

# Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction



Fantastika and the Greek and Roman Worlds

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# Editorial

Paul March-Russell

*Foundation* 118 is a little later than anticipated but editing it during August – especially *this* August – was always going to be an uphill task. With 10,833 registrations and 7951 people in attendance, Loncon 3 was one of the largest Worldcons ever, but bare statistics cannot describe the overwhelmingly positive vibe of the convention. Although there were some complaints from convention-goers, they cannot detract from the excellent organisation, superb communications and meticulous planning that made the five-day event a resounding success. With such a large event, every attendee will have his/her own story so mine will also be partial. What struck me, though, was the friendly atmosphere despite the austere surroundings of the Docklands ExCel. This feeling was embodied by the Fan Village, cleverly orchestrated around a village green that played host to family activities, and neighbouring library area that encouraged browsing and a quiet read. The achievement of this relaxed atmosphere, despite a packed programme of events, was central to Loncon 3's success. The Exhibits Hall and dealers' room, superbly coordinated by, amongst others, Farah Mendlesohn and Shana Worthen, were outstanding: highlights included the Guests of Honour displays, Edward James' affecting tribute to sf/f writers and the Great War, Andy Sawyer's account of London apocalypses, and rare items from the SF Foundation Collection, such as John Sladek's poetry magazine, the brilliantly titled *Ronald Reagan*. As a programme participant with a busy weekend schedule, I was especially grateful to the staff of the Green Room for providing an oasis of calm.

Although there is much to celebrate about Loncon 3, including generally positive and even affectionate representation in such media outlets as *The Guardian* and *Private Eye*, one thing to note was the lack of nationalistic cheer. As the panel on 'The State of British SF' indicated, the British Boom, which was still echoing at the time of the Glasgow Worldcon in 2005, has now receded, to be replaced by a sense of transition as the rise of electronic media affects traditional publishing. Instead, as the series of panels on 'The World at Worldcon' implied, British sf has to take its place as part of an international genre. One would go further and suggest that, whereas current political discourse is filled with nationalistic rhetoric, Loncon 3 displayed not only an active engagement with internationalism but also a notion of cosmopolitanism as something other than a mass-produced consensus. To be sure, the Hugos were weighted towards US products but within that gravitational pull, the successes of Ann Leckie, an

award-winning novelist at the age of 48, John Chu, Kameron Hurley and Sofia Samatar are to be welcomed. In future issues, there will be more from Loncon 3, including *Foundation* 121 which will feature a selection of articles from the academic strand.

Loncon 3 was prefigured, though, by Nine Worlds 2014, rapidly acquiring a strong reputation of its own, and by the annual SFF Masterclass. As noted previously, the Worldcon also galvanized a number of academic events in August, including a conference on Lois McMaster Bujold at Anglia Ruskin and a double-whammy at Warwick: a one-day celebration of M. John Harrison and a two-day conference, SF/F Now. Reports on all these activities will feature in *Foundation* 119.

This issue, though, we cast our minds back to last year's SFF conference – Swords, Sorcery, Sandals and Space: The Fantastika and the Classical World – as the organiser, Tony Keen, introduces a selection of six articles on sf, fantasy and the classical world. I am also happy to feature two related pieces on inspiration from Michael Swanwick and Tony Wolk. *Foundation* has always had a strong commitment to the relationship between creative and critical practice, and – beginning with this piece – I am reasserting it as one of our strengths.

# Foreword: Fantastika and the Greek and Roman Worlds

Tony Keen (Open University)

The six articles included in this issue of *Foundation* are taken from over sixty papers delivered at the SF Foundation's conference, *Swords, Sorcery, Sandals and Space: The Fantastika and the Classical World*, which took place in the University of Liverpool's Foresight Centre from 29 June to 1 July 2013. The speakers focused on the influence in modern science fiction and fantasy of the Mediterranean world of Greece and Rome, from approximately the ninth century BCE to the fifth century CE. Rather than provide an overview on sf and Classics (cf. Rogers and Stevens 2012; Provini and Bost-Fiévet 2014), what I would like to do here is introduce the six articles and, first, briefly discuss some of the methodological issues.

What is described as 'Reception Studies', the study of how Greece and Rome are received in later cultures, forms a significant part of scholarship in Classical Studies (cf. Martindale and Hardwick 2012). The study of Reception in popular culture is an important strand in this, particularly in relation to cinema (Lowe 2012; Michelakis 2012). However, Classical Reception Studies can sometimes be a little insular. In the UK especially, this is a result of research funding protocols that privilege publishing in subject-related journals and series, and tend to militate against genuinely interdisciplinary studies. But it is also partly a product of ideas about what is important about Reception Studies. In 2003, Lorna Hardwick rejected the idea that studies of Reception only illuminate the receiving society; she insisted that they also 'focus critical attention back towards the ancient source and sometimes frame new questions or retrieve aspects of the source which have been marginalized or forgotten' (Hardwick 2003: 4). This is very true, but an argument has built up that this should be the prime or only concern of Reception Studies. This has been most forcefully expressed by Charles Martindale, who argues that Classicists should only be interested in Reception if it 'initiate[s] or inform[s] a significant dialogue with antiquity' (2013: 176). This, according to Martindale, justifies the presence of courses on Reception in the portfolio of Classics departments.

Whilst I understand Martindale's desire to justify Reception within university Classics departments, I see a number of issues with this inward-looking approach. First, whether a dialogue is 'significant' is subjective, though Martindale writes as if it is objective. Second, this approach of privileging certain receptions over others seems to be an attempt to reaffirm

the canon of literature, at a time when others see Reception Studies as a means of democratizing the subject (cf. Hardwick and Harrison 2013). Third, it has the potential to demean the academic areas in whose fields of study the receiving texts lie. As Martindale himself recognizes (2006: 9), it is important in Reception to be credible both to Classicists and to those who study the receiving text. It also follows that the best scholars in Classical Reception are those who are already credible both as Classicists and as scholars in the receiving field. In sf, one might point to Nick Lowe, one of the conference's plenary speakers, and to Liz Bourke, one of the contributors here. This means that interdisciplinary collaboration is vital, and requires a meeting of equals, which means that Classicists need to take an interest in the receiving text in its own right, not just as a means of illuminating Classical Antiquity, and not act as if all other disciplines are merely means of understanding the ancient world better.

Finally, to privilege the illumination of Antiquity detracts from the question of how later societies, including our own, engage with the Classical past. This is surely a question in which Classicists should be interested. Without invoking the dreaded term 'relevance', Classical Studies as a discipline should be engaging with the wider world, and understanding how the wider world engages with our subject matter is an important part of strengthening the position of the discipline. The fact that these articles come from a conference sponsored not by a Classical Studies institution but by an sf body, and are now being presented in that body's journal, clearly signals that we reject such insular methodologies. Of the contributors, myself, Bourke, Frances Foster and Cara Sheldrake are from Classics departments whilst Scott Brand, Mariano Martín Rodríguez and Andrew Wilson are all trained in other disciplines. This reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the conference: indeed, bringing such people together was an explicit conference objective.

There is little in these articles that challenge Andrew Milner's rejection in *Foundation* 117 of Lucian of Samosata's *True History* as ur-sf. Indeed, Milner's view that the *True History* cannot be considered sf is one with which I have considerable sympathy (see Keen forthcoming), though the work clearly sits early in a tradition of the fantastic from which sf would later draw. Of the articles here, only Rodríguez claims an ancient work for sf, arguing that Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* deserves to be placed alongside Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937). The other articles are concerned not with finding generic origins for sf in the Greco-Roman world, but with showing how modern sf appropriates notions, motifs, imagery, etc. from that world. Foster's comparison of the lands of the dead in Homer and Ursula Le Guin

does not necessarily suggest a direct influence (though Le Guin's interest in Classical mythology is well-known). Rather, Foster is placing the *Odyssey* and the Earthsea sequence together as 'cultural companions' (James 2009: 239), where a side-by-side comparison can illuminate both texts.

The other works look at more obvious influences. One can seek these in a single work, as Brand does with *Watchmen* (1987), or one can choose the work of a single author, as in Wilson's treatment of C.L. Moore. One can choose, as Sheldrake does with time travel, to examine how an sf trope is used in a particular ancient *milieu*, or one can take a single ancient culture and see how sf has used that, as Bourke does with the Minoans. All these approaches are productive: what unifies them is a continuing fascination with the Classical world, both amongst those who write sf, and those who write about it. The reason for this is obvious: despite superficial differences, humanity's concerns remain constant and eternal.

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# The Image of the Minoan in Science Fiction

Liz Bourke (Trinity College Dublin)

There is a land called Crete in the midst of the wine-dark sea, a fair rich land, surrounded by water. (Homer, *Odyssey* 19.172-3, my translation)

This article focuses on three examples of the Minoan in science fiction,<sup>1</sup> two from television, the other from literature. 'The Broca Divide' (1997), the fourth episode of *Stargate SG-1*'s first season, sees a community of civilized, peaceful Minoans living with the threat of a curse which causes individuals to become animalistic and uncivilized. In the *Doctor Who* serial, 'The Time Monster' (1972), the Doctor and his companion visit Atlantis, which the series purports to be related to Minoan civilization. Laura E. Reeve's 'Major Ariane Kedros' novels (2008–10) envisage an unfathomable alien race of masked Minoans who enforce a tense peace on the space-faring Hellenic and Terran human civilizations.

It would be simple enough to present the image of the Minoans as portrayed in these works, and compare and contrast that with what we know of Bronze Age Cretan civilization from archaeology and a handful of sources from Egypt and the Levant. But more important than the *what* is the *why*: why do these works use the *idea* of the Minoans? What makes a Minoan? What makes the Minoans good to think with? For their influence in the science fiction and fantasy genres is less pervasive than their more recognizable Iron Age Homeric and Classical successors in the Aegean; thus, when it arises we are unable to dismiss it, even if we want to, as merely part of the genre landscape.

Between 1921 and 1935, Arthur Evans published his multi-volume *Palace of Minos*, placing his excavations at Knossos within the broader narrative of both Bronze Age Crete and the wider Mediterranean. At Knossos, he had discovered evidence of an extensive Bronze Age civilization. This society was seen as a counterpart to the Greek civilization already known on the mainland from the excavations of Heinrich Schliemann and his successors at Mycenae; Evans termed it *Minoan*, after the mythical king Minos, son of Zeus and Europa. The mythical Minos is most famous as a lawgiver and for the transgression of his wife Pasiphaë, who had intercourse with the bull of Poseidon. It was in Minos's labyrinth that tribute youths from Athens were fed to the Minotaur, the offspring of this union (Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*, 15.2).

Conventionally speaking, the birth, growth and decline of Bronze Age Cretan civilization span the period c. 3000 BCE–1100 BCE (see, for example,

the chronologies offered in Dickinson 1994: 9-22; Driessen 1997; Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999). The existence of Bronze Age Cretan civilization was suspected as early as 1878, when Minos Kalokairinos discovered some large storage jars at the place then called Kephala, sparking off a search for the ancient city of Knossos. Just over two decades later, after the devastation of the 1897 Greco-Turkish war, Evans purchased land around the area from its owners. Excavation began the next year, in 1900. The British School at Athens continues to undertake investigation in the Knossos area today.

Evans had engaged in newspaper correspondence for the *Manchester Guardian* during his sojourn in the Balkans during the late 1870s, and as his writings bear out, he was always very interested in ancient objects. In the course of reporting his findings from Knossos, he was to prove himself adept at tailoring his message to his audience. He used detailed measurements and careful deliberation when presenting himself to fellow archaeologists, but for the wider public reinterpretations of the Minotaur and the Labyrinth, Theseus and Ariadne, and the inventor Daedalus predominated: 'The ogre's den turns out to be a peaceful abode of priest-kings, in some respects more modern in its equipments than anything produced by Classical Greece' (Evans 1921: 1).

Thanks to Evans's interpretation of the material remains, Minoan civilization entered public consciousness as a peaceful and priestly society, with a goddess-figure central to their religion. What has become clear only in the last few decades is how much Evans's political and personal biases coloured his interpretation of the evidence: at times he discounted evidence which did not fit his view of a peaceful, united Bronze Age paradise ruled over by a Goddess and her benevolent bull-leaping priest-kings:

The famous prelapsarian pacifism of the Minoan world started out as a deliberate political decision on Evans' part [...] That the 'first Europeans' were unwarlike quickly became a cherished myth. (Gere 2011: 12)

Before the Greco-Turkish War, Evans and a companion in scholarship, John L. Myres, had already reported on Bronze Age fort-like outposts on the Cretan Lasithi Plateau (cf. Frothingham and Marquand 1895: 400-3; Frothingham 1896: 450-68). Modern investigation has confirmed that these seem to be boundary guard stations for control and oversight of territory (Chryssoulaki 1999). But the internal insular divisions hinted at by these remains, and which a younger Evans touted as evidence for a civilization every bit as warlike as the Bronze Age Greek mainland, were to find scant welcome in his later work. Indeed, his later writing at times reveals as much

about Evans himself as it does about the evidence he was excavating.

