

#262

Jan.-Feb. 2003

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Fiction Reviews:
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The *SFRAReview* (ISSN 1068-395X) is published six times a year by the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) and distributed to SFRA members. Individual issues are not for sale; however, starting with issue #256, all issues will be published to SFRA's website no less than two months after paper publication. For information about the SFRA and its benefits, see the description at the back of this issue. For a membership application, contact SFRA Treasurer Dave Mead or get one from the SFRA website: <www.sfra.org>. SFRA would like to thank the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for its assistance in producing the Review.

SUBMISSIONS

The *SFRAReview* encourages all submissions, including essays, review essays that cover several related texts, and interviews. If you would like to review non-fiction or fiction, please contact the respective editor and/or email sfra_review@yahoo.com.

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Pioneer 10

The Pioneer 10 spacecraft, initially launched on May 2, 1972 and slated to operate for 21 months, is believed to have finally ceased operations. Pioneer 10 was the first man-made object to pass through the asteroid belt and obtain close up photographs of Jupiter. In 1983, it became the first man-made object to pass beyond the orbit of Pluto. Officially retired in 1997, the probe continued to transmit telemetry until April 27, 2002. Its most recent signal was picked up on January 22 by JPL's Deep Space Networks. Subsequent attempts to retrieve a signal have failed.

Skylark Award Winners

The Skylark Award, presented annually at Boskone to recognize significant contributions to science fiction, was given to Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden. Officially known as the Edward E. Smith Memorial Award for Imaginative Fiction, the Skylark has been presented since 1966 when it was presented to Frederik Pohl. Other winners have included Isaac Asimov, Poul Anderson, and Tom Doherty.

Nebula Ballot Released

The SFWA has announced the final Nebula Award ballot. The Nebula Award is decided by the active membership of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. This year's award will be presented during the Nebula Weekend, April 18-20, in Philadelphia. The major nominees are: NOVEL: Eskridge, *Solitaire*; Gaiman, *American Gods*; Le Guin, *The Other*

SFRA President's Message

Peter Brigg

It will be my honour to serve as your president for the next two years and a pleasure to speak to you through this *Review* column. I hope you will speak back, telling what the Association ought to be doing, fixing, and planning. You can email me at pbrigg@uoguelph.ca but it would be even better to develop a Letters to the Editor page in the *Review* so that thoughts can be widely shared and debated.

Our new Editor is Christine Mains (cemains@shaw.ca), replacing the long-serving Shelley Rodrigo Blanchard (to whom we all extend immense gratitude) who needs her time for her Ph.D. thesis. Janice Bogstad is in the final stages of clearing with her institution their cooperation in printing and posting the *Review*, which means she will become Managing Editor. Like every SFRA President for the last little while I am determined to get the *Review* back on schedule. The Executive has decided to come to the membership at the June conference with a proposal that the *Review* become quarterly instead of six times yearly. There is plenty of time to debate this in these pages and on the listserv.

Unlike public politicians, who either quit or run wild once elected, I intend to keep to what I proposed in my Candidate's Statement. We need new blood, and my Conference Programme Committee, Christine Mains and Doug Barbour, already have eleven graduate student submissions for Guelph. We will have a special cut-rate registration for first conference attendees, and it is hoped that will become a standard procedure for our future conferences. I also urge every one of you to send names to Janice Bogstad, our new Vice President, so she can personally canvass people to join SFRA. Our numbers rose by a packed-phone-booth-full last year but Dave Mead, our treasure of a Treasurer, tells me that we are off to a very good start this year. Should you have forgotten to renew, please do it now.

In my other hat, as Conference Chair for Guelph, I can tell you things are going well. We got our sizable Canadian government grant, so our guests can come from afar. Our slate of guests, led by Geoff Ryman, is in the Call for Papers at <www.sfra.org>. We already have over 50 papers. Looking to the future, Beverly Friend and Betty Ann Hull plan to do Chicago in 2004 and your Executive has selected Dave Mead and Peter Lowentrout to do Las Vegas in 2005.

Mike Levy pushed SFRA ahead on a number of fronts and our Association owes him an enormous vote of thanks. And I thank him just about every day because as Past President he is being consulted a great deal. I hope I can keep on pushing, and with your help we will get where we think we ought to be, which is probably different in the minds of each of us. The miracle is the Association itself.

Minutes of Exec Board Conference Call

Warren Rochelle

Call to Order: The Business Meeting/Conference Call was called to order at 2 p.m. EST. 19/01/03

PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

1) Peter announced that Gary Westfahl has been awarded the Pilgrim Award.

- 2) The Pioneer Award is under discussion (committee: Philip Snyder, Pavel Frelich, and Paul Kincade).
- 3) Carolyn Wendell will manage the Claeson Award this year.
- 4) Joan Gordon will manage the Graduate Paper Award Committee again this year.
- 5) Michael Levy will handle the Mary Kay Bray Award this year.

OFFICERS' REPORTS

WEBMASTER'S REPORT: PETER SANDS

As Peter had to leave early, his report was given at this time. He noted the site has easy-to-update files and that he will be culling old files. The 257-58 Review issues are now up on the site in PDF format (256 to follow shortly). There was discussion of the listserv and its value as a recruitment tool. Peter Brigg noted there were 230 of 278 members on email. Peter Sands was thanked for his work and effort on behalf of the SFRA.

PAST PRESIDENT: MICHAEL LEVY

Michael described his role as to provide Peter with wise counsel and to conduct the elections. At present, he is passing on facts and figures to Peter and informing him of miscellaneous duties. One item of unfinished business is the new SFRA logo. Michael contacted Michael Brown, an artist suggested by Warren, but there has been no follow-up by either Michael. Michael offered to send Brown's phone number to Peter, but after some discussion, it was decided that Warren should contact him, as they are personal friends. There was discussion of to whether or not there should be a deadline given for the logo project, and the creation of new letterhead stationery. The latter cannot be done until the editorship of the Review is settled. David noted this could be done easily. There was also discussion of how much should be paid for the logo, as Brown never gave a specific fee. Peter suggested \$200. Two other items of unfinished business are the upcoming conferences and the issues with the Review, both of which are on the agenda for today.

PRESIDENT: PETER BRIGG.

Peter said at present he has no report, but he is actively conferring with Michael about his duties. He made the arrangements for this phone call.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT: JANICE BOGSTAD.

The Vice President's major concern is membership recruitment. Janice has established a file of people to recruit and will begin this on January 26. There was discussion of the need to recruit younger members. Janice noted the number of writing-for-pay opportunities that become available to association members would be a good recruiting tool. Peter noted the membership increased from 273 to 278 after his campaign last year and that we all should be on the lookout for new members. Michael Levy commented that the Graduate Paper Award has also helped in recruitment. David will send Janice a list of people who have not yet renewed their memberships. Peter Brigg also noted the Vice President is in charge of the website and that anyone who has an article in the journals needs to be checked to see if he or she is a member or not.

SECRETARY'S REPORT: WARREN ROCHELLE.

The job of the Secretary is to record the minutes of the Executive Board at the conference call meeting and at the conference and to record the minutes of the general minute. The Secretary, in cooperation with the Treasurer,

Wind; Metzger, Picoverse; Miéville, Perdido Street Station; Swanwick, Bones of the Earth. NOVELLA: Castro, "Sunday Night Yams at Minnie and Earl's"; Chwedyk, "Bronte's Egg"; Duncan, "The Chief Designer"; Finlay, "The Political Officer"; Sparhawk, "Magic's Price". NOVELETTE: Bell, "The Pagodas of Ciboure"; Bowes, "The Ferryman's Wife"; Chiang, "Hell is the Absence of God"; Frost, "Madonna of the Maquiladora"; Steele, "The Days Between"; Stross, "Lobsters". SHORT STORY: Emshwiller, "Creature"; Ford, "Creation"; Lindholm, "Cut"; McDevitt, "Nothing Ever Happens in Rock City"; Pratt, "Little Gods"; Swanwick, "The Dog Said Bow-Wow".

Pilgrim Award

Gary Westfahl will receive this year's Pilgrim Award to honor a lifetime of contributions to science fiction and fantasy scholarship. The award will be presented at the annual SFRA Conference to be held this year at the University of Guelph June 26-29.

BSFA Nominees

The British Science Fiction Association has announced the nominees for this year's BSFA Awards, the winners to be announced at Seacon 03 in Hinckley, Leicestershire on April 18-21, 2003.: NOVEL: *Castles Made of Sand*, Jones; *Effendi: The Second Arabesk*, Grimwood; *Light*, Harrison; *The Scar*, Miéville; *The Separation*, Priest; *The Years of Rice and Salt*, Robinson. SHORT FICTION: *Coraline*, Gaiman; *Five British Dinosaurs*, Swanwick; *If Lions Could Speak*, Park; *Router*, Stross; *Singleton*, Egan; *Voice of Steel*, McMullen.

Clarion South Staff Additions

The Clarion South Writers Workshop, to be held in Brisbane, Australia in Jan/Feb 2004, has announced that Tor Books editor David Hartwell, Australian author Kim Wilkins, and Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson will join Terry Dowling, Lusy Sussex and Jack Dann on the Clarion South faculty.

World Fantasy Judges

The judges for the World Fantasy Award have been announced. This year's judges include Justin Ackroyd, Les Edwards, Laura Anne Gilman, Lawrence Evans, and Jane Yolen. Judges should receive copies of works for consideration before June 1. The awards will be presented at the World Fantasy Convention in Washington, D.C. on November 2.

Arthur C. Clarke Finalists

The finalists for the Arthur C. Clarke Award, honoring books published in the UK, have been announced: *Kil'n People*, Brin; *Light*, Harrison; *The Scar*, Miéville; *The Separation*, Priest; *Speed of Dark*, Moon; *The Years of Rice and Salt*, Robinson.

Ursula K. Le Guin Named SFWA Grand Master

SFWA President Sharon Lee has announced that Ursula K. Le Guin will be named SFWA Grand Master during this year's Nebula Weekend (April 18-19) in Philadelphia, PA. Ms. Le Guin is the twentieth author to be honored as Grand Master. The selection was made by the SFWA

sends out renewal letters to the membership, once in the fall, and again, as a follow-up, to those who did not respond in the fall, in the late spring. Second reminder letters need to go out in the late spring of 2003. Copies of the minutes go to the Board and a more polished version to the Review. Dave Mead noted there was a good response to the fall letters, with 12 new members and a total of 205 members at present. The listserv and the letter both helped.

TREASURER'S REPORT: DAVID MEAD.

SFRA is in good financial shape at present, with \$25,787.74 in savings, which earned \$387 in interest, and approximately \$22,000 in checking. He will send out a projected 2003 budget soon and has almost finished with the 2002 accounting. The income for 2002 was \$27,842, including interest, plus \$1600 from the Atlanta world SF meeting. \$1000 was spent as seed money for New Lanark; the same amount has gone to Guelph. It is generally expected that seed money will be returned. P. Brigg to request an accounting from New Lanark. Present projected 2003 expenses are \$26,867.50, but this will change due to Review and Directory costs. At present 2003 is \$500 budgeted in the red, but things are expected to balance out. Peter noted the constitution permits 60 days to finalize last year's accounting. \$1000 in royalties is expected from the SFRA anthologies. Dave also noted that last year SFRA spent \$2157 to subsidize travel to New Lanark for students, foreign members, and junior faculty. Most grants were \$200-400. \$3000 was allocated to pay airfare for Joan Slonczewski for New Lanark; she was, however, not able to attend. Dave paid a late filing penalty with the IRS. This will not happen again.

SFRA REVIEW EDITORS' REPORT: CHRISTINE MAINS AND SHELLEY RODRIGO BLANCHARD.

Due to confusion with the time of the meeting Shelley did not participate. Christine Mains has taken over as Co-Editor from Barbara Lucas, with responsibility for content, including CFP's, news information, and layout. She is not responsible for printing and distribution. A double issue, #259-260 (July, August, September, October 2002) is currently at the printers under Shelley's care. The nonfiction reviews had to be recollected, causing some delay. Shelley will see to the printing of #261 (November/December 2002). Nonfiction reviews are still needed from Ed McKnight and will be sent to Christine ASAP. Peter called attention to the need to find a replacement for Shelley. Mike has been in touch with Helen Thompson, who is not a member but is on the listserv; but is still uncertain as to whether or not Thompson will be able to take over. Peter will follow up with Thompson. There was a discussion of the Review's expenses and other issues, such as the difficulty in getting material other than book reviews. The need for stability in the production/ mailing position was stressed, as well as the need to find someone soon to take over from Shelley for #262 and thereafter. Janice volunteered to investigate the possibility of handling the printing and mailing through her school, Wisconsin-Eau Claire. The Directory is also to be produced by Christine. Mike raised the question of cutting back the Review to a quarterly. Christine said the editors would appreciate quarterly status. After discussion of the pros and cons of turning the Review into a quarterly, Mike Levy made a motion to revise the by-laws to make the Review quarterly, date to be announced by the editors. Dave seconded the motion and it will be presented to the general membership at the annual conference. The Board felt that this action would make the Review more timely, alleviate some of the burden on the editors, alleviate continuity problems, and

reduce mailing costs.

OLD BUSINESS

There was a reconsideration of the development of online journals in the field. The *SFRA Review* is now online on the website, with the entire issue online 2 months after publication. SFRA has no control over Extrapolation, SF Studies, and Foundation, other than the pressure that its captive subscriptions might be able to exert. It was felt that online journals would only access parts of the membership of SFRA at this time.

