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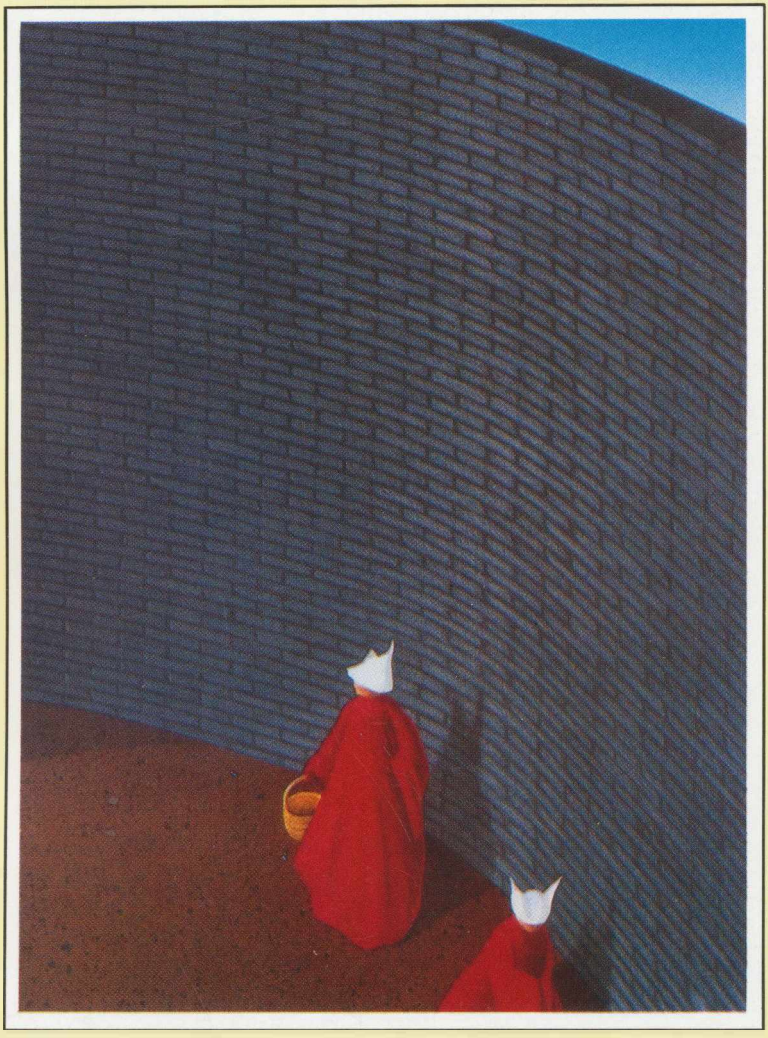
THE
REVIEW OF
SCIENCE FICTION

39



First Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award
The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

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FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

Editor: Edward James
Features Editor: Ian Watson
Reviews Editor: John Clute
Assistant Editor: Valerie Buckle
Advisory Editor: David Pringle

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Editorial

I had my first experience during this last year of being on a panel to select an sf award-winner. I was surprised, perhaps naïvely, at how unanimous it all was. Certainly some of the panelists (two representatives from each of three institutions: the British Science Fiction Association, the International Science Policy Foundation and the Science Fiction Foundation) had their own favourites. Two favoured Josephine Saxton's *Queen of the States* (Women's Press); I don't think I was alone in thinking Samuel R. Delany's *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (Grafton) to be an astonishing achievement (and I was pleased to see agreement of this view in an excellent review by Russell Blackford in the *Australian Science Fiction Review,* September 1986). But the panel was united in finding Bob Shaw's *The Ragged Astronauts* (Gollancz) exceptionally entertaining; and the whole panel was agreed that Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* deserved the first award of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, for its originality, for the relevance of its message, and for its literary power. We are grateful to Virago Press, who are publishing the paperback version in June, for contributing towards the cost of our colour cover; sadly, Jonathan Cape, the original British publisher, do not seem to have been interested in any way in publicising the success of their author—in winning what we trust will become a very distinguished award. We publish Brian Stableford's appreciation of the award-winning book at the very end of this issue.

Arthur C. Clarke has generously funded this award; it would be appropriate here to mention the 1987 Lindbergh Award. The Charles A. Lindbergh Fund makes grants to individuals who are pursuing projects in fields such as aviation and aerospace, communication or agriculture—projects which "contribute to the balance between technological advancement and preservation of the environment". And each year the Fund gives an award to individuals who have made significant contributions to this field: such men as Jacques Cousteau, Paul MacCready (designer of the *Gossamer Albatross*), or Thor Heyerdahl. This year on the 60th anniversary of Lindbergh's flight, the Fund has made its award to Arthur C. Clarke, whose "visions have been realised with technological competence and have affected our society and environment through a perspective of the earth as a whole rather than as isolated parts". We offer him our heartiest congratulations.

One piece of unpleasant news. At the time of issue 30 we increased the subscription rate to £7. This was in early 1984, nearly three and a half years ago. Printing costs have risen since, and we are going to have to increase the various subscription rates as from issue 40. The standard British rate will be £8.50, and the other rates will be raised in a similar proportion.

We intend to publish two more issues this calendar year, which will bring us back to our regular three-issues-a-year (from which there has been slight slippage). And we also intend to publish, uniform with the regular numbers, a full index to *Foundation* from 1 to 40. Old-timers will remember the index of volumes 1 to 8 which was compiled many years ago. An index of issues 9 to 27 was produced on the NELP computer. This has now been transferred to the University of York's mainframe, and I am busy bringing this up to date. The final index will not only be of titles, books reviewed, and contributing authors and reviewers, but will also include a comprehensive author and subject index of

the entire contents. But we can only publish this if we can get sufficient pre-publication subscriptions. Send your money in now, please, at the special pre-publication price of £2.95 ($6).

Edward James
May 1987

Note from Ian Watson

Terry Carr's death on April 7th 1987 is a huge loss to the science ficton community. Terry was an editor of, yes, genius, with the finest taste and almost precognitive instincts. Not only did he start the first Ace Specials series but the second one too. From *The Left Hand of Darkness* to *Neuromancer,* from *Rite of Passage* to *The Wild Shore* and *Green Eyes,* he was at the cutting edge of new imaginative novels, and he nurtured a generation of writers as diverse as R.A. Lafferty, Bob Shaw, Joanna Russ, Joe Haldeman. While, as regards short stories, his *Best Science Fiction of the Year* series was for many years perhaps *the* standard collection, and his original anthology series *Universe* was a very desirable residence.

He was a fine author in his own right, giving us one of the strangest, most original, and beautifully crafted novels, in *Cirque;* and amongst other memorable short tales is one of the best ever written by anyone, the classic "The Dance of the Changer and the Three".

And he was a fine human being, who enhanced life. The world is less.

K.V. Bailey last appeared in Foundation *35, exploring the games of science fiction. Here he adopts a different, and unique, perspective upon sf—viewing the genre in the mirror of Gilbert and Sullivan, and finding in Gilbert and Sullivan certain perennial essentials of the genre. For did not W.S. Gilbert write:*

I'm very good at integral and differential calculus,
I know the scientific names of beings animalculous;
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a writer science-fictional.

Archetypal Eagles, Operatic Sparrows

K.V. BAILEY

Eagle high in a cloudland soaring,
Sparrow twittering on a reed (*Utopia Ltd.*, Act II)

The comic operas of the Savoy canon may not overtly appear to have much in common with the literature of science fiction and fantasy. Yet beneath the surface of Gilbert's libretti there is a layer of symbolism and mythopoeic content which is continuous with what can also be discerned to underlie much of that literature.

It is remarkable that a hundred years after the first presentation (*The Mikado* ran from 1885 to 1887) of works which might be thought dramatically ephemeral, they remain in quotation and familiar allusion woven into the British socio-cultural fabric, different though its texture has become. The operas themselves are still alive in traditional and experimental production, on stage, in concert, in film and television through animation, pastiche and parody. They evoke in audiences more than a Victorian nostalgia: they can still produce a genuinely participatory appreciation. They were in their time topically satirical, but now as then (otherwise they would not have survived) they also work, as does much modern fantasy and science fiction, at imaginative depths—or heights—not always consciously suspected. Sparrows, like wrens, may ride on eagles' backs. As Walter Sichel in his study "The English Aristophanes" has said: "Gilbert's works form a sort of *scherzo serioso* relating them, however gaily, to the tragi-comedy of existence."

In fact, if we look at certain basic imaginative structurings in the operas, we find them in correspondence with major categories of the literature of fantasy (with which I include some modes of science fiction). After offering a general estimate of their place within that genre, I propose to consider specific operas in relation to the following headings: Alien and human; Gothic stereotype and archetype; "Edens" and exiles; magical metamorphoses; Utopian fantasy and satire.

Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, referring to what she terms Ursula Le Guin's "psycho-myths", says that they "provide a promise of redemption on cosmic and personal levels". They are "myths of psychic order which help to contain critiques of disorder". This aspect of them she sees as being in the tradition of

Kingsley, Macdonald and Tolkien. It was Tolkien, she points out, who used the word "eucatastrophe" to signify the highest function of fairy tale—to bring in its ending joy and consolation, denying defeat. As Dr Jackson goes on to say in her "Afterword", fantasy expresses the generation of oppositional energies within a stable culture containing repressive elements, and is inherently idealistic in that it articulates "a longing for imaginary unity, for unity in the realms of the imaginary".

In the context of their times the Savoy operas fulfilled to some extent this function as, I would suggest, in their own distinctive ways did a number of late nineteenth-century fictions which departed from the norms of conventional settings, social manners and psychological realism. Such might include Hudson's *A Crystal Age,* Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines,* diverse as these are in conception and style. The last-mentioned is an interesting example, its publication contemporaneous with the first staging of *The Mikado.* The story's essence is expressed in Ignosi's "Homeric paean": "The winter is overpast: the summer is ahead. Now shall Evil cover up her face, and prosperity shall bloom in the land like a lily." Kukuanaland then becomes a sort of utopia to which the reassembled Quatermain band can look back with longing through remembered tribulations.

All ideal states have as premiss a prior state of disturbance. In the case of the Savoy operas this state of disturbance is often the topsy-turvying of a stable norm to an extent that verges on violence or even tragedy. The disturbance is then resolved with the aid of paradox or comedy. As Walter Kerr says in his *Comedy and Tragedy,* comedy owes everything to tragedy—"both the gift of a thing to be parodied and also the ultimate promise of a new state of being in which all private exasperations and secret despairs will be melted away . . ."

Along such paths of empathy is the spectator of drama drawn towards catharsis, comedy and paradox having distinctive roles particularly in plays dwelling on the miraculous or fantastic, from the Wakefield Mystery Cycles, through *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Peer Gynt* and Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah.* In the Preface to *Back to Methuselah* Shaw places himself in the line of descent of writers of comedy who "kept the theatre open when sublime tragedy perished", admitting that he has also hitched his wagon to the mythical: "I . . . go back to the legend of the Garden of Eden (and) exploit the eternal interest of the philosopher's stone which enables men to live for ever." In Savoy opera performances the original audiences experienced tightly organised presentations of song, speech, mime and dance in proscenium settings where a new brilliance of lighting and sophistication of stage design and direction combined to give realism to unreality and to provide a frame for those chorused finales in which blemish has been remedied and confusions resolved (as in *The Mikado* when: "The threatened cloud has passed away/And brightly shines the dawning day.") The predominantly middle-class audiences, as the long runs, revivals and repertory tours and seasons grew into an institution, became votaries in formal, yet relaxing, celebrations. Herbert Weisinger in his essay "The Twisted Cue" has suggested that the pattern of religious ritual is the ultimate source for the structure of and action within the libretti, and that their ability to move audiences derives from the "imminent power of this pattern infused and diffused through them".

There is a dichotomy between, on the one hand this formal structuring, in which requital for crime, anguish for guilt, atonement, sacrifice, judgement and the *hieros*

gamos are all in melodramatic vein variously represented, and, on the other hand the humorously inconsequential counter-structure of satire, nonsense, distorted logic, and paradox which confounds, convulses and enchants the audience. It is through this dichotomy that the dynamics of the operas, in both their mythopoeic and dramatic dimensions, most typically operate. If there is justice in dubbing Gilbert "the English Aristophanes" it is because, as Walter Sichel has diagnosed, while both are concerned with the ephemera of their day, they both also "saw beneath the surface of the passing show". If Aristophanes did this in *The Birds* and *The Clouds,* so did Gilbert in such works as *Iolanthe*—which is the first of the operas that I now propose to relate in detail to one of the categories of fantasy listed earlier.

Alien and human (Iolanthe)

As in other operas we shall be considering, there is in *Iolanthe* a mixture of themes, "Edens" and exiles being also an integral one. It is essentially an opera of oppositions, involving the two types of being defined in its alternative title *The Peer and the Peri* (Peri, from the Persian "a beautiful being" = a winged fairy). These two types, as in Gilbert's earlier play *The Wicked World,* occupy different though potentially interacting worlds. There is a mundane world and a magical world: a lower and an upper world. Symbolising this, a locational and "mood" opposition is established by the contrasting scenes of the two acts. That of Act I is "an Arcadian landscape" on the bank of a river, with a rustic bridge: that of Act II (on the bank of another less innocent river) is the sentry-patrolled Palace Yard at night, with Westminster Hall and the Clock Tower in the background.

These settings embody yet another opposition. Just as in certain of Shakespeare's plays (e.g. *Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It, A Winter's Tale*), there are symbolic Court/Arcady separations, so in *Iolanthe* the Lord Chancellor presides over his tantantara, brass-banging procession, heads his "Paragons of legislation", while the Fairy Queen presides over the carefree fairy dance, circling "Nobody knows why or whither". Lord Chancellor law is logical, fairy law is flexible: the Peers are human and mortal, the Peris "alien" and immortal. The links between the two worlds and between Court and Arcady are Iolanthe herself and her son Strephon: Iolanthe because she has married a mortal; Strephon, the Arcadian shepherd, because in his prison he hybridises the two worlds, saying of himself: "My upper half is immortal, but my lower half grows older every day, and some day must die of old age. What's to become of my upper half when I've buried my lower half I really don't know!"

Strephon's hope to marry the shepherdess Phyllis is frustrated by the Lord Chancellor whose chancery ward, and desired bride, she is. He and the Peers brashly intrude into Arcady with their chorus "Loudly let the trumpet bray" and his song about the Law being "the true embodiment/Of everything that's excellent". Iolanthe has been pardoned for her mortal marriage, and Strephon's suit is championed by the Fairy Queen, who then proceeds to punish the Peer's mortal *hubris* by a "doom appalling". This turns out to be the introduction of half-mortal Strephon into Parliament, with fairy-given power arbitrarily to upset any legislation. Supporting him in his mission to make Lords and Commons "shake in their shoes", the Peris in Act II intrude into the Court (Palace Yard), just as in Act I the Peers had intruded into Arcady. Strephon's activities give scope for dated (but not entirely so) political satire. As the Peers give pathetic accounts of root-and-branch subversions of procedure, the listening Peris become rather enamoured of them,

and this fairy/mortal attraction and polarity is at the focus of the remainder of the opera.

In the dénouement Iolanthe (to free Phyllis to marry Strephon) discloses that while she is Strephon's immortal mother, the Lord Chancellor is his mortal father. Her punishment (loss of immortality) for revealing this is halted when it appears that all the Peris have married Peers. To avoid a general fairy doom the casuistry of man's law is exercised. The Lord Chancellor drafts "don't" for "do" into the fairy statute, thus making mortal-immortal union not only permissible but mandatory. As the two worlds merge, the Queen herself takes as spouse the manly Palace sentry. When the Queen invites the Peers "to join our ranks" they make a "Happy exchange-/House of Peers for House of Peris!" Sprouting wings, they disappear with their immortal brides "Up in the air, sky-high, sky-high . . ." That finale, comic-operatically absurd though it is, is both liberating and unitary in its import. It resolves duality in the "sacred marriage" *(hieros gamos)*, restoring alienated mortals and perpetuating a paradisal Arcady.

Throughout *Iolanthe* a complex of symbolic motifs resonates, as it does in that considerable body of past and contemporary fantasy which is of similar archetypal provenance, and which has a comparable content of aetherial/material, soul/body, life/death, imagery. In such fantasies love, in aspect of either agape or eros, constitutes that which transcends or unites. We find representations of this in Shakespeare's Oberon, Bottom, Titania triangle; and in the last book of Blake's *Vala,* where the Cupid and Psyche motif is detectable in relationships between Luvah and Vala and Tharmas and Enion. A fairy tale variation occurs in Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête.* In C.S. Lewis's *Until We Have Faces* the Cupid and Psyche myth is overtly used, while Robert Silverberg's fable of "Thesme and the Ghayrog" (*Majipoor Chronicles*) in echoing it achieves a subtle interweaving of agape and eros. Thesme has correspondences with Psyche, with Iolanthe, and with Vala. Blake's Vala, "sweet wanderer" in the invisible Luvah's "lower paradise", which is also the "world of shadows", bathes, emerges from, and sees herself reflected in the river of materiality and sensuousness. Silverberg's alienated Thesme wanders in the rain forest where "the heavy humid air clung to everything like a furry shroud." There she finds a kind of redemption in her ambivalently loving association with the reptilian Chayrog. From this half-idyll, half-ordeal, sexual and spiritual, she emerges saying; "I know I look like a wild animal, but I just need my hair trimmed and a new tunic and I'll be human again."

Such neoplatonic resonances also occupy the mythic dimensions of *Iolanthe.* One aspect of its "lower world" is the stream-bottom, scene of Iolanthe's life banishment. The stage directions are that she rises from the water clad in water-weeds, and that on the words "thou art pardoned" her weeds fall away and the Queen, embracing her, places a diamond coronet on her head. Iolanthe had chosen for place of exile the damp river-bed, living, to the fairies' horror, among the frogs. This was in order to be near her half-mortal son (he, like the amphibious frogs, a creature of two worlds). Such "amphibian" creatures of matter (often symbolised by water) united with or metamorphosed into freer creatures of the upper air (or outer space), populate many science fictions and fantasies. Van Vogt's Silkie in the novel of that name, the "aztec" pilots and sub-ocean divers of Vonda McIntyre's *Superluminal,* and the cyborg, Torraway, of Pohl's *Man Plus* are all examples.

Colonel Torraway of the last-named novel may seem an unlikely counterpart to any character in *Iolanthe,* but, even though *Man Plus* is "hard" science fiction, there are

equivalent mythic and symbolic semblances in his "amphibious" nature. His story in essence concerns the saving and lifting (by an unseen Machine Intelligence) of humanity to another world (Mars), Torraway being the prototype so cybernetically transformed as to be able to inhabit that world of new potential. On earth his transformation is described in the chapter headed "Mortal Becoming Monster". His insect-faceted eyes, his limbs, his metabolism, become out of tune with the earth, his perceptions and behaviour progressively more confused, his marital situation more distressful. The enchantment of music and dance, and the ministrations of his wife-substitute, *anima*-representing mentor, Sulie, assist a reorientation preparatory to his climactic emergence, "his great black wings hovering behind him", on Mars. Then, through his new Mars-adapted eyes "looking out on the bright, jewel-like colours of the place he was meant to live on" he sees it as "a fairyland, beautiful and inviting". He enters it under the monitoring guidance of an insubstantial electronically-induced Wife/Sulie mental image; but it is Sulie herself who eventually "becomes a Martian" to inhabit this "fairyland" with him. The cross-connections between these events and relationships and those of Cupid and Psyche and *Iolanthe* are, of course, not straightforward. The works employ different fictional frames and techniques; but their underlying symbolic and psychological near-identity in the use of human/non-human/alien tropes is impossible to ignore. They have their distinctive places within the same category of fantasy.

Gothic Stereotypes and Universal Archetypes (Ruddigore)

Ruddigore or *The Witch's Curse* sets out to satirise not only "graveyard" and "supernatural" melodrama, but, as W.A. Darlington notes in *The World of Gilbert and Sullivan,* the "village romance" type of Victorian play. The basic plot, however, is made to centre upon the "good" character, Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd, alias Robin Oakapple, who is attempting to escape the inherited witch's curse by assuming the guise of a simple farmer. Betrayed by his bride-usurping sailor foster-brother, Dick Dauntless, Robin/Sir Ruthven is compelled to take the curse and its responsibilities from the shoulders of his younger blood-brother, Sir Despard. When he shirks the doom of the curse—which is to commit an evil deed a day on pain of excruciating death—he is hounded by the revenant dead (ancestral ghosts stepping from their picture-frames), whose duty it is to ensure the working of the inherited curse by applying torture. Sir Ruthven has to turn from a Jekyll into a reluctant Hyde; but he and his immediate predecessor, Sir Roderick, are released from the curse when they realise that, paradoxically, by not committing a crime they have (virtually) committed suicide, which is in itself a finalising crime. They are saved by giving in to and, like a judo thrower, using the power of the curse.

Interwoven with this plot are the fates of Rose, the fickle maiden, Margaret, the Ophelia-like mad maiden, and Hannah the long-deserted one, whose lover (Sir Roderick) is reclaimed from the grave. All are parodied stock characters of rustic and Gothic melodrama, yet their roles counterpoint the main themes of the persistence and avoidance of the witch's curse. Rose and Hannah, respectively in their vacillations and turns of fortune, and in their joint madrigal, sound the note of mutability, of change within the stable closed round of the seasons:

> In the springtime seed is sown:
> In the summer grain is grown:
> In the autumn you may reap:
> Winter is the time for sleep.

As in *Iolanthe,* the settings of the two Acts are significant. Act I—the village, the cottage, is idyllic, its songs and imagery flowery and vernal, its stage populated by the "perpetual Bridesmaids". But if the madrigal is the typifying sound of Act I, the *Totentanz* is that of Act II, which takes place in the menacing Portrait Gallery of Ruddigore Castle, with the faces of the past looking down from its walls. It is here that Robin Oakapple, now again Sir Ruthven, is severely if comically inquisitioned and tortured for dodging the commission of really wicked deeds. He is reminded of "the conditions under which you are permitted to exist":

Set upon thy course of evil,
Lest the King of Spectre-Land
Set on thee his grisly hand.

The curse on the Murgatroyd line was laid by a witch who was burnt by its founder. Seen in this light, the persecuting ancestors are her instruments. Their accusing shades are akin to the Erinyes, the relentless Furies of Greek mythology. As described by John Stuart Blackie (whose classic translations I later quote from) in introducing Aeschylus's *The Eumenides,* the Furies are of Homeric descent and should be regarded "primarily as the impersonation of an imprecation which a person, whose natural rights have been grossly violated, pronounces on the person by whom this violation comes"; but he also confirms the alternative—or complementary—view that they are "the impersonations of an evil conscience, the incarnated scourges of self-reproach".

In Aeschylus's *Coephori* it is Clytemnestra who imposes the curse on Orestes just before he kills her: "Beware thy mother's anger-whetted hounds", she says; and immediately after her murder the curse begins to take effect. The Furies appear to Orestes and pursue him, "all dusk-vested and their locks entwined/With knotted snakes". The Chorus tells him that they are only "vain phantoms"; but Orestes says:

These are no phantoms but substantial horrors;
Too like themselves they show, the infernal hounds
Sent from my mother!

Their pursuit of Orestes continues through *The Eumenides,* in which he describes himself as "the curse-beladen wanderer", but hopes that with the passage of time the curse may be lifted. In his final trial he is liberated through the influence of Athene, Queen of Heaven. She then calms the affronted Furies, who in their anger have threatened to make the land barren: "No green blade shall spring/Where the Fury is treading." Athene, however, says: "Let the green earth swell with the exuberant flow/Of fruit and flowers . . ."; and she will leave the briars and thorns as the province of the Furies. This they accept as honourable and disappear underground, retreating "to hallowed habitations/'Neath Ogyian Earth's foundations" to assume the role of guardians of order.

Moving from Greek tragedy to Victorian fantasy, however bizarre the contrast, we find Robin/Sir Ruthven treading in the footsteps of Orestes. The curses on both stem from a killing. Both Orestes (in Euripedes's version) and Sir Ruthven face the possibility of suicide. The crime, in the one case, is a royal matricide; in the other, a witch-killing—and witches are evocative of Hecate, Queen of Hades, whence the Furies are loosed. The Furies' intent to confront Orestes with "all the guilty who inherit woe" has its counterpart in what confronts Sir Ruthven when out of the darkness step those "Painted emblems of a race,/All accurst in days of yore."

Wilson Knight, in *The Golden Labyrinth,* has viewed the Orestes myth as one in which

"a darkly feminine, Dionysian force from the past disrupts civilisation and clogs advance." He goes on to say that, as Aeschylus develops the theme, freedom from inherited compulsions may be won provided we do not reject, but honour the dark entities, who then become the guardians and kindly powers. Through all the comic melodrama of the closing scenes of *Ruddigore* an echo of this reverberates. Sir Ruthven, rather to his own embarrassment, but under the compulsion of the curse, has abducted Hannah, who attacks him with such primitive tigerishness that he calls on the avenging ancestors to save him. Sir Roderick steps down from his picture-frame and is recognised by Hannah as her old love. Their reunion leads to the "tantamount to suicide" paradox solution, which gives Sir Roderick life again and releases Sir Ruthven from the curse. He is then able to revert from the Hyde to the Jekyll persona of Robin Oakapple, who will marry Rose Maybud and return as "a simple farmer" to "agricultural employment". In that mixture of gothic stereotype and universal archetype the far figures of Orestes and the Furies are seen, at first dimly but soon distinctly, in Victorian theatrical dress; and there is promise of fruitfulness and renewal.

The theme is perennial, and unmistakably alive in twentieth-century fantasy and science fiction. Mark Rose in his *Alien Encounters* writes: ". . . corpses that dance and sing draw their powers from the boundaries they transgress". Their domain, he says, is the grotesque, an estranged world from which may be invoked "the dark forces that lurk behind our world today, threatening its disintegration". Art is a means by which, through their portrayal, "the ominous powers are discovered and challenged."

A work of science fiction which would exemplify this, and one with an implicit Orestean motif, is Lem's *Solaris*. The Phi-creatures have something of the nature of the Furies and of the Ruddigore ancestors. Rheya, Kelvin's tangible but "ghostly" wife, is such, the Solaris-created revenant for whose suicide Kelvin feels the guilt of a murderer, and who in relation to Kelvin is both a Fury and a "gracious one". ("Eumenides" means "gracious ones", a placatory euphemism and an allusion to their potential beneficence.) As Kelvin's colleague, Snow, surmises: "You could say that it (the planet) has taken account of desires, looked into the secret recesses of our brains"; and Kelvin in the novel's hopeless/hopeful conclusion asks: "Are we to grow used to the idea that every man relives his ancient torments, which are all the more profound because they grow more comic by repetition?"

Ray Bradbury's *The Silver Locusts* also has an Orestean strand. One of its themes, explored in the chapters "Night Meeting" and "The Off Season", is the haunting, taunting presence of long-dead or vanished Martians. A variation on the theme is the lethal retribution visited by the dark powers (i.e. the Martians) for the poisoning of their planet and their own decimation. In the chapter "The Martian" they act as avenging Furies. First, as simulacra of the human dead or lost ones, they draw on the memories, hopes and fears of their victims. They then spread death and discord as at critical moments they resume their native shapes. In Bradbury's book man is never really released from his guilt and punishment for the murder of a planet. The up-beat ending, while promising a new beginning, is conveniently idealistic, its imagery in tone more ironically narcissistic than revivifying. The images of seasonal renewal so poignantly introduced into the penultimate chapter, "There Will Come Soft Rains" (the circling swallows, the "wild plum-trees in tremulous white") are uttered by computerised machinery speaking to a tenantless habitation, which the machine will ultimately destroy. They occur in a poem

with the humanly barren conclusion that, of the planet's other creatures:

> Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
> If mankind perished utterly;
>
> And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
> Would scarcely know that we were gone

This down-beat "doom" is in the mood of Wells's Time Traveller who "saw in the growing pile of civilisation only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end".

It is perhaps an unusual thought that at one time W.S. Gilbert and H.G. Wells were contemporary writers; that "The Chronic Argonauts" (1888) appeared shortly before the first night of *The Gondoliers,* and *The Time Machine* (1895) a year before the last of the operas, *The Grand Duke.* A thematic resemblance between the trials of the generation-ranging Time Traveller and those of Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd may not be immediately obvious; but it exists in the relationship of both to the Orestes archetype. The Time Traveller is one of the great humanity surrogate figures of science fiction. Brian Burden in *Foundation* 31 has already traced in him the lineaments of Oedipus and Prometheus; and there are certainly aspects of his experiences which are akin to those of Orestes—and of Sir Ruthven. When the Traveller first glimpses the pale Morlocks he says: "They must have been ghosts . . . I wonder whence they dated." Later he tries to evade "the horror that was coming upon me" but cannot do so, for even in attempting to regard the nightmare as "rigorous punishment" for man's past actions, he is conscious of himself as representative of man's past; in sharing the Eloi's genetic origins, he feels compelled to be "a sharer in their degradation". The process by which the Morlocks had become debased, and the Eloi their prey, was one in which man "had taken Necessity as his watchword and excuse, and in the fullness of time Necessity had come home to him". The Traveller is pursued and tormented by the Morlocks: "I was caught by the neck, by the hair, by the arms and pulled down . . . It was indescribably horrible in the darkness . . . I felt little teeth nipping at my neck." After being pursued in a still later age by crab-like "sinister apparitions", and experiencing "the horror of (a) great darkness", he escapes by going backwards through time until "the sun got golden again, the sky blue." Wells's theme is one of provisional and temporary restoration, but of restoration nevertheless. In the "Epilogue" it is the two white flowers given to him by Weena that are symbols of the survival of human values in face of the darkness that has come out of the past. They are reminiscent of the time when "they (the Eloi) were all running to and fro for flowers, and laughingly flinging them upon me until I was almost smothered with blossom."

Just as the light-hating Morlocks emerge at dusk and come from under the ground, so in Ruddigore Castle the portrait-embodied ancestors descend from its walls as the stage darkens; or, as in their *Totentanz* song, leave their graves "at the dead of the night's high noon", not to retreat underground until the coming of daylight. In the conclusions of both Wells's scientific romance and Gilbert's libretto there are "redemptive" flower motifs. The end-sequence of *Ruddigore* starts with the "oak-tree and little flower" constant-for-ever duet, sung by the reinstated Hannah and the resurrected Sir Roderick. In it the gloom of "the lowering tempest" is dispelled. Events then move rapidly to the lifting of the curse and the final reconciling ensemble of love and fertility: "For happy the lily/That's kissed by the bee . . .", marking the union of Robin and Rosebud, "the bride of seventeen summers", and of Dame Hannah and Sir Roderick. It is, in lesser key, all

rather like the scene in those stanzas of Spenser's *Mutability Cantos* where "On Haemus Hill", to celebrate the "bridall cheare/Twixt Peleus and Dame Thetis", the earth is "dight with flowres, that voluntary grew/Out of the ground."

These elements in novel and libretto reflect (not derivatively but by drawing on common archetypal concepts and imagery) the mood of the final speeches of *The Eumenides:* of darkness giving place to light, of release from guilt, of concord and the continuance or renewal of the life-cycle. After Orestes has been freed from the curse and his tormentors, the Furies, sent underground again, and after assurance of the land's future fertility has been given to him, Athene speaks of "the way of love", and, in the drama's historical context addressing the Athenians, calls for a hymn to celebrate all things that "from Earth/From the sea's briny dew, and from the sky/Bring blessings". She promises the now quiescent Furies that:

> The marshalled host of Theseus' sons shall march
> In festive train with you, both man and woman,
> Matron and maid, green youth and hoary age.

The strangely ambiguous ending of *Solaris* takes place on the beach of a nimoid island. From there the universe seems little more sympathetic than it does from Wells's end of time, and Kelvin is disillusioned of "the age-old faith of lovers and poets"; yet, he records: "A flower had grown out of the ocean, and its calyx was moulded to my fingers."

"Edens" and exiles (The Pirates of Penzance)

"Edens" and exiles denotes a theme-complex in fantasy literature which, as observed earlier, is also present in *Iolanthe.* Variations on it are discernible in contemporary psycho-fantasy and meta-myth, for example, Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* and John Crowley's *Little, Big;* in such fantasy/sf hybrids as Ballard's *The Unlimited Dream Company* or C.S. Lewis's *Perelandra;* and even in the realistic science fiction of, say, John Christopher's *A Wrinkle in the Skin* and *The Death of Grass* or Hilbert Schenck's *A Rose for Armageddon.* What these various works have in common is the delineation of an area of inner or outer space, of mind or memory, imaged in sanctuary, park, continent, island or planet, which is fenced off from, but may be invaded by, an environing unfriendliness. Within such an enclave man finds his "Eden". Beyond its perimeter a surrounding world exists which may be destructive or intrusive, but which in some cases must be encountered before an "Eden" may be realised or regained. In so far as he is excluded from "Eden" man is in some sort of condition of exile or alienation. The Hawkins Island of *A Rose for Armageddon* is such an "Eden" and so, in its way, is the Edgewood of *Little, Big.*

As the critic W.A. Darlington observed *(The World of Gilbert and Sullivan),* the pirates of *The Pirates of Penzance* "have nothing to do with that respectable little seaside town" and "this purely imaginary Cornwall" is "a world of fantasy". The daughters of Major General Stanley, as they enter "threading long and leafy mazes/Dotted with unnumbered daisies", live "in a world that's all our own . . . far away from mortal men". Kate says: "We are probably the first human beings who ever set foot in this delightful spot." Into their "Eden" comes Frederick, by a fateful youthful mix-up compelled to live out his apprenticeship as an outlawed pirate, but now of age and free. He is led towards rehabilitation by Mabel's lyrically tuneful song "Poor wandering one!" But the pirates stealthily intrude on their "Eden", seizing the daughters and threatening the General with

death. All this he averts by playing on the pirates' absurd sentimentality, claiming, untruthfully, to be an orphan.

In the contrasting Second Act, his deception having brought "anguish dread" upon the General and disgrace on generations of his (by purchase) ancestors, he repents before their tombs in the moonlit Gothic chapel. In this fallen "Eden" his flock of daughters clad in white peignoirs and carrying candles circle round him resembling a *miserere* procession. Outside prowl the pirates, looking in through the ruined windows, and eventually breaking in to claim back Frederick by "a most ingenious paradox". His indenture had released him from pirate apprenticeship on his twenty-first birthday; but it now appears that he was born on a leap-year's extra day, so while in the "Eden" world he may aspire to freedom, in the inexorable world of pirate law he has had only five birthdays and is enslaved for sixty years more. (The opera's alternative title is *The Slave of Duty*.)

The occurrence of such differing scales and rates of time is a feature of the many "Edens" of *illud tempus:* Shakespeare's *As You Like It* "Eden", for example, the Forest of Arden, where the Duke's young gentlemen "fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world". It is a forest where "there are no clocks" and where, in Rosalind's words: "Time travels in divers paces with divers persons." Time paradoxes, arrests, and changing scales appear in a wide range of science fiction and fantasy—from the simplicity of folk tales of the sleeper under the fairy hill, through all the Rip Van Winkle variations, to the sophistication of Vonnegut's alternative temporal modes in *The Sirens of Titan*.