Crete in the Bronze Age lay at the crossroads of the eastern Mediterranean. It was in a sense the lynchpin of the Aegean, well positioned for trade by sea: south lie Libya and Egypt; to the north, the Peloponnese and the Cycladic islands; north-east, Anatolia; directly east, Cyprus (famous for its copper) and the Levantine coast. Artefacts of foreign manufacture found on Crete, such as Egyptian vases and sealstones, and Cretan artefacts found as far afield as Egyptian Thebes and the Canaanite site of Tel Kabri in modern Israel speak to both the richness and the extent of Cretan trade in the Bronze Age. Indeed, the disparity between the society's obvious wealth and the lack of the usual iconographic markers of a Bronze Age warrior caste, scenes of hunting or of war, is one of the great puzzles of archaeology. However, the fact that we have evidence both of internal division in the guard stations on the Lasithi Plateau and of external presence as at Thera (modern Santorini), Tell el-Dab'a (Egyptian Avaris), and Tel Kabri in Israel makes it deeply unlikely that Bronze Age Cretans did *not* possess those war-making capabilities which their iconography ignores. Their weapons technology was well-developed, and includes the Minoan type A sword, which is well-known from tomb deposits (Sandars 1961; Popham et al 1974).

While Egyptian art depicts monarchs and armies and Mycenaean art gives us the famous Lion Hunt dagger and silver Siege rhyton, the wall paintings from Knossos on Crete and Akrotiri on Thera depict flowers, animals, sporting or ritual events such as bull-leaping, the crocus harvest, and processions. It has been suggested, however, that Bronze Age Crete did not, in moments of disaster, shy from human sacrifice; in 1979, archaeologists Yannis Sakellarakis and Efi Sapouna-Sakellaraki excavated a sanctuary on the slopes of Mount Juktas, known as Anemospilia, near Archanes, that was destroyed during the series of earthquakes that struck the island about 1700 BCE. The structure collapsed during an earthquake with people still inside. Their findings suggest that during this period of cataclysmic tectonic activity, the Bronze Age Cretans of the area resorted to human sacrifice (Sakellarakis 1997: 294-311). In 1980, under the direction of Peter Warren, excavations at the Knossos Stratigraphical Museum site uncovered a deposit of children's bones in the Late Minoan phase in a house structure along with sheep bones, which bear the marks of cutting to remove pieces of flesh (Wall et al 1986), and may indicate either ritual flensing or some form of ritual cannibalism. The nature of the cut marks is such that they do not appear to indicate complete defleshing or dismemberment.

In short, Evans's benevolent matriarchal Minoans, in their peaceful

abode, have their dark side. It is this contrast between the light and the dark – the wistful conjectures of Evans and his interpreters as he created a whole fabric of legend and society both from the myths of Crete handed down from Classical Greece and his own reconstructive archaeology – and the deepening gulf of our uncertainties that are foregrounded in science fiction.

In 'The Broca Divide', the SG-1 team visit a planet whose civilization draws upon explicitly referenced Minoan elements. The place where they arrive is divided between a forest in perpetual darkness, inhabited by animalistic humans, and a town shown in sunlight, inhabited by civilized humans. SG-1 arrive in the dark forest and are attacked by the animalistic humans whom they drive off. They proceed onwards, and encounter veiled people, dressed all in white, who are engaged in throwing rocks at the animalistic humans in order to rescue a woman. Their leader introduces them as 'the Untouched' and calls himself High Councillor Tuplo (Gerard Plunkett): 'Let us,' he says, 'take you to the Land of Light.'

Natives and visitors emerge from dark forest into sunlight. The camera pans to reveal a settlement whose commanding structure bears a striking resemblance to Evans's reconstructions of Knossos in its setting: a large complex on a low hill surrounded by a town. In Evans's and modern reconstructions, the hilltop is dominated by monumental buildings, which overshadows the town below, much as the *acropoleis* of later Classical Greece overshadow their respective towns. This is mirrored in the episode, so that the home of the Untouched and a reconstruction of the hilltop of Knossos could, at a casual glance, be almost mistaken for one other.

The entryway is deliberately reminiscent of the Knossos North Entrance with its red pillars atop a raised wall and its fresco of a charging bull behind the red-pillared colonnade. Here there is no bull fresco, but rather a centrally-positioned enormous metallic ('bronze') bull's head. The colonnade is also Minoan in style, with red-painted columns with their trademark of being wider at the top than at the bottom. The colonnade, though, is more decorative than functional since it does not provide shade. The entryway also possesses a roof surmounted by horn-shaped antefixae. In the reconstructions of Knossos, the antefixae are one of the more speculative elements although iconographic evidence from sealstones and frescoes, for example the Late Minoan Grandstand Fresco, suggests that large horn-shaped installations – usually called 'horns of consecration' in the modern literature – did exist within what might have been religious contexts.

The interior in the episode provides us with more giant bull's heads, red-painted walls with the odd bull fresco, and upright standing double-

headed axes, or *labrys* (cf. Adams 2004; Hadjidakis 1912-3; Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999: 93). The rectilinear construction of the interior parallels that of the *megara* (halls) from Knossos, with their squared-off pier-and-door partitions. 'Looks Minoan,' says SG-1's resident archaeologist Daniel Jackson (Michael Shanks), giving us narrative confirmation that we are supposed to think of the native characters in light of what we know – or don't know – of Minoan civilization.

The native characters have changed from white robes and veils to blue robes. (Blue skirts are present in Minoan art, but so are bare breasts for women and skinny loincloths for men. Modern televisual conventions trump any real attempt at authenticity here.) Over the course of a meeting, Tuplo reveals that the animalistic humans in the forest are called the 'Touched', 'cursed', as the characters say, by the evil aliens who masquerade as evil gods: 'They became too dangerous, and we were forced to banish them to the Land of the Dark.'

It is later revealed that the Touched are this way as the result of a contagious disease, not a curse. But the divisions in this episode between darkness and light – between evil, animalistic and wrong, and good, civilized and right – share a link with Minoans as the early twentieth century understood them, although updated to suit the conventions and prejudices of the 1990s. Evans saw his Minoans as worshippers of a goddess of nature, ecstatic participants in a bacchanal of Cretan Ariadne (in his view a goddess superseded in bacchanalia by her later myth-mate Dionysus), but in 'The Broca Divide' this Dionysiac self-abandonment is seen as evil, animalistic, primitive, even inhuman. Nature is portrayed as fierce, frightening and dark.

While these Minoans are surrounded by the iconography of bulls and double-axes, there are no other signifiers of ancient Crete: no saffron flowers, no Marine style vases, no blue-monkey frescoes. There are no *pithoi* filled with stores, nor inconvenient snake goddesses to perturb the orderly arrangement of a civilization that exiles its uncontrollable impulses to the dark, literally out of sight, rather than confines or kills them. *Stargate SG-1*'s Minoans, rather than representing the Cretan Bronze Age, reify a very Classical division of the intellect and the passions: between self-control and self-forgetfulness; between *eunomia*, good order, and disorder. In their role as a kind of metaphor-made-flesh, they recall to our attention that perhaps some of the attraction Evans's Minoan civilization holds for the modern age is because of all the things we do not know, the things we cannot know, about Cretan life in the Bronze Age. Their unknowability, combined with their iconographic *difference* from their geographic neighbours, makes

them a slate upon which we project the concerns of our time:

In a certain sense, the Minoans are as much a twentieth-century academic artefact as they were the inhabitants of a world up to 5,000 years removed in time. (Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999: 2)

In Laura E. Reeve's 'Major Ariane Kedros' novels, the Minoan becomes the alien. This is not mere metaphor but literal: the term 'Minoan' is applied to an advanced alien civilization, who appeared one day after humanity had settled the Moon and provided the means for humans to access Faster Than Light travel. After the two competing human polities, the Hellenic Confederation of Autonomous Worlds and the Terrans, proved willing to detonate 'temporal distortion weapons' (Mutually Assured Destruction for star systems), the alien Minoans stepped in to enforce the 'Pax Minoica', under which both sides agreed to the disarmament of their weapons of planetary destruction.

Reeve's Minoans are very advanced: their military technology makes mock of anyone who challenges them. But they are more interested in peace and trade than in domination. They follow the letter of the law:

It took time for mankind to understand the Minoan mind ruleset, called such because it seemed about as inflexible as an AI ruleset. Minoans never forced their own laws, morality, or ideology upon mankind – they worked *strictly* within mankind's laws and they expected the same compliance from mankind. (Reeve 2008: 184)

They are mysterious, even secretive. They are always veiled and no one really knows what they look like: 'The Minoans were obviously bipedal, but the red robes that moved under a nonexistent breeze gave no hints of gender or overall shape of limbs' (Reeve 2008: 183). All three castes of Minoans wear long robes, horned headdresses, and technological jewels. But although the text *tells* us that the alien Minoan symbology is very close to the symbology of Bronze Age Crete, the actual descriptions are not sufficiently detailed to permit much iconographic comparison.

Minoan technology, however, is a different matter. In contrast to the depictions of human technology, which are hard-edged, metallic, sterile in the traditional vein, Minoan technology is described in organic terms. It is rounded, mutable, squidgy; it smells funny:

The edges of the outer seal of the airlock sank into something Matt considered a cross between semitransparent primordial stew and tapioca pudding gone really, really bad. It was light olive green with internal blotches that varied between red and brown. His eyes blurred from the

In this way, Reeve's Minoans, though alien, reflect Evans's view of the Bronze Age Cretans: powerful yet peaceful, apparently united, integrated into an organic nature. By making her Minoans alien – or her aliens Minoan – Reeve has achieved, consciously or not, a sideways commentary on modern interpretations of Bronze Age Crete. The past is another country, and its inhabitants, however familiar they seem, however well we think we know them, stand outside our complete understanding.

In the 1972 *Doctor Who* serial 'The Time Monster', the Doctor (Jon Pertwee) and his companion, Jo Grant (Katy Manning), visit Atlantis. Jo claims that 'it was part of the Minoan civilization. Oh, you know, the Minotaur and all that Cretan jazz.' The story posits it was also located on the island of Thera and that it was destroyed in the same volcanic eruption which preserved the site of Akrotiri. However, the visual cues with which the production team has represented Atlantean-Minoan culture consist of an anachronistic mishmash of styles in which Minoan, Mycenaean and Classical elements co-exist simultaneously.

The serial opens with the Doctor experiencing a dream sequence, in which the viewer sees standing double-axes framed by red-painted columns, framing a krater on a gryphon base in a vaguely Geometric (that is to say, early Greek Iron Age) style. The double-axes are a Bronze Age Cretan element. So are red-painted columns – but unlike columns from the Cretan Bronze Age, these columns are fluted, and do not taper from a wider top to a more slender bottom. The columns represented here resemble more Classical Ionic columns. Early in the first episode, a floor installation of some kind can be seen behind the Doctor. This floor installation resembles a Mycenaean *megaron* more than it does anything from the Cretan Bronze Age. The Mycenaean connection is strengthened when the dream sequence flashes on the iconic 'Head of a Sphinx' (a painted stucco on limestone image of a woman's face, probably thirteenth century BCE) found at Grave Circle A at Mycenae. This is immediately followed by an image of one of the snake goddesses from the Temple Repository at Knossos, bringing us back to the Cretan Bronze Age, c. 1600 BCE.

Atlantis, as 'The Time Monster' presents it, is all double-axes and red-painted Ionic columns, with the occasional over-life-sized female statue with Bronze Age Cretan style flounced and tiered skirts. The names of Atlantean-Minoan characters are for the most part derived from Greek; some, indeed, like Hippias and Crito, occur in the dialogues of Plato. A council scene in the fifth episode presents the viewer with more evidence of the production team's pan-Aegean approach to depicting Atlantean-

Minoans: Bronze Age Cretan horns of consecration frame a replica of the relief sculpture above the Lion Gate at Mycenae, two confronted lionesses on either side of a central pillar. The columns here, though still red-painted, are also still slender and fluted, and the dialogue of the Atlantean-Minoan king, Dalios (George Cormack), brings to mind not only the philosophers of the Classical period, but Plato's ideal of the philosopher-king. The Atlantean-Minoans of 'The Time Monster' are less *Minoans* than they are *Atlanteans*: the production team's use of an anachronistic mish-mash of striking Aegean imagery in the set dressing renders them a culture out of time. They are not quite Classically Greek; but they are not quite anything else, either.

