

□ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC 40

Contemporary Literary Criticism

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Volume 40

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the
Works of Today's Novelists, Poets,
Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters,
and Other Creative Writers

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Preface

Literary criticism is, by definition, “the art of evaluating or analyzing with knowledge and propriety works of literature.” The complexity and variety of the themes and forms of contemporary literature make the function of the critic especially important to today’s reader. It is the critic who assists the reader in identifying significant new writers, recognizing trends in critical methods, mastering new terminology, and monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion.

Until the publication of the first volume of *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* in 1973, there existed no ongoing digest of current literary opinion. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need.

Scope of the Work

CLC presents significant passages from published criticism of works by today’s creative writers. Each volume of *CLC* includes excerpted criticism on about 50 authors who are now living or who died after December 31, 1959. Since the series began publication, almost 1,800 authors have been included. The majority of authors covered by *CLC* are living writers who continue to publish; therefore, an author frequently appears in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, or the dramatization of a literary work as a movie or television screenplay. For example, the present volume includes Marguerite Duras, who was awarded the 1984 Prix Goncourt for her novel *The Lover*; Fred Chappell, recipient of the 1986 Bollingen Prize in poetry; and Peter Carey, whose novel *Bliss* was adapted into a critically acclaimed film. Perhaps most importantly, authors who appear frequently on the syllabuses of high school and college literature classes are heavily represented in *CLC*; Jean Anouilh and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. are examples of writers of this stature in the present volume. Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These are the contributors to the well-loved but nonscholarly genres of mystery and science fiction, as well as literary and social critics whose insights are considered valuable and informative. Foreign writers and authors who represent particular ethnic groups in the United States are also featured in each volume.

Format of the Book

Altogether there are about 700 individual excerpts in each volume—with an average of about 14 excerpts per author—taken from hundreds of literary reviews, general magazines, scholarly journals, and monographs. Contemporary criticism is loosely defined as that which is relevant to the evaluation of the author under discussion; this includes criticism written at the beginning of an author’s career as well as current commentary. Emphasis has been placed on expanding the sources for criticism by including an increasing number of scholarly and specialized periodicals. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers frequently find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by the editors supply them with all the information needed to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. However, complete bibliographical citations facilitate the location of the original source as well as provide all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

A *CLC* author entry consists of the following elements:

- The **author heading** cites the author’s full name, followed by birth date, and death date when applicable. The portion of the name outside the parentheses denotes the form under which the author has most commonly published. If an author has written consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any important name variations under which an author has written. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by question marks.

- A **portrait** of the author is included when available.
- A brief **biographical and critical introduction** to the author and his or her work precedes the excerpted criticism. However, *CLC* is not intended to be a definitive biographical source. Therefore, *cross-references* have been included to direct the reader to other useful sources published by the Gale Research Company: *Contemporary Authors* now includes detailed biographical and bibliographical sketches on nearly 86,000 authors; *Children's Literature Review* presents excerpted criticism on the works of authors of children's books; *Something about the Author* contains heavily illustrated biographical sketches on writers and illustrators who create books for children and young adults; *Contemporary Issues Criticism* presents excerpted commentary on the nonfiction works of authors who influence contemporary thought; *Dictionary of Literary Biography* provides original evaluations of authors important to literary history; *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series* offers autobiographical essays by prominent writers; and the new *Something about the Author Autobiography Series* presents autobiographical essays by authors of interest to young readers. Previous volumes of *CLC* in which the author has been featured are also listed in the introduction.
- The **excerpted criticism** represents various kinds of critical writing—a particular essay may be normative, descriptive, interpretive, textual, appreciative, comparative, or generic. It may range in form from the brief review to the scholarly monograph. Essays are selected by the editors to reflect the spectrum of opinion about a specific work or about an author's literary career in general. The excerpts are presented chronologically, adding a useful perspective to the entry. All titles by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type, which enables the reader to easily identify the works being discussed.
- A complete **bibliographical citation** designed to help the user find the original essay or book follows each excerpt. An asterisk (*) at the end of a citation indicates that the essay is on more than one author.

