

# THE FRANK ARNOLD PAPERS



EDITED BY  
**ROB HANSEN**

# **The Frank Arnold Papers**

**Frank Arnold**

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*Published by*

Ansible Editions

94 London Road, Reading, England, RG1 5AU

[ae.ansible.uk](http://ae.ansible.uk)

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This Ansible Editions ebook published December 2017; expanded October 2024 with “The High-Flier That Flopped”, “To Hell with All This!”, “In Search of Frank Arnold” (adapted from Rob Hansen’s website), “Out of This World”, “Published Reviews 1938-1969” and two more unpublished “SF Fragments”. Trade paperback edition October 2024.

*Cover photograph*, left to right: Ted Carnell, Ted Tubb, and Frank Arnold at the 1952 London convention. Photo from the Vince Clarke collection.

*Interior photographs* of Frank Arnold opening each section of the main text: [Autobiography](#), cropped from

the 1952 cover image; [On Journalism](#), also 1952, from the Vince Clarke collection; [On Science Fiction](#), 1952, from the John Carnell collection; [On Fandom](#), 1974, by Merv Barrett.

Ebook ISBN 978-1-913451-35-6

Trade paperback ISBN 978-1-916508-27-9

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# Introduction – Frank Arnold by Michael Moorcock

Frank Arnold's encyclopedic knowledge of SF and the London SF writers was phenomenal. He was in every way a phenomenon but a largely unsung one by the time I came to know him in the 1950s. I was struck by his obvious courage, especially in the matter of his spoiled hand. He never tried to hide it and had trained himself to use it as normally as possible.

When London sf fandom moved from The White Horse to The Globe, Frank had become a kind of official greeter, especially around the time of the first London Worldcon of 1957. He made it his business to introduce visitors to regulars and to fill newcomers in on the history of British science fiction from its earlier beginnings as a genre, through its later developments as a literature, without any particular preferences or prejudices. Even when he asked you back to his rooms in West London, you could see that, while the past was beautifully represented by first editions of Wells and Orwell, copies of *Scoops* and other rare British magazines, it showed almost as much reverence for the present.

If you had time, Frank would show you parts of his collection including original drawings, manuscripts, photographs and so on. His photograph collection came close to rivalling Arthur Clarke's. His rooms weren't unfamiliar. They were those of a man who had found a remedy for loneliness, for the solitary life. Lined around the shelves were all the signs of a man who preferred the reliable wonders of the human imagination to the terrors of emotional relationships, whose self-image was not especially great, yet who overcame his shyness to be not only the first man whom a young, shy sf fan would meet when he turned up at The Globe or The One Tun but the person to make that fan welcome, introducing them not just to young fans of their own age but to the writers whose names they had only read on the covers of books and magazines and admired as they admired the distant suns of space.

Frank's career as an sf writer was pretty much over by the time we met. I liked him a great deal and respected him considerably so I was glad to republish the fine long essay I included in *New Worlds: An Anthology* (Fontana/Flamingo, 1983; revised Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004) because Frank had the scope and knowledge to give me exactly the perspective I felt we needed. It seemed fitting that one of the magazine's founders

should be included in what was intended to be a kind of memorial to my version of *New Worlds*, remembering that it had originally been founded by fans and professionals pooling their enthusiasm and sustained by amateurs and professionals, just as so much else is achieved in science fiction. Frank was a living corner-stone of *New Worlds* and his involvement with it was as much part of British science fiction as the magazine itself.

*Michael Moorcock*  
*Rue St Maur*  
*Paris 75010*  
*16-x-17*

# Foreword by Rob Hansen

I never knew Frank Arnold. To me, he was just the old boy who was the keeper of the visitors' book at the first Thursday of the month gatherings of London fandom. These were then held at the One Tun pub in Farringdon, and I don't recall us ever exchanging any words.

I started attending the Tun when I moved to the capital in 1980, and I soon got used to seeing Frank in his usual spot there, sitting at the table nearest the door with a handful of other fans. He would have been a useful person to interview for *THEN*, my history of science fiction fandom in the UK, but, alas, my serious researches would not really begin in earnest until 1988, a year after his death in 1987. That's when I learned of his role in the creation of *New Worlds* and of his long years as part of the science fiction fan/pro community back in the days when it really *was* a community.

An only child, Francis Joseph Eric Edward Arnold was born in East London in 1914, his parents splitting up when he was nine years old. Frank remained with his mother on what he termed "the wrong side of the family", an event he believed had derailed what would otherwise have been the course of his life and to have negatively affected it ever after. He left school in 1928 at the age of fourteen, the paucity of his education destined to hobble his future ambitions, and soon found employment at a small local architectural firm. Here, in his own words, is what happened subsequently:

I became an artist in 1931 when I grew fully aware of my surroundings, the vivid clarity of air, the little rolling green hills, the trees that looked like men, the vast liberation of the skies. The love of what is clear-cut and sharply visible, vigorous, definite and fully understood became my first-nature, and nothing has blurred it in later years.

I became a politician at heart in 1933-34, when the mercenary classes were destroying all this. It was a matter of emotional excitement, not of intellectual conviction, but it was a necessary beginning.

I became an author, after many fluctuations of desire, in 1939 when I read a passage about Shaw, saying that in spite of all discouragements, "he went on writing Shavianism, and forced

the world to make him a rich man.”

I became a politician, from full intellectual and emotional conviction, in January 1947 when I quit Fleet Street forever. Thus ending ten years of abortive attempts to enter journalism, an error that wasted much energy but gave me essential experience.

Frank never held any elective office that I’m aware of, though his political views as a self-proclaimed Wellsian socialist inform all of his writing. As for his later employment, here’s what he wrote in 1965:

The actual sequence of events in my life has followed a reverse order: Fleet Street, the Law Courts, the book trade, and now Public Relations. The order would have been adequate had I begun with the book trade, and finished there.

He apparently did public relations work for Paramount, Babcock & Wilcox, and the Royal National Institute for the Blind. In the early 1970s he landed a Civil Service job, where he remained until his retirement.

Sometime after his death, for reasons I no longer recall, Frank’s papers ended up with me, minus any published manuscripts. These were contained in ten or so ring binders and most of them were not in any sort of order I could discern. I gave them a cursory look, saw nothing of immediate interest to me, then stored them away in my cellar, giving them no more thought.

In the summer of 2017 the box containing Frank’s long-forgotten papers came to light once more when I was in the cellar looking for something else. Now, decades later, I gave them a more serious examination, extracting anything about UK fandom – my main area of interest – and seeing if there was enough to form the basis of a fanzine article or two. Frank’s papers are a mess, containing too many half-finished pieces, or fragments of what look to be once-complete pieces. I found the first page of what had obviously once been a longer article on fandom, two vignettes from the White Horse days, a one-page piece titled “First Thursday: II” (no sign of “First Thursday: I”) and the final two pages of what had once clearly been a five-pager about the final days of The Globe. I thought maybe these could be edited together but, as it turned out, no editing was required. Weirdly, when placed in chronological order, they read as a coherent article anyway. This was quickly snapped up for fanzine publication and appears here as “The White Horse & The Globe”.

Which made me think that maybe there was other writing in that mess of papers also worthy of excavation. There were some already complete

articles in there (“The Rise & Fall of Edward Hulton”, “Looking Back on My Days as an SF Author”, etc., and some others not included here for various reasons), which seem to be part of larger projects Frank was working towards, but many more that were incomplete.

I sorted the papers into piles under the sub-headings used on the contents page, and then set to editing together the pieces you’ll find in these pages, all of which were written over a thirty-year period between the early 1950s and early 1980s (save, obviously, for the two 1939 pieces reprinted herein). The titles they appear under are largely the ones I gave them. This is almost certainly not how Frank would have organized this material, most of which I don’t believe has ever been published before, but I like to think he would have approved of the final result.

I never knew Frank Arnold, but in going through his papers and putting this volume together I think I now have a better idea of who he was. After reading it, I hope you will, too.

*Rob Hansen*  
*September 2017*

Over the years since 2017 *The Frank Arnold Papers* ebook has proved to be a popular download at the TAFF site, and Dave Langford (publisher at Ansible Editions) and I decided there should be a print version of this volume. Dave hunted up a number of published SF reviews, from 1938 to 1969, and three further essays by Frank that we felt should be included. Add in my own article “In Search of Frank Arnold” and what you’re now reading constitutes a new, hopefully definitive edition.

*Rob Hansen*  
*September 2024*

# Autobiography



*Frank Arnold, 1952*

# 1: Early Years

Even today, it is hard to grasp how much my life has taken the form of romance, epic, legend and fairy-tale....

It should have been enough that I was born within a mile of Wanstead Park, one-time home of the romantic and disastrous Earl of Essex; that I should be brought up on the Essex coast at points between the ancient fortresses of Maldon and Colchester; that amid these battlefields of long ago I should have grown used to the thrilling sight of flying-machines from earliest boyhood; that my Father should have been one of Kitchener's Men in 1914, and that I should have grown up in the awesome and exciting shadow of "the War"; and in my own turn, I should have been a military volunteer in the summer of 1940, eternally known as "our finest hour...."

But no... I had to be sundered suddenly from my family and friends at an early age, losing touch with them completely for the next thirty-odd years, leaving me to wander through my adult life at a loss, wondering what on earth had happened. I had to be thrust forcibly out of the real world of family life to undergo a sort of incarceration, an experience repeated many times in later life when I was struggling to restore a shattered fortune. I had to suffer disappointments in all young love-affairs, except the last one, compared with which all the others pale into insignificance. I had to grow up as a scholar-vagabond, while having the temperament of a military adventurer, an explorer, a discoverer, a sort of D'Artagnan thrust into one Chateau d'If after another, clamped in an Iron Mask....

My memory starts from the age of three, and I cannot remember the time when I did not want to do just as my elders did – driving, sailing the rivers, shooting game on the marshes, travelling, exploring, seeing the world, mastering trade and skilled craft.

The ambition of every normal boy is to grow up as quickly as possible and be a man like his father. In later life he will readily break the heart of his mother, or anyone else, who tries to stop him.

The first adult "playthings" I ever handled were trophies of war: my father's medals, English and French; his revolvers, English and German; the German coalscuttle helmet which we used as a flowerpot in the garden. The first and most exciting hearsay I ever heard was about the war, and my father's adventures therein. He would tell me about them as we drove

about the empty lanes of Essex at 50 or 60 miles an hour, and a sense of speed, determination and implacable force was early impressed upon me. Under these grim and exciting impressions, little tales of war began to form in my mind of their own accord.

At kindergarten I fancied myself as a schoolday hero, at school I fancied myself an explorer and adventurer, after school I fancied myself a captain of industry. My first spontaneous efforts at prose-narrative emerged from a natural sense of fun and humour during my school days, and were always better after enjoying a spell of good company.

I was never much of a pupil at school, though the curriculum was as much at fault as I, as it tended to obstruct the growth of intelligence instead of developing it. I loved history and geography, and literature of all sorts ("He's always got his nose in a book," was the only comment I ever heard passed about my own doings). I never did very well at games, though I loved cricket and football and with a bit of encouragement might have been a fair player. It was nobody's fault that I was unhappy at school, it was simply that the place was not suitable for me so I did not fit. Leaving school was like leaving prison, and I felt relief at emerging into the real world at last.

It the late summer of 1930 I came to realize, rather dimly, that in spite of temperament and affinity, and although the impulses were unquenchable and would remain to influence the rest of my days, the life of a military adventurer was not to be mine, and that I must settle down somehow into the life of metropolitan society.

Nor could I settle into an adventurous branch of commerce, such as the motor industry, which was my second choice after the Army. My chief talent seemed to be graphic art, and with training I might have been a successful commercial artist; without that training, of course, my prospects were nil. To fall back on writing, therefore, was the last resort, and the best; for whereas graphic art deals mainly with inanimate objects, writing is at its best when dealing with other people, which suited my temperament best of all. However, it took me a long time to realize that to master this craft I needed to finish my education in history and to take a vocational course in biography if I were ever to envision that Wellsian world of today and tomorrow.

Chadwell Heath, 1934. Everything of value in my subsequent life stems from then and there. This was my Locksley Hall period, the time when the first flush of Youth needed its survey and summing-up, when the position needed review and the next move in the next direction was to be sought.

There is no doubt that the years I spent as an “architect’s apprentice” were sheer waste, so far as a genuine working career was concerned. By contrast, a job on a local paper, with the right degree of encouragement, would have been the making of me. It would have taken me into the police-courts and council chambers, to weddings and the divorce-courts, to christenings and burials. I should have heard innumerable life-stories, I should have seen men in argument and conflict and learned at first hand how human affairs are carried on – at any rate, at that level; and if I had learned my job properly, I should have paved the way to a career in Fleet Street and Westminster.

Of course, I did not get this apprenticeship, and subsequent experience continued to dissipate my abilities and even my interest as schooldays had done before. The number of activities that attracted my excited attention between leaving school and entering Fleet Street was so great that I could not possibly have made a career in any one of them. Journalism alone could embrace the lot, and by following this I should become a chronicler of my times seen as a whole instead of an active participant in any one sphere.

Yet, when all is said and done, it is the people themselves, the practitioners, who attracted my keenest interest. I had had a pretty solitary time of it at school, and when I left my hunger for agreeable company was intense. After the dullards I had endured – and was to endure for many more years – I needed talk and jokes and general liveliness, the company, in a word, of live-wires. Lacking these, I had to rely on books, plays and reports for my impressions – not much to go on for a hopeful freelance author.

The impossible utopia I longed for was a small house or bungalow of my own with a view of the hills and the plain from all the windows, where I could settle down and work.

At the time I had forgotten what little I had learned at school and the knowledge I had of the subjects that really interested me – to wit, history, geography and languages – was scanty in the extreme. I had forgotten most of the novels I had been reading up to five years before, and I had no knowledge of classical English literature. But in those years I had been reading SF with an insatiable appetite; it was the one literature I understood, the one by which I could really come to terms with myself and the world and upon which I could establish a career.

## 2: Books, Plays, & Lloyd George

I left school at fourteen, an unhappy little beast with a pall of gloom about me. I was relieved to be home again, in familiar surroundings, and I settled readily enough to a new daily routine, but the fog of melancholy never really left me. Then one day I joined the local library, and the first book I took out was Stephen Leacock's *Nonsense Novels*. To my dying day I shall remember the effects of that great explosion of laughter that burst out of me. It was truly a liberation of the spirit that has sustained me through life, which no subsequent ordeal was able to break.

I moved on to other books and caught up with the stories of another fellow-spirit, P.G. Wodehouse. I do not know how many I read at the time, for I read hastily and greedily, yet I knew that I belonged in his "world" and saw it pretty much as he did.

Wodehouse was to prove, during the war and the two decades following, that his humour was the expression of a strong and sanguine nature. As a man over sixty who had always led a comfortable life, he endured several years in a prisoner-of-war camp, without complaint or repining. He endured twenty years of calumny thereafter, never deigning to defend himself until close admirers besought him at least to publish the facts. Which he did. Still he made no complaint, and even protected the vindictive journalist who had done most to spread the slanders. If ever an idol has earned his idolatry, and earned it the hard way, it is Plum Wodehouse.

Up to this time I had never been to the theatre to see a play, but I sometimes read about new plays in the papers and had heard of the Aldwych farces of Ben Travers. These seemed to be to my taste, and when the films appeared I was quick to see all of them. Recalled in long perspective afterwards they can be seen as unique theatrical creations. No other author ever had five such artists at his command, offering a repertoire of new plays over a period of ten years. Yet the plays were written for these particular artists, and were never so effective with others.

About 1931 or 1932 I read the key-novel of my life and career, the one that reflected in its fashion the conflicts in and around my life – G.K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. The core of the story is the conflict between a poet and a business man. In the great majority of sentimental and conventional novels the story would end with the inevitable triumph of the latter, and the poet would die of heartbreak, for

which we should be invited to pity him. But Chesterton knew better. His poet, Adam Wayne, is no drooping lily but a hotheaded buccaneer, and the logic of the story makes it inevitable that his opportunism should defeat the astute mathematical calculations of Mr. Buck the grocer. The logic of emotion, too, demands that Wayne's opponents should accept and share his opinions; and when, twenty years after his triumph, they rise in rebellion against his tyranny it is because they too have become "patriots" after his fashion. "So is it with the heroic thing" – poets, artists, workmen and craftsmen have one precious thing in common: they have all before them the hammer and the anvil, and it is their task to create. But the hardheaded business man of the mercenary class has another notion – to grab hammer and anvil and sell them for the biggest profit he can get, regardless of who else gets hurt in the process. Poets, artists and workmen can be reduced to beggary for all he cares, and in some cases he will argue that it is right that they should. We disagree. This conflict has raged throughout my lifetime, it raged before I was born and it will rage for many years yet to come. The poets have learned that brilliant opportunism is not enough: the world is moved by mutual interests, by organized confidence and realisable projects. They have now reached the stage, politically, when the mercenary profits of individuals no longer dominate the workings of society, but it will take several years of inexorable striving to reduce the mercenary classes to impotence and create a society wherein workmen, craftsmen, poets and artists can live freely amid a public that welcomes their products.

A cursory reading of Chesterton's fantasy by any average-minded reader might well provoke objections. This, after all, is a fantasy, not a novel or real life; a parable, with moral lessons in it – and nobody ever takes any notice of moral lessons. Of course, there are elements of real life embedded in it, the story of the Hammersmith Road, for instance, and then there is the down-to-earth figure of Mr. Buck to give it substance. But can we find a parallel in real life to so bizarre a figure as Adam Wayne, the buccaneering poet? I think we can. There is a famous figure in modern politics, a figure not only famous but illustrious, firmly set in history, who was rising in the public eye at about the time that the story was published, and he fits it very well.

David Lloyd George looked like a poet, and he was born in a little village which he loved dearly. He never swung a sword in battle, but he came to the forefront in the bitter verbal conflicts of law and politics. He was a man of ideals, not a man of principle. He was moved by humane considerations, but was impatient of firm beliefs. As a Liberal reformer he

earned the lasting hatred of the mercenary classes, and when he made his mistake they thrust him out of power forever. But he had smashed the power of the House of Lords, he had smashed, with his fellow-giants, the power of Imperial Germany, and in old age he had enough strength to speed the ejection from power of Neville Chamberlain, last egregious champion of the mercenary classes. Yes, Lloyd George was a Chestertonian poet, if not a Chestertonian lunatic. He wrote his own name into history, and like Adam Wayne, he forced his opponents to accept his philosophy, largely because his friends and followers were so numerous; when he fell from power they organized, persuaded others and built on the foundations he had laid. His ideals have triumphed, but the work continues.

### **3: Speed Kings & Flying Aces**

The most important news of the late-1930s was given only perfunctory treatment by the media, who were much more interested in scares, alarms, terrors and panics. The real news of the time was, in fact, the progress of British rearmament. We did hear something, of course, about new fighter aircraft for the R.A.F., the Hurricane and the Spitfire, and that the R.A.F. was being generally re-armed with monoplanes. We heard that new warships were being built under the 1936 Naval Estimates (the Washington Naval Treaty having expired in 1935). We heard that the Army was pleased with the new 3.7" A.A. gun. But such news was mostly passed on non-committally, with no intent or attempt to promote comfort or confidence in the public generally.

My imagination had been caught, soon after I left school, by the exploits of the Speed Kings and Flying Aces. Aside from the simple thrill of it, I knew that these fellows were hastening progress in useful modern industries, thereby helping with general prosperity.

The first aeroplane flight, as everyone knows, was made by Orville Wright in 1903 in the U.S.A. Santos-Dumont and others quickly followed suit in Europe. There was a clamour for pilots to get cracking in Britain, and pioneers like A.V. Roe and Handley-Page began building and flying their own aircraft. There were urgent calls for Government support for aviation, so that it could be incorporated into the armed forces in case of war with Germany. Government circles hummed and hawed, protested that aviation was still in its infancy, that aeroplanes were new and unreliable and would be an unknown factor in war – and in any case, the whole thing – the development of aviation in Britain – would cost too much money.

Then one day in 1909 Louis Bleriot, a French lamp-merchant; flew the Channel from France to England in his own aircraft, in about half an hour.

Immediately the panic was on. “England is no longer an island!” shrieked some. “Wake up, England!” roared others. There was urgent competition among aviators for the Northcliffe prizes. The panic had the beneficial effect of compelling Government attention, and suddenly the practical difficulties, to say nothing of the financial objections, all vanished in smoke. In 1912 the Royal Flying Corps was established, soon to be followed by the Royal Naval Air Service, the two bodies that were combined in 1918 to form the Royal Air Force, the victorious power in

two world wars.

Such was the valuable influence, on English and European history, of Monsieur Bleriot. Let us hope there will be more like him in future ages.

When I first encountered big-flight aviators in the summer of 1932 I did not realize that this exciting vision would prove to be the foundation of my dramatic career. I was then a widely-read young fellow who had written a little at school and had a vague feeling that I could write professionally if only something practical caught my imagination and set me going and that day at Goodmayes Park, I saw it. I thrilled to the sight and sound of colourful aircraft and the excitements of the crowd, all on that day, I knew only that at last I was in contact with a glamorous and exciting world of real life.

The occasion was the arrival of Sir Alan Cobham's Flying Display. The great pioneer aviator had now done all he could in the way of long-distance flying, and now the air-lines were going over the routes he had charted. But the nation as a whole was not very air-minded, and he was setting out to improve the situation. He was certainly successful in Essex, for he drew crowds to Goodmayes and later to Romford, where a flying-club was established and even a small airport.

That day I saw Sir Alan himself, a brisk, dapper figure in blue blazer and light-grey slacks, attending to every detail himself. I saw the famous Amy Johnson strolling along with her no-less-famous husband, Jimmy Mollison. I saw the various Moths, I saw the stunt-flying and the parachutist making his drop. It was a fine sunny day and I enjoyed that bright, youthful, once-in-a-lifetime feeling of "This is my world, at last!"

Perhaps I had a suspicion that my capacity for graphic art should have been diverted from houses, which are static, to aircraft, which are dynamic. But whatever my desire, the opportunity did not exist, and the ambition faded.

But if my designing capacities remained dormant, my creative abilities were first dimly evoked, and that by contact with the engaging and amusing figure of Captain Mollison. Much was said about his career and personality at the time, and much of it uncomplimentary. But to me it seemed unfortunate that a man of his skill, courage and physical endurance should have to earn his living by making stunt flights for prize-money. Nor is there any doubt that after the first excitements were over Mollison himself disliked the situation. In short, here was the vision of an able man in conflict with a mercenary society. Everything seemed to be exciting, amusing and pleasing, and so it was; but there was something wrong somewhere, and it had to be put right.

This industrial world, with its artists and engineers, its pilots, its advertisers and salesmen, its millionaires and adventurers, its aerodromes and swagger clubs, its political organizing and fiddling seemed to be a brilliant and beautiful structure; but like every other world of its kind at the time, it was built on the deadly quicksands of private money, in the hands of self-centred and rapacious individuals. The spotlights and adulation, the bouquets and champagne were all showered upon the heroes and adventurers, but when the fun was over the mercenaries tossed the heroes aside and carried on as before. It was not good enough.

By contrast, I read with astonishment the exploits of millionaires and magnates whose affairs were constantly coming to disaster. These were the men I had been instructed to admire and even revere in all my business training so far: instruction which I found echoed so lavishly in all the “free speech” organs of Fleet Street, wherein I rather fancied making a career.

I made a start in the news-business under the worst-possible circumstances. The cinema-newsreel was more like a badly-run school than an adult institution, and rowdyism rather than orderly discipline was the order of the day. There were enough capable technicians to produce an efficient effort for the screen, which was why, I suppose, it managed to appear for a quarter-of-a-century; but I myself was on the receiving end of the rowdyism, and that is my only real memory of the thing.

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*Editor’s note: Frank writes “I did not realize that this exciting vision would prove to be the foundation of my dramatic career.” Without explaining further, he refers several times in his papers to having been an actor. I assume this means amateur dramatics, an interest in some way related to or inspired by that airshow in 1932. (Rob Hansen)*

## 4: Seeking Fleet Street

My boyhood coincided with the rise of the cinema as a popular entertainment, though I was well on in my teens before I acquired a liking for it. My own young mind was much like the cinema screen itself – bright, blank, frequently occupied by lively images which left a myriad of faint memories jostling each other amid the unreflecting blankness. At no point, at that time, did any influence bring me into contact with realities behind images. Fourteen years – half my lifetime then – passed between my leaving school and my attaining an adult job, among adults.

When I first came up to town on my own, modestly in search of jobs, I was greener than gooseberries and too gormless to be true. Yet I recall that glow of excitement I felt, that exhilarating feeling that “This is the place!” as I strolled westwards along Cannon Street on a sunny day, staring at an outer pinnacle of St. Paul’s in the near distance, imagining what lay beyond and what was happening just now in the gay West End, only a couple of miles further along down the road.

For I knew that one of these days I would make my home in town, get married and settle down to a successful career, draw a cheerful circle of friends around me and cut a figure of some prominence in the West End, with front doors opening in welcome on all sides. At the time, of course, I had not the faintest idea of how this was to be done, nor even the notion of a career in my head.

In those early days my knowledge of metropolitan society was scanty and secondhand, but it was effective enough: Speed Kings and Flying Aces, Lord Rothermere’s United Empire Party, Jack Payne’s band, Edgar Wallace, the Hatry case, the Aldwych farces, Tom Webster, Mayfair playboys, the Aga Khan, the Midnight Follies, the gaoling of Bottomley, Noël Coward, the Zinoviev letter, Mrs. Meyrick, the General Strike, Lord Lonsdale, etcetera etcetera. All this formed an exciting and amusing vision in my mind, all these people were flourishing and all these things were happening, I realized, just beyond that pinnacle on the corner of St. Paul’s, and I was firmly resolved that one of these days I should join them all, as one of the crowd.

Ten years later I came up to the centre of town, a bright young scribe\* eager to reform society by the power of the pen, with a heart full of baffled misery and a head full of incoherent journalism. I was hopeful that here at last I had found what I wanted: an opportunity to meet the boys

and talk shop, to tap the sources of metropolitan comedy, to find a platform for shouting the odds and telling the tale.

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\* Not a typo but a word Frank often used for “writer”. [Ed.]

The ambitions in my mind were as vague as the notions of fulfilling them, but at least I had a clear-cut objective at hand – to get myself a job in Fleet Street and make my way by writing. How many thousands of people do the same thing every year is anybody’s guess. I was twenty-seven, I had never worked on a newspaper before, and though my head was crammed with impressions I scarcely knew at all what I was going to write about. The only thing I was fit for, assuming I had had the opportunity, was writing leader-articles and “criticism” for the *New Statesman*, or such-like.

I came of age and passed into my twenties in the nineteen thirties, when the natural buoyancy of the nation was hidden under a frothy scum of whining, snivelling, emasculating pacifism. It was a superficial emotion shared by few, but it flowed full spate between Fleet Street and Westminster and did immense harm to the nation – and, indeed, to the Continent.

For the pacifists were not content to demand peace. Fear for their own skins took them far beyond that – they had to sneer at the courage of other men, especially ex-servicemen, and denounce them as “warmongers” and “jingoists” and the like. A sanguine outlook on life was dismissed as escapism, and only a sulky pessimism was acceptable as wisdom. In the face of this mass currishness, and the rapid decline of the magazine trade, it was not surprising that a would-be beginner like myself could find no-one to look at his work.

## 5: The Hitler Years and Their Aftermath

I was nineteen when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, and thirty-one when he blew out his brains. The entire decade of my twenties, therefore, was dominated and neatly enclosed by his career. It's curious that such a chapter of history, which has had such effects on people all over the world, should be classed as an "intellectual adventure" by an insignificant youth from the London suburbs, but so, in effect, it was, being made so by the peculiar detachment of my life from the realities of society.

It seems scarcely believable today that late in 1932, when the German revolution was gathering to a head, I should have felt pleased and excited, thinking vaguely that this was a good thing. One has to recall the atmosphere of the Baldwin period, the last decaying efflorescence of mercenary society, to realize why a strong political leader who organized the youth of his country to sweep the "old gang" out of power should have seemed a welcome ally to young men with dim prospects of life in their own country. This, we thought, was an example. When were we to follow it?

It did not take us long to realize that Hitler was no friend to us, or to anyone else. Thereupon the paradox set in – that progressive opinion in Britain grew steadily more hostile to Hitler, while the "old gang" grew ever more concerned that he should be given a free hand – at the expense, of course, of eastern Europe and Russia.

The revolution in Britain did not come until 1940, when a Parliamentary coup d'etat – it was nothing less – ejected Neville Chamberlain from power and introduced W.S. Churchill. It was a partial and emergency revolution, under the circumstances, and it did not reach its climax until the election of 1945.

All these lurid and dramatic events careered along their twelve-year course without my affecting them personally by so much as a breath. Scarcely a day's really useful work did I ever do, for I was not a skilled workman but an oddment of cheap labour. Not until the Local Defence Volunteers were formed in the summer of 1940 was I able to make so much as a gesture, and even that, in the event, passed for nothing.

But if I had nothing to do throughout that period, at least I had the

narrative of events under my eye every day, and the rage of argument and counter-argument to animate my mind. With a sort of fascinated rage I followed the growth of the “fascist” empire, and the encouragement given to it by the Old Gang in Westminster. I perceived how they struggled to evade the war, not from motives of pacifism but out of sheer moral cowardice. I saw how one or two personalities at the head of events can so domineer a Parliament of second-raters that events can be controlled, or let slip, by a single pair of hands. I saw that it took only the most desperate straits to make people see reason, and when at last this was done the people were ready for the job of securing victory. Day after day, throughout the war, I watched its progress from the vantage-point of a newspaper office, absorbing the jargon and the reasoning capacity of a “military critic”, and while I had roughly deduced the general course of the war by mid-1941, by the end of the following year I had lost any capacity for surprise and knew what was coming. The whole thing fulfilled, to a sufficient extent, all the prophecies of revolutions and future wars which I had read in Wellsian novels up to ten years before, which gave it an added intellectual appeal.

Sensitive people might find such a thing objectionable; they would point to the horrors of war, and in particular to the peculiar horrors of the concentration camps operated by the Germans and opened up by ourselves after the war. But I recollect that when we were told about them by newspaper reporters as long ago as 1933, many sensitive people were quick to deny that these camps existed, and to condemn the reports as mere sensationalism.

It was through the newspaper reporters on the spot that we learnt the nature of Hitler’s regime, and it is to the credit the popular Press during the Axis period that they recognized the enemy, consistently opposed him and warned our own people in plain language. The original motive may have been self-concern, for reporters in Germany soon saw what Dr. Goebbels could do when the newspapers were in his clutches, but at least they knew that readers and writers alike, and the whole of democracy, were threatened by the new regime, and spoke accordingly. It was on this background that I, with no particular job to do and still young enough to take up a new career, fancied that journalism would offer the job I wanted.

It took ten years or experience to get this idea out of my head. I never did a journalist’s job, but worked as a shorthand-and-filing clerk throughout. By the time I had learnt my way around I knew that no effort I could make would bring me the rewards I wanted, nor offer me the sort of life I wanted to lead. In addition, events had changed my mind in other

ways, and when I finally left Fleet Street behind me early in 1947 it was with a sense of horror and revulsion....

Twelve years before, mercenary society had been favourable to Hitler and Mussolini because they were thought to be “A bulwark against Bolshevism”, and the snob-classes hated the Bolsheviks, not because they are tyrants, murderers or anything else, but because they profess to stand up for the working-classes. Whether the Bolsheviks are really champions of the working-class or not is beside the point; they came to power on the strength of this claim and they have stuck to it ever since, and the mercenary snobs of our own society have always hated them for it – for that, and nothing else.

All this was forgotten by most Pressmen in 1933. The “menace” of Bolshevism was a debatable point, but the menace of Hitler was unmistakable, and since they realized that Hitler was primarily an anti-Bolshevik and wanted to satisfy his ambitions at the expense of Russia, many influential publicists thought it would be wiser to come to terms with Russia and meet the common enemy.

This issue split the political life of the country in two. The influential men of the mercenary classes – Norman, Wilson, Chamberlain and the like – were bitterly opposed to an accommodation with Russia, on any terms, and for this reason they readily turned a blind eye to the evil aspects of Hitler and his men. It was thus that they went wrong at every turn and floundered into the second world war, incompetent and unprepared to wage it.

These conflicts were reflected in the pages of our mercenary Press, day in and day out. All of them were opposed to Hitler, at least in theory, but some, notably *The Times* under Geoffrey Dawson, could find excuses for any Governmental action; while a few of the “populars”, in particular the *Daily Mirror*, were quite in favour of a war with Germany directed by Churchill and in alliance with Russia.

When the inevitable happened in 1941, the general “left-wing” and pro-Russian elements of our society were fully vindicated, and the Press burst into hosannahs of praise for Russia and her people. Correspondents who claimed to know the country well gave intimate details of life under the regime, and “military critics” gave reasons for their belief that modern Russia could never be defeated by the Germans. Leading journalists wrote solemn articles to say that Russia had benefited and been strengthened by the regime. They looked forward keenly to peaceful relations after the war, in a better world. From 1941 to 1945 the mercenary Press played a steady chorus of praise for Bolshevik Russia, and all the most prominent

journalists of the day joined in it.

