in other novels of this sort, hope for women and for a future in which humanity can truly grow lies, ironically, in women’s “invisibility.”

The Gate to Women’s Country is constructed largely of flashbacks -- Stavia’s memories, given continuity with the present by means of rehearsal scenes as she prepares to play her annual role in Women’s Country’s ritual staging of Iphigenia at Aulis, based on a “preconvulsion” story (and used here to emphasize the historical roots of the wrongs done women by male nature at its worst). For the most part elements of plot and concept cohere, but at least one section, an excursion into a male-dominated theocracy reminiscent of both Elgin’s and Atwood’s novels, is not well prepared for and seems tacked-on. Although this latest entry onto the growing list of SF works centered on women seems more to borrow from its tradition than to build upon it, its main characters are believably and sensitively portrayed, and suspense over what might be the women’s secret is enough to hold the reader until hopeful answers are revealed.

--Mary-Kay Bray

Rating the Nebulas


There’s a healthy skepticism about literary awards these days, an awareness that not even the Nobel Prize is a sure guarantee of competence, let alone immortality. A list of past awards is too often a catalogue of forgotten compromises among vested interests, tinged with moral obtuseness, willful or otherwise. The SFWA’s Nebula Awards, listed in an appendix to this volume, have done better than most at recognizing merit. So this new anthology should be approached seriously, in a spirit that recognizes that our love for prizes will always outweigh our suspicion of the prizegivers’ fallibility.

Top prize, then, goes easily to Lucius Shepard’s “R & R,” the long novella which deservedly won the 1986 Nebula and which rightly occupies the center of this anthology. This story alone makes the book worth its price; it’s a near-future war scenario, set in an American firebase in Guatemala, where the central figure, a young American artillery specialist, like the Central American people themselves, has become “trapped between the poles of magic and reason... with the rectangular
computerized bulk of North America above and the conch-shell-shaped continental mystery of South America below.” “R & R” is, among many other things, a timely recapitulation of the process whereby logic and sanity at the level of the individual fighting man tend to get so utterly lost that the political goals of warring governments become absurdly unachievable. Shepard’s style is as dense and lush as the jungle of which he writes. He owes something to Ballard, but is free of the mannerism that frequently causes Ballard’s analogies to descend into self-parody. This is a brilliant story.

“Surviving”, by Judith Moffett, a novelette nominee, takes second prize. It’s about a psychologist who has made her academic reputation via work on a feral child brought up by chimpanzees, only to find that the now adult Chimp Child has been hired by her own university as a biologist. The story deals with the primate inheritance we all share and with which we must come to terms if we are to become whole -- but with which we can never come to terms. The narrator’s initiation into the ways of her primate ancestors is superbly done. The story also touches on the inadequacy of civilized sexuality and the tragicomic gulf between armchair theorizing about a subject and practical involvement in it.

Third prize, but a long way behind the leaders, goes to the charming little parable “Robot Dreams,” by the 1986 Grand Master Isaac Asimov. It’s very much a piece of showing off (the Laws of Robotics get restated in reverse), but it has the virtue, not generally shared here, of concision. It’s followed by a comic how-to piece by Asimov called “Seven Steps to Grand Master,” which also reveals how charm can make up for deficiencies in profundity and may in the end earn Asimov his immortality.

Next (equal) comes Greg Bear’s “Tangents” and Kate Wilhelm’s “The Girl Who Fell Into the Sky.” The Bear story also has plenty of charm when it’s an homage to Fadiman’s Fantasia Mathematica, but loses it when it tries at the same time to pay tribute to the tragic theoretical mathematician Alan Turing. Wilhelm won the novelette award with her brave attempt to find something numinous in the vast grasslands of the American prairies; the tale is full of fine description, but the numinosity is neither easily credible nor of itself a very gripping theme.

The remaining stories have their merits, save perhaps for Orson Scott Card’s “Salvage”; easily the weakest tale, it failed to get a final nomination and was allegedly substituted for Card’s nominated novelette “Hatrack River,” which had been reprinted elsewhere. I don’t object to the inclusion of the Rhysling SF poetry award winners, especially as Susan Palwick’s short lyric “The Neighbor’s Wife” is excellent, but there is little justification for the presence here of Bill Warren’s lengthy ramble through the SF movies of 1986. Though he writes amusingly enough, Warren’s
struggle to be inclusive forces him to include comment on such titles as *Revenge of the Teenage Vixens from Outer Space*; really, exclusivity should be the keynote of the Nebula Awards.

The message to next year's anthology editor Michael Bishop is clear: trust the SFWA's choices, avoid irrelevant filler, and resist pressure to include inferior work just so more big names can appear on the cover. This anthology could have been consistently first-rate; as it is, it is only partially so.

--Nicholas Ruddick

**Dull Cutting Edge**


"Backward, Turn Backward" [...O time in thy flight! / Make me a child again just for tonight], one of the last writings of Alice Sheldon ("James Tiptree, Jr."), is so transparently the waking nightmare of an old lady bent on the mercy killing of her beloved husband, that reading it now is almost unbearably painful. Sheldon was the product of a worldly and sophisticated circle, a woman of considerable beauty and international social connections, who married an Army officer during World War II. In this "time-travel" story the author heaps scorn on the shallow values of the debutante she once was, punishes her alter ego for her upper-crust social myopia, and ends by condemning her to something like a witch-burning. The near-future world in which the denouement occurs is a grim socio-economic chaos, in which the rich have finally commandeered the Army, Navy and Air Force to protect their walled enclaves of luxury against the savage incursions of a totally lawless and impoverished populace. The story's ambience throughout is one of fear and loathing. Its title, drawn from a once-famous sentimental verse ("Rock Me To Sleep," by Elizabeth Akers Allen, ca. 1860) is as ironically despairing as anything Sheldon ever penned.