In Vonnegut's novel Rumfoord, contemplating in his "chrono-synclastic infundibulated way" his impending departure, says: "It's a very good thing really . . . one gets tired, you know, being caught in the monotonous clockwork of the solar system." From Vonnegut's metaphysical paradoxes to Gilbert's paradoxical pleasantries is a fairish step; but the relativity of time and its relationship to "law" is germane to both. Frederick is subject to man's calendric law made, as the Pirate King explains, by "some person in authority . . . very likely the Astronomer Royal". As a result of this he is in duty bound, as a reclaimed pirate apprentice, to expose the General's deception; and he has to tell Mabel that their marriage must await the future year 1940 *(The Pirates* was produced in 1880). An "Edenic" note is reintroduced with the song of the squad of police who, "a-basking in the sun" off-duty, "love to hear the little brook a-gurgling/And listen to the merry village chime"; and through the General's song "Sighing softly to the river". Almost immediately Frederick's bondage is cancelled by the wholesale translation of the pirate body to the verge of "Eden". This is effected by their sudden submission to Queen Victoria. "We yield at once, with humble mien,/Because, with all our faults, we love our Queen."

Paradoxically, then, it is the Court which represents a hierarchical and redemptively transcending "Eden"/"Paradise"—as in the mixture of rustic revelries and ducal restitutions of *As You Like It,* or the resolving of disharmonies at Theseus's celebratory feast in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With this theme is often intertwined that of the "exiles" outside "Eden" assuming new roles and being received back into it. In *The Pirates* it is revealed that the entire band "are all noblemen who have gone wrong" and they are then reinstated to their proper ranks and responsibilities, uniting with the Major-General's daughters in the final reprise of "Poor wandering one!". Such an end to "exile" and to wandering is the stuff of legends and ballads, and is equally prominent in contemporary works of fantasy—for example, in Jack Vance's *Marune,* in Katherine Kurtz's *High Deryni,* even thematically in Mervyn Peake's *Titus Alone,* where Titus Groan, then an

abdicating wanderer, seeks in reverie his own Domain—a "home where the dust gathered and where legends are". The same motif runs through Silverberg's fantasy *Lord Valentine's Castle*. Envisaged distantly from Zimroel, Castle Mount is an "Eden" of restoration. Valentine, amidst his company of vagrants, is told by the dream-speaker; "You have fallen from a high place, and now you must climb back to it."When after its picaresque journeyings the band reaches Castle Mount, and Valentine is about to assume the throne, there is realisation of "a grave and solemn alteration in his life. He knew beyond doubt that his time as a wandering juggler, the freest and in some ways the most joyful in his life, was ended now, and the responsibilities of power were descending on him once again."

A quite similar ambivalence runs through *As You Like It*. It is the same Duke who eventually rejoices in his "returnéd fortune" and "new fall'n dignity" as earlier deemed the forest life of his retinue of outlaws "more sweet than that of painted pomp", and asked "Are not these woods/More free from peril than the envious court?" And so it is too in *The Pirates*. Those fallen peers, restored and urged by the General to "resume your ranks and legislative duties" are the same outlaws who opened the opera with: "Pour, oh, pour the pirate sherry,/Fill, oh, fill the pirate glass" and who, abjuring "the cheating world", were happy to join with the Pirate King in singing: "Oh, better far to live and die/Under the brave black flag I fly."

There is, thus, beneath the opera's picturesque settings, witty lyrics and engaging music, this mythopoeic structure of the losing and regaining of an "Eden"; and it presents the paradox that the condition of "exile" may have attractive "Eden"-like aspects, while the regained or transcending state of freedom may by its very nature incur an inescapable onus. The emotive impact of this recognition, experienced amidst the nonsense and burlesque half-consciously (as it may also be amidst the romanticism and theatricality of fantasy literature), is one factor contributing to the lasting appeal of *The Pirates*.

Magical Metamorphoses (The Sorcerer)

The mind, perception, or body-changing philtre is as old as the drinking of *kykeon* at Eleusis, or as splashes from the cauldron of Taliesin. It is present in the alchemists' elixir; in the hallucinogens of William Burroughs's *Nova Express,* which "shift the scanning pattern of 'reality' so that we see a different 'reality' "; in Merlin's theriomorphically effective potion in *The Sword in the Stone;* in the concoction of Doctor Jekyll; and in the drugs and dynamos of *The Invisible Man*.

The work of ingested "magic" in such fictions may have some correspondence with the effects of actual drugs, but more significantly, it represents the mutations of mind or body that dream, fantasising or other subconscious activities can conjure up. It may facilitate communication with superhuman, alien or animal entities; may endow the subject with strange powers (levitation, telepathy, invisibility); or may alter emotional and erotic dispositions—the juice of Oberon's "little western flower" did just that.

An obsessive idea with Gilbert was the change of human nature for the better by means of a magic coin or swallowed lozenge. In 1884 during the run of *Princess Ida* he proposed to Sullivan a plot in which each character was to be metamorphosed into an ideal version of his or her self; but Sullivan would not have it, so *The Mikado* was devised instead. In one of their earliest collaborations, however, *The Sorcerer* (1877), something similar was at the heart of the plot. The scene of the first Act is the betrothal feast of Alexis, the son of

Sir Marmaduke Pointdextre, the village squire of Ploverleigh, and Aline, the daughter of Lady Sangazure, a supposed descendant of Helen of Troy. Alexis has the vision of breaking down the barriers of rank, education, wealth and age by what amounts to social miscegenation, love being the great solvent. The name character in Mervyn Peake's *Mr Pye* has a similar idea, and experiments with largely negative results on the little world of Sark—love being in Peake's fantasy aspected as agape. Gilbert's libretto aspects it as eros. In it he satirises both the initial condition and the great change to what in the 1870s would have been considered social anarchy. To fulfil his purpose Alexis brings in the magician, John Wellington Wells, "a dealer in magic and spells" and an adept of "Lectro-biology, mystic nosology, spirit philology, high-class astrology" etc. Summoning up a chorus of spirits and friends, this Sorcerer empties phials of an elixir into the teapots of the village feast—the result, all the characters unconscious on stage as the Act ends, destined to fall in love with whoever they first see on waking.

As in *The Pirates* and *Iolanthe,* Act II is performed in moonlight. (Gilbert's plots and songs abound in sun-moon symbolic contrasts.) At midnight the entranced villagers awake, and soon, as Alexis says: "The whole village has been paired off in the happiest manner. And not a match has been made that the hollow world would not consider ill-advised!" But things go wrong for him when he finds that his father is enamoured of the pew-opener, Dame Partlet; his fiancée of the aged vicar; and his mother of the Sorcerer. Only when the Sorcerer, pressured by the villagers, yields himself up in lieu of Alexis to the underworld deity Ahrimanes is every spell-bound character released to his or her natural lover. A hierarchical (and erotic) equilibrium is then restored—an effect equivalent to that of Puck's corrective herb which restores the confused Athenian lovers to each other and, breaking the miscegenation of Bottom and Titania, reunites the Fairy Queen with Oberon. Then, as Puck says: "Jack shall have Jill . . . And all shall be well." In the conclusion of *The Sorcerer* Sir Marmaduke's "Come to my mansion all of you! At least/We'll crown our rapture with another feast" is answered by the final ensemble "Now to the banquet we press . . .", which, comically but surely, parallels the situation and Theseus's words at the end of the *Dream:* "A fortnight hold we this solemnity/In nightly revels and new jollity."

What we have been considering is a magic which leads to worlds turned upside down, a progression of fantasies, confusing yet cathartic. They precede a return to normalcy, but leave some lingering enchantment and enrichment of the imagination. *The Sorcerer* lies well within this tradition. It has also a dark streak, common to kindred fictions of fantasy: there is a cancelling, a dying, a sacrifice that all may be restored. The Sorcerer vanishes beneath the earth surrounded by fire and smoke with the cry: "Be happy all leave me to my despair—/I go—it matters not with whom—or where"; but this is at once forgotten in the "Unmingled joy! Ecstatic rapture!" of the reunited who find things just as they had previously been.

Within this tradition of magic are many fantasies unlike in style and detail but very similarly rooted. In Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland*, for example, Alice's confusion of identity after she has descended the rabbit hole arises out of changes in size and perception, the result of her experiments with the "Drink Me" potion, the "Eat Me" cake and the magic mushroom. When the Caterpillar asks: "Who are *You?*", she replies: "I hardly know . . ." She longs for her former state: "It was much pleasanter at home, when I wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits."

During the final trial of the Knave of Hearts, as Alice gradually assumes her proper size it is *her* head that the Queen orders to be cut off; but, beating off the attacking cards, with a scream "half of fright, half of anger", she returns to experience the normal world precisely as she had left it, finding herself "lying on the bank with her head on her sister's lap".

Ian Watson's trilogy which opens with *The Book of the River* has similar ingredients. Yaleen, his protagonist/heroine, drinks the initiatory phial of the Black Current, and later is seized with a madness which propels her via the Black Current itself to descend the Worm's gullet into its cavernous Ka-store. She goes on to a succession of experiences, traumatic and ecstatic—of other people's lives, of occupation of alien bodies, of reluctant existence as a cherub ("I'd *liked* my old body: I'd been at home in it!"); and of death and rebirth as her own sister. In the final volume (*The Book of Being*) the "Time-stop" experience of the "Grand Climacteric" precedes a return to the "normalcy" of the desert balloon expedition, enacted in the same naturalistic dimension as that in which the trilogy began. In its "Afterword" the Guild Mistress/historian of the future, even while demythologising Yaleen's story, justifies the myth because ". . . the imagination needs uplifting. Joy is not to be sniffed at." So it is with all of these fictions of magically activated metamorphosis. Alice looks back on her dream as both "curious" and "wonderful". There is both trauma and joy to be experienced in empathising with these subjects of identity-change and confusion—the enchanted lovers of the *Dream* and *The Sorcerer;* T.H. White's adolescent Arthur in the fish-moat and falcons' mews; Yaleen in her cosmic and shaman-like transformations. Protagonists emerging from or released from such magic, whether through dream awakenings or symbolic deaths, may achieve fuller consciousness of their true selves, and be granted what Theseus at his festivities wishes the quartet thus released at the end of the *Dream*: "Joy, gentle friends! joy and fresh days of love . . ."; may achieve what is symbolised by the "Unmingled joy!" of those restored villagers flocking to the Squire's banquet at the end of *The Sorcerer*.

Utopian Fantasy/Satire (Utopia Ltd; The Gondoliers)

"Edens" and utopias are distant cousins, occasionally meeting and even marrying. "Eden" is a country of the spirit and imagination; Utopia more often one of intellect and of aspiration. The one tends to be equated with a golden age of the past; the other with a community to be attained in the future—though either may be simply "elsewhere" or "elsewhen". From Plato to More to Campanella and on to Wells and beyond, utopian possibilities have beckoned, but have also prompted a literature of comment and satire built around the inability to achieve or fully sustain them—at which point Utopia may become Dystopia. Utopian/dystopian ambivalences and dystopian disasters are traceable in Swift, Butler, Shaw, Wells, and in later twentieth-century fantasies and satires as various as *Brave New World,* Le Guin's *The Dispossessed,* Simak's *City* and Vonnegut's *Player Piano;* in fictions of societies as ecologically bizarre as that of the Plant Men in Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker,* and as bleakly outrageous as that of the neo-Californian "neighbourhood" in Marc Laidlaw's *Dad's Nuke.*

Utopia Ltd. (1893) has its place in this tradition, much appreciated in its day, and symptomatic of its decade. In those 1890s, the period of the last Savoy operas, an influential utopia was that of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891), preceded by *A Dream of John Ball* (1888). Whether he resurrected the past or peered into the future,

Morris's utopia was a sanitised mediaeval one. His reaction was against a craftless society, mechanistic in technique and socio-economically stratified: a society which might presage a future, at best of "a dull level of utilitarian comfort", at worst one in which "science was in the main an appendage to the commercial system, nay, not seldom to the police of that system."

In Gilbert's libretto the locale is exotic—a Pacific island about to become anglicised. (We are at the time not only of Morris's "escape" but of Gauguin's.) Gilbert's pristine Utopia is a lotus-land parody where "The breath of flowers,/The languid loves/Of turtle doves-/These simple joys are all at hand . . ." It changes after the importation of English "culture". Then "all that isn't Belgrave Square is Strand or Piccadilly." The satire is dated, but transposed into late twentieth-century terms it would be relevant to the westernising of a Third World state supplied with naval, military, educational and other advisers. Such advisers in *Utopia Ltd.* are called "The Flowers of Progress" (the opera's subtitle). Their counsel is; "Increase your army"; "Purify your Court"; and eventually they secure the floating of Utopia as a limited company. John Wolfson in *The Final Curtain* describes the contrasts in the original production between its wildly primitive Utopian costumes and those of the Lifeguardsmen who enter in the middle of Act I; and the subsequent startling visual effect of the Utopians in their anglicised formal dress in Act II. The satire was edged. The Act II Christy Minstrel parody of a cabinet meeting, and the mockery of a Royal Drawing Room were at the time piquantly funny, but gave offence in high places. Eventually the inhabitants rebel: their Utopia has become a dystopia. Reform is "like some remorseless ogress". They complain that "all the jails are let/As model lodgings for the working classes", and demand the expulsion of "these detested Flowers of Progress" with "affairs restored to their original complexion." This is, however, achieved quite simply by one further reform—the introduction of the British two-party system, which ensures legislative stalemate and a confusion of affairs comparable to that of the genuine England.

Utopia Ltd. had a reasonably long run, but then remained out of repertory; yet its first critics praised the score and Gilbert was described as being at his wittiest. The fact is, topical satire has a limited life; though there comes a time (it may yet arrive for this period piece) when historical and literary perspectives can give it new zest. Shaw's *The Apple Cart* (1929), for example seems to sparkle now in revival more than was possible in most of the intervening years. The satire of *Utopia Ltd.* has its Shavian touches: the with-it South Sea princes down from Girton; the "Palace Peeper", a kind of *Private Eye* of the naughty 'nineties. What it notably lacks, however, are those deeper roots of fantasy which might have found it an enduring place in the imaginations of audiences. To realise this one has only to compare it with its immediate predecessor, *The Gondoliers,* which is perennially fresh.

That opera's second Act is also occupied with somewhat (but not altogether) dated utopian satire concerning "a monarchy that's tempered with republican equality", but its more enduring impact rests on motifs of basic imaginative appeal, the like of which we do not find in *Utopia Ltd.* These motifs, the material of folk and fairy tale, of myth and legend, are, in *The Gondoliers,* of the royal child, abducted or substituted for when young and humbly reared, who at last takes possession of a kingdom; and of lovers (Luiz, the stolen prince, and Casilda) separated only to be united. Herbert Weisinger in "The Twisted Cue" has likened the course of Luiz's destiny to that of Spenser's Red Cross

Knight. It is certainly close to that of the traditional hero who finds his manhood (symbolising his innermost identity) in discovering his true and royal father, and in realising himself to be destined for royal status and through this to union with his (*anima*-personifying) "princess". In tracing the destiny by which the Duke of Plaza-Toro's drummer boy becomes "The King of Barataria" (the opera's alternative title) and Casilda becomes his Queen, *The Gondoliers* enters the company of legend as distant as that of Perceval and Blancheflor; of *A Winter's Tale;* of nineteenth-century versions such as Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper;* and twentieth-century fantasies as closely related as C.S. Lewis's *The Horse and his Boy* and (as we have seen in slightly different context) Robert Silverberg's *Lord Valentine's Castle.* In this company *The Gondoliers,* for all its Venetian frivolity, Baratarian absurdity and ephemeral social satire, reveals an archetypal core giving it longer dramatic staying power than *Utopia Ltd.* was ever likely to achieve.

Coda

In 1876 at the first Bayreuth festival, and under Wagner's supervision, the first performances of the entire cycle of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* took place. A year later *The Sorcerer* opened at the Opera Comique. In 1879 Sullivan was working on the score of *The Pirates* and Wagner was working on that of *Parsifal.* There was an overlap of contemporaneity between the two operatic canons, disparate as they are in style and dramatic and musical weight. What they have in common is that they helped to perpetuate through the late decades of the nineteenth century a vein of myth-impregnated fantasy in the theatre at a time when realistic narrative dominated the novel (Zola, Gissing) and problem-oriented dramas, of a comparable realism (Björnson, Ibsen, Robertson), were appearing on the European stage. Wagner's social ironies and political "message" were winged by the Valkyries, were carried by the twinned power of music and epic that tapped multivalent springs of northern myth and fantasy. C.S. Lewis in *Surprised By Joy* tells how his young imagination was imprinted with "Northernness" by experience of Wagner. Northern myth energises Tolkien's fictions, and much that stems from them. The overall structure of *The Ring,* as David Ketterer has shown (Foundation 31), is used as a symbolically referential framework in James Blish's *Cities in Flight* tetralogy.

The light opera of the Savoy canon carries its more eclectic mythopoeic themes more lightly, defines them less consciously and impresses them more subliminally. In *The Golden Labyrinth* Wilson Knight wrote of Gilbert's approach to such topics as suicides, executions, desertions and hauntings: "Throughout these operas the treatment of pathos and horror has the impersonal, uninvolved quality of old ballads, of folk-art or of a Shakespearian song." That appraisal can be applied not simply to those specific motifs but to the total impact of each semi-ritualistically structured opera. It identifies a "detachment" shared by many of the genre works we have been considering. What, in *Gilbert: His Life and Strife,* Hesketh Pearson wrote of the Bab Ballads is true also of the operas—each one of which Chesterton said, though superlative, was "a spoiled Bab Ballad": ". . . the quality that makes them unique and perhaps immortal is the sudden imaginative perception that human beings and the conditions of their existence on this planet are inherently ridiculous." And yet that existential situation, as enacted in the operas, in its very absurdity and irony, and because of its anomalously mythopoeic substructure, may touch audiences in ways of which they are hardly aware, Sullivan's

music often being a subtle factor in this respect.

Hesketh Pearson, in the biography previously cited, said of librettist and composer that "their dissimilar natures, the one masculine, the other feminine, (made) an ideal fusion in art." Sullivan counterpointed light with shade, tempered cruelty with pathos, produced evocative melody maybe across the grain of the comedy—sometimes to Gilbert's consternation. Gilbert complained that Sullivan's ghost music for *Ruddigore* was like interpolating farce with lines from *Paradise Lost*—a pointer to how originally creative their partnership was: indicative also of how these operas may affect the imagination at more than one level. The overlapping of two disparate, even polarised, areas of consciousness may produce quite startling outcomes—a strange percipience, a *frisson*. This can happen when the attention, occupied with what is entertaining, is suddenly infiltrated by that which is archetypal. The metaphor of my title again leads to the fable of King Wren (or twittering sparrow) rising from the eagle's back; for as in the aesthetic experience of these operas of extravagant fantasy, paradox and nonsense, so in the reading of imaginative genre fictions, "classic" or ephemeral, one is often aware that beneath the spring, the flutter, the soaring virtuosity of their action and inventiveness beat infinitely more powerful lifting and launching wings.

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David Brin arrived in London in Autumn 1986, intending to spend the best part of a year here; we took the opportunity to coax an article from him. With a doctorate in astrophysics, he appears to regret that he is a mere sf writer rather than a working scientist. But there must be quite a few scientists who envy his 1984 Hugo, Nebula and Locus awards for Best Novel (for Startide Rising*), or his 1986 John W. Campbell Memorial Award (for* The Postman*). He has recently finished* The Uplift War, *which will be his sixth novel.*

The Profession of Science Fiction, 35: A Shaman's View

DAVID BRIN

How to tell others about the "Profession of Science Fiction"? It isn't exactly one of those careers your guidance counsellor ever described to you, nor is it the sort of thing you are likely to encounter during an afternoon at the Job Mart. It would seem to be, in fact, one of the *least* describable fields of endeavour around.

For one thing, I've never met an associated group of individuals with fewer common characteristics. The sf authors I know range from Stalinists to right-wingers to proto-anarchists, from sweet old ladies to former Green Berets, from temperamental geniuses to hard-nosed realists.

Oh, a few commonalities can be listed. Most of my peers are flaming individualists, for instance. Many seem to suspect that "consensus" is a dirty word, one that is symptomatic of a group badly in need of stirring-up. The majority would rather have an amiable argument than a dinner at a four-star restaurant, but like best of all to combine the two. Also, they all seem to love to mix and match metaphors and bizarre notions, to pun, to play devil's advocate.

Still, no two writers seem to *write* in exactly the same way. Some keep their current projects absolutely secret, lest some mystic energy leak away if they tell anything before it's all safely down on paper. Others take the attitude of the "tribal story-teller", and find their enthusiasm only stoked ever higher the more often they describe the tale they plan to tell.

So, how do I describe the Profession of Science Fiction? Obviously, this must be a personal account, so I'll eschew academese (I can speak it, I have my union card) in favour of an earthier tone. One coming from *me.*

Shall I be biographical? Philosophical? Evocative?

Why not combine all of these. Since I claim it's what we do best, let's talk in terms of *metaphors.*

An Odd Comparison

Here's our first one. Let's start by looking at *scientists*—today's caretakers of knowledge who are the era's accepted interpreters of the world. This has caused no end of bitterness

among those who once wore that mantle, and yet the comparison cannot be denied. Scientists certainly can be called today's "high priests".

Some metaphor. And certainly it can be observed that the Scientific cloister attracts many of the same types that once flocked to the Catholic orders, or to the Rabbinate or, for that matter, to the temples of Ra. Only nowadays the miracles they learn how to deliver are palpable—both more rewarding and more dangerous than ever before.

Oh, there are a few ways in which the new clergy violate priestly tradition. For instance, they seem to be much less prey to the age-old clerical fetish for obscurantism and keeping secrets. Rather, scientists sometimes appear positively obsessed with sharing their lore (e.g. getting a grant to do a BBC series on their favourite topic).

Nevertheless, the analogy holds. Science even has its heretics—UFOlogists and psychic researchers—and it has its own "orders". Physicists may be likened to Jesuits or Brahmins, interpreting the Grand Design. And mathematicians are the equivalent of Kabbalists, who delve into mysteries that one supposes might drive other men mad.

An interesting comparison, but what does all of this have to do with the Profession of Science Fiction?

Well, first off, it is clear that Science Fiction takes part in the values promulgated in our culture by modern science. Even when sf turns a critical, scathing eye toward a certain type of technical advancement, or warns of dire consequences, it nevertheless remains part of that culture, operating from within its overall web of assumptions.

Unlike most prior world-views, which harken back to some ancient, lamented Golden Age, science preaches a "look-forward" attitude toward wisdom—holding that next year's version of "truth" will be better than this year's, and so on into the future. Science fiction actively participates in proselytizing this theme of guarded progress and acceptance of change. Even when it deals in warning messages, sf nevertheless conveys the fundamental assumption that the future is ours to shape, for well or ill. To past priesthoods this would have been anathema. But to the modern clerics—the scientists—this is accepted dogma, only more reinforcement of their own treasured beliefs. It is not surprising, then, that so many of them read sf.

Still, I have a much more personal reason for working in this analogy-metaphor. As one invited to tell his own story—how I took up the "Profession of Science Fiction"—I feel that I must first confess that it was not my first love. And it never will be.

The Autobiographical Bit

You see, at an early age I was one of those spoken of earlier, a young man apparently doomed to be attracted to priesthood. In other days I suppose I would have striven to become a rabbi, or a pastor, or perhaps a temple theoretician. It's a condition easy to diagnose in a youth. The symptoms include a tendency to take long walks and stare at stars while mumbling to oneself. There is also a moody intensity over metaphors nobody else seems to be much worried about, and an eagerness to find out "what's going on".

As a youngster I met men and women from many walks of life. It was clear even then that my greatest gift was with words. Everyone spoke of how much money I'd make if I entered Law.

I *hated* the lawyers I met! They struck me as a money-grubbing, unscrupulous lot. Pfeh! They didn't even seem to enjoy their profession. (The true test of that, I figured, was whether they would do exactly the same thing, day in and day out, if they were

independently wealthy and had to *pay* to do it! All the lawyers I knew would simply take the money and skip off to Bimini.)

I met quite a few scientists, as well. (My father took me to watch Einstein play the violin, when I was five.) *They* seemed to be having fun. Here was a bunch of guys who would—if necessary—bribe somebody to let them do what they loved doing: science.

Oh, over the years since then I've met scientists who were twits, jerks, bad husbands and fathers, cheats, liars—you name it. But it did seem a larger *fraction* of them were stable, decent people who were having a good time. Their lives weren't just devoted to their work, either. The better ones seemed to fill their homes with music and loved to read or talk about anything under the sun. That was how I decided I wanted to live.

Anyway, as I grew older, I came to see that these were the guys who were talking to God in the language He used to make the Universe. That was an idea that appealed to my romantic soul.

Yeah, I was better with words. But somehow I managed to scrape together enough talent at maths to squint at the equations, to blink in myopic wonder at the beauty of them, at their symmetry and fantastic clarity. It was like hearing Bach and viewing Van Gogh all at once. Wow.

Then came the day when I realized I'd never, ever be a Jesuit.

Now mind you, one can draw out a metaphor too far. But I figure it was something like the way a young monk must have felt when the Abbot called him in to tell him he wasn't being sent to Rome, but to a tiny village ten days' ass-ride south of Rheims, there to teach school.

Oh, even a Franciscan or a Dominican can do good work, if he applies himself hard enough. Eventually I got my "union card", my PhD. Sweat can partly make up for lack of brilliance; it was a good dissertation. All along, though, I'd been puttering at this hobby of scribbling stories. It helped ease the pressure of studies, it amused my friends, and there finally came a day when it began paying the bills.

Hell, that's downplaying it *too* far. I loved writing! It was a passion that called beckoningly, drawing me ever away from my chosen profession. When it started paying —not just in cash but in respect, attention, kudos—I found it ever easier to put science on the back burner.

It's hard to be regretful, nowadays. So few people get to do what they *really* want to do, or even their third or fourth choices. I am lucky, indeed. My profession allows me to sleep late, to take trips at a moment's notice, to give television interviews and get invited to dinner by congressmen and MPs, all in the line of duty.

And yet, once a priest . . .?

There are times when I feel I'd trade a million-book best-seller for just *one* paper in grand unified field theory that would make Alan Guth or Steven Hawking cry out "I wish *I'd* thought of that!"

Tsk. Life isn't perfect. I'm not complaining.

Witch Doctors

So, if not a member of the priesthood, what then *is* a science fiction writer? Well, knowing full well that we must never really believe our metaphors, I offer another one for you to try on.

Always at the fringes of the temple grounds there have also been *shamans,* freelance

agents who have danced and chanted and fed their patients strange herbs to give them vivid dreams. Often the afflicted were cured by the power of suggestions alone. And if not, well, at least they were distracted from their misery for a while.

I suggest that this is a good analogy for the role of sf authors. We leap and dance, we hop and gyre. And, most wonderfully of all, we chant. Oh, do we chant! And our incantations certainly do create images in the minds of our clientele. Vivid, startling hallucinations of vast star clusters or rolling storms on faraway worlds—of voyages to times and places past or times and places that never were and never *could* be—chilling images of individual terror and even of apotheosis for our posterity. You name it. They come to us, pass over a little silver, and we take them for a ride.

So, in a sense we are shamans. Is this a worthy role?

Yes, I think so. At the very least we do distract our patients from their troubles for a while. And I believe the mythic values I've seen purveyed from the mortars of Science Fiction—like assorted healing herbs—are for the most part wholesome medicine.

At our best, we New Shamans can even inspire. We sometimes bring about that wonder of all wonders—a *new thought* in some mind out there which might otherwise have remained dead, dead, dead. That I see as miracle working of a high order.

But there is a danger. The danger is to the magician himself. To the witch herself. The professional hazard of being a shaman is that we always seem to be on the verge of falling into the trap of worshipping our own incantations! Like an actor who believes his own press flacks, we tumble into a pit whenever we start taking ourselves too seriously.

Ego is a death trip. Some quite gifted shamans (and many critics, as well) seem to forget one of the most basic rules of magic—that there is no place an incantation works better than in the brain of its author!

"Oh! What a great paragraph!" (I muse, having just typed it.) "What a (chilling, moving, insightful) passage!" (I think, after just re-reading it.) "Nobody else could have done it better!" (I cry out, forgetting that in nobody else will the words resonate exactly the same way. To no one else will the images mean quite as much.)

Again, pfeh. Those who travel down that road all too often ruin their work, as well as their good names. The rewards simply aren't worth it.

Resource Wasters

Another metaphor I really like was raised by Lee Montgomerie in *Interzone,* some while back.

"Sometimes I think time is running out for sf, locked in a desperate energy crisis. So much of its conceptual fuel has already been burned up, exhausted, reprocessed . . . Sometimes I think sf is already dead . . . endlessly and pointlessly revisiting its old haunts, saying nothing."

Actually, Montgomerie incanted quite a number of metaphors, and gloomy ones at that, reminiscent of the theme Spider Robinson raised in his Hugo Award winning short story, "Melancholy Elephants".

Are sf authors, then, little more than greedy exploiters of a limited resource? The resource of relevant, usable ideas? It is a point I raised some year's back, at the Eaton Conference on Hard Sf. (Proceedings published under the title, *Hard Science Fiction.*) In that essay I suggested that the best authors tend to avoid any concept which has already been explored well, and prefer instead to go off in search of even newer ideas. We tend to

admire this fetish for originality, but it may very well be that in doing so authors "mine out" conceptual territory that may not be limitless after all!

Chris Evans has put it another way. "In a sense, every sf writer in the world is labouring in the shadow of H.G. Wells. None has achieved his mastery of form, his originality and invention. Of course, Wells had the advantage when he was writing that practically the whole field was there for the making . . ."

Do I seriously believe this model of my profession, as rapacious exploiters of a limited resource, as *eco-criminals*, in a sense?

Well, we can be so sanctimonious at times, so bloody self-righteous, that maybe I find it interesting to see us in a black hat, for a change. Hmm.

A Pause to Get Serious

Leaving aside metaphors for a moment, Science Fiction is really a wonderful profession, one that can be remunerative, can force one to endure a little flattery, and often delivers some pretty good times, all for doing what one would have been willing to *pay* to do anyway. As I said, that was one of the benchmarks I long ago set for a worthwhile profession. So even though it means I must be a witch doctor, rather than a priest, I suppose I can live with my plight.

Now this, of course sets me up for disdain from a certain type of critic—the sort who will inevitably say, "He's having fun. Therefore he can't be a true artist." Fortunately, it is easy to laugh at the sheer impudence of such a remark. Anyway, Lawrence Kubie demolished that logic in his epochal book, *The Neurotic Distortion of the Creation Process,* in which he demonstrated conclusively that genius and pain aren't such great partners, after all.

It's nothing more than a Hollywood myth that the artist is born to suffer. And artistic types have been the first to help foster this fable. It plays well, especially with the girls, and people will put up with your most outrageous behavior, excusing it as "artistic temperament". Oh, what a lovely scam!

Certainly, some creative geniuses *have* suffered. But I am tempted to suggest that they prevailed in spite of the handicap of misery, rather than in partnership with it. The sculptor, Bruce Beasley, is just one of many counterexamples of men whose brilliance dazzles nearly as brightly as their joy with life.

An artist (including the sf author) is best served by leaving it to posterity to judge his work. Any need to see oneself as some sort of genius probably arises out of ego roar anyway, and is totally disconnected from the truth of the matter, whatever it may be. Believing such nonsense only delivers one into the hands of those critics whose cycles of "discovery" and "re-evaluation" can be so mean-minded and so sadly predictable.

I continue to do as I always have—to circulate my manuscripts among those I respect, dropping those pre-readers who heap on praise and retaining those whose complaints show me where I am becoming self-indulgent or still have much to learn. Where some castigate "readable" authors as "panderers" to the common tastes, I maintain as my role model Mark Twain, who wrote sensational, ground-breaking literature which, nevertheless, could be read with joy and profit by teenagers a century later. To those who admire opacity in writing I say, enjoy, *bonne chance,* have it your way, and I will do it mine. To those who cry out about "eternal human verities", who maintain that literature must always reflect some supposed perpetual human obduracy or stupidity, who insist it

dwell on our incapability of improvement or ever learning from our parents' mistakes, to all such I offer what pity I can.

As I see it, we are living in the most exciting time in the history of the human race. I give one in three odds that we'll fry ourselves, in which case our generation will certainly have had it best of all. On the other hand, two-to-one I predict—*within our lifetime*—a civilization so dazzling as to make us all blink in wonder at our incredible good fortune.

Wherefore those "eternal verities", then, if we are bound for Conflagration or the Dawn? Literature which grinds over the same old territory *ad nauseam* does nothing to prepare us for either eventuality. I also find it incredibly boring.

Maybe *that* is what the Profession of Science Fiction is all about. We are the ones who toy with new myths, with the images and ideas our culture may need as it rushes headlong toward a future that may glow or may burn but in any event will certainly feature profound change.

Is He Serious?

So here we are, at the conclusion of an idiosyncratic treatise on his profession by one of science fiction's so-called "apostles of optimism". I've heaped on the metaphors . . . An sf author is a tribal story-teller. No, he's a genius. No, he is a priest. No, he's a shaman. No, he is a rapacious exploiter. No, he's a humble craftsman. No, he's a daring explorer of unknown territory.

Are we actually expected to accept these metaphors at face value? Is Brin being serious?

I'll give you one last hint about that.

There is an illness which strikes creative people particularly hard. This disease has ruined countless writers, artists and scholars throughout time. It is called *ego roar*. And against this plague you have only one surefire defense . . . a willingness to laugh at yourself, to work hard and remain fiercely devoted to your craft, yes, but also *never* to take yourself too seriously.

Buddha say*, "Before enlightenment, chop wood, draw water.

"After enlightenment, draw water, chop wood."

Hmm.

* Wow, man. Heavy. Now that Buddha fellow, *he's* a guy who shoulda won an award!

*Sf poet Robert Frazier was born in 1951 and currently lives on Nantucket Island managing a craft and jewellery store in the summer season, and teaching in a Montessori school during the winter. His mother was a landscape painter; his father was a cryptanalyst who helped crack the Nazi code book at Bletchley during the Second World War. Author of two collections, he has won the Rhysling Award for sf poetry, and edits Star*Line, newsletter of the Science Fiction Poetry Association.*

Original Light: The Rhysling Awards and Genre Poetry

ROBERT FRAZIER

The acceptance of poetry into the science fiction market place began at a slow pace, with a handful of pioneers and no solid precedents to follow, yet poetry has established itself as a fixture in modern fantastic literature. More small press publications use it than not, and the professional magazines and book anthologies publish a heftier amount each year. Fantastic poetry also has a major award—the Rhysling Award, voted on by the members of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. Now in their tenth year, the Rhyslings are perhaps the only visible indicator of the trends that move and shape this poetic growth in popularity.