When peace came at last it brought to a head the long-standing difference of opinion between the Capitalist and the Communist societies, which had been embittered by the hostility shown by Capitalists in the previous twenty-five years and was to be exaggerated by the boastful claims, from certain quarters, that the present was destined to become the “American century”, backed by a big air force and powered by the thrust of “free enterprise”. In the course of brawling debates at the United Nations the Russian delegates trampled the “American century” in the mud, and Free Enterprise with it.

In the meantime the inevitable had happened in Britain and a socialist Government had replaced the capitalists. This, as wiser people recognized, was more than a mere difference of political opinion – it was a desire for a complete change of life, and it involved therefore the clashing desires of people who had done well for themselves under the old capitalist regime and the people who had not. It likewise involved all the unpleasant realities of social life: snobbishness brought about by differences of income, changes of income-level and blows to snobbish pride. All this was reflected in the Press, which had been built up and was owned almost entirely by the mercenary classes, who wanted to cling on to their wealth and privileges by hook or by crook. They hated the socialists with all the hatred that snobs reserve for their rivals, and in their anti-socialist campaigns they stopped at neither truth nor scruple. The campaign was applied to international affairs as well, and famous journalists who had formerly praised Russia to the skies now turned and abused that country right and left. Their abuse was not confined to matters of political antagonism – it got right down to racial hatred, and no kind of story was too bad to be printed, regardless of whether it was convincing or not.

By the end of 1946 I had recognized the fact which I had formerly disregarded: that journalists are not the champions of free speech and free opinion that they boastfully claim to be, but are simply the mouthpieces of their mercenary employers. They did not have to be told what to write – they agreed widely with their employers’ opinions and could readily interpret them in their own fashion.

You cannot hope to bribe or twist,  
Thank God! the British journalist.  
But, seeing what the man will do  
Unbribed, there’s no occasion to. \*

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\* Humbert Wolfe, *The Uncelestial City* (1930). [Ed.]

The eminent journalist, in short, was an employed person, a common clerk of no greater importance than myself. For all of his boasting, the influence of his opinions extended as far as the political influence of his boss, and no farther. He had no power over the policy of his newspaper, and only as much responsibility as his boss cared to give him; and even if such responsibility had any importance by itself, its social importance was insignificant, for the General Election of 1945, confirmed by that of 1950, turned a glaring spotlight upon the powerlessness of the Press. In short, most of our leading journalists are the employees of second-rate politicians who have had their day.

Thus I realized that the promise of a happy and useful career which journalism had seemed to offer me in 1937 was a fraudulent promise, like all the other promises of mercenary society. Whatever my efforts, I should never attain the independence and self-expression-through-free-speech which I desired. My previous efforts were wasted – but not the time spent in making them; I had learned a thing or two about the operations of our mercenary society, and could now look straight at the uglier facts which more comfortable men preferred to evade. Ten years of journalism and the four years aftermath, now concluding, had told me all I needed to know, from direct experience, about the world of mercenary commerce in which I was born and bred, and by which my mind and its attitudes was conditioned.

Consider. My respective families were well-off and snobbish middleclass tradesmen of the pre-1914 era, who were ruined mainly by their own silly extravagances; the first Great War merely completed the process they had begun themselves, and by the time I reached the age of reason my relatives were the “new poor” of 1920. I was brought up to be a “young gentleman”, modest and polite in manner, unobtrusive and even self-effacing in company. A half-hearted attempt at career was made when I was “apprenticed” to a small-fry architect in the suburbs, and when this venture failed I had nothing to fall back on but shorthand-typing. At that time a male shorthand-typist was no better, occupationally, than a common scullion, and was treated as such. Four years with a pack of hooligans told me how much the “individual” is valued in a mercenary society.

Mine is a romantic mind that responds to the epic and saga of human history. The voyages of Jason and Magellan, the campaigns of Alexander and Henry V, the travels of Marco Polo and Sir Richard Burton, the discoveries of Captain Cook and Captain Scott, are the kinds of human story I appreciate most. For this reason, the stories I concocted between 1938 and 1940, and again in 1953, were not fiction of the usual magazine

type: they were efforts at writing saga, imposed upon visions of landscape. The reasons for this are now recognisable, and they are significant.

I know now that if I had really known my own mind in my young days, and followed my natural instincts in the first place, I should have gone into the Army. My whole spirit, tastes and outlook are cut out for the military life, a life of adventure under the sanctions of order and discipline. That is why my first efforts at creative writing celebrated the military virtues; and it is for that reason, I am convinced, that they were so well appreciated at the time, and have been so well remembered since. For those tales were imbued with courage and a sense of purpose, that is the very stuff of saga: a sense that was the very stuff of my own character, enmeshed as it was in a purposeless life....

For people of my generation or near it, the year 1940 was a turning-point from which none of us will ever look back. It was indeed “the legend of an epic hour”, and nobody could be more thankful than I that we lived through it. I was rejected for the regular forces, and I never encountered the enemy; but vividly I remember that bright sunny evening when I hurried into the marketplace, where the volunteers were gathering, and saw the stacks of rifles ready to hand; and for the first time in my life I found myself taking a professional interest in inanimate implements. That summer, Army or no, I was in uniform, with rifle in hand, in the company of battle-hardened veterans who had beaten the enemy before, and for the first time in my life I breathed in the heroic atmosphere of history. Other men may write dramatic books about their war experiences, or peevish novels complaining about Army life, but we of 1940, in our own lesser way, have shared something with the men of Agincourt and the Armada. After all that we could never be quite the same again.

(1956)

## 6: The *News-Chronicle* & Me

When I departed from Fleet Street in 1947, tired, dazed and miserable, it was with the realization that I had fought my first round with metropolitan society and lost it. I knew that there were good reasons for my failure, but I also knew that it was only the first round, and I was coming back to fight again as soon as I was fit and ready.

Common ignorance was the first reason: I was appallingly under-educated, and I had blundered about on the outer edges of journalism with not a hope of getting on the inside. Nothing short of a fresh bout of schooling in history and modern politics, self-administered according to the flow of interest, would suffice to fit me out for a journalistic career. There were also questions of character: I was too old to think about staff-work again.

I had worked on the *News-Chronicle* for two separate spells of about eighteen months each between 1941 and 1944. This was the period of (Sir) Gerald Barry's editorship, and the paper had about two and a half million readers every day.

The memory of my days there are as vivid in my mind as anything that happened last week; sometimes it is difficult to realize that it all happened so long ago, that most of the people I knew are dead. That the paper itself is gone causes me much less surprise, for I was never enamoured of it, as a paper. My favourite at that time was the *Evening Standard*, then under the admirable editorship of Patrick Kirwan, with (Sir) David Low still at his peak. Its news-gathering was first class, the editorial line sound and strongly expressed. I was glad to have spent a couple of months on it in 1944, and wished I could have made a career with it.

My job with the *NC* was that of shorthand-telephonist, sometimes known euphemistically as "telephone reporters". We sat in a telephone booth with a little desk and earphones, taking down in shorthand the story from the chap at the other end, usually a local reporter but occasionally one of our own correspondents. After dictation, back to the typewriter to hack it out and take it to the newsroom. Not at all a difficult job, but it could be very wearing, and after several years of it, involving irregular night-work and thereby irregular sleep and irregular meals, my health began cracking up and at last I had to chuck it. To this day I still suffer from the heart-condition I developed then.

In a chapter of Glenton-Pattinson's *The Last Chronicle of Bouverie*

*Street*, it is stated “The shorthand-telephonists were very much a part of the editorial team”, beside which, in my own hand, I have scribbled a cynical “Ha-ha!” If it is supposed to imply that we were all Old-Pals-Together it is very wide of the mark – certainly for my time. This vision of OPTs was strong in my mind when I first came to Fleet Street – indeed, it was one of the big attractions. I found my colleagues were indeed chummy, but I had not been there long when I was told that the reporters had been expressly instructed not to fraternize with the shorthand-telephonists. Be it said to their credit that most of the reporters resented the order, and flouted it whenever they could. But see a shorthand-telephonist in *The Feathers* or *The Mucky Duck* – ha-ha! Charitably, in view of what they suffered later, I refrain from naming those reporters who obeyed the order to the letter, and with pleasure.

This regulation was incomprehensible to an American visitor who joined the staff in 1943. One evening, I met him in the corridor as I was going out to supper. We had not spoken before, but he nodded amiably and asked if I was coming out for a drink. We strolled down the stairs together, talking, up Bouverie Street and into Fleet Street, still talking, along the Strand to Charing Cross and the Chandos, where we turned in for beer and sandwiches at our leisure. Then we strolled back the same way to the office, taking about an hour and a half for our supper-hour, during which time we did not stop talking for half a minute. Such was my acquaintance with Larry Solon, whom I gladly recall by name. He went on to become a first rate war-correspondent, and through his despatch I had the first news, one Friday night, that the Allied fleet had set sail for Normandy, and the D-Day landings.

## 7: Rewriting My Life

The two sides of my nature, masculine and feminine, have been in conflict since I was about twenty-one: the boyish or feminine side, that of the excitable lad longing for awfully big adventures, and the masculine side of the ambitious young man wanting to make his way and earn a place in the world. The former had been predominant until then, but a sudden fortunate change of circumstances woke the latter, which has slowly become predominant ever since.

At this point the proverbial Freudian usually pops up, with his little sex-joke. As usual, he is out of place. By the simple physical fact that we are conceived and borne of two sexes, we must bear the elements of each in our composition. As we know from recent law cases, the physical fact of sex is established at birth and in the majority of cases, which are normal, character follows the physique. The influence of environment and personality, however, can cause complications, of which I had abundant share....

I have come, to realize that the greatest misfortune of my life was the fact that my father married the woman whom he did. I am convinced that if he had married any other women from any other family, I should have been born in any case and my life, if not necessarily ideal, would have been far better than I have actually known it.

My father and mother were by far the worst-matched couple I have ever known. It was inevitable that they should part company and that I should be brought up by only one of them. At the time of the parting I was nine years old, and was given into the custody of my mother. It was the worst thing that could have happened, for in character and temperament I was virtually a replica of my father.

In over forty years I never achieved any sort of genuine understanding with my mother, a self-willed and somewhat deluded personage who did the best for me according to her lights – which, so far as marriage and motherhood were concerned, were dim indeed. Her emotion for me was intense, but it never impressed me as being love, which comes of understanding; and that lady never understood another person in her life. In the years of noise and confusion, I came to realize that she loved me in her own fashion, which was that of a child loving her doll, the familiar inanimate companion she could pick up and talk to whenever she wanted, then put away and forget about until next time. That

the doll could have a life and wishes and ambitions of its own, quite different from hers, was something outside her comprehension.

An indifferent Fate mercifully parted us when I was about twenty-five. From then on I lived after my own fashion as best I could in the circumstances. But, without a single third party to act as a counter-balance, or a proper career to occupy my life, I was struggling against that influence until the end. Only now, three years after, am I beginning to feel the effects of freedom.

The foregoing, of course, is the barest summary of a very intricate situation; but it gives the essentials. In the past year or so my imagination has been playing with the notion of what-might-have-been, often a futile exercise, but in this case I think, valid and even fruitful. It is enlightening to speculate on what might have happened to both my father and myself if he had in fact made another (and therefore better) marriage.

Father was a skilled mathematician and a trained accountant. With his energy and capacities he could have gone far in any suitable trade and achieved at least a directorship. It is not legitimate to imagine that he would have made any great fortune, let alone become a multi-millionaire like his cousin Charlie. But a fair degree of affluence, with a stable life for his family is a reasonable speculation.

I have no great ability at arithmetic, and know that journalism is my proper occupational ability. Certainly I should have had a proper start, an apprenticeship at the right age, and then I could have gone as far as my abilities would take me. I do not think I could ever have achieved the heights as a staff-journalist, but I could always have earned an honest living at the trade and my ambitions as a freelance would have had a solid foundation.

Above all, there was the network of friends my father had, which would have grown with the years and to which I would have added when my time came. In the event, I have in fact built up a network of friends, a vast international fraternity; a curious fact, though perhaps typical of our family.

Of the three local papers available, the *Stratford Express* is the one on which I should have most wished to serve an apprenticeship. I always felt cheerful in Stratford Broadway, with its air of brightness, bustle and spaciousness which appeals to me to this day. The *Express* office is still there, opposite West Ham Town Hall; the King's Head, the Three Tuns and several other fine houses are also still there. In my time, of course, the Empire music-hall was flourishing – it flourished right until its end in the blitz – and the streets were alive with trams. In such an atmosphere, just

down the road from home, I might well have learned journalism and the printing trade from the ground up.

I think I should have been better at desk-work than at leg-work; the crafts of sub-editing and make-up would have been more to my taste than the reporter's round of weddings and police-court cases. Not until my aircraft period began in the summer of 1932 would I have been really keen to get out and about. From then on, I would have followed eagerly the career of Edward Hillman, and later the fortunes of the Romford Flying Club. Undoubtedly I should have joined that club, learnt to pilot aircraft and, in time, become a flying instructor myself. Some members of that club, I have heard, later saw war-service in the Auxiliary Air Force – though I doubt that I too could have achieved such proficiency!

Holidays, mostly spent on the coast, sailing; a part of life centred mainly on the Island, where I might have made that important personal encounter, with happier consequences. “The world of sails and wings”, with romance thrown in – a perfectly natural development, given the original premise.

All being well, I should have stayed with the local paper until the outbreak of war and my eventual call-up. Before that time I should have joined the S.F.A. and made the friendships, and founded the ventures, that I have enjoyed ever since. I can assume that I would have been as fortunate as all my friends and come home from the war alive and undamaged. I would have resumed my old job and re-settled into it; but eventually I should have made my way to Fleet Street, done my stint there and in Whitehall, and settled down to my own serious work aged forty or thereabouts.

I have mentioned the career of Edward Hillman: in my notebooks I should have jotted down the details of any another career, the outlines of many other such characters, all of whom I should have encountered. In my files would have been outlines and critiques of all the literature I had read since boyhood, all sorted out; a necessary foundation for all freelance work.

I have mentioned hero-worship as an element of my character. All the heroes I worshipped were – and are – famous public figures. There have been absolutely none in my private life except, of course, my father. Few of the men I have ever worked for have even stirred any admiration, for many I have felt nothing but contempt, which has not changed with memory. Yet in recent years a few men have gained my respect, and their effect on my life has been stimulating. I only wish I could have known and worked for such men when I was young.

## 8: Thoughts of a Taxpayer

“What this country needs today is an army of unemployed economists”

It is a long time now since I last read that obscene phrase, “over-full employment”, and with the current agitation being what it is, I don’t expect to hear it again. Nevertheless, the protagonists of “classical economics” and still the chief oracles in the field, mainly for lack of effective competitors, and until they are ousted from, positions of influence the aforesaid phrase will be mumbled into many beards besides their own.

“We few, we happy few, we band of brothers...” for taxation doth make brothers of us all.

Up to the ripe old age of twenty-eight, I had never paid income-tax in my life. Not because I knew how to dodge it, but simply that I did not earn an income big enough to be taxed. The pittance I received was an office-boy’s wage, for junior’s work. At the time, it was still accepted in schools of “economic thought” that grown men should be employed on such work, where they were employed at all.

That I was not uniquely unfortunate, or unusually backward, in suffering this state of affairs was brought home to me thirty years later when I joined the Civil Service. It seemed to be understood by the Commissioners that there were plenty of people in my age-group whose general commercial experience made them suitable recruits in spite of any educational shortcomings. They accepted my application, and here I have found a commonsense understanding of human problems quite beyond the range of all those seedy little men for whom I worked in my youth. I may have wasted a lot of my own time, and frittered away much of my own life, but heaven knows most of it was done for me by people to whom I was bound, and who didn’t care tuppence whether I lived or died.

I should think that by now, every wage-earner must be a taxpayer: it seems inconceivable that anyone can still be paid so little that they do not pay income-tax. It follows that when we read the current unemployment figures, we are reading about taxpayers out of work and no longer paying taxes; and if anyone still imagines that a million unemployed taxpayers are of any benefit to the national economy, he wants his little head examined.

Since taking Government service, my own income has been

substantially increased and I am now earning what would have been an excellent salary when I was a young bachelor. I can even contemplate saving and investment; and it is since I started here that successive governments have set out to boost the various national savings schemes. This strikes me as the best political happening of recent times, the one that raises the final barrier against any return to pre-war conditions of working life. The modern wage-earners are not only taxpayers, but potential investors as well; and anything that helps them to a degree of independence from their own jobs is a Good Thing.

# On Journalism



*Frank Arnold, 1952*

## 9: Priestley, Orwell, & Gollancz

I came to the City in 1942 in a state of high excitement and with my head full of left-wing journalism. My sentiments were those of a furious anti-diehard rather than those of a convinced radical who knew what he wanted from the world, and my original impressions were overwhelmed by the uproar of left-wing publicists at the time. I became an enthusiastic reader of the *New Statesman*. I followed, wherever possible, the broadcast talks of J.B. Priestley, I became steeped in the yellow books of Victor Gollancz and I was struck by the journalism of such men as George Orwell and Michael Foot.

It is now generally admitted that Gollancz's yellow books played a major propaganda part in the election of 1945. Most of them were cleverly written, and had the advantage of authenticity. The black record of the Tories from 1920 to 1940 was plain for all to see, and the relentless analyses of these books cleared the issues for an electorate confused by the excitable claims, denials and prevarications of Tory interests. The Gollancz books broke down the iron curtain of hypocrisy and exposed the "guilty men" as what they were – guilty men. They have never recovered from that exposure.

Since then Gollancz has dropped his Left Book Club, as he had dropped earlier enthusiasms. A man of fitful interests, his own writings betray a clouded, abstracted, theoretical point of view about everything, nevertheless he sticks to his socialism, whatever shape or form it may take. He can rejoice at having beaten the mercenary Press-lords at their own game; after Rothermere's fatal association with the fascists, a man who understood public opinion and shared it was bound to have the advantage in political controversy, and since 1945 the Press has largely ceased to count as a political force.

Priestley in 1940 was an outstandingly popular author with a lot of successes to his credit. His outlook was left-wing, derived from a sincere sympathy with society's underdogs, and for that sincerity he was respected. Like everyone else he was aroused by the tremendous impetus of anti-Tory feeling in 1940, and a series of strongly-worded radio talks brought him a flood of letters from ordinary listeners who appeared to look to him for "leadership". These letters misled his enthusiasm, surprised him into illusions that approached delusions of grandeur, and upset his judgment. The idea entered his head, all of a sudden, that he had a

“mission”, and that radio broadcasting had put power into his hands.

In time there came the inevitable squabble with the B.B.C., who had been quite willing to let him have his head until they too began to receive letters – letters protesting against this radical being given freedom of speech, in sufficient volume for them to call him off the air. By now he could easily persuade himself that this was a conspiracy, in which the B.B.C. were willing tools, and he gave up with bad grace.

Then came Priestley’s flirtation with amateur politics in the Hulton-Gollancz “1941 Committee”, which broke up like all other groups composed of self-assertive individuals brought together by theoretical beliefs. Priestley’s dogged nature, however, saved him from this debacle. He wrote away indefatigably; plays like *Desert Highway* and *They Came to a City* continued the earnest essaying of radical thought, and they were very successful on the stage. In 1945 he even achieved a world-premiere in Moscow, where *An Inspector Calls* was produced, and the play repeated its success in London at the Old Vic.

Priestley took something of a blow in the election of 1950, when he made a routine left-wing broadcast for Labour and was rejoined by a personal attack by Charles Hill, the “radio doctor”. Hill’s talk was a slimy piece of work, and though it failed to turn the electoral tide for the Tories it gave them just the sentiments they wanted to hear, and made Priestley, who had no opportunity for rejoinder, look rather a fool.

At the time of the election George Orwell was a dying man, and in any case he was a spent force in journalism. However, between 1935 and 1945 he had stirred up considerable excitement in radical circles and was widely admired or detested, according to preference. After publishing several books he began to write steady articles for the *New Statesman*, *Tribune* and the like, wherein he shattered many illusions of theory-ridden intellectuals with his show of robust commonsense. As forthright a left-winger as anyone else, he pointed out that too many radicals were taking their example from continental models, that in criticizing the Government they were presuming to criticize their own countrymen, rather as if they were superior foreigners and the people they tried to convince were ignorant natives. His blusterings probably did much to cure other left-wing writers of their extremes of silliness, but they accomplished little else.

Orwell’s career offered me some unexpected lessons. In a vague sort of way I fancied myself as doing the same sort of thing, in 1942. I too was very excited by the state of the world, and wanted to toss my opinions about gratuitously. With excited agreement I followed Orwell’s writings until I began to notice that he was writing with the same cocksureness

about all subjects, whether he knew anything about them or not. In his own way he proved to be as big a fool on paper as any other left-wing intellectual; and gradually the obvious dawned on me – that he was chucking his opinions about, not because they were important or could possibly influence anyone, but because he could write entertainingly. As I took my own opinions too seriously for such nonsense I lost interest in and respect for the man. In the end Orwell joined the anti-Russian chorus, and became respectable to all the right-thinking people of yesterday.

From the successes and failures of these men I learnt the biggest lesson of my own experience: that I am foremost an author, and not a journalist. I have always sensed that opinion, however important, is useless in literature unless presented with all the force of artistic vision.

## 10: Health, Hulton & the *Gay Book*

Edward Hulton's publications had been on the market for three or four years before I recognized their importance. In 1938, when *Picture Post* first appeared, I was so obsessed with imaginative fiction that I quite overlooked the factual material from which it was derived – like any other tyro I sought to spin “plots” out of the empty air and sell masterpieces in a hurry, becoming rich and famous quickly. My excited ambitions of the time, however, must not be dismissed too swiftly in later years, for imaginative excitement gives a force to the intellect that factual interpretation can never quite achieve. Therefore, the fact that *Post*'s arrival was obscured, for me, by the happy brilliance of *Gay Book* must be considered a gain rather than a loss. *Gay Book* has disappeared, leaving behind it a glowing memory; *Post* has lost its original impetus, and lingers on, a febrile shadow of its one-time self.

*Gay Book* was the best out of that flood of American magazines which poured over the water up to 1942. As funny as the *New Yorker*, it had a charm lacking in the older magazine; as cheerful as *Esquire*, it was of wieldy size and pleasant shape. Built round photos of pretty girls, like most others, it gave much more than mere bathing beauties and pin-ups: the poppets were seen at work and play, indoors and out, in all stages of dress and undress, with a naturalness unequalled by other periodicals, and the captions had just the right note of friendly impudence. Now that I have lost my every collected copy, I can recollect that it gave me more spontaneous pleasure than any other periodical, and it was my dearest ambition, at that time, to write witty stories for a magazine like *Gay Book*.

The daily newspaper, the weekly magazine, the monthly periodical, the fictional film, the newsreel film, the flux of novels and plays, the advertising posters, radio and television broadcasting – all these reflect and interpret the passing show of everyday life, each in their own fashion, each with its own technique. The journalist's job is to record, the author's job is to interpret, to present the world to the world. Admiration for pioneers, technocrats and craftsmen, contempt for the mercenary classes, and affection for young people who come up to the City to make lives of their own – these are the emotional forces behind my vision of human society.

I arrived in the City as an employee of the mercenary Press in 1942,

still excited by illusions and struggling with misconceptions. I still believed, quite seriously, that the Press was an established institution with democratic sympathies and a progressive outlook. I imagined that journalists were men of independent position, fearlessly outspoken, men ardently combating public abuses, and I believed their claim to be guardians of the public interest. I fancied that I could start at the bottom and work my way up to a place beside them.

I learned, of course, that all journalists without exception are employed persons and subject to the discipline, however light or remote, of their mercenary employers. That the function of a newspaper is to make profits for its owners, and other considerations are unimportant; so that their claims to be Watchdogs of Freedom and Guardians of Democracy are catchpenny slogans. Newspaper owners are politicians and newspapers are their instruments, and a study of modern history shows that these gentlemen are political failures. Finally, the Press has been elbowed aside by the B.B.C. in its original job of presenting news, and the positions will never be reversed.

In the course of these years of endeavour I rather forgot the original ambition that drew me to the City. “The Press is bound, but the Stage is free!” to paraphrase Shaw. My years on the Press had more or less conditioned me to accept employment as a permanent way of life; the vision of myself as a free agent running his own business tended to fade, especially as my health sank under accumulating strains. But it never faded entirely, and today – 3rd January 1951 – my health is better than it has ever been for twenty years, and is still improving.

*(1951)*

# 11: The Rise and Fall of Edward Hulton

“The legendary journalistic network was *Picture Post*. It makes, for sociologists, an almost textbook case: blaze of glory before and during the war, a strong, clear left-wing tradition; constant dispersal, hardening into a Gridiron, and deserved death as it decayed into a club.”\*

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\* Source of this quotation not given. [Ed.]

In 1938 Edward Hulton had the ball at his feet. Still young (thirty-ish), very rich (reputedly a millionaire) with a good family tradition of publishing behind him, he listened attentively to the foreign journalist, a refugee from Hitler’s Germany, who proposed to start a new popular magazine with his help. The help was generously given, the magazine was started and *Picture Post* was a success from the first bell.

The first phase lasted nearly a year, by which time war had broken out. It was a magazine of features rather than news, and once a feature had been used it was seldom seen again, however topical it might have become. As the purpose of the paper was to tell stories in pictures there were big photographs on every page, to which the written material was almost entirely subordinate. There did not seem to be any particular point or purpose in the editorial line, but most of the features were interesting enough and the lavish splashing of photographs made the whole thing a bright offering. As the magazine trade had been moribund since about 1930 the novelty and freshness of thing had a great appeal to the reading, public, and most of us agreed that *Picture Post* was a good three-pennorth.

During the war years, *Picture Post* became more of a news-magazine than it was before or was to be after. Reduced in size, increased in price, with lower-quality newsprint and reproductions, it retained its good reputation and, if anything, improved upon it. When the magazine resumed its old function of picture-story features after the war it had a solid foundation of goodwill to rely upon.

In its early days, *Picture Post* had featured a few articles by H.G. Wells, and later it garnered contributions by Priestley and Joad. Before the war it had many features on the possibility of national reconstruction after the great depression, which developed naturally into the construction of a

better nation (and perhaps even a better world) after the war. There was an implicit sympathy with the aims of socialism and a classless society, but there was never any political partisanship. Nevertheless, *Picture Post* was to be one of the many guiding threads that led to the Labour victory of 1945.

From the beginning, Edward Hulton had permitted his staff to produce the magazine in their own way, he himself having had no previous experience in producing journals. But he had also written a full-page article in every issue, and had made this page the platform of his opinions on politics, world affairs and whatnot – after all, he was the proprietor, and had a right to do so. Unfortunately he was not a particularly good writer, and his views, like the expression of them, were commonplace. However, he continued to expound himself right on into the heyday of Attlee's government.

That heyday, as we all remember, was not very bright. Although no-one in their senses could have expected the war and post-war difficulties to be overcome in a hurry, everyone blamed the government for not producing the better-new-world-after-the-war out of a hat. Among these disillusioned idealists, Edward Hulton was conspicuous. After ten years of his "left-wing tradition" he noticed that the Labour Government had no great love for millionaires. He himself was a millionaire, and wanted to remain one. His sentiments about-faced, he became bitterly anti-labour, and *Picture Post* had to follow an anti-Labour line.

Thus Hulton broke the first golden rule of political journalism, which is, to remain loyal to the side which you backed in the first place. For your readership is gained from the supporters of that side, and if you betray one then the other feels betrayed also. That happened to Hulton and *Picture Post*. From the time he announced his change of allegiance the angry letters began to pour in and circulation began to decline. At the same time a decline set in with the quality of the magazine itself. There were several causes.

For by now the novelty of stories-in-pictures, told by masses of photographs, had worn off, and the readership needed something fresh. Here the essential weakness of the magazine, implicit from the beginning, became obvious: it relied upon features instead of news; and whereas news-topics discover themselves in the course of nature, and lose no value through being repeated, features are individual concoctions which have to be thought out afresh every time, and can seldom be repeated. The strain on the staff was beginning to tell, and was not to be eased by the proprietor's temperamental demands. The features themselves were

straining after novelty, cleverness, one-upmanship, a pseudo-sophistication and a sort of bright-young-thing facetiousness, all written up in obvious desperation. It was the sad decline of a journal that had once shown promise and never quite realized it.

It was at about this time that Hulton married, the lady being one of a Russian aristocratic family exiled after the revolution. It was not long before *Picture Post* jumped on to the anti-Russian “cold war” bandwagon, in the fond belief that this was a popular cause. *Picture Post* had been staunchly pro-Russian during the war (while the Conservative establishment remained as anti-Russian as it dared to be), so this final volte-face proved to be the death-blow. *Picture Post* ceased publication in 1956, after eighteen years of circulation. The excuse was offered that television had rendered the picture magazine superfluous – plausible, perhaps, but feeble, and false too. *Picture Post* began declining in quality long before the boom in television started. As we have said, Edward Hulton had the ball at his feet. He kicked it away with spiked boots.

The right man in Hulton’s place would have developed the journal as a proper news-magazine, steadily in touch with current events, reliable for information and opinion. Avoiding partisan politics, nevertheless he would have retained the Wells-Priestly connections and maintained the paper as a forum of socialist opinion, stressing the progressive, constructive and humanitarian sides of such opinion.

Such a man would have been alert for the rise of SF, and when the time came he would have been ready to take on *New Worlds* and later to promote *Space-Times*.

This latter promotion is still a possibility. There is talk (in the *Times Literary Supplement*, for instance) of paperback publishers issuing house-magazines again. If these re-appear, and it is possible, there is room for the journal surveying science and the modern world, science in everyday life, science in politics and so on, with regular reviews of current SF thrown in.

There are no magazines fulfilling any of these functions today. When the economic monkey-business of the trade has been more rationally settled, it is possible that they can appear.

## 12: The End of the *News-Chronicle*

It is good to have Glenton & Pattinson's *The Last Chronicle of Bouverie Street* on my shelves again. The three years I spent at work with the *News-Chronicle* formed a landmark and turning-point of my life, and I can never know too much about it.

As is fairly well known, the paper was founded under that name in 1930, and it was in this year that the period of mass-circulation dailies really began. Several old newspapers had ceased publication in the nineteen-twenties and the remainder set out to grab as much circulation as they could. A daily readership of one million, once the proud record of Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*, was now the object of all of them, and in few years the *Daily Express* reached over two million. Since then circulations of four million and even five million a day have been achieved and maintained, and there they have remained static. Saturation point must have been reached by about 1950. Ten years later the *News-Chronicle* was the first of them to cease publication.

My period was 1941-1944, the middle of the Gerald Barry editorship. At that time, I believe, the circulation was well over two million a day, and the paper was at the peak of its fortunes. It was still identified with Liberal politics and at that time the Liberal Party, though a much reduced force, was by no means negligible. There were about twenty members in the House of Commons and their Leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, was Minister for Aviation in the war-time government. The *NC*, therefore, was still a representative paper in politics, and its future was unquestioned.

When I came to the *News-Chronicle* in 1941 the Liberal Party in Parliament, though much weaker than it had been, was not yet a spent force. There were some twenty members in the Commons and the Party leader Sir Archibald Sinclair (Viscount Thurso) was in the War Cabinet and a close friend of Churchill. Their leader in the Lords, Viscount Samuel, was a respected elder statesman. The *News-Chronicle* itself, the historic Liberal daily, enjoyed a circulation of well over two million copies a day.

On the international scene, the victories of the Axis were reaching their climax and heading for the turning-point. It seemed fairly certain, as the tides of war ebbed and flowed, that the Grand Alliance would have to

form the basis of a reconstructed international order; an order replacing the League of Nations and necessarily improving on it. This prospect was quite a reasonable one under the circumstances, and provided the Liberals with an adequate ideology.

For all these reasons it may be said that the Liberals, though no longer a power, were by no means negligible. So the *News-Chronicle* suited me very well as the big, successful, influential national daily which it was my ambition to join. In their ranks, at any rate, I could see some of the lines of the post-war world being drawn, hear the proposals and arguments for the new international order, nod a deferential “Good morning” to some of those who were doing the planning and arguing.

At the same time, I was never wholly in sympathy with the *NC*. I shared the ideology of the post-war world – I am not a born Wellsian for nothing – nevertheless, there was the war to be fought meanwhile and for me, as for the majority, it was a patriotic war first and last. I had not been allowed to enter the armed forces, but at least I could be thrilled by their achievements and victories. Thrills of that sort could not be shared much at the *NC* – there was always someone to throw official cold water on them. There was some official enthusiasm for the Russian victories, yet even this was never wholehearted. It always seemed to imply that the Russians were running the war and that British effort should be devoted to running errands for the other allies. To me it was all an unlovely reminder that the Liberals in their heyday had been the most ardent supporters and devotees of the German Empire, and the fall of that institution had seen the fall of the Liberals as well.

By 1945 I had left the *NC* forever, so I did not witness the effect of the election debacle. From that time on the Liberals really were a spent force, and have since dwindled to an eccentric minority talking to themselves. This political factor undoubtedly influenced the mind of Laurence Cadbury when, after suffering a sad personal loss, he decided that the *News-Chronicle* should cease publication.

The *NC* remained a successful and prosperous paper right until 1956. In the previous year the management had bought the northern *Daily Despatch* from Lord Kemsley and gained over 300,000 more readers at one swoop. Before that year was out the chairman, Lord Layton, had announced that the *NC* and *Star* were both paying their way comfortably. As 1956 dawned, there was no cloud in the sky.