But there are some similarities to the Minoans of 'The Broca Divide'. In the Atlantean-Minoans of 'The Time Monster', good order and self-control, as embodied by King Dalios, is opposed by lack of self-control – greed and lust, personified by the High Priest Krasis (Donald Eccles) and Queen Galleia (Ingrid Pitt). When these overcome the good order embodied in the person of the king, Atlantis is destroyed. It is, again, a very Classical opposition and one quite unlike the alien Minoans of Reeves' trilogy.

Reeve's Minoans come a decade after those of 'The Broca Divide'. Where the Minoans in 'The Broca Divide' concretize a metaphor between the intellect and the passions, between civilization and barbarism, human and animal, Reeve's novels use the idea of the Minoan as emblematic of an advanced, ancient and incomprehensible civilization. The *idea* of the Minoan, projected onto the future, becomes a receptacle not only for human hopes but also for human uncertainties. Reeve's trilogy has a deep thematic concern with the process of waging peace during a Cold War. Looking over their shoulders are the alien Minoans, as they have been looking over the shoulders of the whole Mediterranean, Classical tradition since Evans first dubbed Bronze Art Crete Minoan and highlighted its differences to its contemporaries.

What makes Minoans good to think with is precisely those differences, and the lacunae in our data that makes them capable of being many different things to different people; that, and the romantic mirage that Evans drew out of the soil of Crete and the fertile ground of Classical myth. The image of the Minoans in science fiction is a microcosm of their image elsewhere: slightly weirder, perhaps slightly more explicitly alien – and in *Stargate*'s case slightly campier. They mean what we *want* them to mean in a way that is not as easily achieved with cultures whose image of themselves we possess in writing, or who were not quite so thoroughly mythologized by the modernists between the two World Wars. As Robert

Graves said of his (in part Minoan-inspired) White Goddess:

[We] sailed to find her  
In distant regions likeliest to hold her  
Whom we desired above all things to know,  
Sister of the mirage and echo. (Graves 2013: 3)

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup>When I speak of what is today archaeologically known or surmised about Bronze Age Crete and its inhabitants, I will typically use the term 'Bronze Age Crete' or 'Bronze Age Cretans'. When I refer to their image in literature or visual media, I will refer to them as 'Minoans'.

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# A Gordian Knot: Classical Elements in *Watchmen*

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Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' twelve-part serial, *Watchmen* (1986–7), explores both the political anxieties of the decade, and the history and function of superhero comics. It contains many subplots that are held together by internal and intertextual references. According to Moore, *Watchmen's* creators tried to fabricate a 'jewel with hundreds and hundreds of facets and almost each of these facets is commenting on all of the other facets and you can [...] look through any of the facets and still get a coherent reading' (Kavanagh 2000). One of these facets is formed of motifs borrowed from antiquity. These elements include, amongst others, quotations from the Bible and Classical mythology. This article examines how these sources are used to lead the reader through the novel.

## Writing on the Wall

Juvenal's 'who watches the watchmen?' (*Satires* 6.347) is not only referred to in the title but appears as graffiti throughout the novel. The phrase in turn refers to the Bible (Daniel 5:25–8), in which the Babylonians are warned of their imminent doom by disembodied fingers writing on the wall. The appearance of the sprayed slogans in *Watchmen* portends the deaths of key characters such as Hollis Mason, Rorschach and the Comedian. Yet, they also feed into the novel's deceptive play of signification, for example, by appearing to confirm Rorschach's conspiratorial theory of a mask killer.

The quotation also occurs alongside the name of the band, Pale Horse, whose moniker refers to the fourth of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Revelations 6:7–8). The band's lead singer calls himself Red D'Eath, which could equally refer to Edgar Allan Poe's short story, 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842), or to the second Horseman associated with war and mass slaughter (Revelations 6:3–4). Rorschach subsequently states: 'World on verge of apocalypse. War and Death already here. Other Horsemen can't be far behind' (*Watchmen* 10: 20).

A further reading of the graffiti is also possible. In the Book of Daniel the writing appears to the Babylonians during a feast, following which the Persians sack the city and kill King Belshazzar. The Greek historians Herodotus (*Histories* 1.191) and Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.15) confirm the city's fall during a festival. Modern scholars state that the Persians sacked Babylon in the night before *akitu*, the feast of the Moon God *Sîn* (Wolters 1995: 200). In

*Watchmen*, Adrian Veidt's attack occurs at midnight while the youth idol and figurehead of the knot-top subculture, Red D'Eath, is celebrated by his followers. The fall of Babylon also occurs in Revelations 14:18, furthering the impression that New York is to be read as the ancient city's modern equivalent.

Fittingly, 'who watches the watchmen?' is used as the epigraph in the trade paperback collection and later compilations of the graphic novel. It is not, however, quoted directly from Juvenal but from the 1987 Tower Commission Report, which examined the Reagan administration's role in the Iran-Contra scandal. Although Moore admitted to being surprised when he realised that the quotation was used as the epigraph (Kavanagh 2000), this indirect citation does stress the double meaning of the term 'watchmen', referring to authorities inside and outside the novel's diegesis as well as superheroes in comic-book literature.

This example highlights the variety of ways in which Classical elements are used in *Watchmen*. The Juvenal quotation is part of a series of clues that leads the reader through the novel towards the man behind its central scheme, and beyond. The readers are thereby approached on different levels, as a number of possible ways to read *Watchmen* are offered. The same motif can refer to both the novel's diegesis and external contexts. It may allude to an idiom, a passage of the Bible or the works of a Roman poet, while it could just as easily be taken on face value and seen as graffiti. This range of possible references means that there is also a potential abundance of false leads, which contributes to the novel's paranoiac act of reading.

## **Undoing the Gordian Knot**

Adrian Veidt plays a major part in the comic's plot. He feels kinship with Alexander the Great, failing to find anyone who can match his intelligence. Impressed by the Macedonian's conquests and lateral thinking, he vows to bring an age of illumination to humanity. Like Alexander, Veidt strives to outdo his parents, his contemporaries and his predecessors. Surpassing his idol, who profited from the achievements of his father (Bosworth 1988: 5–6), Veidt rejects his inheritance and ventures further into Asia than the Macedonian ever did. In doing so, he enhances his skills and finally concludes that Alexander failed through neither outliving his conquest nor building a unity that survived him (*Watchmen* 11: 20). The insight that the Macedonian merely resurrected the wisdom of the pharaohs provokes Veidt to identify himself with Ozymandias, King Rameses II of Egypt, when

he takes up crime fighting.

Veidt retires at the height of his popularity and becomes a billionaire industrialist by building upon his former alter-ego's reputation. Prompted by the Comedian's challenge that the global crisis is beyond the capabilities of masked heroes, Veidt concludes that nuclear conflict is inevitable. Treating this problem like the legendary Gordian Knot, undone by Alexander's lateral thinking (cf. Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 18), he conceives a single decisive move to sever the political stalemate: a fake alien attack which causes millions of deaths but forces humanity to unite against a common foe.

The ancient Phrygian legend is another focal point of the plot, with different threads leading towards Veidt and his plan. These conjoin when Ozymandias celebrates his success in front of a mural depicting Alexander at Gordium (*Watchmen* 12: 19). The legend is also alluded to via the popular knot-top hair-style, whilst on Mars – a planet named after the Roman god of war – Dr Manhattan shows Laurie the Nodus Gordii ('Gordian Knot') mountains (*Watchmen* 9: 5). The position of these knots underlines how the ancient legend is used as a symbol for the Cold War and mankind's apparently fixed mindset. Moreover, Veidt's Gordian Knot Lock Co. is responsible for replacing the locks in Dan Dreiberg's apartment, a task which is repeatedly undone by Rorschach's brute force. This foreshadows the violent nature of Veidt's plan to solve humanity's great conundrum.

## **Corporate Identity**

When a cab driver and a newsagent discuss the necessity of 'bringing light to the world' to prevent war (*Watchmen* 5: 21), they quote the motto of another company belonging to Veidt: the Promethean Cab Company (*Watchmen* 12: 5). Unwittingly, they not only point the reader towards the industrialist but also allude to his attempt to illuminate the world. In terms of the plot, Pyramid Deliveries is the most important of the industrialist's firms nominally linked to antiquity. Its logo appears on various vehicles, whilst the hit-man hired to attack Veidt is contracted through this company, which eventually leads Nite Owl (Dan Dreiberg) and Rorschach to Ozymandias. Correspondingly, the pyramid appears as a bad omen on posters at the family murderer's flat and the newsagent's stall. The industrialist even describes the duty of his hit-men to dispose of each other as a lethal pyramid (*Watchmen* 12: 10). Whilst investigating the Comedian's death, Nite Owl describes Veidt's corporate empire as a maze (*Watchmen* 8: 4). Ozymandias' resemblance to the Minotaur of Greek mythology becomes

clear when he is revealed to be at the heart of the labyrinthine mystery, demanding human sacrifices as the price for saving the population at large.

Like the names of his companies, buildings linked to the industrialist are designed according to ancient themes. His office tower represents an obelisk and his Antarctic hideout a temple complex. The interior design of both is dominated by Egyptian artwork that also serves a symbolic purpose, for example, the three stone jackals in the vivarium (*Watchmen* 11: 7) refer to Anubis, the jackal-headed god of the dead, and therefore prefigure the demise of Veidt's three employees. Although the industrialist's Antarctic fortress also holds artefacts with connections to Alexander the Great, it is fittingly named Karnak, after a complex in which Rameses completed the Great Hypostyle Hall, decorating it with carvings celebrating his own military triumphs (Sullivan 2008: 9). These decorations accord with Veidt's merchandising of his alter-ego as they too are based upon personal exploits.

As the design of the buildings and the names of the companies all refer to the figure of Ozymandias, they can be seen as a visual extension of Veidt's costumed self. Even Bubastis, Veidt's pet lynx, is given the Greek name of the feline Egyptian goddess Bastet. This deity was regarded as protector of the pharaoh and the goddess, Ra. In *Watchmen* the lynx guards the self-appointed successor of Rameses. Furthermore, the Egyptian city Per-Bast was the centre of worship for Ra and a depository for mummified cats. The lynx's sacrifice could refer to the latter. Moreover, according to Diodorus Siculus (*Historical Library* 1.48.1) a great cat accompanies Rameses II in the depictions of his campaigns at the Ramesseum.

## **Ambiguous Heroes**

When they created Ozymandias, Moore and Gibbons were not just inspired by ancient sources. Like *Watchmen*'s other masked crime-fighters, Veidt's alter-ego is also based on a character acquired from Charlton Comics, which was sufficiently changed to represent a specific archetype of the comic superhero (Kukkonen 2008: 85–6). Peter Cannon (Thunderbolt) was orphaned and subsequently trained in the Far East, so that his mental and physical abilities outmatch the normally achievable. He shares this background with Ozymandias and other well-known superheroes such as Batman. Furthermore, they both have enemies with an ancient Egyptian background. While Thunderbolt faces Evila, a witch and former empress, Batman is confronted by the insane Egyptologist, King Tut. Both examples

indicate how Veidt's character is moulded from both ancient sources and comic-book allusions. Similarly, Superman not only has the Fortress of Solitude, which is not unlike Veidt's Antarctic retreat, but also opposes another successful industrialist – Alexander 'Lex' Luthor (Kukkonen 2008: 92).

Additionally, Nite Owl is based on Charlton's The Blue Beetle. This hero owns the Bug, a spherical aircraft with similarities to Archimedes, the flying device in *Watchmen*. Although supposedly named after the owl in Walt Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963) (*Watchmen* 7: 7), its rounded shape is reminiscent of the Greek natural philosopher, famous for his mathematical work on circles and spheres. Dreiberg's inherited wealth, cavernous laboratory and costume design suggest links with Batman that are underlined by his essay, 'Blood from the Shoulder of Pallas' (*Watchmen* 7: appendix), which discloses his interest in Classical mythology and shows parallels with Batman's origin (Frenz 2009: 184). The text further describes the terror nocturnal hunters can cause which is reminiscent of Ovid's description of an owl as *dirum mortibus omen* (*Metamorphoses* 5.550). This potential for causing fear inspired both superheroes to create their alter-egos and is mirrored by the effect they have on their foes.

The manner in which the novel's protagonists have been constructed shows how multi-layered the intertextual references are. To understand the plot, readers do not have to decipher all the clues; however, to fully appreciate the amount of details requires a broad familiarity with literature, especially Classical mythology and superhero comics. For instance, the strengths and weaknesses of Ozymandias, including his ambiguous motivations and vaunting ambitions, are comprehensible only through dialogue with a variety of ancient sources and comic-book archetypes.