Each year the SFPA membership votes for the best long and best short poems in science fiction, but their tastes range far beyond the genre expectations of science fiction. In order to explore this, manageable terms are needed, and so I prefer to split Rhysling winners, and the bulk of fantastic poetry at large, into four sub-genres: science fiction poetry, fantasy poetry, science-oriented poetry, and speculative poetry. To date some of these terms have been used interchangeably, but I intend to keep them separate.

Science Fiction Poetry

The science fiction poem does not necessarily follow the plot conventions of traditional sf, but it does employ characters and a narrator. Suzette Haden Elgin, founder of the Rhysling Awards and the SFPA, calls this the "narrative constraint". About half the poems published in professional sf publications are science fiction, and this is reflected in the spread of Rhysling Award winners. The first year's winners, four including ties, were all science fiction, but the award quickly broadened its horizons. Just two winners in the next six years were science fictional.

In 1980, Andrew Joron's long "The Sonic Flowerfall of Primes" from *New Worlds* explored an ill-fated love between artificial intelligences, in this case Earth satellites, while the remnants of man watched and waited below.

> The signal fades & our thoughts turn out of color
> Other words are activated: revenants of his twenty-hundredth
> Revolution—songs, devoted to his female double
> Whom we'd developed as a back-up unit: she shared
> His programming, smiled or sorrowed/and grew ill.

In 1981, Canadian poet Ken Duffin imagined a utopian "Meeting Place" for us among the stars in his sf short poem winner.

From 1982 through 1984, as in the year 1979, I would not term any of the winners "science fiction". During this time the fantastic poem branched out to speculative horizons. I consider this its major growth period.

In 1985, Berkeley poet Bruce Boston brought science fiction back into focus with his short masterpiece "For Spacers Snarled in the Hair of Comets". This is a mature look at the less than glorious side of spacefaring. In just a handful of couplets, Boston evokes a way of life both tangible and intangibly imbued with a sense of wonder.

on a planet whose name we've forgotten:
the vacuum is behind us and before us,

the spiced ale is cool and hallucinogenic.
Already the candle sparkles in our plates.

The poem perhaps epitomizes a maturation of the science fiction poem itself, and this swing back to sf was followed in 1986 by the long poem winner "Shipwrecked on Destiny Five" and short poem winner "The Neighbor's Wife". Andrew Joron sets up a well-known device, the log of a wrecked ship, but Destiny Five is imagined in surreal terms, and this adds a special aura of transcendence to the crew's inevitable death. Susan Palwick's neighbours are as down to earth as you can get, and very real. They tolerate the wounded, shipwrecked alien that the old man Colin takes in as a surrogate for his lost wife.

When it could walk on six legs Colin taught
it to fry bacon, weed the garden, milk
the goats, which cower at its touch.
"Reminding her what she forgot in Heaven,"
he tells us, but she has not remembered speech.

Boston, Palwick and Joron write with vastly different styles and themes, and their scope might well define the parameters for the science fiction poem today.

Fantasy Poetry

The fantasy poem may also go beyond the macabre and magic conventions of its fictional counterpart, but it too remains constrained by the narrative element.

In 1982, "Story Books and Treasure Maps" became the first fantasy poem to win the Rhysling. After Steve Eng, the next fantasy winner was a trilogy by Ursula K. LeGuin, "The Well of Baln". The three poems tell the story of a count who becomes obsessed with a bottomless, supernatural well on his estate. His wife cannot see it, while his daughter has travelled inside it.

I used to play with children with white hair
in one of the countries down inside the well
where all the rocks are glass.

The melding of their three viewpoints is truly innovative. Joe Haldeman won the long poem category in 1984 with paired sestinas in "Saul's Death", but this has a science fiction twist at the end of an epic swordfight, and it may well be dubbed a science fantasy poem.

Science-oriented Poetry

In 1979, Michael Bishop won with his superbly crafted and superbly funny long poem modeled after Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress". It illustrated contemporary

scientific conjectures on black holes, as well as played with the love of a black hole for "The Lady Of A Physicist".

With her my Beatrician guide,
We'd tunnel with the thermal tide
Into the arms of Betelgeuse—
With Quasar sets and Marcel Proust
Emergent with us, glory-bound,
Detritus of God's Lost & Found.

Alan Lightman's winner in 1983 envisioned future storage "In Computers" of the essences of extinct wildlife and lifestyles. Another winner from the pages of *Science* magazine in 1984, Helen Ehrlich's "Two Sonnets", involved a love sonnet to the spirit of Lucy, an ancient skeleton, and the spirit's reply.

Yet I knew not you'd issue forth from me,
Nor can you penetrate his mystery.
As silence holds all future time at bay,
So tides will turn and sweep him, too, away.

In 1985, for the third year in a row, a poem from *Science* captured readers' imaginations with a biographic poem written in the form of a "Letter from Caroline Herschel".

The factual, non-narrative, science-oriented poem established itself as a force in these years, yet it also established an impressive repertoire: from Bishop's humour, to thought-provoking looks at the future and past, to biographies of scientists. Several of these biographies were anthologized with a rich variety of science poems in *Songs from Unsung Worlds,* edited by *Science* poetry editor Bonnie Gordon.

Speculative Poetry

Speculative poetry, to me, is a catch-all term for fantastic poetry that doesn't fall into the first three categories. It displays by far the widest range of exposition and subjects.

By my system, the first speculative Rhysling winner was Duane Ackerson's "Fatalities", a prose poem on the peculiar properties of time. In 1980, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* published the first of several winners from its pages, an inventive poem on "The Migration of Darkness" as an entity around our globe, and its process of accreting shadows.

However, not all specks of darkness migrate.
Some that are less adventuresome or downright lazy
choose to stay behind.
These convey together, in varying numbers,
seeking shelter from the strong sunlight

Ray DiZazzo's "On the Speed of Sight" from 1982 gave vision and time a speed that differs for all living things. The most recent speculative winner was 1983's "Your Time and You", by Adam Cornford, from the small press poetry magazine *Velocities.* This surrealist-influenced poem, extrapolated from a quote by Sartre, anthropomorphizes time into a cyborg lover.

Your time is a fast worker you should be too
talk with your fingertips
touch all the right keys and switches
feed it the hot numbers starting with you
the little pink secrets
Go through the motions until you sparkle with sweat
Undo its bracelet of extinct species
Whisper *yes*

The speculative poem consistently found an audience during the five year period from 1979 to 1983, and it still does.

Though time appears to be a favoured subject of speculative poets and readers, the speculative poem, which can be narrative or non-narrative, is tied to no subject or form. Tom Disch's 1981 long poem winner is actually an open letter of criticism "On Science Fiction" in its present state.

Apparently, the Rhysling Awards reflect the wide tastes of readers and writers of fantastic poetry, and though historically science fiction poetry has broadened to speculative poetry, giving way even to non-fiction science poetry, no one style or type of poetry has dominated the awards or the field. Eclecticism, then, is the only trend, and this young poetry genre, still growing in popularity, seems healthy and better off because of it.

The future looks bright. When poetry began to be published in science fiction publications, in places like *Unknown* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction* during the Fifties, most of it was comic and some of it was doggerel. Today serious poetry dominates the field. Humorous moments abound in Rhysling winners like Cornford's "Your Time and You" and Palwick's "The Neighbor's Wife", but ultimately these poems are poignant and thoughtful. Readers prefer vision and emotional impact, and they respond well to those who make free verse sing like only a fantastic poet can—a quality that Andrew Joron, three-time Rhysling winner, calls poetic "velocity". As a result, this literary form continues to be a breeding ground for fresh voices and innovative ideas, which, though not developed with as much detail as in a fiction piece, expand for us and shift to a vibrant hue like photons of original light from the Big Bang.

THE RHYSLING AWARDS
Given by the Science Fiction Poetry Association

1978
Long Poem: "The Computer Iterates the Greater Trumps", Gene Wolfe
Short Poem: 3-way tie
"The Starman", Duane Ackerson
"Corruption of Metals", Sonya Dorman
"Asleep in the Arms of Mother Night", Andrew Joron

1979
Long Poem: "For the Lady of a Physicist", Michael Bishop
Short Poem: 2-way tie
"Fatalities", Duane Ackerson
"Story Books and Treasure Maps", Steve Eng

1980
Long Poem: "The Sonic Flowerfall of Primes", Andrew Joron
Short Poem: 2-way tie
"The Migration of Darkness", Peter Payack
"Encased in the Amber of Eternity", Robert Frazier

1981
Long Poem: "On Science Fiction", Thomas M. Disch
Short Poem: "Meeting Place", Ken Duffin

1982
Long Poem: "The Well of Baln", Ursula K. Le Guin
Short Poem: "On the Speed of Sight", Raymond DiZazzo

1983
Long Poem: "Your Time and You", Adam Cornford
Short Poem: "In Computers", Alan P. Lightman

1984
Long Poem: "Saul's Death", Joe Haldeman
Short Poem: "Two Sonnets", Helen Ehrlich

1985
Long Poem: "Letter From Caroline Herschel", Siv Cedering
Short Poem: "For Spacers Snarled in the Hair of Comets", Bruce Boston

1986
Long Poem: "Shipwrecked on Destiny Five", Andrew Joron
Short Poem: "The Neighbor's Wife", Susan Palwick

Merritt Abrash is chairman of the Arts Department at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Troy, New York where he teaches some art history—and has regularly taught courses in sf and in utopian studies since his interest bloomed a decade ago. In 1976 he initiated and directed the first Conference on Utopian Studies, which became an annual affair and has developed into the Society for Utopian Studies. His graduate degrees, however, were in Public Law and Government, which helps to explain the particular thrust of the following article, successor to previous articles and essays in critical anthologies such as Clockwork Worlds *and* No Place Else *(reviewed in* Foundation *32) and in journals such as* Extrapolation. *Mr Abrash's deepest sf interest is in Philip Dick, and we find his insights into* The Penultimate Truth *attractively persuasive.*

"Man Everywhere in Chains": Dick, Rousseau, and "The Penultimate Truth"

MERRITT ABRASH

Philip K. Dick's 1964 novel *The Penultimate Truth* is routinely dismissed as a minor work, worth no more than passing mention.[1] Dick himself is on record with little more than "certainly not a major book but it has a couple of good ideas in it"—but the only "good idea" he identifies is merely a plot device.[2] On first reading the novel does seem a bit of a potboiler, especially compared with the major Dick works of the same period—*Martian Time-Slip, The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, Dr. Bloodmoney.* It ranks

high in sheer sf inventiveness, but serious deficiencies include an excess of subplots, a confusing and unconvincing major character, and some convoluted and ultimately absurd time travel gimmickry.[3]

Nevertheless, *The Penultimate Truth* is notable for the attention devoted to social and political setting. Dick rarely goes very deeply into the social and political dynamics of his frequently bizarre fictional worlds, but so much of this novel concerns such matters, and the implications are so weighty, that it is fair to speculate that in this case the social science aspects were intended to be more than mere scaffolding for the plot. And, in fact, one clue strongly suggests that the true substance of the novel is not at all the plot—actions and developments stemming from an initial situation—but the initial situation itself. It is possible, on this line of interpretation, that the guiding concept behind that situation is the concretization of abstractions and metaphors, both familiar and lesser-known, in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The clue referred to above is a reference (the only one in any of Dick's novels) to Rousseau by name:

> Your lives are incomplete (a character thinks), in the sense that Rousseau had meant when he talked of man having been born in one condition, born brought into the light free, and everywhere was now in chains.[4]

Rousseau's lines, opening Chapter I of the *Social Contract,* are among the most famous in Western thought: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they."[5] Interpretations are legion; it is one of the great unresolvable controversies in political theory. Obviously Rousseau did not mean "in chains" literally, but just as obviously he was referring to a humanity-wide condition of deprivation and restraint. *The Penultimate Truth* describes such a condition and relates it to "Man is born free" as a particular historical development.

The "situation" at the heart of this novel is that the vast majority of humanity lives uncomfortably underground in the unquestioning but false belief that this is both a practical necessity and a patriotic duty, while a tiny élite lives in luxury on the earth's surface, expropriating most of what is produced by the others. Thus stated, this sounds like a variation on Plato's Allegory of the Cave—a philosophical metaphor illustrating an abstract point. But Dick is not merely "illustrating" a point: instead, he embodies it in a novel which, except for its placement in the future, is realistic in all those respects which have come to characterize the modern novel. In particular, the situation of humanity in *The Penultimate Truth* has a plausible history of concrete events.

In the year 2009, war broke out on Mars between the colonies of Earth's Eastern and Western Blocs. It took a year for the war to spread to Earth, by which time both sides had moved their entire populations underground into hundreds of thousands of "tanks", complete small communities geared entirely to maximum war production in attached underground factories. The actual fighting was to be done on the surface by "leadies"—sophisticated robots which were the main product manufactured by the "tankers".

For two years vast battles were fought between the armies of leadies. The only humans on the surface were upper-level (no pun intended) military and administrative personnel, along with media specialists vital for sending information and propaganda via television to the tanks—the only communication, since tankers obviously could not come to the surface because of radioactivity. It gradually occurred to the leaders on both sides that the

apparently unwinnable war was no longer to anyone's advantage, and at the same time on each side advanced leadies capable of strategic thinking came to the logical conclusion that the interests of their masters—the above-ground élite—would be best served by ending the fighting but not letting the tankers know this. Then the élites could divide the land and good things of the world among themselves, while leadies carry out reconstruction and afterwards serve as mechanical slaves, and would continue to be produced and repaired by the tankers under the delusion that there was still a war going on.

The fighting was accordingly ended, and the tankers were henceforth deceived by ingenious television simulations providing seeming evidence of a purported see-saw progress of the war. To inspire them in their endless privations, a "Protector" addresses them periodically with calm determination, spiritual reassurance and evident concern for their welfare—actually, the Protector is a simulacrum (modelled on Eisenhower) whose speeches and movements are programmed by the media specialists. Finally, to make sure the tankers never discover the actual state of affairs, they are warned of hideous plagues raging on the war-ravaged surface.

At the time the novel opens, the war has been over for thirteen years. The élite live like feudal lords, each with his or her "demesne" and retinues of leadies. Complete stability has been achieved: the élite own the earth, while the tankers think they are fulfilling their patriotic duty and are thankful to be safe from the plagues and not losing lives in the fighting. No end is in sight: occasionally a city is shown falling and the tankers' production quotas are increased. The Protector's television pronouncements are a source of comfort and strength, adjusted to the condition of morale as reported by political commissioners in the tanks. Matters are handled identically in the Western and Eastern blocs, except that of course the progress of the war is presented differently.

It is to the tankers that Dick refers when he speaks of Rousseau: men "born in one condition, born brought into the light free, and everywhere . . . now in chains." This commits Dick to a particular interpretation of Rousseau's words: men are born with a birthright of a share in the good things of the earth, and the tankers

> were entitled to something they did not have; they were victims of robbers. Theft had been committed against all the millions of them, and there had been no legal or moral remedy all these years. (8: 74-75)

This is not in itself particularly profound: governments are deceiving their peoples and condemning them to cramped, worry-filled lives. It is hardly a revelation that small élites take advantage of emergencies to tighten control over whatever portion of humanity they can affect. But Dick's novelistic realization of Rousseau's plaint is more complex than this.

In the first place, the peoples on both sides had egged on their governments to fight. Even taking into consideration that intense propaganda in the years before the war had encouraged hatred of the other bloc, the fact remains that the élites, quite apart from their own responsibility, are satisfying popular passions. To one of the Protector's leading speech writers, the norms of popular behaviour make the massive deception in which he participates a virtual duty: if the tankers were allowed to return to the surface, the world of vast demesnes "would become a densely populated civilization once more, not quite as before the war, but close enough. Roads would reappear. Cities. And—ultimately there would be another war" (7:61).

This line of thought comes straight out of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*—population increase produces property in land and other goods, followed by conflict and the agreement to establish a government empowered to use force to protect the right of individual possession. It is civilization that sows the seeds of war (and of practically all other undesirable human interactions—see the *First Discourse* as well on this subject). The élite may indeed take this point of view merely as a rationale (Dick uses this word), but if the Devil can quote Scripture for his purpose, there is nothing to prevent the élite from quoting Rousseau for theirs. Man has been deliberately put in chains? To be sure—but circumstances demanded it (the two years of real war), and in any case civilization has at least been defused by stabilizing it at a regressed stage which promises indefinitely prolonged peace among nations and between classes.

This leads directly to the second subtle elaboration Dick's concretization builds on Rousseau. The breathtaking deception of the mass of humanity automatically arouses indignation in the reader, but on reflection it is hard to figure out on what basis the indignation can be sustained. Governmental deception as such, detached from consequences, does not appear illegal or immoral in any major western political theory except Rousseau's. A Hobbesian government sets its own standards of morality, but even in Lockean political thought the issue is not morality as such but the right of the sovereign people to change a government which infringes upon natural rights. There is no natural right not to be deceived; of course such deceptions can promote violations of natural rights, but the deception in itself is not such a violation, and a government which deceived its people for the purpose of *furthering* their natural rights should cause no complaints among consistent Lockeans. Popular displeasure with governmental deception calls for remedy through normal electoral processes, not an appeal to heaven.

The same considerations apply, *mutatis mutandis,* to all theories of popular sovereignty. Rousseau, however, with his uncanny foresight, recognized that the proper functioning of popular sovereignty would require full and correct information for the citizens in their collective capacity of sovereign. A government which withholds or falsifies information is striking at the people's ability to govern itself, and this cannot be morally compensated by any amount of practical benefit. Hence the *Social Contract* is uncompromising on the issue of full information, and it is within a framework of Rousseau's ideas and no other that the governmental policies in *The Penultimate Truth*—for which Dick feels obvious repugnance—can be condemned regardless of motives or consequences.

In any terms but Rousseau's, in fact, the two great states in the novel are fulfilling the primary functions for which they were established. Each protects the lives of its citizens—not only in the highly ambiguous form of organizing people and resources against a hostile "they", but in devising and utilizing the leadies which enable a war to be fought without losing *any* lives. Each sees to it, in the total disruption of economic life, that all citizens are fed. And each goes through the motions, given the emergency nature of the situation, of dealing with its people on a basis of law—much is made in the novel of the elaborate legal procedures governing relationships between government and tankers.

In what way, then, are the governments not fulfilling their appropriate functions? As long as they are doing these things, and as long as their peoples choose to allow them leeway because of emergency circumstances, the charge of injustice—or robbery—is one imposed by outsiders applying extraneous standards. Only Rousseau proposes an internal

standard which cannot be nullified by either benevolent governmental motives or socially desirable consequences: the general will.

Rousseau's concept of the general will has proved even more troublesome than the words about men being in chains. Dick's accomplishment, intentional or not, is to give the elusive concept of general will a concrete embodiment within *The Penultimate Truth*'s fictional situation. Tankers and élite alike agree that it would be right and just for human beings to live where they had been born, on "the surface of a world . . . with its air and sunlight and hills, its oceans, its streams, its colors and textures, its very smells" (8:74). One of the élite confesses that "They had made their deer park at the expense of the millions of tankers below; it was wrong and they knew it and they felt guilt" (7:63). This human right is accepted as so self-evident a proposition that one of the Protector's programmed speeches even acknowledges to the tankers that "the abridgement of your reality, the deprivation of your rightful life" is an inequity that must eventually be ended (8:75). "The people are never wrong, but often deceived" is another renowned formulation from the *Social Contract,* but it is hard to imagine even the most intense propaganda deceiving the people about this issue; their conviction truly manifests a general will.

But, just as Rousseau warned, the general will can be undercut by the existence of particular wills. The élite are unwilling to take any steps towards rectifying the injustice they acknowledge because, as Adams, the speechwriter who eventually does break ranks, notes, "They were selfish" (7:63). The general will is remote from specific measures and effects, whereas the élite's particular will brings immediate material advantages. When a shockingly devious plot is devised to imprison a powerful maverick who is actively sympathetic toward the tankers, Adams actually nerves himself to warn the victim anonymously, but gives up at the first hint of difficulty:

> Can't, he realized; can't ever do it . . . The bonds are too strong. The ties; they're too long, old, tight. I have introjected them and now they can act as a part of me; they live here inside, within me. Life-long. Now and now on. (17:142)

Secure in the psychological grip and material seduction of their particular will, enjoying the benefits of being slavemasters without the crudities of human slaveowning, the élite would seem to have created a veritable earthly paradise for themselves. But Rousseau assures us this cannot be so: "One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they." This is indeed the case in the novel. The élite suffer from debilitating guilt—enough "to make their late evenings a thrashing agony of loneliness, emptiness, and their nights impossible" (7:63). They are always tired from the unrelenting work necessary to supply and administer the tankers and, on the part of the media people, to maintain a flawless deception. It is clear, in fact, that Adams does not *enjoy* his blessings in the sense of satisfaction leaving one's heart at ease. There is an odd sense of the vast material benefits serving as *compensation* for the strain of being "the master of others".

The most significant disability attached to being a "master", however, is on quite a different level. Near the end of the novel, Adams sees no way to avoid death at the hands of a hostile élite faction except by going down into a tank. He is warned about the crowded conditions, including sharing of bathrooms.

> "Good enough," Adams said. He would agree to anything . . . And—he would be more than willing to share the bathroom . . . He would not endure it; he would thrive. Because it would make up for the loneliness of his years as dominus of his vast, silent, forest-surrounded demesne . . . (27:222-23)

In other words, what the élite lack, in every case where we observe them, is community —exactly what Rousseau posits as the necessary condition for the fulfilment of an individual's humanity. Adams's remark brings to the fore what is implicit throughout the novel: life in the tanks, its discomforts made tolerable by the sense of common purpose, has a humanity-enhancing communal quality, whereas the élite in their separate demesnes have regressed far back toward the state of nature. They are surrounded by leadies (a master-slave relationship which precludes a genuine community) and overloaded with property which they must protect against their armed fellows. Boundary disputes between demesnes are chronic, with each dominus possessing an army of leadies to patrol and threaten; the sole arbiter of such disputes, ironically enough, is a council of extremely sophisticated leadies—somewhat as if Hobbes's pre-social humans had had access to computers to judge their conflicts.

The framework of *The Penultimate Truth,* then, can be understood as an historically explicable organization of human life which manifests a dynamic realization of Rousseau's enigmatic opening of the *Social Contract.* When this is perceived, a tapestry of other themes from Rousseau becomes visible throughout the novel. The plot against the maverick who wants to release the tankers involves sending futuristic weapon prototypes back six hundred years in a time-scoop. Both time-scoop and weapons were unexpectedly found by a Cherokee Indian leader, known in the time of the novel as David Lantano, who has used them to intervene purposefully in subsequent history. It is his present intention to overthrow the élite, declare the war ended and restore the tankers to their rightful heritage. Strangely enough, those characters who learn his secret deeply mistrust him, and at the end of the book, although Lantano has in fact taken over from the élite, the novel's tanker hero considers him an enemy. Lantano's motives and role are confusing to follow, but to a surprising degree they become explicable through reference to the *Social Contract.*

Rousseau postulated a "Legislator"—a necessity in his terms in the evolution of an ideal community—who is uniquely powerful, far-sighted and free from self-interest. Lantano has an obvious affinity with such a Legislator: armed with irresistible weapons and able to visit and hence know the future, he possesses the equivalent of the wisdom the Legislator needs. "It would take gods to give men laws," writes Rousseau,[7] and Lantano's infallible foresight and ability to intervene at crucial points over the course of centuries certainly fill the bill. Even more suggestive of Lantano's Legislator-role is Rousseau's further remark that the Legislator has to be "working in one century, to be able to enjoy in the next".[8] Only with time travel can this be *literally* true—another example of Dick's transformation of abstraction and metaphor into a simulation of reality.

But if Lantano intends to undo the colossal injustice against the mass of humanity in the tanks, why does the tanker hero turn against him? No direct explanation is proffered in the novel, but again the *Social Contract* contains the clue: "He who has command over the laws ought not any more to have it over men."[9] The Legislator's power over fundamental social organization is so great that he must not be additionally allowed to exercise direct power over the people. Lantano, however, intends to rule; he has descended from his godlike Legislator's role into the violent and corrupting struggle for actual power. Once embarked on this course, not only must he lose his moral authority in Rousseau's view, but he will be perceived by the tankers as no less manipulative of the people than the previous élite. Elite and Lantano become indistinguishable in their insistence upon

imposing grand designs for personal power on humanity; only the means differ.

The question is why Dick should have brought the godlike Legislator into play for the ultimate purpose of dismissing him as unworthy. What is there about Lantano which might account both for Dick's fascination and disillusionment with him? It can hardly be without significance that Lantano is a fifteenth-century American Indian. In the terminology of Rousseau's *Second Discourse,* this identifies him as a *savage,* with the more specific meaning of a mentality reflecting the "happiest and most durable epoch . . . the least subject to revolution, the best for man . . . the veritable prime of the world."[10] In short, the noble savage, recognizing the evils and corruptions of civilization for what they are—until at the last moment Lantano too becomes corrupted, playing a partisan role and seeking to exercise the power which, in his capacity as Legislator, he is supposed to bestow upon the people. If Dick takes the surprising tack of portraying this particular Legislator as ultimately dangerous, it is most likely because the author wants the tankers—with whom his sympathies obviously lie—to seize their own destiny rather than having it handed to them by a superior being, no matter how benevolent.

It is ironic that the sentiment which leads the masses in *The Penultimate Truth* to accept their loss of birthright voluntarily is one for which Rousseau has the highest praise: patriotism. True, love of superpower is quantitatively and perhaps qualitatively different from love of community as Rousseau idealized it, but at bottom they reflect the same impulse. The tankers are wholeheartedly devoted to serving their country, and grateful that this can be done without direct risk to their lives. Based on the information they receive, their duty is self-evident.

But of course that information is totally controlled, and the consequence is a continual and unresisted expropriation of the mass of humanity by a tiny élite. Such an achievement is beyond any form of control over material objects or processes—police, elections, means of production, and so on. It is uniquely the result of control over information, specifically control over *media.*

Dick expends much space and ingenuity in describing the media techniques which helped bring on the war by inspiring hatred and suspicion between the blocs, and which now keep the tankers convinced that the war continues to rage. These techniques are so skilful and innovative, and so brilliantly combine technology and the creative imagination, that they emerge as a perfect exemplar of the "development of the sciences and arts" which, Rousseau writes in the *First Discourse,* has "added nothing to our true felicity (and) corrupted our morals".[11] "Our souls have been corrupted in proportion to the advancement of our sciences and arts toward perfection,"[12] he asserts—and, in fact, the only apparent fruit of the amazing refinement of the science and art of media in *The Penultimate Truth* is perfect propaganda. Adams, ruminating over the time-scoop, contrasts the constructive uses to which it might have been put with its only actual use, as a weapon in power struggles among the élite:

> We are, Adams realized, a cursed race. Genesis is right: there is a stigma on us, a mark. Because only a cursed, marked, flawed species would use its discoveries as we are using them. (13:110-11)

And so the media, quintessential product of the progress of the sciences and arts, serve as the means of the utter corruption of those who direct them and the alienation from their birthright of those at whom they are directed. Nowhere in *The Penultimate Truth* do the two *Discourses* and the *Social Contract* mesh more logically and effectively than in

Dick's treatment of this theme.

The conceptual understructure of *The Penultimate Truth* deviates from Rousseau's outlook in one important respect. It is clear from the *Second Discourse* that man is in chains through neither accident nor intent, but because the seeds of the degeneration in his condition are embedded in the very act of establishing human society. Power and property, inseparable from human association in the post-savage state, necessarily corrode freedom.[13]

So far there is nothing to which Dick would take exception, but Rousseau goes one cheerless step further: the truth about this retrogression and its causes is powerless to inspire humanity to change its ways.

> Truth has almost never amounted to anything in the world, because men act more from passion than intelligence, and while they approve the good, they do what is evil . . . It is one of the things that has discouraged me most during my short literary career to feel that even if I had all the talents I needed I should be vainly attacking fatal errors, and that even if I could be victorious, things would not go any better.[14]

In contrast to this despair, the tanker protagonist in *The Penultimate Truth* warns Adams that " 'It's over . . . Over for you personally and over for all of the élite.' *Because,* he said to himself, *I'm going to tell* [the tankers] the truth" (29:236). When Adams, trying to protect the elite against reprisals, insists that "I know . . . we can come up with something," the tanker responds:

> "I know you can, too." Except for one thing . . .
> You're not going to.
> Because we will not allow you. (29:238)

The novel ends with this promise that truth will effect a profound change for the better in the debased human condition.[15]

Such an expectation receives sweeping expression in a peculiar episode earlier in the novel. In a speech written for the Protector to deliver to the tankers, Lantano uses the image of a nocturnal bird, flying in through one window of a warm, animated castle hall, enjoying it for a moment, and then flying out another window into endless darkness.[16] The speech commiserates with the tankers whose lives lack even "this short flight through the lighted hall," and assures them that

> this iniquity will be abolished . . . and even the memory, even the *idea* of us who are up here now, will forever vanish . . . And you will not be able to curse us because you will not even recall that we existed. (8:76)

Iniquity abolished, the idea of it vanished, the very memory of past history obliterated —this more closely resembles Marx's "end of history" than Rousseau's despair that even in victory "things would not go any better". Yet the upbeat promise of Lantano's speech and the novel's ending is undercut by another image, part of Adams's ruminations on the "universe of authentic fakes" made possible by transporting artefacts through time:

> And that universe . . . which you would think you could enter the IN door of, pass through and then exit by the OUT door of in say roughly two minutes . . . was endless, was room beyond room; the OUT door of one room was only the IN door for the next. (5:45)

There is, in other words, not any true OUT door from the human condition, at least not through human efforts in this life. And Dick chooses to have Lantano, who believes otherwise, rejected. Perhaps the deviation from Rousseau is more apparent than real.

Regardless of how one wishes to interpret *The Penultimate Truth* (or even if one believes that it is too slight a work to justify interpretation at all), a critical question remains to be answered. The "truth" in the title undoubtedly refers to the actual state of affairs on the earth's surface. But this is only the *penultimate* truth. Then what is the ultimate truth? Rousseau is of no apparent use here, nor is there any persuasive internal evidence. But since the "truth" revealed in the novel is complete and unambiguous within the fictional context, Dick would hardly have referred to it as penultimate unless it bore on a more significant one in some other context.

Speculation on this subject, lacking any grounding in the novel itself or knowledge of the author's intentions, is reduced to a matter of opinion, no doubt coloured by the social and political outlook of whoever is doing the speculating. I am attracted to the notion that for Dick, the ultimate truth is that the novel is a metaphor for the way *our* world actually works. In the novel, the truth—the penultimate one of the title—is, briefly, that an élite is exploiting the vast majority of humanity under cover of false information about the condition of the physical world and human affairs. Thus abstracted from plot specifics, this "truth" lends itself to a comprehensive metaphor.

The great mass of humanity in our world is not constrained underground making objects which go directly to a political and technical élite, but they spend their lives creating wealth much of which is expropriated, in accordance with law, by those who control capital. The surface of the earth is not ruled out of bounds by purported plagues, but vast tracts are declared off limits to the many through either state power claiming military necessity or the power of capital backed by property law. The media do not often produce visually false images of the world and human events, but every refinement of the arts and sciences is utilized for highly selective enhancement or depreciation in the interests of commercial or ideological persuasion.

A metaphor of such scope and density makes *The Penultimate Truth* the weightiest social and political statement among Dick's novels. It would, of course, be entirely fitting for his mentor in such matters to be Rousseau, urgently concerned with heart rather than head, with pity—analogous to Dick's treasured "empathy"—rather than calculation, and with society as a stage for human character rather than a mechanism to be valued for its own sake. These parallels hold regardless of provable influence by the earlier author on the later.[17]

One further consequence of interpreting *The Penultimate Truth* as a concretization of abstraction and metaphors drawn from Rousseau: the novel must be labelled a failure inasmuch as the allegorical aspect is so thoroughly blended into the fictional story that readers, almost without exception, fail to detect it. And it is fair to ask whether so obscure an embodiment of specific social and political ideas may not result from a reader imposing ideological constructs of his/her own rather than deliberate allegorizing by the author. But besides Dick's direct reference to Rousseau, an underlying kinship is demonstrated by the former's concern, throughout his body of work, with humanity's existential chains and the misuses of the arts and sciences on the level of public policy. The two writers share the melancholy conclusion that humanity takes wrong turnings because it is humanity, visionary social contracts and upbeat novelistic endings notwithstanding.

Notes

1. Aside from inclusion in lists, *The Penultimate Truth* receives only two brief mentions in Joseph D. Olander and Martin Henry Greenberg, eds., *Philip K. Dick* (New York, 1983), a

Writers of the 21st Century Series volume containing eleven important articles. Bruce Gillespie pays serious attention to the novel in Bruce Gillespie, ed., *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* (Melbourne, 1975), pp.10, 20, 23-24, but only to classify it as bottom-drawer Dick both as idea and literature. Kim Stanley Robinson however, considers it important and offers some good insights in *The Novels of Philip K. Dick* (Ann Arbor, 1985), pp.65-68, 72-76.

2. Greg Rickman, *Philip K. Dick: In his Own Words* (Long Beach, California, 1984), p.165.
3. The novel was written under contract, at great speed, and simultaneously with *The Zap Gun* (which also suffers from subplotitis and careless writing). Perhaps because of this pressure, Dick cannibalized earlier short stories—"The Defenders", "The Unreconstructed M" and "Adjustment Team"—for hardware, concepts and even the name David Lantano.
4. Philip K. Dick, *The Penultimate Truth* (New York: Dell, 1964), p.74. Future references to this work are incorporated in chapter: page form parenthetically in the text.
5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract,* trans. G.D.H. Cole (London, 1913), p.5.
6. *Ibid.,* pp.25-26. This (Chapter III of Book II) is the tantalizing heart of Rousseau's formulation (or, some would insist, *non*-formulation) of the concept of the general will.
7. *Ibid.,* p.35.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.,* p.36.
10. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses,* ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Roger D. and Judith R. Masters (New York, 1964), p.151.
11. *Ibid.,* p.62.
12. *Ibid.,* p.39.
13. Rousseau's purpose in formulating his particular version of the social contract was precisely to make possible a reconciliation between society—by definition restrictive—and individual freedom as it presumably existed in the state of nature. The patent impracticability of his recommendation (leaving aside questions of its validity as theory) testifies to the inextricable association of "chains" with civilization.
14. Charles W. Hendel, *Citizen of Geneva* (New York, 1937), p.225. Rousseau to Tscharner, April 29, 1762.
15. Much earlier, Adams thinks: "Ye shall know the truth . . . and by this thou shalt enslave" (5:43). But this refers to the élite *knowing* the truth but *using* it untruthfully.
16. Lantano's speech states that this image, as a metaphor of every human's earthly life, converted a pagan king in the British Isles to Christianity. This obviously refers to Edwin, Anglian king of Deira and Bernicia, who was baptized at York in 627/8 after a meeting of the king's council at which an unnamed nobleman gave a speech incorporating the image of the bird and the mead-hall. However, the moral of the speech at York was rather different than Lantano's: since we know nothing of the darkness before or after the flight through the hall, a doctrine that promises reliable information should be accepted. H.P.R. Finberg, *The Formation of England* (St. Albans, 1976), p.42.
17. Although Dick had to have enough familiarity with Rousseau to refer accurately and appropriately to the opening of *The Social Contract,* all other speculations in this article about Rousseau's influence on *The Penultimate Truth* rest entirely on influence. Inquiries to some of Dick's acquaintances have not revealed evidence of any particular knowledge of or interest in Rousseau on his part. I am convinced, however, that he would not have written a book so fertile in social and political imagery, and with such striking philosophical digressions, without a thorough understanding of Rousseau—to whom he does, after all, make a critical reference.

