

## NEW MAPS AND OLD WAVES

Kingsley Amis represents an anomaly in British science fiction, a mainstream author with a deep affection for traditional SF and a distaste for New Wave experimentation. The literary lion of such social comedies as *Lucky Jim* (1954), which earned him a designation as an Angry Young Man, turned his mainstream credentials to the service of his long-time love for SF in his 1959 Christian Gauss lectures at Princeton.

The lectures were shaped into Amis's 1960 book *New Maps of Hell*; the lectures and the book gave science fiction literary status that may have contributed to later scholarly consideration and academic acceptability in course offerings. Clifton Fadiman and Basil Davenport, both associated with The Book of the Month Club, had lent their names (and faces) to the back cover of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and each included some SF works in anthologies. Davenport also wrote the short *Inquiry Into Science Fiction* (1955) and an introduction to the series of lectures by Heinlein, Kornbluth, Bester, and Bloch at the University of Chicago in 1957 collected as *The Science Fiction Novel* (1959) but with the limited distribution of a fan publisher. In the 1970s mainstream scholars Robert Scholes and Leslie Fiedler would turn favorable attention to SF, Scholes with a series of lectures at Notre Dame collected as *Structural Fabulation* (1975) and, with Eric Rabkin, *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (1977), and Fiedler with an anthology, *In Dreams Awake* (1975).

*New Maps of Hell*, in keeping with Amis's own fictional work, focused on SF's value for satire and social criticism. But Amis followed that with an influential series of anthologies, edited with Robert Conquest, titled *Spectrum*,

which ran through five volumes from 1961-65, mostly focusing on American SF and on stories from *Astounding*, reaffirming Amis's attachment to traditional SF. Like many of his generation, Amis was enticed into SF from discovering at the local Woolworth's a bin marked "Yank Magazines: *Interesting Reading*," and in 1981 he edited an anthology devoted to the Golden Age of Science Fiction.

In an introduction to Cordwainer Smith's "The Game of Rat and Dragon" in *The Mirror of Infinity* (1970), Amis paid tribute to Smith as "a fine example of the kind of writer I admire....: original but making no parade of his originality; aware of the work of his predecessors, humbly and responsibly seeking to extend its boundaries; above all, not looking for the protection which obscurity affords, but, in a genuinely adventurous spirit, never leaving the reader in the least doubt about what is represented as taking place." Earlier in the introduction he had expressed some concern about his "bringing highbrow values into the field" (similar to Dena Brown's blackboard comment at the formation of the Science Fiction Research Association, "Let's get science fiction out of the classroom and back in the gutter where it belongs"). "Now—among the newer writers, at any rate—treatment and style, necessary as adjuncts, have taken over as the chief interests. This is artistic decadence in the truest and most established sense of the term.... Woe to science fiction!"

Born in London in 1922 and educated at the City of London School and St. John's College, Oxford, Amis was a college teacher for a dozen years and has been a visiting professor at American universities. He has been a multidimensional author, following the success of *Lucky Jim* with more than a dozen mainstream novels, half a dozen collections of short stories, nearly a dozen volumes of poetry, radio and television plays, a wide variety of non-fiction books, and the editing of literary collections as well as SF. He won Britain's most prestigious literary award, the Booker Prize, in 1986 and received a C.B.E. (Commander, Order of the British Empire) in 1981.

He has written SF as well. His novel *The Alteration* (1976), an alternate-history narrative in which the Protestant Reformation never happened and Europe remained under a kind of Catholic totalitarianism, is a significant contribution to its sub-genre, and won the John W. Campbell Award. *Russian Hide and Seek: A Melodrama* (1980) also qualifies as SF, and *The Anti-Death League* (1966), *Colonel Sun: A James Bond Adventure* (1968), and *The Green Man* (1969) contain SF elements.

Amis also has written effectively at the shorter lengths with such stories as "Hemingway in Space" (1960) and "Something Strange" (1961). "Mason's Life," published originally in the *Sunday Times* in 1972, deals with one of the most

basic subjects of science fiction, the nature of reality. Robert A. Heinlein in "All You Zombies—," Philip K. Dick in almost all of his works including "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" (which was filmed as *Total Recall*), and Robert Silverberg in "Sundance" are examples of similar concerns, but "Mason's Life" says it all in a few words.

BY

KINGSLEY

AMIS

"May I join you?"

