Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction

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the international review of science fiction

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Reviews

Editorial

Graham Sleight

Roger Robinson, the unsung hero who maintains *Foundation*'s address database, informs me that subscribers to the journal are split more or less equally between those in the UK, those in the US, and those elsewhere overseas. For that reason, I don't want the journal in general, or these editorials in particular, to become too parochial; but once in a while, a local issue arises with more general significance.

The issue I have in mind is the controversy here about the recent funding proposals announced by Arts Council England, and their effect on one publisher in particular, Dedalus Books. Dedalus has been in existence for nearly 25 years, and has contributed a great deal to the field of the fantastic. Most obviously, its first list included Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983), which has since become recognised as one of the seminal fantasy novels of its time. Dedalus is also relevant to our field because of a number of books edited by Brian Stableford that it's published, including *The Dedalus Book of British Fantasy: The Nineteenth Century* (1991), a simply invaluable historical resource. More generally, Dedalus has been active in publishing translated fiction, often of relevance to those interested in the fantastic and the decadent in the nineteenth century. I'm sure I need not rehearse the extent to which translation makes book production more expensive, especially for relatively specialist books; nor do I need to dwell upon the arguments that translation of fiction is one of the most important ways that we in the Anglophone bubble can be pushed into finding out about the wider discourse. It is, in short, precisely the sort of thing that state funding of the arts should be supporting.

Arts Council England is responsible for distributing public money, derived from our National Lottery, to a range of artistic endeavours. According to their website, they have awarded £2.17 billion over the period 1994 (when the lottery was founded) to 2006. Of that, £491 million has gone to music (including, famously, £26 million for the rebuilding of London's Royal Opera House), £568 million on theatre/drama, £208.5 million on dance, and £28 million on literature. Dedalus's grant has been under £25,000 a year, and their website asserted that "this will have catastrophic consequences and even if we can survive, we will have to completely re-think what type of books we can

publish." (http://www.dedalusbooks.com/savededalus.html). I have no means of assessing the truth or otherwise of this statement, but I'd note that it would be very surprising for a company to make this kind of public statement unless they had to. In the end, despite copious publicity around Dedalus's plight, Arts Council England refused to review their decision, and the funding shortfall was made good by a no-strings-attached two-year donation from the Informa publishing group. (Informa's main activity is scientific journal publishing, and this grant was part of their corporate responsibility programme.)

The larger issues, of course, are around how niche publishing operations can survive. Most of us involved in the enterprise of writing about sf and fantasy are niche inhabitants of some kind. Our enterprises may be sustainable because of heavy reliance on volunteer labour (as the SFF is), because of state support (as Dedalus was, like the UK magazine *Interzone*), or because of support from university enclaves, themselves often under threat. As a knee-jerk leftist, I tend to think of state subsidy as a benevolent solution to the problem of keeping such economically marginal enterprises afloat. The lesson I take from Dedalus (and a number of other arts endeavours undermined by this round of Arts Council settlements) is that, even more than before, it can't be relied upon. State support of the arts will only persist as long as we, as citizens, make it clear we want it to. A world with fewer niches would be a far less interesting one.

Four other pieces of business need to be mentioned. This issue's Viewpoint piece is John Clute's "Fantastika in the World Storm". Clute will need, I am sure, no introduction to *Foundation* readers, not least because of his work as Reviews Editor of this journal for many years. The essay was originally delivered as a speech at a conference in Prague last year, and subsequently published online; the version we present here incorporates some revisions and clarifications. I note with some regret that we do not have any letters to publish this issue; I hope that Clute's piece will encourage some feedback.

Secondly, Jolene McCann's paper in this issue, "Judith Merril's Spaced Out Library", was the winner of the SFF's 2006 essay prize. My congratulations to her, and to the runner-up, Lee Skallerup from the University of Alberta for 'Re-Evaluating Suvin: Brown Girl in the Ring as Effective Magical Dystopia'. We are most grateful to the essay prize judges, Lisa Yaszek, Uppinder Mehan and Gwyneth Jones, and to Michelle Reid for organising the competition.

Thirdly, I assume that *Foundation* readers will be aware of Terry Pratchett's recent announcement that he has been diagnosed with a form of early-onset Alzheimer's Disease. Describing the disease as an "embuggerance", he has just announced that he will be donating £500,000 (about US $1m) to the Alzheimer's Research Trust. Almost immediately, SF fandom, in the person of Pat Cadigan, proposed that there should be a collective effort to match this donation. Within a few days, a website had sprung up at http://www.matchitforpratchett.org, through which donations can be made.

Lastly, congratulations are due to Andy Sawyer, *Foundation*'s Reviews Editor and custodian of the SFF library at Liverpool. Andy has won the SFRA's Thomas D Clareson Award, recognising service to the field, for "his work over the years at Liverpool, the library archive & web site, the MA in SF Studies, his many academic contributions, and his long time support of the SFRA and participation in many of our meetings, over the years, among other things." The extent of those "other things", and the length of time Andy has been working in the field, are only part of what makes this award so well-deserved.

Graham Sleight

Viewpoint:

Fantastika in the World Storm

John Clute

A talk delivered at the Cultural Landscapes/Fiction Without Borders conference, Prague, 20 September 2007

Here is what I'm going to do: I'm going to argue that story tellers and readers have seen our planet — ever since it first became visible around 1750 — primarily through the huge range of tales of the fantastic that I'm here calling fantastika. I will then draw some conclusions, and end up here in Prague.

Part One will argue that it is possible to describe fantastika as the necessary form of planetary fiction since 1750.

Part Two will outline the narrative grammars that I find most useful when I write about the three main forms fantastika now takes: Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Horror (which I'd prefer to call Terror, but it's too late now). I think these grammars reveal something of the nature of story which speaks to the difficulties we all face as we try not only to conceive a better world, which is easy, but also to live in one, which is not.

Part Three deals further with the relation of story to world. If the models I'm suggesting make any sense at all, Horror (or Terror) is the most relevant of the three genres when it comes to adumbrating the dilemmas we face in 2007: because Horror is about our resistance to the truth: a resistance which lasts until we are left naked in the real world: which is where the story ends.

And what do we do then?

There is an implied Part Four as well, a dilemma brought to focus by the nature of this gathering in Prague, where experts in sustainability issues and authors of fantastika have gathered to examine the common ground between them, if indeed there is a common ground. Two questions surface. First: How can a genuine storyteller, given the obvious fact that only bad worlds are storyable, possibly contrive to talk about a Landscape which is a place to stay? Second: Who among us trying to create sustainable worlds could possibly care about stories, which never depict them?

Some answers come to mind immediately.

At least two of the authors here in Prague have written works which contradict any easy assumption that a world which is sustainable is a world which is beyond story. Pamela Zoline expects to publish next year a version of her long-meditated novel, *Occam's Beard*, which is devoted not only to the story of the achievement of peace but the greater project of describing peace as life

not closure. John Crowley's vast four-part novel *Ægypt* (1987-2007) seems for much of its length to search of an inner grammar of story of the world by which the world can be endlessly transformed. (One of these transformations climaxes heartbreakingly, in 1620, in a Prague that could never happen, though the Prague of 2007 seems to remember that Prague.) But in the end (like Prospero casting down his wand) *Ægypt* sinks into an exquisitely described civil silence beyond story, a gravid silence in the soil of things, and only after two hundred pages do we awaken again into Time, out here again, in this place we must try — against the odds? — to heal.

Part One: Fantastika and the World Storm

I will start by defining fantastika in a way which may seem obvious, but is not: Fantastika consists of that wide range of fictional works whose contents are understood to be fantastic. We know of course that myths and legends, folklore and fairy tales, beast fables and fantastic journeys, supernatural romances and utopian speculations, ghost stories and god stories have been integral to the long narrative of Western Civilization from the very start: but no example of any of these forms of story laid down before the eighteenth century was ever I think given a name which calved it off from the mainstream of culture.

Up until about 1700, in other words, we did not categorize works of art according to their use of (or failure to use) material that might be deemed unreal. After that point, in English literature — please forgive my sticking to what I know — a fault line was drawn between mimetic work, which accorded with the rational Enlightenment values then beginning to dominate, and the great cauldron of irrational myth and story, which we now claimed to have outgrown, and which was now primarily suitable for children (the concept of childhood having been invented around this time as a disposal unit to dump abandoned versions of human nature into).

This cleansing of the cauldron led of course to huge misprisions of the past — it was during the eighteenth century that William Shakespeare was reconceived as a child-like genius, an idiot savant, partly because he broke the rules of Tragedy, but also because he wrote his plays prior to any cultural consensus that informative obedience to ascertainable reality ultimately told us more about our human experience of the world we inhabited than any myth or fairy tale or fabulation could possibly do. If *The Tempest* (1611) had been written a century later, it would not have been staged. Prospero could not have cast down a wand in 1750 which was simultaneously a walking stick and a magic staff: because the two were not commensurate: moreover, it was perfectly ascertainable that a stick is a stick, and that there is no such thing as a magic staff. QED.

But it is not only Sigmund Freud who tells us that what is repressed will come back; the ancient tale of Antaeus, who returns redoubles in strength every

time Heracles casts him to the Earth, says much the same thing. There is a beauty in the eighteenth century Enlightenment, but it is an Apollonian beauty, the beauty of the intensely described, a beauty achieved through refusal and exclusion and measure and argument. It makes forward planning possible, but also garden suburbs; it engineers the rise of Western Civilization over the past four centuries, but it also blueprints the gulag. And after 1750 or so, as might be expected, a consciously subversive reaction sets in.

Stories begin to surface which subvert the ordered world above; which contradict the closed mundanity of the work produced during the Apollonian Ascendancy; which say there is more to the world than the dressage of proper measure. These stories re-import all the old material, the irrational, the impossible, the nightmare, the inevitable, the haunted, the storyable, the magic walking stick, the curse; and through these reborn forms and strategies we sight, like stigmata surfacing through porcelain, the gross bodily parts of Dionysos, the repressed Twin or Doppelganger who mocks Apollo in his toga: just as fantastika itself apes and mocks and tells the terrible true understory of the world we of the West have entered.

An author like Horace Walpole — whose *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is the first mature British Gothic — was obviously aware that the form he had created made merciless fun of the harmony of the old world. But it is not just mockery: the exorbitant transgressive rambunctiousness of Otranto, and of the five thousand further Gothics published in Britain before 1820, say something else too. In every blatantly disharmonious passage they tell us that it is inherently difficult to understand the world: they tell us that the world is too difficult for Apollo, that reality escapes the ruler. This is of course the message of Aesop. It is also the message of the cruelest of all nineteenth century writers of fantastika, Hans Christian Andersen.

Andersen is of course a great author; but I mention him here in particular because of the characteristic panic hurry of his tales, which marks him as a paradigm of fantastika over the last two and a half centuries. Andersen writes as though the ground was not safe beneath the feet, and that if we don't keep moving, something is going to catch up with us. He hardly ever mentions Twins or Doppelgangers (I think because the thought of them frightened him so much) but when he does he speaks as directly to our condition in 2007 as does Franz Kafka, or Vladimir Nabokov, or W G Sebald.

This brings us to the world storm.

1750 is not only the year in which fantastika began to be written as a weapon against the owners; it also marks the point when Western Civilization begins to understand that we do not inhabit a world but a planet. It is from this point that science — astronomy, physics, geology, biology — begins to shape our understanding that we are a species on a rolling ball, that the past is deeper than we can conceive and that the future is going to rip us apart. (Science fiction

does not begin in the discovery of Space, but in the discovery of Time: terroristic meditations on the conjoining of Ruins and Futurity govern much of the Proto-SF published at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the next — Cousin de Grainville's *Le Dernier Homme* [1805; translated 2002 as *The Last Man*] may the most explicit of these meditations — and surfaces again and again over the next two hundred years.) So science takes the ground from underneath our feet; and fantastika, with its heated and cartoon immediacy of response to instability and threat, responds instantly to the vertigo of this new knowledge.

Fantastika vibrates to the planet. It is the planetary form of story[1].

Something else begins to happen around 1750 as well: the engines of change represented by the scientific and industrial revolutions begin palpably to increase the speed of history, until it races. The planet begins to shake in the storm; change burns the soles of the residents; things alter so fast that we in the matured West are no longer able to sort our lives, which begin to haunt us. Amnesias — most tellingly for our purposes those amnesias, like Oedipus's or Leontes's, that mask profound denials — begin to haunt the residents of the planet and their gated communities; it is no accident that Twins and Doubles and Doppelgangers begin to nurse their injuries throughout fantastika: because the Twin is what we leave behind when life is so fast we cannot remember where we come from. This is the guilt of Apollo.

Part Two: Model Instructions

Each of the three main modes of written fantastika in the twenty-first century — Fantasy; Science Fiction; and Horror — is badly named, in English at least, which is part of the reason I've begun to prefer the term fantastika, though we're probably stuck with the names we've got. The three narrative grammars that I've worked out over the past fifteen years were intended to loosen the lockjaw of this bad nomenclature, to make it easier to track some of the movements of story I think are typical of these three large long-lived changing modes. I've described some of this modelling before — most conspicuously in a number of connected essay/entries in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), and in *The Darkening Garden: a Short Lexicon of Horror* (2006) — and will try to be brief here.

I should note that these models that these models might best be understood as heuristic iterations of discourses woven into the story we see — ie they are magician's tools, not the magic itself — and not as architectural layouts or maps of story, not architectural layouts of the visible shape that one might think each mode should adhere to. I should also add that they are themselves narrative: they read consecutively, and they are designed to gain as swiftly as possible the goal that stories themselves all share: the last And Then which ends the tale. Each model is divided into four parts, and each model can be laid over its siblings, like a palimpsest.

Fantasy

Many of the great fantasy writers of the last century were shaped by the experience of World War One; the attitude of J R R Tolkien to the world storm of his time is anguish and anger; he and other great fantasy writers turn away from the world to shame it. Here are the four phases:

1) Wrongness.
   Some small desiccating hint that the world has lost its wholeness.
2) Thinning.
   The diminution of the old ways; amnesia of the hero and of the king; the harvest fails, the Land dries up; diversion of story into useless noise; battle after battle.
3) Recognition.
   The key in the gate; the escape from prison; amnesia dissipates like mist, the hero remembers his true name, the Fisher King walks, the Land greens. The locus classicus of Recognition is Leontes's cry at the end of *The Winter's Tale* (1610) on seeing Hermione reborn: "O she's warm."
4) Return.
   The folk come back to their old lives and try to live them.

Science Fiction

The basic premise is that the world depicted has an arguable relation to the history of the real world. The underlying impulse of twentieth century SF has been to view the world in this manner in order to see what's wrong; and then fixing it. SF is the most optimistic of genres. SF bronco-busts the world. It rides the world storm. I've cobbled a narrative model for SF out of other writers' work. Though it uses a different terminology, this model closely resembles an earlier model constructed by Farah Mendlesohn for similar reasons in her essay, "Is There Any Such a Thing as Children's Fiction: A Position Piece" (2004):

1) Novum.
   Darko Suvin's term for that aspect of the SF world which differs measurably from our given world.
2) Cognitive Estrangement.
   Suvin's term — modified from Vikor Shklovsky and Bertolt Brecht — for arguable and therefore structured defamiliarization of the world, which derives in part from the fact of Novum, and which allows the defectiveness of the ruling paradigm to be seen whole.

3) Conceptual Breakthrough.
Peter Nicholls's term, from the first edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1979), for the thrust of release when a defective paradigm collapses and the new world — the true world — is revealed. A sense of wonder is often felt, sometimes in spaceships.

4) Topia (U- or Dys-).
The Jerusalem whose gates have been opened by conceptual breakthrough for those who have won through. From this point life is going to be led in accordance with the truths discovered.

Horror

Horror may be the purest response of fantastika to the world storm: because the true sound of any great story in the genre — like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), or Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912), or Gustav Meyrink's *Walpurgisnacht* (1917), or Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977), or D M Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), or W G Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) — is the sound of History leaving Eden. When Kurtz cries out "The horror, the horror!" in *Heart of Darkness* it is because he sees the history of the new world entire, it is because he stands in the eye of the world storm. But he does not look away. The four iterations of Horror are:

1) Sighting.
Some small sour lesion in the world is suddenly visible, even in daylight.

2) Thickening.
The protagonist is mired deeper and deeper in the falseness of the world. The plot literally thickens around him. Fatally, he may think he understands himself, but in fact every move he makes deepens his amnesia, which coils through Thickening like fog; intensifies his resistance, his golem-like rigidity at the threat of change. It is a Gnostic phase: the truth is occluded, which allows us to lie to ourselves constantly.

3) Revel.
The story saves us. The rind of the world is peeled off, we see our true face in the mirror, carnival rules, what we see is what we get, the high are made low: where we belong. There is an almost infernal glee in learning the simple dreadful monistic clarity of the truth. Compared to the foggy parsimonious Marlow, Kurtz is pure glee.

4) Aftermath.
Tolkien looked up from the trenches and called it shame. Those unable to escape from prison call it the world.

That's twelve terms in all, which is a lot, even though they're suggestions, not laws. So I'm going to take thirty seconds more and tabulate them, which is how they come together in my mind's eye:

1) is Wrongness, or Novum, or Sighting.
2) is Thinning, or Cognitive Estrangement, or Thickening.
3) is Recognition, or Conceptual Breaktrhough, or Revel.
4) is Return, or Topia, or Aftermath.

Laid out like that, as permututions of one Ur Story, like three snakes mutually entwined, each snake undergoing the same morphological transforms, something I hinted at earlier may seem more obvious: that the first three phases make up a progress of story; but that the fourth represents places Story can only point at, like Moses. The implications of this gap between telling and living will shape the final paragraphs of this talk.

Part Three: The Cunning of Amnesia

A man in deep middle age, a German-born academic who never gives his name, tells his story. He has found himself, after a period of profound depression, severed from his life. He travels away from England, where he has lodged for many years, and wanders through contemporary Europe, where he visits dozens of famous edifices — train stations, prisons, zoos, fortresses, spas, museums, colosseums, libraries — which somehow do him harm. Indeed, long before the end of the book — *Austerlitz* (2001), W G Sebald's final novel — these whited sepulchres of the official Europe have thickened in his mind's eye into one great prison-like edifice, a house of the dead whose story resists exposure, a house of amnesia. In his wanderings through this thickening world, he soon meets Jacques Austerlitz, a man so similarly occluded from the story of his own life that the two seem twins. Austerlitz has also been visiting sepulchres that seem blinded — stiff mute effigies of the performance culture of old Europe, a culture that both men feel died half a century earlier. Nothing has cleared the air in Austerlitz. There has been no Revel out of fantastika in this Europe: no gaze of Kurtz upon some harrowing truth: no remembering.

The plot of the novel is simple. The edifice whose unspeakable function has somehow polluted the sepulchres of postwar Europe is an extermination camp north of Prague that the Germans called Theresienstadt. Austerlitz's mother has died there, his father in another camp; and his long amnesia begins on the day he is evacuated to Wales, in 1939, as a small child. The novel circles through decades up to the year 2000: and only after many years does Austerlitz tell the

narrator that, against the greatest of resistance, he has caught a glimpse of his real life; the novel does not tell us if he long survives the exposure. Most of the novel is spent detailing the terrible ingenuity of the amnesia whose resistance has kept Austerlitz from his past; but the deepest insight of the book — effected with an intense non-metaphorical literalism only available to an author of fantastika — lies in its inexorable linking of Austerlitz's personal traumas to the sepulchral amnesia which has rendered the Apollonian "utopia" of Europe in 2000, which apes but cannot remember, so profoundly silent.

The deep secret of amnesia is that its victims can talk all they want: but we cannot remember what we are saying. Nothing can be learned, or recovered. The abattoir that cut us in two awaits us. The final message of *Austerlitz* is that here in the heart of the storm of the new century the panaceas we brandish simply proclaim what we cannot remember proclaiming before, that in truth we are waving ghost limbs in a thickening dusk: for we do not know who we are, or where we live.

There is that one small moment of Revel for Austerlitz all the same, in Prague, one small bracing glimpse of pure gleeful truth: he meets an old survivor who is as continuous with his childhood as Prague is continuous with the past of Europe; and she remembers him, just as Prague — a pantomime city which is never silent — seems to remember Europe. But the engines that govern Austerlitz are too powerful, and he is soon gone from her. And it is here, out of the heart of this most terrifying book, that the lesson surfaces: that the active principle that must be dealt with in any modern novel set in the world storm today is amnesia, not recovery. This may not seem good cheer: but it is good to know your enemy.

Recovery is not part of the story of fantastika. It is what happens when the story is told. When we Return to the Land; when we enter the Topia that we have earned; when we learn to breathe the air of Aftermath through our mask: it is then we that we enter the region of Recovery, where we must try to live.

The greatest danger we face there is peace that feels good, because in any human being an internal peace that takes it easy — that does not constantly wrest clarity from the magma and nightmare of the souls within us — that fails to negotiate faithfully with the wronged Twins we leave behind — is exactly amnesia. It is the peace that Sigmund Freud — in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1929) — associated with the kind of tension reduction offered by Adolf Hitler, or Stalin. For the sake of that peace which a citizen of the Third Reich in 1934 might well have called Recovery, we would in fact abandon any chance of Recovery. We would abandon the kind of world John Crowley created at the end of *Ægypt*. We would abandon civilisation.

What the great texts of fantastika offer is what Freud offered: the message that civlization costs, that the truth that makes us free is not identical to self-forgiveness; that civilisation is a constant wrestling with our longing to forget.

That is the best plowshare I know how to figure.

Notes

[1] Though his language differs from that used in this address, and though he structures his analysis of science fiction to gain different ends than mine, the definition of science fiction suggested by Roger Luckhurst in *Science Fiction* (Malden, Massacusetts: Polity, *2005*), page 3, is not I think incompatible with the arguments I laid down in Prague: "SF is a literature of technologically saturated societies. A genre that can therefore emerge only relatively late in modernity, it is a popular literature that concerns the impact of Mechanism (to use the older term for technology) on cultural life and human subjectivity. Mechanized modernity begins to accelerate the speed of change and visibly transform the rhythms of everyday life. . . . SF Texts imagine futures or parallel worlds premised on the perpetual change associated with modernity, often by extending or extrapolating aspects of Mechanism from the contemporary world. In doing so, SF texts capture the fleeting fantasies thrown up in the swirl of modernity."

The phrase "fleeting fantasies" may slide too quickly across the page to fix itself properly — my own sense is that to study the "utterands" of fantastika is to engage in the mystery of the storyableness of the world — but Luckhurst's examination of Mechanism continues fruitfully throughout his study.

Judith Merril's Spaced Out Library

Jolene McCann

This paper is the winner of the Science Fiction Foundation 2006 Essay Prize

Introduction

Judith Merril, the 1950s science fiction writer and then internationally acclaimed science fiction anthologist and critic, left her position of power as the doyenne of American science fiction and moved to Canada during the fall of 1968. She arrived in Toronto "with fresh immigrant status, eight thousand books and magazines" and "fifteen file drawers of jumbled junk and value".[1] While teaching at Canada's infamous free university, Rochdale College, Merril became the chief librarian of the first "spaced out" library of science fiction in North America. The sf books and periodicals that she had amassed during her tenures as an anthologist and critic constituted the majority of the library's holdings. Her collection also included twenty years worth of correspondence with sf literati like Fritz Leiber, Isaac Asimov, Anthony Boucher, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein, John W. Campbell, Frederick Pohl, and various others. At the time the majority of sf repositories were private collections and those that were not were attached to universities; the Spaced Out Library became the major Canadian sf collection and gained international recognition as one of the world's finest collections of sf.[2] It was the only Canadian collection of sf available to both academics and the public, and the Spaced Out Library functioned as a dynamic reference repository, as well as an institutional site from which to organise sociopolitical discussions that were infused with sf themes.

Merril's anthologies, critical work, academic articles, and ultimately, her co-authored, posthumous memoir, *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merril* (2002) charted developments in the sf genre by placing them in their historical context.[3] Similarly, the correspondence files that Merril maintained chronicle the history of mid-twentieth century sf. Merril's proclivity for saving these diverse resources resulted in the preservation of a unique collection of twentieth century sf, and in some ways *Better to Have Loved* functions as a chaotic catalogue of her personal archive. Her memoir relies on the eclectic arrangement of "mementos" from her collection, and Merril and her grand-daughter Emily Pohl-Weary tell the story of Judith Merril's life by fusing together letters, stories, photos, and

essays from her collection.[4] Merril did not finish her own memoir, let alone write a definitive history of sf.[5] Instead she preserved a remarkable collection of primary and secondary sources documenting seminal literary developments in the genre. Letters exchanged between premier writers, critics, and editors give researchers insight into the history of sf from diverse perspectives. Thus, I argue that Judith Merril, in addition to her other sf-related roles, was a curator, a self-styled sf historian and archivist who established a world-renowned repository of sf publications and historical documents in North America at the Spaced Out Library (SOL) in Toronto, Canada. In this essay, I will trace the intriguing evolution of the Spaced Out Library from its transnational manifestations, to its formation as a library collection while resident in Rochdale College, and finally, to its donation by Merril in 1970 to the Toronto Public Library (TPL). Merril concretised her life-long avocation of speculative fiction and secured a significant cross-section of the genre's historical record by establishing the Spaced Out Library in Toronto.

Surveying "Swinging London, Sour America, and 'Free' Canada"

The evolution of the Spaced Out Library's holdings can be traced throughout Judith Merril's (1923-1997) correspondence and personal files, which were originally preserved and catalogued at the library. Correspondence facilitated Merril's anthology work and informed her "Year's Best" anthologies (1956-1968) and her "Books" review column in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* [F&SF] (1963 to 1969). The letter files chronicle her American exodus and the export of her sizable personal library and archive, as do several chapters in Better to Have Loved. In their study of Merril's memoir, Dianne Newell and Jenea Tallentire identify Merril's decades-long practice of archiving research materials, especially her correspondence, throughout various geographical relocations.[6] These correspondence files were originally part of the Spaced Out Library; Merril's preservation of the documents ensured the collection's role as a revealing reference repository for future researchers and sf enthusiasts, including Merril and Pohl-Weary, who used the collection to construct Merril's memoir.

Merril's sf work reveals her life-long avocation of science fiction's radical power; in all her writings she was explicit regarding her views on the social and political utility of the genre. Lisa Yaszek has elucidated Merril's role as a "foundational figure" in the history of sf and examines Merril's Cold War related literary invocations of "maternalist politics" and peace activism in her 1950s fiction.[7] Likewise, Dianne Newell asserts that by the early 1960s Merril's fiction and non-fiction had propelled her to the position of "foremost female editor-critic...and perhaps most political person in North American science fiction circles".[8] In her acclaimed Extrapolation article, "What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?", Merril defined speculative fiction and argued that, "[a]rt at any time can achieve validity

only if it is rooted in the accumulated human experience of its day, and touches somewhere on the nerve center of the culture from which it springs".[9] Similarly, Merril's correspondence files reveal her belief in the power of sf to stimulate awareness of contemporary issues. In countless letters Merril tirelessly advocates a relevant form of speculative fiction, one that would enable the reader to reflect on their present circumstances and envision alternative futures.

The "Books" columns, anthologies, and correspondence found in Merril's collection chronicle her international search for this brand of sf, as well as her frustrations with American sf's inability to address contemporary sociopolitical issues. Thus, the story of the SOL's ultimate relocation to Toronto begins with Merril's creative restlessness during the mid 1960s. In her August 1966 "Books" column Merril referred to American sf as "regressive".[10] She sought sf from outside the U.S., and through her anthology work she began corresponding with the London-based *New Worlds* magazine editor Michael Moorcock in 1964. The following year, she traveled to London for the Worldcon and remained for approximately six-weeks to mix with the experimental writers of science fiction associated with New Worlds. In "What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?", Merril described emerging experimental sf and defined speculative fiction as stories designed to educate readers about "the nature of the universe, of man, of 'reality'" through the techniques of "projection" and "extrapolation".[11] Merril promised an expanded British survey in the article, and returned to London in the summer of 1966. Her ensuing British anthology *England Swings SF* (1968) and her "Books" columns juxtaposed the British New Wave in sf to traditional American sf.[12] In her memoir, Merril describes resultant "warfare" in American sf; for some the New Wave was sacrilege, for others "wonderful revolution".[13] Correspondence Merril saved between herself and British writers like Moorcock, J.G. Ballard, John Brunner, and Brian Aldiss illuminates the evolution of the controversial anthology. Aldiss wrote to Merril in May of 1967, informing her that he did not want his short stories "The Doomed King" or "The Source" to be included in her English anthology. He explained, "I'm no part of the new wave...I think you'd better leave me out all together...".[14] Likewise, John Brunner questioned what he regarded as "facile generalisations" about British sf in correspondence from the same period.[15] The letters Merril collated expose her fascination with London's avant-garde sf and its "cultural trends – including free universities...".[16] as well as challenges to her characterisations of new developments in the sf field.

Feeling it was necessary to leave London and return home to search for American revolutions, Merril departed from England in the spring of 1967.[17] Her politically motivated sojourn to the macabre Democratic National Convention in Chicago fractured an already fragile allegiance to the U.S.A., and in the aftermath of the violence she experienced there Merril impulsively traveled to Canada. She stayed with her friend Chandler Davis, a sf writer and American expatriate from the Cold War era. Davis introduced Merril to Dennis Lee, the co-founder of Toronto's free university, Rochdale College. The idea of Rochdale

reinforced Merril's British exposure to free universities, and she began to contemplate moving to Toronto. As Merril re-entered the United States from Canada, American customs agents detained her and her fellow travelers and sent Merril's personal information and a confiscated book to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Merril recalled, "if I had needed anything else more, that was it. I went home and packed...".[18] She returned to the U.S. to collect her books and files and prepare for a more permanent departure.

Merril spent the late 1960s surveying American and British sf scenes, but ultimately chose to relocate to Toronto, rather than London or elsewhere, for practical reasons. The opportunity to work at Rochdale College piqued her interest in teaching and facilitated the easy exportation of her resources. Toronto was an unparalleled practical choice for Merril, because it was the only option that made transporting the entirety of her extensive collection of sf publications and personal files possible. She made this clear in her letter to Brian Aldiss in England, observing, "I will be out of the U.S., with all my books and files and sentimental treasures ([the] main reason for deciding on Toronto rather than London), which now seems urgently necessary to me".[19]

By 1968 Merril was disassociating from American sf, maintaining contact primarily with sf writers whose work reflected the "New Thing" that she promoted. The sf connections that Merril made facilitated her surveys of England, the United States, and Canada during the late 1960s. She developed these connections with the sf literary community through her correspondence, and the letters and personal papers she archived and exported, in addition to the sf publications she assessed and accumulated through her tenure as both editor and critic, constituted what would become the Spaced Out Library.