John Newsinger is a historian who has published on Irish history in a variety of journals. He has also produced a number of literary studies on Sean O'Casey, John Mitchell, and contemporary thrillers. Currently he is contemplating studies of Edmund Cooper and of the juvenile sf of Douglas Hill, Nicholas Fisk, and John Christopher.

Reader, He Rescued Her: Women in the Tarzan Stories

JOHN NEWSINGER

The images of women presented by male writers were first subjected to feminist scrutiny by Kate Millet in her pathbreaking study, Sexual Politics, that first appeared in 1969. More was involved in this project than just the question of how women were portrayed, because this discussion also provided a crucially important key to the understanding of male writers' own notions of masculinity. Since then feminist literary criticism has moved on from the study of men's writing to the study of women's writing, a development that has unfortunately left the exploration of literary notions of masculinity underdeveloped. This is particularly true as far as popular fiction and genre fiction are concerned. This brief article is intended to pose some unpleasant questions about the nature of masculine identity by looking at the Tarzan stories, many of which I read with great enjoyment as a teenager and have more recently reread with some embarrassment.

A Fate Worse Than Death

> As night fell, Helen, lying bound in a filthy hut heard the booming of the drums in the village street outside. Eerie and menacing they sounded, mysterious, threatening. She felt that they were beating for her—a savage insistent dirge, foretelling death. She wondered what form it would take, when it would come to her. She felt that she might almost welcome it as an escape from the terror that engulfed her. Presently warriors came and jerked her roughly to her feet after removing the bonds that confined her ankles; then they dragged her out into the village street before the hut of Mpingu, the chief, and tied her to a stake, while around her milled screaming women and shouting warriors. In the glare of the cooking fires the whole scene seemed to the doomed girl the horrible phantasmagoria of some hideous nightmare from which she must awaken.
> It was all too fantastic to be real, but when a spear point pierced her flesh and warm blood flowed she knew she did not dream.

Burroughs writes with obvious relish in this description of the plight of the unfortunate Helen Gregory. The scene is well-realised: the boom of the drums, the screams and shouts of the black savages as they mill around her, the glare of the cooking fires. It is all some hideous nightmare. And then the victim feels the prick of the spear point in her flesh and the warm flow of blood. This was no dream. Indeed for Burroughs himself his stories were more than mere fiction, revealing a primeval reality that lay beneath and beyond the facade of civilization with which modern man clothed himself, a reality where white womanhood was continually threatened by primitive lusts and desires embodied in the

form of black savages and murderous apes.

Only the almost magical appearance on the scene of Tarzan saves Helen from being killed and then eaten. He kills one black with an arrow through the heart and then drops down into the village, seizing hold of the chief's son, Chemungo. "Helen Gregory, almost unable to believe her own senses, looked with astonishment upon this amazing man who dares face a whole cannibal village alone." Tarzan threatens to kill Chemungo if the village gates are not instantly opened, and, grumbling, the blacks hasten to comply. "And so Tarzan and Helen passed in safety out of the village of the cannibals and into the black African night."

Only some ten pages later, another female character, Magra, is carried off into the jungle by a great ape.

> Magra struggled to escape until she was exhausted, but the powerful beast that carried her paid little attention to her struggles. Once, annoyed, he cuffed her, almost knocking her insensible; then she ceased, waiting and hoping for some opportunity to escape. She wondered to what awful fate she was being dragged. So man-like was the huge creature, she shuddered as she contemplated what might befall her.

In fact, Ungo intends her as a sacrifice in the Dum-Dum; she will be torn to pieces when the dance reaches its climax.

Once again, Tarzan arrives in the nick of time. After a violent struggle, he forces Ungo to submit and free the woman. Magra "ran to Tarzan and threw her arms about him, pressing close. 'I am afraid', she said."[1]

Burroughs was both obsessed with and fascinated by threats to the lives and virtues of white women. One somewhat ironic survey of the no less than 24 books, only five of them concerning Tarzan, that he wrote in the period 1911 to 1915 found no less than 76 either contemplated or actually attempted rapes.[2] However, it was the African jungle with its savage blacks and wild animals that was to be his most potent fictional realisation of the manifold dangers besetting white women.

The helplessness of Burroughs's women characters when confronted by the uncontrolled masculine savagery and bestiality of the various dangers that he sends against them is continually emphasized. They are threatened not just by rape, but often with being literally torn to pieces and devoured. For Burroughs the humiliation and mistreatment of beautiful white women was a key element in a successful formula. Here can be found one of the most important reasons for the continued success of the Tarzan stories: that they touch upon themes that still resonate, that still serve to excite a male readership. While Burroughs's jungle landscape is a still virtually unexplored domain within the masculine identity, his readers readily recognize it and sense its familiarity.

Tarzan and Jane

Tarzan's first encounter with a white woman occurred when he came across Professor Porter's party of castaways, abandoned on the fringe of the jungle. He is not particularly interested in the men, but "the girl. How beautiful her features! How delicate her snowy skin!" He watches from hiding as she prepares for bed: "she loosened the soft mass of golden hair which crowned her head. Like a shimmering waterfall turned to burnished metal by a dying sun it fell about her oval face; in waving lines, below her waist it tumbled." Jane Porter is evidently a strikingly beautiful woman.

Inevitably she falls into danger and Tarzan comes to the rescue. A great ape, Terkoz, carries her off in a scene that Burroughs was to repeat many times:

> The first intimation Jane Porter had of his presence was when the great hairy body dropped to the earth beside her, and she saw the awful face and the snarling, hideous mouth thrust within a foot of her.
> One piercing scream escaped her lips as the brute hand clutched her arm. Then she was dragged towards those awful fangs which yawned at her throat. But ere they touched that fair skin another mood claimed the anthropoid.
> The tribe had kept his women. He must find others to replace them. This hairless white ape would be the first of his new household, and so he threw her roughly across his broad hairy shoulders and leaped back into the trees, bearing Jane away.

Now Burroughs uses this kidnapping as a means of bringing Tarzan and Jane together for the first time, but it is worth considering what alternatives were available to him. She could have been rescued from one of the commonplace dangers of the African jungle, from a hungry lion, from a falling tree or even from getting lost. Instead Tarzan saves her from "a fate worse than death", from becoming the unwilling member of a great ape's harem. He chooses an explicitly sexual threat that charges the story with a kind of excitement, with a range of fears, desires and feelings that put it in a different class to many similar adventure stories. The beautiful Jane Porter, with her snowy skin and golden hair falling below her waist, is an archetype of white womanhood. She is menaced by a grotesque nightmare monster, "great hairy body . . . the awful face . . . the snarling hideous mouth . . . those awful fangs", that carried her off to do to her what a popular writer could only hint at in 1911-1912. Terkoz has absolutely nothing to do with nature, but everything to do with Burroughs's imagining of the great ape as man's bestial forebear, exhibiting his passions and lusts without restraint. The scene is set for a struggle of titanic significance as Tarzan goes to the rescue. Only Tarzan can save her, only Tarzan can triumph over this bestial savagery, only Tarzan can dominate the primeval forest. All this is written, moreover, without any appearance of being a contrived effect; one of Burroughs's strengths is his evident sincerity.

The two fight . . . and Jane watches, "her hands tight pressed against her rising and falling bosom and her eyes wide with mingled horror, fascination, fear and admiration". Primordial ape and primeval man are battling "for possession of a woman—for her". By the time that Terkoz rolls dead on the ground, the "veil of civilization and culture" has been swept from Jane's eyes and it is as a primeval woman that she springs forward "with outstretched arms toward the primeval man who had fought for her and won her". Tarzan carries her off, although his "heredity" prevents him from molesting her. Instead, he behaves "like some courtier of old . . . the hallmark of his aristocratic birth, the natural outcropping of many generations of fine breeding, and hereditary graciousness which a lifetime of uncouth and savage training and environment could not eradicate".[3]

Jane's falling in love with Tarzan was to place her over the years in more danger than probably any other woman in fiction. In *Tarzan and the Golden Lion,* she falls into the hands of Luvini, a huge black man

> with low receding forehead and prognathous jaw. As he entered the hut with a lighted torch which he stuck in the floor, his bloodshot eyes gazed greedily at the still form of the woman lying prone before him. He licked his thick lips and coming closer, reached out and touched her. Jane Clayton looked up, and recoiling in revulsion shrunk away . . . She felt his hot breath upon her and saw his bloodshot eyes and the red tongue that momentarily licked the thick lips . . . By brute force, ruthless and indomitable, he beat down her weak resistance and slowly and surely dragged her closer to him . . . the two struggled on, the woman, from the first, foredoomed to defeat.

In fact, Jane kills Luvini with his own knife, and, "almost naked, for he had nearly torn

all my clothing from me in our struggles", she steals an Arab's clothes and escapes.[4] Nevertheless, the racist charge of this extract is absolutely explicit, and in the context of America in the early 1920s, must be seen as a veritable literary endorsement of the lynch mobs that policed race relations in the Southern States.

While Burroughs held Tarzan up as the epitome of white manhood, the excitement of his books comes as much from the dangers that surround white women as from Tarzan's success in overcoming those dangers. The books quite deliberately excite their male readership by exposing a succession of beautiful white women to sexual molestation, extending from rape to murder, at the hands of various apes, gorillas, blacks, Arabs and degenerate Europeans. In these situations, Burroughs, as we have already seen, gives his racism free rein.

Before passing on, however, it is worth noting that it is not enough to apologise for this racism as Rodney Needham did in a recent *Foundation* as "a merely literary tactic or at least not an absolute expression of Burroughs' own attitude towards dark-skinned human beings". On the contrary, the Tarzan stories have running through them a powerful and systematic racist discourse.[5] Even more appalling are Needham's presumably light-hearted remarks on that familiar fantasy "rape by ape" which he tells us is a standard imaginary theme of some dramatic force. Moreover, he asks flippantly, would being raped by an ape "be so dreadful as all that for a woman".[6] Of course, in thirty or forty years time Needham's offensive sexism might well appear as "a merely literary tactic". At the present time, however, the serious exploration of the expression of this aspect of masculine identity in popular fiction is long overdue.

The most bizarre and in some ways the most disturbing of Jane's adventures occurs when she falls into the hands of the Kavuru. She is leading the survivors from a plane crash through the jungle to safety when

> she felt an unaccountable urge to turn back . . . At first the peculiar urge was only a faint suggestion; then it became more pronounced, became a force beyond her power to deny . . . A power stranger than she controlled her, and she turned docilely back away from them.
> It was as though someone was calling to her in a voice that she could not hear but that she must obey. It offered her nothing, nor did it threaten her. She had neither hope nor fear because of it.
> When the noose of the Kavuru dropped about her she felt no surprise, no terror—her sensibilities were numbed. She looked into the savage, painted face of the white man who drew her to a limb beside him and removed the noose from about her. It all seemed perfectly natural, as though it were something that had been foreordained since the beginning of time.

The Kavuru are immortals, a community of white priests, who have shunned the company of women, but who now need female victims to preserve their youthful vigour. They have a hypnotic power over women and can effortlessly bend them to their will. Their high priest Kavandavanda tells Jane how women fit into the Kavuru scheme of things:

> You can serve the only purpose for which women are fit. Man may only attain godliness alone. Woman weakens and destroys him. Look at me! Look at my priests! You think we are all young men. We are not. A hundred rains have come and gone since the latest neophyte joined our holy order. And how have we attained this deathlessness? Through women. We are all celibates. Our vows of celibacy were sealed in the blood of women . . . Long ago I learned the secret of deathless youth. It lies in an elixir brewed of many things—the pollen of certain plants, the roots of others, the spinal fluid of leopards, and, principally, the glands and blood of women—young women. Now do you understand?

Man, it seems can find immortality through the murder of young women. One can only wonder at the psychological origins of this particular fantasy.

Jane does her best to escape, using those methods that Burroughs considered most legitimate for a woman, that is, she first seduces Ogdli, a Kavuru guard, and then Kavandavanda himself. Her feminine charms have considerable success and almost effortlessly she persuades the high priest to repudiate the vows which he has religiously observed for hundreds of years. Such is her beauty that he offers to make her his "high priestess . . . a goddess" if only she will give herself to him. The ploy fails, however, when the rest of the priesthood insist that the temptress be put to death. Only the direct intervention of Tarzan and friends saves her. "We have come for our women", he informs the Kavuru.[7]

The Overthrow of Matriarchy

The relationship between Tarzan and Jane is one of benevolent patriarchy. He is the master, the Lord, and she is very much the subordinate mate who has been fought for and won. Burroughs certainly does not portray her as a useless cypher though. Such a woman would not be a credible partner for the lord of the jungle. Jane is portrayed as an exceptionally beautiful woman with a strong will and plenty of determination. She is extremely resourceful, has great courage and is capable of quite incredible feats of endurance which she performs in book after book. Her subordination to Tarzan is not forced on her, but is entered into willingly. She accepts it as natural and beneficial, as the proper way for her to realise herself. Even for a woman like Jane there is no way that she can sustain an independent existence, that she can remain autonomous. She finds herself through her husband, he defines her being, and, of course, he is such a magnificent specimen that no objection is possible. For Burroughs, Tarzan was the great masculine exemplar.

This wholesome state of affairs was obviously not unchallenged because on one of his journeys across Africa, Tarzan stumbled across a most unnatural and perverted society, a community ruled by women!

In his *Tarzan and the Ant Men,* Burroughs attempts to produce social satire in the manner of Swift, and one of his chosen targets is women's emancipation in the form of a primitive matriarchy, the Alalus. Tarzan watches one of their women slouch through the forest. It was "manlike . . ."

> a great brute that walked erect upon two feet and carried a club in one horny calloused hand. Its long hair fell unkempt about its shoulders, and there was hair upon its chest and a little upon its arms and legs, though no more than is found upon many males of civilized races . . . The illusion of great size was suggested more by the massiveness of the shoulders and the development of the muscles of the back and arms than by height, though the creature measured close to six feet. Its face was massive, with a broad nose, and a wide, full-lipped mouth; the eyes of normal size, were set beneath heavy, beetling brows, topped by a wide, low forehead.

This monstrous woman and her kind were perhaps the lowest "in the order of human evolution". So revolted was Burroughs at the very idea of matriarchy that he could only envisage the women involved as "things", as hideous ugly monsters that had in fact ceased to be women in any accepted sense of the word.

Burroughs treats us to an account of the Alalus's social customs. The women live as cave-dwellers and periodically hunt down the forest-dwelling men when they wish to mate. The men are taken by force. Once mating has taken place, the men, if they have survived the brutality that accompanies their captivity, are expelled into the forest until such time as they are needed again. While the women are strong and brutal, the men are

cowardly and weak, living in continual dread of being captured. Alalus society is shown as being characterised by incredible brutality and unbelievable squalor and Burroughs tells us why this is so. His words stand as a warning for all feminists and those men taken in by their misguided theories. The Alalus's "hideous life" is, he tells us, "the natural result of the unnatural reversal of sex dominance". It is for the male "to initiative love and by his masterfulness to inspire first respect, then admiration in the breast of the female he seeks to attract". Love comes only after the inculcation of respect and admiration and without them cannot come at all. As far as Burroughs is concerned love between men and women cannot develop unless women first of all accept their subordinates position by respecting and admiring men. This is what is wrong with Alalus society: because men are not respected and admired there can be no love between men and women with the result that society has become brutalised and the women have become "unsexed creatures", driving the men out. Without men to respect and admire, the Alalus women do not even keep themselves and their encampment tidy!

Tarzan decides to put an end to this unnatural state of affairs and to help out his fellow men. He saves one Alalus youth and teaches him to use a spear and a bow and arrows before proceeding to another adventure among the Ant Men.

In his absence, the Alalus men band together and use their new weapons to overthrow the matriarchy and subordinate the women to their rule. The outcome is inevitable: "such a condition was too preposterous, too unnatural to exist, nor would it exist much longer." The women are defeated in battle and the victors divide them among themselves. Tarzan's protégée leads the way:

> I do not like to cook. She shall cook for me. If she refuses I shall stick her with this, and he made to jab towards the young woman's ribs with his spear, a gesture that caused her to cower and drop fearfully upon one knee . . .

The young woman is still not too happy with the proposed arrangements and so he

> raised his spear and with the heavy shaft struck the girl upon the head, knocking her down, and he stood over her, himself snarling and scowling, menacing her with further punishment, while she cowered where she had fallen. He kicked her in the side . . . Slowly she crawled to her knees and embracing his legs gazed up into his face with an expression of doglike adulation and devotion.

He asks once again, "You will cook for me?" and this time she replies. 'Forever'."

When Tarzan returns to see how his protégée has fared in the battle between the sexes, he is provided with an entertaining display of male superiority. The Alalus youth

> seized a female by the hair and dragging her to him struck her heavily about the head and face with his clenched fist, and the woman fell upon her knees and fondled his legs, looking wistfully into his face, her own glowing with love and admiration.[8]

This violent restoration of patriarchy was very much a response on Burroughs's part to the limited steps taken towards the emancipation of women in America by the early 1920s. His "satire" is intended as a warning against the "new woman" and as an assertion of the inevitability of patriarchy. What is remarkable is the way in which he apparently endorses the routine use of violence against women who do not know their place. The extremism of his fictional stance on this issue indicates a very real measure of insecurity. Although his Tarzan books are packed full of violent incident, it is interesting that nowhere does he so explicitly endorse such routine violence as a means of keeping blacks subordinate. Such measures are reserved for women.

In the course of his travels through Africa, Tarzan confronts one other society where women are the dominant sex, the Kaji. They are a tribe of black Amazons, who have been successfully changing their colour to white over a number of generations, by only mating with captured white men, and killing all negroid babies! This particular racist fantasy surely goes way beyond anything that could be described as "merely a literary tactic". Tarzan *allows himself* to be captured by these female warriors and is escorted to their city. Despite their dominant position, they are still only "women":

> His captors talked incessantly among themselves. They discussed other women who were not with them, always disparagingly; they complained of the difficulties they experienced in the dressing of their hair; they compared the cut and fit and quality of the pelts that formed their loin-cloths; and each of them expatiated upon the merits of some exceptionally rare skin she hoped to acquire in the future.

Such creature's pretensions to equality are, of course, laughable, let alone their claims to dominance.

Tarzan learns more about the Kaji from conversation with an English captive named Troll—"The man was short and stalky, with heavy, stooped shoulders and long arms that gave him a gorillaesque appearance." So much for the English working classes! Troll's heartfelt lament was clearly intended to strike a chord with all Burroughs' readership:

> look at these dames here. Ain't they white. They look white, but they all got Negro blood in 'em. But don't never remind 'em of it. You remember Kipling's, "She knifed me one night 'cause I wished she was white?" Well that's it; that's the answer. They want to be white. God only knows why; nobody ever sees 'em but us; and we don't care what color they are. They could be green as far as I'm concerned. I'm married to six of 'em. They make me do all the work while they sit around an' gabble about hair and loincloths. When they ain't doin' that they're knockin' hell out o' some dame that ain't here.
> I got an old woman back in England. I thought she was bad. I run away from her, an' look what I got into! Six of 'em.

Another prisoner, Stanley Wood, falls in love with the Amazon Queen. He physically assaults a fellow prisoner who describes her as "a n----- wench", but later confides to Tarzan his fear that she must have negro blood in her—"they all have." His dilemma is resolved for him, however, when she is discovered to be the long lost daughter of Lord and Lady Mountford, white and an aristocrat.[9]

The High Priestess of Opar

Burroughs scattered a variety of lost civilisations across Africa for Tarzan to stumble across in his travels. They include outposts of Pharaonic Egypt, of Ancient Rome, of Richard I's Crusade, of the sixteenth-century Portuguese Empire, and, most bizarre of all, a replica of Henry VIII's London, inhabited by English-speaking gorillas who were under the impression that they were Henry, his wives and their retinues. But the one that fascinated Burroughs most was the last outpost of Atlantis, the grim city of Opar with its mighty ruins and its labyrinth of underground passages, its sun-worship and its human sacrifice, its degenerate inhabitants and its beautiful high priestess, La.

Tarzan falls into the hands of the beast-men of Opar and is destined for sacrifice to the Sun. In the event, he saves the high priestess from death and she hides him beneath the city with the intention of concocting some tale for her followers that will enable her to marry him. Tarzan's masculine beauty and physical prowess are such that she finds him irresistible. "You are a very wonderful man", she tells him. "You are such a man as I have seen in my daydreams ever since I was a little girl." Tarzan is puzzled as to why the

Oparian men have degenerated into beast-men. She tells him of the destruction of Atlantis, the overrunning of its African colony by "the black hordes of the north and the black hordes of the south", leaving only the isolated mountain fortress of Opar. Here over countless generations, the inhabitants have undergone physical degeneration until they are no more "than a small tribe of savage apes". Some even mate with the apes. Only the women have been partially exempted from this process and still retain their beauty, but for how long? As for La herself, she is fated to marry one of the more attractive of the beast-men: "Tarzan shuddered at her fate, for even in the dim light of the vault he was impressed by her beauty."

In this story Burroughs successfully brings together many of the themes that obsessed him. A lost white civilisation engulfed by darkest Africa, the great danger of racial degeneration, white women at the mercy of degenerate beast-men, and the triumphant Apollo-like figure of Tarzan overcoming all dangers and all obstacles.

Predictably, the unfortunate Jane is captured by the Oparian beast-men and is subjected to one of her regular horrific ordeals.

> For many days they travelled through the dense forest. The girl, footsore and exhausted, was half-dragged, half-pushed through the long, hot, tedious days. Occasionally, when she would stumble and fall, she was cuffed and kicked by the nearest of the frightful men. Long before they reached their journey's end her shoes had been discarded—the soles entirely gone. Her clothes were torn to mere shreds and tatters, and through the pitiful rags her once white and tender skin showed raw and bleeding from contact with the thousand pitiless thorns and brambles through which she had been dragged.

At last, she collapsed in a state of complete exhaustion, only to be surrounded by the beasts who"goaded her with their cudgels and beat and kicked her with their fists and feet". Despairing, she prays for "merciful death . . . but it did not come". Eventually they reach the city and Jane is prepared for sacrifice. Just as La is about to plunge the knife into Jane's bosom, Tarzan leaps to the rescue. "She is mine", he proclaims and carries her off, leaving La collapsed in a faint.[10]

Tarzan returns to Opar a number of times and Burroughs takes the opportunity to develop his portrayal of La, establishing her as an almost elemental woman. In *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar,* she is described as a "strange anomaly . . ."

> Now the cruel and bloodthirsty creature of a heartless god and again a melting woman filled with compassion and tenderness. Sometimes the incarnation of jealousy and revenge and sometimes a sobbing maiden, generous and forgiving; at once a virgin and a wanton; but always a woman. Such was La.

Tarzan once again falls into her hands, but instead of torture and death, she is unable to control her passion for him:

> she ran her hands in mute caress over his naked flesh; she covered him with her body as though to protect him from the hideous fate she had ordained for him, and in trembling, piteous tones she begged him for his love. For hours the frenzy of her passion possessed the burning handmaiden of the Flaming God, until at last sleep overpowered her and she lapsed into unconsciousness beside the man she had sworn to torture and slay. And Tarzan, untroubled by thoughts of the future, slept peacefully in La's embrace.[11]

But her love is unrequited, and Tarzan leaves her to return to Jane.

La's tragedy makes her one of Burroughs's more successful women characters. She is more than just another beautiful victim to be humiliated, abused and menaced, and instead achieves a kind of dignity. This was not something that Burroughs regularly handed out to his female characters and was presumably accidental. Paradoxically, it is

Tarzan's rejection that establishes her as some sort of autonomous being, even though she is left longing for his return.

Only with Jana, the Red Flower of Zoram, do we find a woman who is in any way the equal of Burroughs's male heroes. We meet her in *Tarzan at the Earth's Core,* as she is being pursued through the mountains by four squat, hairy Phelians, whose leader, Skruk, desires her as his mate. She stands in full view to taunt them before leading them on a chase that she is confident they have no hope of winning. Later, when the American, Jason Gridley, finds himself falling in love with her, she spurns him and takes off on her own, warning him that "only a man may go where the Red Flower of Zoram goes."[12] Although her part in the story is that of someone being either pursued or held captive, she is never shown as helpless, she never stops fighting back and always appears very much in control of her destiny. With Jana, Burroughs had the possibility of a convincing heroine. The pity is that she stands alone in the Tarzan stories.

Notes

1. Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan and the Forbidden City* (New York 1981) pp.45, 49, 50, 61, 65. This is the Ballantine edition as are all the other Tarzan novels referred to. First published in 1938.
2. R.D. Mullen, "Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Fate Worse than Death", *Riverside Quarterly* 4, 3 (1970).
3. Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (New York, 1980) pp.140, 153, 156, 168. First published in 1912.
4. Burroughs, *Tarzan and the Golden Lion* (New York, 1981) pp.154, 180. First published in 1922-23.
5. I have discussed this in more detail in my "Lord Greystoke and Darkest Africa: The Politics of the Tarzan Stories", *Race and Class* forthcoming.
6. Rodney Needham, "Tarzan of the Apes: A Re-Appreciation", *Foundation* 28 (July 1983) pp.22, 24.
7. Burroughs, *Tarzan's Quest* (New York, 1980) pp.140, 171, 179, 188. First published in 1935-36.
8. Burroughs, *Tarzan and the Ant Men* (New York, 1981) pp.16, 23, 27, 119, 178. First published in 1924.
9. Burroughs, *Tarzan the Magnificent* (New York, 1981) pp.61, 62, 63, 73, 74. First published in 1936-37.
10. Burroughs, *The Return of Tarzan* (New York, 1981) pp.172, 173, 174, 194, 204. First published in 1913.
11. Burroughs, *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar* (New York, 1980) pp.70, 75. First published in 1916.
12. Burroughs, *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* (New York, 1980) p.109. First published in 1929-30.

Haim Finkelstein teaches literature and art at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev at Beer Sheva, Israel, and is currently on sabbatical in New York researching the writings and art of Dali as well as aspects of the relationship between sf and modern art.

"Deserts of Vast Eternity": J.G. Ballard and Robert Smithson

HAIM FINKELSTEIN

The present paper has grown out of my conviction that there are areas of modern or post-modern art that have been inspired by a vision or ethos similar to that which animates certain science fiction works. Robert Smithson, a minimal sculptor who was engaged from the late 1960s and until his death in 1973 in the creation of earthworks, reveals in his art and writing a profound affinity with the kind of vision which informs the writing of J.G. Ballard, a writer associated with the New Wave science fiction of the 1960s. Yet—it must be said—my primary aim is not simply to compare the art works of the one with the fiction of the other. I am more concerned with the confluence of minds and visions; consequently, Smithson's writings figure more prominently in this essay than the physical art works. However, I will also trace the evolution of their aesthetic systems as corollaries to their vision. In this respect, Smithson's sculptures (and, for that matter, the forms of Ballard's fiction) constitute an indispensable element, as we shall see, in a dialectic which subsumes both vision and aesthetic.

What follows does not constitute an argument for a "science fiction art" in the making. As a literary genre science fiction has had its share of pictorial representation in all those bug-eyed aliens, spaceships and cities of the future found on magazine and paperback covers. My concern, though, is with an aesthetic which would transcend the illustrative framework of the genre and establish complementary relations with it. A case for such an aesthetic is implicitly suggested in the first paragraph of Robert Smithson's first major published article, "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966). Smithson argues that "many architectural concepts found in science-fiction have nothing to do with science or fiction, instead they suggest a new kind of monumentality which has much in common with the aims of some of today's artists."[1] The statement follows a quotation out of a practically unreadable science fiction novel of the 1930s, *The Time Stream* by John Taine (Eric Temple Bell),[2] describing a view of thousands of "broad, low pillars" stretched in long parallel avenues over a vast desert. These "monuments" are appropriated by Smithson for the purpose of suggesting the aims of minimal artists such as Robert Morris or Donald Judd. These aims have little to do with the original sense affixed to the monuments in the novel. Here as well as in most other borrowings from science fiction, Smithson does not look so much for a "story"—or, to use his words, for the

"'values' of the naturalistic 'literary' novel"—but for concepts and images that would trigger ideas related to his aesthetic conception.

Yet Smithson's contention that architectural conceptions such as those embodied in the quoted passage have "nothing to do with science or fiction" should not be taken wholly at face value; at least not in terms of his own conception of the "new monuments" expounded in this article. It is not that his essay is so much about science fiction (although it abounds in science fiction references, including a long passage devoted to science fiction movies); but it does explore ideas that appear to underlie much of science fiction in their insistent references to time and entropy. A key concept in Smithson's thought and aesthetic, entropy is a measure of the amount of energy lost (or rendered unavailable) when energy is transformed from one state to another. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, in the universe this unavailable energy always tends towards a maximum. The implication is that everything in the universe is running down as energy is dispersed in a more random manner. Smithson views the minimal art made by the artists discussed in his essay as a way of meeting entropy head-on by obliterating any sense of "time as decay" and thus of entropy (elsewhere Smithson appears to concur with the view that "entropy is the cause of time in man"[3]). If the future carries the inevitable stamp of decay, then those works would "cause us to forget the future."

> Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome and electric light. They are built not for the ages but against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries. Both past and future are placed in an objective present . . . A million years is contained in a second . . .[4]

In this largely symbolic fight "against entropy", Smithson upholds the instant—"inorganic time"—as against human time (history and evolution). Such a temporal orientation is attained by an art of "monumental inaction" whose forms, exhibiting "flat surfaces, the banal and empty, the cool, blank after blank",[5] embody a minimal energy condition or what Smithson refers to as "nullification".

The frame of reference Smithson applies to minimal art in this essay hardly fits the ideal of formal clarity free of content and context to which some of its adherents have subscribed. Indeed, Smithson's own early minimal pieces of the mid 1960's—sculptures such as *Alogon #1* (1966) or *Gyrostasis* (1968)—already exhibit some deviations from the canon of minimal art. Theirs are not the cool, balanced and pure, content-free forms of minimal art, but intricate mirror plays or tapering progressions of geometric shapes implying a sense of openness and irreducibility or, in Lawrence Alloway's words, a "sense of collapsing systems".[6] Such a sense also underlies the preoccupation with time and entropy found in "Entropy and the New Monuments". Smithson's contention that minimal artists are motivated by the awareness of an "ultimate collapse of both mechanical and electrical technology" foreshadows his future concern with architectural or environmental sculpture as an element in a new landscape embodying these concepts. Yet, I should add, in this essay Smithson already looks outside the gallery to perceive around him an "architecture of entropy" evoked by the "cold glass boxes" of modern commercial buildings or, better, by the "infinite number of housing developments". This architecture may inspire, Smithson contends, the art of immobility and emptiness of an artist such as Robert Morris. But more significantly in terms of his future thought, this urban sprawl comes to represent for him an entropic condition of sameness and agglomeration leading

to chaos and dilapidation. The denial of entropy Smithson perceives in minimal art is only the obverse of Smithson's own overwhelming sense of decay which, already at this point, is perceived by him on a cosmic scale. Thus the concept of entropy tends to signify for him—and this is the vision haunting him rather than the abstract scientific equation—an "ultimate future (when) the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness"[7] (what is often referred to as the "heat death of the universe"). Similarly, the conception of time as an interval rather than a duration leads to the perception of a "hidden infinity" which later becomes identified in his mind with geological or cosmic time.

While the thought or vision informing Smithson's essay may not, perhaps, be the exclusive domain of science fiction, it does appear to be uniquely attuned to the cultural and scientific orientation underlying science fiction as a relatively novel form of fictional representation. Exploring science fiction from this perspective, Robert Scholes discerns in it the reflection of a revolution in man's conception of himself, brought about by a variety of scientific advances such as the theories of evolution, relativity, gestalt psychology and cybernetics. This revolution has broadened man's sense of time, enabling him to perceive historical time as a fragment of the grander frame of reference of human time, "which is again a tiny fragment of geologic time, which is itself only a bit of cosmic time".[8] The novel as a literary form exemplifying an age conscious of history as a shaping force has thus been superseded, according to Scholes, by a form of speculative fiction (Scholes names it "structural fabulation"). Such a fiction embodies an "awareness of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures", and views human existence as a "random happening in a world which is orderly in its laws but without plan or purpose".[9] Generalized and all-inclusive though this programme for the "fiction of the future" might be, it is helpful in setting up J.G. Ballard as an apt subject for comparison with Robert Smithson. Other science fiction writers may also fit the mark; but it is Ballard who, during the period under consideration (roughly the 1960s), provides a sustained pursuance of this vision in terms of both the content and form of his fiction.

Ballard's underlying concern, like Smithson's, is with entropy and time. He has been called a "poet of death".[10] I would see him rather as a poet of decay. Entropy, though not explicitly referred to as in Smithson's writings, is embodied in a compelling vision of stagnation, decline and dilapidation. A running thread thoughout his fiction is the sense of failure and ultimate collapse of technological society and the betrayal of humanity by the idea of scientific progress. In the late 1950s and early 1960s this vision attains its most haunting expression in the evocation of megalithic cities on the decline. In "Chronopolis" (1960) the city forms an enormous ring of decaying suburban sprawl around a vast dead centre. "Build Up" (differently entitled "The Concentration City", 1957) is a somewhat Borgesian conceit concerning a city-universe infinitely extending in all directions, where "free space" is an unknown concept. Dilapidation in this vast system is expressed by dispersed local disturbances such as huge cave-ins or "black areas" ("a million cubic miles have gone back to jungle"). "Billenium" (1961),[11] the quintessential overpopulation story, presents an ironic view of a world on a downward slope and heading towards total chaos. In later stories Ballard unfolds visions of accumulating junk and consumer waste around suburban areas: "The areas on either side of the expressway were wasteland, continuous junkyard filled with cars and trucks, washing machines and refrigerators, all perfectly workable but jettisoned by the economic pressure of the succeeding waves of

discarded models . . ." ("The Subliminal Man", 1963).

