

'Compassion Circuit' by John Wyndham
 'A Planet Named Shayol' by Cordwainer Smith
 'Into the Shop' by Ron Goulart
 'The Secret Songs' by Fritz Leiber
 'Stranger Station' by Damon Knight
 'Hot Planet' by Hal Clement
 'The Choice' by Wayland Young

'The sharpness of the editorial eye produces many stories that convince by sheer expertise, but the best are those, such as the late C. M. Kornbluth's 'The Marching Morons' and John Brunner's 'Such Stuff,' which are extrapolations of the immediate present, nightmares at noon earned from the abrasive dust of the pavements we all walk.' J. G. BALLARD in the *Guardian*.

This is a limited edition for SFBC, so please, for your own benefit, do order as soon as possible, if you have not already done so.

SFBC 12s 6d, post free (Gollancz 21s)

CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN

From D. B., Teddington:

May I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your 'century' and to wish you many more years of good publishing. Like many of your other readers, I have not enjoyed all the books in that first hundred, but I do feel that the selectors have filled my bookshelves with some excellent reading over the years, and I look forward to some entertaining reading in the years to come. Perhaps I am too old a hand at reading sf, but I wonder if I could make a plea for one or two of van Vogt's novels—I feel that the more modern generation of sf reader has never had quite the same opportunity of reading him that I and my contemporaries had during and just after the war.

From J. K. S.-B., Australia:

I think that the Ballard and Heinlein tales stick in one's memory most of all, with their weird descriptive powers. However, all your authors are to be admired for their incredible imagination. Also your volumes are so easy to hold and the print so clear—very valuable attributes for someone of my years . . . Thank you for the wide range of choices.

From J. S., Orpington:

I would like to add my comments to the views expressed in the correspondence in *SF News* 103. In general the selections provided by the club are of an extremely high standard, although there are the occasional exceptions: *Hothouse*, a sickening piece of drivel by Brian Aldiss, springs immediately to mind.

(1) The authors which I would personally like to see making more frequent appearances in the club editions are Asimov, Heinlein, van Vogt, Russell, Vance and Anderson. The books which I would most like to see are Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy, and *Little Fuzzy*, with its sequel, *The Other Human Race*.

(2) Another idea which I feel would find favour among many members is for an arrangement with the American Science Fiction Book Club, whereby members could receive the selections of this club.

(3) The point raised by I. S. of New Barnet regarding anthologies compiled especially for the club is, I feel, worthy of serious consideration. By the way, when will John Carnell's *New Writings* series make its appearance in the club?

[A reply to J. S.:

(1) We are at the moment negotiating for Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy for SFBC. It is, perhaps, apposite here to remind members that all the sf published in this country is not *automatically* available to SFBC; some publishers dislike book club editions of their books, and others are much too costly. The selections which SFBC can make have to be decided on economic grounds as well as on merit.

(2) The American Science Fiction Book Club: Arrangements with American publishers carry with them a good many practical difficulties and one of the main ones is the exchange of currency. Another important point, too, is the fact that at the moment the majority of SFBC titles are, originally, American publications, and while this is so there is probably little to be gained from a link with the American Science Fiction Book Club.

(3) The compilation of anthologies especially for SFBC: Again the most important point is the economic one: the right to reprint material involves the payment of fees and every SFBC title has to be kept within a very strict budget. In fact the life of a book club depends upon a balance between merit and expenditure and, as members themselves point out, the balance is not always held! If these economic objections—to what are in many ways excellent suggestions—sound unenterprising, it is important to remember that the chief aim and function of a book club is to keep the cost of its selections to a minimum—for the sake of its members.—EDITOR]

WANTED AND FOR SALE

MR A. T. BUCK would like to buy a copy of the SFBC edition of *Earth Abides*; he would also like to sell a copy of SFBC No. 32, *Christmas Eve*.

Miss P. Wright, 38 Abingdon Road, London, W.8, would like to dispose of the following SFBC past titles: Nos. 47 (*The Deep Range*), 48 (*The Lincoln Hunters*), 49 (*Wasp*), 53 (*Dragon in the Sea*), 54 (*Time Out of Joint*), 61 (*New Maps of Hell*), 62 (*The Stars are too High*), 64 (*Slave Ship*), 65 (*Needle*), 69 (*Drunkards Walk*), and 73 (*A Fall of Moondust*).

Mr M. McClarence would very much like to obtain a copy of *Great Stories of Science Fiction*. His address is: 16 Quantock Close, Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne, 5.

Mr E. D. Ormandy, 15 Golden Dell, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, would like to sell all his SFBC books, from No. 2 onwards, either as a complete set, or as separate volumes.

Mr J. Van de Linde, 51 Westmorland House, Preston, Lancs., wants to obtain a copy of each of the following books: *I, Robot*, *Portals of Tomorrow*, *Galactic Cluster* and *Clash of Cymbals*.

Mr B. Dixon, 72 Greenleas, Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex, wants to obtain a copy of *The Green Hills of Earth*.

All the above members should, of course, be contacted direct.

THE FEBRUARY SFBC CHOICE IS
SPACE BORN by Lan Wright
 SFBC 7s (Herbert Jenkins 12s 6d)

THE DROWNED PLOT (OF J. G. BALLARD)

An Evaluation by J. P. PATRIZIO

[This is the first part of an essay which originally appeared in *Zenith Speculation*. Part 2 will be printed in next month's *SF News*.]