Other Features

- A list of **Authors Forthcoming in *CLC*** previews the authors to be researched for future volumes.
- An **Appendix** lists the sources from which material in the volume has been reprinted. Many other sources have also been consulted during the preparation of the volume.
- A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all the authors who have appeared in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, and *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, along with cross-references to other Gale series: *Children's Literature Review*, *Authors in the News*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Something about the Author*, *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*, and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*. Users will welcome this cumulated author index as a useful tool for locating an author within the various series. The index, which lists birth and death dates when available, will be particularly valuable for those authors who are identified with a certain period but whose death date causes them to be placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*.
- A **Cumulative Title Index** lists titles reviewed in *CLC* (novels, novellas, short stories, poems, dramas, essays, films, songs) in alphabetical order. Titles are followed by the corresponding volume and page numbers where they may be located; all titles reviewed in *CLC* from Volume 1 through the current volume are cited. In cases where the same title is used by different authors, the author's surname is given in parentheses after the title, e.g., *Collected Poems* (Berryman), *Collected Poems* (Eliot). For foreign titles, a cross-reference is given to the translated English title. Titles of novels, novellas, dramas, films, record albums, and poetry, short story, and essay collections are printed in italics, while all individual poems, short stories, essays, and songs are printed in roman type within quotation marks; when published separately (e.g., T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*), the title will also be printed in italics.

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted articles included in this volume for permission to use the material and the photographers and other individuals who provided photographs for us. We are grateful to the staffs of the following libraries for making their resources available to us: Detroit Public Library and the libraries of Wayne State University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Detroit. We also wish to thank Anthony Bogucki for his assistance with copyright research.

Suggestions Are Welcome

The editors welcome the comments and suggestions of readers to expand the coverage and enhance the usefulness of the series.

Authors Forthcoming in *CLC*

To Be Included in Volume 41

Reinaldo Arenas (Cuban novelist and poet)—Censored by the Cuban government for his controversial fiction and poetry and for his homosexuality, Arenas now lives in the United States. His recent acclaimed novel, *Farewell to the Sea*, recounts the psychic struggles of a disillusioned writer and his wife.

John Ashbery (American poet and critic)—A widely respected contemporary poet, Ashbery is regarded as a talented stylist whose work often remains elusive to interpretation. His recent works include *A Wave*, which won the Lenore Marshall/Nation Poetry Prize, and *Selected Poems*, which features many of his most important works.

Morley Callaghan (Canadian novelist, short story writer, essayist, and dramatist)—Described by Edmund Wilson as “perhaps the most unjustly neglected novelist in the English-speaking world,” Callaghan has been active in literature for over sixty years. His latest novel, *Our Lady of the Snows*, like much of his work, is characterized by its journalistic prose style, ironic tone, and moralistic themes.

T.S. Eliot (American-born English poet, critic, dramatist, and essayist)—One of the most important literary figures of the twentieth century, Eliot is recognized as a major contributor to the modern age in poetry and criticism. The twentieth anniversary of Eliot’s death has sparked renewed evaluation of his achievements.

Carlos Fuentes (Mexican novelist, dramatist, short story writer, essayist, and critic)—In his internationally acclaimed works, Fuentes draws upon Mexican history and legend to explore and define the identity of his homeland. His recent novels include *The Old Gringo* and *Distant Relations*.

Ernest Hemingway (American short story writer, novelist, and nonfiction writer)—Regarded as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, Hemingway has received renewed critical attention for the posthumous publication of such works as *The Dangerous Summer* and *The Garden*

of Eden. Criticism on these books, as well as recent scholarly essays, will be featured in Hemingway’s entry.

Eugène Ionesco (Rumanian-born French dramatist, essayist, scriptwriter, and novelist)—One of the most renowned exponents of the Theater of the Absurd, Ionesco employs exaggeration and black humor to explore the alienation of individuals searching for meaning in an irrational and meaningless world.

Peter Levi (English poet, novelist, travel writer, and editor)—A former Jesuit priest whose poetry often employs such Elizabethan and classical forms as the sonnet and the elegy, Levi has also written two adventure novels, *Head in the Soup* and *Grave Witness*.

Janet Lewis (American novelist, poet, short story writer, dramatist, and author of children’s books)—The author of *The Wife of Martin Guerre* and other acclaimed historical novels, Lewis has also gained considerable respect for her poetry about the Ojibway and Navajo tribes of North America.

Ross Macdonald (American novelist, short story writer, essayist, and autobiographer)—A prolific and popular author of detective fiction, Macdonald is best known as the creator of sleuth Lew Archer. In his recent volume of essays, *Self-Portrait: Ceaselessly Into the Past*, Macdonald examines his long career and the genesis of his novels.

Anne Rice (American novelist and critic)—The author of the popular novel *Interview with the Vampire*, Rice has recently published *The Vampire Lestat*, the second installment of *The Vampire Chronicles*.