The end of the *News-Chronicle* came about because the owner himself was determined to end it; he rejected all offers from outside interests who were willing to keep it going, and it is clear that his only

motive was a selfish, self-interested family pride.

The Cadbury family, of chocolate-and-cocoa fame, acquired the *Daily News*, the “great radical daily”, early in the present century. Laurence Cadbury was the second generation owner, and by 1960 the family connection stretched for over half a century. Naturally he would have liked this to continue beyond his own time, and but for a family misfortune in 1950 it might well have done so, and the paper be flourishing to this day.

Up to that time Cadbury had decided that after his own retirement his two sons should divide the family businesses between them, Julian the elder getting the chocolate and Adrian the younger getting the paper. Unhappily, Julian died in a road accident, and the plan died with him. In later years Adrian made a tentative start in administration, but while he showed up well enough, it appeared he was not really interested in newspapers at all. So Cadbury knew that if the paper continued beyond his own time it would have to be in other hands, and he did not like the prospect.

It was the Suez episode, curiously enough, that gave him the opportunity he wanted. The prolonged and intemperate editorial attacks on Eden alienated great numbers of readers, to the point that they gave up the paper. The older ones no doubt remembered the paper’s hot-and-cold attitudes to Russia, in previous years, and at last recognized editorial insincerity when they read it. Nor was Suez the last of the editorial follies.

And so, for the last two years, the editorial voice of the paper became feebler and sillier. The staff were so dismayed at this visible decline that at one point they sent a round-robin to the management calling for a more serious approach to the news. No notice was taken, the “spiral of demoralization” continued; and Cadbury began his negotiations with Rothermere.

I am profoundly thankful that I was not still with the *NC* at the end (in fact, I doubt if I could have been, anyway, since if I had not left it sixteen years earlier I would not have lived long enough!) Even now, re-reading the account in Glenton-Pattinson, that description of the last day makes the blood run cold. The inward despair of everyone after a week of wild rumours, the desperate affectation of busy-ness, the belief that doom was certain, but no-one knowing that the paper was already dead – here, surely, was mental suffering at its worst, among a large number at once, and those who had to endure it are to be pitied.

This delaying of the end surely showed up the Cadbury management went at its worst. An earlier disclosure would not have affected the outcome in the least, for the Rothermere-Cadbury agreements were

concluded. The announcement could have been given quite easily on the Sunday, when the actual final edition was being prepared, and the feelings of the staff could have found some relief in the day's work. As it was, the last issue went to press without a word, the staff all came back the next day to start work on an edition that was never to be printed. To force them all through that horrible masquerade after the paper had already died showed an unpardonable lack of consideration. In a situation that was full of ironies, this one struck me as the crowning irony of the lot. We heard so much about the *News-Chronicle* as the Great Radical daily, free and independent. The image was over a century old, and it is still quoted as if it were a reality. If the truth has been told in print before, I have never read it.

It was a shameful end, but it was in keeping with the paper's character as I remember it. No wonder its memory stirs no sentiment, and the thought of its end leaves me dry-eyed.

The Cadburys, unlike the Harmsworths or the Berrys, for instance, were not solely dependent on publishing for their fortunes, nor identified with it by reputation. Their primary commercial interest has always been cocoa and chocolate, and the newspaper that George Cadbury acquired at the turn of the century was only and always a secondary concern. So the *News-Chronicle* alone among the national dailies, belonged to a commercial group outside the publishing trade. In a crisis, therefore, they had no particular incentive to keep it going.

The failure of the paper after Suez, therefore, was the very situation that Laurence Cadbury required. He had only to let the running-down process continue long enough, then he could dispose of the paper with the plausible excuse that it no longer paid its way. Thus it turned out. The Cadburys abandoned the publishing trade, never to return.

## 13: Patriotism & the Left-Wing Press

The *Sunday Citizen* ceased publication today after 117 years. The closure was announced several weeks in advance, questions were asked, and suggestions made, in public, general regret was expressed. Nothing was said about future employment of the staff, and no complaints were received from that quarter, so evidently they are being properly looked after. On the whole, the Co-operative movement emerges from this misfortune with credit. Those who worked for the paper have no cause to regret doing so.

All this is in striking contrast to the squalid end of the *News-Chronicle* seven years ago. There, all was secrecy until after the closure; there, a staff of several thousands were thrown overnight onto a shrinking labour market, by a management that had made no serious provision for them. The said management had refused all offers to help keep the paper going and closed it down deliberately regardless of consequences. That done, the former owner returned to his primary interest of making chocolate.

The sentiments expressed by contributors to this last issue of the *Citizen* also strike the right note, I think. Regrets, yes, but no bitterness, no shock, no horrors. The comments, too, are free of that monotonous chant of self-praise which was so noticeable in the *News-Chronicle* obituaries. At the same time they are equally free of any note of self-criticism, which might help to explain why a paper with a circulation of a million shrank to a quarter that size. I think the two closures are linked, and spring from the same cause: that is, the crisis of the Labour-Left-wing-Liberal-Radical political movement generally, wherein the leadership and their active supporters have created a gap between themselves and the rank-and-file, a gap that is widening steadily and shows no sign of closing.

It is fairly well known that the fortunes of the *News-Chronicle* began to decline after the Suez episode of 1956. Amid the cats'-chorus of condemnation that followed, the voice of the *NC* was the loudest and most strident, and it set the tone for left-wingers for the next eleven years.

It was a tone that went far beyond any reasoned criticism of a wrongful action or any honest indignation it could arouse. It was an anti-British snarl, a sneering at national pride, a gloating over national

misfortune, an eagerness to see the nation's prestige brought down.

The readers of the *NC* were quick to understand what the tone meant, and they resented it. We do not need to be blue-nosed Tories to resent slurs on national pride; just decent and responsible citizens, like the majority of those who vote.

I never had any kind of sentimental attachment to the *News-Chronicle*, which was a very good thing, as events proved. I had wanted simply to get a job in Fleet Street, and while I should probably have preferred the *Express* or *Mail*, or better still, one of the eveningers, the *News-Chronicle* it was, and that was good enough.

The spirit that galvanized my written work was the spirit that never says die and forever cries onward to victory. That spirit is in me still, and demands continuing expression.

It was chiefly for this reason that when I went to work on the *News-Chronicle* I was antipathetic to the journal itself, even though I was happy to be in Fleet Street and working on a famous paper.

The *NC* was still the organ of the Liberal free-traders, whose cause had long been lost. It was no longer even a good cause; I even wonder if it ever was. In the last century Liberal investors poured their money into foreign industries, particularly the industries of the German Empire, and showed a spiteful readiness to do harm to industry at home. Posing as pacifists, and loudly condemning "jingoism", nevertheless they declared admiration for the force and brutality of Bismarck's empire. The Liberal, in short, was always ready to toady to the foreign bully.

In my time, of course, the Liberal Party was heading for oblivion and its craftier members were sneaking on to the coming bandwagon of Labour. But there was no mistaking the editorial attitude of the *NC*; it tacitly disapproved of an Anglo-French war against Germany, and only accepted it because Hitler's Germany was anti-Russian. It hated the prospects of British victory, and would have been more contented if the British war-effort could have been confined to supplying the Russians, leaving them to win the whole war.

The paper had a long-established reputation as a champion of humane causes, though this reputation had faded somewhat by the time I came to it. The war was on, and while the paper supported the war effort it did so merely out of obligation, not with any conviction, let alone enthusiasm. Fighting for causes was strictly a matter for pen and ink, so far as the *NC* was concerned, and behind its toleration for the war there lay prim disapproval. The *NC* was essentially pacifist.

The contributors gave lip-service to abstractions like internationalism,

collective action and so on; but they never gave support to any realities of alliance, and for that matter, never gave honest, wholehearted support to anything at all.

So clearly, the *News-Chronicle* was no permanent home for me, who am a patriot to begin with, and end with, entirely pro-British in my politics, and often pro-French as well. As a humane man, I abominated Hitler's Germany; but as a realist, I knew it had to be fought and beaten, by our efforts most of all.

In one direction only did the paper let itself go – in praise of the Russian war-effort. Quite right and natural too, but this did not come from any genuine understanding of modern Russia and its government; it was not a *British* government, and therefore the *NC* could praise it unreservedly. The Russians, unfortunately, are suspicious by nature and quick to see through hypocritical professions of friendship, which is why our left-wingers were so badly caught out in the postwar years. Characteristically, the *NC* was the first non-Conservative newspaper to turn anti-Russian after the war, and remained bitterly anti-Russian to the end. In the great chorus of condemnation and denigration of Russia, which followed the war, the *NC's* was the loudest voice.

This anti-Russian outburst was probably the beginning of the end. Regular readers, recalling the *NC's* passionate pro-Russian attitude of the war, had their first doubts about the paper's sincerity and gradually, quietly, began to drop readership. This continued on and off throughout the years until the Suez episode brought crisis. The then-editor went up the wall in condemnation of the venture, in terms that could only be construed as anti-British (the paper was certainly not pro-Egyptian). From that time on the fall in circulation became steady.

There is now general alarm in the Labour movement about the losses of their own papers. There are a few sour comments about affluence and the Welfare State having turned the readers into Tories. True or not, the Labour activists want to bring more and more affluence to the workers, thus risking the creation of even more Tories. I think these comments are wide of the mark – affluence or no, most Labour voters are still socialists and I firmly believe that they are still patriots also. They understand quite well that their personal fortunes are bound up with the national pride and dignity, and affronts to that are affronts to themselves. It is no wonder they are repudiating the anti-patriotic Press and refusing support to its causes.

(1967)

## 14: "JAG" (James Agate)

I did not admire him then, and have not changed my opinion since. He does not appear in many memoirs of the period, and certainly no biography has been attempted. Yet JAG was one of the leading and best-known journalists of the period, and his reviews were followed everywhere by everyone concerned.

It is said that he came down from Manchester with a good record of reviewing on the *Guardian* behind him. Apparently he had never been through the full drill of reporting, sub-editing and editing, but was accepted simply on his merits as a reviewer. He had no University degree to support his claims to culture, rather envied those who had one. He could quote spontaneously long passages from Hazlitt and C.E. Montague, discourse brilliantly on Shakespeare. He knew Boswell by heart, and practically the whole of English literature too. "His French is that of Gide and Michelet, Duhamel, and he has the full range of German too," wrote a contemporary about him. His appearances at theatrical first-nights were anticipated with trembling and trepidation by all concerned in the production; his reviews the next morning were read in haste and with hope – which ended quite often in despair.

After every performance he would regale himself with dinner at the Café Royal, where he was an exacting customer of the "Waiter – this coffee is stone-cold!" variety. Here he would happily hold court amongst his cronies and satellites, who listened to him with rapturous enthusiasm. He would often move from table to table, all smiles, all condescending good humour. All this brought him into good repute with the management, who valued his custom.

Yet he never settled down to follow the other fundamental rule of journalism: the journalist who wishes to make any permanent mark on his times must write the book that sums up his knowledge and erudition into an authoritative whole; or write creative literature of his own, to stand comparison with the work of other playwrights and bookwrights. Only such work as this can tell the readers and observers that this man can meet his own exacting demands – or not, as the case may be. Thus only can the critic prove himself an Authority in his own right.

It seems that JAG was incapable of such an effort. He published books in his time, collected editions of his own reviews from the papers. He kept an immensely long and detailed diary over the years in the hope,

no doubt, that he would be recognized as the Sam Pepys of his time. Volumes of it were published year after year, reviewed with respect, and forgotten. I forget when I last saw a copy of any one of them in any library or elsewhere.

In short, and in spite of his air of success and vainglory, he could be termed a failure. He was not the Johnsonian super-character that his own fond imagination supposed him. His vaunted erudition, packed into his performances at the Café Royal to impress his followers, amounted to nothing more than an Act, in the music-hall sense.

*Publisher's note: James Agate (1877-1947) was a leading British drama critic from 1921 until his death, writing for the Saturday Review, Sunday Times and Daily Express. He was also a prolific book reviewer and columnist for these and other newspapers, sometimes pseudonymously; at the end of 1946 he estimated his total output as over seven million words. Though Agate's dramatic criticism didn't have the staying power of George Bernard Shaw and Max Beerbohm before him, or Kenneth Tynan after, his nine-volume autobiography-cum-diary-cum-commonplace book Ego (1935-1948) is still fun to read. Condensed editions appeared as late as 1976. (David Langford)*

# On Science Fiction



*Frank Arnold, 1952*

## 15: Is Weinbaum Over-Rated?

The above sounds rather like an irreverence, so let me hasten to explain. Although the author, alas! is no longer with us, his work is still very much alive, and has any number of admirers to defend it from criticism. The amount of praise that gushed forth during his all-too-brief career drowned all attempts to put him in perspective, so, now some of the gush has died down, it is time we attempted to do so.

When he first appeared in print with “A Martian Odyssey” in 1934 he was greeted with an uproar of delight. He wrote a sequel to the story and followed it up with a fairly rapid output, and before a year was out the torrent of gush reached hysteria-point.

He was the greatest writer of the day, they said; far better than Merritt, Flint, Keller, etc., a greater writer than Wells, Verne and Poe put together, went on the ravers. He was unique, untouchable, etc. A less modest man would rapidly have been turned by such stuff.

But now people are saying that since his death his style has been so much imitated that, were he alive he would have difficulty in selling his own work.

A more ridiculous contention, and a greater disservice to a very worthy author, has seldom been put forward. For it is an axiom, that no imitations can ever equal their original.

His subsequent stories in *Wonder* were all, unfortunately, repeats of the first one. “The Worlds of If”, “The Ideal”, “The Point of View”, were all carbon-copies of each other, and even the author himself confessed this through his character, Dixon Wells, who complained that every time he got mixed up with one of the Professor’s machines he found himself in love with someone who was dead, or who had never lived, and so on. One would think that a confession like this would put admirers into a more reasonable frame of mind, but no.

His style was sufficiently good to carry off these imperfections, for which another author would have been brick-batted. Undoubtedly his delightful humour saved his bacon; nevertheless a real master would not have had to go to these lengths. He would have had original material every time.

It is, in fact, as a stylist that he will be best remembered. As such he was as individual as, say, Keller, Coblenz, Leinster, Flagg, Verrill and similar great individualists. It does him full honour to rank him amongst

these admirable writers, far more so that does the silly, gushing and plainly insincere hysteria that has been given him these last four years.

*(1939)*

# 16: Futurist Fallacies

## No.1: Mental Giants

The development of future science, of course, means vast mental progress in the future but the queerest conception of the distant Superman is that of the being with an enormous cranium balanced upon an undersized, atrophied body supported by feeble limbs.

Many authors have advanced this idea and many people, believing it, have pointed to it as one of the “Horrors of the Future”. The notion is that the body is an encumbrance to the brain, which will make no serious progress until it is free of the physical handicap. If the brain is liberated it will expand and the body will atrophy.

It is difficult to believe that this can be taken seriously. For it supposes that the brain is a mysterious object living apart from the animal frame and can be parted from it to advantage. How on Earth?

For in fact the brain is a very physical object. It is nothing more than a chunk of meat very much alive and very much in need of solid nourishment. The nourishment is supplied by the bloodstream, which in turn is moved by the heart and purified by the lungs, all of which is kept in motion by a healthy body. Presumably the heart, lungs and bloodstream of our supposed “Superman” will be as weak as the body containing them, so how the gigantic brain can be sustained by its wholly inadequate mechanism is something the authors rarely think about. True, there have been brains pictured as being supported by large artificial lungs and bloodstreams, but these were in fixed “brain-houses” which meant the destruction of mobility which is essential for a fully efficient working mechanism such as the human constitution.

And why should the brain grow in size at all? It is not a muscle, and its size is not regulated by mental activity. Size can only be increased with a general physical growth, which in turn stimulate the use of the estimated nine-tenths of brain power still dormant.

There are many relevant fallacies concerned with the development or otherwise of the body in the future. With the spread of civilization many of us are no longer compelled to fight like savages for the bare necessities of life. We have machines that do this, that, and the other, luxuries unknown even to the God-Emperors of ancient days. We can travel great distance in

utmost comfort, converse with friends at the ends of the earth from our own rooms. The burden of toil is constantly lifted from our backs.

So our well-known pessimists interpret this as a sign of wholesale physical decay because of the ceaseless pampering effect of civilization. Probably they are the same people who deplore "The rush and strain of modern life". They date back to 1863 or earlier. They forget that when the machine removes the compulsion of toil people take to it for pleasure's sake.

Years ago the pessimists argued that popular motoring, lifts, escalators and so forth would save us the necessity of walking and therefore the desire to do so. The future, said the Prophets of Horror, would see a race with underdeveloped legs or none at all, and Dr. Keller wrote "The Revolt of the Pedestrians". But hardly had motoring got under way than everybody took to hiking and rambling and have done so ever since, although motor sales are soaring every year.

It is now an established fact that man of the modern mechanized civilization, far from being weaker than his hardy forebears, is actually taller and stronger. This has been proved by comparison with medieval suits of armour, and to quote a case in point, the personal armour of Henry VIII in the White Tower should impress one with the comparative smallness of the monarch, one of the greatest athletes of his time. Bones and skulls of past races also prove that races of giants in the past were myths. Modern men equal in stature the highly intelligent Cro-magnons of prehistoric days. This is purely an evolutionary phenomenon and has nothing to do with the spurt in record-breaking athletics in recent years.

In these days of physical fitness campaigns the prejudice of hack-scientists against physical perfection is dying, but it dies hard. Many are still firmly convinced that the strong man is necessarily a mental cripple. They still think of great scientists in terms of domelike foreheads. Ask anyone who could be the author of a book like *Man and Cosmic Antagonism to Mind and Spirit*, and they would be sure to conjure up some wild-eyed fanatic with flaming hair and cadaverous appearance, and would be shocked to learn that it was fifteen-stone George Hackenschmidt, the champion wrestler, a mere athlete.

It is more than probable that the mental giants of the future will be physical giants as well. The human frame is the most wonderful machine on earth and the intelligent Superman will tend it accordingly. They will develop it to its fullest, and mental capacity will develop with it. They will explore and exploit all its possibilities. Eventually they will train it to do without external aids to existence and make it self-supporting and self-

sufficing. They will do away with exterior forms of nourishment and dependence on machines for constructive work.

There is in the human body, with its five (perhaps more) senses, its actions and reactions, its growth and mentality, a whole ocean of speculation, activity and development which we today have barely begun to realize.

*(1939)*

## 17: Wells, History, & Me

This is the centenary year of H.G. Wells, and the twentieth anniversary of his death. When he died, one month short of his eightieth birthday, the news made front-page headlines in every national daily and called in tributes to his life work and memory from all over the world. Since then, the death of no other literary man save Bernard Shaw in 1950 has created such an impression; it has only been surpassed by the passing of Sir Winston Churchill in 1965.

The salient facts of Wells's life are to be found on the back-covers of many a paperback, and in the inside dust-covers of bound editions. Too much is remembered, I think, about the draper's assistant, son of poor parents, who observed the lives of the poor in the late nineteenth-century and wrote about them with such humor, sympathy and understanding. It is an essential part of the man, of course, but only a part of him, and only part of his greatness.

He was a keen pupil, for a start. He loved learning and knowledge for its own sake; he believed education was the key to life. From a good pupil he became a busy and energetic schoolmaster, with as private practice of lessons on top of his job. He was already beginning to prosper in this line when his spare-time journalism and story-writing launched him as a successful novelist before he was thirty; and though he achieved immortality as a master of the prophetic scientific romance, he grasped the importance of history from the earliest days of his career.

History is a matter which we all come to experience during our lives, which is why the study of the past is a useful and fruitful activity. It is not enough to understand it simply from a textbook point of view; the parallels of past and present experience must always be in our minds.

My own boyhood was always overshadowed by talk and memory of "the war", the war of 1914-18, of which my own memories were merely infantile. The post-war struggles to achieve a general regime of peace, their eventual failure and out-break of the second conflict occupied all my life up to the age of thirty. With such experience to develop and dominate my mind, I could not look upon past history as a mere textbook exercise; everything I read that was of any importance had its parallels and similes in modern events, and could be judged in comparison or by contrast.

The urge to mug up my history, to re-learn all about the Edwards and the Henrys, did not stir me until about ten years after the proper time. It

was a pity (so many things about my early life were a pity) that the same urge did not operate about the time I left school; that nothing caught my imagination or demanded my keen attention, or told me unmistakably that I needed to learn.

My view of history has always been drum-and-trumpet, flags-and-banners, swords-and-plumes. Useless for pacifists to tell me that history is full of crime, folly, frauds and squalid killings – I know that, and have never shirked it. Other facts are that we can have the frauds and follies and killings by themselves, without any embellishments of glory, but history is none the better for that. No – history is only worth learning for the sake of human achievements, whatever the accompanying horrors and terrors, and the more glories there are in it, the better.

When I left school in 1928, there was a natural transition from tales of war to tales of commerce, which were already stirring in my mind before I took my first job. If the necessary source of firsthand gossip, hearsay and shop talk had been to hand at the time, these tales might have taken some sort of form on paper. As it was, they had nothing to come from but secondhand sources, and even these, weak as they were, began to demand expression some ten years later.

For a period of eighteen months, between the middle of 1938 to the beginning of 1940, I had a run of creative activity which produced a dozen short stories and novelettes, five of which were published, three of these being reprinted. Whereupon this creative energy evaporated, and since then has reappeared only fitfully. Nevertheless, I had demonstrably proved that I possessed creative ability, and for a while I had the notion that I might make good as a novelist. How many other bright young men are deluded with the same idea, and try to live up to it, is beyond computation. It is really a good thing my mind was so under-nourished in those days that novels refused to emerge, and I was driven back on my studies and reflections. For although my creative writing ability is evident, I am not and never will be a novelist.

(1966)

## 18: First Contacts

Ten years after leaving school I encountered my first adult companions, young men with literary ambitions, on the outermost fringes of journalism. I shared their ambitions, but my working equipment was probably the least adequate of anyone's. An enthusiasm for history, based on sound knowledge; a sound understanding of modern affairs, fit for a young man old enough to vote; and a proper student's knowledge of the literature we were all eager to promote. This was the equipment I needed. We all wanted to promote science-fiction, and most of them wanted to write it. I was one of the few exceptions – I loved that literature with a surpassing love, but never thought I could write any. I wanted to write comedies of the modern world, and my idol was Wodehouse. Ambition clashed with influence, and left a division in my mind which has scarcely been mended to this day. For I wrote some SF, and on the strength of four published short stories I made a reputation which has lasted through the years, to my own incredulity.

All the same, the literature I wanted to write is still unwritten. By nature I am a humorist, and always have been, for mine is a sanguine spirit that loves a joke above almost anything. Idolatry of Wodehouse, the supreme humorist of my time, was natural, but it was not possible to follow in his footsteps unless the different circumstances of our respective generations was taken into account.

Science-fiction writing runs inevitably to superlatives, for it deals with the revelations of scientific discovery, the drama of human history, the unbounded potentialities of the human mind in its quest for knowledge, and the wonders of an incalculable Universe accessible to the human spirit in its quest for beauty. Thus, in the simpler, more concrete matters, we find ourselves amid huge cities, dealing with swift and shapely machines, great interplanetary ships and the landscapes of other worlds, amid which we live through the emergence of revolutionary inventions and the conflicts of human society.

At first contact with these visions my response was “What would it really be like to enter outer space?” To set foot on the Moon, on Mars, on Venus, on Ganymede, on Titan? How would the landscape really impress me, and how could I describe my emotional impressions? And if these worlds were habitable, what societies and civilizations and ways of life would they produce? What will life really be like in the world of the

future, at any period, at any level of civilization? How would it impress me, and how would I respond?

For that matter, what of my companions? If I were to go on some Argonautical expedition to the planets, what companions would I choose to go with me? What points of character would I desire? How would they respond to emergencies, and to the emotional impressions of the voyage? What events might distract them from the work in hand, and what might come of it?

Aside from the visions of fiction, real life itself affected me the same way. What is the outside world really like, I asked myself when young. And these famous people I keep hearing about – what are they really like? What do they do in the world, and why do they do it? How would I like them, or dislike them, if I actually met them? What are the consequences of their actions, and how have they affected me?

The number of books I have outlined recently give answers to these queries and I offer my opinions and impressions after twenty or thirty years of finding out.

For me, the value of science-fiction as an expression of human ideals and aspirations transcends all its shortcomings as a literary medium.

For me, it expresses my own understanding of human nature and human destiny, my own aspirations; the instinct for leadership, the desire for companionship, the identity of mind with a task and the ambition towards intellectual distinction. It leads in increasing progression from the desire for physical adventures in youth to that for intellectual and commercial ventures today.

There is no doubt that science-fiction inspired me with a passion for Argonautical expeditions among the stars, amid which I understood myself as the leader of a band of companions. Always in imagination I conceived the ships and inspired the teams that built them, led the expeditions that followed and inspired my fellow-Argonauts with my own passion for strange places and unearthly beauty. In real life, despite all failures, I have always risen to occasions and carried out tasks with efficiency.

Although science-fiction takes us on voyages to other worlds, and thereby enlarges our minds above the drabness and dullness of mercenary society, its galvanizing force comes from the understanding that human society itself is a strange and wondrous organism, capable of infinite varieties of development.

Above all, these tales, based as they were upon the themes of scientific discovery, showed me that the pursuit of knowledge is of itself an enthralling, exciting and even romantic adventure in the history of the

human race, and accepted it without question as an essential part of the human story.

In most classical literature, of course, we find what may be described as the domestic view of human life, and the restrictions on the human spirit that this implies. We are confronted by the Family, by Parental Authority, by Money and Property, and the clashes of human desire with these assumed deities. Most of the classical authors assume generally that human wishes are vain, however good or bad; and that since Money and Authority are bound to win in the end, struggles against them are foolish and will end in Tragedy. Hence, the classical literatures emerge from moods of melancholy, and a philosophy of pessimism. The Tragic View of Life is accepted as the highest form of literature.

Up to the time of my youth (*circa* 1930) this made a fairly convincing picture, and novel-readers could put down a classic just read with sage head-noddings and the reflection that “Yes, life is like that.” Yet onwards from the year of my birth (1914) events took place which proved beyond doubt that life was not at all like that, and showed that the classical novelists presented a picture of life quite as fanciful as anything collected by the brothers Grimm or Sir James Frazer.

I believe it was my parent’s generation who learned about the brittleness of Money and Property from first-hand experience (they did not need to learn it from Marx). It was certainly my Father’s generation who knew that human affairs are kept going by human endeavour; that endeavour, on the most heroic scale, is sometimes needed to save civilization itself from destruction. From the same experience they learned what happens to a purse-proud family when the money is lost; and if the disruption of so many families had the elements of tragedy in it, at least the survivors had a chance to enjoy new freedoms, and perhaps extend more tolerance to their own children, when the weapon of Money could no longer be held over their heads.

With the overthrow of these bourgeois deities, therefore, we learned for a fact that desire, ambitions and aspirations play an important and often decisive part in human affairs; to assume that all human endeavour is futile, therefore, is simply being false to fact. That tragedies occur in human lives is no warrant for assuming that the whole of human life is tragic.

In short, the picture of human questing, striving, successes and triumphs presented in Futuristic literature is valid and realistic, presenting a most important aspect of human nature that is virtually ignored in other literatures.

## 19: Looking Back on My Days as an SF Author

It has been a strange experience to re-read the stories I wrote in the summer of 1939, after so long an interval. There are four of them, of different lengths making a total of about 50,000 words, nearly as long as a novel. Two of them have the same theme, viz: a world of automatic machines operating without human intervention. The other two, in different ways, give my versions of the Superman idea.

Not to mince words – they are all competent works, written by an author with a clear gift for story-telling. There is a good vein of human sympathy running through all of them. The characterization is not as good as it should be, the characters tending to be typical figures rather than individuals, but on the whole the types ring true. There is no love-interest in any of them: I had nothing to go on at the time, being painfully inexperienced in love affairs on the adult level. In the Superman stories I got over these difficulties by having the characters already married or engaged – the machine stories have no women at all, though they are none the worse for that.

It is a relief to find that “Wings Across Time”, the one that was best remembered, is not nearly as bad or as derivative as I used to think. I *did* have some ideas of my own in it, after all. And while I repeated the two basic themes, each had an original variation: there is no “mixture as before” element anywhere.

I had just begun the long story “Mecanica” when war broke out in September. I finished the story, writing it in two successive drafts as usual, in about three weeks. I lay fallow for a few weeks more, then “The Twilight People” demanded to be written. This took nearly as long to write, though little more than half the length of “Mecanica.” I was pleased with that story, and still am: indeed, I am still pleased with all four. Then the war got into its stride, and my imagination dried up.

The said imagination woke again, if only fitfully, in the summer of 1945. I recall busily scribbling out character-sketches, unrelated to any particular story, but I also vividly remember sketches of character and passages of description for a novel that was in my head at the time. The thing proved abortive – I was in a shaky state of health, a confused state of mind, and incapable of finishing work, or even sorting it out into proper

order. Fortunately I kept the notes, and have occasionally re-read them: there is real material here, the stuff of contemporary novels, confirming the promise shown in the earlier SF stories.

It was some time ago that I conceived a theme which, I think will successfully unite the SF romance with the Contemporary Novel. From the finished products of 1939 and the unfinished effort of 1945, that synthesis may yet be achieved.

As to the state of mind I was in that summer; why did the stream dry up? Why the blockages to further flow? And why was this, at the time, the only stream?

I was 31 years of age, and at a climacteric. A necessary move had been made, a mistaken ambition had been attempted and contentedly put aside. So far as these were concerned, I was free to concentrate on whatever I wanted to do. Several important failures hampered me.

1. The days in Fleet Street were over; they had given me great satisfaction, but I had failed to achieve any position there;

2. I had failed to proceed with the educational programme I had set myself some seven years earlier;

3. I had failed to write that necessary review and analysis of the SF and other fictions I had read in earlier times.

The first failure caused a heavy sense of disappointment, the other two left me in a state of mental congestion and confusion. There was a fourth element; the lack of an adequate social experience to justify novelist as a career. The collection of “characters” I imagined for that first novel were all truly conceived out of observation; but there was too little Observation, too much derivation from other reading. The balance needed righting.

The classical novelists approached their subjects in the manner of portrait-painters, which is why so many classical novels are named after their protagonists: *Tom Jones*, *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*. The approach requires an instinctive sympathy with the individual portrayed, to the extent of putting every other factor into second place. Some novelists have even take the actor’s approach, and seen his chosen hero as a “part” – Dickens is the most famous example. Others have simply taken autobiography as their theme, and patterned a story, or stories, around Self. None of these approaches have ever called to me.

My first attraction, as a would-be journalist, was to big and exciting public affairs – big flights, Parliamentary rows, great public meetings. My interest, I think, was documentation, the flow of events and their consequences. Only secondarily did I come to the individuals concerned,

to see how their lives and characters influenced events, whether their attempts to do so succeeded or failed. At this point my own failure sets in.

I have always had my fair share of friends, and a great capacity for hero-worship. I have always admired the great men of public life, and nonetheless because of personal flaws and failings – indeed, a man's qualities and achievements are often enhanced by contrast. But in my own life there have been no heroes or exemplars: in all walks, I have known only the small fry, good, bad and indifferent. It is from this mould that I need to break out.

The novel, therefore, sprang partly from vague memories of people I had known in a sort of society a few years earlier, and partly from the City set-up depicted so well in Marston's *The Rocket*. The hero was vaguely modelled on one of the Bright Young men I had slightly known there, and I introduced myself as a local reporter and Best Friend figure. The first locale is the small semi-country town where all their lives begin, second locale is the City and West End where fortunes are made and/or lost, and Our Hero, through struggle and conflict, becomes a man at last. The main theme is the destruction of the small country town by outside commercial forces, the action shows ten or twelve years in the life of our hero as the nation moves towards war.

The planned narrative reflected some important aspects of my own life, although chronology required that Hero and Best Friend would both be older than I, anything up to ten years. The secondary figures would be the older generation: commercial men struggling to exploit the town, the City industrialists of Hero's later adventures. The Hero is an honest fellow who plays the Skin Game as cleanly as possible, but dirtily if he has to.

The whole concept crystallized my feelings at the decisive point of my youth when, at the age of twenty, I was abruptly dragged away from my native parts, never to return. The experience did me great harm and I was trying to work out a solution in my hero's affairs. The story was egotistic, or autobiographical, in a sense, and because my mind and feelings had reached sticking-point, in fact a blockage, I could go no further with this narrative nor conceive of any others. Nobody had heard of anti-heroes when I sat down and wrote "The Mad Machines" in 1939, but the central figure in this tale is undoubtedly one of them. Bobby Henlows is a City slicker who was caught out in a swindle, murdered his discoverer in a fit of panic and ran to his brother for help. The brother, Sir Willoughby, is a metaphysical scientist who has invented a time-machine, through which Bobby escapes from the police into the distant future. Here we come to the spectacular part, the world of automatic machines going

about their given tasks without human intervention. Bobby is duly astounded by this world, wanders around in a daze until he finds the police have followed him through the time-machine. He runs for it, and is accidentally killed. End.

The vaunted Anti-Hero of our time is nothing more than the Dirty Little Funk of my schooldays, and I have no sympathy for the type whatever. Nor for City slickers, either. A combination of both was irresistible, and I killed him off without a qualm.