NEW BUSINESS: CONFERENCES

SFRA 2003: Guelph:

Peter reported the conference planning is well advanced and that he is waiting for a government grant before information packets on lodging, etc. go out. He is planning on a preliminary program to go out in late February or March. Christine reported that she has sent out a new CFP and that there are already 50 papers, including 16 graduate students. This number is higher than usual. It is planned for the conference to begin on a Thursday, with Friday afternoon set for a trip into Toronto, and the regular schedule to be resumed on Saturday and Sunday. The general meeting will be on Sunday. Peter said the list of writers remains the same and noted there will be a virtual reality interactive 3-D program available. Mike noted that the writers are not doing enough and feel left alone too much. They should be put on panels and sessions. Dave suggested they be included in the CFP; which they were. Peter is aware of the problem. Mike asked about the official date of the conference, so members could begin pricing airline tickets. Peter replied that it is June 26-29, with the possibility of lodging on the night of the 25th for early arrivals.

SFRA 2004: Chicago

Chicago with Beverly Friend and Betty Ann Hull is definite and dates will be finalized in February. Connie Willis is to be the Guest of Honor.

2005 Conference contenders:

Las Vegas, Lublin, Poland, College Station, Texas, & Brisbane, Australia.

After a discussion which focussed on the ratio of meetings in North America to those held elsewhere given that over 80% of the membership is North American, Las Vegas was chosen (Mead and Lowentroun), with a recommendation that the 2005-2006 executive seriously consider another conference outside of North America in 2006. The contenders for an offshore 2006 conference are Lublin, Poland (Pavel Frelich) and possibly Brisbane, Australia..

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:20 p.m.

ACTIONS ARISING:

- 1) Peter will send Carolyn Wendell a letter regarding the Claeson Award.
- 2) Warren will contact Michael Brown regarding a new logo for SFRA.
- 3) Dave will send Jan a list of members who have not renewed.
- 4) Dave will Peter needs a signature card for the SFRA account.
- 5) Dave will send Jan letterhead stationery.
- 6) Peter will confirm Shelley will be responsible for SFRA Review #261.
- 7) Peter will establish who will fill Shelley's position as Co-editor of the Review.
- 8) Jan will investigate the possibilities of getting printing and mailing done at her school, Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
- 9) Pavel Frelich will be notified of the Board's consideration of the sites of upcoming conferences.

Board of Directors, in conjunction with the living past presidents of SFWA.

Philip K. Dick Nominations

The judges for the Philip K. Dick Award have announced this year's nominations. The award, which recognizes excellence in paperback original publishing, will be presented on April 18 at Norwescon 26 in Seattle/Tacoma. This year's judges include Nalo Hopkinson, Michael Blumlein, Shelley Rodrigo Blanchard, Donna McMahon, and Lois Tilton. Nominees are: *Empire of Bones*, Williams; *Leviathan Three*, ed by VanderMeer and Aguirre; *Maximum Ice*, Kenyon; *The Mount*, Emshwiller; *Report to the Men's Club*, Emshwiller; *The Scar*, Miéville; *Warchild*, Lowachee.

Recent & Forthcoming Books:

- Banker, Ashok. *Stephen King*. Simon & Schuster Pocket Essentials, May 03.
- Barr, Marleen. *Envisioning the Future: Science Fiction and the Next Millennium*. University Press of New England/Wesleyan, Oct 03.
- Benford, Gregory. *Beyond Human: The New World of Cyborgs and Androids*. TV Books, Mar 03.
- Bowker, Gordon. *George Orwell: A Reflective Biography*. Time Warner/Little Brown UK, Jun 03.
- Bukatman, Scott. *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the Twentieth Century*. Duke, Jul 03.
- Carrere, Emmanuel. *I Am Alive and You Are Dead: The Strange Life and Times of Philip K. Dick*. Holt/Metropolitan, Jul 03.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Lewis Carroll's Il-*

Illustrated Letters.

MacMillan/Pan, Nov 03.

Carter, Lin. *A Look Behind The Lord of the Rings*. Orion/Gollancz, Oct 03.

Collings, Michael R. *Horror Plum'd: An International Stephen King Bibliography and Guide, 1960-2000*. Overlook Connection Press, Jan 03.

Edwards, Justin D. *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. University of Iowa Press, Jan 03.

Foster, Robert. *The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth*. Ballantine Del Rey, Oct 03.

Gilmour, David. *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling*. Farrar Straus Giroux, Jun 03.

Haber, Karen. *Exploring the Matrix: Visions of the Cyber Future*. St. Martin's, May 03.

Hitchens, Christopher. *Why Orwell Matters*. Penguin UK, Jun 03.

Kilgore, De Witt Douglas. *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Jun 03.

Lee, Gwen, and Doris Elaine Sauter. *What If Our World is Their Heaven? The Final Conversations of Philip K. Dick*. Overlook Press, Jan 03.

Little, Denise and Laura Hayden. *The Official Nora Roberts Companion*. Berkley, Oct 03.

Lucas, Scott. *George Orwell and the Betrayal of Dissent*. Verso, Jun 03.

Mann, George. *The Gollancz Encyclopedia of SF Technology*. Orion/Gollancz, Oct 03.

Murray, Nicholas. *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*. St. Martin's, Mar 03.

Olson, Paul A. *The Kingdom of Science: Literary Utopianism and British Education, 1612-1870*. University of Nebraska

An Interview With Greg Bear

by Michael Levy

ML: Your Nebula Award-winning *DARWIN'S RADIO* (1999) and its current sequel, *DARWIN'S CHILDREN*, postulate the sudden evolution of a new form of humanity. Can you explain how this occurs?

GB: In *DARWIN'S RADIO*, an ancient retrovirus becomes infectious and transfers genes which trigger a new kind of birth—a speciation event. For centuries and possibly thousands of years, the human gene pool has been accumulating subtle changes and trying them out piecemeal on the human population. But after this “proof of concept” phase, the modifications are expressed all at once, and the result is hundreds of thousands of New Children. Some call them Virus children, a pejorative.

ML: To what extent has the work of Stephen Jay Gould (and his theory that evolutionary changes can occur with great suddenness, ie, punctuated equilibrium) influence these novels?

GB: The work of Gould and Niles Eldredge helped kick my thinking into high gear. Punctuated equilibrium implies a kind of long-term storage of mutations, genetic changes; either that, or rapid expression of newly created genetic combinations. What mechanisms could allow these libraries of genes to accumulate, and what could trigger their expression? In fact, bacteria use a system of viral transfer of genes to mutate their populations on a large scale. What if humans were capable of doing the same thing? Such an event has not happened in human history. We would not understand what was occurring; it could scare the hell out of us.

ML: The New Children in your novel not only speak as we do, but use at least three other forms of communication that humans either don't have or have on only the crudest level. Could you describe them?

GB: In addition to early speech, the new Children have a specialized tongue modification that allows them to voice two streams of language at once. They have glands behind their ears that can produce scents both communicative of mood and capable of subtle and not-so-subtle persuasion. (To humans, this sometimes smells like chocolate.) Also, they have more control of iris and pupil expression, and their cheeks and in some cases chin and brows are equipped with melanophores-freckles that they can control. Their facial muscles are more highly developed. In short, they are high-bandwidth communications wizards. Their brains are not necessarily larger or more complicated than ours, however.

ML: Many SF novels (from van Vogt's *SLAN* to Kuttner's *MUTANT* to Kress's *BEGGARS IN SPAIN*) that have described the evolution or genetic engineering of new forms of humanity, have assumed that the old and the new will inevitably come into conflict. Am I right that you share this assumption? Why?

GB: Human conflict is prevalent even when we all share a remarkably uniform genotype. We fight over skin color, so it seems natural that more definite differences would generate conflict. Still, these New Children remain our offspring—the operant word is children. The conflict becomes not just potentially genocidal, but Biblical—do we sacrifice our own children just because we fear they will replace us?

ML: From *BLOOD MUSIC* (1985) to *THE FORGE OF GOD* (1987) to *ETERNITY* (1988) to your most recent novels, you've shown an ongoing interest in what might be called the apocalyptic future (ie., futures in which humanity is either destroyed or in danger of being transformed beyond

all recognition). Why do such things interest you?

GB: Big changes generate big emotions, and big emotions make for exciting and compelling stories. When everything is on the line, we strip ourselves to our bare essentials and examine our lives-and possibly our deaths-with an incredible clarity we never get when we lock ourselves into drawing rooms and garden parties.

ML: Much of your recent work, including *VITALS* (2002) and the two *DARWIN* books, has been positioned somewhere between traditional SF and the medical thriller à la Michael Crichton or Robin Cook. How would you compare your books to theirs? How do your books differ from theirs?

GB: I've long been a fan of Crichton's better novels and movies (he's one of my son's favorite authors), and would certainly love to have his audience. The major difference between us is in complexity of concept and execution. Crichton has a marvelous simplicity of story and expression that often translates almost directly into the screenplay. For me, believability of both characters and ideas is paramount. My ideas must be worked out with complete conviction on the world stage. My self-described "crackpot" theory of evolution, for example, is turning out to be prescient. It may be close to the truth. And in the end, my books are about change-real change, not thrill-rides you can later walk away from. As well, my view of the future is a little more hopeful-I know that technology brings both changes and problems, but I do not condemn technology for that. Change is inevitable. It's our nature to grow and change. As individuals, we either adapt or we die. The species goes on with or without us, and somehow muddles through.

ML: Will there be a third book in the *DARWIN* series, one in which Stella and her baby take stage center? (Alternately, what can you tell us about your next novel?)

GB: The next novel is a bit of a breather from biology and genetics-it's a high-tech ghost story involving the telecom industry. I'm having a ball writing it-changes of pace are good for me. That said, Stella Nova is coming back to continue her story-and she's bringing along her son, a second generation Shevite. I'll need a couple of years to do the research and find out what sort of biological and political developments will benefit from my gadfly point of view.

APPROACHING PERDIDO STREET STATION
I Just Like Monsters

China Miéville

I've never believed there's a firewall between fantasy, science fiction and supernatural horror. That's one of the reasons I'm very interested in the *Weird Tales* writers like Lovecraft, who are difficult to pigeonhole in those terms. His work, like that of William Hope Hodgson, David Lindsay, Visiak, and others, exists at the intersection of those three genres. I find that genre-bending very inspiring: it's one reason I prefer the term 'Weird Fiction' to either 'SF' or 'fantasy'. That's the tradition I consider myself writing in.

What interests me about the fantastic aesthetic at its best, as with Surrealism, is its radicalism – it has a combative and subversive relationship with reality. It creatively alienates the reader, which throws the everyday into question. I've always been unsatisfied with post-Tolkien genre fantasy because it deploys that aesthetic for completely the opposite reason: it takes Tolkien at his word when he says the function of fantasy is 'consolation' – so mollicoddling the reader becomes a point of principle. That's why so much 'fantasy' is not fantastic at all – instead, it's about the repetition of a set of clichés. This

Press, Jan 03.

Palmer, Christopher. *Philip K. Dick and the Postmodern*. Liverpool University Press, Jun 03.

Phillips-Summers, Diana. *Vampires: A Bloodthirsty History in Art and Literature*. Astrolog, Aug 03.

Pipes, Daniel. *The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah, and the West*. Transaction, Apr 03.

Pratchett, Terry and Stephen Briggs. *The New Discworld Companion*. Orion/Gollancz, Oct 03.

Pringle, David. *Fantasy: The Definitive Illustrated Guide*. Carlton, Feb 03.

Schacker, Jennifer. *National Dreams: The Remaking of Fairy Tales in Nineteenth-Century England*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Mar 03.

Shippey, Tom. *The Road to Middle-earth, Revised and Expanded Edition*. Houghton Mifflin/Mariner, May 03.

Simpson, M.J. *Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams*. Hodder & Stoughton, Mar 03.

Spurling, Hilary. *The Girl from the Fiction Department: A Portrait of Sonja Orwell*. Counterpoint, Jan 03.

Tofts, Darren, Annemarie Jonson & Alessio Cavallaro. *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History*. MIT Press, May 03.

Wisker, Gina. *Angela Carter: A Beginner's Guide*. Hodder & Stoughton Educational, Feb 03.

Yeffeth, Glenn. *Seven Seasons of Buffy: Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Discuss Their Favorite Television Show*. Benbella Books, Sep 03.

Yeffeth, Glenn. *Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix*. Benbella Books, Apr 03.

CFP:

WHAT: Cities of the Mind

WHERE: U of Toronto, Canada

WHEN: 23-24 Jan 2004

TOPICS: The discursive construction of cities, communities, and individuals in cultural texts and critical theory. Papers that oppose the privileging of the urban are also invited. We welcome papers from all disciplinary approaches and addressing all historical periods, with a focus on new researchers and innovative research. Suggested topics, which by no means cover all areas of interest to the conference, might include: utopian/science fictional/speculative cities/the post-city; alienation and displacement; sacred/lost/mythic cities.

SUBMISSIONS: 500 word abstract for a 20 minute paper, no email attachments please.