Nayantara Sahgal (Indian novelist, short story writer, autobiographer, and nonfiction writer)—Sahgal’s writings are noted for their insightful portraits of life in contemporary India. Her recent novels, *Rich like Us* and *Plans for Departure*, are considered important additions to her canon.

To Be Included in Volume 42

- James Baldwin (American novelist, essayist, and critic)—A prolific and popular author of such novels as *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin examines the state of black people in the United States in *The Price of the Ticket*, which features essays from his entire career.
- Julian Barnes (English novelist, editor, and critic)—Barnes's novel *Flaubert's Parrot*, an insightful and humorous combination of fiction and criticism, has garnered considerable praise and has inspired renewed interest in his earlier novels, *Metroland* and *Before She Met Me*.
- William S. Burroughs (American novelist and short story writer)—In his recent novels, *The Place of Dead Roads* and *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs continues to employ the experimental techniques that won him fame for such works as *Naked Lunch*.
- Robertson Davies (Canadian novelist, dramatist, short story writer, and nonfiction writer)—An outstanding figure in Canadian letters, Davies has recently published *What's Bred in the Bone*, a novel that has furthered his reputation as an important contemporary author.
- Harlan Ellison (American short story writer, novelist, scriptwriter, and nonfiction writer)—*An Edge in My Voice*, a collection of essays on nonfiction topics, displays the controversial moralistic approach that distinguishes Ellison's award-winning science fiction works.
- Dick Francis (Welsh-born English novelist)—Francis is a popular and respected mystery author whose experiences as a jockey have influenced his novels centered in the world of horse racing. His recent novel, *Proof*, is a tale of murder and intrigue involving the wine and liquor industries.
- Zbigniew Herbert (Polish poet, dramatist, and essayist)—One of Poland's most important contemporary poets, Herbert often explores historical and political themes and centers on the conflict between ideals and reality. His recently translated works include *Report from the Besieged City*, a collection of verse, and *Barbarian in the Garden*, a volume of essays.
- Larry Kramer (American dramatist, novelist, and scriptwriter)—In his acclaimed play *The Normal Heart*, Kramer seeks to broaden public awareness of the physical and psychological effects of AIDS.
- Harry Mulisch (Dutch novelist, short story writer, dramatist, poet, and essayist)—One of Holland's most acclaimed and popular authors, Mulisch has gained attention in the United States for his novel *The Assault*. This work examines four years in the life of a man whose family was unjustly executed by Nazi forces during World War II.
- Dave Smith (American poet, novelist, and nonfiction writer)—Regarded as one of the most important poets to have emerged in the United States during the 1970s, Smith explores a wide range of themes in his verse. His recent collection, *The Roundhouse Voices: Selected and New Poems*, has received significant critical attention.
- Mario Vargas Llosa (Peruvian novelist, short story writer, and nonfiction writer)—Criticism on this leading contemporary Latin American writer will focus on *The War of the End of the World* and *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta*, his latest novels.
- Derek Walcott (West Indian poet and dramatist)—In his poetry Walcott explores themes related to his mixed heritage while evoking his life in the Caribbean islands. The publication of *Collected Poems, 1948-1984* has secured Walcott's position as an important and versatile poet.

Brian W(ilson) Aldiss

1925-

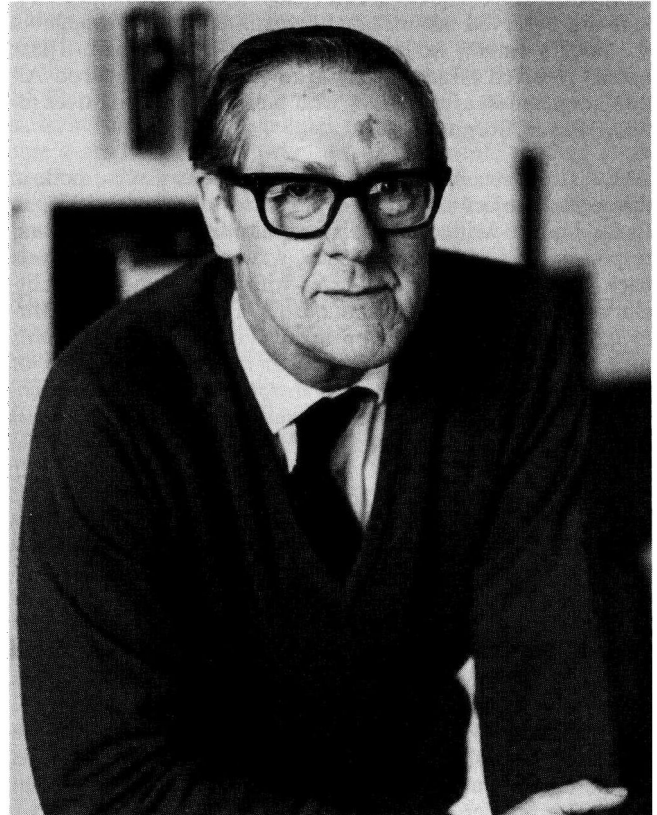
(Has also written under pseudonyms of Peter Pica and C. C. Shackleton) English novelist, short story writer, critic, historian, editor, autobiographer, nonfiction writer, travel writer, and poet.