An "Inner Space Odyssey": The Rochdale Formation of the Spaced Out Library

The sf repository Merril intended developed in phases from a proposal for a library prior to her arrival at Rochdale College; to the transformation of the free university's book catalogue to an actual library during the spring of 1969; to the ultimate closure of the Rochdalian incarnation of the Spaced Out Library. Merril's opportunity to work as a "resource person" in writing and publishing at Rochdale provided space for her extensive sf collection.[20] She was explicit regarding plans for a library at Rochdale, and in two letters to Dennis Lee in September 1968 outlined her prerequisites for moving and her desire to establish a library. Merril initially asked for a large living/working space, but observed: "if you have a library space in which you'd like to include most of my books and magazines — let's say A Science Fiction Collection for the use of the College in general — that would cut down on the total space considerably".[21] Merril described her sf library as "extensive" and informed Lee that her correspondence files would

require nearly as much space as her books and periodicals. These files consisted of "twenty years of correspondence...some of it sketchy, some voluminous", as well as tear sheets and manuscripts and drafts of both her own and others' work.[22] Chapters in *Better to Have Loved* offer glimpses into the collection. Letters she wrote and received from Virginia Kidd and Katherine MacLean anchor two chapters of the memoir and capture the lives of female sf writers in the 1940s and 1950s . Additional letters from Anne McCaffery, Sonya Dorman, Betsy Curtis, Mildred Clingerman, Carol Emshwiller and others are included in the collection. These women wrote to one another to exchange and evaluate their sf stories, as well as to commiserate over the challenges of writing sf as woman (for instance, Calisher wrote to Merril about editors prejudices against women writers[23] and Dorman described balancing a writing career and family as an "abominable hell"[24]). Likewise, letters in Merril's personal papers from Isaac Asimov, Virginia Kidd, James Blish, Frederick Pohl, and Damon Knight reveal a history of the Futurians told from their own postmarked perspectives.[25] While Merril's personal space needs at Rochdale remained flexible, she observed that book and file space were "the main requirements".[26] Her relocation to Toronto was dependent upon the needs of her collection.

Merril was adamant about maintaining personal access to these sf resources, and she envisioned a reference library from the outset. She contemplated donating her collection to universities, and she received offers from two American universities. Yet, she declined these requests largely because the universities failed to offer a "satisfactory arrangement" regarding her access to the materials.[27] She recognised the collection's monetary value to future collectors as well as its "vested value for scholars".[28] Nevertheless, the collection's personal value to Merril remained a significant determinant, and her donation was contingent upon her access to the collection. As she wrote to Dennis Lee, an ideal repository would provide her with an institutional structure and "perching space" where she would maintain open access to her collection.[29]

Merril stressed the importance of bringing all her personal papers "unsorted and unconsidered" to Canada and described a neurotic fear of losing materials after leaving them behind.[30] In much of Merril's correspondence, she provided imagery of being overwhelmed with books and papers. She lamented to Lee, "my accumulated books and files occupy so much space that I periodically have to flee...". Likewise, she explained to him that her resources made her home "uninhabitable".[31] As she prepared for her second, and final, border crossing into Canada Merril wrote to Lee in September 1968: "Query: what difficulties if any am I likely to have bringing this great mass of paper, both public and personal, across the border?"[32] She requested a formal letter of entry from Lee[33], and Merril arrived in Ontario as planned "driving in a rented truck with stacks and stacks of books, sorted and unsorted files".[34] The city of Toronto, and initially Rochdale College would provide Merril with the opportunity to secure and maintain access to twenty years worth of sf publications and an extraordinary collection of letters.

Merril's resource person position afforded her with an opportunity to decide what she wanted to do with her "uncomfortable portion" of power within American sf, and she initially turned her energies towards creating the science fiction library she had described in letters to Dennis Lee.[35] Like education at Rochdale College, which Merril described as "in flux", the Rochdale library was an informal, unstructured collection of books.[36] Books were not donated to Rochdale; instead, owners lent their books to interested parties with the understanding that they might lose some. Rochdale readers would consult the "Union Catalogue", which in the fall of 1968 simply listed 750 titles and individual owner's contact information.[37] With Merril's guidance, the Rochdale Union Catalogue evolved from a list of individual collections to an actual, albeit provisional, library with collective holdings.

Merril worked within Rochdale's recusant channels of governance to acquire a physical space and funding for the library. In an interview during the 1980s, she explained:

> At Rochdale, a lot of people were into science fiction. So I thought, 'Why don't I set up a common library space and get someone to tend the shop?' And that's what happened. Most of the stuff that was in there initially was mine. A couple of other people did put in smaller amounts, so it ended up being about half science fiction. And that's where the name Spaced Out Library started.[38]

In addition to her position as a resource person at Rochdale, Merril was an active member of the free university's governing council. In March 1969 the governing council approved a proposal for a "Library Committee". The committee worked out of a room on the second floor of the 18-storey high-rise housing Rochdale College. Initial acquisitions included Merril's sizable donation of sf and additional books and periodicals purchased with a $300 bequest from the governing council.[39] A student, "D.M." Price, later to become an important Canadian writer, read and catalogued the science fiction books. Meanwhile, Merril wrote the 1969 Rochdale College spring course catalogue, reserving prime space in the catalogue for the free university's "living laborator[ies]", which included the Spaced Out Library.[40]

Merril was more the visionary than the tactical librarian. She later referred to the Rochdale phase of the library as an "honour-system library" and addressed the pilfering of her collection at the college matter-of-factly.[41] She describes arriving at Rochdale College with over 8,000 publications, but by the time she began to organise the Rochdale SOL, she had lost thousands of books and periodicals to theft.[42] Still, her remaining 5,000 piece collection of sf was remarkable enough to draw chief librarian of the Toronto Public Library, Harry Campbell, to Merril's fledgling efforts and he offered Merril display cases and instructions for cataloguing the collection.[43] As students and volunteer

librarians focused on setting up the library on the second floor of the college, Merril negotiated with the increasingly anarchic governing council in an attempt to coordinate an educational festival featuring the opening of the Spaced Out Library.[44] The summer festival successfully showcased the gala opening of the Spaced Out Library.[45]

Merril strategically coordinated the opening of the Spaced Out Library with the American moon landing in July of 1969.[46] Science fiction remained a potentially powerful political tool, and Merril continued to emphasise the genre's socio-political relevancy. She stressed the historical implications of the moon landing, noting that "[t]his was a 'what if?' time in history. A time of complete change, when fiction — especially science fiction — had an important role to play in questioning the existing social structures."[47] She scheduled the "Grand Opening and Summer Festival" from July 13th to 18th and sent invitations to her network of science fiction notables including: Isaac Asimov, Samuel R. Delany, Fritz Leiber, Carol and Ed Emshwiller, Ivor Rogers, Cliff Simak, Roger Zelazny, Jim Sallis, Thomas Disch, and Theodore Cogswell, as well as those in Russia and Japan. These guests were representative of the speculative writers that Merril championed; Carol Emshwiller employed unique sf themes, Ed Emshwiller produced avant-garde, award-winning experimental movies and cover art, and Roger Zelazny, Jim Sallis and Thomas Disch were all members of the American New Wave in science fiction. Merril also asked science fiction icons like Isaac Asimov to sponsor the library by agreeing to include their names on the library letterhead.[48]

Festival plans were elastic and Merril invited some sf authors with as little as two weeks notice.[49] The initial portion of the festival was dominated by "[t]he Library-and-sci-fi stuff", and on Sunday July 13th Rochdale College hosted a cocktail party/seminar for invited guests. Merril planned a panel discussion on space flight with sf writers (including herself, Fritz Leiber, Sam Delany, Cliff Simak, Thomas Disch and "half a dozen others") and astronomers from the University of Toronto.[50] Then came the major event; the following Monday featured the public opening of "(the World's Greatest Science Fiction, as well as other stuff) Library". The Spaced Out Library was open from noon until early evening and sf writers were "on hand" throughout the day.[51] Also, the festival included extended seminars and workshops. A filmmaking seminar, which ran from the 14th to the 17th, featured an "Emshwiller retrospective", displaying the sf artist's work. Similarly, a kite-making seminar ran from the first day of the festival through Thursday, July 16th. In celebration of NASA's successful launching of Apollo 11 at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on the 16th, Rochdale students and sf fans alike launched their homemade kites into the sky with a "Gran[d] Kitefly" that evening.[52] As the Rochdale Daily noted, during the festival "Judy Merril moved through it all as a resident science fiction expert."[53] Acting as an unorthodox archivist, Merril opened her personal collection to Rochdale and the world.

Merril later recalled that the "little library opened spectacularly",[54] but she characterised the festival as largely a publicity stunt and emphasises the temporality of the Rochdale phase of the SOL in her memoir. By July 1969 the Spaced Out Library's relationship to Rochdale was financially tenuous; financial issues, coupled with recurring thievery, led Merril to seek reform at Rochdale College.[55] The free university had become a beacon for transient youths as well as a "the Drug Palace of North America".[56] Merril decried "responsibility droppages" at Rochdale and recalled in an interview that after the festival the Spaced Out Library was open intermittently due to insufficient funding.[57] The Spaced Out Library had become "The Planted Pot Room" by May 1970. "There, 'you can loll about on mattresses smelling the plants, drink tea, coffee and cocoa you make yourself, or warm up with a glass of port and some earthly delight from [the] well-stocked porno section".[58] Merril explained during an interview in the 1980s, "[s]tuff was just getting ripped off. So I took back the basic science fiction library".[59] She had already left Rochdale as a resident and was living in a shared house. When the Rochdale incarnation of the Spaced Out Library closed, Merril retrieved her collection. She recalled, "When I brought all my books home, my tiny room was completely filled with them. They were climbing the walls up to the ceiling all around me."[60] Merril was forced to seek yet another repository for her collection.

An "incredible reality": Toronto's Spaced Out Library

Merril remembered fitful post-Rochdale evenings spent "waiting for the books to topple" onto her, but early cooperation forged what would become a lifelong relationship between Merril and the Toronto Public Library.[61] She explains in her memoir and in interviews that chief TPL librarian Harry Campbell requested that she donate her collection to the Toronto Public Library, in exchange for continued access to her books and files.[62] In an interview she recalled Campbell telling her, "We'll take care of the books and you'll use them. And we'll establish this special branch exclusively for science fiction and fantasy."[63] Merril agreed, and on August 10, 1970 she donated a total of 5,000 books and periodicals to the TPL. The Spaced Out Library then moved to a house on Palmerston Avenue and became a special branch of the Toronto Public Library. Over a year after the move, Merril explained in a letter to her friend Harvey Jacobs:

> I made this deal with the Toronto Public Library, after it became clear Rochdale couldn't support the SOL: Now there's a little six room house with an acquisition budget, a seminar budget, two library staff people, room for ALL my papers and books (those I've given the library and those I haven't), and an office for the Consultant - namely me - I get $200 a month...for telling them what books I think they should buy and what

seminars I think we should hold, and having my name connected with the place.[64]

Accessibility to her collection informed Merril's transnational relocation, as it did her donation to the Toronto Public Library. Merril wanted unfettered access to her personal papers, and she explains in her memoir that in exchange for her sf resources, "Harry [Campbell] wrote into the deed of gift that I was to have office space in the collection for my entire life".[65] Merril became a permanent consultant to the library and was eventually elected as a "Honourary member of the [SOL] Executive Committee for Life".[66] The library was established as a reference collection of "contemporary speculative literature", science fiction, some fantasy, and "conceptually experimental work"[67] — a mandate that reflects Merril's promotion of socially relevant sf.

When the Toronto Public Library absorbed the Spaced Out Library, Merril effectively maintained her status as a resource person. To her friend Katherine MacLean, she explained: "what I'm supposed to do is recommend book acquisitions and organise seminar programs - to suit myself mostly".[68] During the fall of 1970 the Spaced Out Library remained closed to the public, but was, as Merril assured MacLean, "now in physical existence", though operating with part-time staff.[69] Although Merril may have groused from time to time that the Spaced Out Library "just barely" supported her,[70] she described "reveling" in her new office and endlessly promoted the Spaced Out Library in numerous interviews.[71] She was unable to suppress her enthusiasm for the most recent incarnation of the Spaced Out Library, describing it as an "incredible reality!" to Kit Reed in the spring of 1971.[72]

Despite the fact that Merril had returned from London in the spring of 1967 with "the full expectation" that she would return to London "for an indefinite stay",[73] she chose to relocate to Toronto, Ontario instead. In Merril's opinion, Rochdale College — and by extension, the Spaced Out Library — could not have occurred anywhere besides Toronto.[74] She discusses "Rochdale spin-off[s]" in her memoir and designates Toronto as a unique "nexus" or "matrix" capable of engendering not only Rochdale College, but also of accommodating a specialty sf repository.[75] The Spaced Out Library became Canada's premier sf collection, and Merril traveled to various public libraries throughout the country advocating sf as a genre and publicizing the Spaced Out Library. Likewise, Merril granted countless interviews to journalists representing a diverse assemblage of newspapers and magazines who were interested in the new library.

The Spaced Out Library offered Merril the opportunity to ensconce her various science fiction resources and organise lectures and discussions about social and political issues that she deemed significant. By the early 1970s Merril was exploring science fiction-related subjects through primarily non-fiction avenues and she coordinated lecture series and symposiums that used sf-related themes to interpret contemporary sociopolitical issues. For instance, her

1971 discussion series "Spaceship Earth: Speculations on Survival Potential"[76] grappled with issues of ecology, population control, and sustainability. The series provoked more than simple discussion, and following it, Merril observed in a letter to MacLean that the project "led to a current ongoing effort...to establish an ecology-info-exchange and library/materials centre".[77] The Spaced Out Library was not only a repository of sf resources, but also a site, infused and informed by sf and sf themes, from which to engage in public discourse and speculation about social and political issues.

Conclusion

Discussions of Judith Merril's curatorial actions regarding the establishment of the Spaced Out Library are frequently reduced to her 1970 donation to the TPL, a stance which ignores her role as a curator, archiving sf publications and an extraordinary history of letters prior to her arrival in Toronto, as well as the considerable energies she directed towards exporting and organizing the library during the two years preceding the TPL donation. Although Merril initially housed her extensive collection of personal papers and correspondence at the SOL, she donated portions of her files to National Archives Canada in 1985 and again in 1989.[78] By 1991, the SOL had moved repeatedly to accommodate the growing collection and the Spaced Out Library was re-christened The Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy.[79] It currently houses over 32,000 books and 25,000 periodicals;[80] reel to reel audiotapes from Merril's work on CBC radio's Ideas series (featuring interviews with sf writers, critics and futorologists); rare recordings of major 1970s sf conferences; and interviews with Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, J.G. Ballard, Fred Pohl, Sam Delany, and others.[81] In her eclectic memoir she refers to the Spaced Out Library as a "dream-come-true" as well as "the paper-concretisation of a quarter-century of my own life and work on the shelves and in the file drawers there...."[82] Unlike many curators, Merril was intimately intertwined, professionally and personally, with the collection that she administered. Appropriately, her memoir offers readers illustrations of the magnificent collection Merril managed and amassed throughout her life.

The resources originally constituting the Spaced Out Library included an extensive collection of sf as well as a dynamic set of letters documenting a decisive period in the history of the sf genre. Merril's collection and the Judith Merril Fonds at National Archives Canada are open to the public and provide contemporary researchers with revealing reference repositories. Elizabeth Cummins and Dianne Newell and Jenea Tallentire analyze and assert Merril's role in cataloguing the history of sf, examining her history of the New Wave and her life-writing practices respectively. In each of these analyses the authors stress the necessity of setting the sf historical record straight. Newell and

Tallentire explain that Merril's collection of correspondence contained letters "from all the big-name authors", but assert that the influence Merril had on these writers is often overlooked in their personal accounts of American sf. For Newell and Tallentire these omissions elicit "serious questions about what we think we know about the world of modern SF and SF writers in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s".[83] Even Merril sagely questioned the history that she lived, and Newell and Tallentire argue that she relied on her personal archive to write a more candid account of sf in her memoir. The authors explain that, "she called it 'consulting with my younger self,' demonstrating a... desire to get at her own personal history through means beyond memory".[84] Merril espoused this philosophy before she started her memoir, and in a 1976 letter responsing to Damon Knight's history of the Futurians, Merril retorted "Your undocumented memory is (anybody's undocumented memory) is not quite enough for scholarly accuracy in tracing the complex lives of people...."[85] The letters that Merril archived, documenting not only her own voice, but also various voices of the sf literati, have and will assist in constructing and reconstructing decisive moments in the history of 20th century sf.

The Spaced Out Library was established as an sf reference collection for scholars; at the same time it was designed to entice the public with sf and engage sf readers in the kind of speculative thought that Merril felt the genre was capable of engendering. Merril argued that the Spaced Out Library, and libraries in general, sustain literary communities. During the 1990s she championed free public accessibility to libraries, concluding that: "The health of a literary community is inextricably linked to the health of public library systems."[86] The Spaced Out Library was created for the practical purpose of preserving a revolutionary collection of literature; yet for Merril, the books were only vehicles for ideas, and it was the thought, discussion, and activism elicited from these ideas that she hoped to foster.

Merril recognised science fiction's ability to bring individuals together locally and internationally. Her explorations of international sf did not end with her surveys of the U.S., England, or Canada, and in 1971 she traveled to Japan for the International Science Fiction Symposium. Merril enthused about the Spaced Out Library during an interview with a Russian sf magazine, describing it as "a library of a 'lift up literature,'" which might be interpreted multifariously.[87] To lift might mean to remove or transplant; to rise in condition or esteem; to project in clear tones, as in lifting one's voice; or to uplift or elate. Each interpretation could refer to the Spaced Out Library: to its transnational transplantation; to the library's popularisation of a genre gaining in public esteem; to the SOL's role as center for discourse, a platform for lifting one's voice; and finally, to readers' uplifting discovery of the magic of books. The Spaced Out Library cum Merril Collection, as both a repository and an archive of a "lift up literature", remains a distinguished collection - the result of the successful institutionalisation of

Judith Merril's pioneering curatorial efforts and a testimony to her extraordinary life in sf.

Endnotes

1 Judith Merril and Emily Pohl-Weary, *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merril* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2002), p. 191.

2 "History of the Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy." http://www.tpl.toronto.on.ca/merril/history.htm (accessed 25 May 2006).

3 Elizabeth Cummins, "Judith Merril: A Link with the New Wave – Then and Now", Extrapolation 36 (1995), p. 198-209

4 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 9

5 Merril died before the completion of her memoir. Her granddaughter, Emily Pohl-Weary, completed the memoir using detailed guidelines Merril had constructed, interviews Merril left her, and items from Merril's collection. Pohl-Weary describes her role in writing the memoir in an introduction to the memoir entitled, "Writing My Grandmother's Autobiography" and Dianne Newell and Jenea Tallentire's offer an expert analysis of this unique life-writing style in "Co-writing a Life in Science Fiction: Judith Merril as a Theorist of Autobiography"

6 Dianne Newell and Jenea Tallentire, "Co-Writing a Life in Science Fiction: Judith Merril as a Theorist of Autobiography," in A. Weiss, ed., *Further Perspectives on the Canadian Fantastic: Proceedings of the 2003 Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy.* (Toronto: ACCSFF, 2005), pp 19-34.

7 Lisa Yaszek, "Stories 'That Only a Mother' Could Write: Midcentury Peace Activism, Maternalistic Politics, and Judith Merril's Early Fiction", *NWSA Journal* 62 (2004), pp 70-98, at p. 71.

8 Dianne Newell, "Judith Merril and Rachel Carson: Reflections on their Potent Fictions of Science", *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5:4 (2004), pp. 31-43, at p. 32.

9 Judith Merril, "What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?", in Thomas D. Clareson, ed., *SF: The Other Side of Realism: Essays on Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971), pp. 53-95, at p. 54. The article was originally published in two installments in Extrapolation (May 1966, pp.30-46 & December 1966 pp.2-19).

10 Dianne Newell, "Judith Merril and Rachel Carson: Reflections on their Potent Fictions of Science", Journal of International Women's Studies 5:4 (2004), pp. 31-43, at p. 32. Judith Merril, "Books", *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (August 1966) pp.57-69, at p. 59.

11 Merril, "What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?", p. 60.

12 Merril to Kate MacLean, 15 March 1966, Judith Merril Fonds, MG30-D326 v. 10, file 15, Library and Archives of Canada [hereafter, "Merril Papers"].

13 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 163

14 Brian Aldiss to Judith Merril, 17 May 1967, Merril Papers, v. 1 file 15.

15 John Brunner to Judith Merril, 13 December 1965, Merril Papers, v. 3 file 18.

16 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 162

17 Virginia Kidd, "Introduction", in Judith Merril, ed., *The Best of Judith Merril* (New York: Warner, 1975), pp. 7-13, at p. 11.

[18] Kidd, op. cit. p. 12.

[19] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 25 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[20] At Rochdale students made their own schedules and sought information and guidance from nonconformist academics and intellectuals in residence.

[21] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 25 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[22] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 29 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[23] Hortense Calisher to Judith Merril, 18 December 1967, Merril Papers, v. 3 file 36.

[24] Soyna Dorman to Judith Merril, circa 1964, Merril Papers, v. 5 file 28.

[25] Newell and Tallentire on the Futurians. Merril's issues with how she was portrayed in the published works.

[26] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 25 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[27] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 29 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[28] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 29 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[29] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 29 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[30] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 25 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[31] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 25 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[32] Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 25 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

[33] Dennis Lee to Judith Merril, 17 November 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9, file 50.

[34] Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 191

[35] Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 162

[36] Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 175

[37] David Sharpe, *Rochdale: The Runaway College* (Toronto: Anansi, 1987), p 142.

[38] Henry Mietkiewicz and Bob Mackowycz, *Dream Tower: The Life and Legacy of Rochdale College* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1988), p. 57.

[39] Sharpe, op. cit., p. 142.

[40] Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 175

[41] Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, op. cit., p. 57.

[42] Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, op. cit., p. 57.

[43] Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, op. cit., p. 57. The Toronto Public Library also lent Merril and exhibition of Victorian science fiction. (Judith Merril to Theodore Cogswell, 18 June 1969, Merril Papers, v. 36, file 21.)

[44] For instance, in a letter to John Lawlor, Merril mentions Glenn Sinclair, a McMaster University librarian, assisting them with the library. (Judith Merril to John Lawlor, 2 July 1969, Merril Papers, v. 9, file 44.)

[45] Sharpe, op. cit., p. 68.

[46] Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p., 176

[47] Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 176

[48] Judith Merril to Isaac Asimov, [n.d.], Merril Papers, v. 1, file 14.

[49] Judith Merril to Bruce Franklin, 24 June 1969, Merril Papers, v. 6, file 43.

[50] Judith Merril to Juli Kupferberg, 23 June 1969, Merril Papers, v. 9, file 35.

[51] Judith Merril to Juli Kupferberg, 23 June 1969, Merril Papers, v. 9, file 35.

[52] Judith Merril to Juli Kupferberg, 23 June 1969, Merril Papers, v. 9, file 35.

[53] Sharpe, op. cit., p. 65.

[54] Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 176

55 Judith Merril to James Parr, 17 June 1969, Merril Papers, v. 13, file 22.

56 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 174

57 Sharpe, op. cit., p. 76.

58 Sharpe, op. cit., p. 143.

59 Mierkiewicz and Mackowycz, op. cit., p. 58.

60 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 206

61 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 206

62 Mierkiewicz and Mackowycz, op. cit., p. 58.

63 Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, op. cit., p. 58.

64 Judith Merril to Harvey Jacobs, 11 October 1970, Merril Papers, v. 8, file 30.

65 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 206

66 "Business meetings of the friends," SOL Rising 3, June 1989. http://www.friendsofmerril.org/sol03.html (accessed 25 May 2006).

67 "History of the Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy." http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/merril/history.htm(accessed 25 May 2006).

68 Judith Merril to Kate MacLean, 12 Oct ober 1970, Merril Papers, v. 10, file 26.

69 Judith Merril to Kate MacLean, 12 October 1970, Merril Papers, v. 10, file 26.

70 Judith Merril to Sol and Maggie Goodman, 29 January 1971, Merril Papers, v. 7, file 9.

71 Judith Merril to Kate MacLean, 12 October 1970, Merril Papers, v. 10, file 26.

72 Judith Merril to Kit Reed, 22 May 1971, Merril Papers, v. 14, file 25.

73 Judith Merril to Dennis Lee, 25 September 1968, Merril Papers, v. 9 file 50.

74 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 189

75 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 189

76 Merril's general announcement for SOL's *Spaceship Earth* series, [n.d.] circa 1971, Merril Papers, v. 18, file 10.

77 Judith Merril to Kate MacLean, 4 August 1971, Merril Papers, v. 10, file 26.

78 The Merril Collection would later work with Library and Archives Canada, where Merril's papers were housed. From 1992 to 1995 Hugh Spencer, the curator of the Merril collection, worked with Allan Weis on "Out of This World," a collaboration between the Merril Collection (Spaced Out Library) and the National Library of Canada in Ottawa. The result of the collaboration was *The Canadian Science Fiction Database*, a comprehensive listing of "fantastic expression" in Canada. [Hugh Spencer. "The View from a Chair: Patterns, Dreams and Wonderful Visits," SOL Rising 14, September 1995. http://www.friendsofmerril.org/sol14.html (accessed 25 May 2006).]

79 Merril opposed this name-change initially.

80 "What is the Merril Collection?" http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/merril/whatis.htm (accessed 25 May 2006).

81 Hugh Spencer. "Out of This World: Curator's Report," SOL Rising 13, May 1995. http://www.friendsofmerril.org/sol13.html (accessed 25 May 2006.)

82 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 185

83 Newell and Tallentire, op. cit., p. 21.

84 Newell and Tallentire, op. cit., p. 21.

85 Judith Merril to Damon Knight, 14 January 1976, Merril Papers, v. 9, file 20.

86 Merril and Pohl-Weary, op. cit., p. 185

[87] In her interview with the editor of the Russian magazine Tekhnika-molodezhi (*Technology for Youth*, a popular science magazine that also published sf) Merril described the SOL as "a unique collection of science fiction," and observed, "[s]ometimes it is called the library of 'a lift-up literature'." (Vasili Zaharchenko to Judith Merril, [n.d. circa 1971], Merril Papers, v. 20, file 28.)

Science, Religion, and Indeterminacy in Juan Miguel Aguilera's *La locura de Dios* (*The Folly of God*)

Dale Knickerbocker

> For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom...
> (1 Corinthians 1:25)[1]

Unlike their Latin American cousins who have begun to receive serious international critical consideration,[2] Spanish writers of science fiction (sf) continue to languish in relative anonymity outside the borders of their own country.[3] The reasons for this are numerous and would require discussion in a longer format than is allowed in this essay; suffice it to say that the handful of scholars acquainted with the work of such talented contemporary peninsular authors as Javier Negrete, Elia Barceló, Daniel Mares, León Arsenal, Rafael Marín Trechera, and César Mallorquí (to name but a few) would agree that they are as worthy of attention as their better-known counterparts in the Spanish-speaking Americas.

One of the most acclaimed voices in this small but growing number of Spanish sf writers is Juan Miguel Aguilera, whose 1998 novel *The Folly of God* (henceforth *Folly*; all translations are my own) won the prestigious Ignotus prize for best sf novel the following year.[4] The work intricately weaves together elements of the historical novel, the heroic quest, biblical apocalypse, and science fiction. Except for the quest itself, the events, which take place in the early fourteenth century during the decay of the Byzantine Empire, are historically accurate and the main characters real historical figures. In the novel, the adventurer and mercenary Archduke Roger de Flor invites Mallorcan theologian-philosopher-scientist Ramón Llull to attend his wedding to the granddaughter of the emperor Andronicus Paleologus II. The invitation is a pretext for suggesting that Llull participate in an excursion in search of the legendary *ciudad del Preste Juan* (City of Prester John), a metropolis of unimaginable riches.[5] The Archduke possesses ancient tomes and scientific marvels that he believes contain the key to locating the lost realm, but needs the *Doctor Iluminado* (Enlightened Doctor) Llull to interpret them. The scholar agrees to participate and, after many trials, he and a group of three hundred Catalonian mercenaries led by de Flor's lieutenant Juanot de Curial find the fabled metropolis. The city, called Apeiron by its inhabitants, is actually the last remnant of a more technologically advanced

culture all but wiped out by the *Adversario* (Adversary). This mysterious being's true nature is revealed in the work's denouement after her allies destroy Apeiron and with it apparently all hope of spreading their enlightened ways to a chaotic, war-torn, and impoverished Europe.

Folly's main theme is the conflict between a materialist, scientific world view and a religious, spiritualistic one, a topic intimately related to the epistemological question of how humans interpret or make sense of reality. This topic is nothing new in sf for, as Mark Rose has affirmed, "one of science fiction's principal cultural functions appears to be to produce narratives that mediate between spiritualistic and materialistic world views".[6] This essay seeks to explain Aguilera's use of this curious admixture of the biblical, mythological, science fictional, and historical in relation to the development of this theme.

Wolfgang Iser identifies a strain of literature as increasingly common since the eighteenth century, one that "diverges from the real experience of the reader in that it offers views and opens up perspectives in which the empirically known world of one's personal experience appears changed. And so *the literary text cannot be fully identified either with the real objects of the outside world or with the experiences of the reader*" (emphasis original).[7] Iser calls such literature *indeterminate*; in sf, the elements producing such divergence constitute what Darko Suvin has called *nova*, any "phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality".[8] According to Suvin, these nova produce a sense of cognitive estrangement in the reader that constitutes the "*formal framework* of the genre" (author's emphasis).[9] Iser observes that "[t]he more texts lose their determinacy, the more strongly is the reader shifted into the full operation of their possible intentions",[10] an effect that corresponds to the cognitive function ascribed to sf by Suvin: "SF sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a *cognitive* view".[11] In *Folly*, the accurate historical context and familiar historical, biblical, and mythical cultural reference points are juxtaposed with estrangement-provoking science fictional places, events, and beings. This juxtaposition permits Aguilera to interrogate and problematise the material/spiritual binary opposition for, as Heather Dubrow asserts, "it is by overturning our generic expectations that a writer can induce in his readers a series of intellectual reflections [...]".[12] Moreover, as Mary Ellen Bieder points out, "the tension produced by the interweaving of incompatible genre intertexts creates a confusion of genre boundaries that thwarts closure and precludes a stable resolution"; i.e., produces indeterminacy.[13] Thus, this creative blend of genres and sources serves as the perfect metaphorical vehicle for the work's thematic content.

The liberal use of imagery and direct quotes from the Book of Revelation, as well as the eventual annihilation of Apeiron and millennial hibernation of the Adversary, suggest that *Folly* is an example of what Frank Kermode has identified as "an apocalyptic strain in modern literature; [...] we find in that literature transformations of a variety of apocalyptic traditions".[14] In his classic

study *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode proposes that apocalyptic fictions are a necessity of the human psyche, signaling "our deep need for intelligible ends. We project ourselves [...] past the End, so as to see the structure as a whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot in the middle".[15] To give meaning to the past and present, humans create fictions (a term that for Kermode includes history, myth, and literature) concerning the end of the world. These fictions are flexible, adapting themselves to the psychosocial exigencies of the moment.[16] The sf genre lends itself particularly well to providing such fictions.