The "entropic" consciousness at work in all those stories is typified by an unchecked accumulation of things—objects, houses, people—leading to mounting chaos and randomness within the system and finally resulting in an "all-encompassing sameness", to use Smithson's phrase. Smithson indeed offers a similar vision of discount centres near the super highways surrounding the city, inside which there are "maze-like counters with piles of neatly stacked merchandise; rank on rank it goes into a consumer oblivion."[12] Similarly, the houses of suburbia "fall back into sprawling babels of limbos . . . An immense negative entity of formlessness displaces the centre which is the city and swamps the country."[13] Such qualities of formlessness, fragmentation and swallowed up boundaries also govern Ballard's disaster novels and stories. These are apocalyptic visions of disturbances in the eco-system resulting in a leveling down of civilization and its trappings into a boundless wasteland. It may be a "wind from nowhere", in a novel bearing such title (1962), which literally levels all human habitation, burying the world beneath a layer of rubble and topsoil. In *The Drowned World* (1962), freak solar storms turn the earth into a vast tropical zone in which large areas, including all centres of civilization, are submerged under water and have become wastelands of stagnant swamps and lagoons, enveloped by tangles of plant forms, while areas that formerly were seas are now deserts of silt and salt flats. The disappearance of boundaries between land and water makes for one of the dominant images of the 1964 novel *The Burning World* (British title: *The Drought*). A long drought has turned all land areas into dry wastelands of parched earth and sand (sand is another prominent leveller in Ballard's fiction). The seashore now forms a "dune limbo", miles of salt-dunes and pools of brine: "Nowhere was there a defined margin between the shore and sea, and the endless shallows formed the only dividing zone, land and water both submerged in this gray liquid limbo."[14]

The desert or wasteland is the reigning paradigm for the entropic condition. Desert consciousness ranges in Smithson's thought between the "concrete deserts" of cities and suburban sprawl to the deserts of the Southwest in which he and other artists such as Michael Heizer and Walter DeMaria have actually worked. For Smithson—as for Ballard—the desert or wasteland is a zone of fragmentation, lack of differentiation and boundlessness. Perhaps the most intense evocation of what the desert comes to represent for Smithson is to be found in one of his "travelogue" essays, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), describing a day trip taken around construction sites—bridge, pumping derrick, parking lot, etc.—along the Passaic River. One of those sites or "monuments" is referred to as "a sand box or a model desert".

> Under the dead light of the Passaic afternoon the desert became a map of infinite disintegration and forgetfulness. This monument of minute particles . . . suggested the sullen dissolution of entire continents, the drying up of oceans . . . all that existed were millions of grains of sand, a vast deposit of bones and stones pulverized into dust.[15]

But Smithson's desert consciousness is not merely a reflection of his awareness of the fundamental properties of the world surrounding him (although such an awareness is certainly part of his intellectual make-up and harks back to his childhood interest in natural history). It also signifies an aesthetic which has been consistently pursued by him since his early minimal work. Minimal aesthetics call for an art devoid of any personal expression denoting the presence of the artist in his work. Smithson, on the contrary, asserts himself as a distinct voice both in his sculpture and, more persuasively, as a writer.

Writing about other minimalists ("Entropy and the New Monuments"), he evinces from their work a broad frame of reference encompassing, as seen before, ideas of time and entropy and an overwhelming sense of the emptiness at the heart of existence. In the same manner, he charges with specific personal meaning his perceptions of science fiction movies, suburban architecture or industrial "monuments". Thus art comes to mean for him not only art-making but also an act of perception ("A great artist can make art by simply casting a glance"[16]). Placing art in the gallery as an "art object" means separating it from its conceptual frame of reference, severing it from a temporal process governed by the artist's perception. The only way, Smithson feels, an artist can resist this "convenient fiction" of art as an isolated object with a beginning and an end (a fiction depriving him of a continuous presence in his own art) is by a willed introduction of time and process into the art work. Only then will the artist (the perceiving mind) and the art work be placed within a perspective that distends or, rather, breaks up the time and space boundaries imposed by the gallery. It is only fitting that for Smithson, with his predilection for natural history, time and process are consistent with his perception of the earth as a "map undergoing disruption" whose layers and "levels of sedimentation" make one aware of the "millions and millions of years of 'geologic time'."[17] As we shall find out, such a vision underlies his manipulation of the "raw matter of the earth" in his Non-Sites and earthworks.

It is in terms of this programme that Smithson's desert consciousness attains its full significance. As a physical locale the desert epitomizes the condition under which the fragmentation or "pulverization" of matter is seen in all its "primal grandeur". But further than that, the "desert is less "nature" than a concept, a place that swallows up boundaries."[18] In "A Sedimentation of the Mind; Earth Projects" (1968) Smithson expounds a dialectic fundamental to his art, elsewhere referred to as a "bipolar rhythm between mind and matter".[19]

> One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallizations break apart into deposits of gritty reason.[20]

In the light of this dialectic, the desert as concept implies boundless fragmentation infinitely extending in space and time and in the artist's mind. The engulfment of the artist by this "desert" endows the dialectic of mind and matter with the attributes of the primary process. Smithson appropriates Anton Ehrenzweig's term "dedifferentiation" to describe this suspension of boundaries between the "self and the non self",[21] relating it to Freud's notion of the "oceanic" state (in Freud's words, the "limitless extension and oneness with the universe"[22]). Art in this sense does not involve the dreaded Kantian things-in-themselves; it is rather a system of relationships between undifferentiated materials, containers and sets of references. This is the idea behind Smithson's Non-Sites. On his excursions to certain outdoor sites—quarries, mines, derelict man-made structures—Smithson collected stones, slate, bits of found objects. Those were placed in the gallery in heaps or containers (their shapes often reflecting some quality of the original site), accompanied by documentary photographs and maps of the site. The Non-Site is a way of physically containing the disruption of the site, says Smithson. "The container is in a sense a fragment itself, something that could be called a three-dimensional map . . . it actually exists as a fragment of a greater fragmentation. It is a three-dimensional *perspective* that has broken away from the whole, while containing the lack of its own

containment."[23] The fragment contained in the bin is not placed apart from the site from which it was taken (it would be then an art object); it forms, rather, a dialectic with it—a "Site/Non-Site dialectic" as Smithson refers to it later in his writings.[24] Similarly, the artist's manipulation of the "dedifferentiated" matter of the earth does not imply a total immersion in the primary process but a relationship with it as one of many variables in a constantly changing equation.

The Site/Non-Site dialectic is the context in which Smithson's vision of entropy attains its broadest artistic definition. The continuous entropic disruption of matter is not limited to the sites or their non-site fragments. Nothing escapes it, not the bins or containers which will eventually turn to dust, nor the tools of human intervention in geologic processes (tools of strip mining, excavation, construction) which "become part of the earth's geology as they sink back into their original state. Machines like dinosaurs must return to dust or rust." (A few years after writing this Smithson introduced ideas of this nature in his *Spiral Jetty* film, juxtaposing a bulldozer engaged in the construction of the jetty with the image of a stegosaurus.) This dialectic also defines for Smithson the essence of the cosmic or the eternal. He does not like Blake perceive eternity in a grain of sand ("there are no mysteries in these vestiges, no traces of an end or a beginning"[26]), yet it does exist for him as a quality of the ever-extending series of fragmentations. Smithson entertained such notions in the proposals he made in the capacity of artist-consultant for the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport. Proposing that earthworks be built around the airport which would be seen only from the air, he suggests that "this art is remote from the eye of the viewer the way a galaxy is remote from the earth." Thus the airport may be viewed conceptually as an "artificial universe" which, within such a series of fragmentations, consists of a "dot in the vast infinity of universes, an imperceptible point in a cosmic immensity".[27] A perception such as this of a relationship between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic underlies Smithson's earthwork *The Spiral Jetty* (1970).

The Spiral Jetty, however, introduces another dimension in the development of Smithson's aesthetic—an aesthetic of fragmentation, as we may rightly call it—the implication of which will become clearer after we have considered Ballard's "parallel" aesthetic. Similarly to Smithson, Ballard too conceives the external landscape as a "mental map" of a psychic reality. The mechanism involved is not that of projection but the perception of a quality of the landscape that appears connected with a certain innate quality of his character's mind. Such a connection, in his earlier fiction in particular, may be literally accounted for on the basis of some "scientific" theory. The jungles and swamps covering the earth in *The Drowned World* are the scene of a biological regression of plants and reptiles to the Triassic age, when these conditions—high solar radiation, high temperatures and humidity—were the norm. Man, it is assumed, while not going on such a backward journey, has retained biological memories of this age which are now being released by the changing landscape as dream images. "Every step we've taken in our evolution is a milestone inscribed with organic memories . . . Each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our blood-streams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory."[28] Patrick Parrinder may be correct in pointing out that much of the "science" in Ballard's fiction is provided by Jungian psychology.[29] Jungian thought is indeed apparent in the idea of inherited collective thought patterns in the human mind as well as in the speculation concerning the existence of primordial images which are residues of functions from man's animal ancestry. This is true not only of *The Drowned World* but

of quite a few short stories in Ballard's canon. Yet it appears to me that Parrinder somewhat overstates Jung's importance in this connection. The "collective unconscious" to which indeed certain features of external reality are progressively subjugated, as Parrinder maintains, is a vehicle for a vision which is clearly related to Freudian thought. The "entropic", fragmented and undifferentiated external landscape serves as a physical correlative for the psyche's "inner space" with its sense of oceanic engulfment and the loss of individual identity in the womb. *The Drowned World* abounds in imagery evoking the lure of the quiescence of the womb. Silt banks surrounding lagoons and swamps seem "like the lost forever beckoning and unattainable shores of the amnionic paradise"[30]; a planetarium now under water surrounds Kerans, Ballard's character, with the blackness of a "uterine night", water and silt carrying him "gently like an immense placenta".[31] But there is a further descent, beyond the womb, defined by Freud's Nirvana principle and the perception of the instinct's goal as being directed towards a restoration of the primal state of things in unbound or primary processes (and the additional reflection that "inanimate things existed before living ones").[32] Such a wish for "oneness with the universe" is experienced by Kerans in a dream in which he steps into a lake "whose waters now seemed an extension of his own blood stream . . . he felt the barriers which divided his own blood cells from the surrounding medium dissolving, and he swam forwards, spreading outwards across the black thudding water."[33] Irresistibly drawn to follow the sun southwards to a zone of jungles and unbearable temperatures, Kerans appears to be "searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun"[34] where such a dream might become a reality.

The Freudian and Jungian perspective in Ballard's fiction forms a setting for his characters' confrontation with questions of being and oblivion and their search for a form of immortality. Often they have practically no past life or we see them attempting to eradicate whatever they carry with them from their past. The "entropic" landscape surrounding them—boundless and fragmented—offers them an escape from time and memory. "When the artist goes to the desert he enriches his absence", says Smithson in reference to the denial and renunciation of minimalism as well as to his own perception of the void at the centre of existence, the "vacancy of Thanatos".[35] Ballard's characters likewise attempt to enrich their own absence. The bleached deserts of *The Burning World* serve as a cleansing agent providing a "rest from the persistence of memory".[36] Objects and people alike appear to resemble the "smooth pebble-like objects, drained of all associations, suspended on a washed tidal floor", in Tanguy's painting *Jours de lenteur,* a reproduction of which hangs in Ransom's room. The journey which Ransom, the novel's central character, undertakes in a desert landscape existing simultaneously in the external world and in his "inner space" is one intended to bring about an "absolution in time", its end point the virtual timelessness of the inanimate. Kerans (*The Drowned World*) abandons himself to the landscape of the primary process for a similar reason: ". . . he would then be abandoning the conventional estimates of time in relation to his own physical needs and entering the world of total, neuronic time, where the massive intervals of the geological time-scale calibrated his existence."[37] Immortality is often associated by Ballard with the very slow, indeed almost timeless, "majestic progression of cosmic time". "The Waiting Grounds" (1959) presents a vision of a super-civilization whose members progressively slow down their physiological time (thereby accelerating "stellar time") in order to attain the furthest reaches of the universe; finally, their time slowed

down to zero, they achieve an ultimate union with the cosmos. The time-driven hero of another short story, "The Voices of Time" (1960), spontaneously builds a "cosmic clock", a low structure made of concrete in the shape of a mandala (a term adopted by Jung to denote a symbol of harmony of self and the cosmos in the form of a circle with a cross radiating from its centre). Lying at the center of his mandala, he gains a cosmic vision of the River of Time, ". . . a vast course of time that spread outwards to fill the sky and the universe, enveloping everything within them . . . Powers knew that its source was the source of the cosmos itself . . . he felt his body gradually dissolving, its physical dimensions melting into the vast continuum of the current . . ."[38] Ballard appears to concur with Smithson's conviction that space and matter are "the remains, or corpse of time".[39] Thus immortality may be gained either by submerging oneself in the Time leaking out of the ancient matter of the universe ("The Voices of Time") or, as in *The Crystal World* (1966), by adopting the "frozen" time of the crystal (an involuntary adoption, it would seem, due to a strange disease causing a process of crystallization in plant life and people). For Smithson too, I should add, the crystal represents encapsulated time, being the seat of greater disorder or higher entropy. His thought steeped in crystallography, Smithson saw the crystal as the essence of inanimate matter which seemed to him largely preferable to organic nature.

A discernible shift in the temporal perspectives of this search for immortality in Ballard's fiction may serve as a clue to the evolution of his aesthetic. While the early stories ("The Voices of Time"; "The Waiting Grounds") revel in visions of "deserts of vast eternity", to use Andrew Marvell's evocative phrase, the disaster novels usually generate a perspective circumscribed by geology or palaeontology. When we come to "The Terminal Beach" (1964) and the "condensed novels" of the years 1966-1969 the perspective seems severely limited to human history, even to contemporary history. We should keep in mind, though, a common thread running through much of Ballard's fiction—his characters' ontological pursuit of the "white leviathan, zero" ("The Terminal Beach") or, in other words, the search after the "envelopment" of the primary process with its accompanying sense of timelessness and virtual immortality. The timeless (which is tantamount to the eternal) is gained by the synchronic conception of time as a continuum in which past and future exist simultaneously in a certain dialectic. Timelessness is thus relatively conceived and may be generated even by a reduced temporal perspective. Such a temporal dialectic is often exhibited by certain features in the external landscape. The locale of "The Terminal Beach" is a desert island formerly used as a nuclear test site. A vast system of derelict concrete roads, target basins and concrete shelters, the island is literally a "minimal concrete city". The "nontime" generated by the island's architecture ("as ancient in its projection into, and from, time future . . . as any of Assyria and Babylon" is reduced to a temporal perspective embracing Hiroshima and Third World War as the two elements of the dialectic. Traven, a guilt-ridden air force pilot, finds in the island an "immense synthesis of the historical and psychic zero", the minimal landscape thus reducing the question of being to its bare essence.

This gradual reduction of temporal perspective is paralleled by a change in formal conception. The traditional narrative form of the early stories can hardly accomodate the vision of "deep time" and union with the cosmos. The vision is communicated in "The Waiting Grounds" by the disembodied voice of an unearthly interlocutor. One senses also

some incongruity between the relatively mundane narrative framework of "The Voices of Time" and the ecstatic experience of abandonment to the endless "river of time" and its personified "thin archaic voices reaching . . . across the millenia". Even the more limited visionary scale of *The Drowned World* and *The Burning World* entails problems related to the critical distinction between showing and telling. Ballard's own voice is constantly heard commenting on the significance of his characters' actions in terms of the demands of "inner space" (". . . for Ransom the long journey up the river had been an expedition into his own future, into a world of volitional time . . .[40]). He camouflages his voice at times, relocating his philosophical discourses on time and the cosmos in his character's mind. In fact, in much of Ballard's fiction one senses, somewhat uneasily, the essayist grafted on to a story teller. Sensitive to the demands of his craft, Ballard thus attempted to develop a fictional form that would accommodate his vision. His solution lay in what may be termed an aesthetic of fragmentation (to follow the terminology earlier assigned to Smithson). It is already manifested in "The Terminal Beach", where the island's "fragmentary landscape" prompts in Traven a sense of dissociation, a "fragmentary image of himself". The fragmentation is also reflected in the formal structure of the story which consists of a collage of short sections under various headings (The Blocks; The Pre-Third; The Lakes and the Spectres; Total Noon: Eniwetok, etc.) presenting a fragmented "centre of consciousness" and employing several, almost indistinct points of view (author; Traven; The Young Woman; The Dead Japanese Doctor). The "condensed novels", displaying a more extreme form of this aesthetic, dispense with plot and character altogether and present a collage of violent images, observed and commented upon by Ballard's dissociated personages. These are images of assassinations, atrocities, or car crashes, embedded in the realities of our age and often associated with public figures such as John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, with memories of Hiroshima and Auschwitz, or with fears of a thermonuclear holocaust.

One of the earliest "condensed novels", "You and Me and the Continuum" (1966) may serve to illustrate Ballard's intentions. Divided into short "chapters" having suggestive titles (Helicopter; Jackie Kennedy, I See You in My Dreams; Minkowski Space-Time, etc.), the story presents a fragmented narrative concerning the elusive figure of an Air Force pilot whose "mortal remains" (literally or in the sense of memory traces) crop up at different times and in a number of unexpected places. This vague story line only serves Ballard's purpose of creating a timeless, fragmented world which subsumes the many levels of experience informing today's schizophrenic existence. Such a program is explicitly stated in another of those "novels":

> Planes intersect: on one level, the tragedies of Cape Kennedy and Vietnam serialized on billboards, random deaths mimetized in the experimental auto-disasters of Nader and his co-workers . . . On another level, the immediate personal environment, the volumes of space enclosed by your opposed hands, the geometry of your postures, the time values contained in this office, the angles between the walls. On a third level, the inner world of the psyche. Where these planes intersect, images are born, some kind of valid reality begins to clarify itself.[41]

The title "You and Me and the Continuum" provides another point of view concerning the ambience of the story and the rationale for its structure. Those random fragments—bits and pieces of "undifferentiated mass", where "you" and "me" have lost all distinction—are debris, so to speak, of the space and time continuum. Indeed, to utilize Smithson's terminology, if the boundless continuum is perceived as a "site", then those

fragmented "condensed novels" can be viewed as Ballard's "Non-Sites".

Some of the "condensed novels" were brought together in 1970 as *The Atrocity Exhibition* (American title: *Love and Napalm: Export USA*, 1972). The publisher, in the hope of making the selection more palatable to the general public, attempted to present it as a novel whose central character is a doctor suffering from a nervous breakdown, who seeks his sanity by casting himself in a number of roles: H-Bomber pilot, presidential assassin, crash victim, psychopath. The stories, true enough, exhibit some continuity in terms of their subsidiary characters, Dr. Nathan, Catherine Austin, Karen Novotny (all associated in some way or another with a mental institution). The central character in each story goes by a different name, but all names begin with the letter "T". The narrative form of each follows roughly the same pattern. Yet to suggest a traditional plot continuity, it seems to me, is to oversimplify (I assume Ballard himself never meant it thus to be perceived; also, the stories were written over a period of a few years and not quite in the order of their compilation.) Had such a continuity been Ballard's overriding concern, he would have managed better than that. In such an event, fragmentation would have been a plot device rather than the all-embracing vision that it is. It would appear rather that to publish the stories together is to extend the implication of fragmentation to encompass the multiple perspectives offered by their cyclical or repeated pattern. In terms of Ballard's own image of the "continuum", such a conception might perhaps be associated with a model of space-time based on an ascending spiral which repeats the same cyclical form while progressing along a lateral axis.

Yet to take the aesthetic of fragmentation to such an extreme is to tempt the limits of fiction. There is danger that the literary form will buckle under the weight of intentions; repetition might end up in tedium and fatigue. However, my intention has not been to evaluate Ballard's fiction in terms of its ultimate success or failure but to trace the evolution of its vision and aesthetic. And it is apparent that only a persistent pursuit of his vision, along such lines as the preceding discussion indicates, would have inexorably led Ballard to such a reductive formal conception. Smithson followed his vision as persistently, but with the crucial difference that his Site/Non-Site dialectic as applied to the large earthworks expands the art system and pushes further back its limits. *The Spiral Jetty* (1970) exists as a physical structure on the north shore of the Great Salt Lake, Utah ("Coil, 1500′ long and approximately 15′ wide. Black rock, salt crystals, earth, red water (algae)").[42] It also exists as a Non-Site ("Is the Site a reflection of the Nonsite (mirror), or is it the other way around?") in Smithson's essay (1972) and film (1970), and in the mind. Earlier, in 1967, Smithson has defined "eternal time" in terms of "cycles of non duration"—"a paradigmatic or primordial infrastructure, that repeats itself in an infinite number of ways".[43] The "primordial infrastructure" Smithson employs here—a concept and an image reverberating "up and down space and time"—is the spiral. In terms of its form, "the dizzying spiral yearns for the assurance of geometry"; it is a finite form potentially extending to an infinitely remote point at each "end".[44] These points of indeterminacy or boundlessness suggest to Smithson an "undifferentiated state of matter" associated by him, as we have seen, with the primary process. Physically this state is evoked by the experience of looking at the spiral ("the spiral curled into vaporization") and the experience of the site itself. Smithson refers to the region's "shattered appearance", to its man-made "trapped fragments of junk and waste". Matter itself exists in an "indeterminate state" where "hills took on the appearance of melting solids" and "solid

and liquid lost themselves in each other". But the spiral also suggests an emergence from this state by functioning, in Donald Kuspit's words, "as a sliding scale, a continuum which at any point can be read as either a microcosm or a macrocosm".[45] Thus within the *Spiral Jetty* system the spiral appears as a series of ever-expanding spirals; "Each cubic salt crystal", to begin with, "echoes the Spiral Jetty in terms of the crystal's molecular lattice". The spiral itself echoes the appearance of the site, where lake and shoreline "suggest an immobile cyclone . . . spinning sensation without movement". The film introduces other references as well: Smithson reads over the sound track a legend about a whirlpool found somewhere in the Great Salt Lake.[46] The large macrocosmic perspective is introduced by shots of spiraling solar explosions and by the reading on the sound track of a passage from John Taine's *The Time Stream* describing a "vast spiral nebula of innumerable suns". Somewhere along the scale exists man (biologically, for the mind is everywhere): "Chemically speaking, our blood is analogous in composition to the primordial seas. Following the spiral steps we return to our origin, back to some pulpy protoplasm." Blood is associated with the red colour given to the water surface of the salt lake by certain microbacteria. Red is also the colour one sees when closing the eyes and letting the "sun burn crimson through the lids", a point which serves to launch Smithson (in his essay) on a rhapsody of vision as the mediator between the "orbs of blood" in the eyes and the orb of the sun. This mediation is also located on the spiral itself. A sequence in the film is shot from a helicopter spiraling upwards (Smithson points out in the essay that "helicopter" derives from the Greek *helix* or spiral) which manoeuvres the sun's reflection into the centre of the Spiral Jetty, the nucleus in which Smithson locates his "unicellular beginning", in a convergence of macrocosm and microcosm.

A carrier of verbal signs in a larger sign system, the "Spiral Jetty" essay itself continues this reverberation of spirals. In "A Sedimentation of the Mind" and other 1968 essays Smithson applied the geologic metaphor not only to the mind (as we have seen) but also to language: "Words and rocks contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures. Look at any *word* long enough and you will see it open up into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void."[47] This "language of fragmentation" is largely Smithson's own in "The Spiral Jetty", exhibiting at the same time the dedifferentiation of the primary process and a tentative emergence from it ("Perception was heaving, the stomach turning. I was on a geologic fault that groaned within me . . . I had the red heaves, while the sun vomited its corpuscular radiations"). Smithson attempts at some point to order his language in the form of an equation (based on the spiral as an infrastructure) between images and concepts relating to the centre ("scale of centers") and those embodying the edges. But here again the dialectic between the indefinite centre and the limitless edges of the spiral reigns supreme and does not allow any linguistic certainty: "The equation of my language remains unstable, a shifting set of coordinates, an arrangement of variables spilling into surds. My equation is as clear as mud—a muddy spiral." The film also began, writes Smithson, as a "set of disconnections, a bramble of stabilized fragments taken from things obscure and fluid, ingredients trapped in a succession of frames . . ." Here too the spiral serves as an underlying formative principle. Physically, the film reel forms a spiral (as attested to in the film by a juxtaposition of spiral reels of film and a photograph of the jetty). And then, "the movieola becomes a "time machine" that transforms trucks into dinosaurs" (the film abounds in such montages of different geologic eras). A model of time often referred to in

science fiction is that of a spiral; time travel in terms of such a model is a movement between two adjacent points, not along the loop but by cutting across it. Perhaps Smithson had such a notion in mind; he was, no doubt, aware of such a model of time since it is found in one of the preparatory sketches for the Dinosaur Hall sequence of the film.[48]

Ballard and Smithson have had similar visions: their art and writings are suffused with the awareness of temporality as a measure of a universal dissipation brought about by destructive entropic processes in the cosmos and on the earth's surface. This descent towards the "desert" of fragmentation and undifferentiation—the all-encompassing sameness or void of the entropic end point—finds its correlative in the mind's craving for the primal state of primary process and, beyond that, the quiescence of the "unicellular beginning" and of inanimate matter. Yet their art and writing move along different aesthetic trajectories. Smithson ultimately forges for art a "continuum" where "remote futures meet remote pasts",[49] where a microcosm is interchangeable with a macrocosm. Ballard moves towards a conception of fiction which is reductive in form and in the implication of its vision. His aesthetic of fragmentation captures existence as pieces of flotsam and jetsam swept along a continuum largely circumscribed by the here and now, images that are "fragments in a terminal moraine left behind by your passage through consciousness".[50] For Ballard and Smithson both, ours is ultimately an indifferent universe in which meaning can be gotten at only through a collusion in its indifferent design. But Ballard is a literary artist, and his art involves a mimetic representation of Thanatos as a universal promise within a fictional framework. Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* mediates between art and nature. As a physical site it exists *in* nature, thereby extending and verifying the meaning of the "fictions" which are his writings. Thus by embracing the infinite implications of the universe's indifferent design, Smithson's art, paradoxically, upholds life against death.

Notes

1. *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations,* ed. by Nancy Holt, with an introduction by Philip Leider (New York: NYU Press, 1979), p.9. Hereafter referred to as *Smithson.*
2. *The Time Stream, The Greatest Adventure, The Purple Sapphire: Three Science Fiction Novels by John Taine (Eric Temple Bell)* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964).
3. "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space" (1966), *Smithson,* p.34.
4. "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966), *Smithson,* p.10.
5. Ibid., p.11.
6. Lawrence Alloway, "Robert Smithson's Development", *Artforum,* vol XI, no. 3 (Nov. 1972), p.54.
7. "Entropy and the New Monuments", *Smithson,* p.9.
8. Robert Scholes, "The Roots of Science Fiction", in Mark Rose, ed., *Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p.51. This essay forms a chapter in Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulations: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1975).
9. Ibid., p.55.
10. Bruce Franklin, "Foreword to J.G. Ballard's 'The Subliminal Man", in Thomas D. Clareson, ed., *SF: The Other Side of Realism* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1971), p.200.
11. The three stories mentioned above have all been compiled in *Billenium* (New York, 1962).
12. "Entropy and the New Monuments", *Smithson,* p.12.
13. "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" (1968), *Smithson,* p.76.
14. *The Burning World* (New York, 1964), p.93.
15. "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), *Smithson,* p.56. These grains of sand, themselves formed in an entropic process of pulverization, also suggest to Smithson an experiment for "proving entropy": running clockwise in a sand box divided in half with sand of two colors on each side is an irreversible process; the mixed sand cannot be separated again by running in it in a counterclockwise direction.

16. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" (1968), *Smithson*, p.90.
17. Ibid., p.86.
18. Ibid., p.89.
19. "Earth (Symposium at White Museum, Cornell University, 1970)", *Smithson*, p.166.
20. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", *Smithson*, p.82.
21. Ibid., p.84. Smithson appears to have relied quite heavily on Ehrenzweig's ideas as expounded in his book *The Hidden Order of Art* which came out in 1967. Fragmentation, oceanic envelopment, containment are all key concepts in Ehrenzweig's thought.
22. *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London, 1949), p.14.
23. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", *Smithson*, p.90.
24. Smithson provides lists for the two terms of the dialectic in his essay "The Spiral Jetty" (1972), *Smithson*, p.115.
25. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", *Smithson*, p.85.
26. Ibid., p.90.
27. "Aerial Art" (1969), *Smithson*, p.92.
28. *The Drowned World* (New York, 1962), pp.38-41.
29. "Science Fiction and the Scientific World View", *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London, 1979), p.83.
30. *The Drowned World*, p.64.
31. Ibid., p.99.
32. Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol XVIII (London, 1955), p.38.
33. *The Drowned World*, pp.64-65.
34. Ibid., p.158.
35. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", *Smithson*, p.89.
36. *The Burning World*, p.32.
37. *The Drowned World*, p.44.
38. *The Voices of Time and Other Stories* (New York, 1960), p.35.
39. "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan" (1968), *Smithson*, p.96.
40. *The Burning World*, p.149.
41. "Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown", *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London, 1970), p.59.
42. When not indicated otherwise, quotations referring to the *Spiral Jetty* are to Smithson's essay "The Spiral Jetty", *Smithson*, pp.109-116.
43. "Ultramoderne" (1967), *Smithson*, p.49.
44. For a very detailed discussion of the philosophical implications of the spiral in Smithson's art, see Donald B. Kuspit, "The Pascalian Spiral: Robert Smithson's Drunken Boat", *Arts Magazine*, vol 56, no. 2 (Oct 1981), pp.82-88.
45. Kuspit, p.82.
46. For an analysis of the film's sources, see Elizabeth C. Childs, "Robert Smithson and Film: The Spiral Jetty Reconsidered", *Arts Magazine*, vol. 56, No. 2 (Oct 1981), pp.68-81.
47. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", *Smithson*, p.87.
48. Childs, p.77.
49. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", Smithson, p.91.
50. *The Atrocity Exhibition*, p.59.

Letters

Dear *Foundation*, March 1987

What a fine magazine *Foundation* is! Among its various other virtues (too numerous to mention now) it has one great one: it allows dialogue. It will print a whole article rebutting a previous article, not to mention letters like this one. (I know one respected sf periodical which allows nothing, not even letters, so that mistakes of fact and thoroughly daft theories can go totally unrebuked. Maybe some day you'll allow rebuttals *here* to that magazine's pieces: their current issue strongly deserves it!)

Foundation 37 is especially good in this respect. Not least in printing a letter from K.V. Bailey objecting to some points in my "Theory of Errors" (*Foundation* 37). He wants to clear Coleridge of the "error" of having a crescent Moon rise soon after sunset, moreover with a star "Within the nether tip".

I will grant that the first point is arguable: I assumed that the Moon was rising soon after sunset because the context strongly suggests it. There is a whole Part of the poem in the night after the Moon rises, and the Moon rises a long way:

> The moving Moon went up the sky,
> And no where did abide (263-4)

Whereas with a waning Moon it would be dawn soon after.

The second point I do not concede at all. Yes, I have read Lowe's book, but I am enough of a New Critic to find genetic and intentionalist details *irrelevant* to a poem's public meaning. Coleridge knew jolly well that the average reader would spot a "Turkish flag" type mistake, which is why he wrote "Almost between the tips" in the earlier version. In 1817 he grew, rightly, bolder; he understood his genre better, and wrote deliberately "Within the nether tip". In the 19th century astronomy was not an abstruse subject to the average reader (education lapsed later); so the average reader would chuckle over the mistake, and Coleridge certainly intended the chuckle reaction. (Not that his intention matters; but in this case it is obvious.)

Keep up the good work, *Foundation*, and let's have plenty of dialogue.

David Lake *Brisbane, Australia*

Dear *Foundation,* December 1986

I've been reading *Foundation* since it began, but somehow I have never written to express my appreciation of the magazine, which I think the best of its type in the world. I am mostly writing to express my appreciation of Sam Moskowitz's "Setting the Record Straight", which, I think, pretty thoroughly lays to rest the ghost of a pre-Gernsback science-fiction magazine once and for all. I know I once made the embarrassing mistake of repeating Lundwall's claim in an article, assuming, as most of us did, that since Lundwall reads Swedish and German and we don't, well, he must know what he's talking about. Now Moskowitz clearly shows it all to have been hasty wish-fulfilment, if not outright fakery.

I suppose I could quibble with Sam's exacting definitions. After all, some of the late issues of *New Worlds* contained no science fiction, and some of the post-professional issues contained no fiction at all, but no one would seriously deny that *New Worlds* was a science-fiction magazine. So, if that issue of *Hugin* he and Hans Santesson saw was atypical, and most issues published science fiction, then *Hugin* would still count as a science-fiction magazine. But the burden of proof, as he puts it, is clearly on the (thoroughly discredited) Lundwall.

I am left wondering why people like Lundwall are driven to invent such claims. Has the predominance of Anglo-American sf given them *that* much of an inferiority complex? After all, non-English, European sf has given us the works of Lem, Zamyatin, Capek, Nesvadba, the Strugatsky brothers, and yes, even the novels of Sam J. Lundwall. Is it necessary then to pretend that the Europeans invented the *pulp science-fiction magazine?* This was, after all, hardly a *literary* accomplishment.

No, awful as it may have been, Gernsback's *Amazing* was first. Let us give him what credit he is due.

Darrell Schweitzer *Strafford, Pennsylvania*

Dear *Foundation,*

Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the British Interplanetary Society. In some of the articles celebrating that event it was duly noted that some members of the Society had written sf: the works of Arthur Clarke can scarcely be overpraised; and there are others of solid if not equal merit. No-one, however, remarked that the Society's first president, A.M. Low, also entered this field.

I recently came into possession of the first of the three sf novels which bear his name. I use this form of words deliberately; for I find myself wondering about its authorship. The book is a juvenile entitled *Adrift in the Stratosphere* (Blackie, 1937). Even by the standards of '30s juveniles, it were flattery to call it merely bad.

The heroes, three young motor-cyclists, accidentally hi-jack a rocket ship—initially hoisted into the air by a large balloon—which, accelerated to speeds of up to 1000 mph, soon finds itself wandering around the solar system. The distraught heroes are attacked by a space monster and by suitably aggressive Martians, the latter using a succession of death-rays, hypnotic rays and, in final exasperation, a large and formidable "Death Ship". (Inspired dialogue: "We've got to beat these rotten rays . . .")

Having evaded these terrors, partly by using devices thoughtfully built into the ship by its professional designer and described in a notebook equally thoughtfully left lying around, and partly by mysterious properties of segments of space they wander into, the heroes are ready for further experiences. They now bump into and land upon a couple of "space islands" (comets!) and converse with their inhabitants, who are human, frightfully advanced and amiable and somewhat paradoxically given to advocating the simple life. These virtuous fellows dispatch them home, where they are forgiven for flying off with the ship and duly resume their holiday.

I do not know what pre-war schoolboys made of it. I strongly suspect that the one who owned my copy never read it at all: it is in mint condition, and even the dust-jacket is pristine.