An author who has experimented with a variety of literary forms and styles throughout his career, Aldiss is best known as a prolific and popular author and critic of contemporary science fiction. His major contribution to the science fiction field has been to develop a more thoughtful and humane literature which challenges the standard assumptions and beliefs of its audience. In his fiction Aldiss usually focuses on ambiguities, dualities, and paradoxes not generally attempted by other science fiction authors. Although some critics consider Aldiss's dialogue to be overly pedantic and his characters unconvincing, he is frequently praised for his confident, energetic style and the depth and scope of his ideas.

Aldiss's experiences as a soldier in the Far East during World War II have had a strong impact on his fiction. Jungle settings and the sense of exile he felt upon returning to postwar England are reflected in much of his work. Aldiss began his career writing what he termed "ordinary fiction," but he soon became interested in a variety of genres, including moralistic comedy, poetry, occult literature, detective fiction, and science fiction. His first mainstream book, *The Brightfount Diaries* (1955), written under the pseudonym of Peter Pica, is a collection of interrelated short stories about the domestic life of a bookshop assistant. Aldiss's first novel, *Non-Stop* (1958), anticipates his later themes of exile and solitude in the story of a crew of space explorers orbiting the earth who have lost all communication with the planet.

Much of Aldiss's early science fiction originally appeared as short stories in various magazines. Aldiss received a Hugo Award for most promising new author for the collection *The Canopy of Time* (1959; published in the United States as *Galaxies like Grains of Sand*). This book contains his most popular and widely anthologized short story, "Who Can Replace a Man?," which chronicles the end of humanity and the ascendance of machines. Aldiss received the Hugo Award for best short fiction for the short stories he later revised as the novel *Hothouse* (1962). This work is set in a jungle of giant plants and insects and relates the adventures of dwarfish humans attempting to survive in a hostile environment. Aldiss won the Nebula Award for best novella for *The Saliva Tree*, the title story of *The Saliva Tree and Other Strange Growths* (1966). In this tribute to H. G. Wells, a space machine arrives on an English farm in order to fatten animals and humans for alien consumption. *The Moment of Eclipse* (1972), another of Aldiss's well-regarded collections of short stories, is a diverse blend of science fiction, comedy, horror, and mainstream literature.

Aldiss's interest in taboo social issues, particularly sex, has at various times prompted him to write moralistic comedies in which he challenges conventional notions of sexual restraint. In *The Male Response* (1961), Aldiss centers on a group of Britishers forced to confront the casual sexuality of a tribe of



© Jerry Bauer

Africans, and in *The Primal Urge* (1961), his characters are outraged by the most controversial aspects of Freudian theory. Both novels received scathing reviews but achieved best-seller status in England. Aldiss's series of novels about Horatio Stubbs, a sexually obsessed Englishman, met with the resistance of critics and publishers alike. In *The Hand-Reared Boy* (1970), a book about adolescent masturbation, Aldiss strives to avoid lewdness in favor of blunt, honest comedy. In *A Soldier Erect* (1971) and *A Rude Awakening* (1978), the protagonist's sexual experiences as a soldier in Burma and Sumatra are developed as a metaphor for survival amidst the brutal realities of war. Most critics faulted Aldiss for indulging in tasteless, nonliterary subject matter, but the novels were popular successes.