The recounting of Llull's adventures also draws upon a formula common to the heroic mythological tales of many cultures, one that Joseph Campbell termed the monomyth.[17] Campbell asserted that the mythological heroic quest typically consists of three parts: "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return", a structure that Aguilera ludically employs in *Folly*.[18]

The novel also invokes many of the conventions of the historical novel as described by Georg Lukács: for example, ."the important role of dialogue" the critic identified as characteristic of the genre is evident.[19].More importantly, the protagonist's portrayal fits Lukács's description of "leading figures [...] [who] concentrate in themselves the salient positive and negative sides of the movement concerned".[20] Aguilera developes the conflict between spiritual and material world views is through the interaction between characters espousing the opposing ideologies. The choice of Ramón Llull as protagonist manifests this conflict: the erudite Mallorcan's life goal was to prove rationally the existence of God, transcending the materialist/religious opposition for the purpose of converting nonbelievers to Christianity. The Doctor's goal in his most important corpus of writing, his *Ars generalis ultima* (*Great Universal Art*), was to establish a systematic, comprehensive mode of inquiry that would allow the human mind to understand what was according to medieval thought the basis of all reality: God's relation to his creations. As Mark D. Johnston explains: "Ramón Llull's Great Universal Art of Finding Truth synthesizes a vast range of techniques for private meditation, scriptural exegesis, and apologetic argument into a single system for 'discovering' how all knowledge and being reveals divine truth".[21] Johnston explains Llull's system as follows: "[t]he foundations of Llull's Great Art are nine Divine Dignities or attributes, which are the Absolute Principles of all being and knowledge. Nine additional Relative Principles explain the operation of the Absolute Principles at nine levels of existence called Subjects".[22] Llull constructed a device, described in the novel, consisting of moveable concentric rings: the Absolute Principles were each assigned an alphabetical letter and appear on the outer circle, and the Relative Principles on the inner circle. It is an *ars combinatoria*: the wheels were to be manipulated to form all possible pairings between the principles, and each of these could be contemplated with respect to each of the subjects. Through this system Llull believed it possible to understand entirely the relationship between the celestial and the terrestrial.

The historical figure's project is expressed by the novel's protagonist as follows: "[e]xhausting all the possible combinations of these principles we could explore all the knowledge our minds are capable of comprehending" (p. 185).[23] Llull frequently expresses his admiration for thirteenth-century English scientist-philosopher Roger Bacon, and fervently believes his dictum "[o]bserve, experiment, apply" (p. 242). Llull sees no logical conflict between science and religion; on the contrary, "[f]or Franciscans, God's love is the explanation of the universe. God creates to share something of himself with other beings and to be glorified through the love of men curious to know his glory" (p. 116).[24] The relationship between the *Ars* and the novel contributes to the tension between the scientific and spiritual world views and the problematisation of epistemology, for *Folly* offers a fictional history that constitutes a metanarrative explaining humanity's origin and presence on Earth.[25] All of these aspects of Llullian thought are accurately portrayed in *Folly*, as "[a]ll [Llull's] efforts were focused on proving that it is possible to demonstrate faith by means of scientific intelligence: to him it was evident that the existence of the Supreme Being could be demonstrated [...] to convert the infidels by reason instead of by the sword" (p. 21).

The contemporary reader sees the novelistic world through Llull's eyes and is privy to his interpretation of the phenomena he witnesses, creating a dramatic irony that subverts the protagonist's understanding of reality. Examining the ruins of the city Rai, an Apeironite colony before its destruction by the Adversary's forces, he comes across a fresco of Aristarchus of Samos, a Greek astronomer of the third century B.C. who in the novel also founded Apeiron. He comments that Aristarchus "erroneously believed that the sun occupied the center of the universe, that the earth revolved on its axis once a day, and that it orbited the sun once a year" (p. 99); he also affirms that the Greek and his followers "practiced a strange materialist philosophy affirming that matter itself was the foundation of the universe, without any involvement by the gods [...] Aristarchus even affirmed that [...] the stars could be suns like ours, only much more distant, with their own cohort of planets" (pp. 100-1). Readers' knowledge of modern astronomical discoveries allows them to see that the Mallorcan philosopher is in error, placing in question not only his physics but his metaphysics, and thus problematising his argument that there is no inherent contradiction between science and religion.

Aguilera liberally employs biblical archetypes in his development of the main theme. Northrop Frye posits the existence of two categories of biblical metaphors that he terms the apocalyptic and the demonic. It is crucial to note that Frye uses the term apocalyptic in a strictly etymological sense, different from our biblical one: it signifies a revelation or uncovering by God of his plan for the ideal world that humans must strive to create. Every apocalyptic metaphor has its counterpart, a demonic parody, "the presentation of the world that desire totally rejects"..[26] charreddish luminosity [...] As we drew closer to it, the fog grew thicker, and its odor more penetrating. A strange and horrible roar,

like that of some malignant beast, emanated precisely from the direction of that red glow. As we advanced, the noise grew and became more ominous.

Finally an impressive column of fire, that seemed to rise up to touch the sky, was revealed to us. [...] The horrific roar, like that of an insane beast, also issued forth from those ferocious flames, reminding me of the words of the Apocalypse [...]. (pp. 138-9)

The Doctor Iluminatus explicitly compares the camp to Revelation 9:1 "[h]e [the fifth angel] opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft." Llull concludes that "at that moment I was certain that those flames signaled the entrance to hell and that those little black men were faithful servants of Satan, prince of demons" (p. 139). Modern readers, however, realise that the burning cavity is an open-pit oil well. While Llull, from his theocentric perspective, interprets their aspect and behavior as being demonic, other characters suggest they are a previously unknown Tartar tribe, and their description suggests to the reader a primitive simian nature or evolutionary predecessor of humanity. Indeed, Ramón later speaks of their "simian characteristics" (p. 150). The tension between the estranging element of science fiction (the reader knows of no such creature ever having existed) and a possible explanation within the scope of familiar present scientific knowledge creates an uncertainty that places in doubt the scholar's interpretation of their true nature.

Llull's allusion to Revelation 9:1 cited above is important because his experiences in the camp will parallel the following verses of that chapter. After resting, he is marched out of his tent at night for a strange ceremony presided over by the tribe's shaman. They blindfold him, yet he magically is able to see in a sort of inversion of light and dark, a phosphorescent "spectral, ashy light" (p. 162) or "luminous fog" (p. 163). Once again vision, a metaphor of the ability to observe and understand reality, is in some way at once impeded and transformed, placing in question the validity of Llull's ability to adequately interpret that reality. What the protagonist beholds are

> "seven horsemen with long black hair, wearing combat armor, with two wings like metallic shields on their backs. They beat their wings and produced a deafening sound as they approached me. [...] they also had tails like a scorpion, but of shining metal. The tails wagged at the horsemen's backs as if they possessed a will of their own. [...] Their steeds also wore armor, with a small golden crown on each horse [...] [the horsemen were] carnivores, with long sharp teeth" (p. 163).

Compare the fragment above to Revelation 9:3: "[t]hen from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions" and 9:7-11: "In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped

for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lion's teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses riding into battle. They have tails like scorpions, with stingers [...]" Once again Aguilera manipulates familiar biblical cultural codes, recontextualising them into a particular and accurately portrayed historical moment, yet simultaneously defamiliarising them through the presentation of what, according to the modern scientific world view, would be inexplicable, supernatural events.

Llull is saved early the next morning by Juanot and a group of his warriors in what is a suspiciously unproblematic rescue. The Doctor also insists on freeing caged slaves before they leave, one of whom, Ibn-Abdalá, claims he can lead them to the "desert of glass" beyond which they hope to find their fabled goal. The Muslim is learned and Llull takes him for a traveling companion and confidant. In return, Abdalá is able to explain what has happened to Llull: "[y]ou are infected with the Evil" (p. 174), and affirms that this is what happened to the shaman and others like him. Llull will eventually discover that the "evil" is a parasite and that his companion has also been infected; in fact, Abdalá is a spy controlled by the Adversary whose mission is to find Apeiron.

Once Llull is infected, the Adversary begins to communicate with him by radio waves generated by the parasite. He thus finds himself trapped between the "real" world around him and what he at first believes to be dreams or hallucinations, to the point that he becomes uncertain whether what he experiences is real or not. In his first vision, he sees a black lion: "I saw the head of a lion appear, with a mane as black as night. The lion looked at me with intelligent, avid eyes [...] the lion turned, and with its black mane flowing in the wind, moved off among the rocks" (p. 187). Intrigued, he follows it: "[t]he animal rested [...] in a position similar to that of the Sphinx. Her mane, whipped by the wind, vibrated like an aureolus of serpents around its fierce face" (p. 188). The imagery is significant, for as Cirlot observes, "[t]he wild lioness is a symbol of the Magna Mater" (p. 190), which is exactly what the Adversary is eventually discovered to be. Egyptian in origin, the Sphinx passed into Greek mythology, in which it appears most commonly as the torso of a woman on the body of a winged lion. The color black of course suggests evil, and the comparison of her mane to writhing serpents alludes to another threatening female figure from classical mythology, the Gorgon.

To this complex mixture of recognisable mythological allusions (all female and all to some extent threatening) is added a biblical element when the lioness tells Llull "I am reserving a place for you at my feet, on the throne of this world" (p. 189), echoing Lucifer's temptation of Christ during his forty-day trial in the desert. These apparent dreams or hallucinations place in doubt his previous assumptions about what constitutes reality: "I could not trust my senses. Reality and hallucination mixed turbulently, confusing my powers of

understanding" (pp. 195-6). Moreover, on several occasions, it is only in dreams or hallucinations that the scholar discovers the truth, and not through science or reason. For example, before finding out that Ibn-Abdalá was controlled by the Adversary, he has the following vision of the parasite the Muslim carries within: "[f]or an instant I thought I saw tentacles, writhing like vipers, directly in the center of Ibn-Abdalá's face" (p. 184). And it is in a dream that he first learns from Neléis, head of the city council and Llull's guide in Apeiron, that "[t]he Adversary is not dead, Ramón [...] we failed to destroy it" (p. 482), a claim later confirmed by an eye witness. The uncertainty between reality, dream, and hallucination, together with the importance of verified discoveries made through non-scientific, non-rational mental activities, metaphorically interrogate and problematise the material/spiritual binary opposition, as both are demonstrated to serve legitimate epistemological functions.

Llull also displays a certain willed blindness with respect to the possible misuse of technology. When Nyayam, an elderly member of Apeiron's city council, tells him that "each step forward, each technological advance, brings with it an implacable lesson in humility" (p. 240), the Doctor Iluminatus reacts as follows: "I looked at them confused, not entirely understanding what they meant. How could the advancement of knowledge have negative consequences? Only ignorance can be bad, understanding the world only makes us better and happier" (p. 240). To the modern reader accustomed to pollution and living with the threat of nuclear war, such affirmations undermine Llull's claim to the scientificity of his thinking.

Nor are these the only misconceptions proffered by Llull. While traversing the desert, the adventurers eventually reach the "sea of glass" beyond which de Flor's books suggested the city lies. It turns out to be a dry seabed—the sun reflecting off salt crystals gives them the appearance of glass. The image recalls to the Doctor the end of the seven apocalyptic plagues recounted in Revelation 15.2: "[a]nd I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire." Llull is awed by the sight, which inspires him also to think of Revelation 21.1: "[t]hen I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."

Farther on in their trek, the adventurers discover a huge metal object resting on two parallel steel bars, the presence and function of which they cannot even imagine, but which the reader recognises as a locomotive engine and tracks (p. 198). The reader's familiarity with the train is defamiliarised by its anachronistic presence in the fourteenth century. While evaluating this find, they are interrupted by the arrival of a dirigible, described by Llull as a "type of gigantic flying fish with a shining and terse underbelly, the size of a leviathan." (p. 205). The protagonist of course believes the huge white flying object is the biblical leviathan that swallowed Job, and faints from fear.

When the Doctor awakens in an Apeironite hospital, he exclaims "I told myself that, without a doubt, that was the City of God; and that I was finally going to

be reunited with Him" (p. 206). He once again interprets his surroundings by comparing them to the biblical metanarrative of the Book of Revelation. For each aspect he describes, he finds an apocalyptic equivalent, citing passages from Revelation. When he first sets eyes on the city, he quotes 21:9-10: "[c]ome, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And in spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city coming down out of heaven from God" (p. 208). All there is whiteness or transparency, suggesting purity, as opposed to the smoky filth of the Gog encampment, and his experiences there cause him to quote several verses from Revelation in succession: "[i]t has [...] a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal" (21:15); "[t]he wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass" (21:18); "and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass" (21:21). Later, when he observes that the city possesses gas lighting to illuminate it at night, he recalls Revelation 21:23-25 "[a]nd the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it [...] there will be no night there."

The protagonist's belief that Apeiron is the Apocalyptic City of God is significant,[28] as one of the citizens explains to him that the name in Ionic Greek meant "something like the fundamental principal from which all things are derived" (p. 227) — which for the Doctor could only mean God. He explains to himself the fact that there are no churches or temples by thinking that they are unnecessary, as the city itself is a temple. Nor do the inhabitants appear to practice any sort of formal worship — could the City of God be secular? But once he has had time to accustom himself to Apeiron's wonders, he begins to find logical, material reasons behind the city's biblical appearance; for example, "[a]fter thinking about it I found it rather logical that the Apeironites would use glass as the basis for their edifications. Glass comes from sand, and in that enormous desert sand was the most abundant raw material" (p. 232). The protagonist's mistaken belief that Apeiron is the City of God, the ability to explain what he sees scientifically, and the Apeironite's apparent agnosticism or atheism, appear metaphorically to support a materialist world view over the Doctor's spiritual one.

The Apeironite physicians are able to cure Llull of his hallucinations by surgically removing the organism that was implanted in him during the Gog ceremony, which they call a *rexinoos* or "[t]he stone of madness, that which corrupts the soul" (p. 213).[29] They explain that the being grows and wraps itself around the brain stem, allowing the Adversary to communicate directly with the host and eventually to control his actions. Again, the word chosen to designate the parasite is important: it is a word very rarely used in Greek literature that literally means "mind-breaking". This offers a scientific explanation for Llull's hallucinations: they were simply times when she chose to communicate with him.

One point of disagreement between the Doctor and his guide, Neléis, a female city council member, is the nature of the Adversary and her followers. Their debates on this subject serve to develop and problematise not only the religious

weltanschauung but its moral categories of good and evil. The protohuman troops are certainly associated with the demonic throughout the novel: they are irrational, showing no interest in either peace or wealth when Joanot and Neléis attempt diplomacy. When Ramón urges Neléis not to put herself (and him) in danger by going out to meet the enemy about to attack the city in an attempt to avoid bloodshed, Neléis responds that "[o]ur ethics prohibit us from fighting without first giving words a chance. If we did that, we would be no better than the protohumans," to which Llull replies "[i]t is evident that they know no ethics but blood, and you can't apply your moral parameters to such creatures" (p. 361). Neléis convincingly points out that his Catalonian friends also had slaughtered men, women, and children indiscriminately. One reason they cannot come to agreement is a distinction that is never explicitly made in the novel: Neléis consistently talks about her people's ethics, while Llull speaks in terms of morality. While the two terms are all too often conflated, they are not entirely synonymous, as their etymology suggests: morality originated in the Latin morālis, which places an emphasis on customs and ways of life and is collective in nature. "Ethics" is derived from the Greek word *Ethos* meaning "character" or "a way of being". For this reason, morality has become more generally associated with the shared beliefs of religious thought, and tends (even more so in the medieval mind) to deal with absolute values. While related to morality, ethics is more concerned with individual character, and thus is more subjective in focus, more circumstantial and therefore debatable. This difference is evident in their conversations, and the juxtaposition of the two terms and the tension between them allow Aguilera to interrogate metaphorically the moral categories of good and evil, as well as developing the theme of science vs. religion.

The Apeironites believe that the adversary is not supernatural in nature but an extraterrestrial creature thousands of years old. The Enlightened Doctor responds to that interpretation by insisting that all he has witnessed confirms the predictions set forth by John of Patmos in Revelation, and that the Adversary is in fact none other than Satan:

> —I've seen signs [...] the Gog armies, and the fire and smoke surging forth from the abyss; and the locusts riding horseback like diabolical cavalry and this city of light and crystal, shining like a bride adorned for her husband. Your enemy is, therefore, the adversary of all mankind.
>
> —That's one way of seeing things, but it's not entirely correct. Our enemy is a very powerful creature, more than you could imagine, but there's nothing supernatural about it, nothing that science and arms can't overthrow and destroy. (p. 229)
>
> [...] according to our scientists, it's a being born on another world, and it must possess a behavior and values different from ours; if these imply an unavoidable threat to our existence, we'll have no option but to destroy it, without remorse [...]. (p. 363)

Throughout the first four sections of the novel, the fact that Llull is the narrator means that both science and Christianity are associated with reason, good, and the apocalyptic; and the Adversary with insanity, barbarity, and the demonic: "[t]hat city was like an island of reason and logic surrounded by an ocean of madness. A great battle was then being prepared. The definitive battle between reason and madness" (p. 249). Neléis explains to Llull that hers is not the City of God that he believes it to be but that:

> [...] Apeiron's technology allows us all to wield more power and more resources [...] than those enjoyed by a petty king from outside or a nobleman loaded with slaves working for him from sunrise to sunset. We don't have slaves, but machines work for our benefit [...] with their basic necessities covered, and with sufficient time to study the world and their peers, men end up developing strong ethical guidelines. But, when all is said and done, it is only our technology that makes us better, not our philosophy or our ethics.
>
> —That seems a pretty cynical moral base. (p. 363)

Neléis's point that material progress made ethical advances possible—not vice-versa—makes her spokesperson of the Enlightenment belief that through education and reason humans could progress both ethically and scientifically. But Llull views the world morally, in terms of good and evil, and thus considers their ethics cynical.

The following juxtaposition of quotes illustrates perfectly the difference between Neléis's progressive, relativist ethics that validate other cultures' values and Llull's absolutist world view: "[t]here is one point upon which we will never agree, Ramón [...] you consider the Adversary to be a demon, or Satan himself in person, and that his armies are comprised of beings basically and irredeemably evil" (p. 361); "[w]e can't believe that a being of an intrinsically perverse nature exists" (p. 363). Again, Aguilera's choice of name is significant. "Neléis" is an erudite allusion to the son of Neleus, Nestor, the wise, aged adviser in the Iliad, thus suggesting she possesses insight superior to Ramón's. Llull concludes that "[t]hey just couldn't understand, as clearly as I did, the true nature of that Being, the authentic incarnation of Evil in the world" (p. 250).

When Llull refuses to believe councilman Nyayam's claim that there are nine planets, the councilman explains that they possess powerful optical instruments capable of seeing what is invisible to the eye, and challenges the Mallorcan's belief in logic and reason: "[a]nd if those same instruments demonstrated to you that the Earth doesn't occupy the center of the world, would you believe it? Would you accept what those instruments tell you or would you destroy them claiming they're works of the devil?" (p. 241) He replies: "I don't know what I would do, what I'd believe, if I had to face a reality different from what I believe [...] But I know that I would always try to be guided by reason and logic, that I'd never use

irrational or fanatical arguments to defend my beliefs to the death" (p. 242). This affirmation will be put to the test by what he discovers in the Adversary's lair.

But Apeironite materialism is itself undermined during a conversation between Llull and Neléis's domestic partner, in which the girl expresses a longing to see what lies outside: "I'm over forty now [...] and I've never gone beyond the safety of Apeiron's walls. This doesn't favor creativity, my friend. At times I think my people will disappear in history without leaving a trace" (p. 267). Nyayam too expresses the need for "new blood" from outside to maintain the culture's vitality: "[Apeiron] grows and feeds off new blood coming to its veins. Having only one view of the world is almost worse than being completely blind, and Apeiron needs new minds from the Outer World to constantly remind us that our reality is not the only one possible or desirable" (original emphasis; p. 243). The "new blood" metaphor implies that reason is not enough, that it is sterile without inspiration — even if that inspiration comes in the form of relatively primitive Catalonian mercenaries. Llull will maintain that Apeiron is the city of God almost to the moment of his departure, when he finally realises that "that was not the City of God. It was a place of men, with all their defects and virtues, and the only difference between them and the peoples of Europe that I knew was that they had science, they'd developed it during sixteen centuries, and that gave them a power and a perspective on the world completely different from the rest of humanity. But their little world was far from being perfect" (pp. 332-33). Aguilera simultaneously praises civilization and technology for the great benefits they can provide and subverts their hierarchisation with respect to primitive vital instincts, without which he implies society cannot survive. Llull's medieval world view causes him to perceive reality through the lens of theology, his errors and the dramatic irony they create function to subvert his claims of the scientificity of his thought, as well as the possible compatibility of spiritualism and materialism.

The Adversary discovers the location of Apeiron through the *rexinoos* implanted in both Abdalá and Llull and prepares to attack; however, the parasite's presence also allows the Apeironites to triangulate her position. Abdalá's *rexinoos* is too integrated into his brain to be removed without killing him, but its presence allows the Enlightened Doctor to converse with the Adversary through him. He learns that her race is as old as the stars themselves and that she is the source of all life on Earth, which is one of many of their "nursery worlds" where they breed slaves to use in their never-ending wars, since they "are solitary creatures, and each of us can inhabit and govern only one planet, impregnate ourselves and fill it with life" (p. 434).[30] Several of her sisters joined forces to kidnap some of her protohuman slaves and genetically altered them "to create beings of greater intelligence and aggressiveness" (p. 438) — humans. This "mother" and her race are not evil per se as Ramón believes, but more precisely amoral: "[w]e fight for only one reason: to install our own descendants on each and every world in this Universe capable of supporting life, and we send our warrior slaves to destroy our sisters' descendents" (pp. 437-38). She further explains that

> I suffered the most humiliating of defeats, and my slaves were hunted and exterminated like beasts. For a million years I've survived imprisoned here, left with neither technology nor hope. All that remains is to await the end, but I refuse to accept it at the hands of some slaves that have forgotten their origin. I'll fight until the end, to my last breath, and when I die, so will your planet (p. 318).

By reperesenting the *mater* as evil (at least from Llull's perspective) and as being able to create life without any male assistance, Aguilera draws on the Gnostic tradition, still strong during Llull's time. Fruit of God's "First Thought", the Gnostic "Mother of All" jealously and arrogantly creates earth and its creatures. Although by nature corrupt and fallen, her offspring still contain something of the Father's nature, but are imprisoned on earth until redemption is earned.[31]

Joanot and Ramón set out to find and destroy the Adversary with two dirigibles full of Almogávar and Apeironite warriors. They reach the opening of the enormous cavern in which the enemy has her palace, and the description of their Orphic descent is once again a demonic parody of heaven. The opening is conic in form, consisting of terraces that "formed an interminable spiral that, with each turn, sank further and further into the abyss" (p. 374): "[t]he interior walls of the cliffs descended forming concentric terraces until becoming lost in the haze. From the center of the cone rose an enormous, bulbous column of reddish vapor, curling like an intestine and leveling out at the top, from where an incessant rain fell, slipping over the terraces creating muddy, blood-colored creeks" (p. 372). The enormous pit may be volcanic, or it may indeed be seen as hell itself, as Llull believes. The infernal, warm colors red and orange are consistently reiterated: "an interminable line of red stone columns [...] encircled the spiral as it descended into the abyss" (p. 395), and the Mater's palace floor is of "orange marble, veined with red" (p. 426).

When Llull arrives at the entry to the Mater's lair, the imagery used to describe it and her again plays off familiar elements from classical mythology. The lair is clearly a womb:

> [it was] a cylindrical cave [...] that seemed to continue on into the depths. [The light from the doorway] didn't illuminate much farther than a few yards, as if in that place the shadows were denser and more powerful than the light [...] my feet splashed in something viscous. I went over to the wall and touched it with my hand, but quickly pulled it back, disgusted. Walls and floor were all one [...] and to the touch felt like flesh, warm and covered in a sticky mucous. I felt as though I were walking through the inside of an immense uterus, a repugnant thought that froze me in my tracks. (p. 431)

Giving birth to many races in her "womb" deep in the Earth, she also recalls the Jungian *anima*, at once mother, goddess, lover, illusionist, and temptress.[32] Able to make humans see her in any form, she once appears to Llull as his *Amada* or Beloved to seduce him into obeying her. At another point, she "[w]as a decrepit old woman, with a severe face crowned with large curls of white wool intertwined with narcissus flowers" (p. 432). The description of her hair as white wool ironically plays off her character, as she is anything but a gentle lamb. The narcissus flowers signify her self-centered nature, but are also ironic as she is certainly not as beautiful as the mythological youth. In fact, she reminds Ramón of the Fates (p. 430), mythological beings believed to apportion humans' time on Earth — and end it.

Llull learns that because humans share the same genetic origin as her own offspring, she could not create a disease to destroy them without destroying her own slaves and herself: "[y]ou were part of my flesh and my blood, but like a cancer, you wouldn't obey my orders. With you, my sister was looking only to destroy me, and not to occupy this world with her offspring, which is also unheard of, because you are the first race of offsprings without a master in the entire history of the Universe" (p. 438). Aguilera establishes a symbolically important distinction between humans and the Mater's race: she states that "[n]ever do we fight with technology, because that's our instinct, to which we are as much slaves as our offspring are to us" (p. 438). It may seem that the Adversary contradicts herself, since technology would be necessary to manipulate genetic material; however, it is necessary to recall that the word technology etymologically comes from the Greek *techne*, which can refer either to an art or trade skill, but implies an instrumentality used to work upon some material. The Adversary's race needs no such instrumentality: they are able to affect genes directly, their power thus being more akin to creation. It is interesting to note that Neléis contends that the Apeironites' technology has permitted them to develope an ethics: *Folly* perhaps implies that the fact that their opponent's people possess such awesome powers, and thus never had the need for technology, prevented their development of what (humans would consider) an ethical or moral code.

It is important to note that the apocalyptic nature of the text implies a view of history as linear, teleological, and eschatological. Norman Cohn has traced the origins of apocalyptic thought from their conception by the sixth- and seventh-century BCE Persian religious leader Zoroaster through Jewish sects such as the Qumran settlement and then into Christian theology.[33] According to Cohn, the notion of apocalypse revolutionized the human concept of history: previously all belief systems had in common a cyclical, mythological idea of history as a process that repeats itself, but with no significant change to cultural orders. But apocalyptic thought provided history an end, a goal, and above all, meaning. However, the novel seemingly subverts its own apocalyptic plot line and logic, as Llull's discovery at the work's end that the Adversary has not been destroyed but is merely hibernating suggests history is a cyclical process of growth,

destruction, and rebirth. The "Peroratio" added to the end of Llull's memoirs tells of Llull's ill-fated attempts to recruit military aid for Apeiron, and of a visit paid him by a Florentine expatriate. The mysterious visitor informs him of the city's destruction, and confirms the truth of Ramón's dream about Neléis: "[f]or a thousand years the Adversary will remain hidden in the depths of her lair, recovering her powers and her vitality; but, when that time has passed, she will come forth again to confront humanity. That final battle will decide the destiny of our race, and only if our minds and our science have achieved the plenitude of their development will we be able to defeat her" (p. 484). But he also offers Llull a message of hope, assuring him that "Apeiron has been destroyed, but not her spirit, which has been disseminated over all the Earth, like seeds that will bring a new birth for humanity" (pp. 484-5). The linear history of Apeiron's destruction is placed within the framework of a story told on a much larger scale: that of the Adversary's existence. Her thousand-year hibernation recalls Revelation's foretelling of Christ's millennial reign on Earth following Armageddon, after which the devil (in this case the Adversary) is to be loosed again for a period of three and a half years before the resurrection of the dead and final judgment. It is thus possible to interpret this datum as suggesting that there will be a final battle after she recovers—and therefore a teleological end to human history.

The revelation that life on Earth was created by an alien race is certainly not in accord with the Christian dogma predominant in Europe at that time. The protagonist's discoveries cause him a great spiritual and emotional crisis, as he complains: "Lord God [...] What a great abyss and what profound secrets you have made me contemplate to my misfortune! Heal my mind that I may again partake in the joy of your light, because now there is only darkness in my soul (p. 450). The "Peroratio" also reveals that Fray Gerónimo, who had interrogated the protagonist on behalf of the Spanish Inquisition, leaves the official records to his former student and trusted friend Fray Nicolau Eimeric who, after reading Llull's story, "had no doubt whatsoever concerning the true author of that text [...] it could only have been the work of the Evil One" (p. 492). He has the Enlightened Doctor's writings declared heretical and as many of them destroyed as could be found. It would seem that Llull's effort to reconcile science and religion has failed, and the truth that he discovered is destroyed due to the ignorance and fanaticism of Eimeric. But materialist ideology is also subverted. Nayam's warning to Llull on the dangers of science, and his statement concerning the need for new blood indicate the peril of elevating science itself to the status of religion. Nonetheless, Aguilera does point to the possibility that scientific advances, once they have achieved the satisfaction of all humanity's material needs, would allow for ethical advances and thus the spiritual development of our species. This optimism is of course tempered by the destruction of Apeiron, but the author does leave readers the Apeironite "seeds" spread to the wind.

Viewed in its entirety, *Folly* both invokes and digresses from the heroic quest format mentioned above. Llull sets out on a mission to find the fabled city,

where he finds a harmonic social order and advanced technology that could solve many of the ills being suffered by medieval Europe. Before returning to his people with the life-enhancing boon, he must make an Orphic decent into the Adversary's lair to destroy her. He then returns home to try to convince the Emperor and Pope to send armies to save Apeiron and all its miracles. But here the similarities end: his heroic status is undermined because the Adversary has not in reality been slain, and he fails to obtain help to save Apeiron. The denouement's invocation of and ultimate digression from the classic heroic model, along with the work's mixture of the conventions of various genres and its defamiliarisation of recognisable historical, mythological, technological, and biblical elements makes *Folly*'s message concerning the conflict between materialist and religious interpretations of reality ambiguous, indeterminate. By interrogating and problematising both world views, Aguilera offers the reader a profound and well-crafted reflection on the nature of human epistemology.

Notes

1 All quotations from the Bible are from *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (London: HarperCollins, 1993).

2 Some disadvantages include the lack of translations; the fact that Latin America possesses a long tradition of non-realist fiction, and therefore a larger internal market; and the continuing acquisition of smaller Spanish-language publishing companies by larger corporate entities and the resulting consolidation of outlets in the hands of a few companies. Peninsular publishers' preference for established Latin American authors or translations of English-language sf and a consequent unwillingness to invest in little-known peninsular writers also aggravate the situation. Furthermore, peninsular sf is extremely difficult to find in Latin America. Among the exceptions are Ediciones B, Minotauro, Timun Mas, and PulpEdiciones. On Spanish-language sf in general and this problem in particular, see Yolanda Molina-Gavilán's excellent study of both Latin American and peninsular sf *Ciencia ficción en español: Una mitología moderna ante el cambio* (*Science Fiction in Spanish: A Modern Mythology in the Face of Change*), (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen, 2002). See also Fernando Martínez de la Hidalga's anthology of criticism, *La ciencia ficción española* (*Spanish Science Fiction*), (Madrid: Robel, 2002) and Miquel Barceló's *Ciencia ficción: guía de lectura*. Barcelona: Ediciones B, 1990. These studies,and the recent publication by Molina-Gavilán and Andrea Bell of *Cosmos Latinos*, an anthology of English translations of short fiction from four peninsular and eight Latin American authors, offer hope that the situation is changing. See also the entry "Spain" in John Clute and Peter Nicholls's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995).