I would be interested to know whether any reader is able to cast light on a couple of matters which are somewhat puzzling. First, as Low must have been aware of such basic facts as escape velocity, why did he perpetrate or allow such awful howlers? Did he, indeed, actually write it, or all of it, himself, or did he merely give his name to a ghost? Second, the style changes abruptly about half way through: sentences and paragraphs become longer, the dialogue more solemn, levels of absurdity even manage to rise a little. So were two hands involved?

Although the book is not quite bad enough to merit inclusion in that small set of those which are so bad as to gain a certain grisly memorability, it is bad enough to be surprising. So I hope some reader will come up with answers to the queries I have raised.

Professor M. Hammerton *Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

Reviews

Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers: Second Edition
by Curtis C. Smith *(St James Press, 1986, xviii + 933pp, £39.50)*

reviewed by John Clute

There are times for decorum, and there are times when it is necessary to review Curtis C. Smith. This is one of the times when it is necessary to review Curtis C. Smith. Seasoned readers of *Foundation* may recall that (in *Foundation* 25), this reviewer (henceforth I) spent several pages discussing as frankly as possible the first edition of the good professor's *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers,* an alphabetical bio-biblio-critical encyclopedia of the main authors in the field the Second Edition of which has now appeared, and that moments of rudeness—even of Schadenfreude—marked the occasional low point in my efforts to incite Dr Smith to join the clerisy. Next time, Dr Smith (I said, with the smug lucidity of one not then bare to the elements), try to act as though the Community of Scholars was an ideal state as well as a refectory. Trencherman (I said), what of the night? I should have saved my breath.

Though a number of unarguable improvements have been made to this Second Edition of Professor Smith's massive enterprise, the new *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers,* because those improvements have been introduced with devastating inconsistency, turns out to be a far more damaging effort than its dubious sire. And in the creation of encyclopedias consistency is precisely *not* the bugbear of small minds. Indeed, within fairly strict limits, it is almost more important to maintain consistency of presentation—so that the researcher can safely predict what he/she is going to find—than it is to be accurate within a methodological framework so carelessly operated that it cannot present that accurate data in understandable form. (Not that Professor Smith is exactly bedevilled by excesses of accuracy.) If methodological criteria are ahdered to most often in the breach, if protocols of inclusion and exclusion and presentation of data are found to change almost at random and without acknowledgement, then as a work of scholarship any book of this sort will be more than useless. It will be actively damaging.

At first glance Professor Smith's criteria seem clear enough, and in his introductory Editor's Note (essentially the same in both editions) he *seems* to lay down the law in no uncertain terms about the terms under which information will be presented throughout his encyclopedia. But that of course is not enough. As I tried to make clear in *Foundation* 25, the first edition of *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* was in fact put together with dismayingly erratic heed to the rules Professor Smith claimed to follow. For whatever reasons—excessive amiability, budget restraints, ignorance of the consequences, karma—he created in 1981, out of the enormous secondary literature to which he and his cohorts had access even then, a deeply shambolic work of amateur scholarship, a morass of inconsistencies without explanation or excuse, a kind of methodological quicksand from which no fact escaped unscathed. Over his bibliographies (as we shall once again see), Professor Smith exercised a shamingly exiguous cognitive control, and seemed to exercise no control at all over the nature of the critical essays he commissioned

from a vast array of academics, scholars, freelancers, other authors, and a few fish out of water like Darko Suvin or Gary K. Wolfe or Peter Caracciolo. The result? Crisp competent expository prose jostled for space with dire examples of LandGrant Senatorial—the mealy-mouthed squid-ink poshlost that constitutes both lingua franca and camouflage for the dread army of untenured theme-critics generally to be found forming great queues at MLA conventions in the hopes of getting a job in *western* Kansas. Chaos and squid-ink—and that was just 1981. And what was damaging then is grievous bodily harm half a decade later, because Professor Smith has infiltrated into his already jumbled pages a whole new generation of new or extensively revised entries, all—without acknowledgement—composed according to criteria that differ in essential respects from the criteria governing—however erratically—the shaping of the original entries. Invisibly in terms of any explicit modification of criteria, a bibliography of (say) Greg Bear or David A. Drake will differ so fundamentally from an essentially unchanged bibliography of (say) Kris Neville or Theodore Sturgeon that to read—to understand—one of them is ipso facto *not* to read and *not* to understand the other. The effect of all this is not fortunate.

But before we continue, let us first utter some of the rote commendations of the Sheer Bulk of the book that seem to constitute analysis for some of the other reviewers in the field. The book is very large. As an encyclopedic dictionary of the science fiction field it is as close to comprehensive as one might expect within the confines of a single volume. Many new entries have been created, and quite a few of them are entirely accurate, though a new batch of avoidable errors will be pointed out in a moment. Some desperately needed improvements have been effected as well. Professor Smith no longer lists projected titles as though they had already been published, and in fact has ceased listing them at all. (But what bibliographical scholar in his right mind would have ever listed them in the first place? *Invisibly?*) And he seems to have given some creative thought both to the excision of entries he should not have included originally and to the sagacious addition of new ones. (Pamela Zoline is now out, as this reviewer, for one, had suggested, and Joseph O'Neill is in, ditto. But then, as of 1981, Zoline had never written a word of science fiction in her life, and Joseph O'Neill was the author of three science-fiction novels, one of them, *Land Under England* (1935), a long-recognized classic in the field, so that these changes were sufficiently obvious.) Some factual errors have been excised as well, but as the Second Edition was reset there was no excuse for the retention of *any* blooper from 1981 to which attention had been drawn. So. Enough fulsome praise. At this point—before returning to the methodological problems vitiating the text—it might be interesting to note some of the factual mistakes (mostly bibliographical ones, as pointed out in *Foundation* 25) that have survived unpurged.

Professor Smith claims in his Editor's Note to list "all books" without exception published by writers given an entry. This was of course a false claim in 1981, and remains a false claim now. In 1981 I instanced Robert Silverberg's extremely numerous pseudonymous novels, which Smith failed to list, and which he failed to list without admitting the fact. It is the same now. If his behaviour seemed disingenuous then, it is all the more inexcusable in 1986. The mishmash of errors in the Silverberg entry about Ivar Jorgenson/sen has been corrected, so far as the immediate context is concerned, though *The Deadly Sky* as by Ivar Jorgensen (i.e. Paul W. Fairman) is *still* misdated in the Fairman entry. But the Barry Malzberg stories from *The Man Who Loved the Midnight Lady* which Smith

listed as "uncollected" in 1981 are still listed as "uncollected" in 1986. Some though not all of the eight significant errors of citation in the Gordon R. Dickson checklist have been corrected—but, out of the relatively few citations new to the Second Edition, two collections, *Love Not Human* and *Survival!*, are listed as novels; *The Final Encyclopedia* is *not* identified as a Dorsai novel—nor for that matter are *The Spirit of Dorsai* or *Lost Dorsai,* two titles listed by the good professor as novels, though they are both in fact collections; and *The Last Master* is listed as a separate novel when it is in fact *The R-Master* retitled. *Dickson!* (coll. 1984) is omitted entirely, as are three 1985 collections, *Beyond the Dar Al-Harb, Forward!* and *Steel Brother,* which is basically a retread of *Dickson!*

Because it is harder to detect, the next error is far more serious. The Robert Abernathy story, "Junior", which Smith listed in 1981 as first appearing in an anthology one decade after its *real* first publication, he *continues* to list in 1986 as first appearing in an anthology one decade after its *real* first publication. This happens elsewhere as well. Throughout this massive research tool, which students will of necessity be using for years to come, stories are listed either according to genuine first publication, *or* according to publication in any anthology that happens to be in Professor Smith's library. True, in 1986 he has added a codicil to his Editor's Note to the effect that "in those cases where a story has been published in a magazine and later in an anthology, we have tended to list the anthology", but that merely demonstrates the ad-hoc opportunism of the enterprise. Note that no code exists to distinguish a real first publication from any appearance in any book that Professor Smith happens to run across somewhere. Note that the good professor has carefully avoided saying anything about which anthology appearance he will "tend" to cite—it could be the first anthology appearance, it could be the tenth. Note that there is no way to distinguish already-printed stories appearing in reprint anthologies from first publications in original anthologies. And note that weasel word "tended". It means that anthologies are listed when Professor Smith *feels like doing so.* No date attached to any story, therefore, has any meaning beyond the fact that it reflects the date of a citation the professor happens to *fancy.* As a lesson in the contemptuous destruction of evidence, as a lesson in how to slur methodology to assort with the lowest common denominator of sloth, this particular exercise may well be unbeatable.

But let us end with Kipling. In 1981, it was pointed out to Professor Smith that he had done a desperately incompetent job of reducing Kipling's enormous—but fully-established—bibliography into the compass of a checklist, and that the stew of categories under which he sorted titles made utter nonsense of the author in question. For Kipling these categories were, in order: (1) SCIENCE-FICTION PUBLICATIONS/Short Stories; (2) OTHER PUBLICATIONS/Novel; (3) OP/short stories; (4) OP/Fiction (for Children); (5) OP/Play; (6) OP/Verse; and (7) OP/Other. In 1981, and in 1986, Kipling's four novels are wrested from one another and listed variously under categories (2), (3) and (4). In both editions, in other words, one of Kipling's novels—it was *The Naulahka,* Professor Smith, as you've already been told—is listed as a collection of stories, and two of them are listed under (4) as children's fiction, along with *Just So Stories, The Jungle Books* and so forth—though of course *Animal Stories,* and *All the Mowgli Stories,* which are both drawn from *The Jungle Books,* are both duly listed under (3) as adult collections. Under (6) the reader will find, without distinction, full-size books of poetry consorting with broadsheets like "The Absent-Minded Beggar". But if this

resolute inclusiveness leads one to think that titles even remotely relevant to the user of the encyclopedia will also be listed, then everything I've said so far has missed its mark. For the naïve reader, the inclusion of the first separate publication of Kipling's fine ghost story *"They"* (1904) might not seem inappropriate in a bibliography that does not forget "The Absent-Minded Beggar", but one looks for *"They"* in vain. It may be a ghost story. It may be a hardbound book of some 80 pages (not counting illustrations) in the English edition published by Macmillan's, Kipling's home firm, but it does not interest Professor Smith. And there is one further title that has consistently failed to merit his attention. We mentioned its absence from *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* in 1981—and hope it was mentioned by others as well—but we mentioned its absence in vain. It is yet another hardbound volume of around 80 pages. It was published by Doubleday & Company, Kipling's regular American firm. It is the first separate publication of the genuinely important science-fiction story in question. It is called *With the Night Mail* (1909), and it is not listed by Professor Smith in 1986, either. Or should we say that he has not "tended" to include it.

At first glance this may all seem trivial; but it is of course nothing of the sort. In an encyclopedia, discourtesy to the fact is not a blemish but a disqualification. Discourtesy to the fact generates unforgivable inconsistencies, and it goes far to explain the radical gap between Professor Smith's methodological criteria (as made manifest—*pace* weaselings —in his Editor's Note) and the slurry chaos of the book itself. The Kipling example (it is hoped) was comical, but it does most importantly cause one to focus first on the discourtesy which so marks this book, and second on the excesses of fatuity this contempt engenders. Subdividing Kipling's oeuvre into the seven loony categories listed above is an act of intellectual vaporishness that bespeaks an extremely deep-seated indifference to the proprieties of handling hard data. Very simply, it does not matter to Professor Smith that his formulas for the presentation of hard data do not make sense. It does not matter to him that his seven bibliographical categories make a nonsense of Kipling's production, and that even if his categories were arguable (which they are not) they would still (compressed as they are like the contents of a stomped accordion) be of vanishingly small use to most general readers, much less to the specific audience his book pretends to address. Let us leave aside his refusal to list Kipling's one science-fiction book. It is perhaps even more telling to note that, even if he had managed to include *"They"*, the Rube Goldberg ouija board he used for sorting would have almost certainly led him to bury the title under some heading or other very remote from the interests and needs of his audience—most likely, knowing the professor, under OTHER PUBLICATIONS/Other (Story).

There are two points here. Firstly, the assortative responsibilities entailed by so complex a system more than unduly strain Professor Smith's—or anyone's—capacity to make decisions that are not laughable, nor is it much of a surprise to note that lunacies of inconsistency permeate most of the longer entries. And secondly, because his system demands of Professor Smith that he make complex and sometimes problematical decisions as to whether specific titles are science-fiction (and listed under some subcategory of SCIENCE-FICTION), or fantasy (and listed somewhere in the Borgesian entrails of the OTHER PUBLICATIONS nightmare), he is forced into hundreds upon hundreds of arbitrary choices, many of them patently wrong, many more of them simply risible. One example, that of Michael Moorcock, will demonstrate the case. In 1981, our sagacious prof listed almost every single book Moorcock had ever published, whatever its

nature, under SCIENCE FICTION. (The one OTHER PUBLICATIONS/Novel citation was a projected title; that is, it did not then exist. In the event, it was misspelled.) As Moorcock has always been a highly various writer, and as most of his prolific output has been fantasy (when generically described at all), this particular sorting lunacy received considerable comment, and in 1986 Professor Smith has taken a different course. Some titles he now lists under SCIENCE FICTION, and some under OTHER PUBLICATIONS. Which go where? Some go *hither* (says the professor) and some (he adds) go *thither*. The Cornelius books—we learn after all these years of not knowing where to turn—are in fact SCIENCE FICTION. So too—miraculously—is *Gloriana,* and so are Van Bek novels like *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse.* Most of the Eternal Champion books—but not all of them—are now fantasies, and are listed under OTHER PUBLICATIONS, as are most—*but not all of*—the Elric books. The two Colonel Pyat novels to date, *Byzantium Endures* and *The Laughter of Carthage,* which are Moorcock's only titles that could plausibly be described as mainstream fiction, are of course listed under SCIENCE FICTION, and the fact they constitute a series is—of course—omitted. The good professor's usual practice of listing omnibus titles (like *The Cornelius Chronicles*) ahead of the books they contain is here ignored, with—of course—exceptions. Whenever the professor is particularly confused he tends to insert after individual titles distinctions (in brackets) which contradict the category under which those titles are listed; *The History of the Runestaff,* which is an omnibus of Runestaff novels, is therefore listed under Novels as a (Collection)—being (of course) neither. And so on. The gross illiteracy of the 1981 entry becomes the pretzel gala of 1986. A correct response to specific and general criticisms of the 1981 checklists would have been simply to divide them in 1986 into two main categories, SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY and OTHER PUBLICATIONS, and to have subordinated all other distinctions under those headings. This was not done. It was clearly not even contemplated. The stables are fouler than ever.

In that Professor Smith's bibliographical criteria are intrinsically ludicrous, even when applied with as much accuracy as Wonderland logic permits, the Kipling shambles may be inherent—though note that in his spruce little essay on Kipling contributor John Brunner does mention both "'They'" and "With the Night Mail", if only as stories, which only underlines what dozens of examples demonstrate is clearly the case: contributors did not see checklists; and checklists were compiled without any reference being made to contributors' essays. But when we return to Greg Bear and Kris Neville, we enter murkier territory. In both 1981 and 1986 Editor's Notes, Professor Smith claims that "As a rule all uncollected science-fiction stories published since the entrant's last collection have been listed; complete short story listings occur for writers whose reputations rest primarily on their short stories." In 1981 this claim was mistaken, though what it actually claimed (note the weasel syntax throughout) and what any researcher in good faith might *think* it claimed were by no means the same thing; in 1986 it is rather worse than that. In 1981, Professor Smith did compile "complete" short story listings—by which he seems to have meant listings of all uncollected stories whether or not published prior to an entrant's last collection—when he happened to have data readily to hand regarding an author best known for short stories. If he had no secondary source at hand—and clearly he had none for Kris Neville—then no original research was done, and there was no "complete" list for the author in question, *regardless* of his status as a short story writer. As Neville—primarily a short story writer—published his only collection late in life, after most of the

work for which he is known was long done, Professor Smith in 1981 contrived to list only the eight tales published after the appearance of *Mission: Manstop* (1971). In 1986—to add effrontery to sloth—even these items have disappeared, due to the posthumous publication of *The Science Fiction of Kris Neville,* a collection which repeats some of the contents of the 1971 volume. No one pretends Kris Neville was a great short-story writer, though many feel he was a very good one. But no one (except by inescapable inference the good professor) pretends either that he was *not* essentially a writer of short stories. His treatment in *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* is an insult to him and to scholarship both. (In 1981 I mentioned Raymond Z. Gallun as another sufferer from the same disingenuous slovenliness; in 1986 the case is unchanged, nothing has been done to present the real shape of his career. But it is not only secondary writers in the field who get this sort of treatment. Theodore Sturgeon was famous in the field. He was primarily a short story writer. Although much of his work is fantasy, Smith lists almost all of it as science fiction. There are lots of uncollected stories. Not one of them is listed.) But that is not the end of it.

For those who have both versions to hand, it is clear that Professor Smith has become markedly more inclined to include and/or retain short-story data than previously. As he had some "Uncollected Short Stories" data on (for instance) Greg Bear from the first edition, he felt free to retain the full category for this writer, even though publication of Bear's 1983 collection, *The Wind from a Burning Woman,* should in logic have precluded the listing of any story published before its release—after all, no one would pretend that Bear is primarily a short-story writer, like Kris Neville or Theodore Sturgeon, for instance. No. What has happened is that, invisibly and ad hoc, Professor Smith has kind of decided it mightn't be a bad thing to retain useful data, but only as a matter of expedience, only if the stuff is lying on the ground. The result, once again, is a fatal slurring between methodological claim and actuality. The sophisticated researcher—or someone familiar with Professor Smith's ways—will be able to filter some useful information out of *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers.* Non-professional users, on the other hand, will understand the book *more often than not* to be telling them things that Professor Smith could never have intended to impart—that, for instance, Kris Neville was less primarily a writer of short stories than (for instance) the fully documented David A. Drake. And frankly—and this is why I've gone on so long for a second time—I don't think Professor Smith *cares.* He has managed to transmogrify a mountain of hard raw fact into a mine of disinformation, and I don't think he *cares.*

I (henceforth this reviewer) know it's time to stop, but it does seem a shame not to mention the Gene Wolfe entry, and this reviewer is going to mention it. (The Philip K. Dick entry will not be mentioned. It will not be mentioned that one 1984 novel is omitted, that one 1984 title is dated 1985, and that four of the five titles *actually* published in 1985 are *all* omitted.) Wolfe is after all one of the major writers of the 1980s, and students will surely find themselves needing to look him up in Professor Smith's book. They will find that Pamela Sargent's essay—though Professor Smith allots it half the length he allots to the piece on Piers Anthony ("*Macroscope* continues to explore restraints on liberty in order to promote the greater good", and so on, and on, and on)—is decently concise and informative, though intermittently a touch poshlosty, and students should only be warned that *The Devil in a Forest* is neither fantasy nor science fiction. They may find Professor Smith's checklist more intimidating, however, and should be warned that *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* is not collection of short stories but – as Sargent properly puts

it—"a group of three novellas that form a novel". It is, in other words, far more of a novel than most of the fixups listed as novels in (for instance) the A.E. Van Vogt entry. They should further be warned that several of the "Uncollected Short Stories" are in fact *collected* short stories, but that they are collected in a book Professor Smith both misclassifies and misspells (see below); and they should note that, despite Professor Smith's listing of *all* uncollected short stories, it is not the general consensus that the author of *The Book of the New Sun* is primarily a writer of short stories. As they penetrate deeper into Professor Smith's checklist, they should also take note that, under the category OTHER PUBLICATIONS/Novels, one or two wee slips have crept in. *The Castle of the Otter* is not a non-science-fiction novel published in 1982, but a series of addenda (half fiction, half essay) to *The Book of the New Sun* published well into 1983, though dated the previous year. This reviewer does not know how Professor Smith would classify *The Castle of the Otter*—if he had the slightest clue as to its nature; but this reviewer would put it adjacent to the science-fiction series of which it is an integral part, and he would designate its connection. Penetrating even deeper into OTHER PUBLICATIONS/Novels, students will next come to *The Wolfe Archipelago,* but no more than the previous entry will they find on examination that it is a non-science-fiction novel. *The Wolfe Archipelago* is a collection of science fiction stories, and belongs right where it obviously should go—under SCIENCE FICTION/Short Stories. Next and finally, right at the end of OTHER PUBLICATIONS/Novels, students will find *Plan[e]t Engineering.* Whatever he *wants* to call it, however, the book is not a non-science-fiction novel, but a collection of science fiction stories which contains several of the items included by Professor Smith in his "Uncollected Short Stories" listing. And everyone but the good professor will know where it should be listed. And that is the end of the checklist. Students will not find *Bibliomen* (1984) because Professor Smith does not include the book. Students will not find *Free Live Free* (1985) because Professor Smith does not include the book. And that is the end of the lesson.

Eon
by Greg Bear (Gollancz, 1986, 503pp, £10.95)

reviewed by Rachel Pollack

Greg Bear's *Eon* belongs to what we might term the "Ringworld" sub-genre of science fiction. Earth scientists come in contact with some mind-boggling artefact, explore it, and in doing so, encounter even more startling discoveries. In the case of Larry Niven's *Ringworld* and Bob Shaw's *Orbitsville* the basic object—the Ring, the Dyson Sphere —provides the basic astonishment, with the story filling in details, largely of a technical nature. Bear takes a different approach, beginning with a fairly innocuous artefact, and then getting steadily more astonishing as the book progresses. The theory behind his artefact concerns Bear more than the engineering (though he doesn't stint on the practical details). This is all to the good. For most of us, the wilder reaches of theoretical physics will boggle the mind far more than technological offshoots. And Bear firmly embodies his ideas in the engineering of the "Stone".

Unfortunately, a novel, especially a novel over five hundred pages long, requires more than astounding concepts. It requires credible characters, a compelling writing style, and

a plot that holds together at its basic junctures. In all these aspects *Eon* is weak. If a novel aspires to a genuine concern for current world problems (in this case, nuclear holocaust), then those lacks become even more serious. In several crucial areas the weaknesses of plot, style, and characterization make it difficult to ascertain what the book is telling us.

Eon begins with the discovery of the Stone, a hollowed-out asteroid designed as a spaceship. The Stone appears empty, abandoned by its builders, who have left behind cities, libraries, farmland. Through successive stages we learn that the Stone was built by humans of the future, though not necessarily our future, that the sixth chamber of the Stone contains machines to "damp" inertia, and that the development of such machines led to the creation of a singularity of infinite length, and that this singularity, which begins in the seventh, and final chamber, allows anyone traveling along it to enter the future, and in fact, alternate universes. (We learn at one point that every fraction of a millimetre opens an alternative universe; since the human body occupies many millimetres this would imply existing in an abundance of separate and shifting universes at the same time).

All this Bear handles with convincing detail and explanation. At times his physics may become slightly obscure, but in a way that only makes it seem more real. Gone are the days when supposed "hard-science" writers could waffle on about "hyper-space" or "Think of the universe as a big piece of paper full of holes and bumps".

There is evidence of a mystic underpinning to Bear's scientific marvels. The people of the future often invoke the "Pneuma" and other vaguely religious expressions. More significantly they refer to the singularity as "the Way", or more fully, "the Way of Life and Light". The *Tao Teh Ching* of Lao Tzu is sometimes titled in English "The Way of Life".

Certain sage-like individuals can open gates from the Way to specific worlds. In doing so they must avoid getting drawn in by the nascent gate and so "forever lost to the Way". This situation forms a nice metaphor for Lao Tzu's admonition that the Way about which we can speak is not the true Way.

Eon's links to taoism possibly show the influence of Fritjof Capra and Gary Zukav. More unusual (possibly coincidental) is a link to an ancient form of Jewish mysticism, in which the soul journeys through the seven palaces of the "Hekaloth". As with the Stone's seven chambers, each palace displays its own marvels, and each one becomes progressively more difficult for the untrained soul to comprehend. In some of *Eon*'s more interesting passages we learn how the paradoxes of the Stone not only exhilarate but also agitate the scientists. In Hekaloth mysticism the seventh palace brings the soul to the infinite presence of God's throne. The seventh chamber of the Stone opens to the infinite reaches of the Way.

Such linkings of mysticism and science belong to the traditions of sf. Not only Olaf Stapledon (invoked by Gollancz's blurb on the dustjacket) but also Arthur C. Clarke, Theodore Sturgeon, and even Robert A. Heinlein have used sf to show how the physical world, rather than intellectual theology, can lead to a direct confrontation with the divine. By keeping the link tightly controlled, a concrete metaphor, less fanciful than the poetry of earlier writers, Bear leads us more convincingly to acceptance of the mystic possibilities inherent in the physical universe.

If *Eon* had focused on its primary task of boggling—at half the length?—we might have come away reeling from the wildness and depth of its theoretical ideas and technical applications. Unfortunately, a plodding style, weak characters, and seemingly endless

political and military manoeuvres tend to numb the reader long before she or he can get back to the juicy bits.

The language of the book at times approaches drudgery. "She had never been a social butterfly, tending to fall hard and fast and without reciprocation." And, "Though she could not change her solid build her taste in clothes was immaculate." At other times Bear falls back on clichés to describe his characters. Various women show excitement by widening their eyes. Patricia's Hispanic parents are described as "old-fashioned", expecting her to stay a virgin before marriage. Since this attitude was old-fashioned twenty years ago it would certainly be old-fashioned next century. The idea might have piqued us more if Bear had described it as *new*-fashioned, or something that once again had become old-fashioned.

As with much sf the people of the future are more interesting, more thought out than those of the present. The book begins with four prologues, three in the present, one in the future. The last is well thought out, witty, with various clues and indicators to excite our interest. The other three carry no excitement at all. They set up the characters and situations and launch the story, and that's all.

At times Bear attempts to give his characters, notably Patricia and the Russian, Mirsky, some internal existence. For the most part, however, they depend on clichés, and old-fashioned ones at that. The Russians are suspicious, ignorant, aggressive, envious, and brutal. Mirsky does emerge as an interesting figure, undergoing a transformation in the library. In one of the book's sharper moments he withdraws from the endless scheming of his comrades by sending them a straightforward note—which they all interpret as another scheme, full of double meanings and hidden directives. Significantly, Mirsky's conversion to *glasnost* comes under the tutelage of Lanier, the American, who comes from the "free world" (Bear's term, another old fashion), and therefore has never been deceived by his society's rulers.

The scientists in the book remind one of sf comic books of the 1950's: heroic, pure of heart, in love with knowledge for its own sake, above personal gain, frustrated by the petty squabbles of politicians. Bear's assumption of the purity of scientists (American and Chinese; the book was written before the dumping of Hu Yaobang and the crackdown on students) leads to the book's most peculiar feature. The plot hinges on a terrible discovery in the library. If current events do indeed correspond to the history described by the writers of the future, then nuclear war and mass death are only weeks away. The Americans, who got to the Stone first, have discovered this danger. Now, we might think that faced with such a horror, the U.S. president would go to his Soviet counterpart and tell him, "Look, here's proof we're headed for disaster. Let's do something about it." We might think they would examine the records to discover just what policies and actions led to war, and then make sure the same thing can't happen again. We might think they would publicize the information, creating worldwide alarm to jolt events onto a different course. None of these things happen. Instead, they keep the information secret from all but a trickle of people. Bear never provides any explanation for this bizarre behavior. At one point Mirsky asks Lanier why the Americans didn't tell them. Lanier answers only, "What would you have done?" and Mirsky drops the whole subject.

Besides not telling anyone, the Americans send—that's right, scientists—to study the problem of alternate timelines. We might think that *political* scientists, or sociologists, or historians, or even, Pneuma forbid, politicians, would make more sense. But no, the

president sends Patricia Vasquez, who sits alone, reading in the library and ordering devices to measure fluctuations in pi. Even if Patricia had discovered major breakthroughs on divergent universes, what would that have accomplished? The problem is clearly political, not cosmological.

Reading *Eon,* one finds it hard to ascertain Bear's attitudes to both politics and war. The library describes all sides in the pre-holocaust world as "insane". Yet, when the Russians find out (through treason) about the danger, Patricia thinks *Perhaps the Soviet knowledge that a war was imminent would turn them around, make them back off, prevent the war . . .* If Bear intends this ironically, as a comment on the chauvinism that leads to war, the book gives little indication.

More significantly, we come to Bear's attitude to military action. The Russians invade the Stone. The interminable description that follows carries little sense of the horror of battle. The book tells us that the people become sickened by all the casualties. But it shows us esprit de corps and a fascination with the details of war on an asteroid. Lanier indeed becomes disgusted by the fighting. It occurs to him that since the nuclear war has wiped out everything on Earth why should anyone keep fighting on the asteroid? He asks his security chief, "Does it matter?" But when the other tells him "You're goddamn fucking right it matters", Lanier immediately says, "I'm going to fight." If Bear intends this as a comment about human folly the sense of excitement about the battle makes it hard to tell. The real problem here is a suspicion that Bear's characters do not stop the fighting because then Bear would not get to describe all the nifty technical problems of war in space.

The problem of irony becomes more acute when we leave the post-holocaust and enter the future. There we discover that the humans face a recalcitrant militarist race known as Jarts. Due to the singularity's bending of space/time the Jarts have occupied the Way since long before it was built (good boggle, that one). The evil Jarts plan a massive destructive action against the humans (since the plan apparently would kill them along with the humans, it makes no sense, but that's Jart for you). In response, the humans conceive of a grand technological scheme. If it succeeds it will seal the Way forever, thus closing off the human's greatest technical and spiritual achievement (this point is confusing, for the gatekeeper acts as if the gates will remain in some way). It will also kill every single living being found anywhere along the Way's infinite stretches.

Such a plot turn sounds like the harshest possible comment on militarism, insanity, racism, and the pessimistic belief that human (and alien?) nature will never change. And yet, the tone of the writing gives us no hint that Bear intends this situation ironically. Not one of the characters questions what they are about to do. If anything, the plan to kill all the Jarts (and everyone else) appears as a thrilling scientific breakthrough—one more boggle, bigger than all the rest.

Humpty Dumpty in Oakland
by Philip K. Dick *(Gollancz, 1986, 199pp, £9.95)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

This is, of course, another of Philip Dick's hitherto unpublished non-sf novels from the time two decades and more ago when he was trying to become a straight American

novelist—with no more success than the used-car salesmen and other failing small businessmen who populate these novels. Every such novel was turned down, and he was forced to continue churning out . . . masterpieces, full of science fiction paraphernalia. For which he was paid inadequately. Indeed, there's a flash of bitterish irony in *Humpty Dumpty* about sf. "It must be easy to write this stuff," remarks a real-estate salesman; "they must bat it out . . . They fake it as they go along." The salesman claims to get through fifty sf titles a month.

If Dick had succeeded in being able to publish straight novels, and had thus quit sf to continue ploughing the other furrow, how would we rank him nowadays, I wonder? Assuming that straight novel followed straight novel into print. Would we see him as a melancholy Saroyan? As a Californian petit-bourgeois Roth? Who knows. But had he done so, we might look back at *Humpty Dumpty* with its little hints of stress—such as the slight tendency of characters and environment to become mechanised ("the underneath part (of the road) which they usually never got to see. It frightened him, and he pulled on the handbrake. Machines, he thought, had carried away everything here; had left nothing at all. What power to remove? Nothing could stand . . ." "At once, like a machine, he was on his feet. He wheeled smartly and strode through the open door, into Knight's office.")—we might look at these *insinuations* and say to ourselves, Here's a straight who might write sf, and transcend himself, if he tried; he has an inkling of the vision. Imaginary *Foundation* article: "Sf nuances in the novels of Philip K. Dick."

As a story—of fumbling ambitions, paranoid ineptitude, a scam that isn't a scam—*Humpty Dumpty* isn't really in the league of *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike.* In some ways the best thing about it is the title. Here we do meet some moderately memorable characters, such as the garage owner's Greek wife who dispenses optimistic wisdom, and the Huggy Bear fellow with his performing dog which bops balloons around in a frenzy till it can pop them. But overall a colourless sadness pervades the book. Mr Tootsie, the dog owner, tells Al the mechanic, "You got no glamour . . . You nothing but ditch-water walking around on two feet." Yet nowadays in a curious way there's a cushioned, nostalgic comfort about this ditch-water world, and the characters trying to climb out of the ditch into green pastures. At the same time, Dick had already soared high above the ditch into orbit as an actual great American novelist of unique vision—but he didn't know this, and thought the ditch was the route to the golden river.

Oddly, publishers knew, by faithfully bouncing his straight novels—and even by savagely hacking down *The Unteleported Man,* now restored from the original manuscript into total incoherency as *Lies, Inc.* But they kept him hungry too.

Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination
by Tom Moylan *(Methuen (University Paperback), 1986, 242pp, £7.95)*

reviewed by Sarah Lefanu

In May 1968 a wall slogan appeared in Paris: "Be Realistic. Demand the Impossible." This book is about the variety of political forces—oppositional, in Moylan's terminology, anti-hegemonic—that helped construct the utopian demands of that period, and how those demands found literary expression in a new form of utopian writing, called by him "critical utopias". He looks in detail at four of these works, all by American writers:

Joanna Russ's *The Female Man,* Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed,* Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Samuel Delany's *Triton.* His analysis, which rests on cultural as much as literary criticism, is interesting and informative but it seems to me there are two weaknesses in his argument, one political, the other literary. The first lies in an overoptimistic assessment of the effectiveness of 1970s radical politics; the second, not unrelated to the first, lies in his choice of utopian rather than science fictional writing as the generic form for his analysis of the texts.

This, then, is a book about utopias rather than science fiction. In the introductory theoretical section of the book Tom Moylan offers an historical and political analysis of utopian forms and their relation to dominant ideologies that is both complex and lucid. He explores in particular the historical conjunctures that produced specific utopias, from More onwards, and their inscription both within and in opposition to the capitalist ideology of growth and profit. He draws on Engels's critique of the utopian systems builders such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen—and returns to Engels later in the book when he shows how his four chosen texts respond to such a critique by centralising process over system. He distinguishes post-from pre-1850 utopian writing, charting the move to a future topography once the brave new world no longer offered unknown terrain. Utopian writing in the twentieth century, he claims, was either coopted into the affirmative ideologies of totalising systems or into the capitalist ideology of advertising, feeding the dream of a consumer paradise. Before the 1960s, he suggests, "utopia became a residual literary form, and the dystopia was recontained and enlisted as proof of the uselessness of utopian desire."

Moylan argues that utopian writing in the 1960s and 1970s made a decisive break with previous utopian traditions by becoming self-reflexive and self-critical, by refusing stasis and exploring process. "Critical utopia" implies both self-criticism and the concept of "critical mass", that is, potentially explosive. These texts draw on a variety of cultural forces—feminist, ecological, anti-hierarchical, collectivist—that oppose the reifying mechanisms of transnational capital, the modern white-privileging phallocratic capitalist state and the totalising bureaucratic state. He claims then, importantly, the effectiveness of these texts, and draws on Marxist theorists and their re-readings of Freud (although not, interestingly, post-Lacanian feminist re-readings) to show that the utopian impulse itself can be subversive.