Together with such acclaimed authors as Thomas M. Disch and John Sladek, Aldiss became a major force in the "new wave" movement in science fiction, which originated in England during the mid-1960s. Proponents of the movement, determined to break with the overworked conventions of traditional science fiction, argued that the genre should not be thought of as a single mode of literature but as a varied, developing hybrid of many literary forms. Several of Aldiss's novels from this period were originally published as short stories. His experimental novel *The Dark Light Years* (1964) centers on humanity's inability to relate to an intellectual alien race who profess a liking for their own excrement. *Barefoot*

in the Head: A European Fantasia (1967) is the story of a displaced Yugoslavian's journeys through a futuristic Europe inundated by hallucinogenic gas. Timothy White characterized the novel's blend of surreal and literary language as a narrative "written as though Timothy Leary had collaborated with James Joyce." In *Report on Probability A* (1968), Aldiss, influenced by the French antinovelists Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet, develops a quasi-documentary style through which details are observed but meanings remain obscure. Throughout the book's length, nothing is developed or resolved. These novels received largely negative reviews but established Aldiss's reputation as an author who prefers innovation over reliable literary formulas.

Aldiss's best-received fiction of the 1970s is diverse both in theme and subject matter. In *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973), a fantasy novel written as a philosophic treatise on the moral responsibilities of art and science, a futuristic narrator travels back in time, where he converses with nineteenth-century literary figures and with the fictitious Dr. Frankenstein. *The Malacia Tapestry* (1976) is a utopian novel in which Aldiss returns to a subject he often explored in his early fiction—that of absolute stasis, or the concept of entropy. In this book, citizens of a wealthy city-state believe they are descended from dinosaurs and prohibit art, technology, or any stimulus which could conceivably cause change. Aldiss reverses this situation in *Enemies of the System: A Tale of Homo Uniformis* (1978). In this dystopian novel, a futuristic military elite is faced with an impending need for evolutionary adaptation and must decide whether or not to defy the fixed beliefs of their totalitarian system.

Aldiss's Helliconia trilogy has been hailed as his major return to popular science fiction. In these novels Aldiss integrates such scientific concerns as ecology, biology, physics, geology, and chemistry to explore the effects of severe change on a planet circling two stars. Because Helliconia's orbit around its larger, hotter sun lasts 2592 earth years and its orbit around its smaller, colder sun lasts only 480 earth days, the planet's inhabitants are continuously forced to adapt to extremes in weather and temperature. In *Helliconia Spring* (1981), for which Aldiss received the John W. Campbell Award for best science fiction novel, viruses and a rival race known as phagors play a part in natural selection, with phagors becoming dominant in the winter when the humanoid population decreases and the humanoids becoming dominant in summer. In *Helliconia Summer* (1983), a novel of more personal concerns, Aldiss examines the moral implications of politics and the massacre of the phagors. *Helliconia Winter* (1984) centers on the attempts of the humanoids to survive the encroaching ice age and on the efforts of phagors and humanoids to come to terms with their mutual hatred.

Aldiss is also respected as an observant critic of the science fiction genre. He has published numerous essays, reviews, and columns both under his own name and under the pseudonym of C. C. Shackleton. *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (1973) is regarded as a definitive study of the genre, serving as both an introduction to the field and as a reference volume for enthusiasts.

(See also *CLC*, Vols. 5, 14; *Contemporary Authors*, Vols. 5-8, rev. ed.; *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series*, Vol. 5; *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, Vol. 2; *Something about the Author*, Vol. 34; and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 14.)

NEIL HEPBURN

[In *The Malacia Tapestry*, Mr Aldiss] suggests that the past enslaves the present. Malacia itself is a rich city-state, with the texture of renaissance Venice, but a mien belliciously fixed against change of any sort. The ruling council imposes a belief in man's descent from 'ancestral beasts'—biped dinosaurs—performs a ferocious positive vetting on any development of technology or art that might lead to change, and quietly murders those whom it judges to be progressives.

Perian de Chirolo is an actor scratching for parts in this strange place, which seems to be in the real world but not of it; and, to advance himself to a social position in which he can be a serious suitor to the rich and beautiful Armida, agrees to perform in a series of tableaux for the inventor of a kind of colour-photography. . . . But it all collapses as the Galileo-figure is denounced and made away with.