The same theme, a world of automatic machines, appears in “Mecanica”, which is much longer and has a totally different story. Here a party of explorers is marooned in the machine-world and have to march and fight their way back to safety. They are all knocked about a good deal, but come through alive. The narrative is a simple depiction of five brave and resourceful men surviving against odds by their own efforts. They are all explorers of much experience. They appear as type-figures, but there is enough reality in them to repay speculation about the lives they lead off the printed page.

Janning, the leader and promoter of the expedition, is a man still under forty and probably the youngest of the group. He is a bold, hard fellow with a sharp temper, but is fundamentally good-natured. He has been married and not-long divorced, and is unhappy about it; but commonsense will pull him round, and he will marry again.

Pascoe and Farren, the polar explorers, are both married men with near-adult families. Their domestic lives are happy, their professional lives untroubled. Kellogg, inventor of the time-chamber, and Gundry, the army man, are the eldest of the group. They are both widowers, with adult families; their lives now are solitary; but reasonably happy.

Some light and shade of character is provided by the two protagonists, Janning and Kellogg. The hard-bitten leader, determined to overcome all obstacles, is seriously injured and weakened before they reach haven. Kellogg, the timid pessimist whose courage Janning has impugned, proves himself a source of strength in the end. Gundry, the strategist, achieves final content, as usual, when he shepherds the party home.

This march-of-the-ten-thousand theme reappears in “The Twilight People”, a story which also gives my version of the Superman concept. Nearly every other writer on this topic has garbled up his notion from the ideas of Huxley and Nietzsche, and the “Superman” is always a cold-blooded criminal hungry for power and mastery over everybody else.

On the contrary, my Supermen are brave, devotedly loyal to each

other, generous, considerate, always together in conflict. They have great physical strength and nervous energy, their every faculty is developed to the full. They are artists, scientists, craftsmen and artisans all in one. People who were developed like that, I fancy, could overcome all the perils the universe has to offer. The Twilight People are certainly strong enough to survive the near-collision of earth and moon.

The Supermen of “Wings Across Time” have gone a step further and have developed wings and muscular flight. This is a wonderful achievement with unfortunate side-effects, for when in flight the bird-men often become intoxicated and “bird-brained”. They are constantly at war with the Heads, giant brains living a life of immobility and pure intellectual contemplation, which ultimately renders them discontented, neurotic and mad. There are to be no inordinate advantages for anybody, therefore, without corresponding disadvantages.

All of which shows, I think, that these yarns were not mere entertaining hackwork, but contained some original thinking-out in them.

The four stories have a goodly number of protagonists, some of whom appear under rather fanciful names. It is worth observing that not one of them is a Me-figure, in any noticeable sense. All of those who have any individuality have their own. In “Wings” it is true that I introduce myself by name, but not as a figure of the story: simply as the Best Friend who hears the hero’s narrative. But the hero, who tells the story in the first person, is not me. (This is an old-fashioned method of story-telling that could not be used today; and I shall not use the first-person-narrative method again).

From this it is clear that even in my nonage I had some grasp of character other than my own, even without the help of a full and adequate social background.

The resolution of a man’s inner conflict is a favourite theme of novelists. In most modern novels he fails to resolve it and succumbs to failure. This is unacceptable for my own work, since I always intended to resolve my conflicts.

To the extent that Freddie Farr, the protagonist of my proposed novel, is a Me-figure, I put two of my own conflicts into him. He was obsessed and rendered unhappy by the commercial destruction of his home town, and has to become reconciled to loss before he can be an effective man. He pursues a girl who doesn’t want him, and is pursued in turn by a girl he doesn’t want. He is very confused, until finally convinced that Girl No.1 is going to another. Both losses faced, he becomes a Man at last, Fortune smiles, he meets Girl No.3, and eventually they find the home of both their

dreams.

Here we get to the core of my interest in a public man. Did he have to resolve any inner conflicts, or overcome any obstacles, before he began the upward climb? Usually we have to guess about the first, until a biography or memoirs are published; but famous men are often quite willing to talk about the latter.

But of course, this is only preliminary. However much his conflicts resemble my own, or contrast with them the real excitement comes from the spectacular achievement that made him famous. It is something that he alone can do, and he is interesting because of it.

## Published Efforts

- “The Mad Machines” (“City of Machines”): *Tales of Wonder* No.7, Summer 1939
- “The Twilight People”: *Comet Stories*, January 1941
- “Mecanica”: *Cosmic Stories*, March 1941
- “Wings Across Time”: *SF Quarterly*, Winter 1942
- *Wings Across Time*: Booklet, Pendulum Publications, 1946 (comprising “Wings Across Time”, “The Twilight People”, “The Mad Machines”, “Many Dimensions”)
- “A Forgotten Scientifilm”: *Tomorrow*, Autumn 1938
- “The Circle of the White Horse”: *New Worlds* No.14, March 1952
- “Out of This World”: *Films and Filming*, June 1963

## 20: English Science Fiction & the Final Years of H.G. Wells

When I came to Fleet Street in 1941 Wells was at the height of his fame and prestige, aged seventy-four and with five more years to live. His casual journalism was in perpetual demand and a week rarely passed without some effort of his turning up somewhere. In addition, a book or two came out every year almost until the end. I doubt if any other literary man, even Shaw, has had so lively and productive an old age.

Wells had been increasingly a journalist, and rather less of a novelist, ever since 1914, and during this phase came the critical joke that he had “sold his birthright for a pot of message.” His powers of story-telling were as strong as ever – *Men Like Gods* (1923), *The Dream* (1924), *The Croquet-Player* (1937) and many others all prove this, but he used them less often. It is true that his books all became didactic and opinionated, whatever they were about – and in any case, Wells declared he thought himself more of a journalist than anything else.

The publication of *The Outline of History* in 1920, coinciding as it did with the emergence of the League of Nations, established him beyond all doubt as the guide and tutor of the modern world. No other author before or since gained anything like Wells’s status in this respect. However, the main appeal of the book lies in its power as a political manifesto, and therein lay a weakness. Wells had none of the qualities of character necessary to a practical politician and had no capacity for initiating policy, or even influencing policy-makers. Throughout his illustrious old age, with much of the world crying out for his guidance, he remained a “fringe” politician who could do nothing better than preside at public meetings and write letters to the papers. Caring nothing for personal adulation, he never bothered to cultivate a following or encourage emulators, and when he died not a soul was left to carry on the work.

Wells died in 1946, leaving behind him an immense following of admirers, all of them agreeing – and many of his detractors agreed, too – that he was an immortal of literature. Yet among all the successful writers who flourished then and since, there has not been one who could take up the themes of radical idealism and scientific humanism embodied in his name. The need for an adequate successor to Wells is acute. Someone *must* follow.

Wells was the greatest socialist writer of this century, yet he took Socialism so much for granted that he never thought to work out and expound a coherent socialist philosophy. It was the greatest failure of his life, for he alone in his time had the necessary vision for such a task. It is appalling to realize that no other writer, either, has settled down to work out the philosophy of Socialism, in intelligible humanistic terms.

The philosopher who would attempt this project must begin with Wells's own school of literature, to wit, "science-fiction", as the jargoners still insist on calling it. Such a philosopher must also be, in practice, a political journalist, and if he is also a filibuster in this line, so much the better.

By temperament Wells was pugnacious and courageous. He had little understanding of patriotism – his knowledge of English history was too slight – and none at all of the life militant. He could collaborate with a few colleagues on a work of research (i.e. *The Science of Life*) but his concept of team-spirit went no further than that. Whatever interest he had in sports and games was lost after the dangerous accident at football in his boyhood, though he retained a worthy pride in his father's prowess as a cricketer. His professional career was launched and vitalized by tremendous artistic visions, but his knowledge of literature and the arts never became great – in contrast to his friend Shaw, who made his career out of such knowledge.

The moving impulse in all his romances is the love of knowledge, and the continuing eager search for it. Though his protagonists encounter dangers these are never willingly risked, and the heroic virtues of courage and hardihood are displayed only incidentally. Hence these tales, marvellous as they are, often lack the under-current of true romance; the marvels overshadow the protagonists.

In his old age Wells became obsessed with politics. It was not a very constructive obsession, being more of a continuous diatribe against the League of Nations, the Labour Party, the Trade Unions and other agencies that might be supposed to be doing something to fulfil his ideals but disappointed him because they failed to do so on the spot. His attitude was that of a clever but exasperated schoolmaster, always lecturing, scolding and belabouring the boys, however hard they tried. Like most journalists of the post-Northcliffe era he was better at denunciation than anything else. Matters of policy became matters for mere argument, and eventually for mere bickering.

In such an atmosphere he lost interest in current literature, perhaps because his own heyday as a novelist was over and most of his eminent contemporaries were dead. He is said to have charged Hugo Gernsback

pretty high fees for the reprinting of his tales in *Amazing Stories*, but he never seems to have looked at the magazine, nor to have appreciated that Gernsback in his own way was trying to carry on Wells's own work. Apparently he took no interest in "science-fiction", the literature of which he was a founding giant, and to the last he remained unaware that a definite literary movement was growing in this field, and growing, perforce, without his help.

In that later phase Wells often showed a partiality for "elites" – surprising indeed for a man of known democratic sentiments who also talked as much of the Open Society and the "open conspiracy." To what extent was Wells an elite figure himself, and how much did it detach him from the Open Conspiracy?

His professional success gives some of the answer. It would be ridiculous, of course, to claim that success had spoiled him, let alone made a snob of him, yet it is a fact that professional success in any line tends to confine a man to the society of his professional equals, generally to the exclusion of those outside. He loses touch with the lower ranks of society, and thereby loses touch with the currents of democratic opinion. Inevitably he develops something of an "elite" mentality, with its exclusiveness, its ingrowing, its bickering and fatal decay. It is to be feared that Wells, to some extent at least, fell victim to all these misfortunes.

All the same, the Open Conspiracy he talked and wrote about was and is a reality. It is true, as he maintained that government by elites was dwindling all over the Earth, and is still dwindling. By the end of the century it may have perished. But he did not seem to understand the democratic processes at work in the world, or even to know if there were any. In fact, he showed no enthusiasm for anything except the denunciation of other men's failures; yet this man had been a great idealist, and a fountainhead of other men's idealism.

Up to 1951 no other novelist, with the possible exception of Olaf Stapledon, had made a reputation as a writer of science-fiction. In that year, however, came John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* and with the success of this fine work the Movement had arrived. Several other authors have made their names in the field nearly all of them from our network. By now there is an extensive market for science-fiction writers in the paperback publications, and their commercial success is forcing even Fleet Street and Broadcasting House to take an excited interest in their work, and it all stems from my first encounter with Steve Frances, and the recruiting of Ted Carnell....

When we gathered around the tea-tables in that summer of 1936 no

sort of market for SF or any kindred subject existed in this country. Only one of our number was a professional journalist, and he the only one in all of Britain who took an active interest in SF. The periodical trade had been in a state of depression since about 1930, and by now it was in a state of entropy – the publishing establishment simply did not want any fresh ventures or renewed hopes for the future, emphatically they did not want to hear about new writers or writings, and above all, *they did not want to know about SF at any price.*

That there was still a reading public for good popular magazines was proved by the success of the Hulton Press from 1937. Yet in nearly twenty years of publication Hultons were never good enough or strong enough to exert any influence on periodicals as a whole, though the trade often hoped for leadership from that quarter.

In the upshot, the first regular SF magazine in Britain was founded in 1946 by Steve Frances, myself, and Ted Carnell, in that order of appearance. We had neither the resources nor the personal ability, let alone influence in the trade, to make a big commercial success of the venture; yet we made a small success, a lasting success, and now after eighteen years – the lifetime of *Picture Post – New Worlds* is to take on a new lease of life (1964).

It was ironical that about 1948 Hultons were rumoured to be bringing out their own SF magazine. The thing failed to materialize, undoubtedly because there was no writing talent available outside our own network, and since they were not willing to do a deal with us their project failed. It was five years later that another company, much smaller, much better and much more enterprising, offered Ted the fair deal that put *New Worlds* on the publishing map once and for all – three years later still, Hulton went out of business.

The foundation and development of *New Worlds* has been, in short, a Network job. A network such as ours is a fine and durable thing because it is open and free to every newcomer who cares to pay us a visit. He finds it an Open Society, not an elite. Once arrived he is free to make his own way, to settle in if he like, or depart if he prefers – he is not scrutinized, summed up, “tested”, taken in or tried out in any way. Snobbishness, “exclusiveness”, purse-pride or class-conceit – these have no place among us. That is why we have flourished through the years while so many other groupings have perished by the wayside.

For, of all groupings possible in human society, there is nothing so perishable as an elite. Members of an elite are always profoundly satisfied with themselves and disdainful of outsiders. Newcomers are rarely

admitted and never welcomed, and those allowed the privilege are tested to see if they fit in with the pre-conceived notion of fitness. In time the elite becomes so exclusive that nobody wants to join it anyway, and as the original members age, wither and drop off the hooks, the elite becomes extinct. No thanks, it's not good enough for us.

*(1964/1966)*

## 21: Reflections on Science-Fiction

We have had modern science-fiction with us for over a century now, and it's possible to see it in some sort of perspective.

We have been agitatedly told that reality has caught up with SF and therefore the stuff is out of date. Let us take a good hard look at so-called reality and see how true this is. We have had the atom-bomb and nuclear energy since 1945, which means that reality took only thirty-one years to catch up with Wells's *The World Set Free* of 1914. The cosmonauts of today have taken rather longer to catch up with Jules Verne; a whole century, in fact.

The charge that SF is too much concerned with mechanical marvels and shows too little concern for human nature, however, has enough truth in it to call for examination.

The SF story is either a romantic melodrama or a secret-agent thriller. The leading characters are never much more than names, and seem to live in a self-sufficient vacuum; they have no family life, no social circles, no professional connections, no public responsibilities. The very civilizations they live in are cut-and-dried affairs, portrayed in short, sharp outlines. The lives of these people are concerned only with the immediate emergency that makes up the story; there are no signs before or consequences to follow. Let us take some examples from *Journey to Infinity*, one of the best of the early anthologies. In Sturgeon's "Unite and Conquer", civilization is facing a breakdown in revolution and social chaos, till suddenly it is threatened with invasion from outer space. Uniting against the common foe, men fight off the threat and see the invaders depart; then we learn, not only that the whole thing was an elaborate deception, but that the chief character, Dr. Simmons, had engineered it for his own purposes, entirely by himself.

In a much more thoughtful tale, "Mother Earth", Isaac Asimov postulates a galaxy inhabited by Superhumans of Earthly descent. Terra is now facing a population crisis and men are clamouring to emigrate to the Outer Worlds. The Superhumans object, a war is fought and Earth is defeated, thereafter being sealed off. We then learn that the war, which settled the whole crisis, was prompted and provoked by one man, Morano, a former Ambassador to the Outer Worlds. Morano believed that the

population was better served by men staying at home than by emigrating; and that the Superhumans, deprived of new blood from Earth, will degenerate in time and either perish or call for more emigration. Morano accomplishes all this without the help of even a secretary, and passes on his job to an equally solitary successor....

The belief that one man can move the Earth, all by himself, is a cherished American myth. It has its value, but it takes too little account of the individual's limitations.

Finally we have Jack Williamson's "Breakdown", which takes for its theme the fall of Empire. Civilization is ruled by a small clique of engineers, who have created it, and they domineer over the great mass of labourers who keep it going. A Preacher arises, there is a great rebellion, civilization is bombarded from outer space and finally, out of the ruins emerges the small group who have perfected the interstellar drive, using which they head off to the stars to start again. Events are narrated through the eyes of "Boss" Kellon, the official ruler, whose son invents the interstellar drive.

This picture of civilization has been painted many times before, and is of course completely antiquated. As seen from the present century, the future holds absolutely no prospects for any small privileged class to rule the world – such "classes" have been rising and falling for generations. Nor do the sciences offer any opportunities for the seizure of political power. The concentration needed for research work is a very different mental exercise from the negotiations agreements, resolutions and compromises of which commerce and politics are comprised.

One thing is certain about scientific research – it needs ever-increasing *numbers* of workers to maintain it, year after year, generation by generation; and the majority of these must necessarily be skilled labourers, educated and qualified. It follows that widespread education and skill must eliminate ruling minorities like those of olden times, when most men were ignorant. In short, now that the feared atomic war seems to be forestalled the future must see the spread of generally democratic rule for a long time to come.

The would-be prophet must base his calculations accordingly.

(1966)

## 22: Utopianism & Science Fiction

Recapitulating the argument that SF was too far away from the ordinary reader to appeal to his outlook or sympathies, I return to an old bone of contention that I began to worry in the immediate post-war, and the contention isn't over yet.

It's the intergalactic business, the excessive influence of E.E. Smith and the early Campbell, unwitting creators of space-opera. The spaceships go whizzing off at light-years per second, they scud around from galaxy to galaxy and back again, they drop a few names here and there – Aldebaran, for instance, or Andromeda – and to the general reader it doesn't mean a thing.

Because, after all, this galactic hullabaloo amounts to no more than phrase-playing and name-dropping. To say that our spaceonauts hop aboard their ship and hare off to Andromeda is no more impressive than if they took a bus to Shepherd's Bush. The sense of the real wonders of astronomy, the vast distances, the immense time-scale, the sense of infinity and eternity – all this is lost in flip chatter. For that matter, few SF writers seem to know any astronomy. They have heard of few stars besides Alpha Centauri, or the Great Nebula, and once our heroes have barged off in that direction, or an Entity has emerged from thence, we learn no more of other worlds. Despite all the movement of modern astronomy since Hoyle's *The Nature of the Universe* (1950) space-opera has remained in the rut where Skylark Smith shunted it with *Galactic Patrol* (1938). Not a single originator has emerged to guide it out again into the mainstream of science and public interest.

When at last I became a convert to SF I loved it for more than its spectacular thrills: I recognized in it a philosophy and a polity, and a unity of each which was, I felt, peculiarly my own.

I could find little or nothing of this outlook in the contemporary literature which I also read. Indeed, I could find little relationship to contemporary life in it, for that matter. Novelists of the time wrote mainly about decaying families and disgruntled individuals; the great developments in science, industry, technology and politics were either ignored or were abused in unthinking diatribes.

The writers, publishers and readers of SF have, for many years,

forged a society, a market and a world of their own. Their chief concerns in life are about work and careers. They give little serious attention to such things as social decay, fashion, anarchy or the well-advertised miseries of fallen parvenus. Their serious concern is with construction, and the constructive attitudes to human life. Decay and anarchy are things to be prevented, or cured where possible. In an outlook with constructive aims there is little room for pessimism, generally regarded as a sign of low morale and coming from weak moral fibre. Discoveries can only be made, after all, and inventions produced, by people who are hopeful of the outcome; not by people who sit and moan about their miseries. It follows therefore, that the fundamental outlook of SF is hopeful and optimistic. It does not think of human affairs in terms of social conflict, nor anticipate the downfall of rivals. It grants equality and dignity to all men, and the hope that all will benefit from the next step forward in human affairs.

The early SF fans, or at least the effective majority of them, were political utopians. They believed in policies of human betterment and international co-operation. They witnessed the rise and fell of the League of Nations, followed by its effective revival as the United Nations. They observed the collapse of all the foolish policies that had encouraged the Hitler dictatorship and led to the second world war, and had seen at least some of their ideals vindicated by events. It was this that saved them from being merely another generation of get-rich-quick parvenus. They were concerned for civilization, and for the values of civilization; they wanted a better world for their own children and grandchildren, which is why they found such ready allies among the later generations. Their social contacts and gatherings extended over the frontiers and established a new international fraternity – the beginnings of that “Brotherhood of Man” which so increasingly and cheerfully embraces the Sisterhood of Woman.

## 23: The Challenge of Darwin

The most surprising item in *The Coming of the Space Age*, a fine anthology edited by Arthur C. Clarke, is the article by Sam Moskowitz on “Religion and Science-fiction”. Having acknowledged that most SF writers are non-religious at the least, stopping short only at hostility openly expressed, the clergy have woken up to a “challenge” in the interplanetary venture and are now alert to the future. It is suggested they are all ready to take charge of astronautics and boost it as a vehicle of Christian belief.

There have been a few of these straws in the wind over here, suggesting that the parsons want to get in on the act now that interplanetary travel has commenced. So far these are not much more than straws. For the most part the Orthodox line, as expressed in the newspapers and on the B.B.C., is that Science is a menace to Society and that research will produce Horrors and Terrors.

Of course, it has always been clear to Those-who-Know that Science and Religion are irreconcilable. There is no squaring the fables of Genesis with Darwinian evolution, from which it followed that the Fall of Man was not an historical event but a myth born out of hate and fear; from which it followed that the theory of Original Sin had no foundation and that Salvationist religion had no purpose. This has been tacitly acknowledged for the past hundred years at least, which is why Church congregations have dwindled to minorities. There will be no reversal of this trend.

Nevertheless, on the public scene we are intended to accept that the Church is still the Establishment, and in charge of all things that matter. Certainly it has always had the Press in its pocket, and the B.B.C. has rarely been such more than a mouthpiece of Lambeth Palace. While this state of affairs continues, the interplanetary visionaries will always have an uphill struggle in this country at least.

Yet it remains to be seen if there is not one of them who can turn all these factors to advantage and reverse the whole trend. If he uses his wits aright, plays his cards with skill, one at a time, he may yet turn politics, religion, philosophy and literature in favour of the very things they are fighting against now. Many of our number have been doing all this, in a small way, for years. Where is the man who can do it on the grand scale, on the public scene, and rouse the nation?

The mercenary classes, like the aristocracies before them, placed firm reliance upon supernatural religion. They seemed to realize that physical

force alone could not make the workers work for them, even with the threat of starvation. Men have to be terrorized by fear of the unknown as well, before they are in the right frame of mind for exploitation. For this reason the Christian churches have always enjoyed the support of different upper classes ever since the reign of the Emperor Constantine.

The Victorian mercenaries, who were materialists to the core, were wholehearted supporters of the Church. Like all historical upper classes they believed those points of Christian teaching which flatter their vanity and offer the lovely illusion of eternal happiness after death – a belief which is their only concession to superstition. But, such was the ferocity of class struggle during the industrial revolution, when the paymasters were fighting to prevent the workers from uniting against them, the need for supernatural beliefs to reinforce physical authority was greater than ever.

Christian teaching takes its starting-point from the theory of “original sin”, and the original sin, in blunt definition, is sexual intercourse; for Christianity began its career as a protest against the horrible excesses of ancient phallic-worship. Since men can be created only by sexual intercourse, and by no other agency, it is argued that all men are born in “sin”, and therefore human nature is fundamentally evil. The sophistry is obvious to any thinking mind, but so is its political usefulness, which accounts for its prolonged success. The theory is accounted for by the legend of Adam and Eve, a story found in the Bible, which was written by the Jews, who picked it up from a tale they heard from the Babylonians, during their captivity.

Beginning from this theory, which they call a Doctrine, the Christians extrapolate from the story of the Messiah related in four vague and unreliable chronicles called the Gospels. This relates how a man who claimed to be the son of God came down to earth to save men from Sin, a job which could only be done by his own execution. After that his vociferous followers declared that men would be saved from God’s punishment (for sinning, i.e. for undergoing sexual intercourse) by accepting their authority. The truth or otherwise of the story is pure conjecture; historians have found no mention of it among Greek and Roman writings, though an event of such importance as the Christians claim would surely have been noticed.

The theory was universally accepted, if not universally believed, for 1859 years. Thereupon appeared another book, much more dramatic and convincing than any Gospel: *The Origin of Species* by one Charles Darwin.

Darwin the naturalist had spent many years of his life – he was then

aged fifty – studying animals, plants and fossils. Apparently Christian teaching made no impression on his mind, any more than it has upon his friend Sir Charles Lyell, the great geologist. Both believed, like many other men for years past, that the earth was vastly older than was stated in the Bible, and that it had been inhabited by beasts and men not for mere thousands of years but for millions. In his fascinating accounts of growth and change, accomplished by minute stages over long intervals, Darwin demonstrated that: 1. Adam and Eve never existed; 2. Original Sin was never committed, and therefore: 3. the “Fall” did not occur, and therefore: 4. the Gospel story is a pointless fable, and the Christian churches have no *raison d’etre*.

The Darwinian controversy was a public issue from 1859 till 1931, which years saw the decline and fall of mercenary society. Condemnation was as loud as recognition was wide. The mercenary classes to a man saw the political danger of Darwin’s theory, and fought against it with all their might until they understood the emotional force of that phrase “the survival of the fittest”. The next generation of mercenaries, who had benefited even more from scientific progress, promptly sprang upon it and pointed out that the profiteers were the rulers of society, and therefore that mercenary commerce was a phase in the evolutionary process of which the profiteers were patently “the fittest”.

Not all the mercenaries accepted this thesis, however. For one thing, though it flattered their vanity to be called the Fittest, just as they formerly called themselves the Elect of God, they had been robbed of their long-standing illusion of Heaven; and in the nineteenth century, when the irrational fear of death was still very strong among all classes, even the most brutalized mercenary needed supernatural comforting sometimes. “The survival of the fittest” had its vogue among the mercenary classes for a few decades, but the Profiteers scandal of the world war gave it a shaking, and when the great gambling-markets collapsed in 1929 even the most brass-faced mercenary lost the conviction of his own fitness.

The Christian Churches were placed in a situation of interesting and uncomfortable paradox during this century of revolution. As they were great social institutions with wealth, power and political influence in their favour, they were not to be overthrown in a century by one man’s theorizing. But Darwin’s proclamation was a shattering blow, and two more were to follow inside twenty years, one of them mortal. We shall deal with the second blow here.

On a series of evenings in the year 1877 the great astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli was studying the planet Mars – then in conjunction

with the Earth – from the observatory at Milan, of which he was director. Announcing his findings to the world, Schiaparelli said he had seen markings, which looked like channels, upon the surface of the planet. Mistranslation of a word marked an epoch in discovery that eclipsed Columbus. In Italian, the word “channels” is written canali. English translators mistook the word for “canals” and promptly the word flashed round the scientific quarters of Earth – canals had been discovered on Mars. The existence of canals assumed existence of their builders – ergo, Mars was inhabited by intelligent beings, and these beings, the Martians, were they men?

To this day, the controversy over habitation of Mars is unsolved. It is accepted that life, of a sort, may exist on the planet; the markings, which may or may not be channels or canals, are accepted as real markings and not as optical illusions. The riddle of Mars remains a riddle, and may do so until the interplanetary flyers of earth set foot on its surface.

The theory of the Martians received little notice from the Church, mainly because its hands were already full with Darwin, but in any case, Mars is a long way off and outside canonical jurisdiction. The implications, however, are plain enough. The Church was founded when man believed that the earth was the centre of the Universe and the sun revolved round it. Copernicus and Galileo had destroyed that belief, but even then, men could still believe that they were Lords of Creation, made in the image of God. With the realization that the other planets might be inhabited, by creatures that might not be men, an age-old superstition was exploded and the mysterious Universe took on an aspect undreamed-of in previous ages.

In the political world, the moral implications of Darwinism were recognized and accepted by the various bodies of Socialists who began to accumulate in the years following. This attitude has continued up to the present time, but the truth of the implications has been taken so much for granted that their moral force has been lost, and present-day socialists are often now wondering why their movement has apparently come to a standstill.

It was unfortunate that the leading intellectual figures of early socialism failed to make anything of Darwinian theory. Shaw, with his love of poses, adopted an anti-Darwinian line for the sake of fashionable controversy, and helped to confuse issues. Wells took Darwinism so entirely for granted that counter-arguments made no impression on him; his squabbles with the Catholics, and his attacks on them, showed little sign that he understood the fundamental disagreement; while Russell,

having little grasp of science anyway, developed a technique of casuistry that evaded moral arguments and prevented the solution of all problems whatever. Such is the state of intellectual chaos which the next pioneer must attempt to clear up.

Darwinism made necessary a revision of all moral philosophies that preceded it. Seen in the new light, their various contributions to human betterment could be valued at their proper worth, and fresh resolutions could be taken as guidance for the future. This was the point missed by the various fashionable leaders, Russell in particular. It was understood all too well by the leaders of the Church; who saw that Darwinism threatened the credibility of their own fundamental doctrines, and thereby their claim to authority. For this claim, in the upshot, was based on the story of Genesis, which declared that Man was a fallen animal who had once lived in a state akin to that of the angels. The Darwinian theory showed that this story was false; that, on the contrary, Man had once lived in a state akin to that of the brutes, and had risen by slow degrees to his present improved condition. In the century of bitter conflict that has followed, they have wound up by claiming that the conflict of religion and science has now ended. This is true to the extent that scientists are not trying to overthrow the Church as a social institution, and churchmen are no longer trying to obstruct scientific research; but the basic moral arguments on either side are irreconcilable, and must remain so.

## 24: James Bond Meets Mrs Dale

*Editor's note: Mrs Dale's Diary was the first significant BBC radio serial drama. It ran from January 1948 until April 1969.  
(Rob Hansen)*

An enthusiastic Sunday-paper critic has commented that science-fiction has restored Incident and Plot, two victims of the modern, sensitive, middle-class novel, and therefore he praises them. He opens up vistas of social science and history which I must examine....

The cultivated "middle-class" people who read sensitive novels are, we assume, the relicts of those wealthy tradesmen of yesterday who rather fancied themselves and Ladies and Gentlemen, the grocers and drapers and tailors and tobacconists of London's inner suburbs. Their lives, we must imagine, are pleasant, humdrum, uneventful, with moments of happiness and of agreeable sadness, concentrated upon the routine of home. Our Sunday-paper critic has analysed the portrayal of these peons in the novels of Virginia Woolf and, a little apologetically, drawn the parallel with the stories of Mrs. Miniver. He might well have gone farther, and touched bottom, by comparison with the diary of Mrs. Dale....

Let us have no illusions about the reality and the falsity of this middle-class life, led as it is by so many. For all their affectation of culture the ladies and gentlemen are only jumped-up tradesmen after all, and their chief aim in life is self-indulgent comfort. It produces a society of unmanly men and unfeminine women, whose emotions do not rise above bickering or soothing, who are infantile and senile both at once. The men are groomed and foddered and "mothered" for a while, after which they toddle off to their little jobs, like little boys to school, and the women heave a little sigh of relief and set about the all-important task of "playing house."

"The men exist solely as objects of feminine curiosity," comments one writer on Mrs. Dale. I think "feminine" rather overstates the case; these characters are not women talking about men, but little girls talking about their dolls. In all this middle-class utopia created by "sensitive" authors there is no trace of adult passion or emotion, only the solemnity of children playing at grown-ups – Barrie's generation, half a century later.

If this utopia were confined to its own section of society and did not obtrude itself we might take a charitable view of it – each to his taste, live and let live, and so on. Unfortunately it has produced a breed of

“sensitive” writers who have swarmed over modern literature like lice let loose, who have made their trivial egoism the measure of all things and have derided human virtues accordingly. In short, our Modern Sensitive Young Writers are Mummy’s Darlings who demand that literature shall glorify their own vanity and self-pity.

This is a natural state of affairs at a time when plutocracy as a political force has been outstripped by labour, and the poor old middle-classes find that they are really no better than the working-classes they despise. Why, then, should I comment on these unfortunates at this rather late date? Why not live and let live, under present-day circumstances?

But it was not so long ago that sensitive young writers were laying their nasty little hands upon our beloved science-fiction and, to give them their due, were asking questions that need to be answered and offering challenges that must be met. They still point out that Wells ended his days in a mood of pessimism, and claim that Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* portrays the logical end of scientific progress. As I have conclusive answers, I would take up those challenges with pleasure.

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This week has seen the appearance of yet another book about the egregious James Bond, the most famous and best advertised secret agent in fiction. I read my first two of them only recently, and was astonished at the anti-climax they provided after all the years of ballyhoo. I had hoped that they might offer a piece of fresh and genuine character-study, on the lines of Holmes and Drummond. Instead of this we get the silhouette of a commonplace kind of thug, who takes on dangerous jobs for the mere brute thrill of the thing, which is all the reader gets – or, for that matter, seems to want. To go on carping: the famous “licence to kill” doesn’t cut much ice either; before joining the Service, Bond had killed two men by chance, almost by accident, so he is already a double murderer and doesn’t need a licence to kill anyway. For Bond appears to have had no military or naval experience before this, any more than he had a home or family life (it is astonishing how authors of the World War generations have failed to use this experience in portraying their thug-heroes, who are usually old enough to have seen fighting service and learnt from it).

The set-up of the Agent, the Master and licence No.007 would suggest that the author had read Robert A. Heinlein’s *The Puppet Masters* to some purpose. This excellent SF thriller was published in 1950, three years before *Casino Royale*, and its protagonists are Sam the Agent, Mary, and the Old Man, whose private phone number is 0007. The Service in this tale is no end of a rough-house, and the personnel survive their

assignments by skin-of-teeth; nevertheless, a thread of honest human sympathy and compassion runs through it, and we know that the heroes are genuinely dedicated to the fight for humanity. In the Bond tales this is casually assumed, but it is not convincing. The trouble lies in the times wherein they were written, the real Cold War period, post-1950. The author must have supposed that the noisy anti-Russian effusions in the right-wing newspapers expressed an actual public sentiment. If so, he was mistaken as were the papers, for sound historical reasons.