RECENTLY there has developed a split in the ranks of readers of sf. This split has been caused principally by the works of one man—J. G. Ballard—and it seems that when his name is mentioned all reason flies, laying bare blinding emotions which cause protagonists to abandon logic and to resort to insults.

Having read extremist arguments on both sides, it seems to me that a more detailed examination of Ballard's writing might be in order; if it achieves nothing else it will explain why I find J. G. Ballard unsatisfactory as an author.

(1) *Ballard the Technician*

'Ballard is one of the brightest stars in post-war fiction.'

KINGSLEY AMIS.

'In J. G. Ballard's book *The Drowned World* we have something without precedent in this country, a novel by a science fiction author that can be judged by the highest standards.'

KINGSLEY AMIS.

'We will not see its better this year,' BRIAN ALDISS about *The Drowned World*.

Any writer who wishes to be taken seriously, who is not writing just for the money, must of necessity be fluent in his own language. This does not mean that he may not venture outside the traditional limits of the language, using words in untried context, say, but a writer using words wrongly through obvious ignorance, making mistakes of grammar and perpetrating similar technical errors, will irritate his readers to the extent that they may not even finish reading his work, and if they do, they may look with suspicion on any conclusion he may draw.

In *The Drowned World* Ballard shows a disregard for the English language which borders on illiteracy. Time and again the reader is jarred out of his suspended disbelief by fundamental errors of grammar and word usage; in fact there are times when it is hard to imagine that Ballard owns a dictionary. For example, a few of the grosser etymological errors are as follows:

'The solar disk was no longer a well-defined sphere.' This occurs on the first page, and sets the grammatical scene for the whole book; a disk is not a sphere. Ballard doesn't stop at this, he more than once talks about the 'annulus' of the sun.

'I grieve for your irrevocable death.' (It should have been 'inevitable'.) 'He continued to speak in a low, even monologue.' (Surely 'monotone'?) 'The black bowl of the lagoon . . . like an immense well of amber.' (Black and amber are two different colours.) But my favourite is where Kerans shoots Big Caesar, who then emits 'A strangled bubbling grunt'—frankly the mind boggles.

Sentences too seem to cause Ballard some difficulty, most of his stories being sprinkled with sloppy construction. Two prime examples, both from *The Drought*, show the confusion which can arise:

'As Ransom stepped aboard he let out two piercing whistles.'

'Mrs Quilter's upgrading of Ransom's status had not yet extended to Catherine Austin.'

In the first example, it is not Ransom who is whistling; in the second, it was Catherine Austin who had not yet upgraded Ransom's status. Both of these are made clear in the context of the story, but not immediately so. They require a second reading, a stopping to think, before the meaning is apparent—and, of course, a subsequent loss in mood.

There is really no excuse for this. Ballard can convey his meaning very well; a little care and rewriting, and these irritations would not get as far as the readers.

This observation is even more pertinent when it comes to preserving continuity of plot. In fact one does not need to be a good author to achieve this, all that is required is a little proof-reading; just conscientious reading through of the manuscript will always bring to light the slips like the one in *The Drowned World*, where Colonel Biggs explains that Strangman will get a free pardon, having just said that he has done nothing unlawful. Or, at the end of the book, where we are told that the Colt carried by Kerans contains two shells, and then that he scratches a message with 'the empty 45'. Or yet again, where Kerans finds Hardman 'no more than a resurrected corpse', feeds him on berries for three days, which resuscitates Hardman sufficiently for him to go trundling off into the jungle (with temperatures up to 140° F). Then Ballard tells us:

'For some reason he [Kerans] knew that Hardman would soon die.' For some reason indeed!

It is interesting to note that all the faults cited above are from novels, none are from short stories. The explanation for this is simply that Ballard does a better job on his short stories than on his novels: other than the ever-present split infinitive, I have found them quite free from mistakes—remarkably so when compared with *The Drowned World* and *The Drought*.

From a technical point of view I found *The Drowned World* read like a first draft, so much so that I would be willing to accept the explanation (if it was forthcoming) that the draft used was sent to the printer in error. Ballard, particularly in his short stories, shows a fine facility with words; I find it surprising that he allows so many juvenile mistakes to be published under his name.

(2) *Ballard the Scientist*

'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?'

Job xxxviii. 2.

I have it on good authority that Mr Ballard is one of those people who suggest that science is unnecessary in sf. Whilst having some sympathy with this point of view, I would not take it as far as he does, i.e. to the point of ignoring incontrovertible facts, where doing so is not an integral part of the story. What I mean by this is that in *The Sound Sweep*, for example, science is ignored to good effect; when you think of it the whole basis of the story (residual sonic vibrations resonating in solid structures) is pretty far-fetched, yet Ballard has used the theme to write one of his best stories.

However, when the author is deliberately looking ahead of the sciences as we know them, this sort of thing is permissible, and the reader knows where he stands. It is in the little snippets of throw-away information that mistakes appear, and it is here that Ballard is as careless as many others (and as lazy; it wouldn't take much effort to check his facts.) In *The Drowned World*, for example, Ballard indicates that he doesn't know what scuppers are, thinks morse and semaphore are the same thing, and tries to