Somewhere in this entertaining farrago, with its science-fiction intrusions which Mr Aldiss seems unable to resist, there is a serious novel crying to be understood. But the questions—about class, authority, wealth, the effect of all of them on the capacity to feel, the weight of the past, the problem of change—are asked in a trite way, and never answered. It is best, perhaps, just to enjoy the continuous pleasure of reading Mr Aldiss's prose . . . and being struck by his felicitous invention of fantastifications which never jar with the milieu he is describing. (p. 95)

Neil Hepburn, "A Quick Tweak," in *The Listener*, Vol. 96, No. 2467, July 22, 1976, pp. 94-5.*

HARRIET WAUGH

[In *The Malacia Tapestry*, Aldiss] has attempted an exceptionally difficult form of fiction, and one in which there is a wide chasm between the first-rate and the rest. While a novel does not necessarily have to be very good in order to be enjoyable, this form of fiction does require a very high order of imaginative and intellectual power for it to work successfully; by these criteria, *The Malacia Tapestry* fails.

Mr Aldiss takes the reader into an imagined country on the borders of Byzantium. The people of the country evolved from prehistoric monsters, who still exist and are hunted at certain times of the year. Because of this killing, the religion of the country insists that man is basically evil. According to one version, if the people try hard enough they might achieve goodness, but in the other version there is so little chance of such grace that they must appease instead the gods of evil. . . .

The plot itself is a simple tale of romantic infidelity and betrayal, concerning a hero who is a handsome, empty-headed and essentially uninteresting actor who skids through life looking for a jolly time, not too concerned with the state of the nation. . . . The hero sums up the predicament of the novel rather well when he complains that the plot of the tableau in which he acts for a revolutionary photographic inventor, and which turns out to mirror his own story, is banal. It is a sad case of the emperor having no clothes.

Harriet Waugh, "The Front Line," in *The Spectator*, Vol. 237, No. 7727, July 31, 1976, p. 23.*

TOM PAULIN

Brian Aldiss knows how to be witty about the wilder reaches of subjectivity. The stories in *Last Orders* are hilarious fantasies

which turn Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* into space-age musicals and Neffpanimate Holman Hunt's "The Awakening Conscience". This act of cinematic ingenuity shows "Turner's little steam train cross a viaduct in a storm and its passengers alight at Maidenhead". A similar ingenuity effortlessly imagines blank-faced clone-serfs, obsolescing futures, 'ashes in the air, and traces of older destinations'. And what's so appealing about Aldiss's surreal universe is his way of introducing both quirky comedy and an obstinate humanity. In one story he quotes Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and then shows how suffering happens in its ordinary way while galaxies explode and expensive, delicate space-ships plunge into infinity. (p. 745)

Tom Paulin, "Mortem Virumque Cano," in *New Statesman*, Vol. 94, No. 2436, November 25, 1977, pp. 744-45.*

ALEX DE JONGE

[*Last Orders*] is vintage stuff. Some of the pieces are fairly conventional, others dazzling little narratives set on Aldiss's favourite territory—those glistening and frequently wild zodiacal planets. More ambitious compositions are musical in conception, reminiscent of symbolist prose poetry in their use of names and images to explore dreamscapes and work variations on their basic themes. Like symbolist writing, only less pretentious, they are beautiful but enigmatic. Mr Aldiss succeeds in leaving rational understanding behind without lapsing into gratuity. The writing conveys a sense of necessity and pleases greatly although I sometimes lacked any clear idea of what was going on—my fault I suppose. The writing is poetic in a good sense, a million miles from pseud's corner, authentically imagined probings into the deepest areas of inner space. . . . Real writing this. (p. 21)

Alex de Jonge, "January SF," in *The Spectator*, Vol. 240, No. 7802, January 14, 1978, pp. 20-1.*

A. N. WILSON

Told in the first person, [*A Rude Awakening*] chronicles the discreditable doings of Harry Stubbs, a name aptly suggesting unpleasantness of character and perpetual chain-smoking. The main flaw in this often clever book is that, while presenting the drunken antics of Stubbs (now a sergeant in Sumatra) in a realistic enough way to show that he is a mindless reprobate, it has no other voice but his in which to comment on things in general. Why should we accept his (of all people's) banal reflections on the political situation in the Far East in 1946?

And the obsession with whoring seems excessive. . . . Doubtless true, *A Rude Awakening* shows why the experience is distinctive, but not why it is one that a man could conceivably wish to have had. Aldiss is too fond of these dull tarts to think that some of his readers might find them boring.

A. N. Wilson, "No Offence," in *New Statesman*, Vol. 95, No. 2455, April 7, 1978, p. 471.*

PAUL ABLEMAN

Life In The West is primarily a novel of ideas, and a pretty good one. It shares with the kind (and it is the best kind) of SF that Aldiss writes the property of using character and situation to explore ideas rather than ideas to reveal character. The 300-odd pages of the book are divided into 14 sections.