The medium-sized man with the undistinguished clothes and the blank, anonymous face looked up at Pettigrew, who, glass of beer in hand, stood facing him across the small corner table. Pettigrew, tall, handsome and of fully molded features, had about him an intent, almost excited air that, in different circumstances, might have brought an unfavorable response, but the other said amiably,

"By all means. Do sit down."

"Can I get you something?"

"No, I'm fine, thank you," said the medium-sized man, gesturing at the almost full glass in front of him. In the background was the ordinary ambience of bar, barman, drinkers in ones and twos, nothing to catch the eye.

"We've never met, have we?"

"Not as far as I recall."

"Good, good. My name's Pettigrew, Daniel R. Pettigrew. What's yours?"

"Mason. George Herbert Mason, if you want it in full."

"Well, I think that's best, don't you? George...Herbert...Mason." Pettigrew spoke as if committing the three short words to memory. "Now let's have your telephone number."

Again Mason might have reacted against Pettigrew's demanding manner, but he said no more than, "You can find me in the book easily enough."

"No, there might be several.... We mustn't waste time. Please."

"Oh, very well; it's public information, after all. Two-three-two, five—"

"Hold on, you're going too fast for me. Two...three...two..."

"Five-four-five-four."

"What a stroke of luck. I ought to be able to remember that."

"Why don't you write it down if it's so important to you?"

At this, Pettigrew gave a knowing grin that faded into a look of disappointment. "Don't you know that's no use? Anyway: two-three-two, five-four-five-four. I might as well give you my number too. Seven—"

"I don't want your number, Mr. Pettigrew," said Mason, sounding a little impatient, "and I must say I rather regret giving you mine."

"But you must take my number."

"Nonsense; you can't make me."

"A phrase, then—let's agree on a phrase to exchange in the morning."

"Would you mind telling me what all this is about?"

"Please, our time's running out."

"You keep saying that. This is getting—"

"Any moment everything might change and I might find myself somewhere completely different, and so might you, I suppose, though I can't help feeling it's doubtful whether—"

"Mr. Pettigrew, either you explain yourself at once or I have you removed."

"All right," said Pettigrew, whose disappointed look had deepened, "but I'm afraid it won't do any good. You see, when we started talking I thought you must be a real person, because of the way you—"

"Spare me your infantile catch-phrases, for heaven's sake. So I'm not a real person," cooed Mason offensively.

"I don't mean it like that, I mean it in the most literal way possible."

"Oh, God. Are you mad or drunk or what?"

"Nothing like that. I'm asleep."

"Asleep?" Mason's nondescript face showed total incredulity.

"Yes. As I was saying, at first I took you for another real person, in the same situation as myself: sound asleep, dreaming, aware of the fact, and anxious to exchange names and telephone numbers and so forth with the object of getting in touch the next day and confirming the shared experience. That would prove something remarkable about the mind, wouldn't it?—people communicating via their dreams. It's a pity one so seldom realizes one's dreaming. I've only been able to try the experiment four or five times in the last twenty years, and I've never had any success. Either I forget the details or I find there's no such person, as in this case. But I'll go on—"

"You're sick."

"Oh no. Of course it's conceivable there is such a person as you. Unlikely, though, or you'd have recognized the true situation at once, I feel, instead of arguing against it like this. As I say, I may be wrong."

"It's hopeful that you say that." Mason had calmed down, and lit a cigarette with deliberation. "I don't know much about these things, but you can't be too far gone if you admit you could be in error. Now let me just assure you that I didn't come into existence five minutes ago inside your head. My name, as I told you, is George Herbert Mason. I'm forty-six years old, married, three children, job in the furniture business...oh hell, giving you no more than an outline of my life so far would take all night, as it would in the case of anybody with an average memory. Let's finish our drinks and go along to my house, and then we can—"

"You're just a man in my dream saying that," said Pettigrew loudly. "Two-three-two, five-four-five-four. I'll call the number if it exists, but it won't be you at the other end. Two-three-two—"

"Why are you so agitated, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"Because of what's going to happen to you at any moment."

"What.... Is this a threat?"

Pettigrew was breathing fast. His finely drawn face began to coarsen, the pattern of his tweed jacket to become blurred. "The telephone!" he shouted. "It must be later than I thought!"

"Telephone?" repeated Mason, blinking and screwing up his eyes as Pettigrew's form continued to change.

"The one at my bedside! I'm waking up!"

Mason grabbed the other by the arm, but that arm had lost the greater part of its outline, had become a vague patch of light already fading, and when Mason looked at the hand that had done the grabbing, his own hand, he saw with difficulty that it likewise no longer had fingers, or front or back, or skin, or anything at all.