## Ozymandias

The futility of Veidt's efforts is emphasized by the quotation: 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!' (*Watchmen* 11: 28). The following lines of P.B. Shelley's sonnet ('Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away') emphasize that everything declines, even the most powerful leaders and empires. They signify the cyclical nature of human endeavour as well as the long-term failure of Veidt's plan to create an everlasting peace (Cormier 2010: 95).

The poem paraphrases an inscription on a statue of Rameses II recorded by Diodorus Siculus. In his Historical Library, part of the pharaoh's throne

name is transliterated into the Greek as Ozymandias (1.47.4). Consequently, in *Watchmen*, a Romantic poem is used to quote a Greek scholar describing an Egyptian pharaoh. This indirect quotation suggests that Veidt, despite claiming the opposite, is not only closer to Alexander than Rameses but is also influenced by his own times. Even the Macedonian, despite being declared son of Ra, did not fully resemble the rulers of old. He and his successors Hellenized the land on the Nile and its culture. Similarly, Veidt will never be able to recreate what Rameses or even Alexander achieved. His time, with its different mentality and technological background, influences his actions just as strongly as the Greek culture affected the Macedonian's conquest. The quote from Shelley's sonnet is, however, consistent with Veidt's self-image. The title 'King of Kings' was given to both Rameses II and Alexander, but today, it is used most often when referring to Jesus Christ. This usage fits the industrialist's belief in his own messianic role.

Veidt's image of Alexander also resembles popular versions of the Macedonian and his conquests. In 1948, William Tarn wrote an influential biography of Alexander, in which the Macedonian is praised as the first person to transgress national boundaries and bring different cultures together (145–7). This positive interpretation appealed to the post-war readership and is evoked in Veidt's admiration for Alexander. It is more likely, however, that the partial integration of Persian nobility into Alexander's ruling class was not driven by moral considerations but by the Macedonian's need to strengthen his own position and army (Bosworth 1988: 271–3). Consequently, Veidt's actions suggest a selective reading of Alexander's legacy which influences his decision to achieve world unity by force.

Another symbol used in *Watchmen* to depict the human tendency to distort history is the Nepenthe old people's home where the first Silk Spectre resides. Its name derives from a drug in Homer's *Odyssey* (4.220–1) which is taken to quell sorrows through forgetfulness. Sally Jupiter, too, tries to forget the negative aspects of her life while she, in turn, is forgotten by the outside world. It is telling that Dan and Laurie visit her at the end of the novel, when they are trying to leave their past, and especially the knowledge acquired in Karnak behind them, in an attempt to restart their lives.

## **Mirrored Morals**

Classical influences can also be seen in other characters in *Watchmen*. The newsagent describes himself as having the weight of the world upon him but being able to take it like the Titan Atlas (*Watchmen* 3: 2). Since his

monologue is placed at the beginning of the chapter in which Dr Manhattan leaves Earth, it mirrors the superhuman being's situation. Equally, when the newsagent declaims how a man stands alone without being able to rely on anybody (*Watchmen* 3: 18), it corresponds with Dr Manhattan being defamed and shunned by other people. His role as stabilizer of the world is stressed when Rorschach, mocked by the newsagent, who says that the world did not end the day Dr Manhattan left the planet, replies 'Are you sure?' (*Watchmen* 3: 22), a point further underlined by President Nixon's refusal to accept responsibility after the superhero's departure (3: 27).

As symbol of the nuclear age and pivotal figure in the Cold War's arms race, Dr Manhattan forces Veidt's action against himself and New York. In this respect, he resembles the Titan Prometheus who, by aiding mankind, provoked the gods into punishing him and his charges. Like the Titan, Dr Manhattan is exiled to a rock (Mars) outside the human world. One of the punishments for Prometheus's act is the creation of Pandora, who brings evil into the world (cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 590–3). This sanction seems to accord with the quotation from Juvenal, the answer of a man advised to hire guards to prevent his wife from being unfaithful (Juvenal, *Satires* 6.346–8). Juvenal also claims that an age of great integrity ended when the gods started to sleep with mortal women (*Satires* 6.1–24), resulting allegedly in the moral depravity of the poet's own time.

As Backe (2010: 120–2) observes, the reference in Sally Jupiter's surname to the god with the largest number of mortal consorts acquires further resonance when she is nearly raped by and later falls in love with the Comedian. Furthermore, Sally acts like the married woman described by Juvenal, since she is artistically exploited by her husband but also betrays, manipulates and leaves him. Both her mistreatment and her own faults might refer to the great price that, according to Juvenal (*Satires* 6.73), the favours of a comedian can cost a woman. Additionally, Sally becomes the equivalent of the *Satires*' evil mother-in-law (6.231–42), when she forces her daughter to follow in her footsteps, turning Laurie into the she-gadiator described by Juvenal (*Satires* 6.247–65). Furthermore, Dr Manhattan leaves his girlfriend Janey Slater for a younger lover, causing her to become embittered like the ungrateful matron in *Satires* 6.420–50. Contrarily, Rorschach appears as the illegitimate child, a type with whom Juvenal sympathizes (*Satires* 6.600), and whose moral flaws result from the trauma caused by his mother, an unloving prostitute.

The flawed decisions made by the characters in *Watchmen* and the women in Juvenal's *Satires* are all influenced by other people. Like Juvenal, Moore and Gibbons address contemporary social problems when they

exaggerate certain mannerisms of their protagonists and set their novel in deliberate opposition to other popular texts. While the Roman poet satirizes the description of sophisticated, urban women in the works of Catullus and other poets, *Watchmen*'s authors present an array of figures with characteristics that generally do not appear in mainstream comics of the 1980s.

## Through the Ages

The various ages of mankind, which Juvenal referred to while contemplating the decline of morality, derive from Hesiod's *Works and Days* (109–201), a didactic poem that states how a constant decline from the Golden to the Bronze Age was followed by an Heroic Age that led to a brief improvement on what had gone before, leaving the Iron Age as a crucible in which the actions of mankind will decide how the future will develop. These ages are reflected in the names of the two Silk Spectres (Backe 2010: 130). In this reading Sally takes the name Jupiter, which belongs to the god that ended the Golden Age by overthrowing his father. Laurie on the other hand is named after an attribute of Classical rulers – the laurel leaves, and stands for the beginning of the Iron Age, ruled by human leaders.

The differences between the generations are highlighted by the behaviour of the two women. Sally is very conscious of society's expectations (Cormier 2010: 93). Her values and decisions are strongly affected by others, mostly by men. Laurie, on the other hand, follows her mother's wishes, but mostly acts according to her own will. When she finally overcomes Sally's influence, she decides to give up the costume worn by the first Silk Spectre and choose a more practical disguise. Her description of this costume (*Watchmen* 12: 30) in many ways resembles the one her father wore, after he went through a similar transformation during his youth. By contemplating wearing this token of her own identity, she symbolizes both the hope of a fresh start and the fear of an unchanging world in which people like the Comedian will always have a valid function. Her role as representative of the Iron Age and mankind's responsibility for the future is thus underlined.

This reading is confirmed on *Watchmen*'s penultimate page (12: 31) where a selection of the aforementioned graffiti and company names have been rewritten after the attack on New York. They now imply a sense of hope, which can be seen as a reference to Hesiod's *Works and Days* (96–9) in which Pandora closes her pitcher of evils when only hope is left inside. This can be seen as a further punishment, leaving humanity in a

state of despair, or as a blessing, since hope can lead to a false sense of security and subsequent idleness. This second reading suits the plot of *Watchmen* better, since the reluctance of his contemporaries to take responsibility has forced Veidt to act and the optimism on the final pages might yet prove to be a misjudgement. Contrarily, in many later versions of the myth, Pandora releases hope when she sees mankind suffering under the evils she unleashed. Consequently, the novel's ending remains open, leaving the outcome of Veidt's plan in the hands of humanity.

The previous ages of mankind are also depicted through the succeeding generations of superheroes. The Minutemen are romanticized as representatives of a Golden Age of costumed crime-fighting. This period ended when Dr Manhattan's arrival brought the Silver Age, leading to the Keene Act and thereafter the Bronze Age of masked vigilantes. The Comedian's demise then marks the beginning of the brief Heroic Age in which the costumed crime-fighters return, which ends with the attack on New York that starts the Iron Age. However, *Watchmen*'s various generations of masked vigilantes do not directly allude to Classical mythology. They roughly resemble common renditions of the history of superhero comics (Reynolds 1992: 8–9; Rosen 2006: 89), which in turn refer to Hesiod's ages of mankind. By putting the future into mankind's own hands, nostalgic views of the past are criticised in favour of an optimistic and responsible approach towards the future. Fittingly, Moore admits that *Watchmen* helped him to escape his own nostalgic view of the superhero genre (Cooke 2000: 105).

Since, however, Juvenal complains about contemporary audiences which can no longer distinguish between the best and the worst poets (*Satires* 1.1–32), the references to the mythological ages of mankind might allude to the quality of 1980s comics and their readers, suggesting that *Watchmen* is 'bringing light to the world' of such literature. If this is the case, then Moore no longer shares that opinion, as he has repeatedly pronounced his dissatisfaction with the way the comic book industry and especially the superhero genre have developed (Kelly 2013). In Moore's view the opportunity presented by the Iron Age has been missed.

## Olympian Perspectives

*Watchmen*'s cinema, Utopia, is another allusion to the futility of idealizing the past. It refers to Plato's *Republic* (5.473), in which an early utopian creation, Kallipolis, is described. This allegedly ideal city is ruled by philosopher-kings. These benevolent dictators are part of a three-class society in which farmers, watchmen and rulers are clearly distinguished. Veidt's actions,

when seen as crimes committed by an individual detached from everyday life, look like a paradigm for what goes wrong when two of these castes mix. However, the industrialist's decision might also be seen as a token of wisdom and strength in a difficult situation, which afforded the sacrifice of some to save the majority.

A similar decision is discussed in the motto of *Watchmen*'s third chapter, a quote from the Book of Genesis, in which Abraham tries to convince God not to destroy Sodom if it contains ten righteous people. This image reappears in *Watchmen* when a taxi driver assaults her girlfriend before the attack on New York (*Watchmen* 11: 20–8). The victim and the nine people that come to her aid constitute the number required to save the city in the Bible. This might indicate that Veidt is less merciful than Abraham's God or that he does not know about the good people among the city's populace. However, both these readings seem superfluous as the Bible fails to mention a search for righteous people in Sodom and does not reveal why God would save the city for ten good people, but not for Lot and his family (Backe 2010: 60).

*Watchmen* raises the question whether anybody acting from an Olympian perspective can be trusted in doing the right thing for individuals – no matter what their powers and intentions may be (Skoble 2005: 38–41). The saviour mind-set is scrutinized and with it the concept of superheroes as well as the limitations of anybody holding power. The novel prompts every human not to abdicate responsibility and so prevent situations from arising in which any group or individual could come to believe that mankind needs saving from itself.

A similar notion is discussed in a further text written by Shelley. His four-act lyrical closet drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) is based on the Aeschylean *Prometheia* trilogy, of which only *Prometheus Bound* and fragments of the other two plays remain. Shelley's drama does not, however, culminate like its Classical predecessor in reconciliation between the Titan and Jupiter. Instead, the father of the gods is overthrown which allows Prometheus to be released. Veidt attacks New York in the same chapter in which Shelley is quoted (*Watchmen* 11: 28). He tries to resolve the problem of the Cold War by removing the dominant force behind global politics. At the end of the novel doubts remain, but the revolution seems to have been successful, as no new tyrant has been installed and Veidt's ambition might prevail. In this respect, the novel resembles the conclusion of Shelley's work and the possible interpretation of Veidt as a potential bringer of light is underlined.

Both Ozymandias and Dr Manhattan are described as godlike by other characters and a child sees Jesus in Nite Owl (*Watchmen* 7: 24). The

attributes used to distinguish the masked crime-fighters show how modern superheroes are based upon Classical heroes and divinities. Even the depiction of Dr Manhattan's genitals is understated like those on Classical Greek statues. Additionally, his godlike powers are debated and he is shown to be an object of veneration among his enemies. Dr Manhattan's divine nature is further indicated by his birth name. Since 'Osterman' translates as 'Easterman', his surname can be read as a reference to the Resurrection. It also creates a further link to his return from oblivion which resembles Christ's rising from his grave. Additional parallels to Jesus occur when Dr Manhattan is betrayed by those closest to him and when he reappears during Veidt's attack on New York, as Christ is believed to do during the apocalypse (although, in Dr Manhattan's case, with little effect). His stay on Mars can also be seen as an equivalent to Jesus' forty days in the wilderness and the depictions of him floating above his contemporaries are reminiscent of traditional iconographical representations of Christ's Resurrection (Kukkonen 2008: 91–2).