DEADLINE: May 1, 2003

CONTACT: <cities_of_the_mind@hotmail.com>

For updates please see: <<http://www.utoronto.ca/english/conference/cities-of-the-mind.html>>

WHAT: Victorian "Freaks": A Collection of Essays

TOPICS: The Nineteenth-Century is noted for its strict notions of the normative and its anxieties about difference. "Freaks" and various kinds of freak shows proliferated in this climate. Not only is freakishness associated with what seems odd or fanciful, but also with a "turn of the mind," rebellion, or critique. This collection aims to explore various disruptions caused by or creating "freakishness" as it relates to social issues and social change. We invite paper proposals that explore

escapism is the opposite of real escape – its 'consolatory' impulse is highly ideological, making the fantastic unable to engage with reality on any critical level.

When I was writing *Perdido Street Station*, I wanted to create a secondary world that deliberately inverted as many of those tropes as possible. So for example, Tolkien and his heirs write fantasy set in Feudalism Lite, so the political economy of New Crobuzon is brutal and capitalist. Tolkien uses race in essentialist fashion – elves and dwarfs and orcs are defined by their race. In my world, though people are *perceived* in certain ways because of their race – there are racist stereotypes, in other words – those stereotypes are no more true than in real life.

I come out of a pulp tradition, and I know my job is to tell a story that keeps readers turning pages. But obviously it makes the book more interesting (for me and hopefully the reader), it gives the book texture if I examine certain themes as part of that. I've been a socialist activist for some years, and the concerns which inform that political and theoretical position are very visible in the book.

Traditional fantasy is often conservative by default, in that it eulogises hierarchical pre-modern social forms, basing itself not on real feudalism, but on feudalism's highly spurious image of itself, in which social conflict is completely pathologised. That's why the fantasy trope of 'dark invaders' is so strong – because social problems are seen as stemming from *outside*. If you refuse to base your fantasy on those generic clichés, then you can immediately posit social conflict as *integral* to a political economic system.

Questions of political and economic exploitation and oppression are central to the social landscape of New Crobuzon. Although the novel is structured around a pretty traditional monster-hunt, it's crucial to *PSS* that it takes place against a backdrop of political repression and economic exploitation. That raises questions like racism, sexism, homophobia and, most centrally, class politics, predicated on class exploitation.

There are a few specific political references: for example, the fact that there is a dock strike in the city is a riff on the long-lasting strike at the Liverpool Docks. In more general terms, I made the political and economic powers-that-be as much the villains of the piece as the criminals they're in league with. That's fun and polemical (and heartfelt), but not particularly radical in itself: it's a pretty standard cultural riff – even of Hollywood films – that the government is in league with big business. But in other ways a more systematic politics informs things.

So for example, there's a section where I describe the social base of the fascist Three Quills Party in terms of an embattled-feeling petty bourgeoisie. That derives from my (socialist) analysis of the social base of fascism as particularly concentrated around small shopkeepers, managers, small business-people, etc, during economic difficulties. Now, obviously the reader doesn't have to agree with that, or even notice it, but i) it allows me to examine certain political ideas, and ii) it gives the city a complexity and social conflict which is more 'realistic'.

There are loads of references to books in *PSS* (something which is taken even further in the next book, *The Scar*). In particular, M. John Harrison's *Viriconium* books provide a framing reference, and several names for areas. I also drew a lot from bestiaries, both folkloric and fantasy gaming (there are plenty of other RPG references, particularly the mercenaries Isaac hires). I love creating monsters, which is why most of those in *PSS* are either riffs on slightly more arcane mythologies than those usually plundered or are entirely cre-

ated. While writing, I did quite a lot of little bits of research on various aspects of the world – on steam engines, early railways, urban geography, that sort of thing. I didn't do any real scientific research – it's not that kind of SF. In the very loosest terms, though, crisis theory draws on unified field theory, and marries it with ideas of dialectical logic taken from classical Marxism.

Like Derkhan, I'm involved with a radical newspaper, and the quotes from *Runagate Rampant* were an affectionate pastiche of that polemical style. Apart from the politics, though, I'm not conscious of my own biography intruding thematically into the book. However, I'm also conscious of how dumb I can be about things like that. I grew up in a single parent family with my mother and sister, and after my first book *King Rat* came out, many people pointed out to me how much of it was obsessed with notions of missing fatherhood. And I *swear* I hadn't noticed at all.

Perdido Street Station and the Edge of the Fantastic

Farah Mendlesohn

[This article is part of a larger work, the outline of which can be found in the forthcoming article, "Towards a Taxonomy of Fantasy", *JFA* 13.2.]

China Miéville's ground-breaking text *Perdido Street Station (PSS)* walks a tightrope between sf and fantasy. I don't intend to argue here into which category the book falls, but rather to explore the strategies by which Miéville maintains this tension. Superficially *PSS* is a clearcut fantasy novel: its most obvious referent is to Gormenghast which is itself significant to my argument, but it is also positioned in part as a homage to M. John Harrison's *Viriconium*. In that simple statement I have encapsulated the major dichotomy of the label "fantasy" because neither of the texts to which I have just referred contain magic. But, like *PSS*, both could, and have been, considered to be science fiction.

PSS is considered a fantasy because it contains magic (and because Miéville has said it is); Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin is a scientist working within a fantastical world. However it is precisely his status, his choice of label, the means by which he proceeds and the way in which this is described which has led some (the Arthur C. Clarke judges in 2001 for example) to claim *PSS* for science fiction. Isaac calls himself a scientist (or thaumaturge), is regarded by most as such, works with machinery which he understands to be mechanical, regards the world as essentially mechanical and proceeds by the scientific method to the point of abandoning his "universal theory" when it becomes clear that such a thing is unscientific. In his portrayal of a scientist at work, Miéville matches the facility displayed in McAuley's hard sf novel, *Secret of Life*. *Perdido Street Station* "is all about understanding the world as a set of instructions the world must adhere to". (Clute, Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction, 2003) It adheres rigorously to its internal pseudoscience. Yet there is acknowledged magic in the way the slake-moths feed off individual intelligence, magic in the creation of the Remade, and magic that enables the Garuda to take flight.

There is a point at which sf relies so much on wave and point that it might as well be fantasy. John Meaney's *Paradox* fits this category. Ostensibly a hard sf novel, the changes in the world are wrought by writing mathematical logic in the air with a sort of laser pointer. There may be space ships and an artificial world in this novel, but in my mind it's still fantasy because the drive of the novel is towards a magical solution. In contrast *Perdido Street Station*, written and published as an unabashed fantasy novel, posits a world with inherently

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the intersections between freakishness and the discourses of gender, race, class, sexuality, empire, to name a few. Possible paper topics might include, but are not limited to: poverty and freakishness; imperialism and freakishness; race and freakishness; gender and/or sexual anomalies; drug freaks; vampirism and other horrors; monstrosity; psychoanalysis and mental freakishness; transgendering; medicalization; criminalization

SUBMISSION: 200-400 word abstracts

DEADLINE: May 15, 2003

CONTACT: Dr. Marlene Tromp, Women's Studies and English, Denison University, Granville, OH 43023 <tromp@denison.edu>

WHAT: New Myths? Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror

WHO: The Fifth Annual Conference of the Department of Arts and Media

WHERE: Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, UK

WHEN: 3 May 2003

TOPICS: Science Fiction is not about the future but reflects, via analogies, metaphors and allegories, our fears and dreams about the present. Fantasy is not escapism, but a rewriting of our past and of our present. Horror shows us what we have (barely) survived, and our current nightmares. These genres rewrite and interrogate old myths, and offer us up new myths to guide us, to warn us, to amuse us, to scare us. Some of these myths merely confirm what we already know, some of them expose the ideology we weren't previously aware of, some of them offer us future possibilities and some of them... well, you tell us.

SUBMISSIONS: abstracts of 200 words for 20 minute papers to Dr Andrew M Butler, D28, Department of Arts and Media, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ, UK or to <ambutler@enterprise.net>
DEADLINE: March 30th 2003.

WHAT: Author Study: The Cherryh Odyssey

WHO: Editor: Edward Carmien, Wildside Press

WHEN: Publication Date: Summer 2004

TOPICS: In 1971, DAW books hit the publishing scene. Five years later, they published Gate of Ivrel, C.J. Cherryh's first published novel. Five years after that, 13 Cherryh novels had seen print, firmly establishing her as a writer of substance and imagination. Today she has published more than 70 books, and her works are routinely translated into several languages for international publication. Editor Edward Carmien in conjunction with publisher John Betancourt of Wildside Press seeks submissions for an anthology of non-fiction articles and essays about C.J. Cherryh, her work, her career, and her place in the pantheon of fantasy and science fiction publishing and fandom.

SUBMISSIONS: 2,000-8,000 words, written and formatted in MLA format (double-spaced, typed, citation format), and sent to the address below. Previously published material is acceptable. Manuscripts will not be returned. Wildside Press acquires non-exclusive anthology rights to include the works in all editions of this book. Individual copyrights are retained by the author.

CONTACT: Edward

logical physical rules, and in which investigation and testing are the primary drive. As well as being in some sense a definition of sf itself, this helps to avoid some of the embarrassing stereotypes of character to which fantasy falls prey. For example, China has written that he had to rethink the cactus people when he realised that there was no earthly reason why they had to be good with plants—humans aren't all good with animals after all. But more to the point, the result is that magic is subsumed into a context in which we have a scientist who explores his world within a scientific paradigm which can be tested through experimentation. His "universal theory", essentially an element of fantasy, comes under pressure from the "real" world. And while the slake moth thread within *Perdido Street Station* is clearly fantastical in its intrusion of wrongness and the sense of a world under pressure from the fantastic, both Isaac and Lin (the Khepri) are engaged in a classic science fiction plot in which it is *their* experimentation which brings catastrophe and which must be resolved (however partially) by essentially material means, leading not to the return of normality, but to an expansion of knowledge bought at a price too bitter to bear.

Although this is only one element of the book, the paradigm it establishes permeates the consideration of human/garuda flight, which is explored first through anatomy and only later via manipulation of the physical universe; where the devil might actually "be", another dimension apparently; and our understanding of the Remade, who are physically rather than magically damaged even though that physics is not ours. It is quite possible, therefore, to argue that *PSS* is not a fantasy, but an alternative world sf novel. The same might also be true of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, an interpretation validated when Titus leaves Gormenghast for our world. *Viriconium* with its clear establishing shots of a far flung future built on the ruins of a high tech empire (a trope Miéville introduces into *The Scar*), also bids fair for the category of science fiction.

However, the debate about content is essentially a quest for plot tokens. The key to understanding what these texts achieve in holding the precarious tension between sf and fantasy is in their narrative rhetoric and structure. Structurally, each one of these texts is essentially estranging. *Estranging* fantasy, a sub-genre of fantasy which I have described elsewhere ("Towards a Taxonomy of Fantasy", *JEA* 2003) misdirects our gaze from what is fantastic *to the reader*, to that which is fantastic *to the inhabitants of the narrative* is vital to the genre borderland. Miéville, Peake and Harrison all employ the baroque style to achieve this. Estrangement shapes the mode of description and seems to be essential to the "tone" or what Miéville memorably described as the "thing-thing" of fantasy (*Conjunctions* panel, ICFA 23, 2002). Miéville's tap root texts, *Titus Groan*, and *Viriconium* both share with *Perdido Street Station* the ability to employ the baroque to infuse the everyday with the sense of the fantastic, to enhance the ordinary, filtering the blur of the every day through the sharp purple distortion of a migraine, so that we are alerted to the fantastic not through the awe and amazement characteristic of demanded reader response in either *intrusion* fantasy (such as horror) or *portal* fantasy (any portal, utopia or quest fantasy), but because that which is taken for granted by the protagonists is frequently marked by an ordinariness of description which contrasts with the absurdity (to our eyes) of what is being described. ("Towards a Taxonomy of Fantasy", *JEA*, 2003) A very simple example is the following description of a cab rank, ordinary in the eyes of the protagonist:

Cabs waited all along the iron fence. A massive variety. Two-wheelers, four-wheelers, pulled by horses, by sneering pterabirds, by steam-wheezing constructs on caterpillar treads...here and there by Remade, miserable men

and women both cabdriver and cab. (Ch2)

This is the first time we meet the Remade. Aware of rickshaw pullers in other countries it is easy to be diverted by the pterabirds away from what is being described because there is no amazement at the sight, no indulgent description of men and women whose bodies have been forced into the shape of cabs, with metal or flesh extensions. That comes later, here Lin expresses only familiar pity. In contrast, the ordinary, the outlines of the city or of a building, are expressed with baroque wonder:

New Crobuzon was a city unconvinced by gravity.

