



defined as being the sum total of the characters, events, moods, scenes, etc, that go to make up the whole. 'Plot' is the author's way of telling his story: the order in which the events are described, the relative ascendancy the characters bear to each other, and so on. (The work as a whole has a greater, more intangible life, independent of story or plot: language, symbol, nuance, passion ... but this is art, not narrative energy.)

My theory about all this is that the original idea generates plot, and it is the complexity of the plot that in the end will determine the actual word-length. As I believe that the 'story' is rather more important than the 'plot', my circuitous logic eventually explains why I think short

stories are no less important than novels, just shorter.

I usually work on short stories while I'm between novels. In only one fairly traumatic instance have I ever broken this rule and interrupted a novel; this was when an insistent American editor, whose needs were deemed more important than mine, wanted a short story written before the end of last week. As far as I am concerned there is, and will remain, a large hole punched out of the middle of *The Space Machine*. I doubt I would ever allow this to happen again, even though a relatively calm look a few years later does not reveal any obvious damage to either.

One matter which interests me is that there is no less demand – in either time or commitment – from a short story. At least two of my novels have taken less actual writing time than at least three of my short stories. As for commitment: I conceived, drafted and completed one novel in less than eight months, whereas one short story was stewing in the casserole of the subconscious for a decade and a half before I could find a way of telling it. (If you're interested, this one is 'Whores', in this book.) Yet another short story, conceived at the same time, is yet unwritten. Of course there is overlap.

Most readers will have a preference for novels over collections of short stories, or vice versa. Although this is inarguable I hope I have made it clear that to some writers – or to this writer at least – no such preference exists. A writer's intention is measured in values that do not include word-length ... and if that sounds over-weening let me add, quickly and modestly, that I would never presume to tell you which to prefer. © Christopher Priest, 1979

An occasional series of science fiction books which have been widely acclaimed as outstanding examples of the genre.

Stranger in a Strange Land

Robert Heinlein

When his parents die shortly after his birth, Michael Valentine Smith becomes the last human being on Mars. He is raised by Martians and from them acquires extraordinary psi powers. After 25 years a Terran expedition finds him and returns him to Earth. This is the story of his humanisation.

Entertaining and perhaps shocking, *Stranger in a Strange Land* undermines

modern society, attacks the religious explanations of faith, questions the idea of sexual relations based on jealousy and pokes a satirical finger at moralists and politicians. It created an uproar when first published and was the target of vicious attacks, particularly following the publicity that it was used as a guidebook by the Manson family, but it was also recognised as an outstanding example of science fiction and won Heinlein his third Hugo. 400pp

REF 6495

SFBC £3.95

New English Library £5.25

The Backlist

- BRUNNER, John** TIMES WITHOUT NUMBER
SFBC £2.20 Severn House £3.95 REF 6430
- CONEY, Michael** THE GIRL WITH A SYMPHONY IN HER FINGERS REF 6428
SFBC £2.50 Severn House £4.50
- CONEY, Michael** SYZYGY REF 6429
SFBC £2.15 Severn House £3.90
- CONEY, Michael** THE ULTIMATE JUNGLE
SFBC £3.40 Millington £4.50 REF 8956
- DICK, Philip K** A SCANNER DARKLY
SFBC £2.70 Gollancz £3.50 REF 8712
- DICKSON, Gordon R** (Ed.) NEBULA WINNERS 12 REF 8646
SFBC £3.75 Harper & Row £4.95
- FARMER, Philip José** THE BOOK OF PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER REF 6348
SFBC £2.75 Severn House £4.95
- GOULART, Ron** FLUX AND THE TIN ANGEL
SFBC £3.75 Millington £4.95 REF 8781
- HARRISON, Harry** MECHANISMO
SFBC £3.95 Pierrot £4.95 REF 8804
- LEIBER, Fritz** SHIP OF SHADOWS
SFBC £5.25 Gollancz £6.95 REF 6427
- OLANDER, Joseph D and GREENBERG, Martin** Harry (Ed.) WRITERS OF THE 21st CENTURY: ASIMOV (non-fiction)
SFBC £3.95 Paul Harris £6.00 REF 8934