Half of these are set in Eralpa, Sicily where one Thomas Squire is participating, as guest of honour, in the 'First International Congress of Intergraphic Criticism' and much of these sections is taken up with a detailed account, complete with long extracts from delegates' speeches, of the proceedings. What is 'Intergraphic Criticism'? It seems to be the treatment of popular art forms, and even diversions, as serious cultural manifestations. One delegate reads a paper on pin-ball machines and another, perhaps not surprisingly, on science fiction which, again perhaps not surprisingly, he manages to elevate to the status of literature. . . . [Squire] is the dynastic master of Pippet Hall, a country seat in Norfolk, and also a businessman and spare-time publicist who really knows where culture's at. It fleetingly occurred to me, while reading these sections, that perhaps Aldiss had originally aimed at a television spectacular and, unable to launch it, had settled for this prose version. But then there is the other half of the book to consider.

This consists of a series of flashbacks which jumps about rather confusingly and, I felt, gratuitously in time in order to reveal Squire's past. This turns out to contain a number of lurid elements. For example, his father was killed and partially eaten by his own mastiffs and, as a Freudian result, Squire, also feeling deprived at having been too young for the second World war, gets himself recruited into a Special Ops unit and sent to Yugoslavia to shoot Russians. He then returns to England, college, the family seat, the city and marriage. The blurb talks of his 'many affairs with women' but I counted only four. This is hardly Casanova stuff but suffices to alienate his wife who takes the kids and leaves the hall. . . . While recognizing that real people often do display contradictory qualities, I was never convinced that the disparate elements in Squire's character really fitted together. He remained for me essentially a talking head. Indeed, all the characters are chiefly talking heads but many of them generate more sense of being autonomous people than the hero does. Amongst the notable creations is the reluctant Russian Vasily Rugorsky.

But somehow, the places in the book seem much more real than the people. Singapore, Sicily, Serbia and Norfolk are all crisply evoked as is a cave in the jungle decorated with thousands of images of hands which are alleged to be the oldest works of art in the world. . . .

But most real of all are the ideas. Mr Aldiss is first-rate at unpicking the blurred fabric of thought in which we all live and showing its constituent threads. . . . [He] is acute and even profound on the nature of the great ideological conflicts of the contemporary world, on the rise of cities, on race and on many other things.

Selina Ajdini, whom Squire fancies, reads the congress a paper on Aldous Huxley, maintaining that 'Huxley's life typified the end of one great strand of English and European bourgeois Romantic thought' and also that the type of elite that Huxley represented 'typified a repressive class structuralism cloaked by a veneer of scientific and humanistic enlightenment'. Squire pencils 'higher foolishness' on his note-pad. Squire reveres Huxley, whose ghost hovers over these pages, and almost certainly Brian Aldiss does too.

It is a pity, then, that Aldiss did not emulate his master and limit his aspiration to a slender novel of ideas in which the characters make little pretence of being other than points of view. It would probably have resulted in a stronger work than this lopsided one which strives to incorporate flesh and blood

but thereby only succeeds in obscuring the thought. The sense of strain can be felt in the pretentious title. What we really have here is not 'Life in the West' but 'Certain Currents of Thought in the West.' Still, while they are flowing, the reader enjoys an exhilarating dip.

Paul Ableman, "Ideas Man," in *The Spectator*, Vol. 244, No. 7913, March 8, 1980, p. 21.

MICHAEL BISHOP

[The] least popular of Wells' early scientific romances was *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, undoubtedly because it smudges the conventional distinctions between the bestial and the human. Also, in the person of Moreau, it confronts the reader with an unsavory parodic God, an almost archetypal "mad scientist" whose obsession is (. . . according to [Frank] McConnell) "to recapitulate and improve upon the process whereby men evolve from beasts." Although Wells called this novel "an exercise in youthful blasphemy," its themes still disturb us, and much of *Doctor Moreau's* power derives from our continuing, perhaps innate interest in these questions. . . .

[Aldiss] attempts to tap the sources of this power by casting his newest novel as a modern sequel to Wells' evolutionary nightmare. *An Island Called Moreau* . . . takes place in 1996, exactly a century after the publication of its famous predecessor, during a global war. Particularly Wellsian is Aldiss' adoption of a prophetic, cautionary voice. In a brief, italicized coda he writes, "*The question was whether humanity's instinct for survival would impel it to find a way to permanent peace. Otherwise, all would be lost.*" (p. 10)

U.S. Undersecretary of State Calvert Madle Roberts ends up on a mysterious Pacific island. He soon learns that Wells' late Victorian allegory was triggered by his acquaintance with a "real" person, one Angus McMoreau (like Wells, a student of Thomas Huxley), and that the descendants of the Scottish doctor's grotesque beast-men are undergoing further experiments at the hands of a British thalidomide victim and genetic specialist by the name of Mortimer Dart.