His method of analysis is to delineate three operations of the utopian text: in terms of the iconic register, where the alternative society is presented; in the discrete register, which contains the narrative of the protagonist/visitor; in terms of the ideological contestations in the text that bring it, as cultural artefact, back to the contradictions of history. In so doing he de-simplifies the concept of utopia as an other and better place and very effectively allows it both literary and political complexity. This argument is as much about form as it is about content. Indeed he claims that as the content of utopia "is rejected as too limiting and subject to compromise and cooptation, the open form of the new utopia becomes a subversive new content in its own right".

Moylan uses his analytical tools on the four texts to produce readings that are close, sensitive and illuminating, although I felt that his choice not to look at them in terms of the writers' oeuvres, nor in generic science fictional terms, was limiting, particularly regarding Russ and Delany. For he is not unfamiliar with the wider field of science fiction, nor with science fiction criticism. His analysis of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed,* for

example, draws heavily on Delany's close reading in *The Jewel-hinged Jaw* and builds on it. I found it full of insight, careful to delineate the compromises of the text within its structure of binary oppositions "that mirror and enclose each other" while careful to tease out and reveal the political aspirations that underlie it. I felt that *The Female Man* suffered most from Moylan's insistence on the utopian aspects of the text. For despite his emphasis on the centrality of feminist practices, Moylan does not really address the question of gender, writing and the construction of the female subject.

Most importantly, perhaps, Moylan's complex structural analysis of the four texts removes utopias from the sterile debate on content and emphasises instead the subversive power of form. Unfortunately, the repetitiveness of his political argument tends towards reductionism. Not surprisingly, within the terms of his own thesis, Moylan is on the side of the angels. The message throughout the four exegeses is that process, change, self-criticism, ambiguity is good; binary opposites, stasis, resolution is bad. The reiteration becomes tedious. While I would not deny the importance of the variety of political practices developed during the 1960s and 1970s, I think it is unnecessarily narrowing not to see these books in other terms too: those of the well-established oppositional practice of non-utopian science fiction. As it is, in literary generic terms, having set up some kind of epistemological break from their utopian forebears, these four books appear to spring from nowhere. And, more importantly, in an analysis that is essentially about the potential political effectiveness of cultural artefacts, that is, books, they seem to *lead* nowhere.

The phallocratic state and transnational capital—only two of the hegemonic powers against which Moylan optimistically pits his chosen texts—are not only not shivering in their boots but instead, in this latter half of the 1980s, are moving from strength to strength. In the United States the power of the former can be seen in the growth of right-wing fundamentalism and the gains of the moral majority, while in Britain it can be seen in a language of right-wing "morality" that seeks to reverse the gains made by the women's liberation movement and the cooptation of those gains within the insidious ideology of "post-feminism". The power of transnational capital is all too apparent in current developments in Southern Africa and Central and South America. Utopian desires, there, are being shattered in earnest. The multiplicity of anti-hegemonic forces about which Moylan speaks so inspiringly and which were undoubtedly inspiring to his texts, seem in disarray rather than strength.

The problem with this book lies not so much in the content of the claims that Moylan makes for his critical utopias. He sums up, "at the ideological core of the critical utopian novels is a message of contestation with the current dominant forces, a set of meditations on the process of willed transformation, the activism, required for social revolution." Such a demand for the seriousness and effectiveness of these works is wholly admirable. The problem, instead, is that, oddly, given his political commitment to the historical process, they appear as isolated instances: separated from their utopian antecedents and producing, it seems, no effective tradition of their own. Because Moylan does not touch on what has happened, in the 1980s, to the radicalising forces of the 1970s, it is as if we have reached a political and cultural vacuum. What has happened to the "critical mass" of these four texts? What is the fallout from the explosion? Had he chosen to read them in terms of science fiction, Moylan might have been able to point to more recent "oppositional" writing. The work of Gwyneth Jones, for example, is centrally concerned

with the exploration of opposition to hegemonic power and that delicate area where the personal becomes the political. As it is, by stopping short his political analysis at the end of the 1970s, Moylan undermines his own arguments about the effectiveness of the texts. While individually his close readings are excellent, it is disappointing that they are coopted into a line of argument—a hegemonic one, at that—that seems to foreclose on any future writing.

Hitler Victorious: Eleven Stories of the German Victory in World War Two
edited by Greg Benford and Martin H. Greenberg *(Garland Publishing Inc., New York and London, 1986, 299pp, $19.95)*
Alternative Histories: Eleven Stories of the World As It Might Have Been
edited by Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg *(Garland Publishing Inc., New York and London, 1986, 363pp, $19.95)*

reviewed by Stef Lewicki

Just as fiction that speculates about the future is capable of provoking serious thought and reflection about the human race and where it may be heading, as well as being entertaining, so, there ought to be something to be learnt from imagining how things might have turned out differentiy in the past if other choices had been made or events occurred, as well as a certain amount of entertainment. On both counts, however, these anthologies were rather disappointing: most of the stories pale into insignificance beside the novels that are the best examples of "allohistory"—dreadful term, adopted by the editors—such as Dick's magnificent *Man in the High Castle,* Keith Roberts's *Pavane*, and Amis's *The Alteration*. The stories do nothing to reinforce the idea that it is people like ourselves that make history and are making the future by our decisions now.

Norman Spinrad's very perceptive and thought-provoking introduction is the best part of the *Hitler* anthology. He attempts to analyse the undoubted fascination of the Hitler years, an era when evil in the world reached its zenith, and states quite correctly that we, as a race, still don't know the "how" and "why" of Hitler: the man has not been exorcised from our imaginations. Spinrad is accurate when he says that the attraction of such "Nazi" virtues as efficiency, and the concept of "Führerprinzip" exert a magical rather than an ideological hold on human beings, reaching deep into the collective unconscious. The intellectual rationale for such a collection of stories in which the Nazis were victorious is the importance of the Second World War as the most crucial historical nexus for humanity so far, coupled with the question "What have we learnt since then?"

From this point it's all downhill, I'm afraid. The book has the feel of a piecemeal anthology, padded out with a lot of previously unpublished material which should have stayed that way. It's a shame really: Spinrad is right that this is a theme which needs to be confronted, but this book fails to do that. In "Enemy Transmissions", Tom Shippey shows a strong feel for the cultural changes after a Nazi victory, and treats the development of the language skilfully, but the premise of the story is rather too far-fetched to convince. C.M. Kornbluth, in "Two Dooms" explores the dilemma of a scientist in our world who has to decide whether to participate in the Manhattan Project, and who is convinced that he should, after a brief spell in a parallel world in which the Axis Powers won the war. The best aspect of this story is the depiction of science stultified by ideology in a Nazi world.

Brad Linaweaver's "Moon of Ice", a skilfully crafted novella written as a continuation of Goebbel's famous diaries, is an imaginative and fairly successful attempt to enter into the persona of a key historical character. Nazism seems to have achieved its aims of a Jew-free Pan-European state, and almost to be mellowing with age. The background is carefully constructed but again the actual plot is rather silly and far-fetched.

The rest are dire: one story was unreadable. The idea of someone from a parallel universe preventing Hitler's suicide merely in order to trick him into an eternity of torture for his crimes—the premise of Benford's "Valhalla"—I found an incredibly silly and pointless story, made worse by one or two factual errors. "Do Ye Hear The Children Weeping?" is an implausible story about a house haunted by the foetuses experimented on by a Nazi doctor, and to crown it all, Algis Budrys's "Never Meet Again" provides a dose of cold war propaganda.

The *Alternative Histories* collection is rather better. Examples are chosen from a wider period, the last century. They all spring from the premise that there have been a number of crucial crossroads in history where our world might have been radically different had other events occurred or other choices been made. Hale's "Hands Off" (1881) must have been the first time anyone realised that a minor alteration to the past could have a massive chain of consequences—a device used so effectively by Ray Bradbury in his story "The Sound of Thunder".

Many of the stories betray traits of early twentieth-century sf combining very interesting ideas with poor plot and shoddy writing. Such a one is Poul Anderson's story in which Carthage defeated Rome. The idea that the society of Carthage had no ordered or developed science because it was pagan, whereas in our world the concept of a Christian God who, representing the power of *law* within nature, fostered the rational development of the sciences, is fascinating: the story itself however, is merely a swashbuckling yarn about the attempt to put things "right" after time has been tampered with. Likewise L. Sprague de Camp's "Wheels Of If" is genuine old-style sci-fi. A certain amount of care has been taken building up a different political map of the world, but the story itself is rather pointless and confusing: conventional warfare in a parallel United States setting. He does raise—and leave unanswered—the interesting paradox: if time and history are altered, does someone who exists in both universes (though obviously a different person) perceive that any change has taken place? If you think about it, they shouldn't, and this rather invalidates this story (and a few others).

Irving Cox's "In The Circle of Nowhere" portrays a Red Indian world in which "white savages" have been enslaved. It obviously reflects the racial politics of the time when it was written (1954): the Red Indian hero is attempting to persuade his peers—who will have none of it—of the basic equality and humanity of the "white savages" . . .

Keith Roberts's "The Lady Margaret" foreshadows his excellent novel *Pavane*. There is style to his writing and real human emotion in his characters, as well as thoughtful attention to the economics of a representative, Roman Catholic, Pan-European state. He also doesn't waste any of the energy of his story in trying to correct aberrant time. H. Beam Piper contributes a wonderful cameo-piece: at the beginning of the nineteenth century the authorities have to cope with an interloper diplomat from another time continuum. It's all nicely told through diplomatic correspondence, and there's a delightful twist at the end. Stephen Benet does something very similar with equal flair, creating a very plausible parallel past, and even though the ending is rather obvious, it doesn't spoil the overall effect.

R.A. Lafferty describes a very quirky but appealing U.S. in which the automobile never caught on and the entire nation is linked by a myriad network of local trolley lines. It's a world very similar to our own in other respects, and all the logical arguments condemn the development of the private car: in our universe, we have chosen to fly in the face of logic. Kim Stanley Robinson's "The Lucky Strike" has the bomber pilot on the flight to Hiroshima succumbing to his conscience, deliberately bungling the drop, court-martialled, condemned to death and shot, even thought the "demonstration" of the A-bomb brought the war to an end anyway. Although the characterisation is good, the ending, where the world disarms as a result of his death, seems incredibly naïve, given what we know of global power politics since 1945.

The collection closes with an academic and historical essay which is too shallow to be satisfying or useful. There is much better material about parallel history available. Insofar as Chamberlain makes us aware in his essay and bibliography that there is a good deal of "allohistory", he leaves us wondering why some of the stories in these collections have been selected. The notes and bibliography are detailed and excellent—probably the best part of this tome—although admittedly incomplete, especially with regard to material published in other languages. Chamberlain doesn't gloss over the difficulties of writing "allohistory": it obviously takes a lot of care and research to dovetail a story with "real" history at whatever crucial nexus is chosen, and having read these two anthologies (and enjoyed some of the stories in the second) my conclusion is that it probably takes the length and detail of a novel to do this convincingly, and have anything worthwhile to say. However, it does make me rather angry that, when there is clearly a wealth of material to choose from, so much dross is included in what are in principle worthwhile anthologies: this is what gives science fiction a bad name, and we have had enough of that. More maturity is what we need.

Artificial Things
by Karen Joy Fowler *(Bantam, 1986, 218pp, $2.95)*

reviewed by Sherry Francis

A naughty daughter who slips through chinks in cognitive time; a mature woman who guiltily conjures an old ghost with her therapist's aid; a lonely wife whose psyche is invaded by alien minds: these are a few of the characters who appear in Karen Joy Fowler's outstanding first collection of short stories. And her characters are individuals, not high-tech furniture for a world squeezed into the coffin-sizes limits of one writer's imagination. Fowler would not have such hubris; she does not care for a piece of the cyber-hunk action. For her, grandiose speculation about the human future requires lived experience of the past. Since such expertise is unattainable, her vision of the world to come is modest in scale while her portrayal of a single individual may require the most powerful of science fictional images.

In "Face Value", Fowler claims a whole planet to convey her characters' state of mind. On a desert world, a man studies an alien species, while his wife, who provides the only human companionship available, languishes in a sand-swept igloo, sustained by memories of her friends and her mother. Taki becomes more absorbed in his life's work while Hesper is simply absorbed. The aliens supremely indifferent to the scholar who

studies them, paw Hesper's clothes, steal her mementos of long-dead kin, rob the poetry she has written and attempt to poke curious fingers into her mouth. Taki, keen to accustom the aliens to human presence, forbids Hesper's resistance to the violation, not knowing that the aliens have emptied her of identity. They filled the space they have prised open with their own collective will.

The outlines of feminist parable can be discerned in many of the stories. "Face Value" is the description of patrilocal custom in an sf idiom. The futuristic, alien setting enhances the universality of the Persephone myth, wherein a woman sacrifices old affections for her husband's unfamiliar world. Fowler's stories are feminist only in outline, however. She seldom attends to the most typical concerns of feminist fiction, particularly relations between men and women. The interior exploration of a gendered subject concerns her more.

This concern is most apparent in "The View from Venus", in which future observers insinuate themselves into the mind of a woman attending college at Berkeley in the 1960s. Fowler uses the science-fictional device to purge bald feminist commentary of any air of didacticism. Linda, like other Fowler women, is uncertain of her sexuality and attractiveness yet her dowdiness is self-imposed, reinforced by subliminal fears of male predation. She meets a "gorgeous male" as he moves into the flat across the hall from her and, after a halting beginning, she finally manages to swoon romantically against his granite chest. Those who despise romance fiction will not have their sensibilities impeached, however. By framing the tale with the perspective of future observers who are themselves students of Romance, the reader is one step nearer to objective appraisal. We see not stereotypes but a woman struggling with those stereotypes in an irresistible scenario of male/female relations. At the moment of the swoon, Linda's attraction to the hunk is deferred since she experiences stimulation as a by-product of her partner's attraction to her. The story is fun as well as educational because it casts the reader into the role of guiltless voyeur. The lecturer in "The View from Venus" commands us to abandon academic detachment for a close identification with our subject and her amours. With the delight of a closet Dallas fan in a semiology class, the reader gladly plunges into the lesson.

Fowler returns to her interest in the writing of politics on the feminine body in "The Bog People", a tale set in Northern Ireland. Again, the protagonist is a plain, self-doubting girl who receives the sexual attentions of a man. This story has no element of humour to lighten the tone of complete despair. The girl in question is a Catholic from a Republican home while her lover is a British soldier. Like Linda in "The View from Venus", the heroine has a third-person relationship to her own body. Her sexual delight is released from its religious cocoon by a man who finds her attractive; the attractiveness of the man himself is secondary. It is the power of male validation, rather than the mutual attraction of a Romeo and Juliet, that refutes national boundaries and community loyalties.

Fowler's ardently female voice rarely speculates on the motivations or feelings of her male characters but unlike other feminist writers, such as Joanna Russ, she does not attack or exclude men as a sex. In "The War of the Roses", a story set in a post-revolutionary society, Fowler hints at essentialist distinctions between male and female natures. Such innatism can be used as a mandate for gender warfare or a basis for gender compromise. Fowler's characters take the latter course.

Fowler does not confine herself to questions of feminism alone, however. In "The War

of the Roses", Fowler investigates the extent to which power structures determine the quality of life, independently of the type of authority, traditional or revolutionary, which uses these structures. The fact that sf can be used so effectively to discuss politics, subjectivity and gender calls for a new interpretation of the phrase "a literature of ideas". Fowler uses a science-fictional context to heighten the impact of her stories, to stress the urgency of the questions she poses, to insist that her admittedly liberal humanist values are relevant to our species' doubtful future. It is an additional bonus that Fowler conveys her ideas with a skill that is astonishing in a new writer, her prose being a superb example of low-fat writing. In every paragraph, she demonstrates an acute discernment between the superfluous and the essential. Her images and language precisely reinforce the themes of the story in flawless structures.

If I were to name one quality that underpins all of Fowler's literary projects, both normal and philosophical, it would be humility. Her value judgements, however they are inspired, assert no claims to historical validation, for historical truths would only be accessible to beings such as those in "The View from Venus", observers who can merge subject with object. Mere mortals have nothing more to hand than a faulty historical record. Even if we could return to the scenes of ancient events, we would still be external observers, imperfect in our discernment of motives and actions. This sentiment is expressed in what is perhaps Fowler's best known short story, "Praxis". In the far future of "Praxis", a bloated plutocracy dominates the great mass of human beings, whom they police with the aid of the trigger-happy androids they have fashioned. But the androids or "simulants" are also supreme thespians who live the identities of the characters they play. Only aristocrats can afford the tastefully sadistic thrill provided by these snuff-dramas, wherein a lamenting Juliet may stab herself too thoroughly to be recycled. The protagonist, an historian whose patron has paid for her ticket to one of these realathons, witnesses what she believes is a political assassination though her patron warns her that the murder victim was herself only an android. Despite her own uncertainties, the historian decides to record for posterity the truth as she sees it.

Occasionally this humility results in tales that are not wholly satisfying. The humble tone in Fowler's stories, also results from the fact that there is no certainty of the *episteme,* be it science-fictional or fantastical. In trying to write a story that is not self-validating yet is conclusive in a formalized way, she occasionally chooses superficial images to end a story, suggesting the use of artifice rather than genius. This is a small flaw, however, in an otherwise immaculate collection where the hand of genius is tirelessly at work.

Victim Prime
by Robert Sheckley *(Methuen, 1987, 203pp, £9.95)*

reviewed by Mike Christie

Once upon a time Robert Sheckley was a good writer. Short stories like "A Pilgrimage to Earth" and "Can You Feel Anything When I Do This?" poked fun at sf traditions and established and maintained his reputation as a witty and accurate writer. He came up through *Galaxy,* a magazine ideally suited to his dry style and sardonic touch, and for two decades he continued to produce quality short stories.

How many writers are famous for their short stories? When Sheckley eventually ran dry, his credit in the eyes of cognoscenti was as high as ever, but out there in the bookstores his books were pretty sparse on the shelves. With Herbert, Asimov and Heinlein all making money hand over fist, Sheckley evidently decided to cash in with a couple of crap novels. Thus we got *Dramocles,* a dismal failure that managed to tarnish Sheckley's reputation pretty thoroughly. And now, to complete the job, we have *Victim Prime.*

The book did manage to stimulate my sense of wonder. It succeeds in astonishing the reader with the baldness with which Sheckley steals old ideas from himself and parades them as new. *The Tenth Victim* was one of Sheckley's less successful books, being already an overworking of a perfectly competent short story, "The Seventh Victim". But in *Victim Prime* Sheckley has had the gall to use the idea yet again, without any acknowledgement at all.

In *The Tenth Victim* the idea of legal murder is given a social background to the accompaniment of rather more heavy-handed satire than most Sheckley. In this future, anyone can join in the Hunt, and become alternately Victim and Hunter, attempting either to murder, or to kill in self-defence. In *Victim Prime,* the Hunt is only legal on Esmeralda, a Caribbean island, but otherwise no essential detail is changed.

Hiding behind some of the scenery are glimpses of material which an earlier Sheckley would have delighted in. A United States collapsing through inertia and decay, as Harold, the hero, travels down the East Coast to Esmeralda, would have lent itself to Sheckley's style ideally. We even meet the Professor on the journey, a learned tramp who would have been at home in many other Sheckley books. Here, though, he is abandoned after eight pages, as if it was just too much like hard work.

There is, however, something even more distressing than laziness going on in *Victim Prime.* On page 15 Harold has just fought off three muggers as he makes his way down the coast. They failed to bluff him out, and Sheckley closes the chapter with: "They used to say back in Keene Valley that Harold didn't have a mean streak in his body. But he was determined, very determined, and he didn't push worth a damn."

If you're at all familiar with Sheckley, you'll find it hard to believe that those lines are not satirically meant. You'll just have to take my word for it. Not only has Sheckley forgotten how to write, he seems to have forgotten why. There was a time when the sort of crap he's producing here would have been the target for his own satire the next month in *Galaxy.* Seeing him produce it as if it meant something is one of the most depressing sights in sf, and anyone who buys this book will only encourage him to sink even deeper into the slime.

Rumors of Spring
by Richard Grant *(Bantam, 1987, 439pp, $18.95)*

reviewed by Colin Greenland

Richard Grant's first novel *Saraband of Lost Time* was published in March 1985. Comparisons with the Viriconium stories of M. John Harrison were inescapable.

> They took the secret hallway through the Tomb of Artists and came into a dim precinct which the King had always prized for its seediness and antiquity. Somehow the last century's buffoonish architects had failed to notice it.
>
> Shuffling characters gathered in doorways to whisper and cast furtive glances down the

avenue, and fat matrons looked down from balconies with expressions of placid disgust. Embroidered banners, faded and moth-preyed, advertised a variety of illegal services and equipment.

In fact, with its elusive plot, its elegant absurdity and deliberate pathos, its charming, preoccupied grotesques fumbling hopefuly with a senescent technology amid scenery of shabby grandeur, *Saraband* could well have *been* an M. John Harrison novel, if Harrison wrote 300-page novels, and if *A Storm of Wings* had turned out to be a paradigm of his work instead of a magnificent sport.

Perhaps it did also show one reason why Harrison doesn't write 300-page novels. Perhaps a fundamental arbitrariness does, at that length, start to show through the rich deep pile of invention. Extended, connections become tenuous. The apocalypse, when it arrives, is neither here nor there. But *Saraband* is great fun while it lasts, more literate and intelligent than a shelf-full of generic posthistories, and possessed of a wilful oddness that was almost enough to secure it the Philip K. Dick Award.

Reacting, Bantam have "got behind" (as they say) Grant's second novel, putting it into simultaneous hardcover and trade paperback editions (and thus disqualifying this one from the Dick Award, though I don't suppose that's uppermost in their minds). The hardcover is a beautiful book, but presented with a tacky, floscular dust-jacket and blurb that make *Rumors of Spring* look and sound like something the Care Bears might be in. Perhaps Bantam Marketing were not satisfied with the plain, handsome solution they came up with last time they had to dress a book like this one.

For Grant has been reading John Crowley: *Engine Summer,* I should think, and *Beasts* too; but especially *Little, Big.*

She searched her memory, sorted through the innumerable stories she had collected there. But like the cluster of rowan trees, whose leaves and flowers intermingled in the sun, all the stories ran together, their plots and characters getting jumbled—as though Thrull had been right: there was only one Story, and everything you thought was separate was really part of it. All the once-upon-a-times and the happy-ever-afters were not true beginnings and ends but only transitions, places where the plot spun around on itself like a staircase, spiralling to yet another story, and suddenly you were there in the middle of things again.

Other influences are manifest: more Harrison ("The Silent Partners' Club was situated in a cul-de-sac beside a luthier's shop. It bore no sign, save for the wheels-within-wheels motif said to be derived from the fortune card THE RANDOM WALK, which someone had etched in its façade."), and also Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast,* when Lady Widdershin's garden party is invaded by the Brigade of Irregular Poets and passionate declamations are made by gaunt figures in soiled academic gowns. But the great benefit of *Little, Big* has been to give Grant a locus for the specifically magical elements of his story; an acceptable tone for the metafictional passages of his text; a poetic shape for time (that spiral staircase is important); and a consequent opportunity for a consummate and wonderful ending. Grant does not copy, he learns. He pays tribute openly (his literary agent appears as a breed of clematis), and while he adopts, he adapts. He is more lyrical than Harrison, more lively than Crowley.

Rumors of Spring is set in the same country as *Saraband of Lost Time,* though historical relations between the two books are, as one might expect, uncertain and contradictory. The same ambience of gleeful anachronism prevails: Edwardian gentility with sci-fi technology (ray guns and air yachts). There are some similar characters: a vague, kindly aristocrat; a blunt, self-reliant woman; an unpleasant boy who comes

around. The story starts in a relatively near future, at a botanical conservation centre inside the sickly last forest on an ecologically devastated and politically disintegrating Earth, then hops five centuries to a time when the same forest, mutated, is expanding so fast and violently that civilization is threatened. Funded by the Hardy Plant Society of Riverrun, the First Biotic Crusade sets out to penetrate the forest, rediscover Balance Act Reporting Station 12, and find a way to make the vegetable empire cease its expansion.

Of course it's not as straightforward as that. The Crusade's unstoppable big black transport jumps the gun and takes off into the forest with a miscellaneous and accidental crew only two of whom are supposed to be on board. Things at the botanical preserve are not as neglected as everyone had supposed. Spirits of the wild wood are involved, so references to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other fairytales are knowingly sprinkled around. Comic and curious exchanges ensue, while narrative logic, consistency and taste must scramble along behind as best they can.

Not that *Rumors of Spring* is a romp or skit. What distinguishes Grant's comedy definitively from Terry Pratchett's or Robert Rankin's is the meditative, even plaintive tone of the story that all the bizarrerie keeps returning to, the story of a fourteen-year-old called Vesica growing up "though she didn't particularly want to", escaping from her wicked stepfather to find her true love and her true self. Vesica is a lonely, confined, intuitive child. Grant depicts her with some sensitivity and provides her, in her companions and enemies, with a varied array of vital models, pretensions and humours.

It was C.S. Lewis who observed that the strength of *Alice in Wonderland* is that Alice is an "ordinary little girl"; the same thing is surely true of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. The whole story of *Titus Groan* is of an ordinary little boy imprisoned by inheritance. In the very idiosyncrasy of *Rumors of Spring* (a loose spiral of free-association patchwork with a clear, bright centre) Richard Grant takes us one step nearer the revival of an alternative tradition of fantastic writing—from Peake through Harrison, from Carroll through Crowley—that has recently seemed to be overrun by elves and dragons.

The Finnbranch
by Paul Hazel *(Sphere, 1986, 594 pp, £4.95)*

reviewed by Gwyneth Jones

The landscape is severe and comfortless, mountain and bog and poor, struggling pasture. Later, overwhelmingly, there will be the sea. The sun rarely seems to shine; the lighting is a bleak Celtic twilight. The world of *Yearwood,* first book of the Finnbranch saga, is immediately recognisable as an all-purpose British bronze age continuum, though the "land between the seas" is never geographically identifiable. It is no surprise when we discover ourselves in the company of a Fatherless Child, a Faithless Queen; miraculous youthful exploits that hint of powerful lineage; and of course a disgruntled foster-father. This is the time of the fall of matriarchy and the turn (and subsequently the return) of the king. This is the bronze-age quandary explored in other myths beside the pre-Arthurian corpus: Ancient Britain is crawling with Fathers and Sons, wandering around attempting petulantly to identify each other, and establish the new lines of descent.

In real life Britain, not least in the Western Isles where *Yearwood* sometimes seems to be set, it is also a time of remarkably high culture. The mysterious major constructions of

the era, scattered all over that seaboard, suggest the level of population and sophistication of these contemporaries of Mycenae. It always seems to me, with apologies to Hazel's fine bleak atmospherics, that the climate *must* have been slightly better in those days. In fact there is some evidence of this in *Yearwood*; or else fairly well developed trade routes (they drink wine all the time). But social sophistication and commerce are not Hazel's concern. This is a rich, cold broth of mythologies. Uther and Igraine, Arthur begetting his sister's child, are merely surface froth. The young Finn is not only Arthur: he is also Odin, climbing the World Tree Yggdrasil, and trading an eye for the sky goddess's wisdom. The story is only fleetingly The Return of the King: there is a deeper, weightier theme. Its plot-device involves the folklore of the seal people, well known all over the west, who come to land and mate with humankind. In pan-Celtic legend both men and women ascend from the Other World, which is always associated with water though not necessarily the sea; to entrance and then abandon their human husbands and wives. For Hazel's purposes the powerful otherworldly creatures are exclusively male. But it is soon clear that their world is indeed the land of the dead.

At the conclusion of *Yearwood* Father and Son finally meet, in the old Freudian cave-contest. From this point on Finn is no longer a character at all: he has been subsumed entirely into the myth. In the puzzling timeshifts at the end of the book he explicitly loses his individual identity: hereafter he is equally his own father and his own son; the dead High King and the Promised King to come. It would be a mistake to call this a reference to the Arthurian legend: both are late glosses on a very old, old story. In the shift to *Undersea* Hazel powerfully conveys the inescapable paradox of the central duel of patriarchy. However that contest ends *the king is killed.* Finn has accepted the relay baton. He is now as good as dead. He descends under the sea, and soon enough he actually becomes Death, *Duinn,* the Dark Lord.

Hazel never clearly explains why there are no women, except for one crone goddess, in the other world. Even the green mares that Cuchulain found there are changed, resolutely, to magnificent stallions every one. As Hazel points out, in the dead land there is no need for reproduction. The population increases steadily without that aid. But there are deeper reasons for this segregation. In *Yearwood* a connection is firmly made between the land, the nation; a woman—and the sea, the king; a man. In the modern romance with a now obsolete social system, it is often forgotten that kingship was originally an elective office. The divine right to rule was a much later rationalisation of illegally extended powers. The Celtic peoples often spoke of sovereignty as a woman: a queen who not only would but ought to choose and change "her" consort if he lost the mandate of heaven through incompetence or injustice. This symbolic relationship explains the curious behaviour of "Yllvere", Finn's mother, in *Yearwood.* And the remarkable tolerance shown to various unfaithful queens of late legend, like Igraine and Guinevere. In the realistic plot Yllvere cuckolds her inadequate husband, treats the High King as a servant, and eventually betrays her son to his enemies. But in her function as *the land* she is neither fickle nor immoral. Finn is the victim not of an unloving human mother, but of the needs of the race, and by extension the life force itself, which can have no regard for individuals.

In *Undersea,* as both realistic plot and human personality fragment, the opposition becomes even more sharply defined. The man, male, is death, water, cold, battle. The woman, female, is life, land, warmth, the hearth. And therefore absent here, as the sun itself (a goddess in the Celtic pantheon) is absent. This also explains why in the house of

death, Tech Duinn, the shepherd of the dead tends an ineffective fire, that gives no warmth and will not cook meat. There is no moral value placed on this opposition. The submarine world is definitely not paradise, nor are its inhabitants the souls of the blest. And we have already seen that "life" can be as cruel as death. But except for a momentary truce between the Dark Lord, Finn, and his cosmic consort, we are shown no resolution for the equation. The dead are waiting for a king, Finn's son, who will lead them in a victorious invasion of the land of the living. The paradox is left untouched: no one wonders what would happen then to the defeated. The invasion doesn't happen. Finn, even at his most cosmic, is not Lugh, the Light, the Promised One. This is a harrowing of hell that doesn't come off. And Finn departs. Like many an Irish or Welsh culture hero: after an interlude in this dour fairyland he will live out his life as the High King, full of bronze-age pomp and incident and battles. Until, some day, his son arrives to supplant him.

In both *Yearwood* and *Undersea* Paul Hazel struggles with a dilemma that plagues all myth-invokers. The metaphor is intense, the references many layered, intricate and absorbing: the characters are worse than wood. This failing is displayed to the point of absurdity in the passages of prehistoric soap opera. Ersatz-mediaeval wallpaper epics slither with obnoxious "contemporary" idiom and last year's slang. But serious Fantasy can make equally painful reading. Its creators seem to feel that if someone is going to turn out to be Death at the end of the story it is absolutely necessary that they use a special gloomy voice all the way through. They must also employ frequently expressions such as "In truth—" and begin their sentences with the dreaded Atmospheric Adverb. But turning out to be Death at the end of the story is something that comes to us all. Verily, I am aware of my terrible and inescapable fate even as I write these words. It doesn't give me verbal constipation. If it seems uncouth to portray the great archetypes with the irreverence one accords a mere fictional character, the writer should remember that *all recorded myth is literary.* And that covers all the myth that we possess, from Levi-Strauss fragments up; written or spoken. The cosmics were always people. To try to recreate a level of pure, inhuman intensity that existed "before" Y Mabinogion; or the story of why the loon cries the way she does, shows a serious misapprehension. Take care of the fiction, Mr Hazel. The myth will take care of itself. It knows what it is doing, maybe better than you.

Points of identity should not be forced. It is not enough to say the *Finnbranch* is a reworking of various Celtic themes. It is also a new imaginative creation in its own right. It is a pity then that the third book *Winterking,* which makes a determined leap away from the other two, appears to be the weakest part of the trilogy. Suddenly the setting is a contemporary or near contemporary North America. It transpires that we are in one of those (slightly) alternative universes spawned with such depressing vigour by '80s sf. Finn's (Death's) protegé escaped from the Other World at the end of *Undersea* mounted on the great white stallion which is also *Yggdrasil*—another manifestation of the World Tree; Odin's "horse" on which he rode or hung nine days and nights in sacrifice to himself. Ever since then Wyck, or Wyckham, has endured or enjoyed his ride on the world tree all down the ages, unable to die. In this altered world he faces a mysterious confrontation, at last, with his patron. In effect it is as if Hazel has written a lighter type of fantasy *backwards.* His ordinary-type people fall under a bus and wake up in never-never land in the last book instead of the first. The high serious tone of the first two books has vanished. Instead we have a coy and pompous lubricity, with garments falling like

autumn leaves from an assortment of female non-characters; and surprising eruptions of scatological humour. Algonquin Indians feature as a kind of lost tribe of Cymru. Pits open in the woods, roots writhe like tentacles. Without quite reaching the purple slime level, Hazel descends a good way towards pure Shoggoth-toshery. Freed from bronze-age constraints, something of human presence does emerge in the plethora of minor characters. But it is almost lost in the riot. Almost lost too, is the climactic encounter between the haunted and the haunter, Death and the man who cannot die. Something of cosmic significance occurs. But as at the end of *Yearwood* Hazel insisted on pointing out the illusory nature of his king's victory: here too he seems to deny that there is any final escape from the cycle. There is an offhand association of the World Tree/stallion, with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But this is not the story hinted at by biblical references. Original sin there may be, and someone may have hung on a tree for it, but there is neither the sacrifice nor the concomitant redemption here. The saga ends on a note of problematic renewal: the world, no better than before, simply turns again.

In spite of all pettish complaints *Finnbranch* is a work of some stature, and very welcome. It is no weakness for a book of this kind to leave the reader guessing. Paul Hazel's vision does not give up its secrets easily, and a familiarity with the older myths he quarries is not the whole answer; nor should it be. And when Hazel avoids the pomposity and coyness that sometimes afflict him, his writing has the power to carry his theme. The cold, muscular seascapes of *Yearwood* and *Undersea* will stay in the mind a long time.

