

publishing, when one had the impression that every woman had a drawer full of works of the imagination, just waiting for the right publishers to recognise them.

Secker & Warburg On our list: James Kelman and Aidan Mathews, highly praised and original voices from Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively; Donald Barthelme, whom Malcom Bradbury calls "the best of the American short story writers"; Ben Okri, winner of the Commonwealth prize for literature; Gert Hofmann, an outstanding new German writer, previously published by Carcanet; Jim Crace's new novel; David Profumo, son of John, a most exciting talent; Marianne Wiggins, with a book that invites comparison with *Lord of the Flies*.

Verso On our list: Boris Kagarlitsky presents a unique perspective on *glasnost* from outside the official structures in *The Thinking Reed* — the *NS* has already run an extensive interview with this brilliant young Soviet thinker, co-ordinator of the newly-formed Socialist Clubs; *New Left Review* editor Robin Blackburn's long-awaited *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848*; our foremost scholar on Central America, James Dunkerley's *Power in the Isthmus*, a massive and authoritative political history of the region; new translations from Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard, plus Peter Sloterdijk's polemical treatise on modern culture, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, a bestseller in Germany. John Thackara's *Design After Modernism* (Thames & Hudson) will make waves beyond the design world it confronts. Mike Marqusee's brilliant novel *Slow Turn* (to be published in paperback by Sphere) succeeds where Gattung and co. have singularly failed in recent weeks by extracting excitement out of cricket. □

AIDS VILLAINS

While Rome burns

Duncan Campbell

The Search for the Virus

STEVE CONNOR and SHARON KINGMAN *Penguin* £3.95

CRISIS: Heterosexual Behaviour in the Age of Aids

WILLIAM MASTERS, VIRGINIA JOHNSON, ROBERT KOLODNY *Weidenfeld* £9.95

IN NEW YORK's *Village Voice* recently, Richard Goldstein offered the city a prayer for the coming Aids holocaust. "Someone has to survive this. Let it be us." Were the prayer to be extended to invite retribution on the people's enemies in the war against Aids, these two books, in quite opposite ways, offer suitable candidates for damnation.

The Search for the Virus, which highlights questionable behaviour by leading scientists, is a classic Penguin book of the old Pelican style: comprehensive, up-to-date, scientifically based, written by experts, above all educational. It avoids apparent politicking and moralism to lend credence to these purposes. In this, it well reflects the columns of the *New Scientist* which the two authors write and supervise — columns which

some British Aids doctors are aware have often made their patients better informed on the latest clinical and research developments than they are.

But such a "neutral" format carries the price of eschewing proper headline journalism when there are important stories to be foregrounded. One of these is a major piece of scientific investigative journalism. Here, methodically investigated and clinically laid out, is the disturbing story of how leading US scientists bullied their way to the top of the queue to claim the discovery of the cause of Aids. The direct consequence was a year lost between the time when HIV (the virus that can cause Aids) was found and the day that the scientific community recognised the breakthrough as such. Come the day of judgment when the Aids pandemic is finally over, that lost year will be shown to have cost a heavy toll in lives.

A Frenchman, Professor Luc Montagnier, discovered the virus, first known as LAV, in 1983. Few appreciated the significance of his first, tentative paper. Yet a year later the US government announced that an American, Dr Robert Gallo, had discovered the virus; but he called it HTLV-3, erroneously labelling it as one of "his" family of discovered viruses. Of course, it was the same virus as LAV — and in more ways than one. In pursuit of the US claim to discovery and to patent rights to tests for the Aids virus, Gallo's team published as their pictures taken of the French virus, LAV. They disguised or overlooked the fact that "their" virus was a sample supplied to them by the French team. An ensuing three-year scientific battle between the Americans and the French was only resolved by a 1987 Heads of State meeting between Reagan and French Premier Jacques Chirac. At this point, the bug was renamed HIV, and both scientists were acclaimed as "co-discoverers".

This was a political convenience, far from the scientific truth. Gallo's behaviour before and after his "discovery" are an ugly lesion on the face of 1980s science. His subsequent attitude to the *New Scientist* for publishing the story of the erroneous claim is said to be quite as incandescent as Mrs Thatcher's last year in the matter of the *New Statesman*.

As scientists, however, Connor and Kingman have not gone into the social effects of the epidemic, and thus wander into some questionable constructions. They refer, for example, to stopping Aids as a battle against an invading army where the battle in respect of gay men has been "fought offshore" and "lost". This metaphor reproduces questionable and subjective views which elsewhere they properly attack. Aids sufferers are a part of society, not an "offshore" colony; and their own evidence is that the battle to stop HIV spreading in the gay community has been won through profound changes in personal behaviour.

With **CRISIS**, it is the writers who deserve wretched damnation. From the Masters and Johnson stable that brought you the sexually interesting 1960s, *CRISIS* has two main tenets: 1) that HIV infection has reached at least twice as far into the US population as the US government admits and 2) that the powers-that-be are deceiving us all about our chances of catching HIV from loo seats, mosquito bites and a litany of other superstitious occurrences (they even devote a chapter to the subject of loo seats).

To call *CRISIS* a comic would be unfair to the *Beano*. M&J's efforts are perhaps best epitomised

by the passage where they discuss the utility of playing basketball in "rubberised suits from head to toe" and take themselves so seriously they find it necessary to point out that this isn't really a *recommendation*. This from another review:

[This book] is not instantly recognisable for what it is: a thoroughly irresponsible, scientifically illiterate, panic-inducing piece of hypocritical mischief-making of which the authors and their publishers should be deeply, and enduringly ashamed.

Phew! But quite right too, and this quotation is not brought to you by reason of an attack of reviewer's laziness. If the *Daily Mail* and the *NS* can agree in their assessment of a book on *this* of all subjects, there's only one decent course for an honourable bookseller to take: return all stock to the publisher forthwith, for this is assuredly the publishing blunder of the year. □

FICTION

Genghis woz 'ere

Josephine Saxton

Chinese Whispers

ROBERT SPROAT *Faber* £10.95

IT WAS NOT THE TURKS but their micro-organisms which defended Western civilisation from the advance of the Mongol hordes. When Mangku, grandson of Genghis Khan, died of acute dysentery in 1259, his armies held to tradition and returned home.

Had this not happened, suggests Robert Sproat, his own novel might have been printed in Uighur script or ideograms; more probably, had he tried to write *at all* under the rule of the descendants of Genghis (formerly Tamburlaine, Temujin the Shepherd *et al*) Khan, he'd have had his hands cut off at the very least. (I will not offend you here with details of reprisals used by barbarians; everyone knows they were unkind.) Sproat's book is stuffed with what we now call Operant Conditioning of the most frightful ingenuity, purporting to be largely extracted from a Secret Official History of the Mongols, the story of psychotic megalomaniacs or great leaders. If, after 600 years, some brilliant writer exhumes a few facts or fancies about Hitler and, extrapolating, produces a "novel", what should the attitude be? Nostalgia?

As it is, the manner in which Sproat's book is written redeems it. It can be witty; is often humorous; it revels in detailed but controlled nightmares. Sproat is occasionally arch — with the one-word chapter intended to ambush us into sudden revelation of an idiom — but this is the tiny imperfection which stamps with authority the general perfection of his prose. Hardly a word is wasted or in the wrong place; the rhythms of the tailored sentences flow with an astonishing ease, never relying on flamboyance to obtain some very shocking and colourful effects.

It has always been futile to cavil at an artist using talent to depict and, sometimes, to revel in evil, to glorify that from which we now turn in horror. But, at this remove in time, there can hardly be an