Aerostats oozed from cloud to cloud above it like slugs on cabbages. Militia-pods streaked through the heart of the city to its outlands, the cables that held them twanging and vibrating like guitar strings hundreds of feet in the air. (Ch. 6)

Similarly, in *Titus Groan* the presentation of the absurd as commonplace, the intense descriptions of the makers of painted statues, the incessant and obsessive mapping of the castle leaves us continually off balance as we reach for the referent, only to find it absurd yet taken for granted by the texts inhabitants. *Viriconium* proceeds differently: an anti-quest, its baroque language poises both reader and plot forever on the edge of the fantastic, expectant and denied. In looking for the fantastic we look always in the wrong direction, expecting magic and being presented only with a weary and degraded sense of wonder. This is a fantastic which is built on the ruins of our expectations (Clute, British SF panel, ICFA 23). In *Perdido Street Station*, Miéville employs both techniques, “remixing” (Butler, British SF panel, ICFA 23) the baroque misdirection of Peake with the disillusioned fantastic of Harrison. Our gaze is directed to the greenhouse pile of the cactus people which is perfectly ordinary—it is only the Crystal Palace writ large, already rusted and degraded, whole panels of glass smashed, and a source of resentment for younger members of the cactus community—while the vile wonders of the remade skulk at the edge of our vision. We wait for Isaac to develop his unifying theory, only to see it dashed in the reality of the politics of his world and the forced understanding of the Garuda’s crime. Our expectation of scientific and fantastical wonders are buried under the ruins of New Crobuzon’s vicious repression and a post-heroic age. *PSS* warns us both of this remixing and the baroque estrangement which will be adopted in its opening pages. The entrance of the Garuda into the city emphasises the wonders of *the city* rather than the wondrous nature of the Garuda. Why should the narrative dwell, at that point, on what the Garuda knows? This novel might have turned into a portal fantasy had Miéville so chosen; we might have walked through the Garuda’s negotiation of this “fantasy land”, each element described with the painstaking blandness of a travelogue and followed its quest, but instead we are immediately forced into an inversion in which the Garuda becomes spectator, not actor, a role which is emphasised in the book’s closure in which the Garuda walks away from the city changed in ways he did not desire, forced to accept a different reality, in a section which appears to mimic (and comment upon) the opening of the novel. That this mimics the opening of Delany’s *Dhalgren* is presumably not accidental, and the shift in perspective employed is also central to that novel. Although *Dhalgren* is usually considered as science fiction it is similarly a transverse text and uses as its plot driver the idea of mis-interpretation/reinterpretation, a theme which while not central to *PSS* structures the relationship between Isaac and the Garuda.



Carmien, WCC of Rider
University, 101 Walnut Lane,
Princeton, NJ 08902,
<ecarmien@rider.edu>

WHAT: Popular Cultures/Cultures of the Popular: 1870-1945
TOPICS: From the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century critical judgements about popular culture remained extremely diverse; theorists both celebrated the emergence and preservation of popular cultural forms and lamented the rise of new market-driven cultural commodities. Perhaps because of such diversity, there are areas in which a thorough assessment of the relationships within and between these positions remains to be done. Popular culture was itself extremely diverse and developments in critical studies have helped to produce a more detailed picture of the forms that popular culture took at that time. Recent work in nineteenth century and modernist studies has also begun to question the degree to which ‘high’ and ‘low’ literary forms remained separate during this period. Nevertheless, the interaction between and within these different cultural modes is still requires further elaboration. The English Literature Group at the University of Hertfordshire is launching a series of research seminars intended to explore the questions around popular culture and theories of the popular during this period. A selection of papers from this series will be published in the journal *Critical Survey*.

SUBMISSIONS: abstracts approximately 500 words in length, should be sent to Liam

Connell <l.connell@herts.ac.uk>

DEADLINE: 1st September

2003.

CONTACT: Dr Liam Connell, Department of Humanities, University of Hertfordshire, Wall Hall, Watford Campus, Aldenham, WD25 8AT
 INFORMATION: <http://www.herts.ac.uk/fhle/faculty/humanities/web%20pages/literature/critical_survey.htm>

WHAT: A Commonwealth of Science Fiction

WHO: The Science Fiction Foundation

WHERE: University of Liverpool

WHEN: August 5-8, 2004

TOPICS: GoH: Damien Broderick, Nalo Hopkinson, Jon Courtenay Grimwood

SUBMISSIONS: Proposals to <abutle01@bcuc.ac.uk>

INFORMATION: <<http://homepages.enterprise.net/ambutler/acosf/>>

WHAT: First International Doris Lessing Conference

WHERE: New Orleans

WHEN: April 1-4 2004

TOPICS: "Doris Lessing's Economies: Negotiating Exchange" Proposals are invited for papers on the notion of exchange or other economic aspects of Doris Lessing's fiction and/or nonfiction. Potential topics might include the exchange of commodities, language, affect, or ideas; circulation and consumption; avarice and altruism; symbolic exchange; the ethics of exchange.

SUBMISSIONS: 1-2 page proposals to Cynthia Port, Department of English, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104, or send an email to: <cport@english.upenn.edu>

DEADLINE: September 15, 2003

Csicery-Ronay argues that "The sublime is a response to an imaginative shock, the complex recoil and recuperation of consciousness coping with objects too great to be encompassed. The grotesque, on the other hand, is a quality usually attributed to objects, the strange conflation of disparate elements not found in nature." (SFS, 29.86, p.71). *Perdido Street Station*, ostensibly a fantasy novel, yet seems an exemplar for what Csicery-Ronay is here describing; it combines the imaginative shock of flight, of the universal theory and crisis energy, and the wonder and beauty of thaumaturgy, combined with the recoil when we see the Remade and the Construct Council. It embodies the grotesque both in its manifest "excess of the organic" (Csicery-Ronay, p. 82) and in its insistence that the very consequence of the sense of wonder—unqualified admiration for science and technology—is the grotesque manifested in application and consequence.

Like *Gormenghast* and *Viriconium*, *Perdido Street Station* functions most fully as the classic *immersive* fantasy ("Towards a Taxonomy of Fantasy", *JEA* 2003). As readers we sit at the back of the narrator's mind, watching the action without explanation. Rather than be instructed in the world around us by an ignorant narrator (as in the classic portal fantasy) we must negotiate the world through the eyes of someone who takes it for granted. This is the case even when what the protagonist (Isaac) is seeing is strange and new to him: it is easy to miss the point that there is a difference between meeting something utterly strange, and meeting something that one knows exists, so that while the wild Garuda is foreign to Isaac, it is not a fantastic possibility which he needs explained: he has context and history behind his curiosity. Similarly, his understanding of the slake moths is couched in terms of the possible, not the fantastical. Isaac is, to use Clute's term, competent in his world. The sense of wrongness is naturalised. While he may be surprised by the nature of the fantastic, he is not surprised by its existence. This competence allows Miéville to elide explanation: his description of New Crobuzon is glorious, elaborate and complex, but what it is not is an *explanation*. We are never told, for example, how cactus people function. We are never told how it is possible to communicate with the devil, nor the specific relationship of the world to what appears to be hell. The assumptive nature of the immersive fantasy not only allows the baroque descriptions of *Perdido Street Station*, to an extent it demands it. The air of the fantastic is created by the assumption that *we understand*. We can call this a form of ironic mimesis in that it is demanded that we not only accept that which is not true as the real, but it is demanded of us that we pretend to understand it. For this to work effectively, the world building has to be densely packed: the baroque becomes not a fetish of this kind of fantastic, but quite possibly essential to it. But it is this quality which helps to explain why a sufficiently well-constructed fantasy is indistinguishable from sf: once the fantastic becomes sufficiently assumed then, it acquires a scientific cohesion all of its own. The extent to which it is an immersive fantasy, therefore, become one locus of the debate as to whether it is fantasy at all.

So we are placed in a dilemma, *PSS* is fantasy because it resembles two baroque novels which we usually describe as fantasy but neither of which contain the magical elements we associate with the fantastic, and which themselves could be read as sf. *PSS* is science fiction at the very point at which it is most fantastic because method is not elided and is instead framed within an "alternative physics" and is *normalized*: the remade are constructs, the Garuda has hollow bones like a bird, and Isaac proceeds by the scientific method. Without the baroque setting, were this book set for example on a metal satellite and the characters labelled clearly "aliens" most critics would unquestioningly ac-

cept the novel as sf; by mixing the tropes and rhetoric of fantasy against the rules and expectations of science fiction Miéville forces us to actively decode the text as we go. We cannot fall back on cosy genre tradition.

Citations:

Csicery-Ronay, Jr., Istvan, "On the Grotesque in Science Fiction" (SFS, Vol. 29, no. 86) pp. 71-99.

Miéville, China, Conjunctions Panel, ICFA 23

Clute, John, Conjunctions Panel, ICFA 23

Butler, Andrew M., British SF Panel, ICFA 23

Mendlesohn, Farah, "Towards A Taxonomy of Fantasy", *JEA* 13.2.

Perdido Street Station: *Interpretive Strategies Needed*

Kenneth Andrews

[Editor's Note: The following has been copied with the author's permission from a posting to SFRA-L dated 15 May, 2001.

Now that semester is over and I have been restored to SFRA-L, I thought that I would start a discussion of China Mieville's *Perdido Street Station*, which I've just finished.

(1) Pre-industrial, industrial, or post-industrial? Post-colonial?

Wherever this planet is, it is not Earth, nor are the inhabitants descendants of Earthlings/Earthers (as far as I can tell). Mieville describes the landscape with great relish. (He has a thing for "snot" and industrial degradation.) It is both post-industrial (the weather machines no longer work and no one knows how to repair them) and pre-industrial/medieval (single-shot flintlock guns; guilds). One character has a repeating rifle at the end, which causes great surprise. There are dirigibles, advanced biotechnology, but apparently no telephones or long-range communication devices, or television, radio.

The khepri (intelligent bugs — or at least the females are intelligent) fled their homeland centuries before (perhaps due to an infestation of slate-moths, although the reason is never given). They are refugees, despised, ghettoized. (The "mad scientist" who unleashes the slake-moths is the lover of Linn, a female khepri. Having sex with a bug is likely to cause most readers to think about their attitudes towards "disapproved" forms of sexuality.)

(2) "By the power of my mind I set these things in motion." My favorite line from the original movie version of *Dune*.

Magic and technology converge — humans use spells. Machines augment telepathic powers. (I'm a fan of stories with telepathy.) In fact, the main point of the novel (or so it seems to me) is machine intelligence versus other kinds of intelligence. (The sentient garbage dump — the Construct Council, I believe — is aware, intelligent, and linked to machines elsewhere in the city. However, its intelligence is mechanical, cold, unfeeling, even "cruel.") The Weaver represents what? The animal mind? Surface intelligence without "layers" like id, ego, superego. The slake-moths represent what? Insatiable desires? The crisis engine links Weaver and human together to defeat the moths, overwhelming their desires with more "nutrient" than they can absorb.

(The crisis engine reminds me of the Augmentor in Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Lathe of Heaven*. Also, I just re-read Zelazny's *The Dream Maker*, which also has a machine to permit the psychologist to enter the mind of his

WHAT: The Graduate Student Forum of The South Atlantic Modern Language Association

TOPICS: the importance of Heroes and Heroines in Contemporary Literature. Topics may include but are not limited to: an emergence of African-American heroes and heroines, the cultural significance of heroes & heroines in contemporary America and the world, connections between mythology and contemporary literature. Other topics and abstracts are also encouraged.

SUBMISSIONS: send abstracts of approximately 500 words to: <dfitzger@jaguar1.usouthal.edu> or

<mlombard@jaguar1.usouthal.edu>
DEADLINE: June 1, 2003.

WHO: &.: Ampersand: The Journal of the Department of Comparative Literature at NYU

WHAT: Small Worlds, Large Worlds, Other Worlds...

TOPICS: New worlds, old worlds, third worlds, first worlds, art worlds, Disney worlds, wide worlds, monadic worlds, multiple worlds, possible worlds, language worlds— all worlds. Is literature anything but a depiction or evocation of some world? Is the political anything but a statement on how the spatial and material world ought to be controlled, divided, described, inscribed? Can we not think of history as a narrative of men and women imposing their visions of the world upon the world itself? Beyond literature, beyond nations, beyond theory, beyond language, beyond history, there is world. Yet the concept of world is a problem on all of these levels—a source of conflict in all of these worlds. Ampersand

is looking for papers on the subject of world. Submitters are welcome to construe world as empire, world as globalization, to understand world as a question of space, to envision it in terms of middle passages, discoveries of new worlds, assimilation and hybridization. Theories of world, histories involving the discoveries of worlds, stories treating events altering the world, all involve the expression of world. Minor worlds are as welcome as major worlds, possible worlds, impossible worlds, heterotopias, and utopias, all are welcome.
DEADLINE: May 20, 2003

WHAT: Unstable Realities, Unstable Identities

WHERE: Saint Louis University Madrid Campus, Avda del Valle, 34 – 28003 Madrid - Spain

WHEN: Friday, June 20 - Saturday, 21, 2003

TOPICS: Possible areas for discussion include (but are not limited to): staging (un)reality; identities and/at war; pre/post-colonial identification; fragmenting the real; power relationships; identity construction and disintegration (from a wide variety of perspectives); voicing/censoring the self; fantasy and form; dreamscapes; literature and philosophy; identity and borderlands; emerging individual or communal identities; split identities; intersubjectivity; genre-bending and hybridity. Keynote speaker: TBA.

SUBMISSIONS: 250-word abstracts for twenty-minute papers by email (no attachments, please) to the conference organizers, David Leal Cobos and Amanda Springs at <leald@spsmail.slu.edu> or <springsa@spsmail.slu.edu>
DEADLINE: April 30, 2003

patient.)

(3) The social and political critique.

The government is oppressive (secret police, torture, Remade – grafting non-human parts on criminals and political dissidents as punishment).

Ultimately the government of New Crobuzon is at fault. The slake-moths produce an addictive narcotic of great street value. The government allows their scientists to breed the moths, but lose control of them when they escape. The slake-moths feed on the troubled “dreams” of the populace.

Except for one slip up (a sentimental farewell on the part of an interesting but minor character at the end), the novel is quite hard-edged. (It has more than its share of “dei ex-machina” appearances of the Weaver, and an “urban legend” mentioned early in the novel is an important, but rather inexplicable, character in the end.)

Other ideas anyone?

NONFICTION REVIEW
Gothic Writers

Stephen M. Davis

Thomson, Douglas H., Jack G. Voller, and Frederick S. Frank, eds. *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Bibliographical Guide*. (2002) Greenwood Press, Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881. pages, hardcover, price. ISBN: 0-313-30500-5.