In past ages the people of this country have had very serious quarrels with our French and Spanish neighbours. More recently we have clashed very badly with the Germans. At any suitable time an appeal to anti-foreign feeling was quite a legitimate way of reinforcing patriotic sentiment.

But one of the blunter facts of history is, that we have never, at any time, had a serious quarrel with the Russians. The Crimea War and the crisis of 1877-78 were mere flea-bites, and the Russians, in fact, have never done us any harm. Nor, for that matter, have the Chinese, also a remote and distant people whose relationships with Europe are of comparatively recent origin. As individuals we may speak of the Russians and Chinese in derogatory terms, if we don't like them; but we speak for ourselves alone – there is no feeling of widespread national resentment to appeal to. Hence, the Cold War was also a Phoney War.

Reverting to Bond, and the lack: the fellow has apparently had no family, no schooling or upbringing. Unlike Bulldog Drummond, he has no circle of pals from the old regiment or any other source – he is always the Lone Wolf of American fiction who turns up from nowhere and exists in his own right. In a recent story, I believe, there has been a marriage, cut short by murder. If this had happened before the first story was written it might have provided the man with some motivation a bit stronger than is the usual case, but it didn't, and so. In all the welter of fast cars, barking guns, swank restaurants and showing-off, torture, seduction and the rest of it, there is never a moment of home, friendship or relaxation to offer a relieving contrast.

Let us now cease carping and find a good word or two to say, preferably words which no-one else has said before. The Bond series began when the-so-called "Anti-Hero" type of novel was having its vogue. In each of these ephemerae the leading figure was a species of milksop, or Mother's Darling, or supposed victim of society. His characteristics were weakness, petulance and selfishness, often with dirty behaviour thrown in. Since novels about such creatures cannot possibly have much success with

the public they rarely ran into much more than one edition, but the spate of “new writers” who wanted to churn out such stuff was enormous. But a writer who could create a character with even a semblance of manhood, if not heroism, was bound to have a success against such a background. If Bond has had no family or upbringing, at least he has had an “upgrowing”. His courage, and even his somewhat exaggerated hardihood, have been developed by hard experience. He can make up his mind and reach quick decisions, like a man. He can suffer pain without crying, which is more than the anti-heroes can do. He has no grudge against society, and never whines about the Futility of War. The author may be little more than a successor to Peter Cheyney and James Hadley Chase, but the public that laps up the novels shows more discernment than we might think.

The lowest ebb, the nadir of anti-hero fiction, has been achieved in the Mrs. Dale series, previously mentioned. The people in this fantasy-world are not human beings but the theoretical products of upbringing, a Sunday school teacher’s idea of what well-brought-up people should be – not adults, but facsimiles of adults, like tailor’s dummies. By contrast, the Bond fantasies are much more in the dimensions of real life. In my wilder dreams I have sometimes imagined a screaming poster announcing “James Bond meets Mrs. Dale – in Head-on Collision!”

## 25: SF Fragments

### **Carnell and *New Worlds***

It is a standing complaint against the *New Worlds* team that their works are merely an imitation of the US pattern, without originality of their own. There is sufficient truth in the complaint to be a handicap to the team and to the literature, and it will need a very successful innovator to lead them out of the cul-de-sac.

It is a great misfortune that Ted Carnell and I should have differed so strongly in the early days, for it grows plainer and plainer that I was right and Ted in error. Nobody respects his achievement more than I do, but in his tastes he was obsessed with the “quickfire Yankee stuff” of the nineteen-thirties, and apparently he still is. The attitude can be summed up in his criticism of a tale by William F. Temple, which he rejected because it was “too much like the old *Strand* style of writing”. If there is one thing the reading public wants to see return today, it is precisely the *Strand* style.

(Undated)

*The Legion of Space* (1934 *Astounding*; book 1947): Jack Williamson

When I first read this tale many long years ago, I said to myself “This is hackwork – old Williamson is slipping.” On a second reading recently I still find it the old routine, but it is a much better story than I thought at first. Williamson’s gifts of fluent narrative, exciting incident and imaginative episode are all there, going strong, and the excitements of space-opera, however familiar and predictable, are always acceptable. Nevertheless...

John Star passes out of the military academy to take up his commission in the Legion of Space, and is immediately posted to the secret fortress on Mars holding the most important defence-secret in the solar system. The fortress appears to have a garrison of about six men, guarding the young woman who is the presiding genius of AKKA, the defence secret.

The solar system is governed by the Green Hall, a democratic republic, for which the Legion of Space is the defence force. The Head of the Legion, Adam Star (distant kinsman of young John) is also head of a despotic family which once ruled the system as an empire. He is now plotting to restore their rule after overthrowing the Green Hall. His nephew Eric, an explorer, has made up an alliance with the Medusae, an ultra-

galactic race of intelligent monsters; together they will fight for the Restoration.

John Star is opposed to them, and after the young woman has been kidnapped by the Medusae, he and three friends seize an intergalactic cruiser, the *Purple Dream*, and hare off into space to the rescue. Apparently this is John Star's first voyage under his own captaincy – perhaps even his first voyage....

It is improbabilities of this sort that I cannot swallow. I can take intergalactic flight and alien monsters, I welcome Aladoree Anther and the vital secret, I can understand a plot for a political coup d'etat – commonplaces of history. But I cannot swallow a young cadet taking command of a major secret, and leading a long and dangerous expedition into enemy territory, before he's done a day of regular routine service; nor believe in a major weapon hidden in a fort without a garrison; nor he and his three companions accepting each other on trust at first sight, and charging off on a major adventure without a question or any improved acquaintance.

In fact, despite some commendable attempts at individual characterizing, the four heroes remain little more than names; and, despite its own thrilling title, the Legion of Space is not much more than a name either. The Commander has no General Staff, no Headquarters, no garrisons and, apparently, has precious few personnel anyway. Needless to say, it has no history of victories and achievements, no famous names of men, ships or regiments, no traditions, no esprit-de-corps. But these are the commonplace weaknesses of all space-opera, and it remains a good, thrilling yarn for the idle hours.

(1964)

*The Naked Sun* (1957): Isaac Asimov

The inhabitants of Solaria are a snobbish lot, seventeen thousand fastidious individualists occupying an area larger than Earth and living in an advanced state of “keeping meself to meself”. Each in a prosperous landed estate, tended exhaustively by thousands of robots, each Solarian shuns the personal contact of his neighbours and converses by “viewing”, even to the point of a vicarious companionship. There is marriage, of a sort, but it is not thought decent to refer to children – indeed, such words as “love” and “affection” are considered most obscene. The Solarians claim to have modelled their society on that of ancient Sparta, with robots in place of helots, and their oh-so-pure lives are devoted every day to getting better and better.

Under such handicaps it is not surprising that they are somewhat flummoxed when a murder takes place in their midst. There are no police or lawyers on Solaria, since there has never been any need for them, so the Solarians swallow their overbearing pride and invite the primitive old planet Earth to send a detective to investigate. He turns out to be Elijah Baley, from *The Caves of Steel*, who goes to Solaria with reluctance. However, he tackles the job boldly, forces the haughty Solarians to accept his authority and finally unravels the plot behind the murder – incidentally recognizing the essential weaknesses of Solarian society in its basic assumptions, and why Earth will have nothing further to fear from Solaria.

(Undated)

*Starship Troopers* (1959): Robert A. Heinlein

“Come on, you Apes! You wanta live *forever*?”

The invitation quoted above, reputedly from “an unknown corporal, 1918” heads the first chapter of this narrative and aptly sums up the spirit and outlook of the corps of Mobile Infantry portrayed in this book. They are supposed to be the guardians of a civilization of five thousand years hence, and to turn each man into the Perfect Killing Machine (or “boys into men”, as the euphemism has it) he is submitted to an incessant routine of bullying, privation, humiliation and discouragement such as no other troops can have endured in any period of history. Nor do their sufferings relax when they are passed for service; not being required to know who, when, where or why they are fighting, they merely go wherever the government sends them and fight whoever is there, because they have to be fought. Guardians of civilization, not one of the Starship Troopers seems to have the remotest idea of what civilization is.

In short, this narrative is a symposium of all the old Army bull, carried to the Nth degree and void of that sense of comradeship in arms which is the valuable side of military life – this despite many a quotation from Kipling, who understood that comradeship so well. The life of the Starship Troopers would never turn them into good fighting men but into neurotic animals – “Much more likely to fight each other than to fight the enemy,” as another authority has said about another matter. No matter how we look at it, the Starship Troopers have much more in common with Hitler’s S.S. than with, for instance, Cromwell’s “Russet-coated captain who knows what he loves, and fights for what he knows.”

Not to end on a carping note – this horrible army is portrayed with a power, conviction, and realism that is altogether admirable. Recommended

to anyone who hasn't read too many Army books already, and can stomach another.

(Undated)

*Guardians of Time* (1960): Poul Anderson

“If I went back to, say, the Middle Ages, and shot one of FDR's Dutch forebears, he'd still be born in the late nineteenth century – because he and his genes resulted from the entire world of his ancestors, and there'd have been compensation. But every so often a really key event does occur. Some one happening is a nexus for so many world lines that its outcome is decisive for the whole future.”

Time-travel is discovered in A.D. 19352 and its discoverers set up the Time Patrol, whose members roam up and down the aeons to ensure that the historical continuum is maintained and that no fanatic attempts to interfere with the key events and the course of history. The Patrolmen can visit any era they choose, or to which they are assigned for investigation, and can there live an active life for as long as need be. Holidays in chosen eras are also possible.

Manson Emmert Everard, former US Army Engineer, joins the Time Patrol on A.D.1954, and four of his assignments are the subject of this book. The first one takes him back to Victorian London of 1894 to solve a murder mystery out in Kent, which takes him on a further time-journey to the days of Hengist and Vortigern. Another takes him to ancient Persia, before the wars with Greece, to find a missing friend who, it transpires, has found himself a good position there, from which he cannot be removed without disrupting the course of history. A third trip takes him to mediaeval China, where an attempt at interference has to be thwarted.

On the final trip Everard and a colleague find a world in which the continuum has been really disrupted and the world is in confusion, to resolve which the Patrolmen have to return to the Second Punic War, to intervene in the battles of Hannibal and Scipio. These ingenious tales are told in a style that races along like a mountain stream, sparkling with many a flash of wit.

(Undated)

### **Fact & Fiction**

In 1950 came Arthur C. Clarke's first book, the brief technical monograph *Interplanetary Flight*. Then in 1951 came his breakthrough, the magnificent success of *The Exploration of Space*, from which sprang his career as globe-trotter, undersea explorer and inspired writer of fact

and fiction. He was one of the first theorists, if not the very first, to see the curious analogy between exploration underseas and in outer space: both of them being airless regions.

A second best-selling book of that year, 1951, was John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*. We at the White Horse knew that "John Wyndham" was our old friend and idol John Beynon Harris, who had written so many fine things for the Gernsback magazines and others. For John this book marked the beginning of a new and distinguished career as a novelist, which only ended with his untimely death in 1969. Not many of us had known him well, for he was shy, reserved, and we saw him seldom. But, unlike so many men of this type, he was not in the least unsociable – he was always good company and it was always a pleasure to meet him.

It has been said that science-fiction is now obsolete, since science-fact has caught up with it. So far as flights to the moon are concerned, science-fact has only caught up with the Science-fiction of one hundred years ago. When it comes to building space-stations and satellites, science-fact is only beginning to catch up with the science-fiction of forty years ago, and it will take much more than a century to catch up with science-fiction concepts that have been mooted since. That is the great thing about science-fiction: since it is always looking ahead it can never be out of date.

This is the summer of the first European Space Conference, at Brussels in July. Many science-fiction lovers would like to see their own countries involved in the space venture, and their views are being aired at the Science-fiction World Convention at Heidelberg in August. It is very likely that the Russian and American governments, whose space-men have reached the first great landmarks and secured their national prestige, would be glad to see other nations doing their share of the work and paying their whack of the costs.

(1970)

## 26: Published Reviews 1938-1969

### A Forgotten Scientifilm

We are approaching the fateful year 1940, and now that the film industry is going to the dogs and exhibitors are falling back on revivals it is high time that science-fiction fans campaigned for a revival of one of the best and least appreciated films ever made.

This is *High Treason*, the 1940 epic of 1930 [actually 1929], and a genuine, 100 per cent. drama of the future. It was the second British-made talking-film and the first large-scale spectacle in sound made in any country. Its scope was not quite equal to that of *Things to Come*; nevertheless it would be an astonishing achievement even today.

The story was a very strong one, based on 1930 topicalities that are still vitally important, despite the changed aspect of the world. Tension exists between the United States of Europe (dream of the late M. Briand, then living) and America on the Canadian frontier and elsewhere. It is fostered by a stop-at-nothing gang of anarchists, controlled and financed by arms-magnates. The Council of Nations wavers. The President of the League of Peace and his beautiful daughter strive to avert the threatened war, and the heroine finds herself in conflict with the opinions of her own fiancé, a Major in the Air Navy.

The excitements promised by such situations are obvious, and the producers gave them to us in full measure. They pictured the World of 1940 as one of gigantic buildings, large-scale television, high-speed motoring, flying with gigantic aerodromes (on which were staged some wonderful crowd scenes), the Channel Tunnel and superpowered armaments.

In this respect the film was criticized, and rightly, as time has shown, for being too much in advance for 1940. 1980 or so would have been a better date, but in so good a film it is a small point.

Through all this exciting spectacle there ran such drama-packed scenes as frontier gunfights, great air-raids, the mining of the Channel Tunnel, the panic of mass mobilization, a dramatic assassination seen over television by the whole world, and the subsequent trial to bring the story to its powerful climax.

It seems amazing that so ambitious a film could have been made in

those early days of sound, and almost incredible that it should have been forgotten so quickly. Yet fanmag critics hardly ever mention it, let alone describe and criticize it. Maybe the movement was too small and scattered in those days to give it much notice.

No film from America ever equalled it. There was a footling comedy called *Just Imagine*, current about a year later, and M.G.M. made a weak echo of *High Treason* about four years back entitled *Men Must Fight*.

*High Treason* was much more credible and intelligent than *King Kong* or *The Invisible Man*. It was more coherent and dramatic than *The Tunnel* and *F.P.1.* made by the same firm a few years later. Even the never-to-be-forgotten *Things to Come* did not have the same quality of human interest.

All in all, the first talking scientifilm was a splendid achievement and deserves much more attention than it has received.

Exhibitors are giving *Things to Come* another run, cashing in on A.R.P. topicality. In a year's time the older epic will have considerable topicality and curiosity interest. What about shouting for it, fans?

(1938)

*The Fox Woman* by A. Merritt and *The Blue Pagoda* by Hannes Bok. New Collector's Group, New York. \$3.00.

Though this new Merritt novel appears four years after his death, he began writing it as long ago as 1923. Dissatisfied with various aspects of the narrative, he abandoned it for completion later. But his busy life as a journalist gave him little time for creative work, and at his death a manuscript of only the first four chapters was left, along with notes for the remainder. From this difficult start Hannes Bok has made a bold and, on the whole, successful attempt to finish the story.

Abraham Merritt was one of the most popular among the great fantasy authors of 20-30 years ago. Born in Pennsylvania, he was originally intended for the law, but newspapers claimed him and he remained with them for most of his life. Travel was his passion, and with it archaeology, folklore, astronomy, botany (one corner of his garden at home was devoted to exotic drug-producing plants), anthropology, magic and witchcraft – all subjects to stimulate a vivid imagination. He loved the ruined temples of Central and South America, where he wandered often and listened keenly to tales recounted by the Indians. Lost civilizations and little-known peoples, haunted by evanescent monsters, coloured his thought and inevitably became the material of his stories.

Most of his eight published novels are very much in the vein of Rider

Haggard, with a touch of the early, prose-poetic, time-machine-creating Wells.\* Lone explorers discover an unknown and fantastic civilization in some remote corner of the earth, invariably ruled by a beautiful woman of supernatural origin (the Snake Mother, Norhala of *The Metal Monster*, or in this case the Fox Woman), who conjures up unheard-of powers to oppose the schemes of the villain. Simple romantic adventures, relying on fantastic concepts and narrative strength for their effect, they are marred by a somewhat over-florid style and an excess of picturesque epithet, matched only by the extravagant praises lavished on them by his ecstatic readers.

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\* These, in order of their original appearance in the American *Argosy*, are *The Moon Pool* (1918), *The Metal Monster* ('20), *The Face in the Abyss* ('23), *The Ship of Ishtar* ('24), *Seven Footprints to Satan* ('27), *Dwellers in the Mirage* ('32), *Burn, Witch, Burn!* ('32), and *Creep, Shadow, Creep!* ('34). With the exception of *The Metal Monster*, all have appeared in book form, the last three also being published in England. All, too, have since been reprinted in various magazines, and more recently in the "Murder Mystery Monthly" pocket-book series of the Avon Book Co., New York.

Yet, in his own vein, Merritt was a sound and able writer.

Few of his admirers can have shown so much devotion as Hannes Bok, of whom it is said that once, as a boy, he copied out the whole of *The Metal Monster* in longhand, this being the only way he could then possess a copy. He has since acquired a complete collection of Merritt's published works, and has now fulfilled a long-standing ambition to illustrate one of them; an appropriate ambition, for Mr. Bok must be one of the finest fantasy artists since the days of Sidney Sime, and he is as right for Merritt as Sime was for Dunsany. Being also a proven author, he was perhaps the only man capable of finishing *The Fox Woman* as Merritt might have intended.

The story tells of one Jean Meredith, wife of an elderly explorer, who when the story opens is being pursued by bandits in a remote province of China. The bandits have murdered her husband Martin at the instigation of his brother Charles, who is greedy for his fortune. Sobbing for vengeance, Jean finds sanctuary in the Temple of the Foxes, ruled by her husband's wise old friend Yu Ch'ien, priest of the fox cult, and the mysterious Fox Woman, who takes spiritual possession of Jean – and also of her daughter, in giving birth to whom Jean dies. The daughter grows up part Occidental, part Oriental fox woman, to achieve the vengeance desired by her mother.

Merritt's own narrative concludes shortly after the birth of the child.

In the second part, entitled *The Blue Pagoda*, Bok takes up the thread at a point eighteen years later as the girl comes from China to America to see the wicked uncle. He has done his creditable best to write in the Merritt fashion, though his own style is brisker, more “modern” and less graceful than Merritt’s; and he has packed the story with fantastic invention and hectic incident in a manner that should satisfy every follower of the Merritt tradition.

This first production of the New Collector’s Group is a large, slim volume with a black binding, gilt cover-lettering and six full-page Bok illustrations. Its general appearance is something like that of an old-time magazine, an illusion that is oddly heightened by the double-column printing. The edition is limited to 1,000 numbered copies, which immediately on release acquired considerable collector-value.

(1947)

*The Forbidden Garden* by John Taine. Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa. \$3.00.

As most fantasy readers well know, John Taine is not only one of the best novelists the field possesses but an eminent scientist and writer of more serious books on mathematics. A new Taine novel is an event, for he is not a prolific writer; though this is his thirteenth published work of this sort. All his stories are, however, in the tradition of the best scientific romance and acceptable to all who can appreciate Wells or Stapledon.

Born in Scotland in 1883, Eric Temple Bell (his real name, under which he publishes his non-fiction books) went to the U.S.A, in 1902. Graduating from Stanford University, he took his Master’s degree at the University of Washington, and his doctor’s degree in mathematics at Columbia University. Since ’26 he has been Professor of Mathematics at the California Institute of Technology, devoting his time to teaching and research, to the writing of technical and not-so-technical works on his beloved mathematics and, as a hobby, to science fiction. Not being mathematically-inclined, we can imagine that the writing of those fascinating pieces he has given to fantastic literature, and which we hope he will continue to add to, must have come as a relief after the production of such volumes as *The Cyclotomic Quinary Quintic*, or even *The Magic of Numbers*.

Though his has been the peaceful if active life of a varsity professor, Dr. Bell prefers the wildest, most inaccessible parts of the earth as the settings of his novels. His first, *The Purple Sapphire*, published in 1924, had its scene in Tibet; *The Greatest Adventure* (’29) unearthed a race of dinosaurs in the Antarctic; *The Iron Star* (’30) tells of a search of darkest

Africa for the source of a mysterious reversal of evolution; and *The Forbidden Garden* lies somewhere on the borders of India, China and Tibet.\*

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\* His other novels published in book form are *Quayle's Invention* ('27), *The Gold Tooth* ('27), *Green Fire* ('28), *Before the Dawn* ('34) and *The Time Stream* ('46). Novel-length stories presented only in magazines are *White Lily* (*Amazing Stories Quarterly*), *Seeds of Life* (*Amazing Quarterly*), *Twelve Eighty-Seven* (*Astounding*), and *Tomorrow* (*Marvel Science Stories*).

In this, the first new story we have had from him since '39, his grasp of a dozen sciences, his forceful narrative ability and his capacity to evoke wonder are all evident as before. But there is, unfortunately, not quite so much of the plausibility which in most of his earlier work makes even his loftiest imaginative flights thoroughly convincing. His theme is, indeed, so enthralling that it is unforgivable to any but his most ardent admirers that he should have wound up his mysteries in a flurry of minor improbabilities in the last chapter of what otherwise might have been a first-rate story.

In the general atmosphere of mystery, suspicious people with peculiar ambitions are surrounded by a network of spying, intrigue and treacherous in tent, while everyone's motives are ulterior and even their identities uncertain, though no actual crime is committed or appears to be contemplated. The great London seed firm of Brassey House offers a big reward to two American explorer-geologists if they will bring back a shovelful of soil from a remote part of Asia. Courteously but evasively, Brassey avoids telling exactly why he needs the soil, though it has something to do with a rare delphinium.

In Bombay, the two explorers meet the firm's agent – the beautiful heroine – who is to give them their sealed orders, but not until all three of them are well advanced into the high Himalayas, supposedly remote from spies who have plagued Brassey House for thirteen years – an exceptional period if only commercial rivalry is at work. But mystery and misadventure follow the searchers across the roof of the world into the forbidden garden itself, to work out a theme in which hereditary insanity and radioactivity combine with an interstellar visitant, black ice and other Tainean phenomena which do not lose their interest in spite of the unsatisfying ending.

Fantasy Press have done another excellent job of production, and the illustrations of A.J. Donnell are a valuable adornment.

(1947)

## About Books

The amount of fantasy emerging from British presses these days is probably as great as it ever was before the war; a significant fact in view of the paper shortage and other hold-ups in production. If you include books which, while not exactly the sort of thing we like to get our teeth into, are nevertheless of some relation to our particular interests, diligent searching will bring to light enough reading to keep you occupied while waiting for more completely satisfying volumes to arrive, either direct from the fountain head of fantasy or from British publishing houses who are reprinting some which have already appeared in America.

Such, for instance, as Gerald (H.F.) Heard's *The Great Fog and Other Weird Tales*, which comes from Cassell at 8/6. This is, with the exception of one of its nine pieces, the same volume as appeared last year from Sun Dial, New York, under the title *Weird Tales of Terror and Detection*, this being a reprint of the original edition published in '44 by Vanguard. Mr. Heard, whose novel *Doppelgangers* (reviewed in the June-July issue) is also to be published on this side, has been widely acclaimed for his work in the fantasy field, and in *The Great Fog* you will find more of scientific than supernatural interest.

There are some choice pieces of fantasy, too, in *Sealskin Trousers*, a collection of stories by Eric Linklater (Hart-Davis, 8/6). These include the title story; as a change from plays and films about mermaids, Mr. Linklater gives us the tale of a merman and his capacity for getting people drowned of their own free will.

Incidentally, I noticed that *Chinese Ghost and Love Stories*, already mentioned in these pages, gives an insight into the cult of the Fox-Women which is the theme of the posthumous Merritt novel I reviewed in the last issue. These delightful pieces, which have also been published in an American edition, are translated by Rose Quong from a selection of ancient tales collected from all over China in the 17th century. The volume comes from Dobson, who have also published Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, an imaginative study of the German fantasy film illustrated with 64 stills which revive our memories of *Metropolis* and *The Girl in the Moon*.

*Back to the Future*, by Meaburn Staniland (Vane, 8/6), is a new satire set in several periods during the next century, and although the author attempts the ticklish task of political prediction it is described as "a riot of fun". A different type of volume is *Evidence Before Gabriel* (Aldor, 9/6), the first novel of London writer Conrad Frost, whom the publishers cheerfully describe as having "a Wellsian imagination and a pen worthy of

a Maugham or Hemingway”.

*The Three Tiers of Fantasy*, by Norman Berrow (Ward, Lock: 8/6), while having a strong fantastic slant, is only irritating to such as us since it explains it all away in the end, leaving it just an ordinary thriller. Of scarcely more interest, perhaps, is *The Private Memories and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, by James Hogg (Cresset, 8/6), which is a tale of a deal with the Devil originally published in 1824. I mention it only because its title mystified an earlier writer of this column when it was announced as due to appear in the Gollancz “Library of Strange Fiction” series. Unless, of course, you have a taste for these old-timers.

In which case you may have observed that Home and van Thal have reissued, at 8/6, *A Strange Adventure in the Life of Miss Laura Mildmay*, by Sheridan LeFanu, whose novel, *Uncle Silas*, is the basis of a new British film. Or you may have heard *Miss Mildmay* being reviewed in the *Books and Authors* programme of the B.B.C., in which the life and work of England’s pioneer of the supernatural story was the subject of some discussion. Fans of *The Man in Black* should also make a note of the fact that a collection of tales by Poe, Bierce, Jacobs and others, which have been broadcast in the *Appointment with Fear* series, has been published under that title by Flatteau at 2/-.

A non-fiction book with a *Last and First Men* aspect is *Mankind So Far*, by William Howells (Sigma, 16/-), which presents an account of evolution up to date and finally takes a speculative look at man as he may develop during the next million years. Some, too, may find the popular prophetic interest of Professor A.M. Low’s latest, *Your World Tomorrow* (Hutchinson, 16/-), worthy of their attention. Personally, I find *Future*, which started life as a book and is now a news magazine, a guide to current events and things to come which lives up to its title, and is worth every penny of 6/- per issue.

Among latest additions to the transatlantic stream are John W. Campbell’s *The Mightiest Machine*, which is now available from Hadley, Rhode Island, and *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature*, the first complete bibliography of fantasy, which Shasta of Chicago have provided. Of other American volumes in preparation we shall have more to tell in the next issue.

(1947)

### **Prophecies in Celluloid**

*From Caligari to Hitler* by Siegfried Kracauer. Princeton University Press, \$5.00.

Few followers of science-fantasy are unfamiliar with the theme that their favourite literature forms, as it were, a body of modern mythology, with its superhuman heroes and its sagas of the future. Those of us who have been devotees since pre-war days are also familiar at least with the titles of the many films which have presented in celluloid the sort of imaginative excesses our science-fiction writers so often indulge in; particularly the old German silent films, such as *Metropolis* and *The Girl in the Moon*. Those who did not actually see them will have heard of them, as unforgettable experiences in the life of every true fantasy fan.

It is interesting, now, to find Dr. Siegfried Kracauer, a former editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, regarding these films as representing a cinematic brand of prophetic mythology, which he does in a fascinating survey of the German cinema in its heyday. From 1913, dawn of the first Great War, until '33 when the Hitler regime began, the German film formed a powerful mythos drawn from the very subconscious of its people, expressing their hopes, fears, visions, ambitions, despairs and desires over the fluctuating history of twenty years. That, at any rate, is his theory, and he produces an impressive weight of evidence to support it.

Dr. Kracauer has been an American citizen for some years, but he is German-born; he was a newspaper editor and art reviewer throughout the period he describes, and appears to have seen almost every German film ever made. He analyses about a hundred films, many of them internationally famous, in minute detail, dealing with their plots, their characters, their psychological and sociological implications.

His chief thesis is this: that after 1920, when the post-war world took shape in Germany and film-making got into its stride, the various film makers, who were serious artists drawing their material from contemporary life, envisioned the world as a helpless thing threatened by an insane tyranny on one hand and wild chaos on the other. The people were undecided either way; they were fascinated by visions of both tyranny and chaos, and in moods of fear they turned to whimsical day-dreams. Screen dramas prophesied the coming of some insane tyrant who would dominate the world with fear before plunging it into a final doom. The prophesies piled up, until with the advent of Hitler the monstrous villains of the early silent films – the Caligaris and Mabuses, the Golems and the rest – stepped right out of the screen and walked about the world in real life, committing hideous crimes in actuality.

When people and artists are in such a condition of mind, it is inevitable that fantasy becomes the staple diet of drama. This state of affairs was foreseen back in the comparatively stable reign of the Kaiser.

The first German film of real importance was Paul Wegener's *The Student of Prague*, made as long ago as 1913. It was re-made ten years later, and the original film is lost. It is the story of a student who makes a pact with a sorcerer for immense wealth and a titled wife in return for – his reflection in the mirror. On signing the compact, the reflection steps out of the mirror and becomes an independent creature. The man gets his wealth and wife, but the reflection kicks up hell's delight in the usual Jekyll-and-Hyde fashion, until in the end he stands before the mirror and puts a bullet through the reflection, so killing himself.

A second film by Wegener was *The Golem*, first made in '15. This monster is a clay statue brought to life by a magic sign, and it is a perfectly good, obedient robot until, as you might expect, it falls in love with the master's daughter. Everyone is horrified, not least the Golem itself, realizing it is of monstrous origin: and so it runs amok, as monsters always do.

A more ambitious melodrama, almost unknown to the English filmgoer, was *Homunculus*, a thriller-serial which was very successful in Germany during the first war. As the title suggests, it is a Frankenstein story of a man from the test-tube: a handsome and brilliantly intelligent creature. But, like the Golem, he has trouble with women – and runs amok. He then wanders the earth like an outcast, though often received in society with delight -until people hear he is Homunculus, the man without a soul. In a distant country he becomes a dictator; in secret, he rouses the masses in rebellion against himself, whereupon he crushes them with ruthless cruelty. Finally he wanders up a mountain in the midst of a storm, and is finished off by a thunderbolt.

In '20 came the famous *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, tale of a fairground hypnotist who keeps a performing somnambulist in a coffin, sending him out on murder frolics at dead of night. The film was made memorable by the bizarre “expressionistic” settings then fashionable in contemporary art. (Expressionism itself, says Dr. Kracauer, was an aspect of prophecy.) The film still exists, and is frequently revived by film societies.

Many films after this followed a crypto-fantasy pattern, but it was not until '27 that a piece of genuine futuristic prophecy appeared – the celebrated *Metropolis*. Adapted by Fritz Lang from the novelette by his wife, Thea von Harbou, it tells of one Freder, son of the tyrannical capitalist who rules Metropolis – a soaring city that Lang conceived when he first glimpsed the rising, expanding New York of Calvin Coolidge and his “prosperity”. Freder joins the workers who slave in the city's bowels, and falls in love with the girl preacher Maria who consoles them in their

misery. The mystic theme in the story, that the heart must be the mediator between brain and hand, appears to Dr. Kracauer to have proved useful for Josef Goebbels a few years later.

*The Girl in the Moon* was another Lang-von Harbou collaboration. Made with the help of the German rocket societies of the time, it was a genuine attempt to construct this kind of story, though “the lunar landscape smelled distinctly of Ufa’s Neubabelsberg studios”. The film was shown for about one week in London in ’29, before it was submerged by the talkies. A great pity, for it is the only real interplanetary film yet made.

Contemporary with it was another Homunculus film, *Alraune*, being a woman concocted in a test-tube. Daughter of a hanged criminal and a prostitute, she turns out a fascinating super vamp who ruins everybody she meets, finally killing herself off. It was shorter than the earlier film and less spectacular.

Probably much better than any of these films was *Secrets of the Soul*, a psychiatric drama, made ten or fifteen years before the boom in this kind of thing set in. It opened with a shot of Professor Freud in his study, benignly nodding his approval of the film. A man suffers a sudden shock which gives him an inexplicable fear of knives, razors and other lethal ironmongery. He has curious nightmares which show him climbing ladders in empty space and falling off invisible precipices into bottomless depths. There is also an urge to murder his loved and loving wife. A psychoanalytical cure is neatly effected, and everything ends normally and happily. This great film also has been completely lost, and there seem to be few people beside myself who remember seeing it.

Dr. Kracauer makes no mention of *F.P.1*, a fine flying film dealing with a floating aerodrome in mid-Atlantic. It was adapted from the novel by Kurt (Robert) Siodmak, and an English version was made with German collaboration. This was in ’32, just before the Hitler regime commenced. About the same time there were still-pictures in English film magazines of an interesting piece called *Gold*, dealing with artificial manufacture of the metal; but the film, if completed at all, was never shown in Britain.

All this is the barest outline of the amazing story Dr. Kracauer presents, which must appeal to all students of the fantasy medium, and which is all the more astounding for its being true and historic.

(1948)

*The Princess of the Atom* by Ray Cummings. T.V. Boardman & Co. Ltd., London. 191 pp. 8/6.

There have been many fascinating stories of journeys into the

smallness of atom worlds – indeed, one theory is that we ourselves live out our time upon an atom world of an infinitely larger Cosmos. Ray Cummings’s story is as exciting and adventurous as any yet written. It tells of Dianne, a princess of an atom world who is left as a baby in our own world, to escape the machinations of Togaro, who plans to rule the Universe.

