

# Sex and drugs . . . and science

John Treherne

**Strong Medicine.** By Arthur Hailey.  
*Michael Joseph with Souvenir Press/Doubleday: 1984.*  
Pp. 430. £9.95, \$16.95.

From the writer who brought to millions the glitter of *Hotel*, the drama of *Airport*, the intrigue of *The Moneychangers*, this immensely powerful novel takes the reader deep into the heart of the pharmaceutical industry where millions of dollars and millions of lives hang on every decision ... and into the heart and mind of an unforgettable woman.

THE manifest enthusiasm of Mr Hailey's publishers for his latest production even extends to sending a review copy to *Nature*. Evidently they hope to reach the hearts and minds of the scientific community, as well as selling the film rights. Their optimism is not entirely misplaced. There is widespread public and professional concern about the activities of international pharmaceutical companies; readers of the 9 August issue of this journal will recall Carl Djerassi's angry review of Gary Gereffi's book on the drugs industry and the Third World, under the headline "Making drugs (and soaking the poor?)".

There might be doubts about the depth of Mr Hailey's fictional study, but there can be none about the swiftness with which he grapples with his subject. In the Prologue we are "up forward in first class" on a Boeing 747 amidst caviare and champagne — next year (i.e. 1985). Eight lines down the first page, Celia de Grey, the international drugs tycoon, reminds her handsome, supportive husband, Dr (of medicine) Andrew Jordan, that *certain deaths may be drug-related*. Two pages later we are back in New Jersey in 1957. The harassed young Dr J. (attending the critically ill wife of a factory hand in a thunderstorm), gets very cross with Celia, the beautiful saleswoman from Felding-Roth Pharmaceuticals, who obligingly returns to the hospital with an untested drug called Letromycin. She rivets the doctor with blazing eyes and persuades him to administer Letromycin — and saves his patient. After this Celia never looks back: she is gratefully embraced by and, within another page, married to Dr J. ("a quiet civil wedding with a few close friends and relatives"); she persuades Felding-Roth not to market Thalidomide, has a baby, flings her weight about at sales conferences, has another baby and by 1963 is on the fast track at Felding-Roth.

The break-neck passage of time is signalled by the regular insertion of tense paragraphs seemingly culled from *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*. In 1972 ("The rock-music cult called 'Woodstock Nation' flared briefly, then burned out") Celia is despatched to Britain to nose out

any local pharmacological talent. Between shopping trips to Harrods, she finds her way along Tennis Court Road to "Cambridge University's Biochemistry Building", there to seek the brilliant young Martin Peat-Smith who is in close pursuit of a memory-enhancing brain peptide, which, he hopes, will "perhaps eliminate mental ageing altogether". Celia is appalled by the gloomy squalor of what seems to be embarrassingly like a contemporary Cambridge research laboratory, is hardly mollified to be told that Fred Sanger once worked upstairs, but is much taken by Peat-Smith who is swiftly translated to the luxurious Felding-Roth laboratory at Harlow. There he gets to work to isolate Peptide 7, sacks the tight-lipped sadistic animal technician Gertrude Tilwick, seduces her beautiful replacement, Yvonne, and, eventually, Celia herself. There are quite a lot of spicy bits: Peptide 7 is not only an elixir but, it turns out, a powerful aphrodisiac and, apparently, a slimming agent.

Not surprisingly, Peptide 7 is an instant success; long lines form at pharmacy counters and Felding-Roth is well on the way to an increase in revenue of six hundred million dollars. Peat-Smith is elected to the Royal Society and there are rumours of a knighthood and a Nobel Prize. Meanwhile, Felding-Roth achieve another coup with Hexin W (a drug of rather vague pharmacological properties), the brainchild of the unpleasant Dr Vincent Lord who was very put out by the success of Peptide 7.

Unfortunately, Hexin W is discovered to have nasty side-effects and poor Celia (now the boss of Felding-Roth) is soon in trouble with the Federal Drug Administration and the persistent and unscrupulous Senator Donahue, who is intent on her destruction. Nevertheless, she manages a brief trans-Atlantic dash, next year (i.e. 1985), to witness Peat-Smith's investiture at Buckingham Palace. Yvonne (Lady Peat-Smith), looking lovelier than ever thanks to Peptide 7, is naturally very disappointed at not meeting Princess Diana, but excited by the prospect of Sir Martin's New-Blood post at Cambridge.

And that is where we came in, 400 pages before, with poor Celia returning to America to face the music. Will the Felding-Roth code of practice stand up to scrutiny by a Senate investigative committee?

Arthur Hailey's latest offering will doubtless help to relieve the tedium of

many an uncritical hour up forward with caviare and back in economy class with a hamburger. Despite the cardboard characters and a strong-bronzed-arms-and-yielding-breasts approach, *Strong Medicine* does make the attempt to write about important issues in a surprisingly fair and even-handed fashion; for most readers it will probably constitute their only extensive reading on this matter of vital public concern. So we should, indeed, be grateful to the creator of Celia de Grey, Gertrude Tilwick, Peptide 7 and the nubile Lady Peat-Smith. □

*John Treherne is University Reader and Honorary Director of the Agriculture and Food Research Council's Unit in the Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge. He is author of several novels, the most recent of which, The Trap, will be published early next year by Jonathan Cape.*

## Making scents

C.T. David

**Chemical Ecology of Insects.**  
Edited by W.J. Bell and R.T. Cardé.  
*Chapman & Hall/Methuen: 1984.*  
Pp. 524. £30.

THE subject of chemical ecology embraces everything of ecological significance that is mediated in any way by olfaction or taste. It thus encompasses a vast amount of information and a great range of different behaviours. A full account of the area would be expected to include material about pheromones, about chemical influences on interactions with other organisms — the finding of plant and animal hosts by smell, for example, and in prey detection and predator avoidance — and also about reactions to other chemicals in the environment.

It would seem that any book which attempted to cover the effects of all of these semiochemicals would be superficial; but *Chemical Ecology of Insects* proves that need not be the case. The editors have provided us with a selection of detailed and interesting chapters — starting with mechanisms of chemoreception; leading on through odour dispersal, insect orientation mechanisms to distant odour sources, plant-host finding, plant-herbivore relations, predators and parasites, chemical protection (including a long chapter on mimicry which seems more to do with "visual" than with chemical ecology), and spacing and aggregation; and ending with chapters on the pheromones of bark beetles and social insects. The only serious omission is of a discussion of the relations of insects to vertebrates.

Such a range of material cannot be dealt with in detail here. So I will concentrate, quite invidiously, on one of the many good