The editors of this work are correct in stating that “the database of Gothic fiction and criticism has proliferated almost exponentially since the great revival in Gothic studies commenced in the late 1950’s” (ix). Part of this expansion, however—at least in this annotated bibliographical/condensed critical guide—seems to stem from a rather generous interpretation of the term “Gothic.”

My first reservation, in glancing through this book, was the choice of represented authors. For while the term Gothic is frequently applied to works which merely attempt to instill a sense of ominous and indefinable terror, even without the medieval setting of the true Gothic novel, the editors of *Gothic Writers* have added a rather odd mix of authors to the logical extension that writers like H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King provide. It seems more logical to me, for instance, to think of Toni Morrison as an author who has written some passages that share elements with Gothic work, rather than devoting a David Dudley essay to an author who has only one entry, *Beloved*, listed in his Principal Gothic Works section. And if Flannery O’Connor is a major Gothic figure, shouldn’t Carson McCuller’s *Ballad of the Sad Café* warrant her inclusion? Again, where is Shirley Jackson? Charles Williams? Both are fully capable of providing hauntings and real moments of horror in their major works. Even the Japanese gain two entries in *Gothic Writers*, with essays on Ueda Akinari and Izumi Kyoka. While the editors make plausible cases for viewing these two authors as “Gothicists,” the reader may start to suspect that some editorial choices have been made to expand the territory that Gothic specialists have to draw on, and to give some ethnic diversity to the Gothic. To the editors’ credit, they are sensitive to this possible conclusion, and they attempt to counter it by arguing that the Gothic is “not so much...a genre as a literary ‘impulse’ or mode of perception with broad dissemination abroad and beyond any defined period” (xviii).

My second reservation with *Gothic Writers* is the editors’ prefatory statement that they seek to make their work useful to the widest range of applications, “whether the user is an undergraduate seeking a promising topic for a

term paper, a well-published academic seeking to stay abreast of contemporary developments in Gothic studies, or simply a curious reader perhaps delving into the Gothic for the first time....” (ix). This, I think, is too much akin to the elixirs of the mid-nineteenth century, certified to cure complaints of the kidneys, lungs, and epilepsy. The bibliographies are certainly reasonable places for a researcher to start, and the annotations do provide valuable assistance to the scholar who needs to know quickly whether or not a major critical work still holds value. My own major interest here, H.P. Lovecraft, is adequately if breezily dealt with by the prolific S.T. Joshi; the bibliography supplied is a beginning, but the scholar venturing into this territory for the first time would like to know, I imagine, that De Camp’s *Biography* has an uneven reputation and cannot always be relied upon for its academic rigor.

I found the critical discussions in the fifty or so “author-specific discussions” by twelve contributors to be quite helpful in furthering the editors’ goal of treating the Gothic as more of an impulse and perception than a movement set in time and place. And while I might not ever come to view Margaret Atwood as a neo-Gothicist, Carol Margaret Davison makes a worthy attempt at explaining *Surfacing* as a Gothic novel in which “the Canadian wilderness replaces the European castle as the site of the protagonist’s exploration of her psychic closets” (28).

Stephen King is dealt with competently by Tony Magistrale, who traces King’s novels from the time when his female characters were “patronizingly restrictive and frequently negative” (218) to the novels after and including *Misery*, in which King finds “a new significance for women characters, an intense scrutiny provided to the roles of writer and reader” (219).

Less satisfying is Marie Mulvey-Roberts’ treatment of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Here, Mulvey-Roberts summarizes the monster’s rationale for turning on Victor Frankenstein: “Beset with loneliness and despair, the created turns against the creator in a reenactment of the Fall” (393). Of course, the relationship between monster and Frankenstein bears no resemblance to that of God and Adam. The latter’s relationship is rooted in trust, even when that trust is broken, while the monster attempts to place demands on his creator, saying, “What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself” (Shelley 129). It would be inconceivable for Adam to command his creator in such a manner. And, of course, if the two relationships are completely different, there can be no parallel in *Frankenstein* to the Fall. If there is any Biblical parallel, surely the monster makes a much better Lucifer—noble, vengeful, powerful, and able to say, “I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred” (Shelley 129).

So, my sense is that this guidebook is useful, though uneven, and that it will prove of more use to an upper-level undergraduate, or perhaps a graduate student in need of a work mapping out the Gothic through its brief critical surveys and annotated bibliographies.

NONFICTION REVIEW

The Man Who Could Work Miracles

Jeff Prickman

Wells, H. G. *Man Who Could Work Miracles*. Ed. Leon Stover. (2003) Vol. 8 of *The Annotated H. G. Wells*. McFarland & Company, Inc. (www.mcfarlandpub.com) Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640. 142 p. hardcover, \$49.50. (800) 253-2187.

WHAT: 1st Global Conference Visions of Humanity in Cyberculture, Cyberpunk and Science Fiction

WHERE: Prague, Czech Republic

WHEN: 11 to 13 August 2003

TOPICS: Marking the launch of a new annual conference, research and publication series, this interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary project aims to explore what it is to be human and the nature of human community in cyberculture, cyberspace and science fiction. Papers, short papers, and workshops are invited on issues related to any of the following themes: the relationship between cyberculture, cyberspace and science fiction; science fiction and cyberpunk as a medium for exploring the nature of persons; the synergy of humans and technology; bodies in cyberculture; from apes to androids; gender and cyberspace; virtual worlds and home worlds; artificial intelligence; artificial life; elections, protest and war in cyberspace; nationality and nationalism in cyberculture; religion and spirituality in cyberculture, science fiction and cyberpunk; utopias vs. dystopias; SUBMISSIONS: 300 word abstracts to Christopher Macallister, University of Kent at Canterbury <cjm23@ukc.ac.uk> and Rob Fisher, <rf@inter-disciplinary.net> as an email attachment in Word, WordPerfect or RTF; abstracts can also be submitted in the body of the email text rather than as an attachment.

DEADLINE: May 9, 2003 for proposals, July 11, 2003 for full drafts
INFORMATION: <<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/cwvr.htm>>

The Man Who Could Work Miracles. Dir. Lothar Mendes. Perf. Roland Young, Ralph Richardson, and Joan Gardner. London Film, 1937. VHS videotape from Vintage Classics (MGM), 2000.

Volume 8 of Leon Stover's series *The Annotated H. G. Wells* features, to quote from the book's subtitle, *The 1936 New York First Edition* of the script for the 1937 film *Man Who Could Work Miracles*. Stover's interpretation of Wells' adaptation of a much shorter 1898 tale (included as an appendix) is consistent with the assured and assertive tone of Volume 5 *The War of The Worlds* (for my review see *SFRA Review* #256). The Introduction explains how *Miracles* connects to other writings by Wells, and stands in contrast, as the light-hearted "companion film," to his somber and serious *Things to Come* (1936). Both movies were produced by Alexander Korda, who gave Wells a great deal of influence in their scope and vision. Stover ends the Introduction in his typical acerbic style, furthering his argument that Wells based all his works, including *Miracles*, on his hope for a future World State run by those who know better than their fellow citizens: "Wellsian lesson: the common man is no damn good: untrustworthy, unreliable, ignorant and foolishly selfish. Democracy is untenable" (5).

Stover's annotations advance his claim that *Miracles* shows what happens when common people have too much power. Mr. Fotheringay, the main character, suddenly finds himself with the ability to summon, create, and destroy anything—to perform "miracles." Eventually he gives in to his urges to do as he pleases, with catastrophic results. Stover comments, "What more can be expected of the common man, ludicrous when empowered" (79fn). Beyond his provocative reading, Stover also offers convincing explanations of The Three Riders who frame the film, and how they tie to the Hindu trinity throughout the plot. Besides including the original short story, the Appendices contain the thematically related Wells stories "A Vision of Judgment" (1899), "Under The Knife" (1896), and his 1931 radio speech "If I Were Dictator of the World." A brief bibliography and index are also present.

While this slim volume is an absolute must for Wells aficionados, I doubt anyone else will find it essential on its own. However, if used in conjunction with the film, the book becomes an invaluable, if pricey, resource. Any college course on science fiction, utopian studies, or philosophy could find *Man Who Could Work Miracles* a fun vehicle for student consideration of the delights and drawbacks to absolute power. Aside from a bit of cheesiness in execution, the movie holds up well enough, and provides a pathway to many other relevant works on similar themes for a course syllabus.

NONFICTION REVIEW

H.G. Wells on Film

Arthur O. Lewis

Smith, Don G. *H. G. Wells on Film: The Utopian Nightmare*. (2003) McFarland & Company, Inc. (www.mcfarlandpub.com) Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640. 197 pages, hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN 0-7864-1058-2. (800) 253-2187.

H. G. Wells was a major influence in literature, education, and political thinking. He used his fiction as a way to propound his theories about how to create a more perfect world, and, when that world failed to come about, he fell into a trough of despair. Where his early writings had been for the most part optimistic about the ability of humanity to educate itself to overcome its problems, in his later years he despaired about the future and his writings reflected that pessimistic view. This book demonstrates that the movies adapted from his writings were designed for an audience that, for the most part, would not have understood the true purposes of his work. As Smith points out, ". . . for most of his life, Wells overestimated humanity as a species" (186).

According to this book there have been 38 adaptations of Wells' works to film. Smith has seen all but six that have been lost—in some cases with little beyond the title and a few posters. His format first presents a synopsis of the novel (15) or short story (6). The coverage of each film begins with a complete list of credits, followed by a synopsis of the film, discussions, in turn, of the adaptation, production and marketing, strengths, weaknesses, and, finally a rating from none (for the lost films) to four. The adaptation is "a comparison of Wells' literary work and the film adaptation" (2), and production and marketing includes a look at the careers of directors, writers, producers, and actors involved in the film.

Smith does not evaluate each film as an adaptation of the original work, preferring to judge it "on its aesthetic

qualities alone” (3). An excellent annotated bibliography and a thorough index provide further information.

Most often filmed—or, better, adapted to film—have been *The Invisible Man* with ten, not counting *Hollow Man* (2002), followed by *The Island of Doctor Moreau* with five. Smith is careful in his ratings: only *The Invisible Man* (1933) rates a “four” and is characterized as “a motion picture classic—gripping and haunting” (67). *Things to Come* (1936) rates “three and a half” and is named

“...the greatest science fiction film of the thirties and forties.” (179). He is sometimes scathing in his condemnation of others: “inescapable boredom” (41); “avoids any contact with Wells’ ideas” (118); “a comic book version” (121); “a shameless exploitation film” (182). Although *The Island of Lost Souls* (1933) rates a three and a half, we are told that “... the message sent by the film is the polar opposite of that sent by Wells’ book” (28).

Smith does not attempt to examine the numerous movie and TV works that owe something to the imagination of Wells. Such a task would have more than doubled the size of this study. There have been many, even some credited adaptations like the syndicated *War of the Worlds* series of 1988-1990. *The Time Machine* had only one movie version that could be covered in this book (another appeared only last year), but its unacknowledged progeny are many, as in the TV series *The Time Tunnel* (1966-67), *Time Express* (1970), and numerous science fiction movies involving time travel. (Smith mentions two such in which Wells himself is a character, the movie *Time after Time*, 1979, and an episode of the TV series *Time Cop*.)

Smith concludes that “cinema has probably betrayed Wells more than it has any other important author” (182), but wisely points out that writers should not be judged on films adapted from their works. He does great service for those of us who love both books and movies, through this excellent study of the coming together of a great writer and those from another medium who admire his words but do not understand his ideas.

NONFICTION REVIEW
Tomorrow Now
 Jeff Prickman

Sterling, Bruce. *Tomorrow Now: Envisioning The Next Fifty Years*. (2002) Random House (www.atrandom.com) 305 p. + Index. \$24.95 hardcover. ISBN 0679463224.

Bruce Sterling’s *Tomorrow Now* casts a wide net in many mind-boggling directions concerning future society and technology, yet maintains a consistent theme throughout, namely, “the truth is often fantastic. If science fiction has any truly profound insight to offer us, it’s that existence really is weird. Human ideas of ‘normality’ are always merely local and temporal” (271-272). Sterling deftly supports his claim throughout, creating a provocative and fun read, despite his conclusion that humanity is The Sixth Great Extinction. The result is a non-fiction book that will appeal to many, from all types of readers to teachers in search of compelling course material.

Sterling’s strategy for organizing the book’s chapters around the “seven ages” from Jacques’ “All the world’s a stage” argument in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1600) initially surprised me, particularly in light of the daunting scope of the *Envisioning The Next Fifty Years* subtitle. However, Shakespeare’s ages make sense throughout (with the possible exception of “Stage 5: The Justice”), and Sterling fills *Tomorrow Now* with many references to classical myths and figures, from Cassandra to Croesus.

These references to the past are no accident, for as Sterling stresses early in the Introduction, pondering the future always involves the past and present: “Futurism is an art of re-perception” (xii). He takes full advantage of his status as a Founding Cyberpunk to illustrate how even the edgy science fiction he staunchly advocated was barely ahead of the curve: “Cyberpunk involved a lyrical statement of the unthinkable (in the mid-1980s): that someday there would be a world rather like the late 1990s....Cyberpunks valorized things that earned a shrug for their corniness fifteen years later” (xvii). Quite a contrast to his bold Preface in the *Mirrorshades* (1986) anthology he edited, but do Sterling’s novels from *Islands In The Net* (1988) through *Zeitgeist* (2000) really seem “futuristic” now?