3 One could name, for example, Argentine authors Angelica Gorodischer and Carlos Gardini, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz from Mexico, and Cubans Yoss and Daína Chaviano.

4 Ignotus and Gigamesh are two of the largest sellers of fantasy and science fiction in Spain, and present these awards to the best Spanish-language sf each year at the HispaCon, the congress of the Asociación Española de Fantasía, Ciencia Ficción y Terror (Spanish Association of Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror). Aguilera is a professional

industrial designer who began publishing sf short fiction in 1981. His first novel, *Mundos en el abismo* (*Worlds in the Abyss*), co-written with Javier Redal (Mallorca: Ultramar, 1988), was followed by the sequel *Mundos en la eternidad* (*Worlds in Eternity*) (Mallorca: Ultramar, 1990). In 1995 his short story "El bosque de hielo" ("The Forest of Ice"), won the Alberto Magno Prize as well as the Ignotus, published in the journal *BEM* 50 (1996): n.p. In 1996, he co-authored the Jules Verne-winning "La llavor del mal" ("The Seed of Evil") with Ricardo Lázaro that appeared in *Visiones* 1998, Rodolfo Martínez ed. (Barcelona:Asociación Española de Fantasía, Ciencia Ficción y Terror, 1998).

5 On the legend of the City of Prester John, see Robert Silverberg's *Realm of Prester John*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1972). Aguilera is not the first author to make use of the legend: literary adaptations in English date back at least to John Buchan's popular Indiana Jones-style adventure novel *Prester John*, first published in 1910.

6 Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981), p.45.

7 Wolfgang Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction", in J. Hillis Miller, ed., *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1971), p.8.

8 Darko Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre", in Mark Rose, ed. *Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p. 64.

9 Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1979), p. 7. The term was originally coined by the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky (*ostranenie*) in his "Art as Technique" in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3-24, See also Adam Roberts's *Science Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 6-8.

10 Iser, op. cit., p. 6.

11 Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, p. 7.

12 Heather Dubrow, *Genre*, (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 37.

13 Mary Ellen Bieder, "Intertextualizing Genre: Ambiguity as Narrative Strategy in Emilia Pardo Bazán", in Jeanne P. Brownlow, ed., *Intertextual Pursuits: Literary Meditations on Modern Spanish Narrative*, (Lewisberg: Bucknell UP, 1998), p. 60.

14 Frank Kermode, "Apocalypse and the Modern", in Saul Friedländer et. al., eds., *Visions of the Apocalypse: End or Rebirth?* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), p. 85.

15 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 6.

16 Kermode, *Sense*: "We re-create the horizons we have abolished, the structures that have collapsed; and we do so in terms of the old patterns, adapting them to our new worlds" (p. 58). This process also functions in the opposite direction: "fantasy [of apocalyptic nature is] concerned not only with providing each kind with some convenient mental equivalent but projecting the desires of the mind onto reality. When the fictions change, therefore, the world changes in step with them" (p. 42).

17 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1956). Campbell's work has come under criticism in recent years for not including myths that do not correspond to the monomyth; however, his ideas have become common cultural coin frequently employed in literature, and therefore pertinent to this study.

18 Campbell, op. cit., p. 35.

19 Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, trans., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 19.

20 Lukács, op. cit., p. 40.

21 Mark D. Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric of Ramón Llull: Lay Learning and Piety in the Christian West around 1300*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), p. 12.

[22] Johnston, op. cit., p. 12.

[23] All citation are from Juan Miguel Aguilera's *La locura de Dios*, (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 1998).

[24] It is important to note that for Llull, as for all medieval Christian European thinkers, the order of our natural world was a reflection of the divine celestial order; "logic" referred to reasoning by "revealing" analogies between the two, and not to our post-enlightenment deductive or inductive methods.

[25] The term metanarrative was coined by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi trans., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[26] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p. 147.

[27] J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed., Jack Sage trans., (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), p. 213.

[28] In this case, "apocalyptic" is used in the strict biblical sense, and not in that employed by Frye.

[29] My thanks to my colleague John Given for the information concerning this name and the meaning of *rexinoos*.

[30] The Mater's speech is in italics in the novel. I have removed them so as not to confuse the reader.

[31] For a good introduction to the history of Gnostic thought, see Riemer Roukema's *Gnosis and Faith in Early Christianity*, John Bowden trans., (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1999).

[32] See C.G. Jung, *Psyche and Symbol: A Selection of the Writings of C.G. Jung*, Violet S. de Laszlo ed., (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1958).

[33] See Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, 2nd ed., (New Haven CT: Yale UP, 2001).

Papers:

Images of Masculinity in the Recent Fiction of David Almond

Michael Levy

Growing up is always difficult, but many would argue that the years between eleven and fourteen, the first years of puberty, are the worst. Coming out of what is usually a period of relative calm, children not only must deal with the radical physical changes going on in their bodies and the even more befuddling chemical changes going on in their brains, but they must also make decisions, life-changing decisions, about who or what they will be in the future, and they must frequently do so with a dearth of facts and only the most limited understanding of consequences. Of necessity—given what society expects of young people—many of these decisions will be about how they deal with their sexualities and gender identities. Although children are steeped in their parents' and their society's gender preconceptions from birth, it is at puberty that such concerns can become obsessive, gaining the strength to either empower children or warp them, lead them towards healthy adulthood or toward some lesser state of existence.

Although this is undoubtedly true for both boys and girls, in this paper on David Almond's two recent novels, *Secret Heart*[1] and *The Fire-Eaters*[2] I'm going to concentrate specifically on the gender concerns of boys. It is at puberty, perhaps a little before or a little after, that certain key words can take on enormous power for boys. What eleven year old boy, for example, can't remember the embarrassment, even shame involved in having some other boy accuse him of being "queer", this despite the fact that he only vaguely understands the meaning of that supposed insult and despite the actuality, either straight or gay, of his own budding sexual orientation? What eleven-year-old boy, on the other hand, can't remember the power involved in using that word on some other boy, again regardless of the sexual orientation of the boys involved? Then there's the word that is in some strange way the opposite of "queer" in the eleven-year-old boy's vocabulary, the word "man." If being "queer" represents everything many eleven-year-old boys fear they might be, "manhood" can represent everything they hope to be. But just what is manhood? There's the rub.

In David Almond's novels, boys are repeatedly faced with this question. What is manhood? In general Almond's boys are at an age where sexual

orientation is either a secondary issue or not an issue at all. Invariably his boys have female friends, but are not yet sure where those friendships are going. Girls are different and often a bit mysterious. They occasionally seem wiser or somehow more highly evolved than their male counterparts. Almond's boys may feel a tinge of sexual attraction toward them, but no more than that. Thus, to the extent that homosexuality is an issue, it never really goes beyond the name-calling stage. What's important about being a man for Almond's boys is not with whom you want to have sex, but rather how you conduct yourself in the world. If you're a boy growing up in one of Almond's trademark blue-collar communities in northern England, which actions and activities are acceptable and manly and which aren't? To what extent do you owe it to your peers to be like them, maintaining the traditional ways of manhood? Is it possible to have a richly developed creative, spiritual, moral or intellectual life without somehow being less of a man than the seemingly more crude young men who surround you? In David Almond's novels, these questions are central to the development of his young male characters.

Secret Heart concerns a daft young boy named Joe Maloney. Joe's single mother works very hard at the local pub in a town that bears the intensely symbolic name of Helmouth (In reality, Almond has said, the town of Gateshead near Newcastle). His father, long gone, was a carnie and, apparently, a one-night stand. Helmouth, we're told, is the kind of half-dead, working class town where, "everything just came to nothing" (p. 13) and Joe's life seems similarly hopeless. The boy is a dreamer. Physically fragile, he is a reccurring victim of the local bullies. A regular truant, he is virtually non-verbal, in part because of a serious stammer which may paradoxically indicate, Almond has suggested, "that Joe is much more complex and potentially strong than he's given credit for."[3] Joe may also be a seer, someone with the ability to see things no one else can. Although Helmouth and its environs—including such locales as the Ratty Paddocks, the Blood Pond, and Adder Lane—is relentlessly grim, Joe is capable of looking beyond the motorway that bounds the town to the landscape beyond, to places with names like the Silver Forest, the Golden Hills and Black Bone Crags. Above the Crags he sees "creatures he'd known since he was small ...beasts that wheeled in the empty air above the...Crags" (p.16), beasts that no one else can see, dragons perhaps, or rocs, and at night his dreams are haunted by a tiger, a very Blakean tiger (Almond is a serious devotee of Blake).

Bobby Burns, by contrast, seems very much at home in Keely Bay, a small and impoverished, working-class town just outside of Newcastle in Almond's *The Fire-Eaters*. He has a healthy relationship with his mom and dad, the latter a skilled laborer at the local shipyard, he has many friends, and he loves the place he lives. Still, Bobby is someone who is capable of transcending his background. His performance on achievement tests has entitled him to attend Sacred Heart School, where most of the students will be from better backgrounds than he is and where eventual attendance at university will be an option. His name, of

course, calls to mind the great Scottish poet. That Robert Burns, coming from a poor agrarian background, was never entirely comfortable with the high social status his accomplishments brought him, arguably bore on Almond's decision to give his protagonist the same name as a hint of the difficulties the boy will face. This seems particularly true in light of the various negative and classist comments made about Bobby and his like by the administrators at his new school, things like "They don't care...That kind. The kind from Keely Bay" (p.198).

In both *Secret Heart* and *The Fire-Eaters*, Almond's young protagonists are faced with a series of models for "proper" or at least typical local male behavior in their everyday lives. Joe, who has no father or other appropriate male model in his life must deal, first and foremost, with the various older boys who hang loutishly about Helmouth, puffing on cigarettes, seemingly with nothing to do but "flex...their muscles and slap...and punch...each other" (p.136) and make fun of him and anyone else who seems the least bit different. The most obvious adult male in his life, at least of a more socially acceptable sort, is his Humanities teacher, the aptly named Bleak Winters, a humorless killjoy with no sense of imagination. Every bit as unappealing is the local punk, Joff, who has "a snakeskin tattoo around his throat, two gold teeth, shaved head, [and] muscles" (p.17). Joe's one friend, Stanny, insists that Joff will "make a man" of the two boys and Joff obviously has the hots for Joe's mom. Joff also loves knives and the killing of small animals, and fancies himself something of a survivalist. Eventually he will be implicated in the needless killing of a black panther, a beautiful and somewhat dangerous beast long rumored to live in the forest outside Helmouth, much in the manner of the panther actually reputed to haunt the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire to this day.

Fortunately for him, Bobby Burns has a more positive male role model in his daily life than does Joe Maloney. Bobby's father, although worryingly ill, is a genuinely good man, a veteran of World War II, not particularly learned, but valuing education and stalwartly on the side of the underdog. His advice to Bobby is invariably right. Others of Bobby's neighbors are somewhat more ambiguous. His best friend, Joseph, a brute of an older boy who is gradually having his entire back tattooed with a large dragon, is essentially good hearted but intensely anti-intellectual. As boys of a certain sort will, he mostly shows his affection for Bobby in a rough and tumble way that seems to center, like the interactions of the boys in *Secret Heart*, on knocking Bobby down and rubbing his face in the sand. Although Joseph, who is destined for the building trades, foresees that Bobby will rise above him socially and intellectually and doesn't try to stop it, he clearly mourns the eventual loss of his friend and deeply resents Bobby's growing relationship with Daniel, the son of two university professors who have recently moved to Keely Bay. Over and over again Joseph maligns the more sophisticated and somewhat stuck up Daniel (who wears his hair long and speaks proper English) as a "jesse" (p. 26), a "nance" (p. 38) or a "ponce" (p. 212), in other words, as a homosexual.

In *Secret Heart* the bad role models in Joe Maloney's life are deeply hostile to anything that is either different or requires imagination. When Hackenschmidt's Circus comes to Helmouth, the loutish boys who bedevil Joe, are just as nasty to the performers, throwing things at them and calling them "Gyppo scum" (p. 10). If they come to a circus performance at all, it's primarily to jeer. The teacher Bleak Winters wants Hackenschmidt's closed down on charges of animal cruelty, without evidence, based on his own assumptions concerning circuses and despite the fact that the only animals actually with the circus are a pack of well-loved performing dogs. Joff, despite his colorful appearance, is so full of his own preconceptions about manhood and what it takes to become a man, mostly a matter of roughing it in the wilderness and killing things, that he's blind to the miraculous going on around him. In his recent study of Almond's work, Don Latham even suggests that Joff may represent "specifically a part of Joe's nature",[4] one, I would suggest, that Joe must reject to achieve true manhood. The teachers at Bobby Burns's new school in *The Fire-Eaters*, are equally closed minded, despite their upper- or at least middle-class origins. For the aptly named Mr. Todd, who carries a black strap everywhere, education is not about learning or freeing the imagination. To him the children are "half civilized. You are wild things. And you must be taught to conform" (p. 92). Like Joseph, most of the other citizens of Keely Bay, particularly Losh and Yak Spink, two brothers who gather sea coal at the ocean's edge for a living and who were long ago expelled from school, have no interest in anything beyond their own immediate, not unpleasant, but intensely circumscribed lives.

In both *Secret Heart* and *The Fire-Eaters*, however, extraordinary events occur, events that radically change the lives of their boy protagonists. Extraordinary characters appear who serve in various ways as transformative role models, giving the boys lessons in manliness that differ radically from those they have previously learned. The former book, like all of Almond's previously published children's novels, is clearly a fantasy and the events that transform Joe Maloney are indeed miraculous. The latter novel feels, at first, like a work of realism, in fact an historical novel set at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Its transformations at first feel symbolic, though they take a subtle turn toward the literal before the novel ends. For Joe Maloney the transformative events are the appearance of Hackenschmidt's Circus and its various eccentric performers and the magical tiger that at first haunts his dreams and then his reality. For Bobby Burns, there's the Missile Crisis itself and, of course, the mad escapologist and fire-eater, McNulty.

Secret Heart begins with the tiger. It pads through Joe Maloney's dreams and moves "as if it knew him" (p. 1), but he doesn't know what it means or what it wants. He believes it's going to kill him, but it's called away at the last moment by a "man—a huge dark figure in the shadows" (p. 2). Before it quite disappears, however, it draws "Joe Maloney into itself" (p. 2). In some inexplicable way he is part of the tiger and it is part of him. The next day Hackenschmidt's Circus

comes to town. Circuses, of course, or their variant the carnival, with their tarnished tinsel and many illusions, are ready-made symbols for the power of the imagination, and any number of writers, from Charles Finney to Ray Bradbury to, most recently, Mitch Albom, have used them as such. Almond, however, opts for one of the standard variations on this symbol, the dying circus as the death of imagination, for Hackenschmidt's is on its last legs, is in fact advertising its "Final Tour" (p. 10). All that's left of its wild animal acts are the much-loved, but not very competent trained dogs, and one carefully preserved tiger skin. Hackenschmidt himself, the "Lion of Russia, Wrestling Champion of the World" (p. 31), whose act involves wrestling several circus patrons at once, is still a mountain of a man, but clearly running toward decrepitude. In some ways the epitome of masculine power, he will, by the novel's end, be defeated and ground into the dirt when ganged up on by a number of Helmouth's bullies. With the exception of the beautiful young girl Corinna, nearly all of the circus's performers appear to be elderly and some verge on senility. Even Corinna, who does a high-wire act in torn and shabby tights, is convinced that her skills fall far short of those of her long-gone mother, who reputedly would miraculously disappear in midair during parts of her act. As decrepit as the circus is, however, it's still magical and it turns out that Hackenschmidt and company have actually been looking for Joe Maloney.

In *The Fire-Eaters* we meet another strong man, McNulty (a figure from the author's own childhood as it happens), whom Almond describes as "a small, wild-eyed, bare-chested man. His skin was covered in scars and bruises. There were rough and faded tattoos of beasts and women and dragons....He had pointed gold teeth at the front of his mouth and he wore tiny golden earrings" (p. 2). Bobby Burns's father, as it happens, had served with McNulty during World War II and tells the boy that the strong man was driven insane by his wartime experiences. Now, some seventeen years later, McNulty wanders the English countryside, half circus performer without a circus, half mad-prophet. His act involves, lifting a heavy cart wheel, escaping from chains, breathing fire, and, most disturbingly, piercing his body with sharp implements; when Bobby first meets McNulty he pushes a foot long skewer through one cheek, into his mouth, and out the other cheek. He speaks of himself in the third person—"`Could McNulty lift this?' he hissed" (p. 3)—and he passes around a bag, snarling at the crowds that gather around him "Pay!...You'll not get nowt till you pay" (p. 2). After lifting the heavy cartwheel, he asks (perhaps as much to himself as to his audience), "See? See what a man can do?" (p. 4). Like Hackenschmidt, however, McNulty is less formidable than he seems. Indeed, he's terrified of the world around him, clearly still spending much of his time in the post-traumatic stress disorder induced psychosis of his World War II experiences, though there is some slight hint, that he, like so many of Almond's characters, may have psychic abilities. Despite McNulty's tenuous connection to reality, he seems unusually cognizant of and fearful of the darkest possibilities inherent in the on-going Cuban Missile Crisis.

For Joe Maloney, the circus is a revelation. The circus folk know about the tiger that has haunted his dreams. Where others see him as a loser, a goat, someone who needs to grow up and be taken in hand by a "real man" like Joff, the circus people see him as a shaman, perhaps even a savior. The first time Corinna meets the boy, she says "We weren't sure why we came here....But maybe you're the reason, Joe"(p. 34) and later on, the old woman Nanty Solo, both blind and a seer, confirms this belief saying, "Corinna's right in picking you out boy. Nanty gets the taste of something old and animal in you" (p. 88). On the circus's last day, the day when Hackenschmidt will be defeated by Helmouth's mean-spirited hooligans, Nanty tells Joe that "The forests are almost empty of their tigers Joe. Our secret hearts are almost empty" (p. 148) and she feeds him a tiny piece of tiger bone. The magic of the world seems close to being at an end, but Joe, we discover, is destined to renew the world: "Yours is the bravest soul of all. The tiger has chosen you to carry it out of the glowing blue tent and into the forest again" (p. 149). In a shamanistic ceremony, Joe is asked to wear the tiger skin. Looking at it, he realizes that "somehow he had always known that he would put it on" (p. 151). Then, "transformed by tigerness, [he] became a tiger" (p. 152).

Going out into the night-time forest with Corinna, Joe Maloney at first encounters a horror. Joff and Stanny, doing their survivalist bit, have killed the panther, cutting off its head in some sort of half-assed manhood ceremony. Enraged, and imbued by the tiger's spirit—they see it pacing along with them through the dark trees from time to time—the two children consider revenge. They find Joff and Stanny asleep. Manifesting itself in our world, the tiger prowls about the campsite, soon to be joined by a variety of other marvelous, half-seen creatures, unicorns and "beasts with four legs but with heads that seemed human" (p. 161), representatives of the wonder that has largely gone out of the world. When Stanny and Joff awaken, the former can see the creatures around them, demonstrating, presumably, that he's not yet lost to wonder. But Joff can't for, as Corinna realizes, he's a "lost soul...Stupid puny man." (p. 165).

Joff's lesson to Stanny, the lesson he would have taught to Joe, is that real men kill. The tiger, however, perhaps of its own accord, perhaps under Joe's unconscious control, will not kill. The spreading of destruction is not what makes a true man. Letting Joff escape into the dark, Joe and Corinna bury the panther and celebrate their victory over evil in an impromptu performance, dancing with the tiger; they "ran, dancing, cartwheeled, moved faster, faster, and they laughed and gasped as they lost themselves in the delight of it. They disappeared and came back again..." (p. 168), another miracle. Later they find Joff's stash of knives and destroy them. By his actions, Joe not only brings magic back into the world, but achieves manhood. He "closed his eyes, felt the tiger prowling through the forest of his mind, knew the tiger would prowl in him for ever more" (p. 178).

In *The Fire-Eaters*, the question of what is true manhood is also inseparable from the issue of violence. On the smallest scale, the limited world of Keely

Bay, for example, Bobby Burns and his friends, particularly Joseph, repeatedly demonstrate their manhood in the most traditional of all possible ways, by violent, if friendly confrontations. Real men, even real men who have not yet entered high school, hit and wrestle and throw things at each other. They knee each other in the crotch, rub each other's faces in the sand, play war and build bonfires. They are, in essence, fire-eaters, living and thriving off of violent confrontation. Daniel, who isn't physically violent, is thus seen by Joseph as something less than a true man and, although Joseph's reaction to Daniel makes Bobby uneasy, he otherwise accepts violence as a normal part of his Keely Bay world and even takes time to "wonder how I'd do if I ever had to fight [Daniel]" (p. 67). On a slightly larger playing field, however, that of his new school, he begins to see things differently. Mr. Todd's uncalled for use of the punishment strap against him, Daniel, and others, a violence that the teacher clearly enjoys, is simply wrong. Bobby realizes this and quickly joins Daniel in his underground campaign to expose Todd for the monster he is by secretly taking photographs of the man while he is administering punishment, and then posting them around the school.

Then there's the issue of McNulty, who is in some ways hypermasculine—note a number of visual similarities to both Joff and Hackenschmidt from *Secret Heart*, for example—who is concerned with "what a man can do" (p. 4), and who is extraordinarily violent, but who limits his violence entirely to his own person. McNulty has been driven mad, Bobby's father says, by the war, but also by the "Fakes, fakirs and magic men" (p. 59) of Burma, where they served. "Poor souls like McNulty sat at their feet while the sun glared down and the bullets rattled and the bayonets stabbed and the bombs fell and the sun blazed down and the skin got scorched and the brain got melted and the heart got broke. This is where McNulty comes from, son" (p. 60). The strongman is thus not merely mad, not merely self-destructive, but also at least in what passes for his own mind, something of a magic man himself, a seer perhaps like Joe Maloney, someone with a duty, as becomes clear later, to prophecy. Haunted by his collapse during the war, he may also be compulsively attempting to prove his own manhood over and over again.

Early in the book Bobby agrees to help McNulty pierce himself with a skewer after being told to open a casket full of sharp items and "Take out the thing you think should make the most pain" (p. 5), which statement clearly equates McNulty's exaggerated machismo with masochism. Afterwards, the strongman pays him with a silver coin and we're told that "a tiny splash of blood fell from his lips across our joined hands" (p. 8); later Bobby notes a mark on his hand where McNulty's blood had fallen, although, he says, the mark might already have been there. Soon thereafter, Bobby begins to identify with McNulty, eventually feeling a need to hurt himself, and Almond goes out of his way to give the boy a number of chances to notice the effect of pain on the body. Joseph repeatedly shows Bobby his growing dragon tattoo and makes it very clear that the pain is part of his manliness. Stressed about going to a new school, terribly worried about both his

father's potentially serious illness and the worsening of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Bobby, reliving McNulty's escape act, dreams that "[my] blankets became chains and my sleep was a great writhing and struggling to break free" (p. 34). Upset by Mr. Todd's violence as well, he begins to take notice of crucifixes on which "Christ hung in agony" (p. 107). In his biology class, while studying the nervous system, he and Daniel are given the assignment to stick each other's hands with needles in order to create a "map of pain" (p. 108). Then, when some of the students are disruptive, Mr. Todd chooses two boys seemingly at random, though it probably isn't coincidence that one of them is Daniel, for punishment, asking them if they "understand the ancient theory of sacrifice" (p. 109). Later that evening Bobby, with thoughts on his mind of "St. Sebastian with a dozen arrows in him" (p. 124) and "Jesus writhing on his cross" (p. 124), lights a match and runs his fingers through it, copying one of McNulty's performances on a smaller scale and feeling the pain. Later still, in near despair he prays for his father's health, while "press[ing] my needle through the edge of my thumb. I pressed it into the flesh between my thumb and forefinger.... 'Let me take the pain,' I said. 'Not him'" (p. 174). When he and Daniel are finally exposed as the culprits behind the photographs of Mr. Todd, an exposure they've pretty much assured by being so blatant, Bobby is punished with the strap, but refuses to apologize: "I could take any pain he gave me. His punishment would only make me stronger" (p. 202).

The violence of children, the violence of those who are violent merely to demonstrate their power over children, and the violence of those who are unsure of their own manhood, all come together in Almond's depiction of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the impending danger of nuclear war. Early in the book Bobby notices that "BAN THE BOMB" has been painted across a war memorial in Newcastle (p. 13) and Daniel wears a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) button on his jacket. Bobby and his parents frequently watch the news concerning the worsening crisis on their television and the various citizens of Keely Bay discuss the situation with enormous trepidation, fearing that the end of the world may well be at hand. Mr. Burns, Almond's moral compass in *The Fire-Eaters*, sees the posturing of both Kennedy and Khrushchev as evil, saying in disgust "This isn't good enough for them....this quiet, this beauty, this peace. Listen to them. They're animals, howling for blood" (p. 20), and he and Bobby's mother condemn television ads for bomb shelters, shown as something men should build, but with "a lady's touch" (p. 129), as sheer madness. Later, Mr. Burns defends those protesting for disarmament, saying "That's just people doing what they should do...yelling out against what they know is wrong" (p. 193). As the book continues, Almond repeatedly creates parallels between the international situation and the games of War played by the children of Keely Bay, not to mention McNulty's own war-induced madness and masochism (and less obviously, Almond has suggested, the just beginning war in Iraq). Indeed, in one of Bobby's dreams, McNulty's firebreathing is clearly equated with both his war-induced insanity and the potential for nuclear holocaust.

> I dreamed of McNulty's fire. I dreamed that he stood on the quayside at Newcastle and breathed the fire into the air and it did not stop. It spread around, engulfing the market stalls, the cranes, the warehouses, the arching bridges and there was nothing but the great roar of the flames and the screams of those who'd been taken. The river became a river of fire that raced towards the sea and flames a mile high leapt from the water and the smoke blotted out the sun (p. 105).

Of course McNulty himself also becomes a prophet warning against the coming nuclear destruction: "'Get your shelters dug!' he yelled, as if to the whole world. 'Dig down to where the dead live! Cover yourself with the earth. The world's afire! The sky's ablaze! There's no more night!'" (p. 187).

For Bobby all of the various forms of violence in his world become enmeshed. When saying his prayers, he begins to make use of various totemic items—a statue of "Mary and Bernadette in their plastic grotto...McNulty's silver coin...the CND symbol" (p. 175) from Daniel—all of the various crises in his life being rolled into one heart-felt request. "Leave him alone...Take me instead" (p. 175). He sees his and Daniel's guerilla activities against Mr. Todd in terms of "stand[ing] up and fight[ing] before the darkness fell" (p. 195) and wears a forbidden CND badge while distributing the photos about the school. Eventually suspended from school and facing expulsion, he runs through town shouting "Freedom! Freedom! Destroy the missiles! Save the world! Save my dad!" (p. 204). Later, in an extended and beautiful soliloquy, Bobby prays for the salvation of the world and for Keely Bay, from its people to the "rats and voles and moles" to "every grain of sand, every single grain of coal" (p. 222). He prays for everyone he knows, even the hated Mr. Todd. "If someone has to be taken, take me. I live in Keely Bay beside the lighthouse, near to everything I love. I'm in the window with the Lourdes light. My name is Bobby Burns. Take me" (p. 222).

But, of course, the nuclear holocaust doesn't come, and Bobby's Dad gets better, though McNulty, still obsessed with his own perverse need to constantly prove his manhood through pain, but terrified by both his past and by what the future may hold, commits suicide by breathing in his own fire.

So, what, in the end, is manhood all about? Almond doesn't condemn Bobby and Joseph's physical and verbal roughhousing in *The Fire-Eaters*, presumably because it's both consensual and traditional within their community—undoubtedly he feels some nostalgia for such roughhousing in his own childhood—but it's clear that he sees it as in some sense immature behavior, something that Bobby at least will grow out of, and it's equally clear that he condemns such activities when they aren't consensual, whether we look at the verbal insults Joseph directs at Daniel or the similar insults the young men of Helmouth direct towards Joe Maloney and the circus performers in *Secret Heart*. Almond is particularly adamant in his condemnation of unrestrained and unmitigated physical violence. Mr. Todd in *The Fire-Eaters* and Joff in *Secret Heart*, who appear to place the hurting of

others at the center of their own personal concepts of manhood, are very close to monsters and are, in the end, humiliated. One clear indicator of true manhood, for Almond, is the ability to forgive. In his final, transformative prayer Bobby asks God to save even Mr. Todd from death and Joe, after the death of the panther, rejects Corinna's bloodthirsty insistance that the tiger should kill Stanny and Joff, even calling out to the "Sp-spirits of the earth and air [to] look after Stanny Mole this day" (p. 182). Forgiveness, however, does not imply passivity. Bobby takes a stand on Mr. Todd's cruelty and Joe, together with the tiger, actively participates in the return of wonder to the world.

Manhood, for Almond, also involves both selflessness and a willingness to sacrifice for the betterment of others. Joe Maloney in *Secret Heart* has spent his entire life as a much-tormented underdog and yet he has never lost either his ability to care or his sense of wonder. Corinna tells him "You have done a great thing, Joe Maloney. You have done a thing that is filled with courage and that is beyond our understanding....How did we find a boy like you in a place like Helmouth?" (p. 186). At the novel's end the Helmouth toughs realize that Joe has changed and keep their distance as he and the circus folk go by. "Wonder and fear were in their eyes as well as scorn. They parted slowly as the group passed through" (p. 193). Somehow they know, without being told, that Joe now walks "with the tiger inside him" (p. 201). Bobby Burns also learns selflessness and also becomes a willing sacrifice in *The Fire-Eaters*. That he doesn't actually save his father or the world is irrelevant and that no one else understands what he's gone through is equally beside the point, because he is truly ready and willing to give his life for others. Both boys transcend the limited concept of masculinity available to them in their daily lives and both achieve true manhood by learning to care for the entire world.

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3 "A Conversation with David Almond About Secret Heart." http://www.randomhouse.com/teens/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780440418276 (accessed January 20, 2007).