To synopsise too much more of the story would be to explode a few of its crucial "surprises"—but it is significant that Dart's work, which depends not on the knife but on gene-manipulating drugs, has acquired a kind of legitimacy from the *institutionalized* conviction that the suicide of our species is inevitable as well as imminent. By dramatizing this concept, Aldiss' fable effectively argues against such a chilling surrender. And in an age when talk of "limited nuclear war" provokes casual ho-hums rather than outright horror, we can scarcely fault Aldiss for going to the Wells too often.

But I do quarrel with certain aspects of the *presentation* of this message. First, the American narrator occasionally stumbles into phrasing that betrays the author's nationality, and outdated Americanisms like "Why not cool it, Mr. Dart?" do not offset the elegant fishiness of these lapses. Further, when Roberts repeats his mother's tale of how Americans escaped the thalidomide disaster of the early 1960s . . . , Aldiss' dramaturgical string-pulling becomes embarrassingly clunky and conspicuous.

The novel's most damaging flaw, however, is the introduction of a female character, Heather, whom Aldiss wants to behave both as a silly exhibitionist and an ideologically committed government agent—without this latter role's in any credible way dictating her assumption of the former. . . . Beyond in-

jecting S-E-X into the narrative, it depicts Heather as a stupidly tractable wench and Roberts, in his response, as a paragon of priggish nobility. Although later events rescue Roberts from this assessment, Heather remains an ill-defined and therefore unbelievable creation. (pp. 10, 14)

Michael Bishop, "Marvels and Monsters from the Wells Spring," in *Book World—The Washington Post*, March 22, 1981, pp. 10, 14.*

ROBERT E. COLBERT

While Brian Aldiss is the least programmatic of critics—in striking contrast to such earlier, highly influential spokesmen for the [science fiction] genre as John W. Campbell—there does, nevertheless, emerge from the body of his critical work (and even to some extent from the designedly popular historical survey *Billion Year Spree*) a set of inter-related critical principles; it is to these principles that his discussions and evaluations of individual works and writers can be seen to have reference. Paramount among these principles is the high value placed on authorial autonomy. It is this central concern which governs a cluster of related concerns and the value judgments that ensue. It is, for example, Aldiss' concern for authorial autonomy that causes him to cast a skeptical glance at a great number of genre (i.e., magazine) science fiction's sacred cows. One of the distinctive features of his criticism is his advocacy of the necessity for thematic originality. Aldiss finds modern science fiction all too prone to ancestor worship, a major consequence of which is the resort to thematic and formal clichés. (pp. 333-34)

Aldiss rightly detects a paradoxical conservatism in a genre that professes to be concerned with change and diversity; instead, he discovers time and again in modern science fiction a strikingly unimaginative adherence to old stock formulas of theme, plot, and characterization, many of which derive from the technology-worshipping, gadget-oriented fiction printed in Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*. The "orthodoxies" initiated by Gernsback and his followers are seen to have inhibited severely the development of modern science fiction in two paramount ways, either one of which would seem to doom the form to inconsequence. The conservatism introduced by the magazines "shows itself in two ways in science fiction: in the way that posited (future societies) . . . are still but thinly veiled versions of today's capitalist West. The other ways [this] conservatism shows is in an almost frantic fight to retain old forms of fiction and even the old subjects—forms and subjects not exactly fresh when [genre] science fiction began in 1926! So the ostensibly forward-looking is often the backward-looking."

The price that writers pay for their all-too-frequent reliance on old, outdated formulas is that, lacking any genuine originality, their works rapidly date, become essentially unreadable. . . . (p. 334)

[Integrity] does not come easily; a great many forces within the field exert pressure on the writer to compromise with his craft and his conscience. From the time of Gernsback, for example, the weight of genre magazine editors and editorial policies has played a major role in turning writers into mere "producers," men lacking in any genuine creativity due to their subservient role to editors, fans, and financial pressures. . . . [Aldiss] only really came into his own as an artist once he made the decision to place his stories and novels in other markets where editors were more accepting of independent work. Such editors were often younger men who were