Nonetheless, Sterling’s non-fiction predictions in *Tomorrow Now* are sobering. In “Stage 1: The Infant” he downplays fears of widespread genetic engineering and human cloning (including imagining an embittered cloned child as an adult), instead concentrating on biotech, specifically germs, as key. Sterling entertainingly addresses a reader of the future,

stating “Germs cause you no fear, bewilderment, or disgust....Your body contains millions of microbes, altered to do your will” (15). Applications of genetics for “healing and farming” will matter much more than attempts to make super-people.

The prospect of biomedically engineered so-called “posthumans” arises again in “Stage 7: Mere Oblivion,” in effect bringing *Tomorrow Now*’s focus full circle. Sterling cites supermodels and wrestlers as cultural prototypes for future self-sculpturing. He concedes, “People will be given what they want. Tomorrow’s end users/consumers will not be given what their doctors or their pastors think is good for them....The ‘posthuman’ necessarily means a redefinition of what it means to be alive” (292). His argument for why the elderly will be the prime “adapters” of extended life technology is convincing.

Ultimately, it is impossible to do justice to the wide range of compelling topics that fall between Stages 1 and 7, but unforgettable examples are: why Artificial Intelligence will not happen; education and stable employment as we know them are over; new technologies from cell phones to software are made to simultaneously create infinite dependency yet deliberately built with flaws to guarantee the need for upgrading; Islamic terrorism may not be a significant threat; global warming is very real, analogous to cigarette smoking, and much of the damage has already been done; so great is the technosocial change now happening in the early 21st-century that each year is a belle époque.

Another appealing aspect of *Tomorrow Now* is the sprinkling of autobiography Sterling adds throughout, including thoughts on his daughter’s birth, his family history, how he became a science fiction writer, and musing on being sought for memberships on corporate boards despite being a self-described cyberpunk bohemian goth who still dresses like a grad student. Finally, for those who are fans of Sterling’s science fiction, the real treat in *Tomorrow Now* is “Stage 4: The Soldier,” a fifty-three-page romp through who the *real* threats to the New World Order are. Sterling’s genuine enthusiasm for his subject—media savvy self-made drug lords/politicians from Chechnya to Serbia to Turkey, who live fast but don’t die right away—is infectious. The tales of these three men’s lives are given a rendering equivalent to any novella. Worth the price of admission alone, this eye-opening expose on how economic and political power really work is all the more stunning upon realizing that here Sterling writes the fantastic truth about today, now.

NONFICTION REVIEW
At Millennium’s End
 Ed McKnight

Boon, Kevin Alexander (Ed.) *At Millennium’s End: New Essays on the Work of Kurt Vonnegut*. (2001) State University of New York Press (www.sunypress.com) 90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, NY 12207. xii + 204 pages; paperback, \$18.95, ISBN 0-7914-4930-0; hardcover, \$54.50, ISBN 0-7914-4929-7.

In his introduction to *At Millennium’s End: New Essays on the Work of Kurt Vonnegut*, Kevin Alexander Boon writes that the title of this book is based on a coincidence. “As it happened, Kurt Vonnegut’s career as a novelist and the millennium came to an end around the same time. Vonnegut reached what he called the ‘coda on my career’ just as time’s odometer was getting ready to roll over to 2000.” In recognition of this fact, Boon has collected the work of eleven different critics, focusing on various aspects of Vonnegut’s career, from his essays and short stories to his novels, as well as the surprising number of films based on those stories and novels.

Two essays in particular investigate the complex relationship between science and Vonnegut’s fiction. In “You Cannot Win, You Cannot Break Even, You Cannot Get out of the Game: Kurt Vonnegut and the Notion of Progress,” Donald E. Morse argues that it is Vonnegut’s own scientific background that enables him to employ science itself (specifically the laws of thermodynamics) against the scientific “myth of progress”—the notion that science and technology will always provide the answer to all human problems. In “Quantum Leaps in the Vonnegut Mindfield,” Loree Rackstraw examines the relationship between quantum physics and the “mythic” worldview of Vonnegut’s novels, especially *Slaughterhouse Five*. Rackstraw (curiously, the only female contributor to the book—is Vonnegut a gender-specific interest?) sees the Tralfamadorean view of time as an endless chain of eternal moments to mirror both the mythic time-sense of Joseph Campbell and the picture of time emerging out of quantum physics.

Ubiquitous Vonnegut scholar Jerome Klinkowitz examines the author’s too-often ignored contributions to the essay form in “Vonnegut the Essayist.” Klinkowitz points out that, even after Vonnegut had made a name for

himself as a novelist, he continued to practice the essay form that had been his bread and butter in his days as a journalist and technical writer. Vonnegut's motivation for this, Klinkowitz argues, is his "commitment to the great social issues of his day." He makes special note of the notorious *New York Times Book Review* essay on "Science Fiction," in which Vonnegut argues that when SF advocates try to include such writers as Leo Tolstoy and Franz Kafka in their clan it is as ridiculous as Vonnegut claiming that everyone of note belonged to his own fraternity, Delta Upsilon. Klinkowitz even points out the logical fallacy—the "excluded middle"—in Vonnegut's conclusion that "Kafka would have been a desperately unhappy D.U."

In "Kurt Vonnegut: Ludic Luddite," Hartley S. Spatt examines the apparent contradiction between Vonnegut's artistic playfulness and the earnestness of his struggle against the dehumanizing effects of modern technology. "Vonnegut's work is always marked by a deep ambivalence about the Luddite impulse," writes Spatt. There's no denying Vonnegut's distrust of the machinery that led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima, but "the smashing of all machines might take one back not to a pastoral world of peace and plenty but to a world of slavery, violence, and inequity." Many have seen Vonnegut's career as a movement from satire to absurdity, from a sincere attempt to change the world to a hopeless acceptance that it cannot be changed. Spatt interprets this transition in a more positive light, as a waning of the Luddite impulse to destroy and the emergence of the more playful, Ludic impulse for laughter in the face of pain: "To destroy in rage is to destroy utterly; but to destroy in laughter is to cleanse the world and let joy back in."

Mother Night and *Cat's Cradle* are not only two of my favorite Kurt Vonnegut novels, they are two of my favorite novels, period. In "Apocalyptic Grumbling: Postmodern Humanism in the Work of Kurt Vonnegut," Todd E. Davis performs the remarkable feat of explaining to me exactly why I like them so much. Even more remarkably, he does this by placing them in the context of the work of the postmodernist French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. In Davis's view (and, now, my own) Vonnegut counters the modernist metanarratives of manifest destiny, scientific progress, religious triumphalism—and even liberal humanism—with the provisional *petite histories* of postmodernist fiction. The lesson to be drawn from both *Mother Night* and *Cat's Cradle* is that "the fictions we construct, even if their constructedness is exposed, still do as much harm as those that are hidden, and for that reason Vonnegut urges us to choose those narratives that are 'harmless'."

In the most straightforwardly-titled essay in the book, "Vonnegut Films," Boon teams with David Pringle to view the growing body of Vonnegut works that have been translated into cinematic language, including the comparatively recent *Mother Night* (starring Nick Nolte and directed by Keith Gordon) and *Breakfast of Champions* (starring—and produced by—Bruce Willis, and directed by Alan Rudolph). Their overall assessment of the various attempts to film Vonnegut's work is sharply negative; only George Roy Hill's 1972 *Slaughterhouse Five* persuades Boon and Pringle that Vonnegut can ever be successfully adapted to film.

The book is rounded out by Lawrence R. Broer's comparison of Kurt Vonnegut and Ernest Hemingway in "Vonnegut's Goodbye: Kurt Senior, Hemingway, and Kilgore Trout," and Jeff Karon's analysis of "Science and Sensibility in the Short Fiction of Kurt Vonnegut." Vonnegut's career as a writer may be at a self-imposed end (his career as a visual artist continues, as evidenced by the humorous self-portrait on the book's cover), but *At Millennium's End* demonstrates there are still new insights to be mined from his work.

FICTION REVIEW

The American Fantasy Tradition

Christine Mains

Thomsen, Brian M., ed. *The American Fantasy Tradition*. New York: Tor, 2002. Hardcover, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30152-0.

The American Fantasy Tradition is an anthology of short stories, drawn from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that, in the view of editor Brian Thomsen, exemplify a tradition of American fantasy literature clearly different from the more predominant forms of fantasy derived from the European fairy tale and the Arthurian mythos. Certainly in the field of speculative fiction there are a number of anthologies available to both the general reader and the scholar, containing many of the same stories, but Thomsen's very narrow focus on American fantasy would seem to be unique.

For Thomsen, it is not necessarily the author's nationality that makes the work American, although most of

these authors were born and bred in the United States. W.P. Kinsella, a Canadian, is included, as his “Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa” is inarguably American in theme and content; Edgar Allan Poe, on the other hand, is not included as Thomsen feels that his work is more representative of the European paradigm. Defining and legitimating a national literary tradition of the fantastic that is distinct from fairy tales and Tolkienesque quests is Thomsen’s chief concern. In doing so, he follows in the footsteps of mainstream critics in tracing the roots of American literature in frontier encounters and democracy born of revolution.

The anthology is divided into three sections. The first, titled “Folk, Tall, and Weird Tales,” contains works that might be considered fables or legends, similar in form, Thomsen notes, to tales of the fairy folk in European tradition, or the beast fables of Aesop, albeit with an American flavor. These are tales that could be told around the campfire: the earlier folk or tall tales, often set in the American frontier, and the later weird tales that shift the wildness of the now-settled frontier to the civilized regions. The stories in this section range from Rip Van Winkle and Uncle Remus to Lovecraft’s “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” and R. A. Lafferty’s “Narrow Valley.” Many of these stories center on the larger-than-life American hero, a character more mundane and down-to-earth than the wizards and heroes of the European tradition, and thus, in Thomsen’s view, easier for the reader to identify with.

The second section, “Fantastic Americana,” features stories that Thomsen sees as a counterpart to the Arthurian mythos; just as British history is reflected in Arthurian fantasy, the events of American history, in particular the Civil War, play a large part in tales by Henry James, Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Vincent Benét, Avram Davidson, Henry Kuttner, Orson Scott Card and Harlan Ellison. Thomsen seems to argue that the American tradition is superior to the Arthurian tradition in part because of the shorter historical timespan; keeping within the “bounds of recorded history” provides more credibility and less susceptibility to the distorting “extremes of magic and mysticism” (23). The opposite could easily be argued, that access to several centuries of history allows for more mythic energy; certainly it seems odd to dismiss works of fantasy on the grounds that they are too fantastic. But Thomsen’s argument about the differences between American and British fantasy is most thought-provoking when he discusses this section of his anthology, reflecting his interest in the intersections of history and fantasy; his resume includes editing, with Martin H. Greenberg, a number of alternate history anthologies, in addition to *Shadows of Blue & Gray: The Civil War Writings of Ambrose Bierce*.

“Lands of Enchantment and Everyday Life,” the third section, proves to be something of a catch-all; the focus is on the American spirit, which could encompass many of the stories included elsewhere in the anthology. There’s a wide range of stories here, from Stockton’s “The Griffin and the Minor Canon” and Theodore Sturgeon’s “Slow Sculpture” to Harlan Ellison’s “Paladin of the Lost Hour,” Ray Bradbury’s “The Black Ferris,” and Stephen Kings “Mrs. Todds Shortcut. The common center to all of these very different stories, Thomsen argues, is that “the unknown is encountered and we deal with it [. . .] whatever *it* may be” (26).

Each story is briefly introduced, sometimes with an insight which could be followed up on in classroom discussion. Thomsen also occasionally draws the reader’s attention to some possible connections: between David Drake’s “The Fool” and Manly Wade Wellmans’s character of Silver John, and between Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” and Stephen King’s “Children of the Corn.” While the introductions to the anthology and to the individual selections are intriguing, in order to be truly useful to scholars, more critical information regarding the authors, the tradition, or the historico-social context is needed, similar to the mix of fiction and critical essays in Hartwell and Wolfe’s *Visions of Wonder*. Along the same lines, the select critical bibliography could be a little less select and a little more expansive.

What is striking is that most, although not all, of the selections are drawn from the darker edges of the fantasy genre, many verging on horror. The stories featuring ghosts, deals with the devil, or the road to Hell so much outnumber other types of fantasy that the lack of comment from Thomsen on this point is surprising. One could also wish for a clearer justification for the decision not to represent several well known American fantasists, such as Jane Yolen, Patricia McKillip, and Peter Beagle. Certainly these authors can be numbered among those who have written in the European fairy tale/Tolkien tradition. But all have produced short stories that would suit the anthology’s focus, and including them would have provided a broader perspective than can be achieved by reprinting two stories each from King, Ellison, and Wellman.

But enough about what’s not in the anthology and more about what is. Given the narrow theme, the selection of stories is well done. There’s a balance of fairly long and quite short, good to have in a freshman classroom; a nice blend of oft-anthologized classics with seldom seen material; and the inclusion of at least a few works by female authors of the fantastic? Ursula K. Le Guin’s “Buffalo Gals, Won’t You Come Out Tonight,” Louisa May Alcott’s “Rosy’s Journey, and Kate Chopin’s “Ma’ame Pelagic,” among others. The question is, however, what course this anthology would be

most suited for. The focus is too narrowly American for a general course in fantasy, but too narrowly fantastic to work in an American literature course. As it stands, *The American Fantasy Tradition* seems more likely to appeal to the general reader than to the scholar or teacher.