Although Laurie accuses Dr Manhattan, who is literally a divine being created by a machine, of using a plot device from Classical Greek tragedy known as *deus ex machina* (*Watchmen* 10: 23), it is Veidt who apparently solves humanity's seemingly insurmountable problem. The invented alien is an appropriate final link in the chain of apocalyptic images from the Book of Revelation that include two beasts – one of the sea; the other a false prophet of the land. The alien is constructed from a giant squid that uses a psychic's mental powers to spread false messages. The successful outcome, though, of Veidt's fraud might yet prove to be a false prophecy. In both cases it resembles the second beast which speaks like a dragon according to Revelation 13:11, an image that is used to describe the heroes (*Watchmen* 7: 28) and might also point towards Ozymandias. Equally, the false prophet might allude to the deceptive nature of good and evil. In *Watchmen* the saviour of humanity kills millions while the divine being watches on.

## Conclusion

This variety of possible interpretations and references is typical of the way in which Classical elements are used in *Watchmen*. They not only refer to the novel's contents but comment on events outside its diegesis, which in turn might be used to discuss what is depicted in the novel. Some of these motifs form a series of clues which refer to each other and lead the reader through the plot. Others have additional, well-known meanings or allude to

allegorical myths and utilize these to pronounce their messages.

Similarly, historiographical references are used to underline certain elements. Classical pieces function as mirrors of today's morals while more modern texts are used to critically reflect on the past. Popular concepts of antiquity and poetical interpretations of the ancient world make the references more recognisable for the readers. Additionally, the distortion of historical events is made apparent so that the corrupting influence of narrative can be addressed. Other self-referential elements discuss the superhero genre and the comic industry as well as the plot and background of *Watchmen*. Various symbols and their meanings are commented upon by the novel's characters, not least, the Olympian perspective shared by gods, heroes and governmental agencies. Readers are prompted to take responsibility for their own lives and future.

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# Lands of the Dead: Homer's Hades and Le Guin's Dry Land

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Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* series is set in a preindustrial world which seems, at first sight, more mediaeval than Classical. It is a relatively small world, comprising a complex group of islands called the Archipelago (a Greek word in origin, denoting an island group), inhabited by a society of Hardic people who practise magic. To their northeast lie four islands called the Kargad lands, whose people reject magic entirely, but operate a warrior culture with a strong theocracy. Hardic magic is verbal, with each individual having a true name, normally kept secret as it provides the user with power over that individual. Somewhere in the far west there is a dry land, a place to which Hardic people go after death, keeping their true names as the essence of their identities. Various critics on Le Guin's work, such as Peter Hollindale (2003: 185), Sandra Lindow (2003: 36), Mike Cadden (2005: 81) and Richard Erlich (2010: 100), have all observed that *Earthsea's* dry land resembles the ancient conception of Hades, but have not explored this further. In an online Q&A session for *The Guardian* in 2004, Le Guin herself suggested that 'The dark, dry, changeless world after death of *Earthsea* comes (in so far as I am conscious of its sources) from the Greco-Roman idea of Hades' realm', among other sources (Le Guin 2004). I propose to read Le Guin's dry land through the lens of one ancient depiction of Hades, and to show how it problematizes conceptions of Hades and of heroism itself.

Ancient Greco-Roman, Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythologies contain a number of heroic journeys to the land of the dead, generally undertaken while the heroic traveller is still alive. Susan Bernardo and Graham Murphy, acknowledging the ancient roots of the fantastic, have noted that 'it is this ability to return from death that marks these figures as heroic and extraordinary' (2006: 112). Some of the most famous Greek heroes to have made such a journey include Polydeuces and Orpheus, who went to rescue a brother or wife respectively, or Heracles and Theseus, who each attempted to steal from Hades. The task of passing through death while still alive and travelling to the underworld can be seen as a rite of passage for a Greek hero. One such journey is described in considerable detail by Odysseus, providing a visual and intricate picture of the location and nature of the land of the dead.

Following the example of his mythological elders, Odysseus claims to

have made his own heroic journey on a quest into Hades, and, having made a safe return, is able to give a first-hand account of the place. He relates in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* an account, albeit a highly contradictory one, of the places he saw and the people he met there. Odysseus is the most mendacious of Greek heroes, so his account becomes rather more fantastic when his listeners offer him extra gifts during the so-called *intermezzo* (*Odyssey* 11.333-77). Whether we believe his story or not, his description of Hades (with accompanying surviving evidence for Greek chthonic cults) offers a fascinating template for Le Guin's dry land in *Earthsea*. Although the dry land appears, at least briefly, in all the *Earthsea* books published to date, it is in the most recent, *The Other Wind* (2001), where the dry land is explored in the greatest depth, and where it is also finally dismantled.

### The Western Lands

At the start of his narrative, Odysseus gives the impression of Hades as a murky realm. He claims to have travelled to the ends of the earth to find it, in the west beyond the sun's reach. His starting point is already within fantasyland, namely the home of the daughter of the sun, Circe, whose island Aeaëa, Odysseus tells us, lies at the easternmost edge of the world (*Odyssey* 12.3-4). He is unable to travel from this island without divine intervention, as it is not located in the geography of the everyday mortal world. Odysseus reaches Circe's island by accident, and indeed, when he arrives on the island, Odysseus states 'we don't where the west is, nor where dawn is' [οὐ γάρ τ' ἴδμεν, ὅπη ζόφος οὐδ' ὅπη ἠώς] (*Odyssey* 10.190), because the geography of fantasyland is beyond his comprehension. He therefore requires the assistance of the 'fair favourable wind filling the sails' [ἔμμενον οὐδον ... πλησίσιον] (*Odyssey* 11.7) which Circe has provided to send him in the right direction. He leaves Circe's island at sunrise, and sails due west, as the geographical surroundings become gloomier and darker until eventually 'The sun went down, and all the ways were dark, as the ship reached deep flowing Ocean's boundary' [δύσετό τ' ἠέλιος σκιῶντό τε πάσαι ἀγυαί. / ἡ δ' ἐς πείραθ' ἔκανε βαθυρροῦ Ὠκεανοῖο] (*Odyssey* 11.12-13).

In the ancient world, the Ocean was imagined as a river encircling the earth (for example, as portrayed on Achilles' shield in *Iliad* 18), and so crossing the Ocean took the traveller beyond the edge of the world. The sun went down just as the ship reached the edge of the Ocean, implying that to the west beyond everything was shrouded in darkness: 'There is the kingdom and the city of the Cimmerian people, hidden in mist and cloud' [ἐνθα δὲ Κιμμερίων ἀνδρῶν δῆμός τε πόλις τε, / ἥερι καὶ νεφέλῃ κεκαλυμμένοι]

(*Odyssey* 11.14-15).

The kingdom of the Cimmerians is hidden in darkness because it is situated at the far western edge of the world, where the sun never rises since the land lies beyond the sun's path, and also beyond the mortal world. Odysseus' journey is heroic in a number of ways: it is impossible for him to reach his destination without divine assistance – not only would he not know how to navigate the correct way, he would not be able to go far enough in the right direction of his own accord. In addition, the final part of the journey requires navigating through a misty, cloudy darkness, without the familiar stars by which the ancients were able to navigate at night. Finally, judging by his description, Odysseus has sailed from one end of the earth (the far east) to the other (the far west) in *only one day* (cf. Nakassis 2004: 230), for which supernatural or divine assistance is surely a requirement.

Beyond the edge of the western world is in many cultures a suitable location for the dead to reside. In one of Le Guin's earlier Earthsea books, *The Farthest Shore* (1973), Ged's heroic journey to the land of the dead also takes him to what is physically the western edge of Earthsea: to the island of Selidor, the furthest west of all the islands in the Archipelago. His skills as an Archmage allow him to frame the spells which carry him and his companion Arren (the future king Lebannen) to Selidor, and then to the west beyond, the point where Odysseus had to rely on divine assistance. On the journey as they sail towards Selidor 'the way ahead grew dark' (Le Guin 1979: 439), and on Selidor itself, as they walk west, 'a mist veiled the sky, no stars shone above the hills' (446-7). This imagery echoes the way Odysseus describes his voyage as becoming dark and misty, although as Odysseus does not have the knowledge of how to return, his perception of how he arrived at the far west also remains somewhat misty. On the other hand, Ged, as a wizard, has the knowledge and skills to understand exactly where he is headed, and how to get there. During the time which has passed since Ged's voyage, things have changed in Earthsea, and there are no such heroic journeys in *The Other Wind*.

As stated earlier, Odysseus' narrative is highly contradictory. Since antiquity, *Odyssey* 11 has provoked many questions about its composition, authenticity and coherence. A helpful overview of some of these questions is provided by Heubeck and Hoekstra (1989: 75), and a detailed consideration of the problems appears in Sourvinou-Inwood (1995: 84-5). In the second century BCE, the Alexandrian scholiast Aristarchus was said to have questioned the coherence of the whole episode, a critique which Lucian parodies in his *True History* (2.20). In the epic, Odysseus claims

that his journey was triggered by Circe's instructions that he had to visit the Halls of Hades to consult Teiresias about how he might return home (Odyssey 10.490-3, 539-40). However, Teiresias does not provide him with any particularly helpful information; it is in fact Circe who tells him what he needs to know after he has returned to her (Odyssey 12.37-141).

Odysseus' own descriptions of the landscape in Hades are initially dark and shadowy, as he seems to imagine being at an entrance or threshold; but later, he describes Achilles walking along an 'asphodel meadow' [ἀσφοδελὸν λιμῶνα] (Odyssey 11.539, 573), and subsequently claims to have seen various famous punishments in the underworld, some of which would have required him to enter and journey through the land itself (Odyssey 11.568-626). Significantly, to speak with the shades, Odysseus is told by Circe (10.529-30) and Teiresias (11.147-8) to carry out a ritual by which he must let them drink fresh blood from a trench he has prepared, and yet he seems to pay haphazard attention to this requirement in his meetings with the shades in the latter half of the book. These inconsistencies perhaps reflect the range of 'contradictory ideas about the afterlife' in archaic Greece (Ogden 2002: 182). Perhaps more simply, Odysseus is enhancing his story to elicit more presents from the Phaeacians, particularly in the second half of his narrative (Wyatt 1989: 240). However, there is one aspect of the complex nature of Odysseus' meeting with the dead which is central to my reading of Le Guin's interpretation of the Odyssean Hades.

### **Heroic *katabasis* or necyomantic rite?**

Bruce Loudon (2011: 197) has said that Odyssey 11 combines three distinct genres of myth, two of which are the *katabasis* (a physical descent by the hero into the underworld) and the *nekuomanteion* or 'necyomantic rite', a cultic ritual by which the souls of the dead are summoned and consulted at a dedicated shrine. Michael Clarke has suggested that 'we begin with an account of conjuration of spirits (*nekuomanteion*) but end up with a journey through the underworld (*katabasis*)' (Clarke 1999: 215). More recently, Odysseus Tsagarakis has problematized the mixture of the two strands in the Book, questioning whether it is, or was, 'originally, a *nekyomanteia*, a *catabasis* or both' (Tsagarakis 2000: 12), and exploring how these two 'major themes [...] are both used here and interwoven in a way that creates problems' (Tsagarakis 2000: 46). However, I would suggest that Odysseus' physical sea voyage to the far western edge of the world on the other side of the Ocean forms the very first part of his *katabasis*, and it is then fulfilled by his later sightseeing trip within that realm

at *Odyssey* 11.568-626. That part of the journey occurs mainly in the later part of his narrative – that is, after the Phaeacians have promised him more presents if he continues to tell his story. If Odysseus is indeed enhancing his account in the hope of increased payment, then a return to the rather grander physical journey with appropriate landmarks would certainly be more impressive. In this reading, the early part of Odysseus' adventure is built around the necyomantic ritual, which is not a standard feature of the literary heroic journey.