4 Don Latham, *David Almond: Memory and Magic.* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006), p. 78

Heinlein's Juveniles: Space Opera vs. "The Right Stuff"[1]

C. W. Sullivan III

As a "Golden Age of Science Fiction" author and a member of John W. Campbell's stable of writers at *Astounding*, Robert A. Heinlein has long been regarded as a writer of "hard science" science fiction—even in the twelve novels of his juvenile series.[2] Alexei Panshin notes that "if there is anything amazing about [Heinlein's] writing it is his ability to write for, say, ten pages, as he does on space suits in *Have Space Suit—Will Travel*, without losing or even seriously slowing his story" (89). Other critics have noted that Heinlein neither writes down to his readers (Franklin 74) nor "insults the reader's intelligence" (Samuelson 131; Williamson 16) by watering down his material. And Heinlein himself has said that

> I have held to that rule [i.e., not writing down] and my books for boys differ only slightly from my books for adults—the books for boys are somewhat harder to read because younger readers relish tough ideas they have to chew on and don't mind big words—and the boys' books are slightly limited by taboos and conventions imposed by their elders. (Fuller 109)

As a result, there is a great deal of straight science and scientific explanation in Heinlein's juveniles, from the hydroponic system necessary to maintain the air supply, not to mention provide the fruits and vegetables, for a long-voyage spaceship, to the calculation of a Hohmann orbit, a long but economical flight plan for an interplanetary rocket ship.[3] Along the way, however, there are points at which he takes particular care to present actual scientific fact in juxtaposition to either popular misconceptions about space and space travel or cartoon and comic-strip presentations of science fiction.

Heinlein's juveniles appeared between 1947 and 1958, just as his career was really taking off. During that period, he was very prolific. In 1947 alone, the year he published *Rocket Ship Galileo*, he also published seven short stories in *Saturday Evening Post* (3), *Argosy*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Startling Stories*, and *Popular Detective*. It was also during this 1947-to-1958 period that some of his best novels

were published: *The Man Who Sold the Moon* (1950), *The Puppet Masters* (1951), *Double Star* (1956), *The Door Into Summer* (1956), and *Methuselah's Children* (1958). Add those six novels to the twelve juveniles, and Heinlein published eighteen novels in that twelve-year period in addition to roughly two dozen short stories. Although Heinlein's most famous works were still to come, the ground work for many, if not most, of can be found in this twelve-year period.

Rocket Ship Galileo (1947), Heinlein's first juvenile novel, is admittedly the weakest of the twelve he eventually produced, especially in terms of its plot. However, it does contain all of the elements that Heinlein will develop throughout the series, including his insistence on "the right stuff" rather than the stuff of "space opera." Heinlein is serious about the science part of science fiction, and the book opens with three high school seniors preparing to test a small rocket motor. They have formed their own rocket club and are conducting the experiment on their own, not in school, but Heinlein shows them to be serious experimenters gathering data for a proposed future launch. Donald Cargraves, uncle of one of the boys and a famous "atomic scientist" himself, looks over their experiment and is "impressed."

> It is common enough in the United States for boys to build and take apart almost anything mechanical, from alarm clocks to hiked-up jalopies. It is not so common for them to understand the sort of controlled and recorded experimentation on which science is based. Their equipment was crude and their facilities limited, but the approach was correct and the scientist recognized it. (19)

Cargraves then recruits the boys to help him convert an Atlantic-freighter rocket ship and fly it to the moon—perhaps the biggest stretch of imagination in the novel.

Heinlein also takes on both misconceptions about space travel and cartoon or comic-strip depictions of space travel. As the *Galileo* reaches the proper speed for its flight to the moon, the engines are shut off, the artificial gravity provided by the thrust disappears, and Cargraves and the boys experience weightlessness.

> They did not bounce up to the ceiling. The rocket did not spin wildly. None of the comic-strip things happened to them. They simply ceased to weigh anything as the thrust died away. (109-110)

Heinlein even includes the words "comic-strip" to make it perfectly clear that there is a difference between what he considers good science fiction and what he considers to be badly done science fiction, i.e., science fiction which does not contain correct scientific information.

In other places in the book, he corrects misinformation without referencing cartoon or comic-strip presentations. In a discussion about the lack of heating

units in the suits Cargraves and the boys will wear on the surface of the Moon, Heinlein comments:

> There were no heating arrangements. Contrary to popular belief, vacuum of outer space has no temperature; it is neither hot nor cold. . . . The suits were so well insulated, as well as air tight, that body heat more than replaced losses through radiation. (54)

Later in the novel, he uses very nearly the same language, with certainly the same intent, when he comments on the shadows on the Moon.

> Contrary to popular fancy, the shadows were not black, despite the lack of air-dispersed sunlight. The dazzle of the floor behind them and the glare of the hills beyond all contrived to throw quite a lot of reflected light into the shadows. (131)

Heinlein's mention of "popular belief" and "popular fancy" in these two quotations, like his reference to "comic-strip things" in the quotation before them, is more of his attempt to separate his science fiction from less well-written science fiction.

The Rolling Stones (1952) is the sixth novel in the series, and in it Heinlein depicts a family buying a rocket ship and leaving their home on the Moon to travel to Mars and beyond. The novel is, to some extent, a science fiction version of a family vacation in a large station wagon or van, and much of the description is about the ordinary matters of any family trip or about the dynamics of a family all of whose members are highly intelligent and creative. Roger Stone, an engineer and the father of the group, writes a science fiction serial, *The Scourge of the Spaceways*, to make money. When one of his sons says that he would rather read the serial than *Ivanhoe* or *The Mill on the Floss*, Stone says

> My stuff? My stuff isn't literature. It's more of an animated comic strip. . . . Confound it! That's just fiction—and poor fiction at that. It's hokum, dreamed up to sell merchandise. (21)

Stone had begun writing the serial a couple of years before on a bet that he could "write better stuff than was being channeled up from Earth—and had gotten himself caught in a quicksand of fat checks and options" (22).[4]

When he takes command of the ship, he turns over the writing of the serial to his mother, Hazel, and his youngest son, four-year-old "Buster," who says of the first episode he and his grandmother create:

> "I liked it. Let's do that part over where I shoot the space pirate." He pointed a finger and made a zizzing noise. "Whee! Blood all over the bulkheads!"

> "There's your answer, Roger [said Hazel]. Your public. If Buster likes it, you're in." (27-28)

Later on, Hazel, who had planned to end the serial, accepts a new contract solely because of the huge increase in salary offered her.

Hazel's problem, with the new contract, is that she now has to get the hero, John Sterling, out of what appeared to be an inescapable situation at the end of what was to be the final episode. In the first scene of the new series, Hazel explains, Sterling has already escaped and is starting to tell "Special Agent Dolores O'Shanahan" about his escape when "the next action starts and it's so fast and so violent and so bloody that our unseen audience doesn't have time to think about it . . . " Roger accuses her of "literary cheating," and she replies, "Who said this was literature. I've got three new sponsors" (104).

In *The Rolling Stones*, Heinlein does use the words "comic strip" again, but again, his larger purpose seems to be to contrast a certain kind of serial science fiction with the kind of science fiction he writes. The serial science fiction characterized by noble heroes like the appropriately-named John Sterling, villains like the Galactic Overlord, and lots and lots of fast-paced and violent action is exactly the opposite of this rather mundane novel about a family's travels among the settled parts of the solar system. Moreover, Heinlein's repeated differentiation between *The Scourge of the Spaceways* and "literature" to the detriment of the former and the comment that the serial is aimed at highly intelligent four-year-olds further distances his fiction from what he perceives as that written for the popular market.

The Star Beast (1954), Heinlein's eighth juvenile, is primarily a novel about Earth people and aliens, and it deals with that topic on three levels: the personal level of John Thomas Stuart XI and his alien pet, Lummox; the popular culture level of such anti-alien groups as the Keep Earth Human League; and the political level of the Department of Spatial Affairs. Heinlein has little respect for the Keep Earth Human League, whose representative says things like, "As is well known, ever since the inception of the ungodly practice of space travel, our native Earth, given to us by Divine law, has been overrun by . . . 'beasts' . . . of dubious origin" (63); and Heinlein realizes that in the government foreign policy departments of the future, like the ones today, the real work will be done by the second- and third-level bureaucrats who understand the situation rather than the political appointees who do not.

In the latter part of the novel, Mr. Kiku, the bureaucrat who does all the real work, is asked by his superior, the Secretary for Spatial Affairs, Mr. McClure, to appear on "stereovision" with Beulah Murgatroyd. Kiku has no idea who she is, and McClure explains that she is the "creator of the Pidgie-Widgie stories for children, you know—*Pidgie Widgie on the Moon, Pidgie-Widgie Goes to Mars, Pidgie-Widgie and the Space Pirates*" (182). He further explains that

> Pidgie-Widgie is a puppet about a foot high. He goes zooming through space, rescuing people and blasting pirates and having a grand ole time. The kids love him. And at the end of each installment, Mrs. Murgatroyd comes on and they have a bowl of Hunkies together and talk. (182-183)

Mrs. Murgatroyd now has a stereovision show, and the show has a big following among grown-ups as well as children. McClure agrues that Kiku's appearance on the Pidgie-Widgie show will be a "wonderful boost for the department" (183).

Other than Kiku's ignorance of Mrs. Murgatroyd, Pidgie-Widgie, and the books and the stereovision show, Heinlein makes no disparaging remarks about this kind of science fiction, but based on the remarks about cartoon and comic-strip science fiction in *Rocket Ship Galileo* and *The Rolling Stones*, it very easy to see where Heinlein stands on yet another "science fiction" presentation that involves "zooming through space, rescuing people and blasting pirates." Moreover, the fact that they eat a bowl of cereal on "the biggest breakfast-food show on the air," characterizes the Pidgie-Widgie show as "hokum, dreamed up to sell merchandise" (*Rolling Stones* 21). Also, Pidgie-Widgie's adventures and triumphs, like the *Scourge of the Spaceways* serial in *The Rolling Stones*, stand in stark contrast to the ordinary bureaucratic activities and frustrations that make up Kiku's day. Further, Heinlein's use of names is important here. "Pidgie-Widgie" is sufficiently diminutive to make this character ridiculous, and both "Beulah" and "Murgatroyd" suggest, in the case of the former, a kind of old-fashioned stuffiness not at all sympathetic to science fiction and, in the case of the latter, humor—in the sense that this is a funny name and so the person is not to be taken seriously, especially as a presenter of science fiction.

Have Space Suit—Will Travel (1958), the twelfth and last of Heinlein's official juveniles[5] and the last novel to be considered here, starts out in the same vein as the others in regards to cartoon or comic-strip science fiction, but it then seems to adopt some of that genre's conventions. Initially, the main character, Kip, who has won a space suit in a slogan contest (the first prize, which he really wanted, was a trip to the moon), is teased about his wanting to go into space by the local high school dropout, "Ace" Quiggle, who calls him "Captain" or "Commodore" early in the book (9) and gets more creative after Kip wins the space suit.

> Why, if it isn't Commander Comet, the Scourge of the Spaceways! Where's your blaster gun, Commander? Ain't you afraid the Galactic Emperor will make you stay in after school for running around bare-nekkid? ... Junior, seein' you got that clown suit, why don't you put it to work? Run an ad in the *Clarion*: 'Have Space Suit—Will Travel'" (38-39).[6]

In a Heinlein work, anyone with a name like "Ace" Quiggle can't be taken seriously, and his teasing of Kip is there to show the limited intellect and imagination of a high school dropout—especially in contrast to the independent work Kip has had to do to flesh out the meager education he was getting at the local high school.[7]

Heinlein seems to shift gears, though, when Kip is kidnapped by an alien known as "Wormface" and his two human henchmen, 1930s-style gangsters whose dialogue is straight out of a B-movie script. The Wormface is stocky, has four snake-like arms (two where his waist should be), lots of fingers or tendrils, a "sweetish musky" odor, and purplish brown and oily skin (53). But it is his face that is the scariest part.

> The mouth was the second worst part of him; in place of jawbones and chin he had mandibles that opened sideways as well as down, gaping in three irregular sides. There were rows of tiny teeth but no tongue that I could see; instead the mouth was rimmed with cilia as long as angleworms. They never stopped squirming.
>
> I said that the mouth was "second worst"': he had eyes. . . . They scanned like radar, swinging up and down and back and forth. He never looked at you and yet was always looking at you.
>
> When he turned around, I saw a third eye in back. (54)

Heinlein appears to have created the very alien that he has so long criticized in science fiction, and it is the first alien in the twelve juveniles that wants to take over the Earth—and, perhaps, use humans as food.

But Heinlein has done this on purpose. He has written what seems to be a typical "Earth vs. the Invading Aliens" plot so that he can later turn the tables on the reader. Near the end of the book, as Kip and Peewee (his younger companion) and even the reader are relaxing in the capture, trial, and execution of the whole Wormface race, Heinlein then puts the human race on trial in the Court of the Three Galaxies. If the human race is found guilty of being a potential threat to the Three Galaxies, Earth will be rotated onto another plane of existence without the Sun and left to slowly freeze solid. It is a situation reminiscent of the movie, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), but in the end of Heinlein's novel, humanity is given a chance to grow up and will be checked on periodically. As George Slusser notes, Heinlein has used the conventions of popular alien-invasion science fiction to bring the reader to the point at which he or she realizes that there is a much greater danger, humanity itself (49-57). Once again, the action-adventure science fiction is not the important plot; it is a good story but, in the end, "only" serves showcase Kip's character and bring him to the Court of the Three Galaxies.

The examples from *Rocket Ship Galileo, The Rolling Stones, The Star Beast,* and *Have Space Suit—Will Travel* do not stand alone; they are part of the larger

attitude toward science and science fiction in Heinlein's juveniles. In addition to those examples and the serious presentation of scientific topics (to which I alluded at the beginning of this essay), Heinlein is also critical of people who do not have what he feels is sufficient scientific knowledge or who are not sufficiently open-minded.

Farmer in the Sky (1950), the fourth book in the series, depicts the colonization and terraforming of one of Jupiter's moons, Ganymede. As the main character and his family prepare to leave Earth on a shuttle to the transport, *Mayflower*, that will take them to Ganymede, young Bill, the main character, hears the mother of another family ask which of the shuttles was the *Mayflower*.

> Her husband tried to explain it to her, but she still was puzzled. I nearly burst, trying to keep from laughing. Here she was, all set to go to Ganymede and yet she was so dumb she didn't even know that the ship she was going in had been built out in space and couldn't land anywhere. (36)

In addition to characters like that woman, there are characters who are just not ready for what the future brings.

In *Between Planets* (1951), the fifth book in the series, Don Harvey, the main character, has become friends with a Venerian (i.e. from Venus) dragon named Sir Isaac Newton, and they are both on the same ship leaving Earth for the space station. They are seated when the rest of the passengers assigned to that compartment arrive.

It was a family party; the female head thereof took one look inside and [seeing the dragon] screamed.

> She swarmed up the ladder, causing a traffic jam with her descendants and spouse as she did so. (50)

The woman then complains for a long paragraph about the situation, saying things like "those hideous monsters should never be allowed to come to Earth; they should be exterminated" and is transferred, with her family, to another compartment of the ship (51).

There are ignorant and unprepared men, too. In the second juvenile, *Space Cadet* (1948), Matt, one of the main characters, comes back to his family's home on Earth part way through his training at the Interplanetary Patrol Academy of the Solar Federation. Over dinner, a discussion begins about the orbiting weapons, and Matt's father, trying to calm his wife's fears about orbiting weaponry, says

> Catherine, after all, it's *our* Patrol. For all practical purposes the other nations don't count. A majority of the Patrol officers are from North America. That's true, Matt, isn't it? (122-123)

Matt leaves the dinner table soon after, and he and his father resume the conversation later, his father maintaining that "the Patrol could not bomb the North American Union" (123). Matt asks not to talk about it, realizing that he has developed a larger cultural awareness since he has been in training to be a Patrolman. Matt realizes that the national unions, developed from combinations of our current countries, are themselves out of date and that the Patrol is responsible for keeping the peace not only globally but solar-system wide as well—as events later in the book prove. At the end of that chapter, thinking about his visit home, he realizes that "little Mattie didn't live there any more!" (124). Matt has obviously become a citizen of a larger "world," and the reader hears nothing more about his family for the second half of the novel.

The textual evidence alone should be enough to convince any science fiction critic that Heinlein seems to have known, from the first of the juveniles at least, that real science, presented as fact and explained where necessary, was an important element of the fiction and something that would not only challenge his young readers but might well change them.

> I claim one positive triumph for science fiction, totally beyond the scope of so-called main-stream fiction. It has prepared the youth of our time for the coming age of space. Interplanetary travel is no shock to youngsters, no matter how unsettling it may be to calcified adults. Our children have been playing at being space cadets and at controlling rocket ships for quite some time now. Where did they get this healthy orientation? From science fiction and nowhere else. Science fiction can perform similar service to the race in many other fields. (60)[8]

For Heinlein, the science is an integral part of the fiction; that is, the science is, as I have suggested elsewhere, not just part of the background or backdrop, providing the ray-gun instead of the six-shooter without otherwise changing the plot as was characteristic of what he called "comic-strip" or "cartoon" science fiction, the science in Heinlein's juveniles is an essential and organic part of the story (Sullivan 32). Robert A. Heinlein wrote serious *science* fiction; he wrote "the right stuff."

NOTES:

1. A shorter version of this article was presented as a paper at the March 2007 International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, USA.

2. The twelve juvenile novels are: *Rocket Ship Galileo* (1947), *Space Cadet* (1948), *Red Planet* (1949), *Farmer in the Sky* (1950), *Between Planets* (1951), *The Rolling Stones* (1952), *Starman Jones* (1953), *The Star Beast* (1954), *Tunnel in the Sky* (1955), *Time for the Stars* (1956), *Citizen of the Galaxy* (1957), and *Have Space Suit—Will Travel* (1958).

3. See my "Heinlein Criticism and the Scribner's Juveniles," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 17.2 (2006): 169-180, for contemporary reviews which lauded the "reality" of the Heinlein juveniles.

4. Heinlein's comments about serial science fiction as inferior to "literature" are interesting here because in 1947 he broke into the "slick" market. "Between 1947 and 1949, at least ten ... "slicks" were published; four appeared in [The Saturday Evening] Post and two in Argosy." This was a remarkable achievement at that time, and the publishing trail that Heinlein blazed into the "slicks" was eclipsed only by the juveniles which, published in hardback by Scribner's, went immediately to school libraries and public libraries across the country (Heinlein, Grumbles 41).

5. Two other novels might have been in the juvenile series had not Scribner's cancelled the contract: *Starship Troopers* (1959), in many ways a logical successor to *Have Space Suit—Will Travel*, and *Podkayne of Mars* (1963), which has a female protagonist, and would have been a logical successor to the strong females characters—Jackie and Carol in *Tunnel in the Sky*, for example—that Heinlein included throughout the juvenile series. For a discussion Heinlein's female characters, see Marietta Frank, "Women in Heinlein's Juveniles," *Young Adult Science Fiction*, ed. C.W. Sullivan III, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999: 118-130.

6. The title, *Have Space Suit—Will Travel*, is both a serious and an ironic homage to the television series, *Have Gun—Will Travel*, in which Richard Boone played a character named Paladin who was a hired gun that fought for the down trodden and oppressed against the rich, powerful, and unscrupulous. In the alien invasion plot, Kip is clearly not in the kind of control that Paladin is able to exert in the television show, even though he, Kip, talks about being a knight errant for Peewee; however, in the end, the more serious trail of the human race, Kip does stand up and defend humanity.

7. Heinlein comments extensively on the American educational system early in *Have Space Suit—Will Travel*, and one of his characters in the novel, Mr Charton, Kip's boss at the drugstore, says of high-school dropout "Ace" Quiggle, in response to Kip's remark that "Ace" is harmless, "I wonder how harmless such people are? To what extent civilization is retarded by the laughing jackasses, the empty-minded belittlers?" (39).

8. I have to wonder here if Heinlein was thinking about the cultural challenges he presented in the juvenile series with his references, often unexplained, to history, music, and literature, his depictions of complex alien cultures that were not interested in invading Earth even though they might have the power to do so, or his ahead-of-his-time presentations of powerful women and matrilineal societies. The cultural challenges in the juveniles are every bit the "tough ideas . . . to chew on" (Fuller 109) that the scientific ideas are.

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Alternate Histories of the Roman Empire in Stephen Baxter, Robert Silverberg and Sophia McDougall

Antony G. Keen

This article examines three authors who have engaged with the Roman empire and its fall, employing the techniques of alternate history. I examine the works through historical, sf and moral perspectives.

Alternate histories of the Roman empire have a long pedigree, stretching back to Charles Renouvier's 1876 *Uchronie*.[1] More recent examples include L. Sprague de Camp's 1941 time travel novel *Lest Darkness Fall*, and S.P. Somtow's 1980s series *Aquiliad*.[2]

Stephen Baxter's 2003 novel *Coalescent*[3] features two narrative strands, one contemporary and one historical, which eventually come together. The historical strand begins in the last days of Roman Britain, and follows the character Regina across fifth-century AD Europe to Rome, before continuing with the story of her descendants. I, however, am interested in a small scene in the contemporary strand. In Chapter 41 (pp. 373-374), George Poole, the main protagonist, and his long-term friend Peter McLachlan discuss what might have happened had the Roman empire survived, postulating that this would have been a good idea; amongst other things, the European conquest of North America would have been conducted without the genocide of the Native Americans. In a contemporary issue of *Matrix*, Baxter devotes his regular column to the possibilities of alternate histories of the Roman empire,[4] in which he makes it clear that the opinions expressed by the characters in *Coalescent* are in fact Baxter's own. What I want to do is examine Baxter's speculations, in conjunction with those of Robert Silverberg's *Roma Eterna*, to which Baxter refers in his *Matrix* article, and Sophia McDougall's novels *Romanitas* and *Rome Burning*, the first of which appeared two years after Baxter wrote *Coalescent*.[5]

Alternate history is often considered either a subgenre of sf, or a related, associate or parallel genre.[6] Though a staple of recognised sf writers such as Baxter and Silverberg, it is also often written by those, such as Len Deighton or Robert Harris, not usually seen as sf practitioners.[7] I am a fan of alternate histories as a genre, and enjoy one done well and plausibly – Baxter's own *Voyage*,[8] an alternate history of the space programme in which America does not stop after the Apollo missions, but continues on to Mars, springs to mind. But it is

also a genre that an author can get wrong without too much difficulty. Whilst it looks easy, as there is no need to follow the actual historical events, in truth, as Isaac Asimov observed,[9] one needs to do a large amount of research into what actually happened, in order to make the changes one wishes to make plausible. Sometimes, therefore, the scenarios posed go beyond plausibility, and will especially appear so to those who have studied and taught the periods concerned (and I should declare that I am one such in the case of the Roman empire). The scenarios presented by Baxter and Silverberg, I feel, fit into that category.[10]

I should begin by saying that both Silverberg and Baxter are working from the implicit notion of an identifiable "fall" of the western empire in the fifth century AD, though both acknowledge the survival of the east – Baxter calls it the "rump" of the empire.[11] This is not a view I agree with. On the death of Theodosius the Great in AD 395 the empire was left jointly to his sons Arcadius and Honorius. This has often been seen as a "formal" division of the empire into eastern and western halves, and it is certainly the case that for the next eighty years, there were usually two emperors, one in the west an one in the east. However, a number of scholars these days, and it is a view with which I concur, think that it is closer to the truth to see the separate Augusti[12] and Senates in Italy and Constantinople as parallel administrative systems within a single empire – after all, the legislative acts of each Augustus had validity in the other's territory. The collapse of Roman control in the west seems to be to be just that – a loss of control by the imperial centre, by then located in Constantinople. But sf authors cannot really be blamed for accepting what has for a long time been, and in many quarters remains, the popular interpretation of the "decline and fall".[13]

I would like to begin, as Baxter himself does, with Silverberg. *Roma Eterna* is a novel fixed up from short stories published from 1989 to 2003.[14] Baxter draws attention to a prologue that opens Silverberg's novel, one in which two scholars debate what might have happened if Moses' Exodus had been successful – in Silverberg's history the parting of the Red Sea did not take place, and most of the Israelites drowned. It's a fairly common device in alternate history for someone in that history to speculate on a "what if" scenario that would lead to something closer to the world of the reader, thus explaining how the author has changed what the reader recognises as history; it can be found, for instance, in Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Pashazade*, set in a world where in 1915 America brokered peace between the combatants of the Great War.[15] It is employed most effectively in Philip K. Dick's *The Man In The High Castle*;[16] in an alternate world where the Axis won the Second World War, stories are being published of a history where the Allies were victorious – but the history described is not ours.

To return to Silverberg, Baxter states that in *Roma Eterna* "Christ is never born. And it never happens that [quoting Silverberg] 'the basic structure of Roman society is weakened by superstition, until the Empire ... is toppled by the barbarians who forever lurk at its borders.'"[17]

To blame the fall of the empire on the pernicious influence of Christianity is not a new idea – it goes back to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, though for Gibbon it was not the sole cause.[18] The trouble with this expression of the notion is that I think it's a fundamental misunderstanding of the interrelationship between the rise of Christianity and the decline of the Roman empire. I find it unconvincing on three counts.

First, it treats Christianity as unique. Western tradition tends, naturally, to privilege Christianity in its accounts. However, Christianity was, to start with, merely one of a number of similar eastern cults offering an alternative to the state-sanctioned Olympian pantheon or the atheistic Stoicism prevalent in the empire (I write here from my own atheistic viewpoint). Mithraism was another, and Bacchic rites yet another. What Mithraism and Christianity had in common was that they offered an after-life in which believers would be rewarded with a better existence than the one they were currently living through; this stood in contrast to Olympianism, in which an after-life, if believed in at all, was a pale shadow of life. This promise of a reward after death, I think, is crucial to understanding the rise of mystery religions in the empire. Very broadly speaking, when this world offers favourable certainties, people tend to be less concerned about the next – the prosperity of the west in the last three centuries has been accompanied by a decline in Christianity and the growth of secular humanism. Conversely, take away the certainties of life, and people seek for future reward to alleviate the concerns of day-to-day existence, and this is what was happening in the later Roman empire. So in my view, far from Christianity creating a climate of superstition that undermined the Roman empire, it was the weakness of the Roman empire which created a climate of superstition that allowed Christianity to flourish. Take Christianity out of the equation, and Constantine the Great would probably have converted to Mithraism, and the world would have been less different than Baxter and Silverberg might imagine.

Secondly, this explanation of Rome's fall implies that the Roman empire was fine until those nasty Christians came along, which is, as the Australian historian Bill Leadbetter once said in response to a conference paper on the late Roman empire, nonsense (he said it in more forceful terms). For the century before the emperor Constantine's conversion, the empire had been in chaos, the so-called "third-century military crisis", coming perilously close to self-destructing in the 260s AD, when the provinces of Britain, Gaul, Germany and Spain had seceded to form what is now known as the Gallo-Roman empire, whilst in the east the Palmyrene rulers Odenathus and Zenobia held the Levant and, briefly, Egypt and eastern Asia Minor. Constantine wanted to use religion as a means of binding the empire together. His predecessor Diocletian had tried the same, through promoting traditional paganism, but it had failed, so Constantine picked Christianity, already increasing in popularity because of the unstable conditions in the empire.

Thirdly, blaming the fall of Rome on the Christians overlooks an important fact. The eastern part of the empire, equally, if not more, Christianised, did not fall for another thousand years.

One thing I find interesting is that this view, over-privileging Christianity's role in history, can be traced back to Christianity's enemies rather than its proponents. The secular humanists of the Enlightenment felt threatened by Christianity, which most of their fellow-citizens still believed in, and so sought to discredit it.

What is also interesting is that this is not Silverberg's main Jonbar point[19] at all, though from the emphasis given this alteration in his prologue, Baxter may be forgiven for thinking that it is. Silverberg's actual change, the one that leads to the Roman empire surviving, is having the early second century AD emperor Caracalla succeeded not by Macrinus and Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, but by a fictional emperor called Titus Gallius (*Roma Eterna*, pp. 1-2). Gallius reorganises the empire and the army so that the third-century military crisis does not take place, and he beats off the barbarians. Gallius also suppresses all the oriental mystery cults. Now, one might think that the elimination of Christianity could be bound up with this, but Silverberg apparently feels the need to get this particular religion off stage by some other means. One might assume that he feels that Christianity could not be as easily suppressed as the others, but I think Silverberg's need is partly to do with the order in which the stories were written. The story that most obviously draws on religious theme is "To the Promised Land" (*Roma Eterna*, pp. 364-385), telling the tale of a second attempted Exodus, this time into space. This is the last of the stories in terms of internal chronology; but it was published first, and much of the subsequent development of the *Roma Eterna* storylines is to justify what has been established here.

I think this might be why some of the implications of the failure of the first Exodus are never really fully explored by Silverberg. For instance, there's no real attempt to examine what the pre-Hellenic history of the Near East would have been like without the presence of Israel, nor how the absence of the Jewish Revolts of AD 66-73 and AD 132-135 might affect Roman history. After all, it was his command of the force suppressing the first revolt that gave Vespasian his chance to bid for the imperial throne (and, as we shall see, financed his reign). Might he have had the opportunity otherwise?

I have to say that I am not really convinced by the way Silverberg averts the third-century crisis, and suspect that possibly he is aware of the weaknesses in the notion; hence his skimming over it, and perhaps another reason for the concentration on the failure of the Exodus. It is oversimplifying to say that the third-century crisis happened just because the emperors who followed Caracalla did not pay proper attention to the organisation of the empire. There's a case for suggesting that the very system, or rather lack of any formal system, for appointing emperors contributed to the imperial instability between AD 235 and AD 295. From the moment Octavian (who later took the title Augustus and became

the first emperor) seized sole power in 31 BC until the moment the last Byzantine emperor Constantine XI Paleologus hurled himself into the midst of the Turkish troops in the sack of Constantinople in AD 1453, the empire was a military dictatorship, with all that entails, including imperial power resting upon the favour of the army. This made the emperor being vulnerable to military overthrow, and meant that there was never a fixed process of succession, such as the British monarchy has. This was something fundamental to the empire. Any emperor wishing to change that would soon find themselves removed from power, and dead. A single reign would not have eliminated this problem.

In fact, civil war and political intrigue occur quite regularly in the course of Silverberg's novel, without ever creating any weakness in the empire that outsiders can take advantage of. There is a destructive war between east and west, Rome and Byzantium, one that climaxes in the equivalent of our AD 1197 – yet the empire apparently must have regained its strength quickly enough not to be threatened by the arrival of the Mongols forty years later. This, and other movements from outside the empire, such as the Seljuk Turks, are not mentioned. They are never serious threats in this version of history, for reasons unknown. (In fairness, one of Silverberg's stories, "A Hero of the Empire" [*Roma Eterna*, pp. 71-104], does deal with how a perceptive Roman official arranges for a rabble-rouser called Mahmud to be murdered before he can cause any serious trouble.)