FICTION REVIEW

A Shortcut in Time

Stephen M. Davis

Dickinson, Charles. *A Shortcut in Time*. New York: Forge, 2003. Hardcover, 288 pages, \$24.95. ISBN 0-765-30579-8

Euclid, Illinois is an ordinary town with one particularly hair-raising feature; it comes with a series of “perp walks,” walks that are perpendicular to the main streets, and that were installed by a previous mayor to get him more quickly to his regular rendezvous with a lover. While they would be nothing more than a curiosity in any other town, in Euclid, they have an extraordinary attribute: “they were unexpected and subversive in a playful way. They sliced through what ordinarily was hidden” (22), and in certain circumstances, they can transport town residents forwards and backwards through time.

The novelist’s protagonist, Josh Winkler, is an artist with a minor amount of talent and the major advantage of a wife who is a successful pediatrician. He discovers the time-altering uses of the perp walks while being chased on his bicycle by a large dog. Completely by accident, Winkler manages to transport himself fifteen minutes into the past, a feat no one else believes and which, unsurprisingly, leads his wife, Flo, to have him tested for a brain tumor.

The main complication of the novel is Winkler’s attempts to help a teenager, Constance Morceau, return to her proper time—1908. As the plot unfolds, Winkler and Morceau learn from microfilm records that her beau, Dash Buckley, will be lynched by a mob that is partly convinced he has had something to do with Morceau’s disappearance, but more incensed by the rumor that he is part Negro.

Finally, Winkler’s own daughter, Penny, is whisked into the past, and Winkler discovers through old orphanage records that she has traveled to 1918. To make matters worse, he learns that she is destined to die in the influenza pandemic in November of that year. He must find the method to move to her time—a method that up to then had been sheer accident on the part of the perp walk’s time travelers.

The novel is well-written stylistically, with nice touches of humor and a plot that kept me moving through the chapters, especially near the last third of the book, when the complications begin to resolve themselves. I was, though, disappointed in Dickinson’s characterizations: frankly, by the end of the novel, I discovered that I cared very little for any of the characters Dickinson had created. Josh Winkler is a decent enough fellow, but his wife’s reaction to his plight—even if it were the madness that she quite rightfully thinks it to be—comes off as both frantic and frigid. We grow to like Constance Morceau less and less as we learn more about her, and Penny, while being a pretty realistic depiction of a teenaged girl going through typical late-teen self-absorption, comes off even in her major scene of pure altruism as being a rather heavily-grounded narcissist.

It may be that the “alternate-universe/timeline” that Dickinson introduces late in the novel simply kills his ability to smooth off some of the unattractive edges of his characters with late reflection and redemption. For when Winkler makes his return to his time from 1918, the plot does not find its fruition in a world where what was wrong (the accidental brain damage of Winkler’s brother; the fragmentation of Winkler’s marriage to Flo) is made right, but to a Euclid in which Winkler is married to a woman who had not previously been introduced, and still has a brother with many of the same problems that he had struggled with as a brain-damaged street-person.

I understand that Dickinson may well have wished to avoid writing a “pat” time-travel story in the vein of the *Back to the Future* series, but what we as readers are left with is the sense that we’ve been cheated out of a satisfying resolution. So, while the novel certainly contains both humor and some smart writing, I found the resolution and the characters themselves unappealing and unattractive.

FICTION REVIEW
Explorer
 Warren G. Rochelle

Cherryh, C. J. *Explorer*. New York: DAW Books, 2002. 408 pages, uncorrected proofs, \$23.95. ISBN 0-7564-0086-

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For C.J. Cherryh fans, the universe of the *Foreigner* series is familiar territory and they will feel quite at home in *Explorer*, the culminating book in the second trilogy in the series. For those just tuning in, a quick historical review is in order. Some two hundred years have passed since the lost human starship *Phoenix* left Alpha Station in orbit around the world of the alien atevi. The human colonists didn't maintain the station; instead they chose planetside life. The War of the Landing followed and subsequently a carefully constructed plan for co-existence: humans were allowed to settle on the island of Mospheira, in exchange for gradually introducing the atevi to their superior technology. To maintain communications with the "brilliant but volatile atevi," "a single highly trained diplomat, the paidhi" was sent to live in atevi territory, as liaison and intermediary between the two species. The main character of Cherryh's series is the current paidhi, Bren Cameron, who began his service in the court of the most powerful atevi, the ruler of the Western Association, Tabini-aiji.

Ten years prior to *Explorer* the *Phoenix* returned, fleeing, according to Ramirez, its senior captain, hostile aliens who destroyed another ship-built station and seeking refuge. On his deathbed, Ramirez tells the whole story: Reunion Station wasn't destroyed, just damaged, and there may be survivors there, facing the aliens, survivors who have friends and family on the *Phoenix*. The crew forces the ship to undertake a rescue operation, and Bren is sent to represent Tabini, along with Tabini's grandmother, Ilsidi, the aiji dowager, a cunning and wily woman, Tabini's son and heir, as well as representatives of Mospheira. *Explorer's* story begins a year after this voyage, as the *Phoenix* is approaching Reunion Station. There is indeed an alien ship there, but Reunion doesn't exactly welcome the ship with open arms and it seems that maybe the humans were the aggressors and not the aliens.

Bren's talents as a diplomat and linguist are sorely tested in this latest addition to the *Foreigner* universe, another tale of First Contact—the ongoing story of the humans and the atevi, and this new species, the kyo. Cherryh, who is noted for her clear, crisp, and well-written brilliant creations of richly detailed alien cultures and of potential human cultures, does not disappoint here. Her use of political intrigue and plain old-fashioned human greed, stupidity, and arrogance, and plain old-fashioned human integrity, bravery, and kindness is just as deft, as is her keen awareness of human anthropology and sociology. She again provides a fascinating answer to the perennial question of science fiction: what does it mean to be human in an alien universe. Although by now Cherryh's readers know the atevi, they remain no less alien and the puzzle of understanding them remains an ongoing one: how would we interact with a species without a concept of friendship, that only thinks in terms of association? What can we learn about being human when humans are persistently the true Other? And like the preceding novels in the series, *Explorer* is a personal story as well, as Bren continues to struggle with the demands of his job and those of his family. Here, I think, is one of Cherryh's greatest strengths as a writer: the careful and sure weaving of the personal and public to create a sustained believable whole world populated by characters for whom the readers come to care.

I can easily see how *Explorer* and the other titles in the *Foreigner* series could be used in an anthropology or sociology class, let alone a science fiction class. They could also be used in a course that focused on cultural studies. I had thought to close this review by describing *Explorer* as a successful series culmination, after all, the humans and atevi finally seem to realize that they have a shared home, regardless of origin. But, then as I was writing this review, I read in the February 2003 *Locus* that Cherryh has just turned in "untitled volumes 7, 8, and 9 in her *Foreigner* series to Betsy Wollheim at DAW"—so stay tuned for a continued rich exploration of the human condition in an alien universe. Recommended.

FICTION REVIEW

Futures: Four Novellas

Janice M. Bogstad

Peter Crowther, ed. *Futures. Four Novellas*. New York: Warner, 2001. Paperback, 365 pages, \$6.99. ISBN 0-446-61062-3.

Each of the four writers represented in this anthology has produced major works of fiction over the past ten years, and I MEAN major. Hamilton and Baxter have each produced series of books in excess of 800 pages each and McAuley and McDonald, whose individual volumes are more modest in length, nevertheless have an impressive number to their credit. Peter Crowther's short introduction alerts us to the fact that this is the second in a proposed series of anthologies showcasing the work of major British writers and, having read rather more Hamilton and Baxter than McAuley and McDonald (although I've read one or two of the shorter novels of these writers), I can attest that these novellas are excellent examples of their work and thus will serve as a good introduction to those readers wondering whether to invest time and money in the extensive corpus.

While all four works were riveting (not just interesting, and not at all predictable), I had a favorite, Ian McDonald's Tendeleo's story, which is a Disch-like take on the alien invasion story. This preference surprised me first as McDonald is the author with whom I am the least familiar. He uses first personal narrative to create an intimate and immediate connection between reader and character. And the primary character, Tendeleo tells most of the story. She is a young black woman from Gichichi, a small Kikuyu village. Her father is a Christian minister with five churches and she paints an early childhood which is idyllic in its simplicity but also stark in its appearances of poverty. Her voice of matter of fact tenacity is tenderly rendered even to the point where she survives the dislocation of her family in the face of alien invasion, becoming a prostitute and engaging in other unsavory activities. Regardless of these formidable challenges to body and soul, she meets the love of her life, whose voice takes over the story for a while. Then they are, of course, parted, as he's a scientist from the 'West' sent to study the aliens. When his team leaves, he has to leave Tendeleo. For agonizing years they are apart, and then reunited to decode the mystery of the alien invasion that transforms humanity. McDonald's deft use of alternate voices and refusal to ignore the deprivation, to which social dislocation subjects human populations, makes this story both scientific and social on a very believable register. My second favorite is Hamilton's *Watching Trees Grow*, which is literally a detective story spanning the years 1832 to 2038. Covering such a vast expansive of time would be an enviable literary accomplishment even in a much longer work, but Hamilton pulls it off while writing in the first person narrative voice of one man. Interspersed with the tale of a murder over genetically designed privilege, he creates a world which is recognizably grown out of our own and in which certain families have been genetically engineered long life. Beginning their project in the 19th century, they are able to select and mate individuals to produce a hardy breed. But genetic selection also negatively affects their moral system (which accommodates arranged marriage, engendering children, questionable handling of other people less genetically blessed). That he pulls off a chronologically long story with a very complex plot and with a conventional mystery center is nothing less than amazing and will encourage me to tackle his 1000 page tomes sitting on the shelf at home. I also enjoyed Baxter's virtual-reality-god story, "Reality Dust," especially for one of its hapless protagonists, a young woman who must cope with unannounced virtual reality, and without her memory. A combination of relentless drive and a moral system which requires she assist others saves her and this otherwise typically grim narrative. I don't mean to ignore McAuley's excellent "Making History," a far future tale of love, deception and intrigue. Again a first person narrative, it takes the manipulation of males by females to a crafted extreme. A young man tells the story of Demi Lacombe who appears sweet and innocent but is also determined to pursue her ecological agenda no matter who she has to control in order to succeed. This is ALSO a sort of mystery story, a medical mystery concerning pheromones and male hormones where Hamilton's concerned genetics.

I cannot help but comment that these are all male writers who have been supposedly chosen for their hard-science stories. Indeed these stories deal with biological and social sciences, but who of us has not heard that biologically based stories written by women described as, therefore, not hard science fiction. After all, women writers who write on biology are just pursuing their natural affinity for the body over the mind, right? Nuff said. The stories are good for what they do but only Baxter's is not based in a biological and social truth and his is a virtual one which many biological metaphors.

In addition to containing excellently written, thought provoking stories, this anthology represents a compact

introduction to the writing of some contemporary hot properties and is thus useful for advising the reader if they want to pursue more works by these authors. Wearing my librarian hat, I would recommend it to a reader who enjoyed cerebral, if not necessarily hard-science, science fiction before I would recommend they start with the authors' novels, which can be complex and in some cases, massive, rambling works.

In addition, since they are novellas instead of short stories, they DO introduce the authors' writing styles in their novels and thus do a service to readers looking for new interests.

FICTION REVIEW
Guardian
 Matthew Wolf-Meyer

Joe Haldeman, *Guardian*. New York: Ace, 2002. 240 pages, \$22.95 hardcover. ISBN: 0-441-00977-8.

If one agrees with Thomas Disch's definition of science fiction as the literature of hoaxes, then *Guardian* might be the ideal novel to explore such an idea. Whereas Disch draws his examples from the likes of Edgar Allen Poe, and is limited to the short story/novella, Haldeman extrapolates the concept of the hoax to novel length, and while it might fail to convince the savvy science fiction reader, if placed in a classroom on Victorian or Early American literature (with the copyright date blocked out or ignored), the unsuspecting student might be duped into believing that this novel is no contemporary artifact, but the work of the nineteenth century (although more deceptive packaging is also in order). *Guardian*, surprisingly, is a novel set in 1800s America, spanning approximately 20 years, and is written in a careful and convincing pastiche of the work of that era. It concerns the life of Rosa Coleman, her rather terrible marriage, and her eventual escape from the tyranny of such – with her teenage son in tow – to the American west of Kansas, and eventually Alaska. Science fiction? Not especially so, although Rosa Coleman's eventual abduction by aliens and reality shifting might be more than the delusions of a hysterical mind, making *Guardian* science fiction of a very interesting sort.

Inasmuch as this might be the SF novel that Jane Austen would have written — with its attention to domestic minutia — somehow it is still utterly compelling. And this, I imagine, is what Haldeman's intention is in writing a novel, which, in many respects, is his most “mainstream.” By no means is *Guardian* a “scientific romance” in the Wellsian sense, sharing Victorian Age sensibilities with an awe of the possibilities of science and technology: If anything, *Guardian* is rather Luddite in its thematic resolution, which does share some elements of Wells' conception of the possible dangers inherent in technological progression, but differs in that, for Haldeman (and this may actually be a congealing theme in his work), humanity will find its peace through technology that it ultimately rescinds – that technology will help us attain a plateau, and once that position is reached, we will, in our wisdom, abandon technology to history.