How she returns to her own atom world, and with the help of two Earthmen who go into the infinite with her, outwits him, saves her own world, and returns to ours, makes a story in the best traditions of Burroughs and other writers who can hold their audience by the sheer will-power of story telling.

Cummings, now in his seventies, was at one time secretary to Thomas Edison. He has been a prolific writer for over thirty years, a favourite theme of his being micro- and macro-cosmic stories. *Princess of the Atom* is the third of a trilogy (a separate story in itself), of which *The Girl in the Golden Atom* and *People of the Atom* were predecessors.

(1951)

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick. Rapp and Whiting, London, 21s.

No, they don’t, the brutes – they only care for their own preservation and think nothing of living creatures. This is unpleasant for what remains of the civilized world in 1992, after the last World War and the radioactive dust which has killed off most of the animal life, birds, insects and all.

Real, live animals are now highly prized and their owners enjoy the highest social status. Even artificial creatures, electrically driven, fetch high prices the among less privileged majority.

As if it were not hard enough to maintain a civilized existence, humanity must also cope with the androids, who suffer feelings of resentment and inferiority towards the world of organic life. It is difficult to tell an android from a human being, but because they are destructive they must be hunted down and “retired” by the special corps of bounty hunters.

Hence the marathon task of Rick Deckard, bounty-hunting expert, who is assigned to trace, identify and kill off six androids in one day, at peril to his career, marriage and life....

So once again we encounter our old friends, the Hostile Aliens in Our Midst. We meet them against a background of relentless struggle for survival, amid a decaying society whose values are subtly attacked by Buster Friendly, the television clown, and bravely upheld by Wilbur

Mercer, the television preacher: the whole thing portrayed with the author's characteristic precision and wry humour.

(1969)

*Seahorse in the Sky*, by Edmund Cooper. Hodder & Stoughton, London, 21s.

Sixteen passengers in flight from Stockholm to London suddenly find themselves marooned in a wilderness. Their aircraft having vanished. Russell Grahame, a failed MP who had been planning to apply for the Hundreds, now finds himself naturally taking charge of the party, who are of mixed nationalities.

Their situation is relieved by the surprising presence of a hotel and a store, both of them uninhabited but well stocked with goods. When the travellers discover that the stores they use and the things they eat are being replenished nightly, they surmise that their misadventure is the result of a kidnapping, rather than an accident....

Explorers are sent out to survey the new world, and find it inhabited by other strange humanity: there are medieval knights riding around in full armour in one place, and a colony of Stone Age axe-wielders in another. But the first clue to the kidnappers, and to the ultimate reason for the abduction, comes when someone sees creatures like angels in the sky....

The ingredients of this narrative are fairly familiar, but the author has mixed them with skill and told his tale in a refreshingly fluent style.

(1969)

*A Very Private Life*, by Michael Frayn. Collins, London, 21s.

The gently subtle humour of the journalist and TV commentator has been employed to good effect in this, his first piece of sf. It is the tale of Uncumber, a child born into a world of the future where all the best people live in wee homes of their own, as sternly individualistic as the inhabitants of Solaria in *The Naked Sun* of Asimov.

Each individual is cleansed, foddered and watered by electronic circuits and carefully protected from the dirty, smelly, common world outside. Their exterior lives depend on the Hologvision, through which they keep in touch with one another and learn enough of the real world as is good for them, and no more.

Of course, it can't last. One day when she is growing up, Uncumber encounters her destined lover-boy on the hologvision and cannot rest until she has met him. Her break-out from home, her adventures on the way there and back again, are all diverting. Much less sinister than the Asimov

vision, the narrative has some of the artful innocence of *The Young Visitors* and is no less amusing.

Let's hope Mr. Frayn can do it again. Though his ideas may not be very original, his lighter approach comes as a refreshing change from the style of so many American writers whose work we still import in such quantities.

(1969)

*The Still, Small Voice of Trumpets*, by Lloyd Biggle Jr. Rapp & Whiting, London, 21s; Doubleday, New York, \$4.50.

Jeff Forzon, Cultural Survey Officer, has an assignment as tricky as any James Bond ever had. He is sent to investigate affairs in the land of Kurr on the hostile planet Gurnil, which the Interplanetary Relations Bureau has failed to pacify despite four hundred years of effort.

The Kurrians are a simple, pastoral people imbued with a passion for the arts. Poets, painters, musicians, singers – all are highly honoured in their society: and so long as this love of the artistic is satisfied they are indifferent to official cruelties.

Forzon finds he must overthrow a tyrannical regime while still observing the rigid principle of the Bureau: "Democracy imposed from without is the severest form of tyranny." His only solution to the problem is to enlist the people's aesthetic passions in his service. How he achieves this in spite of a succession of obstacles is told in crisp narrative which, coupled with the portrayal of a strange civilization, makes compelling reading.

(1969)

# 27: The High-Flier That Flopped

## The sad tale of *Air Wonder Stories*

“FUTURE FLYING FICTION” was the slogan submitted by the late John Wyndham, a name he had yet to dream up when he entered the contest run by *Air Wonder Stories* early in 1930. Among a reported total of 3,860 entries, it proved a \$100 winner – “the easiest money I ever earned”, he confessed subsequently.

With his entry John B. Harris, of Tavistock Square, London, who had worked as an advertising man, sent a brief sales letter extolling the merits of his slogan: “...short, sharp and distinctive... It is self-explanatory and should catch the eye... The three Fs also have an alliterative value...”

But the \$100 proved an expensive item for magazine publisher Hugo Gernsback: for by the time the contest was judged *Air Wonder Stories* had been dead nearly six months. Taking off in July 1929, it flew erratically until April 1931 before being merged with *Science Wonder Stories* to make *Wonder Stories*, “The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction”.

Nobody mourned its passing, except perhaps Gernsback, who by then was used to the ups and downs which dogged his career as a publisher. He had parted company with his brainchild, *Amazing Stories*, to start a new company and launch *Science Wonder*, closely followed by *Air Wonder*, which in turn was followed by *Scientific Detective Monthly*. That, too, soon folded.

These were difficult days, and the wonder was that Gernsback had the nerve to initiate untried ideas at a time when the Depression loomed over American big business. But they were days of startling enterprise in several fields: not least in the air, where things were as risky as they were on Wall Street.

After the feat by Alcock and Brown in 1919, no pilot had crossed the Atlantic with a heavier-than-air craft until Lindbergh’s spectacular flight of 1927. Several other flyers were lost in the attempt: the only successes were by airships.

Lindbergh’s flight had little importance, but his spirited effort had a stimulating effect on American aviation, which had lagged behind European achievement. On a wave of enthusiasm, American airlines began to extend throughout the continent.

Gernsback's editorials reflected the prevailing mood. "The Airplane of the Future... Airship vs. Airplane... One Thousand Miles an Hour..." An advertisement proclaimed:

*Air Wonder Stories* has been created to explore the path of aviation and see whither it is bound. Progress in any line of endeavour is impossible unless we can project ourselves into the future.

*Air Wonder Stories* contains only fiction... designed to stimulate the reader and, incidentally, the inventor. You will not find... the usual... air bandits or wartime exploits, but... stories by the foremost authors who apply their scientific training to... the great mysterious future of aviation.

Unluckily, the blurb did not justify itself. Too many of the magazine's contributors lacked literary training, and air- and space- bandits forced their way in. The best stories had seen print before. One was Victor McClure's *The Ark of the Covenant*.<sup>\*</sup> It tells of a series of bank raids by bandits equipped with a fast airship and an anaesthetic gas. After many exciting encounters, they are finally revealed as a group of philanthropists, the League of the Covenant, bent on imposing peace on the world's governments.

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<sup>\*</sup> First published by Harper in 1924, it also appeared under the title *Ultimatum* and was broadcast by the BBC in 1929.

Another revival was George Allan England's *The Flying Legion*,<sup>\*</sup> in which ex-officers bored with peacetime life purloin a new air-liner from its hangar, cross the Atlantic and North Africa in a single hop, and find excitement in central Arabia. Both these tales, presented as serials, helped to provide useful cargo.

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<sup>\*</sup> Originally serialized in *All-Story Weekly* in 1919, and published by McClurg, Chicago, in 1920.

A fresher, more imaginative approach was given by Edmond Hamilton's "Cities in the Air", which looked into the far future. Gravity has been nullified, and the world's cities are built, like Swift's Laputa, on great anti-gravity shields, to float in the pure air high above the earth.

Disputes between America and Eurasia lead to battles between fleets of airships, and at length the cities themselves are made mobile and come to grips in the skies.

For the rest, an undistinguished batch of short stories came from such forgotten writers as Edward E. Chappelow, Lowell H. Morrow, and Henrik

Dahl Juve. Somehow, the magazine did not attract the better-known writers who appeared in *Wonder*. But a contest similar to that with which Gernsback had lured new writers to *Amazing*, in which a story had to be written around a Paul cover picture, produced as first prize-winner one who was to become well-known as an author and critic for many years – P. Schuyler Miller.

At the rear of each issue the magazine carried columns of news on the progress of aviation which reads rather strangely today. And it is noticeable that military planes are hardly mentioned, contradicting those who tell us that the world of 1930 cowered miserably between one world war and the next. The accent was all on commercial aviation as a progressive enterprise.

Paul's striking covers often depicted monster aircraft not very different from today's Concorde. There were also some weird contraptions, visualized by writers striving for novelty, like Harold McKay's "Flying Buzz-saw" which wheeled through the sky like a flying saucer with teeth, carving up all that crossed its path.

But aviation did not, after all, provide enough scope for the imagination; especially with space-travel occupying so many fertile minds. *Air Wonder Stories* showed every sign of getting into a rut with its aerial cops and robbers. So, after only eleven issues, it was absorbed by *Wonder* in May 1930.

(1969)

## 28: Out of This World

The centenary of Jules Verne's first science-fiction novel *Five Weeks in a Balloon* was celebrated this year by the release of a film version. The story was rightly dressed up as a period piece, and it is hard to realize now that in 1863, when explorers like Burton and Livingstone were tramping the African jungles afoot, a balloon-flight across the continent seemed fantastic.

Jules Verne, who began his career as a journalist in the early railway and steamship era, was the first writer to foresee that the progress of the mechanical sciences would revolutionize travel and exploration. He foresaw what the submarine and the aircraft might accomplish; and that machines would reach every corner of the earth, the depths of the sea and even outer space. He proved an accurate prophet, and his stories are still popular.

Verne's natural successor as a prophet of science was H.G. Wells, who made his bow with *The Time Machine* (also recently filmed) in 1895, almost simultaneously with the appearance of the first moving pictures. Wells, a biologist by training, had all the achievements of 19th century science behind him to stimulate his vision. He also had a profound belief in the value of scientific progress, and spent his life advancing this cause in writings and speeches.

This hopeful view of science has often been dismissed as shallow optimism, born of 19th century prosperity, but there were better reasons for hope than this. The emergence of anaesthetic and antiseptic surgery had begun the conquest of disease, and as smallpox, cholera and typhoid were gradually overcome, as the surgeon's knife thrust confidently and painlessly into the bowels and brain to root out growths that once were fatal, science could be seen, in this realm at least, to be an unqualified blessing.

Alongside this went the advance of industrial machinery in the mines, factories, cotton mills and shipyards. This created a demand for labourers more skilled than the old hired hands, and increased skill demanded wider education. The rise of machinery hastened the abolition of slavery, and Wells forecast that progress in industry would take the brute toil and drudgery out of work, and he hailed this as a major advance in human affairs.

In laboratories and workshops, men were producing the internal

combustion engine, the wireless telegraph, the hand camera and the moving picture. As these triumphs emerged one after another the mood was optimistic. A prosperous future, with even more scientific triumphs to follow, was predicted at the start of the 20th century, and was the animating force of the Liberal and Labour politics of the day.

Such were the visions and impulses which animated the work of Wells and his successors, from whose writing evolved the body of literature now known as science-fiction. While most authors find their inspiration in everyday domestic life, while many find it in crime and detection, the science-fiction writer finds his in the discoveries of science and their possible effects, often fantastic and exciting, on the course of human destiny.

All this, however, found little reflection in the cinema when it came into its own as a popular entertainment after the first world war. The screen offered plenty of comedy, tragedy and melodrama, but when it came to spectacle the producers invariably turned to the splendours of antiquity, with tales of Rome, Egypt and Babylon. *Intolerance*, *Quo Vadis?* and *Ben-Hur* are among the best known monuments of the period, while the spectacle of futurity, in the Wellsian manner, was almost ignored.

This is surprising, since the world after the war was bursting with technical triumphs. Henry Ford was introducing popular motoring on to the roads, Marconi's wireless telegraphy was being organized into broadcasting and pioneer aviators were crossing Asia, Africa, the oceans and the poles. It was an exciting new world, and its growth seemed to be symbolized in the sudden astonishing rise of New York, in its new steel-girdered architecture. As one graceful tower after another piled up on Manhattan Island, as visitors gained their first fascinated glimpse of the city from the sea and photographers flashed views of the famous skyline all round the earth, it seemed that New York was setting the pattern and creating the image for cities of the future. One day in 1925 a German film director saw the skyline of New York for the first time, and went home afterwards determined to make a film about it. The director was Fritz Lang, the film *Metropolis* (1927).

This melodrama, exciting if somewhat banal, depicts a city "of about one hundred years hence" ruled over by an industrial dictator whose son rebels against him and flies to the machine-filled caverns under the city. Here he joins the regimented workers who toil at the machines, and falls in love with the saintly Maria. The workers are provoked into rebellion, disasters occur, rescues are made and finally there is a general

reconciliation. The film is dominated by its splendid decor – the gigantic towers of Metropolis, lit up with floodlights and searchlights, threaded with graceful viaducts, over which float airliners like swarms of butterflies; and under the city, the grim caverns, the looming machines and the tramping armies of workmen.

The story of *Metropolis* gives a view of industrial society absurdly at odds with the facts, one that takes us back to the Luddites rather than forward into the future. Those gloomy-looking regiments of workmen apparently have never heard of Factory Acts, safety regulations or Trade Unions – there is not one shop steward with a whistle in the whole pack of them. Not that this mattered much in 1926 – *Metropolis* was a sensational success, and frequent revivals have testified to its punch and vitality.

Three years later the same producers offered *The Girl in the Moon*, the screen's first interplanetary story, made in conjunction with the German Society for Space-travel, whose engineers were experimenting with rocket-propelled racing cars and aircraft. The film showed the construction of a rocket-ship, its take-off and flight through space, the gradual dwindling of the earth, with the sun rising and setting around it, and the corresponding enlargement of the moon (all as seen by the passengers), and the ship hurtling over the surface of the moon until the final abrupt landing. The human interest of the story, even with so radiant a moon-girl as Gerda Maurus, was less appealing than the lunar enterprise itself, but the interplanetary scenes were shown with all possible veracity, and the screen has seldom seen a more marvellous spectacle.

A silent film, *The Girl in the Moon* had few showings in the English-speaking cinema, which had discovered sound. But in the same year, 1929, the Gaumont-British studios produced a drama that vied with *Metropolis* as a futuristic vision, and told a much better story. *High Treason*, adapted from a play by Noel Pemberton-Billing MP and directed by Maurice Elvey, was advertised as “a story of 1940”. It opens with an aerial view of London of the future, sprouting with skyscrapers and swarming with helicopters, then switches to a sinister border incident on the North Atlantic frontier. War threatens between the world's rival Federations, battles break out, the Channel Tunnel is blown up and finally the World President is assassinated, after which tension eases off and hero is united with heroine. The story here, unlike *Metropolis*, is not drowned in the spectacle. But there is spectacle enough, with the Channel Tunnel shown in full operation, fleets of bombers thronging the skies and the world's daily news seen on great public television screens. Critics observed that all this was a bit too much to expect by 1940 – only eleven years away – and

were proved right.

Simultaneously the Fox Movietone studio in Hollywood came up with a bright little musical comedy in a futuristic setting, *Just Imagine!* (1930), directed by David Butler. This showed another city of skyscrapers, portrayed with a fairy-like grace and decorated with pretty chorus-girls cavorting around on bicycle-sized aircraft, singing pop-songs. Although *Just Imagine!* was popular, Hollywood companies shied away from the futuristic spectacle and produced no more in the thirties. Instead, they turned to the laboratories of mad scientists who were either plotting to conquer the world or were seeking the forbidden secrets of life.

*Frankenstein* (1931) placed Mary Shelley's Gothic tragedy in a 20th-century setting. The scientist brings his manufactured corpse to life in a great laboratory crammed with immense glass tubes, coruscating with sparks and lightning flashes. Though made with some attempt at seriousness, *Frankenstein* was the beginning of a series that sloughed off gradually into mere horrors. A whole cycle of horror films broke out at the same time, wherein vampires, werewolves, mummies and monsters ran amok through the laboratories and wreaked havoc all around them.

These horror-films of the thirties have often been held up as examples of science-fiction, to the detriment of that literature. The resemblances are superficial, the differences deep. While the technological epics usually celebrated the success of human endeavours, proclaiming that science was invaluable and must go on forever, the horror-films heavily implied that science was a menace and always led to disaster. Melodrama was spiced up with panicky warnings against tampering with the secrets of Creation, and Man was warned not to try and be as the Gods. Often the horror-film ended with the broken scientist repenting on his deathbed, wailing that "there are things that Man must never know". It is this vulgar appeal to fear, the undisguised praise of obscurantism, that made the horror-films something more than mere entertaining sensationalism. Their implication that discovery was always dangerous and that most scientists were trusting fools even when they were not madmen, was a curious concept of science, especially when coming from an industry that was itself the product of scientific research and discovery.

An improvement on these cadaver-dramas was *The Invisible Man* (1934). Wells's novel tells of a masked and bandaged stranger who puts up at a quiet Kentish inn, provokes local curiosity and is discovered to be an experimental chemist who has rendered his own body invisible, and cannot reverse the process. Panic breaks out when items of clothing are seen moving about without visible support, when footprints appear in the earth

of their own accord and a bicycle rolls down the street without a visible rider. The opportunities here for clever trick photography are obvious, and producer James Whale took full advantage of them. Wells himself was pleased with the result, and decided to make more films of his own stories.

Meanwhile, in 1932 Germany had produced the ambitious *F.P.1 Fails to Reply*, from the novel by Curt Siodmak, with versions made in English, French and German. Here a group of engineers build Flying Platform No 1, a vast floating aerodrome to be stationed in mid-Atlantic to ease the problems of trans-oceanic flight. Villainous interests attempt to wreck the project, but after a thrilling struggle they are foiled. The story is not very convincing, and once again it is over-shadowed by spectacle: the construction of the great aerodrome (a fine montage sequence), its establishment in mid-ocean and the comings and goings of the airliners across its surface. Events, of course, were to outstrip the prophecy in a few years when big long-range aircraft were able to cross the Atlantic quite easily. But the film is a fine document of its time and exciting in its own right.

Even more spectacular was *The Tunnel*, adapted from Bernhard Kellermann's novel of 1913, which came from a British studio in 1934, when the Mersey Tunnel was just breaking into the news. The project envisioned here is the building of a railway tunnel under the Atlantic, linking continent to continent, breaking through floods and volcanic eruptions on its way to completion. Authentically presented, and, contained in a story with adequate human interest, the great shining tunnel and its speedy streamlined electric trains looked as convincing as a stretch of the brand-new line from Morden to Edgware. The futuristic drama reached its peak on the screen with *Things to Come* in 1936. Adapted from a book by H.G. Wells, produced by the powerful team of Wells, Alexander Korda and William Cameron Menzies, with a score by Arthur Bliss and a powerful team of actors, *Things to Come* purports to show the history of humanity for the next century. The narrative begins with scenes of everyday life in "Everytown", goes on to show the coming of world war in 1940 and the decay of civilized life as the war drags on for twenty or thirty years. In Everytown a local bully sets up a dictatorship, while outside the towns men are dying of the "wandering sickness". Beyond the fringe of this new dark age a group of scientists are maintaining a civilized life on the shores of the Persian Gulf. At last they come up to Europe in fleets of gigantic aircraft, overwhelm the dictators and start to rebuild the world on a basis of peace and scientific research. This leads to extraordinary scenes of reconstruction – wonderfully contrived by Ned Mann – and the

emergence of a shining new civilization, inhabited by universal aristocracy – there are no drones in Everytown, and no drudges: everyone enjoys their fair share of work and leisure. The world is basking in renewed splendour when a cranky artist revolts against modern life and rouses a mob of his fellow-spirits to rebellion. When it is learned that scientists are preparing for the first voyage into outer space the rabble rushes off to attack the “space-gun”. The raid fails, and the first spacemen are successfully fired off to the moon. The film concludes with a shot of the starlit sky, and a chorus uttering the challenging cry of “All this or nothing – which shall it be?” No other film has attempted to show the human drama on the scale and scope of *Things to Come*. Despite the emotional shortcomings of its chief characters – Wells’s talents as a novelist failed him here – the film has a movement of epic sweep and power that gives it permanent value, even though some of its episodes have been superseded by events.

Numerous popular fictions came out of the film studios in the years between the wars, but the ones mentioned stood out by virtue of a certain family resemblance. They celebrated the triumphs of machinery and human inventiveness, the excitement of new discoveries and the thrill of spectacular achievements, presenting a vision, in short, of the wonderful world of tomorrow. If they showed a bias in favour of optimism it was because the hope that a better world could be made by science was as strong as ever, and the film producers, for the time being at least, were caught up in the thrill of it.

With the coming of World War in 1940 (as *Things to Come* had foretold) the future was cut and dried “for the duration”, and there was no point in speculations or visions. Wells’s second film, *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (1939), a charming fantasy of the supernatural, proved to be his last. As a literary form science-fiction continued through the war and survived after; but it was produced by only a comparative handful of authors, writing in magazines of small circulation, and to the general reading public it was known only vaguely, if at all. Then two events convinced the world, beyond all doubt, that science-fiction sometimes comes true. One was the fall of the first atom-bomb, the other the rise of the first sputnik.

Hollywood studios returned to science-fiction after twenty years with *Destination Moon* (1950). George Pal produced this semi-documentary, seven years before the sputnik, from a script by an established science-fiction author, Robert A. Heinlein. The narrative of *Destination Moon* is thin, but Heinlein knows how to portray scientists as sane men engaged on a worth-while project, and Pal created some attractive lunar scenery for a

background.

Robert Wise's cleverly satirical *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) was more substantial. Adapted from a magazine story by Harry Bates, it tells how Klaatu, a visitor from another planet, arrives on Earth and invites all the heads of governments to meet him in conference and hear the message from his world. The diplomats are evasive, the military in a panic. Despite his peaceful intentions, Klaatu finds himself a hunted man and finally, to convince the Earth that he means what he says, he stops the world's electrical current for an hour. The resulting chaos, and the restoration of order, enables Klaatu to convey his warning – that if men bring their quarrels and wars into outer space they will provoke reprisals from the other inhabited worlds.

For once, in a science-fiction film, one is treated to a good character study, and Klaatu is portrayed by Michael Rennie as a convincing figure. In all dangers and emergencies he retains the calm, the good temper and the self-assurance of a man moulded in a higher civilization – in striking contrast to the fear, suspicion and shiftiness of the Earthlings, whose persons embody all the bombastic propaganda of the Cold War period. In its time *The Day the Earth Stood Still* offered a fine, sarcastic gesture of defiance to Senator McCarthy and all his ilk, though it may have been above their heads.

From his cinematic trip to the moon, George Pal moved on to a story of the end of the world, *When Worlds Collide* (1951), then in 1953 made *The War of the Worlds*. As Wells's tale of a Martian invasion was written in 1897 some up-dating was necessary : the Martians were equipped with flying machines, powerful enough to defy the atomic bomb. The film follows Wells's narrative as closely as possible. The invaders land on Earth, destroy armies and cities with their fearful heat-ray, then at the moment of seeming victory they succumb to earthly diseases. In portraying the Martians, Pal achieves a triumph of suggestion: the creatures are never actually seen, but the audience observes and understands them through the action of their all-powerful machinery, many-armed, multi-eyed, defying gravity. This creates the sense of the uncanny and other-worldly required by the story.

George Pal's science-fiction ventures reached their culmination in *The Time Machine* (1959), his best work to date. It was a deft and charming touch to begin the story in its original period, 1895, and to show Wells's Time Traveller setting forth on his voyage into the future from a picturesque Victorian drawing-room. Rapid changes of the landscape around him give the impression of the voyage through time, which brings

the traveller through the world wars and eventually to an Elysium of the distant future, inhabited by a race of jaded pleasure-lovers, the Eloi. This world is not as peaceful as it looks: the friendly Eloi, as the traveller discovers to his horror, are regularly preyed upon by the Morlocks, a tribe of underground cannibals. This is too much for the Traveller, who fights off a raiding party of Morlocks and encourages his friends to resist the enemy and fight for their freedom. At the end, there is hope that they will do so.

The grim fable of the Morlocks and the Eloi forms only an episode in Wells's original narrative, which the author kept deliberately vague and metaphysical for his own purposes. David Duncan, who wrote the screenplay, was justified in concentrating on this feature to make a film-able story of an unfilmable original.

The two Pal films worthily commemorated Wells in the fifties, and such faults as they had were unimportant – they breathed the spirit of effort and progress that he had bequeathed to the world, and that was the spirit that counted. Jules Verne, too, is still a living force in the modern world. This was shown by Walt Disney's popular *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1954), the late Mike Todd's *Around the World in 80 Days* and Henry Levin's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. Despite their period charm, these films were contemporary with such events as the voyage of Kon-Tiki, the ascent of Everest and the first flights into space, so it is not entirely fanciful to think of Verne as a novelist of today.

Aside from these major efforts there were such excellent films as Howard Hawks's *The Thing from Another World*, Jack Arnold's *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), Gordon Douglas's *Them!* (1954) and Fred McLeod Wilson's *Forbidden Planet* (1956), all of these being straightforward magazine science-fiction. With these productions the Hollywood companies had begun to make up for their neglect of science-fiction in the pre-war years. Going the whole hog, in their usual fashion, they also released another flood of monster-dramas – Crab-monsters, Spider-monsters, Frog-monsters, Blob-monsters and others of that kind. These films, for a time, attracted their own audiences.

British studios have not yet recovered the splendid vein of prophecy that so distinguished them before the war. The death of Wells in 1946 robbed science-fiction of its greatest prophet and protagonist, and no-one yet has taken his place. But a new start was made in 1949 with a good laboratory drama, *Four-sided Triangle*, from the novel by William F Temple. Soon after, *Spaceways* (1952), from the radio play by Charles Eric Maine, brought murder to the interplanetary scene. More recently

came a lively cosmic thriller. *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, and the more subtly spine-chilling *Village of the Damned*.

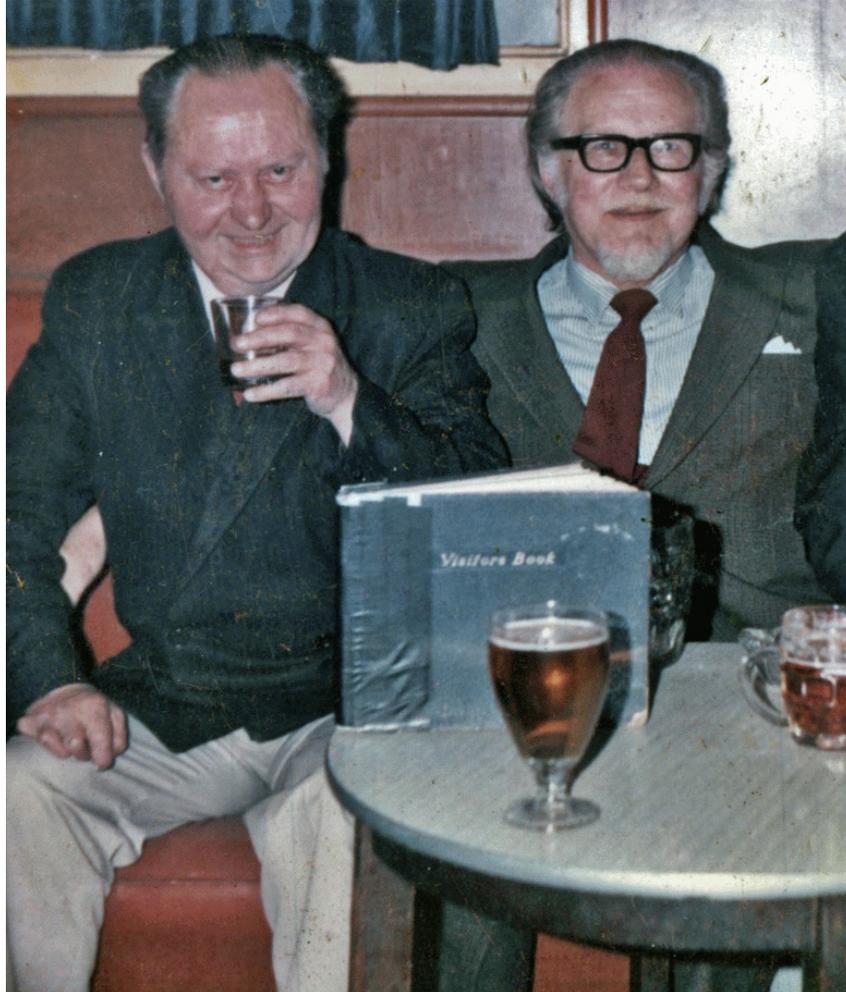
But finest of all was a topical drama that hovered excitingly on the edge of prophecy, David Lean's near-masterpiece *The Sound Barrier* (1953). At a time when faster-than-sound flying was a topic of controversy. Terence Rattigan's screenplay took us right into the world of test pilots and aircraft designers and showed them face to face with the great mystery, in discussions no less exciting than the action. Famous aircraft were shown going through their paces, amid scenes of aerial grandeur rarely surpassed. Since the film was made, aircraft have passed and doubled the speed of sound, but Lean's film captured all the thrills of the beginning and is memorable on that account.

Science-fiction remains virtually unknown to the European film companies. Many of its new writers are making their names in Germany, but none of their wares have found a way into the studios, and the prophetic tradition of Fritz Lang remains dormant. From Czechoslovakia emerged a film of Karel Čapek's atomic novel *Krakatit!* which has yet to be seen commercially in Britain, though made as long ago as 1948. Soviet Russia offered *With Gagarin to the Stars* in 1962, a good documentary showing a futuristic prophecy in the act of coming true. But these are all that Europe has had to offer so far.

The post-war period has not been encouraging for those who shared the hopes and the radical idealism of an earlier generation. Film producers are doubtless as depressed by the atom bomb as anyone – an attitude summed up in the film of Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach*, which gave such convincing expression to popular alarmism. Nevertheless, the feeling is spreading that one cannot sit and moan about the atom-bomb for ever. Wells and his contemporaries, for all their idealism, were never men to shirk disaster, and indeed, looked upon it as a challenge to redoubled effort. The film companies, in recent years, have reverted once more to antiquity and are regaling us with Bible stories, the Roman Empire, Sodom and Gomorrah and the Trojan War. Perhaps some of them will pluck up their spirits and turn their eyes once more to futurity. They may find rich rewards from a public that still sees a living future ahead of it.

(1963)

# On Fandom



*Frank Arnold, Wally Gillings and the Visitors' Book  
at the final Globe meeting, June 1974*

## 29: Early Days in Fandom

It all began with the British Interplanetary Society. This group of engineers, technicians, electricians, chemists and enthusiasts had been founded in 1933 for the study of prospects for interplanetary travel by means of rocket-propulsion. The Age of Speed and Machines was an exciting time to start: memories of the great Schneider Trophy races were still fresh and, down in Southampton, Reginald Mitchell had begun work on the Spitfire, while up in Lincolnshire Pilot-Officer Frank Whittle had filed his first patent for the jet-propulsion engine. On the Continent the Swiss balloonist Auguste Piccarde had ascended to a height we hadn't heard of before – the Stratosphere – while Sir James Jeans, the great astronomer, had made us all conscious of “The Mysterious Universe”. In such an atmosphere of excitement, enquiry and experiment it was not surprising that Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, the magazine of short stories and serials in the vein of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, should have found success on both sides of the Atlantic. Nor was it surprising that only eleven years later – the financial hiccups of 1929/30 intervening – that a British editor should have thought of following the Gernsback trail and producing a sci-fi magazine mainly as an outlet for home-grown talent.

This was the late Walter Herbert (“Old Wally”) Gillings, a London suburban journalist who spent most of his working career on his own local paper, *The Ilford Recorder*. After the usual preliminary difficulties Wally launched the first issue of his *Tales of Wonder*, and it was successful enough to encourage production of a second issue. The magazine, a quarterly, attracted new talent right enough, as well as a story or two from such a Gernsback favourite as John Beynon (“Wyndham”) Harris, as well as Letters to the Editor in volume. Fans who had come together in this way started the first Science-Fiction Association in Leeds in 1937.

What with this and contacts with the B.I.S., Wally found himself with the nucleus of a chat-club on his hands, and decided to make the most of it. One of his most regular correspondents was Edward John (“Ted”) Carnell, the man from Plumstead, who had a job in the printing department of Gamages, the famous old superstore which was then in High Holborn. Wally and Ted used to meet with a couple of boffins from the B.I.S. – Les Johnson and Arthur C. Clarke, the Somerset lad – for pi-jaws on SF and its production and refreshments at the local watering-holes. Before long other correspondents were turning up at their meetings, and when the newly-

formed Science-Fiction Association transferred its headquarters from Leeds to London in 1938 a committee was set up. This consisted of Ted Carnell as Treasurer, G. Ken Chapman of South Norwood, who offered his home as an office, as Executive Secretary, and a distinguished public figure as President.