Mention of Byzantium leads to another issue. A rigorous alternate history, in my view, should concentrate on its single Jonbar point.[20] Everything else that is changed should then either directly follow from the major Jonbar point, or be necessary to allow the change at the Jonbar point to take place. Silverberg, on the other hand, not only has two Jonbar points, the failure of the Exodus and the accession of Titus Gallius, that are unrelated to one another, but he also tries to have his cake and eat it, by retaining some developments that properly arose as responses to the third-century crisis. These include the division of imperial responsibility amongst more than one individual, and the foundation of an eastern capital. The late third-century emperor Diocletian gave himself imperial colleagues because of the difficulty in maintaining the military defence of the empire. Yet Silverberg, through the fictional Gallius, has supposedly eliminated that problem, so the threats are not there.

None of this, of course, means that *Roma Eterna* isn't a good novel – simply that it is based on bad history.

After dealing with Silverberg, Baxter turns to talk of the Varian disaster. Publius Quinctilius Varus, a weak governor, whom Baxter refers to as a "palace functionary", was tricked into a catastrophic defeat in AD 9, resulting in the loss of three legions. Rome was subsequently driven out of Germany. It "needn't have happened", Baxter says.[21] This is true, but to lay all the blame on Varus (as our chief sources, Velleius Paterculus and Cassius Dio, admittedly do)[22] is, as Baxter himself sees, an example of the "great men" theory of history, to which Baxter himself does not subscribe. The causes of Roman failure in first century

AD Germany run deeper than the actions of one man. Varus was indeed a political functionary rather than a military man. That was why he was appointed. As Baxter notes, one of Rome's strengths was its ability to assimilate the nations it conquered, and Varus went to Germany because the Emperor Augustus thought that Germany could begin the process of "Romanisation". But Augustus was wrong; not everyone could be assimilated. The German "primitiveness" that Baxter identifies as indicating that the Romans should have won in fact is the reason for the failure of Rome's policy in Germany.[23]

Of course, the Romans could have won in AD 9, defeated the German leader Arminius, and maintained control of Germany between the Rhine and the Elbe. But it would have been tenuous control, and more wars against allies who had revolted would follow. It would be a long time, if ever, before Rome's writ could be pushed further, to the Baltic or beyond. For solid practical reasons, Rome avoided entanglement in such wars of occupation.

Baxter's own thesis is that Rome doomed itself when the empire stopped expanding, constrained within the limits set by Augustus and Hadrian. This, he argues, took away Rome's main source of wealth generation, and did not help Rome's defence, as the established frontiers were porous. Baxter cites an incident in AD 406 when the Rhine froze, and barbarians walked across it into the Empire.[24]

To take the last of these first, this is to misunderstand how the defence of the empire worked. The military aspect of the frontiers was built around the watchtowers, fortlets and forts. The watchtowers observed and reported on trouble, and the other installations provided troops to deal with that trouble in increasing degrees, in extremes up to the legionary fortresses behind the frontiers. The Roman way was always to defeat the attack in open country, not to stop the enemy actually on the frontier itself.[25] Hadrian's Wall was not an ancient Maginot Line. The linear barrier in Roman frontiers, whether it be natural, as on the Rhine, or man-made, as in Britain, had very little military role. Of course, they provided some impediment, but some Roman frontiers (e.g. that in Africa) only had the towers and forts. The prime purpose of the linear barrier was to control civilian movement across the frontier, and direct it to restricted points of crossing, where it could be monitored, taxed, and so forth.[26] The British empire employed the same principle in India, with the Inland Customs Line.[27]

The fact that the Rhine froze in AD 406 isn't really relevant. For a start, it was a freak event. It doesn't matter whether the Romans had been stuck on the Rhine for four hundred years or forty when it happened. Secondly, it was hardly the first time that barbarians had crossed the empire's borders. And the only way to prevent such an occurrence would be for the empire never to have any borders, to be ever expanding on all fronts. This simply wasn't practicable, so there would always have been frontiers of some sort, even if only intended for a few years; usually these would be rivers. Perhaps such borders might not have been as settled as those of the Roman empire in actuality came to be, but

at heart the options were not a policy with frontiers or a policy without them, but, in the case of Germany for example, exchanging the Rhine for the Elbe or the Oder.

To turn to the wider issue, it is necessary to understand why the empire stopped expanding. Ideologically, the Romans did not acknowledge the concept of the "natural frontier"[28] – it was Rome's manifest destiny to keep expanding until it ruled the world. But in practical terms, this was unsustainable.

One major reason is the size of the army. This is not easy to judge, and estimates vary significantly, but it seems not to have been very large. When Augustus came to power, there were seventy legions in the field. By his death, there were just twenty-five, making a total of slightly more than 130,000 men (this figure is relatively firm, as the size of a legion in the imperial period is established at 5,240).[29] Add to this an uncertain number of auxiliary units, and the result is, according to one estimate, a standing army of perhaps 250,000 in the mid-first century AD, possibly rising to 400,000 by the fourth century.[30] For somewhere the size of the Roman empire, with a population of perhaps eighty to a hundred million, that is not very many; Louis XIV in the seventeenth century had an army of 320,000 (400,000 on paper) for France alone.[31]

The downside of this was that the army was barely able to successfully defend the empire, let alone support a policy of continual expansion (as opposed to the occasional addition such as Britain).[32] The *Pax Romana* was, therefore, a giant bluff, dependent on Rome's enemies never being strong enough to call that bluff. Even when the army grew larger, to face off barbarian attacks, it never grew large enough, and there was ultimately little Rome could do to fend off the continual pressure from waves of peoples moving westwards, driven by further waves behind them.

Even the relatively small army Rome had was larger than the empire was used to paying for, and, combined with an imperial profligacy that was expected of any emperor, drained the empire's finances. Even by the reign of Nero, coinage was being debased, reducing the precious metal content. This created an inflationary spiral; once the difference in value between the face value of the coins and the precious metal content was known, the buying power of the coinage would decline, resulting in the need to devalue the coinage further to spread the imperial reserves. Only the fortuitous revolt of Judaea, and the consequent capture of the treasures of the Jerusalem Temple, saved the empire in the first century.[33] Trajan's seizure of the gold mines of Dacia (modern Romania) in the early second century staved off the problems for a while. But through the end of the second and early third centuries, coinage was again devalued.[34]

Rome had become very rich from expanding into the prosperous Hellenistic kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. But these had mostly all been conquered by the end of the first century. The pickings from north-west Europe were far leaner. After the age of Augustus, wars of conquest in Europe were primarily launched in the hope of large-scale economic gain; Britain was

thought to be rich in precious metals, and Trajan invaded Dacia to control the gold mines. Such campaigns could be disappointing; Britain, for instance, never produced the wealth originally expected of it. Riches did lie further east, in central Asia, and emperors did continue to launch their wars of conquest into Mesopotamia. But Rome's antagonists there, Parthia and later Sassanid Persia, were Rome's only true military rivals, and therefore conquests were fleeting and the possibilities for expansion were poor. So it is doubtful whether, by the second century AD, continual expansion into Britain and Germany would have fuelled Rome's coffers as effectively as it once had.

What the Romans wished to avoid was the problem of imperial overstretch, the problem that now faces the United States, of finding its forces embroiled in long costly struggles against recalcitrant locals for no real benefit. This was why Rome could sometimes choose to cut its losses and pull out, as happened in Germany and very nearly did in Britain, after the revolt of Boudicca in AD 60-61.[35]

So, when Baxter suggests that it would have been better for Hadrian not to stop at the Wall, and to have cleared out the glens, and that a unified Britain could have saved the western empire, I cannot agree. Roman control might well have been exercised, as periodically it was, as far as the Forth-Clyde isthmus, or even up into the Strathmore and beyond Dundee. But any further into the Highlands would be a different matter altogether. Romanising this area would have been very difficult, and without Romanisation, maintaining control was all but impossible.

It is doubtful that a policy such as Baxter advocates would have stopped the Picts being strong. Hadrian's approach was not to incorporate the Picts, but to launch the occasional military expedition to show them who was superior. It seems to me that this was, at least in the second century AD, as sensible an approach as total conquest, and possibly more sensible. The Picts grew strong because Rome grew weak, but to a degree, where one drew the boundary of the empire would not have changed that. It would merely have made an external problem an internal one. In the end, I have to advance the conclusion that Hadrian had a better idea how to run the Roman empire than Stephen Baxter.

In any case, occupying all of Scotland might not have made any difference to the ultimate fate of Roman Britain. It would not have made Britain any more secure against the attacks from across the North Sea. Even if the various generals in the province hadn't frittered away Britain's legions in bids for the imperial purple, the time may well still have come, as it did in AD 410, when the empire had to concentrate its funds on defending the core provinces around Italy and the East, and the troops in Britain could no longer be paid for. And by then Britain could not pay for the troops from local revenue.

History has this way of reasserting itself. I once attended a British Science Fiction Association meeting at which Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne discussed a novel they were writing set in Nazi-occupied Britain.[36] The trouble was, they said, it was very difficult to make such a background convincing, because

when one actually look at Operation Sea Lion, the German plan for invasion, it would never have worked. It was badly planned, the German armed forces were ill-prepared and unenthusiastic, and the Nazi leadership ambivalent about the need for invasion. I rather think the "fall" of the Roman empire is similar, something that needs to be worked at hard to provide a plausible scenario for the survival of the west. Eliminate Christianity, and Mithraism might step into its place. Push the frontier into Germany, and hostile peoples outside the empire become hostile peoples inside the empire (and unless you take the empire all the way into Siberia, you have to have frontiers somewhere). Conquer all of Scotland, and the emperor Honorius might still decide that the defence of Britain can no longer be afforded.

Besides, as Averil Cameron has pointed out,[37] political states and societies don't exist in an unchanging form, and it is unreasonable to expect any state to maintain itself in such a way. Each state has its own dynamic, and, however much "eternal Rome" or "the empire that will last a thousand years" are part of imperial rhetoric, history would suggest that things don't really work that way.[38] The emperor Valens might have been more sensible and astute, and avoided the disaster of Adrianople in AD 378, but that might only have bought the western provinces another couple of centuries.

This is, I think, a problem with Silverberg, one recognised by Edward James.[39] The twentieth century Roman empire with which Silverberg concludes is not that much different in terms of social structures from the empire of the third century AD. Yes, by the end of the novel, the emperors have been overthrown and the Republic "restored"; but Silverberg makes it clear that the First Consuls for Life who rule the Second Republic are merely emperors under a different name. And yes, there is a development of Latin into the Romance languages in Italy and France and Spain (though the implication is that Romance-style language do not overcome Celtic and German in Britain and Germany). But, as Baxter notes,[40] the society in Silverberg's eternal Rome merely persists, with a moral vacuum at its core.

We know that the real Roman empire did not ossify in this way. There were significant changes. At the end of the third century AD Diocletian introduced sweeping social reforms that, in my view, and that of many scholars better-informed about the period, mark the beginnings of mediaeval feudalism.[41] Socially, this is perhaps a more significant change for western Europe than the moment (often ill-defined) at which the Roman writ ceased to be followed.

In the end, should we want the Roman empire to endure? Both Baxter and Silverberg imply that there are things to be said for its long-term survival,[42] but I think we need to interrogate their assumptions – and here, I hope, this article rises above mere nitpicking to ask moral questions. Baxter's idea is that the survival of the Roman empire would provide a "better route" to the present day.[43] The question is, of course, is that true? And would we get anywhere near our current circumstances?

Baxter suggests that the Romans would not have practised genocide in North America, but assimilation. Well, it depends. Where they could, the Romans assimilated. But sometimes political or religious structures were just too antithetical to Rome, and where that happened, they were ruthless. One need only point to the fate of the Druids of Britain, who were banned, hunted down and massacred. There is at least a case for saying that the Romans might have found the native Americans equally hard to absorb. And it should not be forgotten that initially, any absorption would be carried out through military conquest. Even had the Romans not been as duplicitous in their agreements with the native Americans as the Europeans were in reality, and not as genocidal, large numbers of native Americans would have been killed, and many more sold into slavery, as was the case in Gaul after Julius Caesar's conquests.

Baxter's *Matrix* piece further assumes that Roman society at the fall of the empire was much the same as at its height, and in *Coalescent* Poole says that the survival of the empire would have meant "no feudalism" (p. 373). But as already noted, this isn't the case, as the roots of feudalism lay in Diocletian's reforms. So even had the Roman empire survived to conquer America, the society it exported there would have been less different than Baxter thinks. (In this area I think Silverberg, whose Trajan VII Draco massacres the locals as he completes a Magellanic round-the-world voyage [in "Getting to know the Dragon", *Roma Eterna*, pp. 206-238], is more plausible.)

Some basic facts about the Roman empire must not be overlooked. Under the Roman military dictatorship, one would not enjoy the same political and intellectual freedoms as we do today. All emperors, even the allegedly 'good' ones, restricted freedom of expression and individual rights, sometimes ruthlessly so.

It was also a society based upon slave-owning, albeit one in which slaves might still have aspirations. This is a point neither Baxter nor Silverberg really address. George Poole mentions in *Coalescent* that a continuation of the Roman empire would meant no Abolitionist movement, but seems willing to accept that.[44] Silverberg hardly mentions slaves at all – they simply appear in the background, fulfilling domestic functions. Silverberg probably does not intend this, but the slaves in his work are as "invisible" as those in the literature of the *antebellum* American South.

Baxter suggests that industrialisation might have changed all this. Perhaps, but perhaps not. Industrialisation might never have happened. People in the West can sometimes see the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as inevitable (and Silverberg takes it for granted; see *Roma Eterna*, p. 220), but it wasn't. The Roman empire had virtually all the elements needed for the Industrial Revolution, but (possibly because slavery ensured a plentiful labour supply) it didn't happen. And in this subject one can fined what *I* feel is a profitable route to an alternate Roman empire – what if someone had seen how the steam toys of Hero of Alexandria could be combined with the pumps used to empty mines of water to create labour-saving machines?[45]

What Baxter is working with is the common idea that an empire, to be dynamic and survive, must continue to expand.[46] I'm not sure I like that notion. For a start, the whole concept of imperial overstretch, in which I do believe, rather contradicts it – the empire more likely to survive is the one that knows its limitations. Furthermore, this model of empires encourages modern-day imperialists to think that *they* have to expand, with all the consequent misery that entails.

Which brings me back to the main problem I have with Baxter's view in the *Matrix* piece – that he admires behaviour in the Romans (i.e. military expansion at the expense of one's neighbours) that we would not tolerate in a modern state.[47] That's an easy position to slip into, and it's common enough – I myself have been tempted towards it in the past. But if we are to maintain a coherent moral compass, it must be resisted in academic analysis (though, of course, it is permissible when placed into the mouths of fictional characters who are not necessarily to be taken as mouthpieces for the author).

A useful comparison to the attitude of Silverberg and Baxter can be found in McDougall's *Romanitas* and *Rome Burning*. These novels are not promoted as sf, and McDougall has evidently been influenced by the tradition of alternate history that lies outside the sf field. She clearly does not come from a science fiction background. Her interviews suggest that she was unaware of the existence of Silverberg's novel when writing.[48] But clearly the novels *are* sf – not only is there the alternate history aspect, but two of her lead characters possess paranormal psychic powers.

There are a number of similarities between Silverberg and McDougall. They both quote the same passage of Virgil in their prefaces, though in different translations.[49] Their points of divergence from history as recorded are also quite close – Silverberg's is in AD 218 at the end of the reign of Caracalla, McDougall's in AD 192, at what was in reality the assassination of the emperor Pertinax, but is in McDougall merely an avoided plot. Like Silverberg, McDougall does not detail the actual Jonbar point.[50] However, instead of telling the history of the empire through a series of vignettes, as Silverberg does, she jumps straight to the equivalent of the present day, filling out the history in a chronological chart at the end (*Romanitas*, pp. 578-588; *Rome Burning*, pp. 464-471). And McDougall's Rome conquers the New World, at least partially, whilst in Silverberg the attempt is a disaster that lays the Roman empire open to conquest by Byzantium.

McDougall's vision of a modern Roman empire is rather different to that of Baxter and Silverberg. Where they skirt around the issue of slavery, McDougall tackles it head-on. Two of her main characters are runaway slaves, and the clash between proponents and opponents of the abolition of slavery is one of the major issues driving the plot in both novels. This is a Roman empire in which have been devised more efficient, but not less cruel, methods of crucifixion, and where the imperial throne continues to be at the mercy of the sort of court intrigues familiar from Robert Graves' *I, Claudius*.[51] The background of the novels

can be attacked on the grounds of state dynamics, that even given the changes she makes in the second century AD, the Roman empire probably still would not have lasted until the twentieth century, and probably would not have expanded to take in most of the known world (in that Silverberg is perhaps again more plausible). But nowhere in McDougall is to be found Baxter's notion that a better route has been found. At the very most, this is merely a different present, and arguably one which is more callous and less free.

So, in conclusion, I feel that looking at these alternate speculations on the history of the Roman empire lead us to question our own attitude to the historical reality. It is all too easy, especially for British writers of a certain generation, to have a too cosy attitude towards the Roman empire. (Baxter is British; Silverberg, who is more ambivalent and cynical, is American.) Many Britons, particularly those belonging to older generations, remain influenced by the Victorian notion that saw the Roman empire as a precursor of the British, and assume that it possessed the same sort of humane values they would like to think (probably in the face of the evidence) the British empire exemplified. These Britons celebrate the Roman empire for the *Pax Romana* and the order it brought to the Mediterranean World. George Poole in *Coalescent* has at least enough self-awareness to recognise this: "The order of empires appealed to me ... But that was just my inner longing for order and regularity expressing itself." (p. 374). This has been going on since Gibbon identified the period between the reigns of Nerva and Marcus Aurelius as that when "the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous".[52] It may be significant that McDougall, though British, is still in her late twenties, and belongs to a generation that can be more ambivalent towards Britain's imperial past, and by extension, to Roman imperialism.

The risk in admiring Rome is that, if we are unwary, we do so for the same reasons that Hitler and Mussolini did. In the end, I think few of us, if pushed, actually are, or should be, happy with that.

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[1] Charles Renouvier, *Uchronie (l'utopie dans l'histoire), esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européenne tel qu'il n'a pas été, tel qu'il aurait pu être* (Paris: Bureau de la Critique Philosophique, 1876).

[2] L. Sprague de Camp, *Lest Darkness Fall* (New York: Holt, 1941); S.P. Somtow, *The Aquiliad* (New York: Del Ray, 1983), *The Aquiliad #2: Aquila and the Iron Horse* (New York: Del Ray, 1988) and *The Aquiliad #3: Aquila and the Sphinx* (New York: Del Ray, 1988). It should be noted that Evelyn C. Leeper, "Alternate History 101", http://www.geocities.com/athens/4824/ah101.htm (2001) [accessed January 2008], does not list the Roman empire amongst the most popular subjects for alternate history, but this is possibly because the points of divergence for Roman stories cover a very wide range of possible 'onbar points', and few authors will choose the same one.

[3] Stephen Baxter, *Coalescent. Destiny's Children: Book 1* (London: Gollancz, 2003).

[4] Stephen Baxter, "Resonances: End of Empire", *Matrix: The News Magazine of the British Science Fiction Association* 164 (November/December 2003), p. 12.

[5] Robert Silverberg, *Roma Eterna* (London: Gollancz, 2003); Sophia McDougall, *Romanitas* (London: Orion, 2005); *Rome Burning* (London: Orion, 2007).

[6] See Brian Stableford, "Alternate Worlds", in John Clute & Peter Nicholls, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* 2nd Edition (London: Orbit, 1995, revised paperback edition, 1999), pp. 23-25; Leeper, op. cit.; Andy Duncan, 'Alternate History', in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 209-18; Farah Mendlesohn, "Editorial: Alternate Histories/Alternate Science Fictions", *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* 94 (Summer 2005), pp. 3-4; Edward James, "The Limits of Alternate History", *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 254 (November/December 2007), pp. 7-10; Graham Sleight, "The New X" , *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 254 (November/December 2007), p. 36.

[7] Len Deighton, *SS-GB: Nazi-occupied Britain, 1941* (London: Cape, 1978); Robert Harris, *Fatherland* (London: Hutchinson, 1992).

[8] Stephen Baxter, *Voyage* (London: Voyager, 1996).

[9] Isaac Asimov, "Introduction" to H. Beam Piper, "He Walked Around the Horses", in Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg, eds., *Isaac Asimov Presents The Great SF Stories 10 (1948)* (New York: DAW, 1983), p. 28, quoted by Duncan, op. cit., p. 217.

[10] I have argued (in a review in *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 250 [January/February 2007], pp. 19-20) that Baxter's *Emperor. Time's Tapestry: Book One* (London: Gollancz, 2006), not strictly speaking an alternate history novel, suffers from a similar central problem of historical plausibility.

[11] "End of Empire", loc. cit.

[12] 'Augustus' was one of the titles of the Roman emperor, and is used when discussing the later empire to indicate the senior emperor(s), as opposed to the more junior Caesars.

[13] A good treatment of the later Roman empire, that emphasises continuity into the Byzantine period, is Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity ad 395-600* (Routledge *History of the Ancient World*, London: Routledge, 1993); and see also Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* 2nd Edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989 [first edition 1971]). Two recent works that take a "fall" view are Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: MacMillan, 2005), and Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The idea that the "Byzantine empire" is a later label of what was actually the Roman empire continuing is taken up by Boris Johnson (who emphatically believes in the "fall" of the west) in the second programme of his television series Boris Johnson and the Dream of Rome (5th February 2006), reacting against the common orthodoxy that it was something different; see also Boris Johnson, *The Dream of Rome* (London: HarperCollins, 2006, expanded paperback edition 2007), pp. 35-36. It is not, of course, the purpose of this paper to debate these issues in any depth.

[14] Robert Silverberg, "To the Promised Land" (*Omni*, May 1989); "Tales from the Venia Woods", *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (October 1989); "An Outpost of the Empire", *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (November 1991); "Via Roma", *Asimov's Science Fiction* (April 1994); "Waiting for the End", *Asimov's Science Fiction* (October/November 1998); "Getting to Know the Dragon", in Robert Silverberg, ed., *Far Horizons: The Great Worlds of Science Fiction* (New York: Avon 1999), pp. 210-249; "A Hero of the Empire", *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (October/November 1999); "The Second Wave", *Asimov's Science Fiction* (August 2002); "With Caesar in the Underworld", *Asimov's Science Fiction* (October/November 2002); "The Reign of Terror", *Asimov's Science Fiction* (April 2003).

[15] Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *Pashazade: The First Arabesk* (London: Earthlight, 2001). The discussion of the "alternate history", which would lead to something close to (though not quite identical) to what we know as historical fact, is to be found in Chapter Ten, pp. 49-50.

[16] Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* (New York: Putnam, 1962).

[17] Baxter, "End of Empire", loc. cit., quoting Silverberg, *Roma Eterna*, pp 3-4.

[18] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, first published 1776-1788, Chapter 38. This is possibly the most sarcastic work in the history of academic scholarship, at least when describing the rise of Christianity in Chapters 15 and 16. See Roy S. Porter, *Edward Gibbon, Making History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), pp. 121-129.

[19] The term 'Jonbar point' for the point of departure from known history is derived from Jack Williamson's 'The Legion of Time' (*Astounding Science Fiction* 90-92, May-July 1938). See James, op. cit., p. 8.

[20] On rigour in alternate history, see James, op. cit.

[21] "End of Empire", loc. cit.

[22] Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.117-120; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 56.18-22.

[23] Colin Wells, *The Roman Empire* 2nd Edition (*Fontana History of the Ancient World*, London: Fontana, 1992 [first edition 1984]), pp. 73-76.

[24] "End of Empire", loc. cit.

[25] See Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[26] See David J. Breeze and Brian Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall* (fourth edition, London: Penguin Books, 2000 [first edition, 1976]), pp. 39-43.

[27] See Roy Moxham, *The Great Hedge of India* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2001).

[28] On the ideology of Roman frontiers, see C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire. A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.278, expresses the ideology when he has Jupiter say "To Romans I set no boundary in space or time"; this is quoted by Silverberg on his frontispiece, in the translation of W.F. Jackson Knight, *Virgil: The Aeneid* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956, revised edition 1958), p. 36.

[29] Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), pp. 50-55.

[30] First century: Martin Goodman (with Jane Sherwood), *The Roman World 44 BC – AD 180* (*Routledge History of the Ancient World*, London: Routledge, 1997), p. 82; fourth century: Roger Tomlin, "The Late-Roman Empire", in John Hackett, ed., *Warfare in the Ancient World* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989), pp. 222-249, at p. 238.

[31] See Guy Rowlands, *The Dynastic State and the Army under Louis XIV. Royal Service and Private Interest, 1661-1701* (*Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1, 154, 200. In fairness, Louis' army was exceptionally large for the period.

[32] Goodman's view (op. cit., p. 83) is rather different, that the empire had many more soldiers than were needed for the defence of the empire, and that the establishment was so large to preserve the emperor's military dictatorship. It is certainly true that control of the army was where the emperor's ultimate power was vested.

[33] See Alex Butterworth and Ray Laurence, *Pompeii: The Living City* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005), pp. 286-287, 315-316.

[34] David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 137-139.

[35] The Boudiccan revolt seems to me the only sensible context for Suetonius' report (*Life of Nero* 18) that Nero thought of withdrawing from the province.

[36] This novel is the as-yet-unpublished *The Matter of Britain* (see http://www.angelfire.com/ak2/newmanbyrne/matter.html [accessed January 2008]).

[37] Cameron, op. cit., p. 198.

[38] See Neville Morley, "Trajan's Engines", *Greece and Rome*, 2nd ser., 47 (2000), pp. 197-210, at pp. 206-207.

[39] James, op. cit., p. 10.

[40] Baxter, "End of Empire", loc. cit.

[41] See Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization. Vol. 3, Caesar and Christ* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1944), pp. 642-643.

[42] In contrast to most alternate histories, which as Brian Stableford has observed (op. cit., p. 24), tend to show that all possible alternatives are worse than the ones in which we are currently living. (The same observation is made by Duncan, op. cit., p. 216, and by Stableford in the BBC4 documentary *Timeshift – Parallel Worlds*, 28th November 2006.)

[43] Baxter, "End of Empire", loc. cit. This forms a major theme in his *Time's Tapestry* sequence, *Emperor*, *Conqueror* (London: Gollancz, 2007), *Navigator* (London: Gollancz, 2007), and *Weaver* (London: Gollancz, 2008), in that the plots are driven by people from the future sending messages to the past, hoping to create a better present. At the time of writing I have not read *Weaver*, but hope to treat Baxter's use of history in *Time's Tapestry* in a future article.

[44] In *Emperor*, Part III, Chapters I-IV (pp. 207-222), Baxter does feature an enslaved character, who has suffered greatly in the gold mines of Dolacouthi. However, the suffering of Audax does not seem to prompt Baxter's viewpoint character Thalius to question the institution of slavery.

[45] A notion explored by Morley in his splendid part-spoof academic paper, "Trajan's Engines" (op. cit.). However, he attacks (with justification) the "anachronistic, Euro-centric assumptions" (p. 205) that technological development would have substantially prolonged the empire.

[46] It is to be found, for instance, in the 'August' story of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* #30 (1991; available in Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman Library VI: Fables & Reflections* (New York: DC Comics, 1993)).

[47] L.J. Hurst, "What if – or worse: Alternate History in Context", *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 202 (1998), notes that "some Alternate Histories run close to becoming defences of the unreasonable".

[48] See Dinah Arndt, "Interview with Sophie [*sic*] McDougall", Vibewire.net, 1st December 2005 (http://www.vibewire.net/create/dinah_arndtdec01interview_with_sophie_mc-dougall_[accessed May 2007, no longer available]): "Sophie said the idea [that the Roman empire never fell] presented itself suddenly and seemed so obvious she was afraid someone else would get in first." McDougall's novel was certainly publicised as if it was a wholly new idea, interesting considering both *Romanitas* and *Roma Eterna* are published by (different) branches of Orion Publishing.

[49] McDougall also quotes slightly more, Book 1, lines 276-279, as opposed to Silverberg's quoting of lines 278-279.

[50] Duncan, op. cit., p. 210, observes that alternate history stories often do not dramatise the Jonbar point.

[51] Robert Graves, *I, Claudius* (London: Arthur Barker, 1934).

[52] Chapter 3. It should be noted, however, that Gibbon delivers this verdict with a customary layer of irony, and was not himself enamoured of empires (see Porter, op. cit., pp. 101-102 and 138).

reviews

The Reception of H. G. Wells in Europe

Edited by Patrick Parrinder and John S. Partington
(Thoemmes Continuum, 2005, 419 pp. £150).
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Despite the publication date, a review copy for *Foundation* arrived only recently, with a note to the effect that it should have been sent earlier. And a list price of £150 for a not *that* over-large hardback is going to put this collection of essays out of the price of all but the most specialist libraries. Nevertheless, this collection of essays, which arises out of a long-term project to consider the reception of British authors in Europe is welcome. There can have been few British writers with the global impact of Wells, and as we grow to understand the global history of science fiction (with such recent collections as the Morrow *SFWA European Hall of Fame* anthology and the Santiago Ramon y Cajal collection reviewed by Jon Courtenay Grimwood in *Foundation 101*) we also understand Wells's position as father or godfather of world sf. It's possible to overestimate this, perhaps — one can assume that Ramon y Cajal, writing in the early years of the 20th century, could have been influenced by the 1902 Spanish translation of *The War of the Worlds*, but assumptions are dangerous things. And we should not take this as a definitive history of European science fiction when the reference books tell us that sf, or sf-like, narratives appeared all over Europe (and Britain!) before Wells. However, the essays here explore how various strands of literary and political reception, throughout Europe, either took to Wells or, as happened in certain circles in Spain, Hungary, and Ireland, vehemently took against him.

Not all of these essays, of course, focus upon science fiction. For many of these reactive circles it's Wells, the political writer, who is the object of their ire. Richard Nate, discussing the reception of Wells in Nazi Germany, notes that it is no surprise that he was almost immediately banned as "corrupt" (but there are some who try to defend him, although one would not always want to be defended in such ways). Gabriella Vöő examines the attacks on Wells's

liberalism in interwar Hungary. Lucian M. Ashworth describes a defensive reaction to Wells's anti-Catholicism in 1939 Catholic Ireland. But within these essays, a great deal of the history of early European science fiction can be teased out, and it is both illuminating, thought-provoking, and frustrating when we come to realise how much our Anglo-American viewpoint narrows our view of sf and its history.

Time and again, we see the translation of the scientific romances and a body of work arising which engages with them. According to his wife, the Hungarian writer Mihály Babits, Gabriella Vöő tells us, "could not stand Wells", and yet Babits wrote a novel, *Elza Pilóta* (1933), "with undeniable Wellsian overtones". Teresa Iribarren i Donadeu notes that the last sentence of one of the first science fiction short stories in Catalan, Poleyus Gener's "In somni futurista espaterrant" (1910) refers directly to *the Time Machine* and that the first Catalan sf novel, *Homes artificials* (1912) by Frederic Pujulá i Vallè has much in common with *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, translated into Spanish around 1906. Sometimes influence takes time to work through. Andrzej Jusczyk notes the popularity of Wells's scientific romances in Poland between the Wars (often in poor translations) but points to the marginality of local science fiction at this time. Antoni Słonimski's *Torpeda czasu* (1924) may have been influenced by *The Time Machine* (the title translates as *Time Torpedo*) but Jerzy Zuławski's *Na Srebrnym Globie* (On the Silver Globe), we are told, was written in 1901, some years before The First Men in the Moon was translated into Polish.