Aegypt
by John Crowley *(Bantam Books, 1987, 390 pp, $17.95)*

reviewed by Gregory Feeley

"The further in you go, the bigger it gets", observers point out in *Little, Big,* enunciating the keystone of the book's metaphysics. Possibly the principle informs its aesthetics as well, for as most reviewers have remarked, the narrative of *Engine Summer* itself comprises an engine summer, as well as a recorded text coextensive with Crowley's own. Whether the concept of larger-within-small truly informs *Little, Big* is harder to say; certainly the book aspires to that deep congruency of structure with surface texture, and has proven strong enough (in Harold Bloom's sense) to compel its initial reviewers to grant it the benefit of this doubt. *Aegypt,* Crowley's first novel in the six years since *Little, Big,* and his best and most complex book yet, sounds this theme almost immediately—the novel is set in motion by a soul's departure from a "ringing infinite void at once larger than the universe and at its heart"—and plays frequent variations on it thereafter. Another motif, the recovery of that which was lost, also weaves movingly throughout the heart of *Engine Summer.* Whatever the nature and final motives of *Aegypt,* this "book made out of other books . . ., this fantasia on [others'] themes" (Author's Note) shares many or all of the themes, "the figures of history, the stars, stones and roses" of Crowley's earlier work.

Crowley's fiction is in all cases more than the expression of his themes, but noting them offers one entry into a deeply problematic work, better perhaps than a simple recounting of its story, which like the park in *Little, Big* may lead you only back to its perimeters if you choose the paths that seem to lead inward. When at the end of the first chapter Pierce

Moffett, having decided to defer his trip to a job interview in order to dally with an old friend turned shepherd, sings as they proceed up the meadow:

> All we like sheep
> Have gone astray; have gone astray
> Everyone to his own way."

That we all go astray, and more importantly "everyone to his own way", is evident to the reader even this early on, that soul's departure being undertaken "with exquisite agony" and plainly no scheduled run. "The Things that Make us Happy, Make us Wise," the sampler motto in *Little, Big* asserts, also by way of concluding the first chapter. If you are going to fashion a close fitness between your novel's skeleton and its vitals extending right down to the cellular level, you had better be a good formalist.

Formal dimensions to the book in fact abound, and the reader cannot limn too many before venturing to abstract the codex they frame. Pierce Moffett is seen in Chapter One reading Luis de Góngora's poem the *Soledades,* which (as he helpfully observes) begins with a shipwreck and ends with a wedding. Aside from two prologues, Crowley's novel is wholly subsumed within a section called "The Solitudes" which begins with a wreck and ends with prospects of matrimony. Beginnings and endings are important. Here are two passages that define endpoints of what seems at first glance the novel's central theme, the penetration of historiography by mythopoeia:

> A secret story had been going on for centuries, for all time, and it could be known; here was its outline, or part of it, the secrets spilled, or if not the secrets, the secret that there were secrets. (p.77)

> come on: secret societies, Freemasons, *illuminati* haven't had real power in history. Can't you see, he'd said, the truth is so much more interesting: secret societies have had not had power in history, but the *notion* that secret societies had power in history *has* had power in history. (p.388)

Between these poles lies one thread of Crowley's tapestry, a meditation on history and its amenability to Meaning. Crowley (or Pierce) cites the story of the King of the Cats as exemplifying one history disclosing another, "the secret story within it that had been going on all along". "There is more than one history to the world," Pierce reads, and in time repeats; the second history is made of stories as the first is of time, and is true in a sense more important than the literal. The irrelevance of time passed to the potency of these forms is emphasized throughout the novel's implicit tractate, which folds the early centuries AD over the Renaissance, and sees saliences of both resurfacing in the Aquarian motley of the late Sixties. Philip K. Dick, who was no scholar but had a trunk line straight to the Great Unconscious, could in *Valis* evoke this complex of theophany and early Christian wisdom in a sentence: "The Empire Never Ended", which came to him in a dream as the title of an old *Astounding* serial he could never locate to read.

A few more formal soundings must be taken, including a foreshortened synopsis.

Pierce Moffett, a rather feckless academic, is stranded by a bus breakdown in a village in the Faraways, an arcadian range of hills and valleys a few hours southwest of New York City. He meets Spofford, a former student who seems to have taken inspiration from Colin Clout and now manages a flock. Moffett, who has "lost his vocation" for history and failed to win tenure, spends some days in the Faraways, is charmed but returns to New York, his prospective job unwon. The night before leaving he has a dream, of remembering that he had been sent a great distance on an urgent mission but had forgotten it. Waking in the night, Pierce realizes that "the task had been to forget, to become clothed

in forgetfulness as in robes and armor, robes over armor, layer upon layer, so that he could come to pass disguised into this sad city." The next morning he recalls only an incidental revelation, a scheme to redeem his fortunes by writing a book.

In New York, Pierce explains to a former lover, now literary agent, about the Renaissance quest for ancient knowledge and how it tinctured both that era's theology and its nascent scientific revolution. He recounts how mid-fifteenth-century scholars had been amazed by the discovery of Greek texts mistakenly thought to antedate the age of Plato and Pythagoras, which they in fact followed. Many Renaissance thinkers concluded that they had discovered the sacred writings of ancient Egypt, containing knowledge that Greek and later ages had corrupted and largely lost. Pierce ends by recounting how this historical error was caught by the seventeenth century but, while formally abjured by subsequent orthodoxy, persisted in western culture—the word "hermetic", the pyramid on the back of the American dollar bill, the fortune-telling powers ascribed to Gypsies (thought to come from Egypt)—even while various groups, from the Freemasons to present-day cults, still claim various systems of ancient knowledge. Pierce proposes to write "a kind of archeology of everyday life . . . tracing backward these old persistencies". His former flame surprises him by announcing that *she* believes it all true, and accuses Pierce of believing it as well.

Pierce returns to the low-rent Faraways with a small advance on his unwritten book, taking up the acquaintance of a circle of people whose fortunes the reader has continued to follow after Pierce left them earlier. Pierce becomes involved with Rosie Rasmussen, who has been reading the novels of Fellowes Kraft, an historical novelist of the previous generation whose colourful romances influenced Pierce as a child. Kraft was in fact a local celebrity in the Faraways prior to his death, and the Rasmussen Foundation, directed by Rosie's great-uncle, owns Kraft's copyrights. Pierce is eventually shown an unfinished manuscript of Kraft's, which proves to share many of the themes of Pierce's projected book. Amid many beautiful scenes detailing the complex interaction of various people's workaday lives, flashbacks to Pierce's past, and long passages from both Kraft's readable entertainments and more serious works of history that Pierce is reading (all original with Crowley), the novel comes to a moving, ambiguous close.

The form of *Aegypt* shows various organizing principles, some hierarchical, others running threadlike through the text. The two levels of formal structure overarching the individual chapters are:

1. The three sections of "The Solitudes", titled "Vita", "Lucrum", "Fratres". These are in fact the first of the twelve houses of the Zodiac (if the reader does not know this, the text again helpfully mentions it). This is the first and strongest indication—none is forthcoming from Bantam Books—that *Aegypt* is in fact the first of four volumes.

2. "The Solitudes", which constitutes all the present volume save the two prologues, and which possesses its own unity. The conclusion the reader may draw (with no help from Bantam, who indeed once did its best to disguise the fact that *Little, Big* was about fairies, even to the point of suppressing the book's subtitle) is that the Prologues are preliminary to the entire work, which is called *Aegypt*. Crowley has confirmed this.

Two sequences run parallel to the main narrative, like the confluence of the Blackbury and Shadow rivers outside Blackbury Jambs, where they can be seen "rushing together and turning southward, but not mixing":

1. Kraft's unfinished book. Its opening chapters, evidently revised (by Pierce?), are

presented. Presumably the work shall continue, interleafing Pierce's own story, throughout the four volumes.

2. The flight of the soul whose departure is witnessed in "The Prologue in Heaven". Later in the book, angels watch the Elizabethan physician Doctor Dee standing on Glastonbury Tor, addressing one of the novel's central questions ("Is the universe one thing?") to an unanswering sky. They smile, but are presently "disturbed by a noise, a noise as of footfalls far away and faint, the footfalls of someone coming on behind". The soul is evidently Pierce's, or coming to rescue or relieve Pierce, in transit one guesses through the next three books.

There are also two instances in the novel where parallel levels of narrative, the interleaves, suddenly converge. The first occurs in the chapter in which Doctor Dee meets Edward Talbot, another historical personage. Talbot presents him with a book, a ciphered manuscript Talbot says he was led to by a spirit. When Dee attempts to break the cipher, he finds two possible readings for the manuscript's first line: one the opening sentence of Crowley's first Prologue ("The Prologue in Heaven"), the other the first sentence of "The Solitudes". And later, when Pierce imagines his finished book, he mentally drafts an Author's Note that looks toward Crowley's own. Crowley plainly intends more than simple self-referential high-jinks, but the significance of these conflations remains unclear.

The novel ends with Pierce having yet no inkling that the universe is otherwise composed than his humanist secularism admits, although the reader by now knows better. Creation in *Aegypt* is gnostic, the material world a trap in which the divine spark is smothered in matter and dormant. A practising gnostic, on being lectured about the zodiac, protests that astrology merely proclaims "This is the way you're stuck", whereas one must comprehend one's situation yet break through it, "break through the spheres that bind you in". The eight spheres, Archons, Aeons, and the nine choirs of Angels that "fill up the universe, each choir meshing with the higher and lower ones like immense gears of different ratios", are the fixtures that wheel above Pierce, who thinks them important but not true.

The history that is made of stories not time, that tells us of ourselves more truly than facts, speaks to the individual chiefly of mortality, loss, the retreat of certainty. *Aegypt,* for all its redemptive cosmology, conveys with almost cathartic poignancy the ease with which people can mar their lives. The novel ends with a soul still in flight, reshufflings of lovers, and balloons in the air, but the material world's potential for unhappiness remains the grainy wood of this sculpture, there as its wrought outline is also there.

Aegypt is Crowley's most accomplished work, free of *Little, Big*'s sometimes fragrant breath or *Engine Summer*'s occasionally shapeless paragraphs. Bantam's funk over confessing the novel's nature—one of four, yet striated with other books within—bespeaks the real originality of the work, which interacts with those others within and beyond it, like the descending choirs of angels in the gnostics' clockwork cosmos, in a manner both moving and deeply apposite.

Star of Gypsies
by Robert Silverberg *(Gollancz, 1987, 397 pp, £11.95)*

reviewed by Ian Watson

As usual, Silverberg writes like an angel; though in this case perhaps a laid-back angel.

Once upon a time, the highly civilized Romany people lived on a beautiful planet called Romany Star, which circled a sun also called Romany Star; which must have been slightly confusing. When the Rom people realized that their sun was going to swell up three times over the course of the next several thousand years, charring the planet to ashes, they managed to build sixteen starships in which a remnant of the Rom (determined by lottery) escaped . . . and landed on Earth in the barbaric B.C. and built wonderful Atlantis. When Atlantis was in turn destroyed by natural upheaval, the Rom disappeared to become the vagabond Gypsies. But, through thick and thin, they guarded their secret tradition; and when interstellar travel began, they were the ones who could jump ships through hyperspace without suffering nervous breakdowns. This was because of their special genes—which did not, however, prevent them from interbreeding with Earthfolk; ahem.

Now, in the future interstellar Empire, while the dying Emperor languishes and three High Lords jockey to succeed him, Rom King Yakoub abdicates—*reculer pour mieux sauter!*—in order to shock his people back to the old dream of resettling Romany Star following the third flare-up.

Now why should anyone want to resettle themselves on a thrice-burnt heap of ashes? Well, Romany Star is the true home, the source of the Gypsies, who are at home nowhere else. So this is a spiritual matter. Besides, people can now terraform worlds. Meanwhile Romany Star is taboo to visit—until the great sign comes, for return. Though perfectly visible in the sky, the star's existence is a secret to the non-Rom.

To be wantonly pedantic, of course the Gypsies aren't aliens (with very similar genes to human beings), as Silverberg knows full well from his decently thorough research into Romany history, customs, symbols, language. Romany is descended from the precursor language which gave rise, in India, to Sanskrit. It's quite similar in word order and vocabulary to Hindi, though it has picked up lots of loan words in its travels. Consider the Romany sentence, *"Dja, dik kon tchalavedo o vurdo"* ("Go and see who's knocking on the wagon"). Consider the Hindi sentence, *"Dja, dekh kon tchalaya dvar ko"* ("Go and see who's knocking at the door"). Enough of this pettifogging!

Here is a fairy tale, set in space. All over space, in fact, and all over time, since gypsies (alone) can ghost-travel. They can send their ghosts to peep in on past events all over the galaxy and greet cousins back down the time line; though they uphold the Gypsy law never to reveal the future while they're ghosting.

Here is a wonder-book, filled with worlds wonderful and vile, filled with characters larger than life (particularly Yakoub who tells you so, endearingly, quite often), filled with many hardy marvels of the future such as customised body-rejuvenation or extra-dimensional storage pockets which you can stuff with tons of anything you fancy and carry around on your little finger, burdened by not an ounce. Every prodigy is on hand: snails the size of elephants, two-tailed cats, the horrid synapse-pits.

But amidst the cadenzas of invention there's a certain laziness. I worry about the apparent lack of diet of the mudpuppies of Duud Shabeel. Again, Earth has gone down

the tube in an unspecified bit of human lunacy; however, ze Gallic pretender Julian de Gramont keeps the flame of vanished France alive with his devotion to gastronomy and the dead French language, into floods of which he constantly breaks—without any French accents at all. Did the author omit the many missing French accents? Did the American publishers? Did Gollancz? Horreur! Honte! That's a duelling matter. Dinosaur dung! as Yakoub once vociferates, in Romany, though as he then remarks there's no Romany word for dinosaur.

Paradoxically, the principal laziness is an excess of energy. Even if Yakoub himself is prone to splurging, the book needed pruning and tightening. We get the picture of why he abdicated fairly soon, but this simply goes on and on. "Why won't you be King?" "No, I won't be King!" On and on. The planet Galgala is full of gold, so that gold is no longer worth anything. Gold everywhere! Worth nothing! Characters wax quite tiresome repeating this.

In a review of *Lord Valentine's Castle* back in *Foundation* 21 this reviewer remarked that Robert Silverberg really ought to be knighted for services to Monarchy. Here we go again. Emperors (plus Lords of the Imperium, et cetera) are the *sensible* way to govern a galaxy. Even with FTL travel, parliaments would be weeks behind the times. Democracy might work well enough on a limited scale, but imagine the unwieldiness of a parliament of planets. Ridiculous. The existence of an emperor sends a message simultaneously to the whole galaxy saying that we are all members of the same human family. Untune that string, and hark what discord and chaos follows. And even war; now there's something really medieval. In this future we also have civilised slavery, which is so much preferable to ancient slavery.

Yet let's not be churlish! Here's a wonder-book, a fairy tale, a romance, full of exuberance, colour, joie de vivre. Let's stick our tongues deep in our cheeks and enjoy this *patshiv,* this prodigal Gypsy festivity. It's good to have an angel around. Hey, ho! Hootchka! Pootchka! Hoya! Zim!

Science Fiction: Ten Explorations
by C.N. Manlove *(Macmillan 1986, £25, 249 pp)*

reviewed by Roz Kaveney

In this attempt to rethink the ways in which sf can be made palatable to the intellectual and specifically the academic communities, C.N. Manlove sets out to play down that sf which deals in satire and social criticism in favour of what he sees as most quintessentially science fictional, that sf which shows vast vistas of space and time, which shows us strange realms and mighty machines. There is no especial reason why that sf wonder which has been the staple of a particular kind of sf criticism should not be conflated with that awe in the face of the sublime which is the stock in trade of an altogether grander and more traditional mode of critical discourse. Manlove's attempt to do this lends a useful dignity to some of his discussions, but too often in his account of a selection of texts taken from the last forty years of the genre, he confuses aspiration with achievement, confuses the sublime with the merely noisy. *Ten Explorations* is all too often unprepared to make serious value judgements about the quality of texts overall, rather than in their particular capacity to evoke terror and wonder. Somewhere in Thomas Love Peacock, an advocate

of landscape gardening mentions as a merit of his school the awakening in the viewing stroller of surprise, and is asked by his interlocutor what this sentiment should be termed when the stroller sees the surprising vista for the second time. Manlove's texts have that quality at arousing surprise, but lack those other merits which might give that emotion the staying power to be transmuted into a lasting wonder at the sublimity of that invented.

There is a further tendency on Manlove's part to think of the sublime as essentially to do with the inhuman, to have to do with the contemplation of big dumb objects. While he is prepared to discuss the presentation of human values when they are present in the sort of work which interests him, he seems unprepared to admit that the sublime, that a sense of richness, power and the wonderful, can be present in work which concentrates on the human dimension, in works like *The Demolished Man* or *The Left Hand of Darkness* in which the sublime is present in the shape of the tragic. It is perhaps for this reason that his selection of texts so curiously omits work by women; his definition of his purpose automatically excludes those things in which most women, and many other, sf writers have been interested. It has to be stated further that he finds space for a novel like Simak's *Shakespeare's Planet,* which is arguably not very good and certainly hardly fits his model at all save in the loosest of ways.

All of which would be more tolerable were the individual essays up to Manlove's occasional best. His account of *Rendezvous with Rama* is exemplary precisely because there he is working with a book that fits his scheme of things, one in which all human elements are subordinated to the ironic presentation of a universe in which all that we perceive is no more than partially susceptible to our comprehension. Similarly, he does a decent job with Aldiss's *Hothouse* in spite of never fully comprehending the extent to which presentation of the vanity of human wishes is that author's obsessive preoccupation. But he does not live up to these essays more than a fraction of the time, partly because so much of the time he is engaged in special pleading for essentially tawdry works like the Frank Herbert, the Philip José Farmer and the A.A. Attanasio. Even when he deals with an author of real merit, like Robert Silverberg, he is too often tripped up by his prejudices. Manlove takes the images of transcendence in *Nightwings* at face value rather than regarding them as slightly tawdry mockups of that to which they aspire. Transcendence has never been Silverberg's strong suit, which is why *Son of Man* is so disastrously bad a book, dealing as it does in almost nothing but. Transcendence is tolerably well-managed in Silverberg only when it comes as a moment in a realistically lived experience, often, as in *Diving Inside*, a generally depressing one. One wants, and is entitled to expect, something rather more than warmed over '60s mysticism, white male middleclass guilt and dreamy Rackham-cum-Dulac imagery, which is what one gets in *Nightwings*; one needs to have a sense that pain is real, as it is in *Dying Inside,* before one is prepared to believe in its consolation.

But there are further inadequacies in Manlove's approach and it will be most convenient to restrict myself hereinafter to two alone of his discussions of texts. Part of the trouble is his relentless and antihistoricist avoidance of aspects of sf he perhaps considers nonrespectable. His account of *The Foundation Trilogy* avoids considering the extent to which the book was never in the first place conceived of as one book, or even as three. *The Foundation Trilogy* is a series of short stories and novelettes, written, as Manlove does briefly acknowledge, in close consultation with the editor of the magazine for which they were written: they were not the sole artistic preoccupation of the author during the years

in which they were written; nor is their quality or tone uniform. Like many "classic" works of Golden Age sf, their assembly in book form gives a misleading impression. Hari Seldon may have known in detail where the Galactic Empire was going; but there is no especial evidence that either Asimov or Campbell had that much idea from one story to the next. Indeed, the fact that Campbell suggested, halfway through the series' appearance in his magazine, the introduction of a wild card, the Mule, who disrupts the original scheme of the series and shifts its plot away from the slow orderly working through of a determinist scheme to a process of tinkering and tuning by a conspiracy of the brilliant, makes it doubtful that the sequence can be treated as a unity at all.

Much of what is most interesting in the sequence is localised, and if we regard the individual sections as autonomous works, some of them look a great deal better for it, though some a lot worse. For example, the first of the two stories which make up *Foundation and Empire* is largely perfunctory: Lathan Devers is a stock space opera hero and Bel Riose little more interesting. The sinister glamour that Manlove attributes to his portrayal largely derives from function and placing, is imposed by the enthralled and cooperative reader rather than more objectively discernible. The reason for this is that the plotting of this story is, even more than usual for the series, determinist, is telegraphed to any reader with a smattering of historical knowledge by Bel Riose's very name. (And a sizeable proportion of the *Astounding* readership would have acquired that smattering a few years before by reading L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* in *Unknown,* another Campbell magazine.) Campbell's suggestion that a spanner be thrown into the works will accordingly have been prompted by the suspicion that the series could not go on like this much longer as much as by highflown ideological critiques of the series' historical determinism.

The glee with which Asimov threw himself into the next story, one of the better things he has ever written, may have had to do with the discovery that going on with the series did not have to be a bore. Asimov was a young writer learning his craft; the Mule and Ebling Mis and Bayta Darell are given some of his best dialogue ever in the climactic scenes, as Mis struggles with ancient documents amid the mighty wreck of Trantor. The skill with which Asimov delays our realisation that the mutant clown is the all-conquering Mule, while playing absolutely fair in terms of the information available to us, prefigures his later interest in the detective story. The most memorable line from the first volume of the sequence as collected is a smug and ambiguous aphorism—"Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent"; here, the most memorable and moving line is the Mule's valediction to the woman he loves, but will not use his psychic powers to possess—"They call me the Mule. Not for my strength, obviously." This casual acknowledgement of a sterility both physical and political, is the sort of classic hokum we associate with, and love, in the Hollywood film noir of the same years; many of the more powerful moments in this novella—the panic when Selden's recorded announcement bears no relation to events as they have emerged—have this same cinematic quality. In the interests of advocating the merits of Asimov's grand scheme which exists largely in hindsight, Manlove neglects the finer more human moments which are much of the reason for the stories' survival.

Nor is Manlove at any greater ease with merits that are more traditionally literary. With Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun,* he seems hardly to know where to begin. He just about catches on to the possibility that it might be in some measure a Christian text, when a cursory inspection of interviews or of such other fiction as "The Detective of

Dreams" reveals that Wolfe believes in, and practices, Christianity in one of its more sophisticated forms, and is perfectly prepared to use the most central of Christian motifs in his work. What looks like a reference to religion is accordingly more than likely to be one; for example, a whole volume might be written in exegesis of Wolfe's selective use of saints' histories as a part of the implied characterisation of the characters who bear their names. Wolfe as a Christian is not going to write of redemption and transcendence and not mean those things quite remarkably more seriously than Herbert or Silverberg. There is even some evidence that Wolfe has been affected in his portrayal of redemption as an ultimate time paradox, repeated until gotten right, by the evolutionary theorisings of Teilhard de Chardin.

Manlove does not seem to realise, though he picks up on individual literary references, the extent to which literary reference is crucial to Wolfe's method in this book. Wolfe has said (in an interview with this reviewer) that the collage is the quintessential urban art form, and it takes little stretching of this statement to see, on the one hand, the cento, a text assembled from quotations, as a sort of collage, and, on the other, *The Book of the New Sun* as a cento. Wolfe may have started the parallel between the first scene of *The Shadow of the Torturer* and that of *Great Expectations* thinking only in terms of a meeting in a graveyard and a young man ambiguously destined, but the presence in both texts of a young man "with a secret way, pecooliar to himself, of getting to a boy, to his heart and to his liver" indicates something more. Wolfe does not just make use of references; when they throw off spontaneously productive suggestions he has the nous to take them up and run with them.

Quite specifically, Manlove fails to pick up one of the central references of *The Book of the New Sun*—oddly, since it is the one which above all makes Wolfe's masterpiece clearly the sublime text Manlove seems to be seeking out for admiration—which is the one to Borges' tale "The Garden of Forking Paths". In that tale, you will recall, reference is made to a Chinese novel which has odd inconsistencies in its plot—heroes both win and lose battles—and to a labyrinth, seemingly non-existent, which turns out to be the novel itself, since the novel does not limit itself to describing one sequence of probability and causation. Severian's chance meetings include figures from radically different futures, sharing his time as their past, and there is a fair possibility that he is correct when he has feelings of identity with the boy Severian, with the dead autarch in the tomb. It is as if in this novel the text were a palimpsest, as if moments from an underlay of earlier versions of the same events suddenly crop up, producing inconsistencies. If we need confirmation of the possibility, to put it no higher, of this reading, we need only turn to the short story "A Solar Labyrinth" which Wolfe published shortly after he had completed *The Book of the New Sun* and which seems to make the analogy between that novel and a maze quite explicit—its very title says as much. And it is of course logical when dealing with a novel so concerned with texts within texts that one should have to go for understanding of it to texts outside it.

One could further point to Manlove's failings as a Wolfe critic. He neglects in his reading the crucial question of Severian's parentage; to discuss Dorcas without mentioning that she is Severian's grandmother as well as his mistress is a glaring omission, especially when it is that aspect of the puzzle of Severian's ancestry, a puzzle clearly set by Wolfe as one of the subtrails of the maze, which impinges most directly on the plot. Of course, he achieves many worthwhile insights; but, in the end, this account of the most

important of the texts he deals with just will not do. At this stage in the development of sf studies, curates' eggs are not what is needed, and there is too much in this book that can simply not be recommended.

Cover Feature

We are again grateful to Brian Stableford—indefatigable contributor to Foundation, *critic and well known sf author—for producing our Cover Feature at short notice. As announced on the front cover and in the editorial, the first winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, for the best sf novel published in Britain in 1986, is Margaret Atwood's* The Handmaid's Tale *(hardback from Jonathan Cape, 1986, 324 pp, £9.95; paperback from Virago in June 1987, 324 pp, £3.95). Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer of considerable reputation, with several volumes of poetry, numerous short stories and five other novels to her credit, as well as a controversial study of Canadian literature,* Survival. The Handmaid's Tale *is her first novel to tackle sf themes. This year, according to* Locus, *she is writer-in-residence at Tulane University in New Orleans, together with one of the Science Fiction Foundation's two patrons, Ursula K. Le Guin —the other, of course, being Arthur C. Clarke himself. In June Ms Atwood will be visiting Britain, and will on that occasion be presented with the award (an inscribed plaque and a cheque for £1000).*

Is there no Balm in Gilead? The Woeful Prophecies of "The Handmaid's Tale"

BRIAN STABLEFORD

"Behold, listen!" says the prophet Jeremiah. "The cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land." And having reproduced her cry he adds: "For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?"

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in the land of Gilead, in the north-eastern part of what was formerly the USA, in the not-very distant future. It has been described as a dystopian novel, but might be better understood as a Jeremiad: a Book of Lamentations.

Alone among the prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah mourned extravagantly his own fate, complaining of his mistreatment at the hands of those who did not care to hear his message of cursed times to come. Although it is a tale of the future, *The Handmaid's Tale* is not a prophecy in the vulgar sense of being a prediction, but it has much of the prophet's urgent and woeful crying. It is fiction, and its narrative voice is imagined to emanate from the hypothetical future, thus distancing the text from the real author, so the parallel with Jeremiah is by no means exact. But the lamentations which the story contains are so much the heart of the book that the connection must surely be made. And that story is certainly, from Margaret Atwood's feminist viewpoint, "the cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land".

The reader eventually learns from the text that Gilead is the society which has emerged after a coup by right-wing Fundamentalists. The coup succeeded, in part, because of a state of crisis brought about by a drastic decline in the birthrate. This decline had no single cause, but was the result of a combination of factors, feminist demands for control of their own fertility being supplemented by the catastrophic effects of environmental pollution. The theocratic state has assumed total control of reproduction in the cause of preserving society, using infertile women as expendable slave labour (or, covertly, as prostitutes) while redistributing those who are potentially fertile as "handmaids" who will stand in for barren wives, following a Biblical precedent established in Gen. 30:1 – 3. Bizarre symbolism requires that the handmaids lie while copulating between the legs of the wives for whom they are intended to serve as surrogates.

All this, though, becomes clear to the reader only by degrees, and some aspects of the Gileadan social order are not explained until an epilogue, which takes the form of a paper written by an historian who wonders about the authenticity of the heroine's taped testimony. In the early pages of the novel we eavesdrop on the protagonist's "re-educated" consciousness, washed almost clean of the pollutions of memory and resistance. Only by degrees is this straitened and bruised mind slowly restored to a state where it can give true vent to its anguish, guiding the heroine into progressive violation of the mores of her new world, until she must escape or be condemned to death. For the reader, this progression is one of gradual enlightenment, both in a factual sense, as we learn more about this crazy society and how it came about, and in a moral sense, as the heroine becomes able to analyse the horrific texture of its oppressions.

There is an obvious fashion in which *The Handmaid's Tale* can be likened to the classics of dystopian fiction, particularly to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* which is similarly preoccupied with the policing of thought, the rewriting of sacred texts, and the apparent futility of rebellion against such intimate oppression. There are some direct echoes of Orwell's world in Gilead—for instance, the way in which the handmaids are provided with a cathartic opportunity to vent their spite in the mutilation and execution of supposed rapists is reminiscent of the ritualized hate sessions of the earlier novel. Above all else, though, it is the ironically bitter pessimism of the texts which link them together.

Orwell offers us a world with no hope left, suggesting that if we want to imagine its future we might think of a boot stamping on the human face eternally. Margaret Atwood is not so brutally direct, but she carefully refuses to tell us whether the black van which comes at the end to take the heroine away is taking her to freedom or to her death. In her historical epilogue, though she allows her historian to make jokes about the excesses and eccentricities of Gileadan society, she deliberately tells us nothing about the politics of *his*

world, save for such oblique satirical hints as are conveyed by the speech which introduces the paper. As the last line of the text signifies, answers to the questions raised therein belong to another province.

Atwood and Orwell do the same thing in declaring that there are trends evident in the contemporary world which, if extrapolated, might lead to tragedy and the magnification of man's inhumanity to man and woman. Where Atwood differs from Orwell, though, is in her manner of attributing blame. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a book about power and control, but Margaret Atwood's narrator wonders at one point whether her story might be about something subtly but crucially different:

> "Maybe none of this is about control. Maybe it isn't really about who can own whom, who can do what to whom and get away with it, even as far as death. Maybe it isn't about who can sit and who has to kneel or stand or lie down, legs spread open. Maybe it's about who can do what to whom and be forgiven for it. Never tell me it amounts to the same thing." (p.144 – 145)

There is nothing forgiving about *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* but for a feminist work, *The Handmaid's Tale* is surprisingly easy on its male characters. Even the Commander—who, we are told in the epilogue, might well be one of the chief architects of Gilead's social order—is displayed in the narrative as a pathetic rather than as an evil character. When he uses his power to command the heroine into violation of the law it is not (as others assume) for the purposes of perverted lust, but out of a quieter kind of loneliness. The masculine chauffeur, who seems also to be a potentially threatening character when first introduced, in the end treats the heroine as well as he can, within the limits of possibility, and she learns to make use of him even though she cannot love him. In fact, we hardly see men behaving badly at all, and what we do see is counterbalanced by images of women behaving badly in all sorts of ways: the Aunts with their cattle prods whose task it is to re-educate the handmaids; the moral treason of the apparently-heroic Moira in accepting a new role as a whore; the sad deficiencies of the pusillanimous Janine.

Janine is especially interesting, as her sin is to accept the blame for offences that are not really hers, and in the latter pages of the tale we find the heroine lapsing continually into a similarly self-effacing, if not actually self-abusing, capitulation with her oppressors. The narrator (but not the author) is occasionally in dire danger of losing her moral indignation, of forgiving. Her view is then quickly reinforced by the way the historians in the epilogue see the injustices of Gilead—as eccentricities of the historical record, quaintly fascinating, pregnant with opportunities for witty wordplay. For them, Gilead is dead and gone, to be understood rather than to be censured (are we not assured, after all, by another source that to understand all is to forgive all).

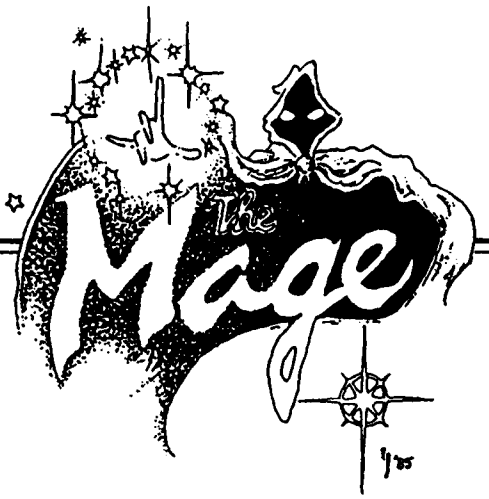
The reader is expected to withhold endorsement from this view (we have been warned by a prefatory quotation from Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal* not to take the text's rhetoric entirely at face value) but the fact remains that a key question in the novel—which we do not find in many dystopian texts—is: How much must we forgive? It is when we bring this question back from the hypothetical land of Gilead to our own world that we appreciate what an awkward anguish it is that Margaret Atwood's heroine has been made to experience. Her lamentations are inevitably soured by her very generosity; unlike Winston Smith she does not make concessions to her oppressors because she has been taken to Room 101 and shown the most frightful thing in the world, but simply because her oppressors are obviously *not* the most frightful thing in the world, and can be pitied,

thanked and respected as well as despised, hated and opposed. There is, clearly, a world of difference between the attitude which a good socialist like Orwell could adopt toward totalitarian manipulators, and the attitude which a good feminist like Margaret Atwood can adopt toward men. One does not have to wonder how much one must forgive a man like O'Brien, but a mere man, unlike a Party member, is all too obviously ripe for forgiveness.

In the window-seat of the room in which the handmaid lives during the period covered by her tale there is a cushion embroidered with the word FAITH. It was, presumably, one of a set, but HOPE and CHARITY have gone. That is the way of things in Gilead: faith has indeed been left to hold the field of battle alone; hope and charity are extinct, and in Gilead there is therefore no balm. But in this prophetic vision there is a most ironic lament—a bitter-tasting anxiety that the charity of women is in fact opposed to their hopes. The heroine, in seeking to live in this appalling world, is left without hope very largely because she cannot deny charity to her controllers. Is this, we are tacitly asked, the predicament of the modern feminist? If it is, then it is surely a hard lot, and the feminist prophet can take little enough pleasure from the alarmist warnings which she offers, or from her fragile hope that tragedy might, after all, be averted by moral renewal. For this reason, we find in *The Handmaid's Tale* a tone of voice that is not characteristic of most dystopian writings, and for which we must hunt for other analogues.

"He has besieged me and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship," wailed Jeremiah, "In dark places He has made me dwell, Like those who have long been dead. He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer." (*Lam.* 3: 5-8) By "He", of course, Jeremiah meant the Lord rather than the male of the species, but in Gilead it comes to the same thing. It always has, and perhaps it always will. *The Handmaid's Tale,* at least, cannot assure us that it will not.

To which one can only add, Amen.



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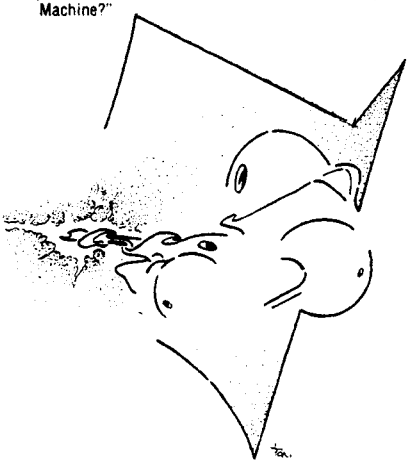

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