In order to talk to the shades of the dead, Odysseus first digs a trench, then he pours a libation to the dead while praying to them, and finally, he sacrifices designated animals:

I dug a pit a cubit's length this way and that, and around it I poured a libation to all the dead [...] I repeatedly entreated the helpless heads of the dead [...] When, with vows and prayers, I'd beseeched the swarms of corpses, I took the sheep and cut their throats over the pit, and the dark blood flowed into it. They gathered up out of Erebus, the souls of the dead who had died. (*Odyssey* 11.25-37)

[βόθρον ὄρυξ' ὄσσον τε πυγούσιον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,  
ἀμφ' αὐτῶ δὲ χοῆν χεόμεν πᾶσιν νεκέεσσι ...  
πολλὰ δὲ γουνοῦμην νεκῶν ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα ...  
τοὺς δ' ἐπεὶ εὐχολῆσι λιτῆσί τε, ἔθνεα νεκρῶν  
ἐλλισιάμην, τὰ δὲ μῆλα λαβῶν ἀπεδειροτόμησα  
ἐς βόθρον, ῥέε δ' αἶμα κελαινεφές· αἱ δ' ἀγέροντο  
ψυχαὶ ὑπέξ' Ἐρέβους νεκῶν κατατεθνηῶτων.]

This necyomantic ritual is quite different from, and much more sinister than, the standard heroic journey, particularly considering the graphic slaughtering of the animals and the blood which he collects. To carry out this ritual, Odysseus need not have journeyed to the far west: Daniel Ogden has shown how necyomantic rites may have been carried out at tombs or at necyomantic shrines in the ancient world (Ogden 2001: 96). Pausanias, in his *Description of Greece*, suggests that Odysseus' description resembles the geography of Thesprotia, where such a shrine existed (1.17.5). The rituals which Odysseus carries out form a pattern of events which are more complex than a physical journey to the land of the dead. It requires him to be situated in an appropriate place from which he can call or summon the dead to come to him.

In Le Guin's *The Other Wind*, some aspects of the communication with the dead appear to resemble elements of the ancient necyomantic rite. Alder is a village sorcerer, who has never learnt any of the great arts of magery in Earthsea, which require long study and education at the school

of wizardry. He is just a simple mender who has recently lost his wife Lily. Alder does not possess the grand skills which the Archmage of the earlier books had learnt and practised; he has not got the power or knowledge to travel to the lands of the dead through a physical heroic journey. And yet he seems, in a dream at first, to meet the dead and talk to them. But there is something strange about the way this happens. He did not summon the dead to come to him; he says himself, when accused of having actively made the journey, 'I have no such art' (Le Guin 2003: 31). Instead, the dead have summoned Alder to come to them, on their terms. Alder tells his story to Ged:

I stood on a hillside. Along the top of the hill and running down the slope was a wall, low, like a boundary wall between sheep pastures. She was standing across the wall from me, below it. It was darker there. She was calling to me. I heard her voice saying my name, and I went to her. I knew she was dead, I knew it in the dream, but I was glad to go. I couldn't see her clear [...] And she reached out across the wall [...] She was reaching her hands out to me, and so I reached out to her, and we took each other's hands. (Le Guin 2003: 18)

Alder describes how he was called, initially by Lily, to the edge of the dry land. He does not cross the boundary of the wall of stones, but remains at the liminal point between the lands of the living and the dead. He does, though, hold Lily's hands across that liminal wall. Unlike Odysseus, Alder has not carried out any rituals for summoning the dead, and he has not even travelled physically to a key place from which he might call to the dead. He describes how, in a dream, he simply found himself standing at the point where the land of the living borders on the land of the dead. It appears from his story that it is he who has been summoned, by his dead wife. This is a strange reversal of the ancient necyomantic rite, one where the dead have summoned the living to the place at which communication between the two can happen, rather than the other way around.

## **Liminal places**

The necyomantic rite allows the dead and the living to come together in the same place, a place that is in-between the two worlds. That liminal place is a transitional point; as Ogden notes of the ritual by the pit in the *Odyssey*: 'the living had to die a little and the dead had to come to life a little' (Ogden 2001: 254). Odysseus' pit has become this liminal place, and both sides have had to travel to meet in the middle; on the one hand,

'they gathered up out of Erebus, the souls of the dead who had died' [αἱ δ' ἀγέροντο | ψυχαὶ ὑπὲξ Ἑρέβου νεκῶν κατατεθνηώτων] (*Odyssey* 11.36-7), while Odysseus' mother asks him, 'how did you come *beneath* the gloomy darkness?' [πῶς ἦλθες ὑπὸ ζόφον ἠερόεντα;] (*Odyssey* 11.155). Odysseus has travelled down to reach the souls of the dead, and the souls have come up to see him, and they meet in this liminal place.

Le Guin's wall of stones is a visual marker of the division between the worlds of the living and of the dead at that liminal point, and plays the same symbolic role. Alder does not cross the wall of stones (in fact, to do so is to die); he merely finds himself on the hillside by the wall, and in the same way the dead do not go beyond the wall. The dead come up to the wall to talk to the living, either in response to the call of the Summoner of Roke, or to summon Alder themselves. However, when the Summoner of Roke tries to summon the soul of Alder's dead wife, something goes wrong with his attempt. Although the Summoner speaks Lily's true name, which should form part of the ritual summoning her, it is not Lily's soul that comes to the wall, but the soul of an unknown child. In addition, Alder himself is increasingly summoned to the liminal wall, until he cannot sleep without being summoned, and eventually the summoning becomes so strong that he is able to take others with him. Even more disturbingly, perhaps, the dead reach across the wall, and try to touch Alder.

When Odysseus tries to embrace the soul of his dead mother, he is unable to do so:

'Three times I rushed, and my heart urged me to hold her, and three times she flew from my hands like a shadow, or even a dream'  
[τρὶς μὲν ἐφωρμήθην, ἐλέειν τέ με θυμὸς ἄνωγε, / τρὶς δέ μοι ἐκ χειρῶν σκιῆ εἶκελον ἦ καὶ ὀνείρω / ἔπττα'] (*Odyssey* 11.206-8).

Tsagarakis has argued that the concept of an immaterial soul did not exist in Homer's time, and he suggests instead that Odysseus' dead are imagined to be corporeal beings who can drink blood and fear the hero's drawn sword (2000: 105-6). However, this image demonstrates the metaphorical distance between the living and the dead: even though Odysseus and his mother can stand opposite one another and talk, they do not seem to exist on the same plane of reality. The physical connection between them is symbolized in the way that Odysseus' blood drains out of him as 'pale fear' [χλωρὸν δέος] seized him (*Odyssey* 11.43), while the shades then drink the blood he has provided. Ogden imagines that this works as if Odysseus' 'blood level, and life level, are brought into a sort of hydraulic equilibrium with that of the ghosts, so that communication can take place' (2001:

254). The living and the dead meet at a liminal point, both geographically and physically. But in *The Other Wind*, the fact that the dead can reach out and touch Alder shows us that something has gone wrong; this is then underlined by the darkened marks on his skin that Alder shows Ged, on the places where the dead have touched him:

[Alder] held his hand out as he spoke, showing a darkness on the back and palm like an old bruise.

'I've learnt not to let them touch me,' he said in a low voice. [...]

'[Alder], you've been in mortal danger,' [Ged] said, also softly. (Le Guin 2003: 20-1)

The direct physical contact Alder has had with the dead has put him in deadly danger in a way that Odysseus' distant conversations with the dead have not.

In the Homeric epic, Odysseus remains in control of his necyomantic rite, choosing which of the dead he wishes to speak to by letting them go near the blood, which he protects with his sword. Teiresias tells him how it is only by letting them drink the blood that the souls will be able to speak to him, and his mother only recognizes him after drinking the blood:

Whichever of the dead who have died you let go near the blood will speak to you infallibly, but whichever you begrudge will indeed go back again. (*Odyssey* 11.147-9)

[ὄν τινα μὲν κεν ἕξ νεκῶν κατατεθνηῶτων

αἵματος ἄσσον ἴμεν, ὃ δέ τοι ἡμερτὲς ἐνίψει:

ὣ δέ κ' ἐπιφθονέοις, ὃ δέ τοι πάλιν εἴσιν ὀπίσσω.]

Thus Odysseus has some degree of control over his encounters with the dead. Alder, however, has no such power to choose which of the dead he wishes to speak to; he tries to find Lily on his subsequent visits to the wall, but he cannot locate her among the crowds of the dead. And when he calls her, even by her true name, she does not come to him; rather, it is the dead who call him, summoning him by *his* true name. It is not just the dead he knows who summon him, he is summoned by whole crowds of the dead, some of whom he knows and some of whom he does not:

[...] as he came closer to the wall he saw a crowd of shadowy people on the other side, some clear and some dim, some he seemed to know and others he did not know, and all of them reached out their hands to him as he approached and called him by his name: 'Hara! let us come with you! Hara, set us free!'

'It's a terrible thing to hear one's true name called by strangers,' Alder

said, 'and it's a terrible thing to be called by the dead.' (Le Guin 2003: 21)

Alder is understandably frightened by the power the dead have over him. Moreover, this power violates and inverts Odysseus' original necyomantic rite.

Debbie Felton has suggested that while the *katabasis* was a heroic accomplishment, the necyomantic rite was not: 'necromancy carried with it no glory for those facing the dead. It was one thing to travel yourself to the land of the dead – whether literally or metaphorically – and face your mortality, but quite another to force the dead to come to you' (Felton 2007: 96). Alder's inverted necyomantic rite is even less heroic in Felton's sense, as he is forced by the dead to come to them. But on another level, he takes much greater risks, and ultimately is in much greater danger, than Odysseus at the edge of Hades.

### **The dead and the restless dead**

Odysseus repeatedly describes the inhabitants of the land of the dead as 'the dead who have died' [νεκῶν κατατεθνηώτων] (*Odyssey* 11.37, 147, 541, 564; cf. 491), and as feeble, whether as disembodied heads or phantoms of their original selves: 'the helpless heads of the dead' [νεκῶν ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα] (*Odyssey*, 11.29); 'phantoms of exhausted mortals' [βροτῶν εἶδωλα καμόντων] (*Odyssey*, 11.476). Michael Clarke has suggested that the dead Odysseus meets are 'worn down to almost nothing' (1999: 194), and that it is their 'lack of life, strength and substance, expressed in their flitting movement, that gives them the same name as is the cold breath of death' [ψυχῆ, 'shade', 'last breath'] (1999: 148). Certainly, these shades pose no real threat to Odysseus, as they show respect for his unsheathed sword, and have no physical existence to do him any actual harm. Considering this, we may even think Odysseus' final exit from Hades rather pathetic, as he is overcome by terror at the sight of crowds of the dead, and runs away: 'countless swarms of the dead gathered with a mighty roar: pale terror seized me' [ἔθνε' ἀγείρετο μυρία νεκρῶν / ἠχῆ θεσπεσίη: ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἦρει] (*Odyssey* 11.632-3). By contrast, Alder has to face crowds of the dead calling on him, summoning him to the wall, night after night, and furthermore, they have the power to hurt him physically.

However, the same terror also affects Odysseus when he initially raises the dead. The spirits who rise up first are the young, those who have suffered, and those who were killed in battle. In other words, they are those who have died in an untimely fashion, without having completed their lives naturally. They appear uncontrolled at first, which frightens Odysseus:

'The great numbers swarmed around the pit from all over the place with a mighty clamour: pale terror seized me' [οἱ πολλοὶ περὶ βόθρον ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος / θεσπεσίη ἰαχῆ: ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ἤρει] (*Odyssey* 11.42-3).

Jan Bremmer has termed these 'the abnormal dead', who have not had the proper burial rites, and are therefore not fully integrated into the land of the dead (1983: 103). Sarah Iles Johnston has suggested that this description implies ideas that 'the abnormal dead lingered between the two worlds and that they were a source of potential trouble for the living' (1999: 11). They become what she calls 'the restless dead', and on both occasions when they frighten Odysseus, they appear in an uncontrolled mass, 'countless' and 'great numbers' swarming around him. They resemble the dead whom Alder encounters, who appear first as 'a crowd of shadowy people' (Le Guin 2003: 21), and later as 'crowding, calling shadows' (Le Guin 2003: 224). Earthsea's dead are 'restless', as they cause trouble to the living, even without leaving the land of the dead, and it is this aspect which particularly frightens Alder, who cannot control them. Unlike the restless dead in the *Odyssey*, the restless dead in the dry land are not limited to those whose deaths were untimely. The restlessness signifies something else which has gone wrong.