So, although this collection is general rather than specifically aimed at science fiction — John S. Partington's concluding essay considers Wells as a pioneer of the notion of European Unification: essays on Spanish and German influence are aimed almost entirely at the responses to the political ideas — out of it comes some fascinating and rarely-noted reflections upon sf. Among its other merits, it will become an important source for that not-yet-written History of Pan-European (or even World) science fiction. The two essays on Wells's reception in Poland are of particular interest. The first, by Andrzej Jusczyk, traces Wells influence on the first Polish writers of sf, who "worked more or less consciously under Wells's spell" and concludes with the engagement with H. G. Wells by Stanisław Lem, the great master of twentieth-century Polish sf. The second, by Juliusz K. Palczewski, brings to our attention the difficulties in translating science fiction by considering how Wells was translated into Polish. It's a clear account which amusingly notes some of the deficiencies in early translations, and like many of the essays here it manages to inform without assuming that the reader has any significant knowledge of the language and culture considered.

Other essays look at Hungarian, Czech, Italian, and Portuguese reactions. Maria Teresa Chialant, in exploring the connections between some of Wells's scientific romances and a novel by the Italian futurist Marinetti, draws our attention to the fact that the technological and cultural forces which created

what we now read as science fiction manifested themselves in different ways. Chialant writes that *Gli Indomabili (The Untameables)*, published in 1922, has "certain morphological and semantic features that can be defined as belonging to the science-fiction genre"; and certainly at least one contemporary Italian reviewer, she notes, noted similarities with the work of Wells. It's certainly arguable that the futurist tendency and what we now call science fiction are parallel developments rather than aspects of the same genre (someone who knows more about futurism than I do would be able to argue more effectively one way or the other than I could). But it's interesting to note that there are influences in common. The Czech literary reception of Wells, according to Bohuslav Mánek, was one of welcome for a writer whose "focus on the social consequences of scientific and technological advance" was congenial to the Czech "[search] for answers to topical social problems as well as major philosophical and artistic questions". The influence upon Karel Čapek, Jan Weiss, and (later) Josef Nesvadba is noted. Čapek himself, of course, repaid any influence with interest with his introduction of the word "robot" to the arsenal of science fiction writers and the general public alike. It was being used in British newspapers within six months of the first English production of *R.U.R. (Russum's Universal Robots)*.

José Manuel Mota's interesting essay on the Portuguese reception of Wells focuses upon the comparative underdevelopment in early twentieth century Portugal of a mass reading population for science fiction (unlike the industrialised Western and Central European countries): "in such a [small] country, where only a minority could have read Wells's scientific romances, ... who would have read him?" Mota notes the availability of Brazilian editions (a translation of *The Time Machine* was issued in Rio de Janeiro in 1899) and French translations, but finds no direct Wellsian tradition in the contemporary Portuguese sf community: "the Portuguese have indeed been reading Wells's science fiction, but [this does not mean that] there has been any interaction, as there never was a Portuguese literary tradition of fantastic or science-fiction literature (no Portuguese Verne or Čapek)". (The Brazilian influence might be noted in the recent anthology of Brazilian sf by Roberto de Sousa Causo, *Os Melhores Contos Brasileiros de Ficção Científica*, or his critical study *Ficção Científica, Fantasia e Horror no Brasil 1875-1950*).

France, of course, has the shadow of Verne, and the familiar controversy about who has the claim to be the "father" of sf is considered by Joseph Atairac. George Slusser and Danièlle Chatelain in (as might be expected) one of the most explicitly sf-oriented essays in the book also raise this question, and point out that Hugo Gernsback, as an immigrant from Luxembourg, may well have had Verne rather than Wells for his "master", but that the situation is complicated by the "retrofitting" of Wellsian influences through *Amazing* and John Campbell's "Golden Age" authors which fed back into post-war French sf to favour Wells's more sociological, less technological approach. (Gernsback's

own internationalism is sometimes overlooked, but in his editorial to the first *Amazing* he tells his readers that "A number of German, French and English stories of this kind by the best writers in their respective countries, have already been contracted for".) Like France, Germany too had its own strong tradition of proto-sf, and although we see comparatively little of this in the essays devoted to Wells's German reception, Elmar Schenkel does describe the well-known antipathy Wells showed towards Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, which he claimed drew from his own *When The Sleeper Wakes* and showed (he claimed) no real sense of futurity. Slusser and Chatelain's essay also moves from French to Russian sf to describe how the Strugatsky brothers drew upon Wells, particularly *The War of the Worlds* in their remarkable science fiction. From the viewpoint of the study of science fiction, most *Foundation* readers will presumably see this as perhaps the most important essay in the collection, although Roger Cockrell usefully notes the earlier Alexei Tolstoy and Yvgeney Zamyatin (who wrote about Wells) in his study of Wells and Bolshevik Russia.

Of the remaining essays, Nicoletta Vallorani's "'The Invisible Wells' in European Cinema and Television" covers a huge territory which perhaps requires a project of its own. It's only here, perhaps, where the European focus becomes shaky, because of the need (in such a topic) to consider how Wells's plots have underpinned so many time-travel and alien-invasion sf blockbusters coming from Hollywood. Nevertheless, Vallorani's arguments first, that American versions of Wells novels like *The Time Machine* often lose their subversive potential by being adapted to a new cultural context and second, that "with reference to cinema, Wells came back to Europe through the USA: some of his archetypes re-emerged in European cinema as a consequence of their enormous popularity in American cinema" are interesting, especially in the context, of course, of Wells's own interest in the cinema as a form of storytelling. Once more, we are reminded of how early cinema, such as Méliès's *Le Voyage dans la lune* (1902) parallels science fiction in its exploitation of the marvellous in story and technical effects, and how themes made popular by Wells, such as invisibility, resonate through popular culture. One fascinating example is a Russian version of *The Invisible Man* filmed in 1984 which, Vallorani argues, symbolically refers to the coming to power and sudden death of Yuri Andropov, "[a]lmost totally unnoticed before becoming the head of the Communist Party".

In such a detailed and extensive study there are bound to be omissions and errors, and looking for these is made more difficult by the fact that almost any reviewer (and certainly this one!) is going to come to the greater part of the book's contents from a stance of thorough ignorance. We rely on enterprises like this to teach us something: I have learned a great deal and have only noted one minor error — the attribution of the script of the 1964 *The First Men in the Moon* to "Nigel Wheale" (not "Kneale"), which error is kept in the index.

Parrinder and Partington have kept a close eye on matters. It would have been interesting to have had contributors from other European countries than those given. The *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*'s entry for Finland, for example, suggests a number of Finnish writers who would have been interesting to look at, and Finnish industrialism and politics may have offered a fertile area for Wellsian ideas to be debated. Similarly for the Scandinavian countries. It seems hard, though, to criticise this volume for what it hasn't done, when it has done so much.

We finish this book wanting more, which is something that is not always said about a collection of academic essays. Both from the Wellsian, and the science-fictional view, now we have learned a great deal about Europe, we want to know about Latin America, about Asia: perhaps such research projects are already on the line. *The Reception of H. G. Wells in Europe* is a landmark. The timeline, and the extensive bibliographies to each chapter, give the reader the important maps of the territory which are needed to consider just what, of Wells, was published when, and what was said about him. Wellsians will *need* this research, but generalists in science fiction studies will gain a vast amount from it, and anyone interested in the construction of European science fiction will gain a great deal of knowledge (and pleasure) from browsing through it.

Queen of Candesce

by Karl Schroeder
(Tor, 2007, 332 p. $25.95)
Reviewed by Charles Stross

If a book is a ball of string that needs unravelling, then the middle volume of a trilogy presents certain additional problems; the string has neither a beginning nor an end, and trying to track it to a terminus leads you into deeper entanglement.

Queen of Candesce is the middle volume of a trilogy, preceded by *Sun of Suns* and followed by *Pirate Sun* (forthcoming, Tor, summer 2008). It's clearly a novel—it has its own preoccupations and theme—but is simultaneously a component in a larger work. So, to recap: welcome to Virga. Virga is a classic science fictional Big Dumb Object—a planet-sized bag of air, water, and other stuff in orbit around a star. Virga is lit from within by Suns, fusion-powered machines that provide light and heat for its inhabitants; the outer darkness is chilly, ultimately the domain of weightless icebergs that line the inside of Virga's skin. In the interests of a more familiar fictional environment, posthumans are banished and electronics are scrambled by a field broadcast by the central Sun of Suns: jet engines running on methanol and rockets relying on black powder are the acme of technology here. And herein lies the high concept. Schroeder takes microgravity *seriously*. Towns are wheels of wood, brick and steel revolving in a cerulean sky. And keeping them revolving requires energy—Poor people grow up weightless, while the rich repose in palaces under full gravity.

Sun of Suns, which opened the series, was a remarkable marriage of the traditional space operatic reworking of the age of sail (in Patrick O'Brien guise, albeit less picaresque), with its description of the voyage of a small fleet, commanded by Admiral Chaison Fanning, to retrieve a magic plot coupon (the Key of Candesce, which gives the bearer control of the magic anti-tech field broadcast by the sun of suns) that would allow him to single-handedly defeat the enemy fleet menacing his home nation of Slipstream. If this sounds somewhat predictable, the devil is lurking in the details. There would be no need for a magic anti-singularity field, after all, if there were no transcendent entities lurking in the background—and indeed there are (in the form of the bizarre phenomenon of "artificial nature" which represents a non sequitur for human ingenuity, and from which the ancestors of Virga's inhabitants fled). And Chaison Fanning didn't dream up this quest on his own: he was put up to it by his wife, the monstrously ambitious and more than somewhat inhuman Venera Fanning. And it is the matter of her belated humanization that lies at the centre of the ball of string that is *Queen of Candesce*.

If an adventure is an excitingly unpleasant experience that happens to other people, then Venera Fanning is the outcome of an adventure. The daughter of

an increasingly paranoid despot, she married the first dashing young admiral who came within reach—then busily began applying the techniques she learned in her father's court to her new homeland (which, to be fair, is run as an only slightly-less-paranoid dictatorship by the Pilot, hereditary ruler and monarch of Slipstream). She's isolated, angry, terrified in the wake of a seemingly motiveless assassination attempt, and fearful. The only way she can deal with her environment is to try to gain control of it, and her chosen tool is the acquisition of hidden knowledge. If *Sun of Suns* raised the curtain on a charmingly naive wooden world romp with rockets, then in the sequel, Schroeder is showing us the darkly inevitable product of the aristocracy-ridden rule of kings (or pilots): for when the flow of information is throttled (in Virga, by the suppressor field from the sun of suns) bureaucracy and government regresses towards an older, more brutal norm, and only the heartless thrive.

But Venera isn't totally heartless. She loves her husband—last seen leading the remnants of his fleet on a near-suicidal flight—and she is nursing a number of huge grudges, not to mention a number of unexamined assumptions about the natural order of civilization. And it turns out that she'll do anything, up to and including fomenting revolutions and breaking worlds, for the people she is attached to. She's at her least effective when she's at her most insular: the more connections she makes to other people, the more she achieves. In fact, if you insist on raiding Heinlein's toolbox, *Queen of Candesce* is a classic "man who learned better" novel—in this case, about a spoiled noblewoman who learns that she is still connected to the rest of the human species. It's a lesson that is brought most forcefully to the front in Venera's confrontation with her personal bête noir, Margit of Sacrus, whose descent into raving lunacy mirrors Venera's recovery of her humanity.

There's a subtle political subtext here as well as the obvious one, but it's not framed in contemporary political terms and doesn't reach its full overt expression until well into *Pirate Sun*. Schroeder is obsessed by information flow, complexity theory, and the question of permanence—is there an end in sight to progress? Is change unlimited—or finite? Venera Fanning's aristocratic assumptions receive a kicking through the course of the story, even though she delivers a good kicking in return to the radical revolutionaries who want to depose the aristocracy and replace it with a trading card game reminiscent of a formalised version of Doctorow's "whuffie".

As to the plot, it's as frenetic as you might expect; and Schroeder uses the breathless pace of events to spin a smooth outer weave of string around the inner fuzzball of post-singularity speculation. If *Queen of Candesce* resorted to infodumps to convey the baroque complexity of its world, it'd be twice its actual length (not to mention unreadable).

Briefly: Venera Fanning falls out of the sky, sunburned and dehydrated, and lands by chance on the rim of Spyre, an ancient (and decrepit) rotating cylinder colony inhabited by aristocratic kingdoms of Ruritanian, if not Gormenghastian,

demeanour and less than sociable instincts. She's still got the Key to Candesce, and learns to her horror that various factions are aware of its existence and want it badly. Propelled by the exigencies of escape (this is very much an Odyssey plot) she contrives, through one harum-scarum adventure after another, to make friends and influence people (in some cases, by shooting them). Besides learning that it is possible to be friends with one's social subordinates, Venera discovers that Spyre is almost impossibly hard to escape from. To get away, she'll have to take over an entire nation, steal a ship, and fool all the other noble houses into thinking nothing is out of order. To make matters worse, news of her existence (and the Key) has made its way to the house Sacrus, whose sinister machinations and manipulations may be at the heart of her long-term troubles. And on top of all that, there are dark hints of war in heaven, among the gods and demiurges that throng the space outside Virga. Her use of the Key to Candesce has attracted the attention of beings better left undisturbed (a matter which builds in an ominous backdrop towards the trilogy's climax in *Pirate Sun*).

And so, to a final noteworthy point: this isn't space opera as we know it. Schroeder is one of the post-nanotech, post-singularity authors: he intimately understands the informational underpinnings of the current age. If his idea of its rules are radically different from those of Vinge, Drexler, Moravec, and Kurzweil (or this review's author), he is nevertheless playing a different game in the same ball park. This book looks like a gripping golden age yarn at first—castaway princesses trying to find their way back home! -- but once you begin to pull on the strings the uncoiling reveals a much more complex, not to say knotty, design that rewards a deeper reading.

Futures From Nature: 100 Speculative Fictions From the Pages of the Leading Science Journal.

Edited by Henry Gee
(Tor, 2007, 320p, £17.99)
Reviewed by Sara Wasson

This collection of 100 short stories (101 if you include Gee's partly fictional introduction) a selection from a series of one-page sf stories which originally appeared in the journal *Nature*. The series "Futures" flourished between November 1999 to December 2000, and again from January 2005 to December 2006, and continues in Nature's allied journal *Nature Physics*. This was not the first time literary writers have featured in *Nature:* H. G. Wells contributed a vision of the future in 1902, of which more later. The present anthology is infused with an intrepid spirit: Gee describes the "spirit of Nature" as "to boldly go where no man has gone before.... And not to care a damn what happens when we get there – in the knowledge that the result might be entertaining, will probably be interesting, and that we'll have learned something on the way" (21). This collection gleefully realises these ambitions.

That playful spirit manifests itself in witty literary intertextuality: Gee's introduction, for example, opens with a revision of *Waiting for Godot* depicting two scientific editors enduring existential anguish in a world where they are obsolete (AIs do all the editing), and Heather Whitney's wicked whimsy combines fairy tale conventions with genetic engineering (a stepmother splicing amphibian genetic code, with instructions for new frog princesses). Even the AIs in the collection have a knack for narrative: Greg Bear offers a book review of a novel by a popular robot author writing novels robots appreciate. Playfulness also extends to literary form: although most of the texts are first person narratives, contributions include fictional news articles, email, corporate memoranda, reviews of imaginary novels, and even a menacing telepathic harangue, if I may coin a phrase for Ian Stewart's contribution.

The tight space limit means the stories cannot sketch a world as vividly as possible in longer writing, and the most significant casualty is sometimes ambivalence and complexity. The stories themselves receive criticism on this count from among their own. In Joan Vinge's contribution, a character scorns *Nature*'s "Futures" series as "these odd little essays predicting 'the Future' ... They all seem to predict the perfect triumph of artificial intelligence over bestial human nature. Acrawl with nanobots, we have transformed ourselves into our own successors – or else humans are obsolete, out to pasture on a planet saved from ecodisaster by the wisdom of AIs" (Joan Vinge in *Futures*, 292). The future world can be painted with bright optimism or dark despair, usually the former. Jack Cohen's narrator relishes the "rich, fulfilled lives" he and others live in the machinery of their Matrix-like Library (66), and Brian Aldiss's contribution

laments the "Savage [Twentieth] Century, when "the human world once contained less order, less joy, and less fulfillment than now" (26-7). Yet the most thought-provoking contributions go beyond celebration; here is no shortage of dystopias. In the rest of this review, I will look at two preoccupations that vein the collection: the concept of the posthuman, and the regulation of the human body in a surveillance society.

Technological transformations raise interesting challenges to the notion of stable human identity, as Donna Haraway, Judith Halberstam and other theorists of the posthuman have shown. One of the dominant popular paradigms of the posthuman is the transhumanist concept of technology facilitating human evolutionary progress into a new species, *Homo sapiens* to *Homo cyberneticus*. Literary criticism of the posthuman tends to be cautious about the notion that the "posthuman" is an evolutionary progression, arguing that a price that must be paid to fit any limited narrative arc: Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, for example, are more interested in the posthuman as a thing of lack, of the "sub" human, on the grounds that any solid human identity always involves oversimplifying the complex desires that traverse a person. That said, however, most of the contributions in this collection do approach the posthuman through evolutionary terms. In doing so, they echo their key forebear on *Nature's* illustrious pages: H. G. Wells, whose 1902 narrator suggested that human beings may be a mere transitional species on the way to posthuman evolutionary glory: "We are creatures of the twilight. But it is out of our race and lineage that minds will spring, that will reach back to us in our littleness to know us better than we know ourselves". I will briefly review a sample of the evolutionary "futures" offered in these more recent *Nature* futures, and then I will argue that a particular strength of this collection is the way it does not merely present posthuman augmentation through the eyes of those who *use* that technology, but also contemplates the labour that underpins the technologies themselves.

Warren Ellis's contribution "At the Zoo" presents the world of 2468 where humans have been radically transformed by genetic engineering: many humans fly; others are augmented with telepathic ability gleaned from whale genes; others have become femtological clouds of nanotech, reprising the "foglets" of Ellis's series of graphic novels titled *Transmetropolitan*. The only two humans *not* modified are now in a zoo, and this story is interesting for the discourses which circulate around these two "pure" humans. One leading thinker of the time talks about the shock and grief that many people felt when they learned their genetic code was radically different from the "original" human code; others rebut any grief by arguing that human genetic code has never been stable. Ellis's piece – a news article reporting on controversy between these two views - hones in on the way language functions in the debate, with particular attention to the way that the notion of another being "purer" than ourselves can be experienced as threatening.

The posthuman figure of the clone is especially fascinating for scholars of identity and cultural history because the concept of a clone directly attacks

many of the grounds on which we construct our frail identities. This collection adds two valuable stories to the body of cloning sf. The narrator of Arthur Chrenkoff's "The Aching of Don Harper" is a recently awakened clone, who does not feel traumatised by the experience of his previous incarnation's violent death and who does feel that "his" identity is intact and continuous, thanks to his consciousness being retrieved from download. Despite his psychological equilibrium, however, he feels the absence of his previous body the same way amputees can feel phantom limbs. "Blood cries out to its own blood, DNA strands yearn for their kin with a longing that can never be satisfied" (61). A similar melancholy permeates Ian McLeod's "Taking Good Care of Myself": this story does not in fact feature a clone, but it is a spectacularly effective sketch of the disorienting sense of disconnection that a clone might both engender and experience. In McLeod's future, time travel has been mastered and is being used to deal with the problem of an aging population by sending the dying elderly back in time for their younger selves to care for. This story presents a person confronted with someone who shares their genotype, but is divided from them by time and an inaccessible mind. The story is freighted with a sense of profound difference and longing.

If it is possible to trace just one thread through this collection's many treatments of the posthuman, it could be this: while sf typically focuses on using technologies, this collection also addresses the work of *producing, disseminating and maintaining* technologies – a salutary addition. Donna Haraway, Elaine Graham and others have long emphasized the fact that science has never been a purely neutral, objective discipline: like any work of production, today's scientific work is shaped by transnationalist and late capitalist pressures. In Graham's words, following Bruno Latour, "Technologies are always full of human labour". Several of the stories in this collection grapple with the economic, social and environmental realities that underlie technological progress. The rest of the review will examine these dimensions of the collection. I will start by glancing what these fictions suggest about the possibility of posthuman agency. I will then consider how the collection engages with commercial commodification of the posthuman, posthuman responses to environmental depredation, and finally how the fictions engage with the labour of the scientific process itself.

The posthumans of this collection are subject to extensive surveillance and regulation. In Roland Denison's future, for example, all citizens have subcutaneous person data chips so that their position can be identified by computer at all times. Psychoactive triggers release endorphins when they obey recommended traffic routes and trigger depression when they disobey. Many of these futures are worlds where human mind and agency has become a malleable tool for malignant controllers of society: perhaps the most striking is David Berreby's, in which people can be sentenced to artificially-induced mental retardation for disagreeing with a proposed law (51-3). Although most of the dystopian stories depict power as wielded by a centralized state or ruling body,

several depict psychoactive manipulation as decentralized and even random: in Barrington Bayley's "Party Smart Card", for example, guerillas forcibly attach psychoactive decals to people's foreheads, the card then transforming the victim's feelings so that they support that party, regardless of their earlier attitude. Even private corporations get in on the act: Vernor Vinge describes a future in which MRI fields can be used to induce profitable psychopathologies in employees, such as obsessional "specialist fugue states" that causes output to soar (293-5).

In the face of such chilling technological control, how might human resistance and agency be imagined? This has long been a preoccupation for sf, and one-page fictions hardly have room to answer it. Nonetheless, Benjamin Rosenbaum's contribution sketches lines of resistance. In his future, the air swarms with nanotech governmental "mites" who can watch, speak, and touch, swarming to catch a person if, for example, one free-falls from a building. That is exactly what some people do: "airsurfers" deliberately infect themselves with a virus that means the mites are temporarily unable to track them on the city grid. A person is guaranteed several seconds of mite-free free-fall until the mites recognise their presence and swarm to catch them. The third person protagonist longs for that freedom, even though the price is social ostracism. It is an interesting recognition of bio-ware as simultaneously potentially coercive and liberating.

Environmental resources are the centre point for Catherine Shaffer's contribution. In this future everything in the home is electronic: books, newspapers, toasters, all feature computer chips and require electric charging. The society is on the verge of becoming even more technologically sophisticated through the imminent "Singularity", a mysterious, epic union with an alien society. Yet although this world awaits in anticipation for this epiphanic technological leap, the leitmotif is technological lack: paradoxically, although even ordinary household objects are now dependent on electricity, electricity itself is profoundly scarce. A "Charge-Up Man" visits monthly to charge everyone's books, magazines, toasters and the rest. When the long-awaited, mysterious Singularity occurs, but nothing changes: there is still no power and nothing can be turned on.

Environmental themes underpin two of the most haunting stories in the collection, Brenda Cooper's "My Grandfather's River" and Igor Teper's "Golden Year", both of which grapple with the way that lost, cherished environments could be resurrected in virtual reality or engineered replicas. Many of the futures in the collection present virtual reality negatively: in Norman Spinrad's contribution, for example, people are reduced to "zombies ... tapped into a thousand available channels of realies, twenty-four hours a day" (273). Yet in the stories by Cooper and Teper, the focus is on the labour involved in *creating* the simulated reality, rather than merely using it. Cooper's narrator describes a lament for a lost area of wetland. The first-person narrator's grandfather had fought to preserve the river, but lost – and before the river was destroyed he brought his grandchild to see it so she would remember it before it vanished.

Years later, she has become an accomplished virtual reality engineer, and she painstakingly re-creates the scene through many hours of literally superhuman nanotech-enhanced labour, to his mingled joy and grief. Teper's protagonist is a lonely widower, six years bereft, who is contemplating a gift his wife gave him. When he and his wife emigrated to a lunar colony he missed the Maine woods, and his wife comforted him by meticulously genetically engineering a living replica of the woods in high summer. Yet she could not imitate seasonal change, and he longed for the glowing gold and russet of the New England autumn. He visits the habitat six years after her death, and to his astonishment sees the habitat transform into autumnal glory: she had secretly spent years crafting "miracles of genetics and biochemistry" (285), to leave him a message of love after her death. In both Cooper's and Teper's stories, the focus is not on the tragedy of the lost habitat or the triumph of technology: rather, their emphasis is on the way that the *creation* of the simulation is a labour of love and itself an act of communication.

In the same way that the stories above contemplate the particular labours and natural resources underlying technological development, so too does the collection scrutinise the labours of scientific research and writing. Alastair Reynolds's contribution "Feeling Rejected" is a negative review of an academic article submitted to a journal for publication. We learn that the article explored a lost civilisation in what seems to be loving detail, but the article has two "flaws": it spends too long examining the intricacies of one culture instead of examining a whole array of cultures at once, and instead of confining itself to conventional scientific indices of measurement, it breaches disciplinary decorum by quoting epic poetry to describe the tragedy which the lost civilisation took as self-defining. Reynolds's contribution suggests that such editorial practice not only rejects the writer, but also the uniqueness of the extinct civilisation itself. Writing is not innocent.

Even if some of the devices are familiar to regular readers of sf, it is valuable that these sketches bring sf visions to a wider readership, particularly in such a delightfully accessible form; this collection has great value beyond mere futureshock. One final quibble: it would have been helpful to have the original publication dates, either in a final appendix or after each text, since the texts were produced over such a wide span of time. Science fictions always tell us about their contemporary moment, and these 101 futures are no exception. They have a lot to say.

The Outback Stars

By Sandra McDonald
(Tor, April 2007, 416pp, $25.95)
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

What is sf actually *for*? Obviously it's meant to entertain, to delight and to instruct, and for me a large part of its attraction is its celebration of difference, non-ordinariness: alien viewpoints, alien landscapes, alien cultures, alien psychologies. I'm interested in speculation about how things might be different.

In context, this book satisfies that interest. In the context of sf, it is shocking to find two main characters who turn down the chance to explore an alien interstellar instantaneous personal transport system in order to work overtime in the office and get their paperwork straightened out. It is scary to meet a seasoned officer who believes she can straighten out "a division full of misfits, incompetents, and criminals" by providing them with a distinctive division T-shirt (it's a team-building exercise, right?). This is sf turning itself inside out, meeting itself coming back and mutating into Real Life; a Real Life which is totally alien to me because it is, I am assured, a true and accurate reflection of the military (McDonald has been an officer in the United States Navy). In other words, what absolutely fascinates me about this book is not its plot (unremarkable, contains a couple of obvious glitches) or the personalities of its main characters (pleasant), but their society (weird!) and some of the book's underlying assumptions and attitudes.

From where I'm standing (lifelong civilian, liberal-anarchist) Team Space, the book's featured quasi-military organisation, looks curiously corporate, and their personnel are a blend of soldier and safariman. "Military posture" and short hair are compulsory, uniforms seem to be semi-optional. Rank is formal and very significant (a major plot strand is the development of an attraction between two characters, a love which is Forbidden because it crosses the officer/enlisted man boundary — civilian employees of Team Space have fallen off the bottom of the status chart, outcastes, which raises the question of whether a relationship between an officer and a civilian would be even worse, or not worth bothering about). This quasi-military society gives the book something of the structure of a children's story — as only senior officers ever take full responsibility for anything, it falls to The Admiral (an absent father-figure) to turn up at the end of the book, sort everything out, and send the protagonists off to play with his blessing.

Team Space is an organisation in stasis. Awkward questions, original ideas, nonconformity of any and all kinds are discouraged. Routines should be followed unquestioningly, enthusiastically, and to the letter. Things are done this way because that's the way they are done, perhaps because this is a military organisation which has existed for "a hundred years in space and still not a single alien to shoot at". Team Space's job, therefore, is to transport colonists

through the Alcheringa (created by a Vanished Alien Race — but how do Team Space know this?) to seven planets terraformed by the same alien race (er, and how do Team Space know that?). The only real enemy is the Colonial Freedom Party, who are Bad because they bomb things. (At least, something really does get trashed, and we're told the perpetrators are the CFP, so they may well actually exist — *nobody* in this book questions the information and viewpoints handed out by Team Space!) The CFP bomb things because they are Bad, or possibly because they object to Team Space's monopoly on the Alcheringa for unexplained political reasons. Who cares? To recognise one is to shoot one, or it certainly would be if one ever showed up.

The Alcheringa, the Outback stars, robot cargo-handlers called DNGOs and referred to as "dingos" — we're in quasi-Australia here. Cultural flavour is fine, but I was briefly very uneasy about the vanished alien race and the interstellar transport system being linked to Aboriginal religious beliefs, because I know that huge chunks of many Aboriginal belief systems should not, in the opinion of practitioners, be available to (non-Aboriginal) nonbelievers/nonpractitioners. However, the material is handled cautiously and I don't think any sensitive information is made explicit. The book also makes it clear that the only people who have access to the religious/mystical aspect of the Alcheringa are those of Aboriginal descent. In other words, this is racist — but probably okay from a liberal point of view if this is seen as positive discrimination. My very limited understanding is that many Aboriginal leaders want the non-off-limits parts of Aboriginal culture to be more widely known and respected, and this is certainly not a disrespectful treatment, though I'm not sure how practitioners feel about their religion and culture being fictionalised.

This leads to the wider question: when is it okay to borrow from another culture to represent a fictional culture, and when is it inappropriate? Obviously, it's much harder (though interesting) to create a fictional culture from scratch than it is to bolt one together from parts, file the serial numbers off a nice piece of anthropology, or even not bother filing the serial numbers off an existing culture. Personally, I am happier with borrowing from cultures which don't currently exist, or with at least some attempt to rework or disguise a borrowing, than I am with a straight cut-and-paste. Thus I'm happier with borrowing from the US Navy and renaming the outfit "Team Space" (which tells us that this outfit is *like* the Navy in some important ways, but not identical with it) than I am with the Aboriginals, who are left with an interesting nonfictional-to-fictional continuity. I hope it doesn't mean that the author regards Aboriginal mythology as fiction. Mythology is certainly story, but it is not fiction as we in the West understand the term.

In my opinion, one of the things that sf is *for* is to stimulate questioning, speculation, open-mindedness. I think this is the only work of sf I've ever read in which a society which mandates unquestioning obedience and conformity, ignoring the universe and concentrating on the paperwork, is presented as unreservedly good. Is it a book at odds with itself? Weird, very weird — so weird as to be fascinating.

In War Times

By Kathleen Ann Goonan
(Tor, 2007, 348p, $25.95)
Reviewed by Ben Jeapes

Everyone should have a hobby, but all too often a fictitious character's pastime is an excuse for authors to evangelise (or just plain bore) the readers about their own obsession. Thankfully that isn't the case here because jazz is a perfect metaphor for the fluid reality of *In War Times*. Jazz, World War 2 Europe, the development of technology in the 1940s and time travel all intertwine easily because all are defined by lack of boundaries. No one, not even the experts, knows entirely what they will end up with from any given set of starting conditions. It is all made up as it goes along.