- OLANDER, Joseph D and GREENBERG, Martin** Harry (Ed.) WRITERS OF THE 21st CENTURY: CLARKE (non-fiction)
SFBC £3.95 Paul Harris £6.00 REF 8935
- OLANDER, Joseph D and GREENBERG, Martin** Harry (Ed.) WRITERS OF THE 21st CENTURY: HEINLEIN (non-fiction)
SFBC £3.95 Paul Harris £6.00 REF 8936
- POHL, Frederik** THE WAY THE FUTURE WAS: A MEMOIR (non-fiction)
SFBC £4.85 Gollancz £6.50 REF 6388
- REAMY, Tom** BLIND VOICES REF 6351
SFBC £4.50 Sidgwick & Jackson £5.95
- ROBINSON, Spider and Jeanne** STARDANCE
SFBC £4.50 Sidgwick & Jackson £5.95 REF 8970
- SIMAK, Clifford D** CATFACE REF 8890
SFBC £3.40 Sidgwick & Jackson £4.95
- SWANN, Ingo** STARFIRE REF 8686
SFBC £2.95 Souvenir Press £3.95
- TIPTREE JNR, James** UP THE WALLS OF THE WORLD
SFBC £3.95 Gollancz £5.25 REF 8753
- VARLEY, John** TITAN REF 6330
SFBC £4.50 Sidgwick & Jackson £5.95
- WARRICK, Patricia, GREENBERG, Martin** Harry, OLANDER, Joseph (Ed.) REF 6352
SF: CONTEMPORARY MYTHOLOGY
SFBC £3.40 Harper & Row £4.50
- WYNDHAM, John** WEB REF 6329
SFBC £3.75 Michael Joseph £4.95
- YARBRO, Chelsea Quinn** FALSE DAWN
SFBC £4.15 Sidgwick & Jackson £5.50 REF 6414

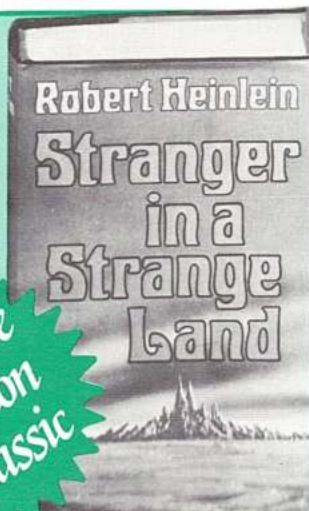
We are all entitled to illusions about ourselves, and mine is that I think of myself as being primarily a novelist. That this is an illusion will probably become clearer when you reach my devious logic below, but I'm never really happy unless I have a novel on the go, a solid stack of pure white paper willingly surrendering its virginity to my typewriter. Perhaps this is vanity, or some Freudian need to dominate, or just that I am impressed by size ... but that is how it feels.

However, in a more objective frame of mind I never see a short story as running second-best to a novel. The two are different disciplines, and a story is not just a shorter version of a novel. I feel this instinctively, to the point where once I have started a short story it never grows against my will into a novel. The two longest stories in *An Infinite Summer* – 'Palely Loitering' and 'The Watched' – were both intended to be long short stories and no more, although both did turn out somewhat longer than I had expected.

I suppose that the difference lies in the complexity or otherwise of the central idea, although it is not for idea alone that one writes.

Consider 'The Watched', for instance: this seems to me to have a relatively simple idea behind it. If A is doing something private and B is spying on him, then we would call B a voyeur and A his victim. The story sets out to question, and perhaps reverse, this assumption. It does not seem to me now, nor did it when I was writing the story, that this sort of question is one that could sustain a full length novel, but this is not to relegate the quality of the idea to some sort of second division.

Every work of fiction has two sources of narrative energy: story and plot. 'Story' can be



- ALDISS, Brian** THIS WORLD AND NEARER ONES (non-fiction) REF 6415
SFBC £4.95 Weidenfeld & Nicolson £6.95
- ASIMOV, Isaac I** ROBOT
SFBC £2.95 Dobson £3.95 REF 6300
- ASIMOV, (Ed.)** THE HUGO WINNERS 1970-72
SFBC £3.75 Dobson £4.95 REF 8957
- ASIMOV, Isaac (Ed.)** THE HUGO WINNERS 1973
SFBC £3.75 Dobson £4.95 REF 8958
- ASIMOV, Isaac (Ed.)** THE HUGO WINNERS 1974-1975
SFBC £3.75 Dobson £4.95 REF 8959
- ASIMOV, Isaac (Ed.)** THE HUGO WINNERS 1970-1975
SFBC £10.50 Dobson £14.85 REF 8964
- ASIMOV, Isaac, GREENBERG, Martin** Harry, OLANDER, Joseph D (Ed.) 100 GREAT SCIENCE FICTION SHORT STORIES
SFBC £2.95 Robson £3.95 REF 8485
- BEGG, Paul** INTO THIN AIR (non-fiction)
SFBC £4.50 David & Charles £5.95 REF 6398
- BIGGLE, Lloyd** THE LIGHT THAT NEVER WAS REF 6353
SFBC £2.20 Severn House £3.95
- BIGGLE, Lloyd** THE WORLD MENDERS
SFBC £2.15 Severn House £3.90 REF 6354
- BRUNNER, John** THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER
SFBC £2.00 Dent £3.95 REF 8612
- BRUNNER, John** STAND ON ZANZIBAR
SFBC 95p Macdonald & Jane's £2.10 REF 0436