Puzzled by what the more knowledgeable Earthsea wizards tell him about the nature of the dead, Alder asks: 'Then why do the dead not die?' (Le Guin 2003: 188). Although Odysseus describes the 'dead' in Hades as those who have explicitly died, in the sense that they have finished the process of dying (and, in most cases, of being buried), Alder senses that there is something wrong with the idea that the soul, no longer connected to the body, must, as he says, 'wear a semblance of the body' (Le Guin 2003: 188) in a dark unchanging land. This suggests Clarke's reading of the Homeric 'shade' or 'last breath' [ψυχή] as a phantom, an 'image' [εἶδωλον] of the man which resembles him in appearance, but lacks his substance (Clarke 1999: 148). Odysseus may congratulate Achilles on having power among the dead, but Achilles corrects him:

Don't console me about death, brilliant Odysseus. I'd rather be a hired farmhand, slaving for another, for a landless man who hasn't much substance, than rule all the dead who have died. (*Odyssey* 11.488-91)  
[μὴ δὴ μοι θάνατόν γε παραύδα, φαίδιμ' Ὀδυσσεύ.  
βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλω,  
ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρω, ᾧ μὴ βίωτος πολὺς εἶη,  
ἢ πᾶσι νεκέεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.]

Clearly, being dead is not much fun: Achilles' power is illusory if the dead of Hades are indeed just helpless phantoms, lacking any real strength. This is not the glory of death for heroes who have achieved fame in life.

## The dry land and beyond

Towards the end of *The Other Wind*, it is revealed to both characters and readers that the location of the dry land, like that of Hades, is in 'the west beyond the west' (Le Guin 2003: 227). This location, beyond the mortal world, is supernatural: it is the land of the dragons in Earthsea, and the divine grove of Persephone in the *Odyssey* (10.509). Humans cannot travel there without assistance, whether magical (as wizards use) or divine (as Odysseus claims to have used). Earthsea's dry land is an artificial creation, originally built to allow the souls of all the Hardic people who died to live forever in that supernatural land, having taught their 'souls to conquer death' (Le Guin 2003: 145), although this has turned into a Pyrrhic victory: 'no beings go there at death but human beings' (144). There is also an absence of animals in the Odyssean Hades, and Bremmer has argued that in archaic Greece 'the animal free soul was not believed to go to Hades' (1983: 127). In Earthsea, dragons reside in the west beyond the west:

The ancients saw that the dragons' realm was not of the body only. That they could fly ... outside of time, it may be [...] There they claimed part of that realm as their own. A timeless realm, where the self might be forever [...] they made a wall which no living body could cross [...] (Le Guin 2003: 227)

However, this division of a supernatural location, walling it off from the rest of the surrounding lands, leads to stagnation: 'The sea withdrew. The mountains of sunrise became the mountains of the night. Those that died came to a dark land, a dry land' (228). The resulting land is dark and dry because it lacks location and direction in its isolation from its surrounds. However, I would like to return to an idea raised at the start about the geography of Odysseus' travels: he claims to have sailed from one end of fantasyland to the other in *only one day*. This odd geography is a peculiarity of fantasyland. Nakassis has argued that the *Odyssey* contains a conflation of unipolar and bipolar cosmologies, whereby 'the edges of the world are simultaneously conceived of as central' (2004: 219). However, when the wall of stones in the dry land is dismantled, Alder notices that 'it was no longer dark' (Le Guin 2003: 238), and the dry land ceases to exist as dawn brightens:

There was an east now, where there had been no direction. There was east and west, and light and motion. (239)

In this way, directions return to what was the dry land, now rejoined with the location known only as 'the other wind'. Ironically, the dragon Kalessin revealed earlier that when this happens, the Archipelago will be permanently divided from the other wind: 'There will be no way west. Only the forest will be, as it is always, at the centre' (Le Guin 2003: 152). The characters' final journey to the wall of stones in the dry land was made from that forest, which is simultaneously both the centre of the world and the gate to the edge of the world.

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# From Stapledon's *Star Maker* to Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*: The Visionary Cosmic Voyage as a Speculative Genre

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Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937) is an outstanding modern example of a particular genre: the visionary cosmic voyage, a genre that can be said to have its origin in Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* (*Somnium Scipionis*) (c. 52 BCE).<sup>1</sup> Cicero's secular, proto-science-fictional approach is subsequently embraced by Stapledon; *Star Maker* brings this literary tradition to a culmination, in both its ambition and scope, while remaining faithful to Cicero and his successors in terms of their exploration of the sublime. This discussion will begin with *Star Maker* and work backwards chronologically, so that the chain of literary transmission from modern sf to its Classical forerunners may be clarified.

Although the place of Stapledon's *Star Maker* in sf literature seems secure, there is no denying that it is also a little-read and often misunderstood work (Tremaine 1982: 243). In contrast to H. G. Wells' scientific romances, or dystopias such as those written by Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, Stapledon's literary output is little known among mainstream critics and literary historians. On the other hand, his work appears outlandish when compared to genre sf. In this context, one of the reasons for the relative neglect of *Star Maker* could be that it has little to offer to lovers of the novelistic thrill. *Star Maker* does not offer the common narrative staples sought by most readers, not least because it is not a novel. Assuming the novel as the main fictional expression of our times, it can be understood that for many readers 'fiction' equals 'novel'. In his study of *Star Maker*, Patrick McCarthy attempts to dispel confusion about the form taken by Stapledon's work:

In his Preface, Stapledon modestly says that 'by the standards of the Novel, [*Star Maker*] is remarkably bad,' adding, 'In fact, it is no novel at all.' Indeed, *Star Maker* is less a novel than a visionary poem or a philosophical fiction: despite some brilliant narrative efforts, it does not develop character and plot in the usual senses of those terms. (McCarthy 2004: xx, brackets in the original)

Despite Stapledon's guidance, even McCarthy's introduction repeatedly

refers to the work as a novel. Although arguably written in the Wellsian tradition of scientific romance, *Star Maker* is no more a novel than another major work in the same tradition as George Bernard Shaw's play *Back to Methuselah* (1921).

McCarthy tentatively refers to *Star Maker* as being either a visionary poem or a philosophical fiction. Both terms could be helpful in understanding *Star Maker* although neither is adequately defined. As a *conte philosophique*, however, in the tradition of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Star Maker* does seek to entertain its readers by appealing primarily to their imagination rather than their reason. The text offers a wealth of worlds and universes which require us to suspend our disbelief. While *Star Maker* has plenty of philosophical passages, it is not, generally speaking, an essay.

Might it then be a poem? This contention would not be as far off the mark as stating that *Star Maker* is a novel, for there are indeed some epic poems in prose – for instance, Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Granville's *The Last Man (Le Dernier Homme)* (1805) – but a poetic reading of Stapledon's work conflicts with the fact that his prose lacks poetical devices. Furthermore, an epic poem, such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1668), is still a narrative with well-defined characters whose story develops over time (cf. Ricoeur 1984: 3). *Star Maker* focuses rather on space: it is not succession that creates its meaning but magnitude, as Stapledon's 'A Note on Magnitude' and timescales indicates. Although this magnitude is both temporal and spatial, it is the spatial dimension which predetermines *Star Maker* as a text. The narrative emerges from a vision to be thoroughly explored rather than a story to be told. In fact, there is hardly any storyline in *Star Maker*. Readers are instead offered a cosmic outlook which is progressively uncovered by a nameless, first-person narrator, who acts as their intermediary with the ever-expanding space of Stapledon's fictional universe. The Narrator returns to Earth with a sort of transfigured resignation, but has gone through time without major development, because he has been observing, not acting. Consequently, the text is fundamentally descriptive, and the narrative's alleged clumsiness is a result of a misreading of its genre.

Contrary to Gérard Genette's claim that 'there are no descriptive genres' (Genette 1982: 134), description can fully support a complete textual construction, being central to a number of fictional genres in a similar way to narration's centrality to the novel and dialogue to stage drama. In genres and sub-genres such as the epic, utopia or travelogue, even if they occasionally permit lengthy narrative or dialogue passages, both of these elements could be dispensed with while description remains essential. These genres not only prove that descriptive fiction is possible,

they have also supplied world literature with an important cultural resource.

For example, *Star Maker* has been productively compared to Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (c. 1308–21) (McCarthy 1981: 266–79). The general structure of these works is broadly similar. A first-person narrator reports what s/he has seen in a visionary voyage, which takes the Narrator from this world's petty concerns to a quasi-mystical vision of the whole universe, and of the mind that shapes it. This journey is not physical but spiritual. The Narrator does not really move. Rather, he expands his capacity for seeing things as they are under the surface, so that his perception widens until it encompasses the whole Cosmos, natural and/or supernatural. All the while he keeps his primary status as a spectator, showing us an expansive landscape to observe and enjoy (cf. Hamon 1993: 69). The ever-widening perspective allows for continuous new vistas. This dynamic process prevents the potential stasis of description, and takes the best advantage of the vastness of the imagined landscape, the details of which are also presented in a dynamic way. The descriptive voice introduces variety by modifying its focus during the visit to that imaginary landscape (or dreamscape). In *Star Maker*, the appearance of nebulae can be described in a few sentences or paragraphs, while a planet can be thoroughly described, including its population, its past and its present. Variety is also introduced through narration. For example, a war among species can be described by Stapledon in considerable detail in narrative fragments which also add to the discursive variety, in the same way that Dante uses the tales of *Francesca da Rimini* and *Ulysses* to break the potentially monotonous descriptions of hellish torture. By the same token, argumentative passages enhance not only their philosophical content but also the descriptive frame in which they are embedded.

A clearer distinction would emerge from their different subjects. Both protagonists embark on visionary journeys, but the emphasis in Dante is religious and supernatural, while in Stapledon it is secular and based on the natural cosmos, in spite of its theological undertones. Stapledon's quest is not only agnostic but also, and primarily, located in a material universe, contrary to the otherworldly cosmos of *The Divine Comedy*. The other world versus this world, the afterlife versus this life (even if expanded to encompass time and the whole universe), are the binary oppositions which distinguish both works as well as their literary traditions.

In the visionary cosmic voyage, the universe is depicted according to contemporary scientific knowledge in order to convey a philosophical and/or astronomical view of an essentially materialist nature. This genre could be defined as a non-narrative literary fiction about (part of) a material

astronomical universe, described in the first person by a character who mentally visits it as an ever-widening, static or dynamic cosmic landscape, devoid of any supernatural dimension. Cosmology underpins description in this genre, even if the final results can be removed from any scientific notion of the described space. In contrast, the visionary supernatural voyage undertaken by the characters in Dante or Milton is underpinned by a mythical religious heritage based on holy scripture and legend, including mythological and theological figures such as angels, devils, and the God of positive religion.<sup>2</sup> Both approaches are sufficiently different to warrant their categorical distinction as well as their different evolution in Western literature.

One of the earliest descriptions of the afterlife in world literature is the Platonic myth of *Er* (*Republic* 10.614–21). Christianity introduced a very different view of the other world, stratified between the pleasures of Heaven and the torments of Hell. In modern times, secular fiction has produced some ironic and/or iconoclastic heavenly or hellish realms, such as the afterlife portrayed in Mark Twain's *Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* (1909). However, even these modern agnostic instances are still based in a pool of legendary tropes and motifs which take root in myth rather than science. *Star Maker* is almost unique as a twentieth-century example of the visionary cosmic voyage. Both scientific romance and genre sf have typically preferred the novelistic form for their cosmic vistas. Exceptions include *A Man Beyond the Universe* (*Un Hombre más Allá del Universo*) (1935) by the Mexican author, Doctor Atl (Gerardo Murillo). This interesting work has remained obscure, however, and it is unlikely that Stapledon would have been aware of it. It is also unlikely that he knew of H. P. Lovecraft's 'Aletheia Phrikodes', the visionary section of the 1916 fable in verse, 'The Poe-et's Nightmare', or of *Behind the Veil* (1893) by the Canadian poet, James De Mille (cf. Monk 1978: 38–53). Although this poem combines a cosmological dream and a vision of the spiritual realm which pervades the cosmos, De Mille stays within religious orthodoxy.

This was not the case with the most influential nineteenth-century author of cosmic writings, Camille Flammarion, whose fame was so great that his books were translated into numerous languages and were instrumental in the shaping of scientific romance. He is almost forgotten today, perhaps due to his rejection of the novel as a literary form. His writings adopt the historical discourse, as in *Omega: The Last Days of the World* (*La Fin du monde*) (1894), or the visionary cosmic description, as in *Lumen* (1887 in its final revised version). Brian Stableford asserts that *Star Maker* 'might be regarded as a definitive updating' of *Lumen* and continues:

Whether Stapledon ever read *Lumen* or not, *Star Maker* sets out to do a very similar job in presenting an image of the universe revealed by early twentieth-century telescopes, and imagining the many kinds of life that might be contained within it. Like Flammarion's cosmic schema, Stapledon's is a product of design, which has a progressive process built into it at the most fundamental level. (Stableford 2002: xxxiv)

There are, however, substantial differences between the two visionary cosmic voyages. Flammarion did not believe in any formal, organized religion, but was instead a passionate spiritualist. He populated his astronomical worlds with inhabitants both strange and familiar, many of them being reincarnations of earthly souls after death. As such, even his most daringly imagined aliens are far more human-looking than Stapledon's cosmic creations. In addition, Flammarion's world-view was starkly positivist while Stapledon's philosophy was far more sceptical regarding the potential benefits of science. Nevertheless Flammarion, who certainly inspired many other writers, could well have fuelled Stapledon's imagination too.