Because of its genre-splitting, *Guardian* is an interesting novel, but it may have difficulty in finding an appropriate audience. Many SF readers may be disappointed by how non-science fictional this novel is, and with its lack of “gosh wow” technology, aliens, and crises, but those with a predilection for the novels of the New Wave writers, as well as those who are interested in the potential of SF, should be very interested in the ways in which Haldeman bends the genre to fit his needs. It should be evident by now that Haldeman is a master of form (each new novel tends to exacerbate the tenuous stylistic relationships between the oeuvre as a whole), and within SF, with its seeming increasing emphasis on generic prose to match its generic elements, that this is an increasing rarity. There is something very satisfying in simply reading Haldeman's work, reading his prose, and understanding his craft. For those who are new to Haldeman's work, this may not be the best place to start – at least in terms of understanding his work as a whole – but for those that are familiar with Haldeman and are willing to take a step forward, or away from SF proper, *Guardian* should provide ample pleasure.

The question that remains for me though, beyond the formalist aspects of the novel, is the teleological purpose of the aliens, of the eponymous Guardians. The Guardian that appears in the novel states that the preservation of life is his duty — that he strives for the most humane reality, in which the greatest amount of life is preserved. Without giving away the ending, it should be noted that this project is undercut by statements from the Guardian that all possible realities co-exist: If the reality shifting that Rosa does only means that she moves into a new reality, that her life and sanity are preserved, then life continues in her “home” reality, with all its tragic consequence. The only life truly spared is Rosa's, although Rosa, in recounting her experience, would have us believe that it wasn't simply her, but possibly all life on Earth – and this may simply be her naïve philoso-scientific view. The more I contemplate the end of *Guardian*, the more I am

inclined to think of Rosa's narrative as a hysterical one (loaded with all the Freudian connotations of that gendered term, as the evidence of the novel supports), rather than thinking it the deceptions of the Guardian or the sloppy work of Haldeman. This novel is, ultimately, one that should raise a number of questions not only for the reader, but of novel, and of the genre of science fiction itself. *Guardian*, like much of Haldeman's work, is more complex than it might initially appear, and should prove interesting for years to come.

FICTION REVIEW

Humans

Warren G. Rochelle

Sawyer, Robert J. *Humans*. New York: Tor Books, 2003. Hardcover, 384 pages, \$24.95. [Reviewed in advance uncorrected proofs.] ISBN 0-312-87691-2.

Ponter Boddit, a Neanderthal physicist who first appeared in Sawyer's 2002 novel, *Hominids*, is back. His adventures continue in *Humans*, Sawyer's sequel to *Hominids*, the second novel in his Neanderthal Parallax trilogy. Ponter, working on an experiment with his man-mate, Adikor, accidentally opened a portal to a world where Neanderthals are extinct and Gliksins are the dominant intelligent hominid species. Or, in other words, our world—we are the Gliksins. In *Humans* Ponter returns, not just to explore our universe, but also to resume and explore a relationship with York University geneticist Mary Vaughan. A cultural exchange is initiated between the two universes, with Neanderthal scholars coming to teach us such aspects of their world as how their Companion implants work (devices which record every activity of an individual, thereby making almost all crime impossible), their genetics, their literature, their research in stem-cell technology and artificial intelligence. And eventually, our branch of humanity sends people to the Neanderthal world.

It is this cultural interaction that is the crux of *Humans*, and the questions raised by the juxtapositions of two very different belief systems, both "morally valid." Sawyer presents this juxtaposition and interaction on both personal and public levels, such as Mary and Ponter's growing relationship and the speech by the Neanderthal ambassador to the UN. The novel thus becomes both a love story and an exploration of metaphysics and philosophy, as Sawyer examines "some of the deeply-rooted assumptions of contemporary human civilization" (back cover). *Humans* is essentially a novel of big ideas, asking such questions, according to Sawyer in an interview in the February 2003 issue of *Locus*, as "Where do we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?" (93). Yet, Sawyer asserts in the same interview, *Humans* is hard science fiction, as the scientific "underpinning" is quantum physics. However, the core issue is not so much the physics, but "whether or not there is something quantally significant about human consciousness" (94). What did cause the Great Leap Forward Cro-magnons made forty thousand years ago? What would have happened if it had been the Neanderthals who had leaped forward and not us? "Quantum physics," Sawyer argues, "is perhaps the best thing that happened to science fiction writers in decades, because it gives us a framework in which we can explore metaphysical and moral questions" and still have a scientific context (94).

The key moral question or questions that dominate *Humans* comes in the thought-experiment Sawyer sets up by creating a culture "that had [not] given up on religion, outgrown its creation myths, but one where such things had never occurred to them, that had looked out into the world and saw the randomness and the amorality (not immorality but amorality, the lack of a moral structure), and just said: 'Well, that's the way it is'" (94). After all, Sawyer contends, "organized religion has been the most evil force in human history" (94). For the Neanderthals, the afterlife is nonsense, as well as all that comes with such a belief. And yet, even at Mary's insistence, Ponter cannot bring himself to challenge the beliefs of those praying for their dead at the Vietnam War Memorial, beliefs that include the certainty they will see their loved ones in the afterlife. Such cultural juxtapositions fuel the creative tension that drives the novel. As are Ponter and Mary, the reader is challenged to think about what he or she believes and why.

The utopian impulse of *Hominids* is also still here, but it is more ambiguous. Yes, in many ways, the Neanderthal world comes off as the better alternative, but not always. Sawyer not only wanted to "reflect on what is wrong with our culture, but also on what the greatness of our culture is, and why it is important that we don't allow ourselves to be wiped out by a few malcontents. The greatness is that thing that drove us out of Olduvai Gorge, up into Europe, over the ocean into North America, out to the moon . . . And," [he hopes] ". . . to Mars" (94). The Neanderthals have yet to go into

space.

In my review of *Hominids*, I said I could see that novel being used in a utopian literature course or to represent the utopian subgenre in a science fiction course, and, obviously anthro and sociology courses. I still would argue this for *Humans*, but I would also argue this novel could be used in a religion or philosophy course. Its examining and questioning such issues as our belief systems, organized religion, and ecological responsibility allows for many teaching possibilities. I am eager to see where Sawyer takes this story in the concluding volume, *Hybrids*. Recommended.

FICTION REVIEW

Conquistador

David Mead

Stirling, S.M. *Conquistador*. ROC Books: New York, February 2003. 439 pp. \$23.95, hc. ISBN 0-451-45908-3 [Reviewed in uncorrected page proofs]

In 2002, S.M. Stirling published a very interesting alternate-history adventure, *The Peshawar Lancers*, which was set in a world where fragments of a great asteroid fell across the northern hemisphere in 1878, creating catastrophic climatic effects world-wide (four years of a sort of “nuclear winter”) and destroying most of north America. His most recent novel is another alternate-history, equally delightful, set in California-as-we-know-it, and in a wonderfully unmolested alternate-California where, for various historical reasons having to do with Alexander the Great, Europeans have never come. Never, that is, until John Rolfe, descendent of that Rolfe who colonized Virginia, creates in 1946 a gate between the two very-parallel worlds, and with his comrades from the war in the Pacific claims this new America as the Commonwealth of New Virginia, using the gold and silver of “SecondSide“ California to fund a very carefully planned colonization scheme.

Some 65 years later, in 2009, Tom Christiansen, an officer of the California Fish and Game Commission, raids a smuggling operation in Los Angeles, and discovers a hoard of elephant and walrus ivory, tiger and sea otter pelts, and a living California Condor of utterly unknown origin. The mystery leads Tom to Rolfe Mining and Minerals – and it also leads Adrienne Rolfe to him. Adrienne, a Gate Security Officer from SecondSide, tries to deflect the FirstSide investigation, but political machinations on her side of the Gate force her to kidnap Tom and his partner Tully to the SecondSide, scene of most of the action of the novel.

Tom Christiansen – and S.M. Stirling – owe a lot to H. Beam Piper’s great stories of Calvin Morrison, who becomes Lord Kalvan in an alternate feudal version of Pennsylvania. Like Calvin, Tom is a cop, and both are very competent, physically fit and militarily capable. Indeed, Stirling is quite open about his indebtedness (and homage) to Piper, L. Sprague De Camp, and Kenneth Bulmer, among others; at one point, Christiansen finds a whole shelf of alternate-history SF in Adrienne’s library. Tom is a very engaging protagonist, as is Adrienne (although some may object to the ruthlessness of her patriotism).

Conquistador is, first and foremost, a rousing adventure story, and isn’t intended to be political parable or allegory. But it does treat a number of provocative moral and political issues that the trope of parallel-worlds makes possible, perhaps even inevitable. Provocative issues of colonial conquest and imperial expansion, the ecological consequences of colonial expansion, and the relations of the imperial conquistadors to the native inhabitants, are explored, although not exhaustively or preachily, and they are integral to the adventure plot and the romance between Tom and Adrienne.

One of the most delightful parts of this excellent adventure is the lyrical descriptions of unspoiled SecondSide California. It’s clear that Stirling has done a great deal of research into California’s history and geography, and fallen in love with that lost beauty. There are passages of almost hymn-like praise to the glorious Nature that was – and is no more, at least here and now on FirstSide.

I recommend this novel quite heartily, although I will be interested to hear what others say about Christiansen’s acceptance of SecondSide, as well as the portrait of the native peoples of Mexico and California.

By the way, one great alternate-reality story Stirling doesn’t mention is Jack Vance’s “Rumfuddle,” which also explores ecological themes and the morality of cross-world exploitation.

FICTION REVIEW

Sword of the Rightful King

Christine Mains

Yolen, Jane. *Sword of the Rightful King: A Novel of King Arthur*. New York: Harcourt, 2003. Hardcover, 368 pages, \$17.00. ISBN 0-15-202527-8.

The Matter of Britain has provided an enduring literary source over the centuries, with the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table being refashioned, in whole or in part, to articulate changing societal concerns. Certainly many authors of contemporary fantasy have felt compelled to work with this material, as have writers for children and young adults, no doubt drawn by the appeal of exciting adventures but also, at least partly, by the opportunity to explore the metaphoric journey of hero into king, of child into adult. One of the latest additions to the subgenre of Arthurian fantasy is a young adult work by award-winning author Jane Yolen, an author of thoughtful and well-crafted fantasy for adult readers although the bulk of her writing consists of stories crafted for a younger audience.

Sword of a Rightful King is set in the early days of Arthur's reign, when he and his companions are only a few years older than Yolen's intended audience. Newly crowned by Merlinus but unaware of his true parentage, Arthur, like many of his subjects, doubts his ability to unite the warring factions of Britain, led by the sorceress Morgause. Arguing that truth is a matter of perception, that if Arthur is perceived by the people to be the rightful king, then he would be that king in reality, Merlinus creates the test of kingship that only Arthur, with the help of magic, will be able to pass: the sword in the stone that only the rightful king can draw.

Yolen's tale thus questions the nature of kingship. What makes a rightful king? Is it inheritance? No, since only Merlinus is aware that Arthur is the true heir. Is it might? Gawaine, struggling to break free of his mother's obsession with gaining the throne for her own sons, believes that "Kingship should be about strength, not blood; about power, not birthright" (13). Certainly Arthur demonstrates his physical prowess, but that is not enough to prove his kingship to all of his subjects. Is it, rather, the ability to command respect? Arthur seems to inspire loyalty in almost everyone he meets, even the selfish and spoiled Agravaine, through an understanding of and concern for others. In this story, as in many works of young adult fantasy, kingship should be understood as symbolic of selfhood, of the kind of person that a teenager should aspire to become.

Or rather, the kind of man that a boy should grow up to become, for this is undeniably a boys' tale, not one of the many recent Arthurian fantasies to be told from a female viewpoint. Of only two important female characters, one is portrayed as spiteful and selfish, a bad mother, and the other is not even revealed to be a woman until the final pages (although any reader even slightly familiar with the source material should be able to guess that the pretty and intelligent boy 'Gawen' is actually Gwenhwyvar in disguise). Apprenticed to Merlinus and privy to the secret of the sword in the stone, Gawen quickly becomes one of Arthur's confidantes and friends. When Morgause taints the sword with her dark sorcery, Gawen replaces it with another (using melted butter rather than magic); thinking the apprentice a boy, Arthur offers to yield his throne to the true rightful king, but when Gawen reveals herself as a young woman, he settles for making her his queen instead.

The revelation, betrothal, and wedding are too underdeveloped to provide sufficient material for an exploration of gender issues, of what makes a rightful queen, of what kind of woman a girl should aspire to become, although the fact that Arthur is not following his Companions' advice to find a queen who looks pretty but doesn't say much is telling, as is his promise to teach her to use a sword. The apprentice's first encounter with Lancelot, 'his' future lover, is also provocative, their attraction emphasized by Yolen in an understated way. I couldn't help but be reminded of Delia Sherman's *Through a Brazen Mirror*, inspired by the ballad "The Famous Flower of Serving Men," which also makes use of the device of the bride disguised as a male servant. Pairing Yolen's tale for teenagers with a work written for an adult audience and thus dealing more overtly with the complex issues of gender and sexuality raised by this narrative device would be an intriguing critical exercise.

A strong addition to the personal library of any scholar of Arthurian fantasy or young adult hero tales, *Sword of the Rightful King* could also find a place on a public school syllabus or in a college course in children's and young adult literature. Certainly anything by Jane Yolen is always worth a read; she's not known as "America's Hans Christian Andersen" for nothing.

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