> "The sharp array of notes hijacked his thoughts, his being, and the world seemed to jump with the octave jumps, move between two different keys, with such ease that it seemed like the most natural thing in the world, when in fact it defined a radically different way of looking at music, of playing it, of experiencing it" (p. 209)

Sam Dance is a jazz playing soldier engineer during WW2 who ends up as a time traveller, briefly. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, Sam is seduced intellectually and physically by the mysterious Dr Eliani Hadntz, who leaves him with notes for the building of a device that will somehow end war and change the human condition for the better. Exactly how the device will do this is never entirely made clear and nor is it clear why Sam, who is much too level headed to fall for a pretty face, gets caught up in it. But caught up he is, and he hangs onto the papers as the USA is plunged into the conflict. A combination of short sightedness and technical skill means he is fated to spend the war as a techie, working on ever more complex hardware like the (factual) M-9 Director, a machine that could track aircraft and aim guns without human intervention. Technology made such leaps and bounds during the early forties that it is sometimes hard to tell, even with a reader's hindsight, which bits are real and which are science fictional. To Sam, living in the eternal present, it's all equally viable. The device is no more or less plausible to him than the miracle of the M-9, and as a conscientious engineer he quietly gets on with the job of developing them both.

Several versions of the device are finally manufactured; it is always small, always portable, always entirely inscrutable as to what it actually does. But it soon becomes clear it has a life and rules of its own; hide it away for a few months, and next time you look it will have become something else.

> "In the attic, hidden in a box in a locked trunk, the latest incarnation of the Hadntz Device. Exuding, perhaps, viruses, DNA, radio waves, infinite spacetimes. A repository of the multiverse; a cipher" (p. 281).

Most of Sam's war — indeed his career — is a stolid progression through the technical development of the twentieth century from 1940 onwards, based on first hand accounts that would make a fascinating novel in their own right and add an invaluable layer of secondary detail to this one. To get us to the point where the device starts working, and indeed beyond, Goonan maps Sam's career onto the real-life career of her own father, who held down the same jobs in the same places as Sam in WW2 and then after as a fire protection engineer. His career took him all across war-torn Europe, and afterwards across the Pacific and the tracking stations for the space and ICBM programmes. Small, verifying details abound to give a fascinating layer of verisimilitude — like, the coal-rationed Brits during the war constantly apologising to their American guests that they can't get the beer warm enough, and the Americans not minding in the least. There is a wonderful moment where Sam, an over-here GI working on the Sandringham estate, has an accidental meeting with the young Princess Elizabeth. The authenticity lies in her reaction. I don't know if this actually happened to Goonan *père*, or indeed to anyone, but if it's not true then it damn well should be.

There are still the occasional clunkers that some natural law seems to dictate will always occur when an American writes about the British: we do not employ the concept of blocks when giving directions around cities, and when someone turns up in a Mini during the Blitz I wasn't sure if the parallel universes had started arriving or this was just an ignorant foreigner writing. I reluctantly concluded the latter.

For twenty years, Sam keeps faith with Hadntz's vision, secretly developing the device and planting it around the world — the old Messerschmidt factory beneath the Bavarian alps, the aforesaid tracking stations — where it can continue to do its obscure, undetectable good.

I said it wasn't clear why Sam fell for Hadntz in the first place. Given that he did, however, he needs no further motivation. The very real threat of the Bomb, the Cold War, the perception in many quarters that the war never really ended are all the incentive he requires. Many years earlier his best buddy and fellow musician branched off into a parallel universe where, at least from the point of view of a post-war Cold Warrior, the future is a lot more rosy, and Sam gets added impetus when his friend occasionally pops over to our world and talks happily of the collapse of the Soviet Union, development of the moon bases, a full term for Kennedy ...

What is lacking, however, is any kind of questioning about whether all this playing with reality is the right thing to do. Sam does have the occasional niggle of doubt. In the 'utopian' alternative, he wouldn't have his wife and kids. His friend is more concerned with the absence in his world of Miles Davis. But apart from

that, Sam never really questions the motivation of Hadntz's vision. Yes, World War 2 was a terrible thing and Hadntz herself has family lost in the Nazi camps, so we can see her point of view. But what would it have cost to avoid it? And who has the right to manipulate our very genes to make sure war never happens again?

And while we're pondering this, suddenly we're in *The Incredibles*: husband and wife flying in a futuristic (and time travelling) plane like a pair of superheroes to the rescue of their daughter. It's a jarring note and the book never really recovers from it. By the 1960s, Sam is living a life of archetypal suburban respectability, for all that he knows he's married to a CIA spook, when one of his daughters goes missing. The latest manifestation of the device, Sam realises too late, is a board game that his children have found in the attic. The girl has used it to go back in time to right a terrible wrong (just say that when Sam and his wife go after her they land at Love Field). This isn't the first time we've learnt that the device actually allows time travel back and forth, rather than just sidestepping between parallel worlds — but you have to think hard to remember that, oh yeah, so it can. (It's the only explanation for various goings on that Sam encountered during the war.) The wrong is righted, Sam and daughter return to the present but in a changed world, and the world is happier for it.

I'm sorry to say that this resolution annoys. It would annoy in a less engaging, realistic and level-headed novel so the fact that it happens here makes it even more annoying. The novel has shown us the fears and paranoia of the Cold War, and we can understand the characters' motivations that arise because they don't know what we do: there wasn't a nuclear war, Communism did fall (eventually) and so on. But at the same time our post Cold War world has had Srebrenica and Darfur and Iraq and the present situation in Burma. In Sam's new reality, Communism ceases to be a threat earlier, Vietnam never develops into the catastrophe it became ... but there is no real reason to suppose items like Srebrenica et al still don't go on to occur. The device, in theory, deals with all of that because it changes the very nature of humans and the ways in which we relate to each other. But who gets to say how humans should be?

This kind of scientific utopianism was the underpinning creed of the likes of H.G. Wells, who knew no better; Arthur C. Clarke, who should have; and *Star Trek*, which had no excuses. It is completely out of place here. I am sorry people died horribly in WW2. I really am, but if anyone has the power to change that — well, I'm sorry but I also deny them the right to change my present existence. Ninety percent of *In War Times* shows such a realistic and sympathetic view of people quietly getting on with their lives, even in the middle of a war, taking the good with the bad, that this too-neat wrapping up of a problem without any kind of debate or questioning leaves a sour note that not even a happy ending can fully undo. Surely if Hitler and Stalin taught us anything — and let's face it, there are one or two key lessons to be drawn from their lives — it's the undesirability of unaccountable people making decisions on our behalf?

Brasyl

by Ian McDonald
(Pyr SF 2007, 357p, $25)
Reviewed by Paul Raven

Ian McDonald's *Brasyl* has been heaped with plaudits, praise, nominations and awards — well-deserved recognition for an author who has long been expanding the envelope of science fiction literature beyond its traditionally perceived white/middle-class/Eurocentric viewpoint by way of his sharp, intelligent and well-written novels.

To attempt to produce a brisk synopsis of this novel would not only be incredibly hard, but an insult to its complexity. Even in his first published novel, *Desolation Road*, McDonald had already grasped an aspect of the novelist's craft that still eludes many more popular authors — he knows not to use everything he's got. Far from making his books incomplete, it gives them their larger-than-life vividness, with the world beyond the narrative pushing in, peering over the author's shoulder, making itself felt despite its absence. This is the polar opposite of M. John Harrison's "clomping foot" of worldbuilding. The world is built, but there's no time for a comprehensive tour of the facilities.

That *Brasyl* is set in Brazil should come as little surprise. Its location in time is a little more complex, however, as the book has three narrative threads: one set during the eighteenth century with the country under the (nominal) control of the Portuguese; a second set in 2006 (which we shall refer to as being set in the present, for the sake of simplicity); and a third in 2033.

The present thread is principally set in and around Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's mind-numbingly huge, colourful and chaotic focal city (though not its capital, in formal terms). The eighteenth century thread starts in Salvador, but soon moves into the uncharted and untamed rainforests of the Amazon basin. The future thread is focused on São Paulo.

Each thread has its own central character, also. The colonial thread follows the mission of Luis Quinn, a Jesuit priest of Irish descent, charged with locating and bringing to judgement a fellow priest of the order who is believed to have started operating beyond the boundaries of his remit to bring Christian salvation to the *indios* of the rainforests.

The present-day thread pans around Marcelina Hoffman, an aspiring television producer of German ancestry. Fiercely career-driven, she has avoided such things as starting a family in the pursuit of success. She's smart and ruthless, but plagued with self-doubt.

The future thread belongs to Edson Jesus Oliveira de Freitas, sixth son of a sixth son, born in a poor *favela* ghetto, but with the wits and drive to make a go of his life and transcend the traditional fates of young men in his social demographic — an early gang- or drug-related death, or a lifetime of grinding poverty. He's a

small-time businessman rather than a criminal — but in São Paulo's future (much like its present), the line between the two is pretty fuzzy.

Brasyl is a knowingly post-cyberpunk novel whose sf-nal conceits go beyond the classic dystopian urbanism of the parent genre. The rhythm and style of the Gibsonian flavour of cyberpunk is manifest in the modern city scenes, which are rife with neon, motion, logos and brands. McDonald pulls us tightly into the city by using place names and landmarks as a local might, scattered through dialogue and prose heedless of the reader's lack of comprehension.

This saturation of local language makes for a more immersive reading experience, but adds challenge in the process — I don't think it would be unfair to suggest that *Brasyl* would be tough going for inexperienced readers, even considering the inclusion of a glossary at the rear.

But there is evidence of ferocious attention to detail at the word and sentence level; McDonald has really gone to town as far as giving his characters the appropriate voice is concerned. Each uses metaphors appropriate to their own world and outlook, like the physics lecturer who regrets a choice not taken because he was "too entangled", and who "wipes any tears gone before they gather gravity". Likewise, the dialogue between Father Quinn and his nemesis is redolent of the language of the eighteenth century while retaining enough tautness to avoid deterring the modern reader.

Most telling of all, and a great pleasure to read, are the passages of prose set in São Paulo and Rio where you can feel the enjoyment and fascination that McDonald must have experienced while researching the book. The pulse and pace of a Latino metropolis leaps off the page like the neon noise of bars pouring through a taxi window, authentic and vivid. A challenging read it may be, but it's never a chore, and frequently a thrill.

So, what is *Brasyl* actually about?

The fluidity of identity is far from being a new theme in science fiction, or indeed in modern literature of any type. However, McDonald makes full use of the sf-nal arsenal to take the theme further than 'straight' fiction can usually manage, amplifying the post-modern fragmentation of identity that was a hallmark of cyberpunk 1.0.

In the future thread, Edson de Freitas lives in a São Paulo where surveillance, digital rights management and law enforcement technologies are at saturation. Most citizens have their identity stored on their 'i-shades' (wearable computing devices); the majority of items of any monetary worth are tagged with RFID chips of increasing sophistication; the independent law enforcement agencies bid on individual jobs over a network that operates somewhat like a high-speed arbitrage eBay for paramilitary muscle; high above the city, surveillance satellites scan the streets, tracing tags, and monitoring movements, recording transactions. Everything is watched, all the time.

Contrary to the expectations of the creators of such a system, crime has been far from eradicated. Indeed, the technology has simply created a raft of

new crimes related to circumventing the surveillance. Edson, as a street-wise hustler, is more than aware of these hacks and loopholes — and is also aware that having more than one identity is essential to survival on the fringes of São Paulo society. He has cultivated a number of alibis; not simply the sort of 'paper dupes' of a twentieth century spy novel, but characters that have a life of their own. In some cases, they are the lives of people who are willing to loan out the use of their 'clean' identities, like the young DJ on Edson's talent agency roster whose identity Edson sometimes loads onto his i-shades when travelling about the city. In other cases, they are elaborate and theatrically perfect alter egos — like Edson's other 'life' as the *bicha* drag queen Efrim — enabling Edson to attend parties and other events with people who know his 'true' identity, and still remain largely incognito.

The implication here is one that some experts in security technologies have warned us of, risks that usually go unheeded by the governments that are so keen to implement them. Identity technologies will not prevent identity fraud. In fact, they will make it easier — and in many cases make it essential for the very people that they intend to prevent from doing it. Technology divorces us from the modernist concept of the single identity, creating a post-modern panoply of possible ways of appearing to the world around us. McDonald appears to take a neutral stance to this phenomenon, neither condemning it or lauding it. It is simply a given.

Technological identity is merely one facet, however. Sexual identity is fluid in a much more casual way than is currently accepted in the world of the reader. Edson's other life as Efrim is only part of the picture here. Edson is bi-sexual, but completely at ease with being so, at least as far as the politics of sexuality are concerned. He has been having a long-term homosexual affair with a university science lecturer, but is equally attracted to (and involved with) female characters. The normal dilemmas of multiple relationships apply, but there is never any self-loathing or confusion over which is Edson's 'correct' sexuality — at least not from Edson's perspective.

His relationship with the lecturer brings another level of identity play into the picture. Edson knows the lecturer as "Mr Peaches", a nickname born of the circumstances of their first encounter and maintained despite Edson's knowledge of the man's true name. But furthermore, their relationship is based around sexual role-playing, with the two of them dressing up as superheroes or television characters when they are together.

Identity and sex also go hand in hand in the present-day thread. Marcelina is engaged in a casual affair with Heitor, a newsreader from the same television channel that employs her. Heitor likes to dress Marcelina in clothing that flaunts her sexuality when she is staying with him, and Marcelina and Heitor both get a kick out of her parading in these scanty outfits by the windows of his apartment. Again, surveillance is a given — but here it is the mutual surveillance of the general population, other citizens watching each other for profit or kicks. Heitor

enjoys the voyeurism of knowing he is the subject of voyeurism, while Marcelina enjoys the anonymity of being watched closely by people who have no idea of her actual identity. Heitor and Marcelina's sexual obsession with anonymity can be seen as a reaction to the pressures of their jobs, which are intensely focused on their primary identities. Heitor especially is a highly visible authority, with a face known to the entire city and a personality known to very few. But that authority does not empower him — we are not our jobs, McDonald seems to be saying.

Unsurprisingly, given the state of current affairs in the world beyond the pages of books, recent literature has engaged vigorously with the dialectic between rationalism and faith. Science fiction has the equipment to do so in very different ways, and McDonald has raided the tool box to appropriate a number of them.

Possibly in an attempt to balance the identity theme in the modern and future threads, the core of this theme is located in the past thread, and more specifically in Luis Quinn himself.

Quinn is a pivot around which questions of faith and logic can rotate, and a contradiction embodied. He is a flawed man, and he knows it; indeed, it is his driving force. Haunted by the memory of a time when he bludgeoned a man to death in a tavern with a pewter mug, he turned to religion for redemption, and for the discipline to temper his fighting spirit. Sent on his mission to Brazil after constant requests to his superiors for a 'worthy task', he questions not only the logic of his own order, but the means by which he must fulfil his mission — by killing Father Goncalves, if there is no other way to stop the rogue priest:

> "My own Society has made me a hypocrite, yet I obey, as any soldier obeys, as any soldier must." (pp161)

Quinn's companion on his journey into the rainforests is Robert Falcon, a French man of science who is attempting to measure the oblation of the Earth, and who has invented a 'Governing Machine'. This device is rarely discussed in the foreground, but we learn that it is some sort of primitive punch-card mechanical computer, a proto-Turing Machine. Quinn is appalled by the thing, telling Falcon that it has as much potential to enslave man as Falcon believes it has potential to free man from drudgery. The device will come between man and God ... which echoes forward into the modern and future threads, where technology has indeed separated man from God, and man from himself.

However, Quinn comes to represent a reconciliation between rationalism and faith, not least because he recognises that they are equally dangerous when treated dogmatically. Sent by Goncalves to a forest tribe who dose their captors with heroic quantities of poisonous frog venom and use them as scryers across multiple realities, Quinn follows a path not dissimilar to the Jesus his Order venerates. He becomes a saviour figure to the jungle tribes, narrowly defeating

the imperialism of Goncalves's fusion of Christianity with the gods of the *indios*. He also becomes the leader of a mystical order that fights a similar fight across time, and across multiple realities.

Which brings us to the third theme, which is also the overarching sf-nal trope that ties the whole book together. It's a combination of the "Many Worlds" interpretation of quantum theory (which hypothesises that each moment of choice or change at a quantum level produces a number of realities where each possible outcome comes true, ultimately leading to a near-infinite multiverse of realities) and the "Simulation Hypothesis" (which posits that, if the human race transcends its physical limitations and goes post-human, they are very likely to run simulations of the past, and that it is statistically more likely that we are experiencing one of those simulations rather than the one 'true' reality), with a dash of hallucinogenic rainforest shamanism thrown in for good measure.

The notion here is that the universe itself is in fact a universal quantum computer that is running an infinitude of these simulations ... and that like any other computer, it can be hacked. In the future thread, Edson meets an alternate version of his recently deceased quantum-physicist girlfriend who has used high powered quantum computing to escape from her reality, one in which the environmental collapse of Earth is far more advanced than that of Edson's native reality, but where the human relationship with information technology is more integrated. Here, McDonald shines another light on identity and the way in which technology separates us from ourselves, showing that with slightly different philosophical paradigms, our technological alienation need not necessarily be a given.

This quantum universe also allows further explorations of the faith/rationalism dichotomy. In the past thread, Luis Quinn gains the ability to move between realities by surviving the monstrous dose of hallucinogenics given him by the mysterious *indios* of the rainforest, a mystical equivalent of the effects replicated by quantum computation in the future thread. Quinn uncovers a war of stealth raging between the realities, which essentially boils down to a disagreement of interpretation. The religious interpretation is defended by the dimension-hopping agents of The Order and their pet politicians, who see things as follows:

> "There is a universal mind, and all are notions of it. The prelates and the presidents, the pontiffs and prime ministers call it the Parousia, the end-time, but the eye of a simple man's faith can better know it as the kingdom of God. The Enemy says that is a lie, an endlessly repeated dream grinding ever slower as the multiverse wheels down, and they seek to break it, to wake the dreamers." [pp313]

'The Enemy' are those who would wrest the knowledge (and hence the control) of the multiverse from the elite Order — because to wake from the cycle of dreams

would be the only way for the 'one true' reality to be created. Both interpretations are mystical in their own way, and remarkably similar in many respects.

So much so that I was hard pressed to completely separate them from one another. Here I must either confess my inaccurate reading or praise the ouroboros of McDonald's cunningly ambiguous plotting (or possibly both), for after two close readings of the book I still can't be sure that the two orders aren't in fact alternate versions of one another; whether Luis Quinn is the head of The Order, its principle opponent, or both, or neither. Given the underlying idea of multiple realities and multiple iterations of the persons within them, any interpretation is possible — if there is a definite concrete clue that isn't contradicted by another scene or statement, I must have missed or misinterpreted it.

But that, to me, is the core of what makes *Brasyl* such a fine novel — it leaves you with plenty of food for thought, with questions left satisfyingly unanswered. And while I felt it didn't have quite the breathtaking impact that *River Of Gods* had for me on a first reading, I'd say that what little it lacks in immediacy is more than made up for with its richness — I have had to sketch or entirely skip over a number of fascinating themes for the sake of space. *Brasyl* will remain a continent rich in resources for adventurous critics for some time to come, and it can be hoped that it will achieve a deserved place in the canon of literary science fiction.

The Lost District and Other Stories

By Joel Lane (Night Shade Books, 2006, trade paperback, 190 pp., $14.95)
Reviewed by Darrell Schweitzer

I've always maintained that it does not behoove a critic to try to tell people why they shouldn't have enjoyed something they already have. Not even Mark Twain actually did that in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," instead articulating why many readers had felt uneasy with material they were supposed to like, which is another matter entirely. Similarly, it won't do to say "Everybody else is wrong and I am right," particularly when "everybody" includes some very respected colleagues.

There's no doubt that Joel Lane has a following and a track record. Furthermore, Tim Lebbon has called him "one of the finest fantasists writing today." Graham Joyce writes of the present volume, "a stunning collection from one of the finest short story writers writing today." Ramsey Campbell says, "One of the absolute treasures of our field."

Yet there is a mystery. I found several stories in this book almost unreadable. The question then to be explicated is "Why is this considered good?" or even "Why is this considered publishable?"

It also won't do for the reviewer to just admit he went down in defeat, any more than it will for an explorer, who is supposed to map the territory, to report a fogbank, then turn around and go home.

We press onward.

Entirely too many Lane stories can be glibly described as "terminally depressed people in bleak environments do nothing in particular." The title story falls into that category. "Like Shattered Stone" offers the occasional memorable turn of phrase (as when large, heavy snowflakes are compared to the shedding skin of angels) and an intriguing image — and an intriguing idea. It's about a sculptor, give to very abstract work, who keeps discovering his stone worked over (apparently when he's asleep) to reveal beautiful, realistic work, as if someone is trying to emerge from the stone. But nothing is done with this. The story has nothing most readers would recognize as dramatic structure, much less a climax. There is much ado about the bleakness of this fellow's life, his boring job, etc. It's a painful slog to what isn't so much an ending as just where Lane stopped typing. Why was this considered good?

"Against My Ruins" is science fiction of a sort. A man putters about in urban ruins after an undescribed holocaust. He meets a woman who shares what little she has (some stale crackers) with him. They have loveless sex. She takes him to the wrecked store where she got the stuff, and there is nothing left. They don't have sex. They sit together, depressed, until the sun rises. Why was this published?

By contrast, perhaps because it was written for a horror anthology, "The Window" begins with an arresting opening line ("It wasn't until the third date

that the boy asked Richard to behead him."), then proceeds to a conventional, though capably understated ending, almost as if Lane is deliberately copying the traditional form of the Modern Horror Story as precisely as if he were writing a sonnet. This is completely lucid, without any speculative or fantastic content, but a convincing study of psychopathic personalities who proceed from (gay) bondage-and-dominance to Jeffrey Dahmer style murders. (That ending, which will surprise no one, reads: "The only implement he had for digging was a rusty trowel. He'd expected the ground to be hard, but it wasn't. Not the first time, anyway.") Another story, "The Pain Barrier," likewise explores (gay) sex, pain, and desire, and even ventures briefly into the fantastic. Nicely written and atmospheric, if with a certain sameness of dark alleys and random encounters. This one was also written for a horror anthology. Could it be that Lane actually needs such market strictures to keep his fiction on track? (Yet "Exposure," published here for the first time, is not only a coherent supernatural horror story, but downright creepy.)

There is certainly craft here. There is awareness of such devices as the hook, rising tension, climax, anti-climax, and the art of heightening effect by leaving certain things to the imagination. What is going on? One might launch into a reactionary cant about how, in the age of Slipstream and the New Weird, lit-mag values have begun to infect the genres again, and it has become once more possible (as it was in the New Wave era) to publish formless lumps of prose and pass them off as stories — at least until the readers walk away. Or is it a matter of truly alien aesthetics? What does Lane think a story ought to do? Is his idea of human experience and human relationships so strange that many readers simply cannot, if you will pardon the redundancy, relate? Or is this just an uneven, undisciplined writer who misses as often as he hits the mark?

Therein lies the mystery. Only time will tell. If he continues to fascinate a growing audience, another explorer will have to return and penetrate the fogbank.

Cowboy Angels

By Paul McAuley (Gollancz, 2007, 425pp, £18.99)
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

In one of the essays included in his latest collection, *Heterocosms* (Borgo, 2007), Brian Stableford considers how a science fiction story should end. The point is that other generic fictions have an ideal end point — solving the crime, falling in love — that may be exploited or subverted by individual works. But science fiction offers a different type of story, and there is no generic end-point that helps to define it. This is true as far as it goes, but perhaps it does not go far enough.

By examining the climax of a story, Stableford is really looking at its structure. In many types of fiction there is a particular type of incident that sets the plot rolling (a crime, a chance meeting), there are certain stages that a plot must go through (the investigation, the on-off romance), and there is the end point that will therefore resolve, with greater or lesser satisfaction, all that has gone before. Stableford's point is that science fiction does not follow such a pattern, and indeed if you look at what drives the plot it does not. But plot is not the only driver of an sf story, the world also serves that function. In other words, science fiction presents us, of its nature, with a setting that is not wholly recognisable. It might be set so distant in time and space that nothing about it is familiar; it might be set in a parallel universe in which certain historical events have not followed the course we would anticipate; it might be set in a world that is exactly like the here and now we recognise, except for the intrusion of one technological device or the appearance of one alien character. Thus one of the starting points of an sf story (which may or may not play a part in driving the plot) is that element of unfamiliarity; and the end point at which it is aimed is making us understand something of the character or the consequences of that difference.

What's more, certain types of sf story have their own particular structures by which they move towards that end. Time stories, by which I mean stories involving time travel, multiple universes or some if not all alternate histories, almost invariably follow a circular or perhaps a spiral structure. The end point of the story brings us back to where we started, so that we might understand more thoroughly what is going on and how it came about. Paul McAuley's excellent new novel, *Cowboy Angels*, is not just a perfect exemplar of the use of this structure, but also makes a debate about the structure one of the driving forces of the plot. In other words, the principle characters in this novel come to recognise that they are in a temporal loop, and what then comes to drive the story is their individual take on whether or not they are condemned to repeat the actions that set the whole novel in motion, or whether there is a way to break the circle.

It is, as this might imply, a very self-referential type of science fiction. Sf novels are mentioned several times, characters named just once in passing are called Philip Kindred, Laumer and Leinster. Without articulating it, our three

central characters know that they are in a science fiction novel. Whether they also know that they are in a thriller is less clear. They talk casually about the good guys and the bad guys; and while they are quite confident that they are the good guys, they are less sure about who the bad guys might be. Which is as it should be in a thriller, at least in these days when we no longer believe in the black and white. But the hero of a thriller needs to be fast, strong and resilient, not self-reflective. While it seems quite appropriate to recognise your role in an sf novel, it seems totally out of place to recognise that you are taking part in a thriller. It is this disconnect that makes the combination of thriller and sf less common than we might expect, and that makes McAuley's success in blending the genres here so remarkable.

He does this by the simple expedient of making his characters inconsistent. As an sf novel the job of the book is to explain the world; and in these passages the characters are reflective intellectuals able to take on board complex existential notions. As a thriller, the job of the novel is to chart a course between realpolitik and morality; and in these passages the characters are hardy action heroes ready to shoot before they think. But for the most part we don't notice this inconsistency because of the skilful way McAuley varies the pace of the novel. When fists are called for, the writing is brisk, taut, sweeping you along willy-nilly; then it will abruptly slow to allow the contemplation of another curiosity of the multiverse in which the novel takes place. And if it seems that the disjunct might get in the way of the plot, McAuley brazenly points it out in a way that defuses (and diffuses) our unease. When our hero, Stone (what a wonderfully tough name that is for an action hero), is being tortured by thugs, one of them comments that Stone is too intellectual, has too much imagination, to resist, He's right, of course, so that when Stone does resist, indeed when at the peak of pain and exhaustion he is actually able to fight back, all this does is confirm his heroic status. Yet because even this brutish musclehead has recognised that Stone is an intellectual, we are able to accept that while fighting for his life he is also able to solve the science fictional puzzle of the world.

Or should I say worlds? McAuley presents us with a sequence of alternate worlds, each varying in some notable way from the history of the base reality that is here simply referred to as the Real. Each of these alternate histories is called a sheaf; the analogy is with sheaves of paper rather than of wheat, McAuley's characters flick through worlds as we might flick through the pages of a book. The way between these worlds is by Turing Gates, which were discovered in the Real but in no other reality. The America of the Real was shocked to find that the America of these other sheaves was not the all mighty power, but was rather under Nazi rule or communist rule or crippled by internal dissent or engaged in a debilitating war. The CIA therefore set out to spread American values, victory and hegemony into these other sheaves, fomenting wars and rebellions, aiding corrupt tyrants who were at least our corrupt tyrants, and in general bringing to these other USAs all the dubious practices that in our history they employed,

with varying success, across Latin America. (It is, perhaps, worth pointing out that our own reality is not the Real, we inhabit, rather, what is known here as the Nixon sheaf.)

The election of Jimmy Carter brings this warmongering to an end. The upper reaches of the CIA and the military are purged and contact between sheaves is limited to intelligence, aid, commerce and the occasional black-market deal. Or so it is supposed to be as the novel opens.

Such a multiverse is not exactly novel, science fiction writers have been playing with these ideas for a very long time. One thinks, for example, of Jack Vance's classic novella, 'Rumfuddle'. But, to start with, McAuley uses the multiverse to make a number of effective satirical points. We learn in passing of reality TV shows in which people from one sheaf are confronted with their avatars from other sheaves, who have usually been more successful in life. And I particularly liked the invention of a gangster who made himself a custodian of a major museum, so that every so often he could sell a unique masterpiece to a collector in another sheaf. More than this, however, McAuley combines the familiar multiverse setting with one of the most basic of thriller plots (an agent is called out of retirement to chase an old friend who has gone rogue, and in the process discovers corruption at the very top of his own organisation), and makes of it something that feels entirely new.

Stone is the agent who testified against his fellows and now lives a rural idyll in one of the uninhabited sheaves. But the agency calls him back because Tom Waverly, once one of the best of the 'cowboy angels', as the old agents were known, is apparently killing avatars of the same woman across sheaf after sheaf. Aided by Waverly's daughter, Stone tracks him down, but at the last moment Waverly, ravaged by radiation sickness, kills himself. Stone and Linda Waverly continue their investigations, trying to work out why Waverly was killing the same woman, then Tom reappears. It is this moment, when conspiracy thriller collides head-on with temporal paradox, that the novel really takes off. Combining the frenetic paranoia of betrayal and counter-betrayal typical of contemporary spy dramas with the paranoia-inducing unreliability of time and reality that emerge from time travel and alternate reality fictions is a heady mix that makes for a complex structure in which one must constantly doubt what is happening, whether it is doomed to happen again, and whether it never really happened in the first place. Can Tom avoid the radiation sickness that has already contributed to his death? Can Stone save the life of the girlfriend who has already been killed?

As the plot spirals, so that we start to see the beginning approach once more, we understand that in a time paradox story there is no finality. Not even death, the brute ending of most thrillers, need be a conclusion. Certainly there is a high-level conspiracy that, if unchecked, will lead to a resumption of warmongering across the sheaves, but foiling that (which provides the bloody, action-packed thread of the novel) is almost incidental to resolving the temporal paradoxes that multiply as the story progresses. All of which makes for

a gripping and satisfying enough story so that when McAuley briefly throws in time-travelling men in black from the future it seems too much for the story to bear, either an unnecessary addition to a plot that we must already struggle to hold in our minds, or perhaps a too-easy get-out clause for so rich an adventure. Nevertheless, as we come round to something like the beginning once more we can only applaud a book that is either a thriller as rich in ideas as the most complex science fiction, or a science fiction with the drive of a good thriller.

contributors

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