That figure was Professor A.M. Low, also President of the B.I.S., an eminent electrical scientist who made a widespread reputation in journalism as a champion of popular science. It was said of Low that if only he had stopped inventing for a while and concentrated on merchandise he might have made fortunes. Who knows what might have happened had he developed his Televista machine in 1914, twelve years ahead of John Baird? Who knows – not me, anyway. But Low shared with H.G. Wells the philosophic belief that science is a social force intended for the benefit of Humanity, and can have no other purpose. It was a belief amounting to an ideology, and so far as SF has an ideology, this is it. “Doc” Low wanted to enlighten the younger generations of his time as to the value of science, and in this spirit he lent himself readily to the leadership of the Science-Fiction Association. He recognized it as a valuable portent of the future, and accepted the Presidency with pleasure.

This is the outfit that I joined in 1938, a green and gormless youth hungering for new companionships – and here let the author break down and babble his confessions. I had become a science-fiction fan quite a few years before on seeing my first copies of *Amazing Stories*. Mine had been a gloomy upbringing, a disorderly family background, schools hanging over me like wet blankets, no shiny prospects whatever ahead of me. But mine is not a gloomy disposition, and when I first saw that cover-picture of a mechanical man wrestling with a lion I could not wait until I had saved up my pennies – all three of them – to buy it. This was it – a literature of *encouragement*. Within these glorious pages I “dipped into the Future, far as human eye could see”, and sailed off into the infinite with *The Skylark of Space*. This was the allure I found in SF, and I’ve never lost it. Because of a disability derived from a cradle accident I was denied admission to the world of action – cars, aircraft, speedboats – and though I devoured news of the Speed Kings and the Flying Aces, though my heart was at Hendon and Brooklands, I knew I could do no more than hope to write about it. Perhaps, I thought, perhaps I might find the medium.

I found the right company well enough. My new friends were all either just married or still courting. While bantering wisecracks with Wally and Ken and Ted and Bill, I was also relishing the presence of Madge Gillings, Joan Chapman, Irene Carnell and others of the girls – and here is

an important point. The Circle has never been exclusively a Blokes' Club, whence henpecked husbands find refuge from nagging wives. The girls have been on the scene from the start and that, I think, is how it should be – and of course, always has been.

Before long the casual meetings were getting a bit more crowded. The S.F.A. had no settled Headquarters and the Executives were doing their correspondence and accountancy from home. So likewise were the smart printed fanmags *Science-Fiction Gazette*, *Novae Terrae* and *Tomorrow*, with their problems of contributions, editorship, distribution, and so on. The early casual meetings at pubs and teashops were good fun, but rather inadequate for an ambitious Association eager to go places.

A new sense of elbow-room was created when three fellows, Arthur C. Clarke, Bill Temple from South London, and Maurice K. Hanson from Leicester took over a large bachelor flat at No. 88 Gray's Inn Road and invited the crowd of us to join them for a get-together every Thursday evening.

It was at 88 Gray's Inn Road that the Circle really took off. It was here I began to take stock of my new companions. I took an immediate liking to Ken Chapman, a big, slow-spoken fellow who was Something in the City, a member of the R.A.C. (Royal Automobile Club) and our Executive Secretary to boot. Likewise Ted Carnell – I have never known a more galvanic personality than Ted, tall and lean and forever smiling, whose very presence filled the room with vitality. By contrast, Bill Temple's wisecracking was of a slower, subtler kind, and formed a perfect foil to Arthur Clarke, whom he christened "Ego". It fitted Arthur well; there was nothing bumptious or aggressive about Arthur's ego – it was always a sense of self-mockery in it – just that from a very early age, since about the time he was learning to talk, he knew he was a very clever fellow indeed, and he meant the world to know about it – and now, of course, it does. This was the company that gathered round the genial Wally Gillings and persuaded him that our latest offerings were just the thing for *Tales of Wonder* before clattering down to the Red Bull tavern for a pint or two before going home.

But now a new menace had fallen across the path, the dark shadow of – yes, you've guessed it. Have you read recent memoirs of how the unthinking British People, bewildered and confused and apprehensive, terrified that "the bomber will always get through", were quivering in their beds and wondering what to do next? Boloney, believe me. Ever since the Rhineland March of 1936 it had been obvious to everyone who understood the meaning of fists shaken in his face and threats bellowed in his ear that

the Armistice years were ending and the war would soon be resumed (the two World Wars were one and the same). Abroad, the new Reichsfuhrer was an egomaniac who seemed to spend most of his life talking to himself, usually at the top of his voice, and it was evident he intended to drag the world into another war whether our Pacifists liked it or not. Of course, we were all profoundly opposed to war. But then we were all profoundly opposed to rheumatism too, and when you've got it, you've got to cope with it. With good-humoured confidence we agreed to suspend activity in the S.F.A. "for the duration", all packed up and went into the Armed Forces, to experience the great campaigns of the coming years.

With one exception. Although I had half-expected it, the actual rejection by the Army and relegation to Civvy Street had come as a blow. My spirits chirped up a bit when I got myself a job on a big national daily in Fleet Street, and so fulfilled a boyhood ambition. This provided me with my first adult salary – £5.00 per week plus overtime – to make me finally independent of my widowed mother. I was then able to get the first home of my own, a small two-room flat with k. & b. and all mod. con. at 14 Crawford Street – the house is still there – a pleasant byway running between Baker Street and the Edgware Road. Here during time-off I was able to offer tea-table hospitality to fans home on leave and up in town, whence we could have a good pi-jaw before slipping across the road to the Beehive or round the corner to the Volunteer. The time I spent there preserved a link between the pre-war S.F.A. and the postwar Circle, and I keep a modest pride in it.

As well as could be under the circumstances, those years in the first home of my own were happy ones. I liked the flat, a cosy little nook as ever was, I liked the Marylebone neighbourhood and I loved the occasional strolls in Regents Park, the most beautiful park in London, whence I found I had an illustrious neighbour – H.G. Wells himself no less. We never met: he lived in rather grander style than I did, in a mansion in Hanover Terrace. Passing by, I used to smile at the huge figure 13 beside his front door. But I did see him once, after the war, at a United Nations get-together in the Wigmore Hall. He was not impressive to see or hear, the famous high-pitched voice was as squeaky as ever, but from his speaking one could understand the genius of the man and I'm glad I heard him, if only the once.

The war came to its sudden end, as everyone knows. The emergence of the atomic bomb was no great surprise to SF fans, who had read their *World Set Free* (1914) and many another story involving the future of atomic energy, and most of us had read about Lord Rutherford and his

atom-splitting achievements at the Cavendish Laboratory. I remember my own reaction to hearing of the bomb – “Good Lord, they’ve got it already!”

Of course, I felt compassion for the victims of those two bombs, just as I felt compassion for the victims of Pearl Harbor and Singapore, and my neighbours around me in London, and innumerable other cities, under blitzes. But the bombs had averted an invasion of Japan costing far more bloodshed and widespread destruction, and I suspected they would be a useful deterrent to any more wars of the same kind. For that reason, if for no other, the scarehead propaganda that has deluged us ever since has left me unmoved (of course, the damned things must be defused, and taken out of harm’s way).

By this time I was coming to the end of my tether. I had enjoyed the life in Fleet Street – I had had four jobs there, one of them twice over – but the irregular hours of duty, variations between 2.30 p.m. and 4.30 a.m., with a walk home to Baker Street at the finish, had just tied my nervous system into granny-knots and I felt the grave was not far off. With regrets I left the Street and went back to ordinary 9-5.30 office work, without a break between the two. And before long my friends from the S.F.A. were demobbing and coming home – every one of them, I was relieved and happy to find. I was soon to meet Ted Carnell again, under different circumstances than before.

In the past year or so, hunting up a bit of recreation I had come across one or two crummy little literary-and-theatrical clubs where fellow-writers, of a sort, would congregate for gabfests. In one of these I encountered Stephen D. Frances, a rumbustious old-fashioned Bohemian type who was eager to start his own paperback venture producing books in series (the real flood of imitation Penguins had not yet started). Hearing I was an SF fan, invited me to produce his SF series, beginning with a collection of my own early stories – I blushed becomingly, and accepted.

Now that World War II was over, a covey of fans who had survived it held a “Hullo – good to see, you!” session at the White Horse tavern in Fetter Lane. Their pre-war meetings had always been held in this corner of London, the neighbourhood of Holborn, Gray’s Inn Road and Hatton Garden, and it was good to be back, but we returned to a slightly altered scene. No. 88 Gray’s Inn Road was still there – and still is – but Arthur Clarke was soon to sail away into the stratosphere, Bill Temple had married Joan and gone to live in Wembley, Maurice Hanson had vanished, and the Red Bull was gone – one of the ruins Hitler had knocked about a bit. Amongst the newcomers were members of Stephen’s tiny publishing

group who were eager to produce a new SF magazine, and came along for help. It was gladly forthcoming, and so *New Worlds*, with Ted Carnell for Editor, eventually emerged.

Ted had been Treasurer, in a working committee of four, on the Science-Fiction Association. He it was who pointed out that though we were happy to revive contacts and mutual interests, the Association had involved us in a lot of spare-time work with no tangible results; instead of reviving it this time, therefore, why not keep together by regular meetings for a chinwag over a noggin at the saloon-bar, whilst any wider interests might flow from there? We all agreed, with enthusiasm, right away – and have been doing so ever since.

(1983)

## 30: To Hell with All This!

*The Science Fiction Association (SFA) founded at the 1937 Leeds convention was the first attempt to form a UK national SF organization. [Ed.]*

“What is all this?” asks you. I can hear you asking. Well, it goes like this, chums:

“Dere Mr. Gillings, I think yor magazine is rotten and Turner’s drorings are dredful.” “Dear Mr. Carnell, *New Worlds* gives me a pain in the neck and Frank Arnold is nuts. I think *Satellite* is orful, why is it such rotten print and such rotten paper and why is it rotten?” “The American stf. mags are dead from the neck up.” “The English mags are dead from the hair down and English fan-mags are horrible. Everything’s horrible.”

But that ain’t the half of it. There’s more to come, and it goes like this:

“English fans are the dirtiest, laziest, nastiest, ugliest bunch of skunks...” “American fans are a bunch of skunks...” “I hate Frank Arnold – I hate Johnny Burke – I hate Ken Chapman – I hate everybody in science fiction, but I’m a swell guy.”

You think that’s the lot? Not a bit of it; Listen to this:

“Give us reprints...” “Nuts to reprints...” “We want more action; cut out the science and give us blood...” “Let’s have human interest...” “Let’s have thought-variants...” “Let’s have mutants – I don’t know what they are, but they sound awfully good...” “Your mag is rotten – cut out the boring science-fiction and give us a lot of sex...”

I can hear you yawning. All right, then, just one little bit more:

“The SFA are a bunch of skunks – Chapman and Carnell are making money out of the SFA – tons of it – what about that non-commercial SFA – Chapman and Carnell are running the SFA to boost Science Fiction Service.”

That’s enough. No doubt you wonder what I’m talking about. I’ll tell you, chums. That is a fair to average sample of the sort of chatter which has been circulating around science-fiction for quite a while now, and which you and I and other men of good will are thoroughly fed up with, and which we mean to put a stop to. Isn’t it silly! Here is an organisation of fellows linked by common love of a brand of literature, and in its midst is a group of hominoid growths who go out of their way not only to talk

like the above about their fellow-members but the very literature itself.

Brother-members, you and I are people of very few wants. All we want to do is read science-fiction and our dearest wish is to see regular science-fiction magazines published in our own country, as our happy American cousins have enjoyed for years. How can we use our collective influence to bring about such a happy state of affairs? Why, by making this Association a live and intelligent group with a purpose, a group that can prove to the men who make science-fiction – the authors, editors and publishers, that there is a keen public waiting for them if they will turn their attention to this brand of literature.

Those of us lucky enough to be at the historic Convention of 1939 must have been struck by one great fact – that although the Association is only a couple of years old it has already come of age. The schoolboy squabbles of the type outlined above must be killed from now on. Science fiction lovers as a class have grown up and the SFA must grow up with them if it wants to see a steady and influential flow of science fiction in Britain.

Recollect what that popular author-member W.J. Bassingham told us – that British editors are common-sense fellows who will accept anything reasonable, but you can't fool them with a lot of fairy-tales. Anybody in professional writing will tell you that editors are hard nuts to crack – you've got to *sell* things to them. They are pestered too much by cranks already to listen to the babblings of kids who want pipe dreams. If we want science-fiction from them we've got to *sell* it to them ourselves; prove that we are intelligent adult readers who will pay hard cash for what we want to read if they will publish it.

The kids responsible for the kind of guff aforementioned would never sell anything to their own grandmothers. Reader and brother-member, these same kids are a small minority but they are responsible for the ruin of many an Association in America, and their brand of twirp would do the same for the SFA if we don't put the stopper on 'em pretty quick.

Nuts to these squabbles and uproars! Nuts to the senseless insults showered upon hardworking authors and editors and even the harmless, devoted stewards of the SFA. Nuts to these futile criticisms of professional magazines that are good enough to extract money from a hard-boiled public! "To Hell with All This!" we cry, and the SFA will go forward, a courageous, capable, serious-minded but fun-loving body. Do you agree?

I'll bet you do.

(1939)

*Alas, two months later the SFA was suspended at the outbreak of World War Two and never revived. [Ed.]*

## 31: The White Horse & The Globe

The Science Fiction Association was formed in 1937 and I joined it a year later. Its intention was to promote “science-fiction”, a branch of literature which then had a small readership, but has since become widely popular.

The registered membership was never more than a few hundred, scattered throughout the country, with a similar number of pen-friends and collaborators in the U.S.A. Among the leading spirits were dealers in books and magazines; many others were ambitious to become authors themselves and have since done so. One member alone was a professional journalist, Walter Gillings of the *Ilford Recorder*, who successfully persuaded a publishing firm, World’s Work Ltd., of Kingston, Surrey, to issue a quarterly magazine of fiction entitled *Tales of Wonder* (1938-1941, sixteen issues). Several hopefuls had their first stories published in this magazine, including myself, with a story in the Summer 1939 issue. I still possess a copy of this venerable work.

Our weekly meetings in London were held at the home of friends in Gray’s Inn Road. Monthly meetings were held at the old Druids’ Hall in Lamb’s Conduit Street, where we had the pleasure of meeting our President, the late Professor A.M. Low, a distinguished man whom we regarded highly. Since his death he has been the subject of an excellent biography, *He Lit the Lamp*, by Ursula Bloom (Burke Publishing Co., 1958)

With the outbreak of war in 1939 the Association ceased to exist as a registered group, and has never been revived. During the war years, which we all had the good fortune to survive, the leading members kept in touch, and in 1946 we effected a reunion. We were opposed to reviving the old Association, chiefly because it involved too much thankless work and expanse, but the decision to hold regular weekly meetings at a pub in Fetter Lane proved very popular, and they were established at the White Horse tavern for the next seven years. The commercial and professional aspects of the former Association, however, had now become more important and a new magazine of fiction, *New Worlds*, we published with the help of a friendly company (Pendulum Publications Ltd. at first, but some other companies later). The Editor was the former Treasurer of the S.F.A., Ted Carnell, who edited *New Worlds* for eighteen years and then

passed it to a successor, who still runs it. Ted then joined a well known company for whom he edits a continuing series of books, *New Writings in SF*.

Following a change of management at the White Horse, the group transferred to the Globe tavern, Hatton Garden, in 1953, and has been meeting there ever since. Despite the lack of a formal organization in London the circle of enthusiasts has expanded over the years and an average evening nowadays brings in about forty or fifty people, with frequent visitors from overseas.

The first distinguished author to call on us at the Globe was no less a man than C.S. Lewis (*Out of the Silent Planet, The Screwtape Letters*, etc.) One of the great scholars of his time, Professor Lewis was forthright in upholding his own views on all questions of history, literature and theology. If they happened to coincide with fashionable opinion, well and good, but if they did not – well, it was rough luck on fashionable opinion! When he came to the Globe, Lewis did not really know who we were, nor did he need to – enough that here was The Master enjoying an evening off amongst admiring pupils. What a feast of conversation we had that evening! Lewis hated and loved SF in almost equal measure, and I shall never forget how his eyes lit up when I chanced to mention Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*. "An evil book," he called it, with relish, for he was as strongly devoted to it as I am. So far from sharing A.M. Low's belief in the blessings of science, Lewis believed that science was the especial gift of Satan – a view which has since been propagated by many much less exalted thinkers and agitators.

Dr. Lewis was brought to the Globe by our friend Joy Gresham, the quiet little New York journalist who had come to London soon after the War, found her way to the White Horse and quickly settled in as a regular and "one of the girls". Mrs Gresham's marriage had ended earlier, and a year or two after the aforesaid meeting she had married Dr. Lewis. Their story has been finely commemorated in *The Letters of C.S. Lewis* (Geoffrey Bles, 1966), a book deserving attention not only from admirers of Lewis but lovers of SF generally.

Fleet Street called on us one evening in the persons of Anthony Hern, then Literary Editor of the *Daily Express*, and his leading book-reviewer, Nancy Spain. Well known as an author and journalist, Miss Spain was also famous for her lively performances on television and her unorthodox methods of obtaining interviews, all of which had stirred up flurries of mixed comment and criticism. But that evening the lady had come to the Globe to relax, enjoy herself and have a good chat with everybody; and I

for one was quite charmed with her. She had a genuine liking for SF, though you would never have thought so from her article in the *Express* on the following Saturday!

Mr. Hern was a quietly amusing chap, whose talk showed that he knew more about SF than he allowed to appear in the public print. Miss Spain was a pretty, vivacious little lady whom I found entrancing. I only wish that she had lived longer, and we had seen more of her.

I wish I could recall more about the visit we had from Dr. Marie Stopes, the celebrated pioneer of Women's Lib, who called in one evening to see what the next generation was doing in pursuit of the future. There remains the impression of a strong and intelligent personality, one who knew that her aims were worthwhile and was achieving them. Yes, only a brief impression, but I'm glad that I had it.

The reader-followers of SF have sometimes been described as a "cult", but that is quite wrong. There is nothing secretive or exclusive about this fraternity, and newcomers to their midst can always be sure of an open-handed welcome.

The now-famous Visitors' Book to the Globe was begun at the White Horse in 1951. The first signatory is "Lew Mordecai, Landlord", immediately followed by the first visitor, no less a figure than Poul Anderson, a quiet talker but a good one. Before the end of the year we had a visit or two from L. Sprague de Camp, whose conversation was witty, learned and copious. These were the first of many famous names in the book, which is nearly half-full, with some eighty pages of signatures from all over the world.

Before we left the White Horse to go to the Globe we had one last visit from our old friend Professor Low. Although his health was beginning to suffer, he was in excellent spirits that evening and happy to renew old acquaintanceships. On the very last evening, in December, some visitors brought in the distinguished authoress Clemence Dane, who proved to be a mine of information about SF and gave us a grand hour or two of conversation. Then we were off to the Globe.

Though the dining-room here was bigger than the one we had left, we had no difficulty in filling it with our company, and soon we were just as much at home here as before. The book-and-magazine market continued to flourish; but Ted Carnell's editorial conferences were no more, since he was now working full time on *New Worlds*. Gradually his attendances diminished, and eventually ceased altogether, and he faded away into the legendary spirit of the Globe.

It was at about this time that I started falling into philosophical

meditations, if that is not too strong a phrase. These Thursday evenings had been going on for quite a long time, several once-familiar faces had faded away and just as many once-new faces had become familiar. It dawned on me suddenly, I don't remember when, that I was now considerably older than a good many of my current friends. When I first joined the S.F.A., I reflected, I was a youngster in his early twenties, like most of my companions, while people like Professor Low were of my parents' generation. Now I was getting on for forty, and the new fans all around me comprised the Young. Generation. In the outer world the ballyhoo for "teenagers" was reaching its height – or depth – and we were hearing the first mutterings of the "generation gap" – and what on earth, I wondered, was that? For of course, the appeal of SF is timeless and universal, and the different generations talk to each other with a common understanding. Since then, Time has marched on a bit more, and I reckon on another Younger Generation turning up at the Globe every five years or so.

And so we come to 1957, the year in which USA Fandom had decided to hold their first World Convention abroad, and chose London as their rendezvous. With fans arriving from France, Holland, West Germany etc., we all met at an hotel in Bayswater, there was a banquet (at which the Loyal Toast was drunk at a Worldcon for the first time), there were film shows, midnight jazz sessions; and among those present were newly-weds Dave and Ruth Kyle, Forrie and Wendy Ackerman, Bob and Barbara Silverberg, Sam Moskowitz – and John W.Campbell himself! As if these were not enough, we also had that rarest of Con visitors Eric Frank Russell (a fine wad of name-dropping this is! But I defy anyone to recall, several years after, traits of character, little foibles and mannerisms, typical remarks and witty repartee, all experienced amid the kaleidoscopic tumult of a Convention!)

By 1960 our weekly meetings had been reduced to monthlies. This was not through declining interest or waning numbers – merely that weekly attendances were becoming a bit of a strain, especially to those who had to travel distances; and with Inflation now a part of national life, they were a bit of a strain on pockets as well. Having always met on a Thursday, we decided that the first Thursday of the month was as good as any other, and First Thursday of the Month it has been ever since.

The World Convention of 1965 was the last major event in London fandom up to date (1970). This splendid affair took place at the great Mount Royal Hotel near Marble Arch, evidence that we needed bigger hotels for every Convention. With pre- and post-convention meetings at

the Globe, the whole thing ran to nearly a fortnight of celebration.

Soon after this, Lew Mordecai gave me the shock of a lifetime – he was leaving the Globe after twelve years. The place, he said, was a bit too big for him and his family, and after a holiday they would look for a smaller house. Before going, he handed me the Visitors' Book and a photo of a celebration dinner held at the White Horse a few years back. This is now on the wall of my study, over a portrait of H.G. Wells, beside the SF shelves.

For many of us it was (to coin a phrase) the end of an age. But this time there could be no following Lew to the new place as we had followed him to the Globe.

There is a tacit agreement that up to now London has had its full share of big events, and it is time to let other cities and towns take their turn. For instance, the Easter Convention of 1971 is being organized from Birmingham and will be held in Worcester. But London can pick up the threads of organization at any time in the future, if called upon. The meetings at the Globe are more crowded than ever: before 1965 average attendances were twenty or thirty, since 1965 they have been fifty or sixty, sometimes more – quite a big enough crowd for the Saloon Bar. The personnel are there, and a Con-Committee can always be relied upon to spring up out of their midst.

This long record of regular attendance at the same house has also been noticed by the Management, and appreciated. They have recognized that "first Thursday" is our night, and in a good many unobtrusive ways they have prepared and adjusted the saloon-bar so that we shall feel at home. We hardly notice all this, absorbed as we are in our own interests. But it is there all the same, and it is one of the many reasons why I have always resisted any suggestions that we should find another pub which would be more convenient for some reason or other. Any advantages we might find in another house, I have reckoned, would be cancelled out by corresponding disadvantages. In the years at the Globe we have become world-famous, we have built up a fund of goodwill, and if we suddenly struck our tents and rode off to another oasis we should have to start the whole thing over again, from the beginning. So I, for one, determined to remain at the Globe, though all fandom forsake me.

At this point of the argument some of the older regulars will suddenly recall that they have seen my face hanging round the saloon-bar for more years than they can remember. "He's as old as the hills," they mutter, with sidelong glances. "He knows all about the Circle – he's been coming here since the dawn of time" – or words to that effect. It is true I was one of the

original Gray's Inn Road gang of 1938-39, and that I have been coming to these meetings longer than anyone else except my old mates Ted Tubb and Syd Bounds, but they don't come so often. In the course of years I seem to have attained a status like that of the old codger in the House of Commons who is known as the Father of the House. ("No, you can't call me a Father-Figure," I once protested to a young friend, "I'm not married yet – see what you're calling the rest of the company!") The Charmed Circle of the Globe has been pretty much of a home, family and career for most of my adult life, and I expect to be in the midst of it for the rest of my days.

*(1970)*

## 32: Mordecai of the Globe

He has been “Mordecai of the Globe” for quite a while now, but just as a famous admiral is always linked with the name of a single famous ship (Vian of the *Cossack*, Mountbatten of the *Kelly*, etc.), so the name of Mordecai will always be coupled with that of The White Horse Tavern, Fetter Lane: the house where he emerged from honourable nonentity to the ranks of London’s most famous taverners, assured of a place in our social history along with Tom Lord, Ted Lloyd, Kit Catt, Tom Topham, Dirty Dick, Charles Morton, Auguste Romano, Victor Berlemont, Charley Brown, Walter Plinge and Sir Harry Preston.

Londoner of the very pavements, Lewis Mordecai was born in Holborn in 1911, the son of a publican. All his boyhood memories are centred round this borough, and it was while he was going to St. Andrew’s School, near the Viaduct, that his father became landlord of the Globe Tavern in Hatton Garden, where the family remained for many years.

Young Lewis was quite ready to follow his father into the family trade, with all its amenities and advantages, but naturally enough he wanted to sew a wild oat and see the world a bit before; settling down to the peaceful humdrum of a publican’s life. In a word, sea-fever was in his blood and he was hearing things:

Hark! The voice of the ocean is calling  
With an insistence  
Sad and appalling....

The call of the sea is never to be resisted by those who have heard it, and accordingly the young Mordecai applied for a job at the Orient Line, and was taken on as a steward, aged sixteen. Years of life on the waves were to follow.

Cape Horn, the China Seas, the Barrier Reef, the Barbary Coast, the Rio Grande, the Spanish Main, the Isles of Greece, Table Bay, the North Cape, the South Pacific – Mordecai saw them all. Then came the war years, and Mediterranean convoys, with U-boats and dive-bombers all around; the Arctic convoys to Murmansk and Archangel, and pocket-battleships to cope with. Mordecai doesn’t talk much of all those years, but sometimes, in quiet moments behind the bar, with his pipe going strong and the cat on his lap, there comes a faraway look into his eyes which tells us that the old shellback is dreaming dreams of long ago.

The war over and done with, Mordecai felt he had seen as much of the sea as he wanted; and it was time to settle down. A vacancy was going in a London tavern, and he took it, but after a time, things changed, and he came to the White Horse, with a pretty wife and a small son to keep him company (another small son came to join them a little later).

Here in Fetter Lane, so close to Holborn Viaduct, he was back on his native heath, with the familiar City clientele coming through his doors every day; the shopping crowds of Holborn, the staff people from Gamages, the Prudential and the *Daily Mirror*. Since most of his business was done in the daytime, with a brisk lunch trade at the midday hours, the evenings were comparatively quiet, with only a handful of regulars dropping in.

One evening in the week was an exception, however. For more than a year before his arrival a crowd of twenty or thirty young people had occupied the saloon bar for the whole of Thursday evening, every week with clockwork regularity. Their mutual interest was literary; they did a sale-and-exchange trade of books and magazines and talked themselves hoarse over their pet enthusiasm, a specialized form of literature, bearing the unappetizing name of “science-fiction”. They were not a formalized literary body like the Poetry Society or the Dickens Fellowship. Theirs was more the loose fraternity of the Johnsonians; the Janeites, and the Baker Street Irregulars, united solely by their speciality.

Now, Mordecai had a touch of literary taste himself. It was no illiterate deck swabber who went to sea in 1927, but a fairly cultivated lad who always packed four or five books into his ditty-box, always including a Shakespeare and a Dickens. The ostensible ringleaders were youngish men of his own age, Cockneys like himself, with the Cockney’s robust and matey sense of humour. In this atmosphere, Mordecai began to expand and breathe his own and in a very short while, boss and landlord though he was, he found himself drawn in irresistibly as one of the boys.

No one who knew the saloon bar of the White Horse, in its hey-day, from 1946 to 1953, will ever forget it. When we passed through that front door of a Thursday evening it was like stepping into our own drawing room, with the whole place and the whole crowd before our eyes at the first glance. It was a squarish, compact, oak-panelled room, one corner neatly cut off by the quadrant of the bar itself, a glass-panelled partition separating it from the public bar and with the staircase behind and overhanging it. The elements of a drawing room, a stage, an arena and a market-place were all present, and the scene was enlivened by a little undercurrent of drama that had brought the whole crowd together in the

first place.

The aforesaid ringleaders had first united their forces before the war “to promote the aims and objects of science-fiction”, and now, six years later, they realized that the only way to do it was to promote a magazine themselves. Accordingly, amateur journalists and artists who would be professionals were gathering round them like bees round a hive, and things were humming merrily. Amid the unwholesome atmosphere of post-war public affairs with its suspicions, animosities, and false alarms, the circle formed a bright little centre of enterprise, vision, progress and optimism, a force that was certain to make its impression and establish its foothold, sooner or later, on the vast, confused, incoherent market of commercial publishing. But of course the circle as a whole, informal and unorganized, as it was, had no interest in commercial enterprise; they came in simply to meet their pals and have a chat. Now, in a public house the focus of interest is always the bar itself. Customers, may drift from table to table, spending ten minutes here or about half an hour there, but throughout the evening they return to the counter, for obvious reasons. The man behind the bar is usually a nonentity, but sometimes he can be the making or breaking of a circle of his customers. In this position Lew Mordecai showed up at his best.

He could discuss books with anyone in the room. He could tell a funny story with the best of them, and his repertoire was inexhaustible. He held his own easily in wisecracking backchat with Ted Carnell. He listened sympathetically to the doleful autobiographies of Wally Gillings and Bill Temple, and with intent amusement to the disquisitions of Sam Youd, exuding philosophic perspicacity from his seat in the corner. All the time he attended dutifully to the flow of orders at both bars, passing through the archway from one to the other like a presiding deity, going about his business with a seaman’s quiet efficiency and economy of effort. In short, he kept his house in order with the minimum of fuss and flurry; and indeed, with his wiry frame and silvery hair, impish grin and slightly pointed ears, he radiated good cheer and contrived to be both King and Jester at once, the life and soul of a Thursday evening.

And what a varied and lively scene he looked upon from his eyrie in the corner! Here in the centre were authors and artists talking shop with Carnell and dazzling him with their offerings. Just beside them the luckier lads, much luckier, were gathered closely around Audrey Lovett, and they weren’t talking shop at all (does she still think sometimes, I wonder, of the boys she left behind her?). On the centre table the noisy magazine market was always in full swing, the brightly-coloured journals lighting up the

room like jewels on a Woolworth's counter. At the side table sat Fred Brown and Charlie Duncombe glowering at each other in battles of dialectical chess. In the far corner a trio or more, usually including Syd Bounds, John Newman and Vince Clarke, fought it out regularly on the dartboard; at this point, too, was the famous "Battle Corner" where the Convention Committees battered each other to a pulp as they hammered out a programme for the next convention. In the other far corner lay the long leather divan, where so many couples for so many years, settled down to hold hands and talk in whispers. All the time the later arrivals were flowing in, and new faces were of frequent appearance. For of course the circle was no parochial affair, The boys from Manchester and Liverpool and Northern Ireland were regular annual visitors, and at one time or another our friends drifted in from all parts of the British Isles.

The great middle period of the circle ran its course from 1949 to 1951. By now the budding authors of 1946 were settling down, getting into stride and fulfilling some of their early promise. At long last Bill Temple finished his novel *Four-Sided Triangle*, and launched it on its amazing career with its many translations, its film version and the many new literary friendships it brought him. At about the same time a new novel, *The Winter Swan*, began the prolific career of John Christopher, and Jonathan Burke made his bow with *Swift Summer*. Now the brilliant career of Arthur Clarke burst out in its first blaze of glory, and then John Wyndham, the quiet fellow in the corner, shook the reading public with his famous *Day of the Triffids*. These were the halcyon days, the midsummer years, the golden age of the circle, when everyone could see that the White Horse was developing into a sort of twentieth-century amalgam of the Mermaid Tavern, Lloyd's coffee-rooms, and Charley Brown's in Limehouse. Needless to say, its light reflected pleasantly on the genial soul behind the bar. One presentation copy after another crossed the counter, all inscribed "To Lew..." with various good wishes and kind regards, making their way to the neatly-furnished rooms upstairs, and taking their place on his shelves beside the war-memoirs of the Prime Minister, the Everyman classics and the works of his favourite novelists, Joyce Cary, Somerset Maugham, Raymond Chandler and Evelyn Waugh.

This, too, was the time when the White Horse emerged as the world's rendezvous for science-fiction's fandom, for "fandom" is an international movement that has flourished so far for twenty years. Fans all over the world who had a chance of making the trip to Great Britain were told that, amid the friendly lanterns of London's pubs, one house reserved a welcome for themselves alone, on any Thursday, if they cared to drop in.

Accordingly across the seven seas that Mordecai had once sailed the fans came travelling, to gather merrily at their own inn at the end of the journey.

