

to do anything. *Daru* isn't like that, you may be drunk but you can still carry on."

In an article published in 1954 in the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Carstairs compared Westerners to the Rajputs. Westerners too, he wrote, were committed to a life of action, were brought up to regard individual achievement as crucial, and found the experience of surrendering their powers of volition through marijuana to be threatening and distasteful. Like the Rajputs, they could drink alcohol yet remain in control.

Most consumers of alcoholic drinks manage to remain in control because they are able to measure quite precisely the amount of the drug they have ingested. The concept of moderation is very important in maintaining the social status of alcohol—which is why Stuart Walton, the author of *Out of It*, disapproves of the idea. In his well-argued if slightly self-indulgent thesis, wine writer Walton suggests that intoxication is an essential form of release from the pressures of existence, "the opportunity for a temporary

escape from the moderation that the rest of life is necessarily mortgaged to. It is the one aspect of our daily lives . . . that allows us radically to question the point of moderation as a desirable goal in itself."

Walton deems intoxication "a biological necessity, otherwise it wouldn't be so continuously prevalent in all human societies." As he points out, we possess an innate drive to alter our normal consciousness. Children spin round and round until they are giddy, and hold their breath until they feel thoroughly lightheaded. Holy men and women can lose themselves in meditation, but most adults cannot do this for themselves, or cannot be bothered to learn. "Drugs," summarizes Courtwright, "are powerful chemical shortcuts to altered states of mind." Whatever measures are taken to regulate or suppress the trade in them, their popularity is unlikely to diminish.

>ANDREW BARR, the author of *Drink: A Social History of America* (1999), is writing a social history of food.

ARTS & LETTERS

THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES IN SCIENCE FICTION.

By Justine Larbalestier. Wesleyan Univ. Press. 295 pp. \$50 hardcover, \$19.95 paper

My fondest hope for Larbalestier, identified on the jacket of this, her first book, as a research fellow in the Department of English at the University of Sydney, is that she get out of academia. A smart, assiduous writer with a good eye for telling detail, she uses her talents well in laying out the science-fiction landscape from the 1920s to the 1990s and in tracking the contributions (sometimes disguised) of women writers, ranging from the relatively obscure to such superstars as Marge Piercy and Octavia Butler.

Larbalestier focuses on battle-of-the-sexes stories, which ran chiefly in SF magazines beginning in the 1930s and feature pretty much all the variations you would expect—

worlds where men are subservient, or women procreate parthenogenetically, or indeterminate creatures morph seasonally into one or the other sex. Her brief summaries of the stories and her commentaries on their publication (and the public's reaction) are amusing, in a dry sort of way, and provide a nice antidote to the genre's tendency to take itself too seriously. But just when she's hitting her stride, you can almost feel the academic gear kick in. Instead of rattling on about the stories themselves or the pulp magazines (such as *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Science-Fiction*, and *Wonder Stories*) that ran them, she falls back into murky jargon that seems designed to wow some tenure committee.

Which is a pity, because under the forbiddingly abstruse prose there remains a good story about the participation of women—as writers, editors, even readers—

in what was initially called “scientifiction.” (Hugo Gernsback first employed the term in 1926 for his magazine *Amazing Stories*. Later, after he lost control of that magazine and had to start another, he came up with “science fiction” in order to stake a fresh claim to the territory.)

Larbalestier organizes her book around chapter headings drawn from the work of one pioneering woman writer of SF, James Tiptree, Jr. (1915–87). You read that right. Although she was born Alice Bradley and lived much of her life under her married name, Alice Sheldon, she chose a nom de plume at the corner market—“I simply saw the name on some jam pots”—and used it for many years to conceal herself and her previous career as an experimental psychologist. During that time she wrote acclaimed and groundbreaking stories, among them “The Women Men Don’t See,” “Her Smoke Rose Up Forever,” and “Faithful to Thee, Terra, in Our Fashion,” which often carried off prestigious SF prizes such as the Nebula and the Hugo (named after Gernsback).

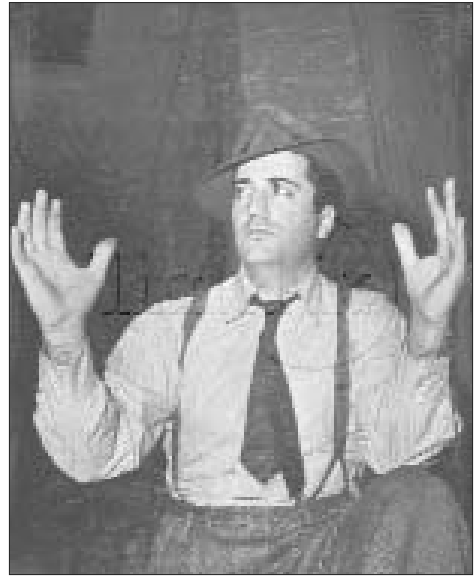
Since 1991, the James Tiptree, Jr., Memorial Award has recognized “fictional work that explores and expands the roles of women and men.” (Larbalestier herself has served as a judge.) Though you don’t have to be female to win, it helps; the prize has gone almost exclusively to women. If Larbalestier would ever like to play hooky from the stultifying academy and indulge her quite evident penchant for gender-bending SF, she might have a good shot at winning one. Nobody knows the intergalactic landscape better.

—ROBERT MASELLO

A DARING YOUNG MAN:
A Biography of William Saroyan.

By John Leggett. Knopf. 462 pp. \$30

Bill Saroyan was somebody once—and never more so than in 1940, when he won the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for his play *The Time of Your Life*. Just 31 years old, the California-born son of Armenian immigrants was already known for several collections of fresh and appealing short stories, in particular *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1934). The stories celebrated life and life’s



William Saroyan in 1940, directing rehearsals of his play, The Beautiful People.

outsiders and the large heroism of little people in the face of adversity. Just the ticket for depression-worn America.

Saroyan was in the triumphant first stage of a writing career of boundless promise. He regularly believed that anything he wrote was great, and not just great but maybe the greatest thing he had ever written, and maybe the greatest thing of its kind in American literature. He had the same initials as Shakespeare, after all, and if he wasn’t on the road to greatness, it’s only because he had already arrived.

Well, he lived until 1981 and got to compete with his young self for four decades. He never stopped writing—stories, plays, memoirs, and novels, in staggering profusion and at blinding speed. He might do a story in two hours, a play in a week. Yet his early success proved a height from which the subsequent decades were mostly descent, professional and personal. The descent was sometimes precipitous and sometimes halting, and on occasion it was even reversed. At every stage it was self-propelled.

To the extent that he’s remembered at all today, Saroyan has a reputation as a sentimentalist, and that, says Leggett, is to misread not just the man but much of the work. In fact, the sentimentality of the early writing curdled into anger and resentment at the world’s all-too-frequent failure to share the author’s self-