Next to this mega-shocker (also included in *Crown of Stars*, Sheldon's last story collection, TOR, September 1988), the other pieces in *Synergy II* seem tame or trivial. The next best story in the collection is newcomer Daniel Pearlman's "Taking From the Top," another near-future dystopia focused on the world surplus of octogenarians. Pearlman's society thins the elderly through systematic "euthanasia" via Medicare -- patients are "put down" (rather than mended) if they are hospitalized after 80 and can't produce enough "Social Value points" to merit another year of existence. The spectacle of aging scientists and scholars scrambling to collect enough garbage off the streets to merit social value points is grimly comic and all too plausible.
Mildly inventive are Howard Waldrop's "French Scenes," a writer's story satirizing the creative artist's love-hate relationship with Hollywood, and James Morrow's "Diary of a Mad Deity," in which "multiple personality psychosis" is extrapolated into an amusing burlesque of Global Realpolitik. The only story in the collection with any truly avant-garde extrapolation, however, is also the most trivial.

In my review of *Synergy I* [SFRA Newsletter No. 154] I compared that first collection's lack of the advertised "leading edge" science to a more exciting non-fiction account of an emerging discipline, "Chaos theory." *Synergy II* indeed contains a tale based on Chaos theory, Rudy Rucker's "Probability Pipeline," but it's superficial and affectless, as those familiar with Rucker's work might well suspect. Its "idea" concerns wave motions in a tidal basin, a perfect laboratory for chaos investigators of course, and Rucker's reverse extrapolation of "strange attractors" into "strange affec­tors" capable of producing desirable patterns in the California surf is ingen­ious. The idea is wasted, though, on a tired and trivial plot ("nerd makes good") and stale, flat characters no reader could care about. Per­petual adolescent horseplay gets tiresome rather quickly, and Rucker's work contains nothing else. His stories are like the old Rube Goldberg cartoons, in which some earthshakingly improbable series of causes and effects succeed in some monumentally trivial pursuit, like lighting a cigarette or kicking a cat. "Probability Pipeline" is a prime demonstration against Zebrowski’s thesis that the most important ingredient in good science fiction is the science.

*Bob Collins*

**A Universe of Pure Consciousness**


First novels are often disappointing. One picks them up with a sense of anticipation, with the hope that this new author will offer something his predecessors have not. Often the anticipation and hope dissolve into frustration as one finds rough edges and unfulfilled potential. David Zindell's *Neverness* is the rare exception, a first novel that delights and satisfies.

Zindell's imagination bubbles over like a mass of fermenting yeast. He creates not one but a series of societies that interact with one another to depict a constantly changing universe of infinite possibilities. The result is a novel which deserves to be called epic in scope because it deals with such a wide range of situations and problems -- from the daily lives of specific individuals trying to cope with very personal problems, to the almost timeless lives of transcendent, godlike beings trying to cope with
problems of such abstractness and universality that they are difficult to even conceptualize.

During his meteoric career, Mallory Ringess, the protagonist of Ne'erness, is forced to deal with a wide spectrum of the social levels in the novel -- from the Solid State Entity (a being with multiple brains the size of moons) at one extreme, to the Alaloi (a primitive group of hunter-gatherers perhaps based on the historical Aleutes) at the other. The tale involves Ringess and his fellow Pilots of the “Order of Mystic Mathematicians and Other Seekers of the Ineffable Flame” in a quest for the Elder Eddas, which ostensibly contain the meaning of life. But Ringess is also involved in a search for his father and for himself. Suffice it to say that his many adventures lead him to perceptions and conclusions about all three questions.

But the book is not all adventure. The characters are well drawn and fully rounded. Ringess is credible, he grows and develops. Soli, the Lord Pilot, a solitary and embittered man; Bardo, Ringess’ best friend and something of a court jester; Moira, his mother; and Katharine, his lover - - all are impressed with the seal of conviction.

This is a book full of subtle allusions and resonances. One easily sees how it uses Arthurian motifs (the Pilots in their quest are like the Knights of the Round Table) and archetypal patterns (the bastard/orphan searching for his father). Significantly, these motifs and patterns are used in innovative and enlightening ways; they are thematically related to modern problems.

It is the themes which give the novel substance, a substance which is simultaneously scientific, philosophical and theological. The science is marvelous, awe-inspiring. Ringess lives in a time when almost instantaneous space travel is possible. He works in ships which link him directly to quasi-intelligent computers. Yet his Order strictly limits technology. The science leads directly to the philosophical and theological questions. Since extreme genetic manipulation is possible, questions about ethical implications and about the basic nature of humanity arise. Since some of the beings in this universe exercise divine powers, one is invited to explore the nature of divinity and the ultimate ground of existence. Zindell does not shrink from these questions. His answers to them may well become the subject of much critical controversy. As Mallory Ringess concludes: “The deep structure of the universe is pure consciousness.”

Ne'erness is a large, rich, and fascinating novel. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

--Robert Reilly