Impossible to remember now who came first, or how many came in the time – random names from the bran-tub of memory is all I can offer now. Some may recall Clive Isherwood, the athletic New Zealander who came over to brave the terrors of an English winter, or John Cooper, who dropped in one evening from Sydney, New South Wales. Of course, we all remember the night when the door opened to reveal the beaming bulk of Forrie Ackerman, and how we rushed him to the centre table, with Wendayne Ackerman at the other end, plied them with teetotal tipples, and kept them talking till closing time. Or the night of that glorious confab with Sprague de Camp (who can forget his delivery of a Hamlet soliloquy, in the London accent of 1606?) while Mrs. de Camp chatted quietly in the bar corner.

Or, brightest memory of all, those nights when the cavaliers of the White Horse clustered thickly in adoration round Bea Mahaffey (most of them were queueing up just to get near her) when for once the Thursday system broke down and we came in nearly every evening for a fortnight; until that evening when we drove her through the flagged and festooned streets of London, in a fleet of cars, and escorted by motor-cycle outriders, past the squad of the Metropolitan Police drawn up in smart array outside the Lord Mayor's Mansion House, to that farewell of laughter and tears on Liverpool Street Station before her departure for Harwich and the Continent.

But these were only the most famous of our USA visitors. Of others we can recall jovial Red Johnson of Dayton, Ohio, and demure Elizabeth Smith (aka Evelyn E. Smith, sometime *Galaxy* authoress) from Pittsburgh, Pa. (it shook us when we heard that “E.E. Smith” was coming to Town!). Or Rita Krohne of Milwaukee, Wis., strolling through the glades of Russell Square with a quintet of admirers in her wake, and Jesse Floyd of Savannah, Ga., who claimed a brief acquaintance with glamorous Lee Hoffman of the same city. O those familiar faces of only a little while ago – when shall we see them all again? Soon, let us hope!

Our European neighbours came over to the Conventions in a solid phalanx, Georges and Mme. Gallet from Paris, Ben and Barbara Abas from the Netherlands, followed soon by Jan Hillen and Nic Oosterban, and Sigvard Ostlund from Sweden, and so distant a visitor as Frank Lam, from Hong Kong, and more Antipodeans like Ken Paynter from Sydney. Here indeed were gatherings of united nations, with goodwill all around and no

slinging of vetoes in any direction!

And where did our central figure take his place among all the International celebrations? Let us recollect that moment in one of Carnell's introductory sessions when he called upon Lew Mordecai to stand up and be presented, and how Lew shuffled to his feet amid a thunderous roar of cheers, smiling and actually blushing, probably for the first time in his life!

The golden age reached its meridian and died down towards the afterglow, as golden ages always do. The saloon bar was a densely crowded place in the last couple of years, for all of its ample spaciousness; many a night we had to struggle through the crush to reach the bar, and raise our voices to be heard above the hub-bub. There was a curious atmosphere of impending crisis, of That was the year when the Londoners agreed to forgo their annual convention thereafter, to give the other cities a chance to offer hospitality. For London it felt like the end of an age, the beginning of a long breathing-space before another age commenced.

The blow fell in December, when suddenly the buzz went round – “Lew is leaving the White Horse!” At first it seemed incredible, but then we recalled he had been unusually quiet just lately, and a rather hangdog look had replaced his usual cheerful grin. When questioned he glumly admitted it was true, and up went the disappointed cry – “oh – it won't be the same!”

But after all, he wasn't going far – just across Holborn to the Globe in Hatton Garden, a mere five minutes walk from the White Horse. Promptly an expedition was despatched to the Globe to sample its wares, and it came back with a favourable report. It was the hour of decision; seven years of close personal associations were not lightly to be broken, for the whole world had heard of the White Horse, and in any case, most Londoners have a feline attachment to their favourite haunts and are always reluctant to quit them. But with a new management coming a change was inevitable, and as Carnell put it later, “Friendship means more than panelled walls.” The decision was spontaneous, unanimous and instantaneous – the circle was transferring, lock, stock and, of course, barrel.

Friend, we will go to Hell with thee,  
Thy griefs, thy glories, we will share,  
And bind the earth and rule the sea,  
And set ten thousand devils free –

A fortnight before Christmas, 1953, the first meeting was held in the great green cavern of the saloon-bar at the Globe, a house twice as large as the White Horse and twice as busy. The little huddled group of fans, fresh

from the intimacy of “the Nag”, seemed lost in that crowded arena. Attendance was sparse that night and the week after, and for a while it seemed that the circle had broken up, with most of the regulars absent and the floating population completely lost. Then from Christmas onwards the tide turned, regular faces reappeared, long-lost faces turned up again – “Old ones, new ones, loved ones, neglected ones” – all came back to the familiar circle in its new home, the life of the circle resumed its carefree flow and all Hatton Garden knew that once more a Mordecai ruled the Globe.

For to Lew of course it was a return to the home of his boyhood, and inheritance, as it were; of a family estate. His wife and family settled down quickly, and once or twice his father has come up from Brighton to look the old place over. The transfer has proved, after all, happy and satisfactory. With the story of the White Horse to inspire it and the trusty hands of Lew Mordecai to guide it, we can confidently expect that one day the Globe will be as famous as the Cheshire Cheese, the George and Vulture, the Elephant and Castle and the Prospect of Whitby.

Time and the Circle alone will tell.

(1954)

## 33: From the Globe to the Tun

One evening at the Globe last summer I suddenly thought, “Next December we shall have been coming here for twenty years – we ought to celebrate!”

I spoke about it to some of the surrounding fans and they, always ready for a celebration, agreed enthusiastically. I said I would write to some of the old original immigrants from the White Horse, Fetter Lane, who had not been seen at the Globe for some years. I wrote to distinguished authors William F. Temple, John Christopher (Sam Christopher Youd), Charles Eric Maine (Dave McIlwain), all of whom had started their literary careers at the White Horse; also our first Editor, Wally Gillings (*Tales of Wonder*, 1938-1941). At the November meeting I mentioned it to Arthur C. Clarke, who gave his good wishes but told me laughingly he was going back to his home in the tropics, never to see England in December again! I mentioned it to our new landlords, Mr. and Mrs. Aitken, who promised us plenty to eat and drink on the evening, and truly kept their promise.

I wrote to Lew Mordecai, landlord of the White Horse, book-lover and wit, whose transfer to the Globe in 1953 was the cause of our move in the first place. When Lew told us he was giving up his tenancy of the White Horse and moving to larger premises elsewhere we were sorry to hear this, for Lew had been part of the scene and we did not know how a new landlord would fit in. We promptly cheered up when Lew told us he was not going far – to the Globe Tavern just round the corner. So Ted Carnell took a small Committee of Enquiry to the Globe, sampled the liquor a few times and pronounced it an excellent house, well worth changing to. So Lew departed and we all followed him, carrying on in the new premises as if nothing had happened.

The Globe was possessed of a spacious basement, wherein at times we held our Celebration Dinners. On my study wall hangs a picture taken at one of them, with some three dozen guests around the tables, of whom I can still recognize about half. But the regular pride-and-joy of the basement was the full-size billiard table, equipped with cues and a set of snooker balls. What nights they were when our resident champion Charlie Duncombe sprang up with blazing eyes, a devilish grin, and a great roar of “Snucker?” Down we would troop to the table, whence Charlie seldom failed to beat the living skylights out of us. But we learned the keen eye

and the straight cue, and enjoyed it all. Since that time Snooker has become all modern and sophisticated, thanks to TV, but back then it was good old stuff to us.

We have been getting big crowds at the Globe on First Thursday for many years now, but we have never had such a crowd as on celebration evening, Thursday 6th December. Like all our meetings nowadays it was international too: Mr. and Mrs. Kyle representing the U.S.A., Joel Meyer and Hölger Müller representing the German Republic and a pretty young student from Pisa, Caterina Guerra, to represent Italian fandom. No wonder our saloon-bar is called the Bar of World Opinion!

This big crowd, with its international connections, give us reason to look even more closely into the future – which is what fandom is all about anyway. Next summer, 1974, the Globe reverts to its original owners and is almost certain to be pulled down with all the surrounding property. We are informed that the tavern will probably be rebuilt as part of the new development on the site; but this will take some time, and fans must have an alternative rendezvous while this is going on. Beginning Thursday 3rd January 1974 a reconnaissance party from the Globe will be surveying and sampling other taverns in the neighbourhood to find somewhere suitable. We favour staying in the City of London licensing area, since the pubs there do not do very much evening business, so there is more room for us and our trade is welcome. The magical catch-phrase “The Globe, Hatton Garden, First Thursday of the Month” has kept world-fandom in sure touch for all these years and we intend to maintain a tradition which is too good to lose.

(1973)

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When we heard that the Globe was to be demolished in a new scheme for the redevelopment of High Holborn, we took it as one hell of a blow. The unaccustomed mood of depression did not last long – one evening at the height of the crisis John and Marjorie Brunner strolled in, looking very pleased with things, and told us they had just had an excellent supper at the One Tun on Saffron Hill just around another corner, which might offer us our future rendezvous. So I took a party round to have a look, found it to be a spacious place, bigger than the Globe, with in addition a good nosherie at the end of the bar. To top it off there was a friendly welcome from the then landlords, Mr. and Mrs. Kelso. We made the affirmative decision right away, held our next First Thursday meeting at the Tun and have held them there ever since.

I have kept this account as brief as possible, hoping to assure the

reader that the One Tun meetings are a real live issue. The Neo-fans who find their way to the friendly billabong just up the road from Holborn Circus will NOT find a haunt of fading old-timers, nor the melting-pot of some transient and toffee-nosed fashion. They will find a welcome amongst a crowd of us who enjoy a good, keen-eyed look into the future – which is why the world-wide fraternity of SF Fandom has a future ahead of it. The spirit of Bill Temple and Ted Carnell have animated the Circle from the beginning and created its atmosphere. It is an atmosphere wherein legs are pulled unmercifully, whence toffee-noses melt in the heat, where attempts at one-upmanship all perish at a mocking glance, It is an atmosphere which to me has been the breath of life itself. The Circle will record its golden jubilee in 1987, and I hope there will be celebrations accordingly.

*(1983)*

## 34: The Visitors' Book

The famous and historic Visitors' Book of the Globe Tavern will be/has now been handed over to the Library of the Science-Fiction Foundation for permanent retention. A small but priceless and irreplaceable record of London social life in the post-World War years is thus preserved for the future.

The book was introduced by Lew Mordecai, the popular landlord at the White Horse tavern, Fetter Lane, where the original fan meetings were held. This was in 1951. Lew's signature is the first, and he is followed immediately by the first visitor – Poul Anderson, no less. I recall him as a quiet-spoken fellow, patient with autograph-hunters, who had a lot of good things to talk about. His brother John, the next signatory, was soon to embark on a distinguished career in the U.S. Navy.

Edward John Carnell soon follows. The founding Editor of *New Worlds* and first editor of *New Writings in SF* had also been Treasurer of the pre-war Science-fiction Association. It was he who suggested, at the re-union meeting of 1946, that the Association should be dissolved. It had given us too much spare-time work for too-small results, so why not just meet at the pub for drinks, conversation, the exchange and sale of books and magazines, etc.? Everyone present was enthusiastic and London fandom has carried on that way ever since, without organization or officials, but ready and willing to follow up any good idea that was brought up.

A run of soon-to-be-famous names quickly follows: E.C. Tubb, currently author of the "Dumarest" stories; William F. Temple, author of *Shoot at the Moon*; Dave McIlwain, better known as Charles Eric Maine; Sam Youd, to become famous as "John Christopher"; Peter Phillips ("Dreams are Sacred"), who for a long time was a literary critic on the old *Daily Herald*; A. Bertram Chandler, with his alter ego George Whitley; Arthur C. Clarke, another member of the old S.F.A. and of the British Interplanetary Society, who had just published his first book, *Interplanetary Flight*; John Beynon Harris, a pre-war favourite of all fans who had just published his new novel *The Day of the Triffids* under the name of "John Wyndham"; H. Ken Bulmer, a rising short-story writer who would eventually become Editor of *New Writings in SF*; another illustrious transatlantic visitor, L. Sprague de Camp, whom I recall as a fascinating talker and cracking good company; Walter H. Gillings, founder of

Britain's first true SF magazine *Tales of Wonder*, and now a contributor to *SF Monthly*. With two more names from the current generation, Bob Shaw and John Brunner, we are near the end of the White Horse days.

Before we left, two authors of an earlier generation called to see us. J.M. Walsh had been a best-selling thriller writer in the Edgar Wallace period, but he had turned aside to write *Vandals of the Void*, an interplanetary yarn that is still sought by collectors. He had also contributed "The Vanguard to Neptune" to Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories Quarterly*, and was now pleasantly surprised to find that these tales had drawn so many admirers. The second visitor, who graced our very last night at the White Horse, was Clemence Dane, authoress of a long list of famous novels and plays. She had never attempted to write SF but was keenly interested in it, and thrilled to find a younger generation.

This summer, London's unofficial SF Circle celebrated the first anniversary of its move to the One Tun, Saffron Hill. The anniversary meeting was as crowded as ever, despite its being the height of summer; and though no count has yet been made, the meetings must have attracted anything up to a hundred visitors throughout the year. The new Visitors Book begins with the signatures of the proprietors, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Kelso, "Him and Her of the One Tun". They are followed by visitors from the U.S.A. – very appropriate, since it was July 4th! Miss Julie Ellery of San Diego, Calif., and Mr. and Mrs. Sam Russell, also of California but later resident in Berkshire. There follows an original founding-member of the Circle, Arthur C. Clarke, no less, who wasn't going to miss an occasion like this.

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Visitors from, in this order of appearance:

U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Israel, Sweden, Eire, South Africa, Denmark, Northern Rhodesia, Hong Kong, Belgium, France, New Zealand, Italy, India, West Germany, Norway, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Argentina, Uganda, Holland, Japan, Switzerland and Poland.

From July 1951 to July 1974 = 112 pages of signatures, including:

Poul Anderson; Ted Carnell; E.C. Tubb; W.F. Temple; D. McIlwain; S. Youd; Peter Phillips; A.B. Chandler; A.C. Clarke; J.B. Harris; H.K. Bulmer; L.S. de Camp; Wally Gillings; George Hay; Leslie Starke; J.M. Walsh; Mary Patchett; Bob Shaw; John Brunner; Clemence Dane.

Now the Globe:

Dr. Marie Stopes; Arthur Sellings; Alfred Bester; C.S. Lewis & W.H.\*; Brian Aldiss; Nancy Spain; Anthony Hern; Mack Reynolds; Bob

Silverberg; James White; Sam Moskowitz; F.J. Ackerman; Bob Bloch; Jack Williamson; Fred Pohl; Judith Merril; Hans Stefan Santesson; Harry Harrison; Tom Disch; Larry Niven; J.G. Ballard; Anne McCaffrey; Ursula Le Guin; James Blish; Chris Priest; Don Wollheim; Raymond Fletcher, M.P.; Sam Delany; Paul Ableman; Peter Nicholls; Peter Grosvenor; Martin Walker; Isaac Asimov.

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\* C.S. Lewis's brother W.H. Lewis? [Ed.]

Occasions; WorldCon 1965; Sci-Con '70; Pre-WorldCon Meeting, 1970; The ChessmanCon, Easter 1972; Twentieth Anniversary, 1973; The Asimov Last Night.

(1974/75)

## Postscript by Bob Wardzinski

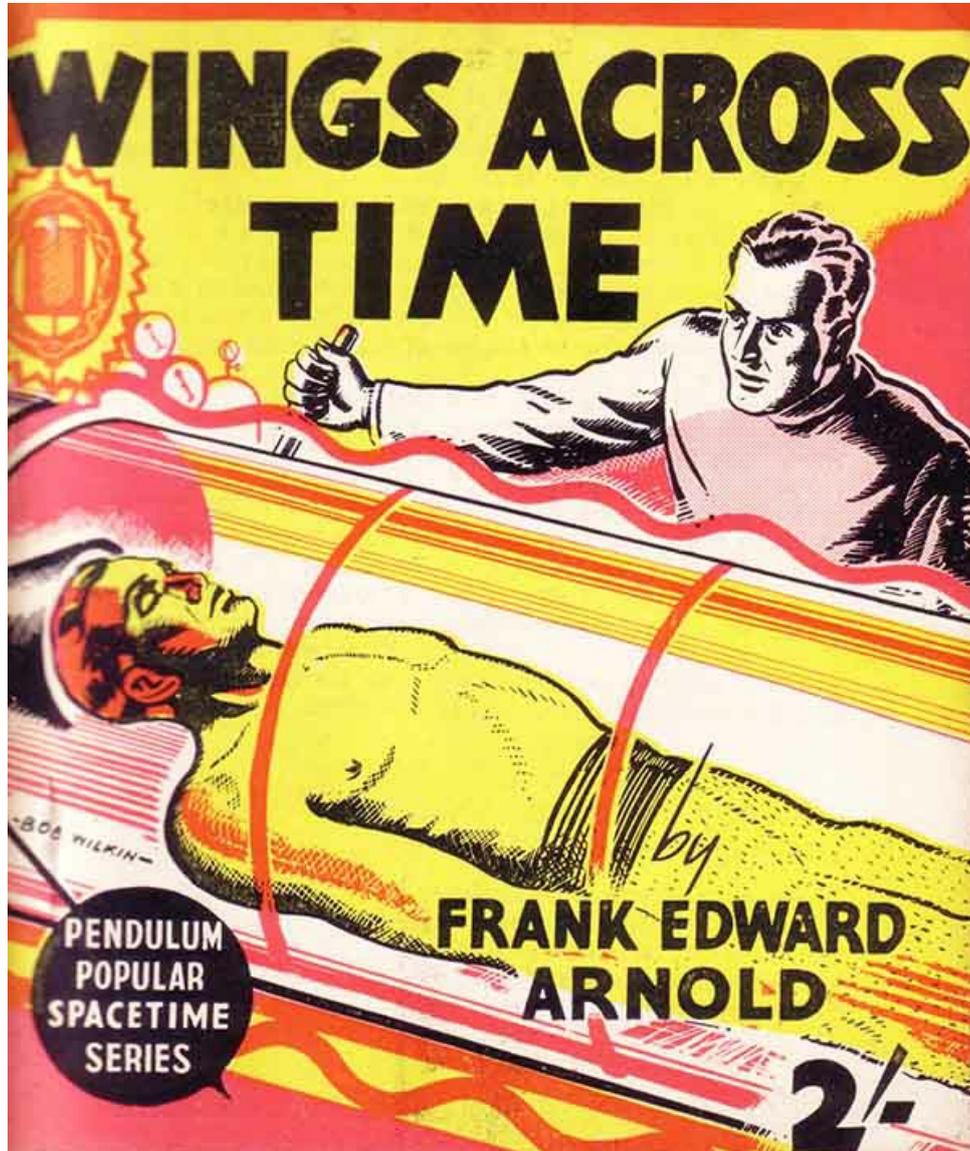
In the 1980s I occasionally drove a van for Fantasy Centre and did so when they purchased Frank Arnold's collection shortly after he died [1987]. He lived in a couple of rooms at the top of a dilapidated Victorian terraced house in South London which he rented from an elderly couple. The décor of the house was very badly neglected with threadbare carpets and meagre furnishings. Indeed, all Frank appeared to possess aside from a few clothes was a small number of bookcases housing his SF collection. After just a little searching, Dave Gibson and I found the *Globe Visitors' Book* in Frank's sock drawer. Dave immediately said this was not to be sold but was to be given to the Science Fiction Foundation (then housed at the North East London Polytechnic). I have checked recently with Dave and he says the visitors' book was given to Vince Clarke and he in turn delivered it to the SF Foundation. As I remember, it was black, about A4 in size and quite unassuming.

*Relapse #18 (2010)*

*Publisher's note: Unfortunately this report of happy closure has since been contradicted. As Mark Plummer wrote in *Banana Wings* #68 (see [Bibliography](#)) after quoting the above: "It seems the book did at least make it as far as Vince Clarke's house, as Sandra Bond remembers seeing it there. She also confirms that Vince meant to pass the book to the SFF but, just like Frank before him, it seems this never happened. Andy Sawyer is sure that it isn't in the SFF library and Rob Hansen is sure it's not*

*amongst Vince's effects which found their way to him." Keep watching the skies.... (David Langford)*

# Appendix



*Wings Across Time* (London: Pendulum Publications, 1946)  
Cover artwork by Bob Wilkin

# In Search of Frank Arnold

When assembling this volume I left out a fair bit of stuff for various reasons, among which was the following account by Frank of a visit to the streets of his childhood. Undated, but references to his first fifteen years and visiting forty years later suggest it was *circa* 1969:

...I looked once more at number 50. The timberwork was painted recently and the front door, once mud-brown, is now bright red. The ivy has been removed from the adjoining garden wall. Otherwise, the house is unchanged. I had forgotten the little canopy over the front door, which also covers the front door of No.48. That house was home for the first fifteen years of my life; when I was not away at school, I had to find what place in it I could in the company of four neurotic women and their drunken old mother.

I was happier, of course, at the house in the next-road-but-one where I was placed for looking after. There, a kindly and sensible matron and her two children, of my own age, gave me company. The eighteen months I spent with them did something to bridge the gap of the previous five years, though of course it could not do everything. The company I endured at home was enough to start pumping neuroses into me that were not there before. It has taken all of these forty years to pump them out again.

The road suffered badly in the blitz. Twelve houses were bombed on our side, ten more on the other, but the houses I knew have survived. I had forgotten that the road is pleasantly decorated with shrub-trees, including plenty of my favourite red-may. The fine street-lamps, of course, have been replaced with contemporary German abortions, as everywhere else.

In other pieces, Frank referred to Wentworth Road and Melbourne Terrace in connection with his childhood in my own area of London. Since it's only a twenty minute walk from home I visited Wentworth Road. Frank wrote that he was "was born within a mile of Wanstead Park", which description fits Wentworth Road so this could be his birthplace. It's a short road whose house numbers only go up to 38 and which shows no signs of having suffered WWII bombing damage. I think we can therefore

reasonably conclude that “number 50” was 50 Melbourne Terrace. However, modern street maps show no such place, so either it has been demolished since or renamed. (The nearest Melbourne Terrace is in Waltham Forest, but it’s too short to fit the description.)

If Frank’s father was fighting the Kaiser when Frank was born, it may be that the two didn’t meet until young Frank was four or five years old. He didn’t stick around long, leaving when Frank was nine and breaking all contact a year later. He may not have supplied any financial support either since Frank’s mother appears to have had to take in lodgers after the departure of her husband, hence that reference to “four neurotic women and their drunken old mother”. Frank named his father as one of the few men in his life he admired, but this doesn’t strike me as very admirable behaviour.

Armed with these two street names I took a bus to the reference library at nearby Stratford, to see what could be gleaned from the electoral register. Not much, as it turned out. There was no one named Arnold residing on Wentworth Road according to the register, but I had a copy of that page printed off anyway. (Only later did it occur to me that if her husband was away, Frank’s mother may have been staying with her parents when she gave birth – and it would almost certainly have been a home delivery with the aid of a midwife, as the majority of births were back then.) Of a Melbourne Terrace, there was no sign. There were however three Melbourne Roads. I had checked these out beforehand but only one of them, in Ilford, actually fitted Frank’s description. On the one hand Ilford was a bit far afield, but on the other that particular Melbourne Road intersected Thorold Road, then home of Walter Gillings and site of the first ever meeting of an SF group in the UK. This coincidence appealed to me but, alas, the electoral register showed no Arnold family living there during the period in question. So I left it there, a dead end.

Having subsequently acquired a pre-war copy of the London A-Z, I was able to confirm there was no Melbourne Terrace then. At some point the L.C.C. – the old London County Council – renamed a lot of streets, and a guide to these is included with the A-Z. It was not listed among those either. Which suggests Frank misremembered and that it was probably Melbourne Road. The A-Z also shows the best candidate – the Melbourne Road off Barking Road – looking markedly different to how it does now, the chunk nearest Barking Road having since been hived off to form Didsbury Close. All the original houses in that section are gone, presumably lost in the Blitz, which fits Frank’s description. Number 50 is in what remains, but is not the original. No, that house looks to have been

built in the 1970s or 1980s. So I'm prepared to tentatively identify this as the street where Frank grew up.

A week before the collection was due to be published, I unearthed another small tranche of Frank's papers. These contained specific details about his wartime flat that I hadn't known before, including that it was in...

...14 Crawford Street – the house is still there – a pleasant byway running between Baker Street and the Edgware Road. Here during time-off I was able to offer tea-table hospitality to fans home on leave and up in town, whence we could have a good piejaw before slipping across the road to the Beehive or round the corner to the Volunteer. The time I spent there preserved a link between the pre-war S.F.A. and the postwar Circle, and I keep a modest pride in it.

I had an illustrious neighbour – H.G. Wells himself, no less. We never met: he lived in rather grander style than I did, in a mansion in Hanover Terrace. Passing by, I used to smile at the huge figure 13 beside his front door.

So, naturally, a few days later, when I was going into town anyway, I checked these out. The Beehive pub is about a hundred yards from 14 Crawford Street, which is the sort of place it would cost a fortune to live in these days. It always amazes me that Frank and others were able to live at these addresses in central London on what were, even for the times, quite meagre salaries. Back then, what with smog and the like, I suppose the suburbs were considered much more desirable, but since the arrival of the Clean Air Act that's no longer the case.

I walked from Crawford Street to Hanover Terrace, which overlooks Regent's Park, a stroll that took me twelve minutes. Here I found the blue plaque I'd expected, commemorating Wells's years at that address. Walking directly back to Baker Street I discovered the other pub Frank mentions – The Volunteer – which is a few yards from 221b, where a line of tourists were patiently waiting to be admitted to Sherlock Holmes's fictional abode.

When I got home I resolved to check what the official records could tell me about his birth and his parents' wedding. These would be held at Newham Registry Office, a mere five minutes' walk from my home, though according to the website:

We do not have the capacity to undertake lengthy searches. Searches in the birth or death index covering a period less than five years can be made, but only where accurate registration

details have been given. We are unlikely to be able to search for periods between 1891 and 1965.

You can submit a request to do a general search of the indexes yourself, however a member of staff must be present to assist you.

For this reason you must pay a fee of £18 and make an appointment. You should also give two weeks notice to ensure a member of staff is available to help with your search.

Once you have found the entry we will issue any certificates you require.

This all seemed very reasonable, so I strolled over there to make an appointment. However, it turns out they were in the process of moving and the records weren't in the building any more, so it was no longer possible for me to do such a search. A year earlier, and it would have been.

A pity. I had been hoping to find Frank's date of birth, mother's maiden name, and the date his parents got married. I wanted the dates to confirm a suspicion that had been growing in my mind since I started this journey, namely that Frank's father might have been forced to do "the honourable thing" and marry his mother after getting her pregnant and that he would never otherwise have married her. As Frank himself wrote:

My father and mother were by far the worst-matched couple I have ever known. It was inevitable that they should part company and that I should be brought up by only one of them. At the time of the parting I was nine years old, and was given into the custody of my mother.

A year after leaving, Frank's father severed contact with them, which further supports my theory that Frank was the unwanted result of an unintended pregnancy. This is speculation, of course, and these events happened almost a century ago, but I think it fits.

Which is where I left things when posting the above to my website in January 2018. As Sherlock Holmes famously said, "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data." Bill Burns has now uncovered that data. It appears that Francis Arnold married Lucy Ellen Orrin on 19 September 1911 and that their son Francis J. Arnold was born on 3 January 1914, probably at 18 Whitta Road. This was his mother's address at the time, now long gone, and is close to Wentworth Road, Frank's childhood home.

*Rob Hansen  
August 2024*

## Afterword by Dave Rowe

Frank Arnold was the last link with the original London Circle of Ted Carnell, Arthur Clarke, Bill Temple and all. First Thursday of the month he would be there at the pub, a half-pint in his left hand and the Guest Book cradled under his right arm.

He was short, balding and slightly rotund. He had a grand memory (especially for long poems) and a slightly theatrical air about him. When making a point he would stab his index finger upward, his eyes would glisten and a somewhat cheeky smile would come to his face. It was a mild form of bravado which could inflate in some of his writings. Very few people would adopt the title politician just because they were interested in politics.

He lived for those first Thursdays. He would always leave with a smile on his face and sometimes after slightly over-imbibing there would be a distinct stagger to his step as he headed for the Chancery Lane Station. We loved him.

His apartment (which was devoid of television) was tidy and as neat as a pin but in the kitchen he would use the same dish cloth and tea towel even when they were brown and hole ridden, all that despite having a drawer full of clean ones.

His book collection, almost entirely hardbacks, seemed to end in the late 1950s. It included an almost complete collection of Gerald Kersh (non-SF), H.G. Wells and he would extol the virtues of David Lindsay's 1920 *A Voyage to Arcturus* as one of the greatest SF novels ever written.

From time to time he would consider writing a book-length history of the early London Circle. We would try to encourage him in the venture although we knew it was improbable that he actually would.

Knowing Frank's laxity, Rob should be highly congratulated for sorting the chromium from the crud.

For those of us who knew Frank there are one or two revelations in this collection but the biggest surprise of all is the realization that Frank died three decades back. Surely it was just a few years ago. Dear deceased friends can haunt you in wonderful ways.

*Dave Rowe, September 2017*

# Bibliography

The fiction list below is essentially the same as in Frank's own record titled [Published Efforts](#). The nonfiction list has been expanded with help from the Internet Speculative Fiction Database and other sources. His most used byline, for all fiction and much nonfiction, was Frank Edward Arnold. Where essays and reviews appeared under other variations of his name – most often Francis Arnold – this is indicated below. Items first published in *The Frank Arnold Papers* are not included: for these, see the [Contents](#).

## Fiction

- “The Mad Machines” – as “City of Machines”, *Tales of Wonder*, Summer 1939
- “The Twilight People” – *Comet Stories*, January 1941
- “Mecanica” – *Cosmic Stories*, March 1941
- “Wings Across Time” – *SF Quarterly*, Winter 1942
- *Wings Across Time* – London, Pendulum Publications paperback, 1946 (comprising “Wings Across Time”, “The Twilight People”, “The Mad Machines”, “Many Dimensions”)

## Nonfiction

- [“A Forgotten Scientifilm”](#), reviewing *High Treason – Tomorrow* volume 2 #3, Autumn 1938, edited by Douglas W. F. Mayer. (As Frank E. Arnold.)
- [“Is Weinbaum Over-Rated?”](#) – *New Worlds* #1, March 1939, edited by Ted Carnell.
- [“Futurist Fallacies”](#) – *New Worlds* #2, April 1939.
- [“To Hell with All This!”](#) – *The Satellite* #10, July 1939, edited by John F. Burke.
- [Review: \*The Fox Woman and The Blue Pagoda\*](#) by A. Merritt and Hannes Bok – *Fantasy Review* #5, October/November 1947, edited by Walter Gillings.
- [Reviews: “About Books”](#) – *Fantasy Review* #6, December 1947/January 1948.
- [Review: \*The Forbidden Garden\*](#) by John Taine – *Fantasy Review* #6, December 1947/January 1948.

- [“Prophecies in Celluloid”](#), reviewing *From Caligari to Hitler* by Siegfried Kracauer – *Fantasy Review* #7, February/March 1948.
- [Review: \*The Princess of the Atom\*](#) by Ray Cummings – *New Worlds* #12, Winter 1951. (As Frank Arnold.)
- “The Circle of the White Horse” – *New Worlds* #14, March 1952 (as Francis Arnold); reprinted in *New Worlds: An Anthology* (Fontana/Flamingo, 1983; revised Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2004) edited by Michael Moorcock.
- [“Mordecai of the Globe”](#) (as “Mordecai of the White Horse”) – *Eye* #3, Christmas 1954, edited by Vince Clarke, Stuart Mackenzie and Ted Tubb. (As Francis Arnold.)
- [“Out of This World”](#) – *Films and Filming*, June 1963.
- [Review: \*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?\*](#) by Philip K. Dick – *Cosmos: Science-Fantasy Review* #2, May 1969, edited by Walter Gillings. (As Francis Arnold.)
- [Review: \*Seahorse in the Sky\*](#) by Edmund Cooper – *Cosmos: Science-Fantasy Review* #2, May 1969. (As Francis Arnold.)
- [“The High-Flier That Flopped”](#) – *Cosmos: Science-Fantasy Review* #3, June/July 1969. (As Francis Arnold.)
- [Review: \*The Still, Small Voice of Trumpets\*](#) by Lloyd Biggle, Jr. – *Cosmos: Science-Fantasy Review* #3, June/July 1969. (As Francis Arnold.)
- [Review: \*A Very Private Life\*](#) by Michael Frayn – *Cosmos: Science-Fantasy Review* #3, June/July 1969. (As Francis Arnold.)
- “From Frank Arnold’s Papers...” – *Banana Wings* #68, November 2017 (as Frank Arnold); preview of this ebook’s sections [“The White Horse & The Globe”](#) and [“The Visitors’ Book”](#). The first of these two essays has since been expanded with more recently discovered material: a second paragraph on Anthony Hern and Nancy Spain followed by a new paragraph on Marie Stopes.

## Links

- *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*  
[https://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/arnold\\_frank\\_edward](https://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/arnold_frank_edward)
- *Fancyclopedia 3*  
<http://fancyclopedia.org/frank-edward-arnold>
- Internet Speculative Fiction Database  
<https://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?739>
- London Circle timeline

<https://news.ansible.uk/london.html#history>

*David Langford, 2017, 2024*

## **The End**

This free ebook of *The Frank Arnold Papers* is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at [taff.org.uk](http://taff.org.uk). If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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