In *Life in a Thousand Worlds* (1905), William Shuler Harris mentally visited a rich variety of planets, describing their populations and habitats as Flammarion had done. Harris's vision lacks the poetic enthusiasm that pervades both Flammarion's work and Pedro Castera's possible early imitation, 'A Celestial Voyage' ('Un Viaje Celeste' (1872), regarded as a minor classic in Mexico, and published the same year as Flammarion's first version of *Lumen*, entitled *Stories of Infinity* [*Récits de l'Infini*]). It is worth noting that Castera does not imagine alien beings; he emphasizes instead his personal vision of the sublime beauty of the stars that he beholds in his brief but intense journey through the cosmos. The same could be said of one of Wells's early fictions, 'Under the Knife' (1896), which has a similar subject and structure to Castera's astral projection, although the sense of the sublime tends to overwhelm the anesthetized dreamer, instead of elevating him as in Castera's vision. Despite this difference in mood, these short works share a common emphasis on personal feelings, as do other similar visions such as Valentí Almirall's 'Un Manuscrit de Savi o de Boig' ('A Manuscript Written by a Wise Man, or by a Madman') (1880). This feature links them to an earlier Romantic model.

The Romantic cosmic voyage is best exemplified by Jean Paul's 'Traum über das All', in his late novel *The Comet, or, Nikolaus Marggraf* (*Der Komet oder Nikolaus Marggraf*) (1820–2), translated by Thomas de Quincey in 1824 as 'Dream upon the Universe'. The dreamer's journey through the cosmos reveals that 'the cosmos is a sea of light, sustaining planets containing

mortal life, but the seemingly empty space between the planets is peopled by incorporeal beings, and the mortal shadow-beings are transfigured when they leave their planets and enter the sea of light' (Smeed 1966: 31). None of those beings is described, however, with any detail. Jean Paul's intent seems rather to communicate how the dreamer is overwhelmed by both the apparent emptiness and the light that fills up the universe as a symbol of its pervasive material and spiritual life. This vision, which seems to approach the mystical, is nevertheless anchored in scientific fact. As such, 'the "Traum über das All" is different from all [his] other *Dreams* in that it is much more closely concerned with astronomical reality; it is in fact a description of the astronomers' cosmos, imbued with metaphysical significance' (Smeed 1966: 30).

Jean Paul adds a Romantic sense of the sublime to his Enlightenment models, such as Johann Jakob Engel's 'Galilei's Dream' ('Traum des Galilei') (1801), where the cosmic voyage is little more than a vehicle for defending modern heliocentric cosmological views against religious ignorance, in line with seventeenth-century uses of this kind of visionary fiction to defend particular theories in a pleasant way for a broader readership. Nevertheless, Engel's propaganda piece is briefer and lighter than earlier heavy-handed textual mechanisms such as Gabriel Daniel's *A Voyage to the World of Cartesius (Voyage au monde de Descartes)* (1690), in which the cosmic voyage is simply a fictional device used to present the universe as if it were exactly as René Descartes' Theory of Vortices had argued, a theory to which Daniel strongly objected. The book is highly technical and the occasional comic and visionary tone is all but drowned out by serious discussions of the matter at hand. Similarly, Athanasius Kircher's *A Heavenly Journey in Rapture (Itinerarium Exstaticum Coelestis/Iter Exstaticum Coeleste)* (1656/1660) promoted Tycho Brahe's cosmology as a compromise between modern science and church teachings. The book is as technical as Daniel's, although Kircher's Latin prose allows for some flights of poetical imagination when it describes, for example, the precious stones that are the most outstanding features of the planets of the solar system. These are otherwise entirely devoid of life, either material or spiritual. Kircher's universe is a mineral one, and man would be alone in the cosmos were it not for the angels who link him to the divine sphere. Indeed, one of them guides the visionary voyager; as a result, this mental journey has a certain medieval flavour which did not prevent it being quite popular among the intellectual elites. Christiaan Huygens refuted it in his essay *Cosmotheoros* (1698) while Valentin Stansel closely imitated Kircher's cosmic voyage in his *The Celestial Wanderer Uranophilus (Uranophilus*

*caelestis peregrinus*) (1685).

Above all, Kircher's book could have inspired one of the greatest poems in the Spanish language, *First Dream* (*Primero Sueño*) (1692), by the Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. She describes a dream which takes her mind (or soul) into outer space, from where she contemplates the Earth, and tries to understand it by following a reverse Neo-Platonist structure from the most simple (the mineral realm) to the most complex (the celestial spheres). She trusts the inherited, orthodox view of cosmic order to discover later that, even if she has followed her reason as well as Church teachings, the result is failure, as in the myth of Phaethon (which is also superbly retold in the poem). Scepticism abounds and could be said to border on heresy: 'human reason is partial, limited, relative, and unscrupulous; faith, on the other hand [...] offers no real explanation of the ways and mysteries of the cosmos' (Stavans 1997: xl). Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz goes beyond even Stapledon's agnosticism. In *Star Maker*, there is indeed a god or demiurge who appears as an explanation of the universe, a universe which also offers the comfort of fellow rational beings as well as a possibility of guidance. The cosmos in *First Dream* is utterly empty and incomprehensible, and the voyager's mind is (as in Castera's story) all alone in its journey. The fact that such a radical work was not only accepted but also praised by Spanish-speaking contemporaries of Sor Juana may be explained if the poem was read purely as a work of art instead of as a statement of the writer's conception of the universe. The same Baroque idiom in which it was written might have concealed its revolutionary content from most readers who, although appreciating the superb command of rhetoric, would have found its ideas obscured by the poem's difficult style. Sor Juana's distance from the main intellectual centres of Europe also isolated her poem from the main tradition of the visionary cosmic voyage. Furthermore, the genre's tendency towards philosophical prose rather than poetry has served to obscure the contributions of poets such as Sor Juana and De Mille.

In contrast, Johannes Kepler's *Dream* [*Somnium*] (1634) was known to his seventeenth-century followers in the fictional use of cosmology, and has often been considered as a major precursor of sf, despite the fact that the described journey is oneiric and the traveller is transported to the Moon by demons. Kepler's method of travel is, however, no more far-fetched than being guided by an angel or telepathic nebula. Technical feasibility is irrelevant in visionary cosmic voyages which are, in any case, a matter of the mind rather than spacecraft, and which ask for a reader's suspension of disbelief based on the conviction that a personal soul or spirit exists and that it can act independently from the body, albeit in a non-supernatural

way. Once we accept this principle, Kepler's speculation is reasonable enough, given contemporary scientific knowledge, and the author insists on this by writing extensive explanatory notes. The Moon and its inhabitants are described with the highest degree of plausibility and constitute the main focus of the work. Furthermore, Kepler completely breaks away from the medieval embedding of the celestial in the heavenly: 'the presence of explanations on heavens in medieval and early humanistic poetry is anchored in the belief of paradise and the celestial hierarchies of Christian mysticism, not in a supposed real and physical displacement of a character to the skies' (Camenietzki 2007: 48; my translation). Even if the celestial journey is not physical in most cosmic voyages, it is nevertheless presented as having happened in a real setting, in the known universe. The cosmic and the mundane realms are put on the same conceptual footing; there is no qualitative switch between mutually exclusive fictional worlds, between the Earth and a divine beyond (as there is in Dante). Kepler's originality lies in having secularized those visions, bringing them back to the natural realm. By doing this, and following the example of an earlier visionary voyage to a utopian moon, written by the humanist Juan Maldonado and also entitled *Somnium [Dream]* (1541) he recovered the spirit of the Roman orator Cicero and his reworking of ancient philosophical and cosmological lore in order to produce a cosmic outlook congenial to the pragmatic *ethos* of his fellow Romans. In the process, Cicero 'presented a concept of the Universe that closely resembled a cosmic voyage' (Menzel 1975: 896).

The description of Scipio the Younger's dream is part of Cicero's *On the Republic (De re Publica)*. However, the complete treatise remained lost for centuries while *The Dream of Scipio* was repeatedly recopied and commented on as an independent piece, from Macrobius in the fifth century CE onwards. This work served both as a source of cosmological knowledge and as a model to be imitated in many fictional dreams, in which the dreamer is visited by a being from a higher plane and is shown what this plane looks like as well as its meaning. In the Middle Ages, this vision beyond Earth was mainly allegorical as can be seen in Dante's or Geoffrey Chaucer's reworkings of the visionary voyage. Allegorical figures might have had for them a measure of genuine truth as embodiments of abstract concepts endowed with material reality, warranting a certain analogy to later science fiction (cf. Braswell 1981:128). However, Kepler and his followers demonstrated that a dream could also very well be the vehicle for a material(istic) vision of the universe, where the inner eye could perceive how things are or could be in concrete terms, eschewing the abstract ghosts borrowed from theology or philosophy. The visitor and the

visited are on a similar material footing, even if the cosmic realm could be, at the same time, the place for spirits or the divine itself.

This lesson was probably learnt from Cicero. Unlike its alleged main source, Plato's myth of *Er* from *The Republic*, *The Dream of Scipio* downplays the otherworldly content in favour of the depiction of a world physically beyond the terrestrial one. In Cicero's vision, the celestial sphere is certainly the abode of souls previously purified of base earthly interests and passions in a similar way to the one proposed by Platonism, with a very Roman emphasis on political virtue.

Nevertheless, the bulk of *The Dream of Scipio* is a depiction of the cosmos and its inhabitants, in much the same way as it is in Kepler, Flammarion or Stapledon. The dreamer, Scipio Aemilianus, and his uncle and guide in the cosmos, Scipio Africanus, are so alike that they can even embrace, whereas in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6, Aeneas could not do the same with his beloved ancestors during his journey to the underworld. The embrace between the Scipios suggests that in the fictional space described in Cicero's text there is something material, concrete. Cicero states that the spheres are for the virtuous deceased, but these do not look like disembodied presences. If they can only be perceived in a vision or a dream, this does not undermine the fact that they are real, as much as the cosmic scenery in which they carry on their everlasting lives is real. Cicero describes this scenery with such a degree of detail that the cosmological dimension makes up the central part of the work, to which is added the moral and political lesson drawn from the fact that the otherworldly cosmic beings are just men who had deserved to be raised to the stars, reaching a higher position in the scale of beings, similar to Flammarion's spirits in *Lumen* which are primarily purified men and women. In addition, Cicero's stars, as well as the planets he describes, are basically matter - more precisely fire, one of the four elements of the ancients' physical world. They are endowed with divine intelligence, but they are still material bodies whose description calls to mind the sentient stars and nebulae in *Star Maker*. Among them, the Earth is just another globe. Our planet and its inhabitants are heavy with the burden of dirt and sins, but they are not essentially different from the rest of the cosmos:

For man was given life that he might inhabit that sphere called Earth, which you see in the centre of this temple; and he has been given a soul out of those eternal fires which you call stars and planets, which, being round and globular bodies animated by divine intelligences, circle about in their fixed orbits with marvellous speed. (6.15)

All of these stellar bodies are not only subject to nature's laws, which make them follow their orbits, but they are also material in such a way that they could be fully perceived by human senses if these were finely attuned to them, so that they could hear, for instance, the music of the spheres. This heavenly sound is not only a metaphor for heavenly harmony and perfection in Cicero's universe; it has also a physical existence:

But this mighty music, produced by the revolution of the whole universe at the highest speed, cannot be perceived by human ears, any more than you can look straight at the Sun, your sense of sight being overpowered by its radiance. (6.19)

*The Dream of Scipio* shows a material cosmos that is closer to modern science-fictional views than it is to the abstract, purely spiritual and religious space in both Plato's myth of *Er* and the medieval allegoric visionary voyages. The text also, arguably, prefigures Darko Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement. Scipio the Younger keeps looking back at the Earth, for which he is rebuked by his uncle who asks him to look at it from a different, higher perspective. Through this perspective from the stars, Cicero presents an estranged vista of our planet. From the celestial spheres, the Earth is far smaller than its inhabitants believe, these include its would-be conquerors, among whom Scipio Aemilianus will also soon be counted:

There where stars which we never see from the Earth, and they were all larger than we have ever imagined. [...] Indeed the Earth itself seemed to me so small that I was scornful of our empire, which covers only a single point, as it were, upon its surface. (6.16)

Cicero later mentions the different parts of the Earth where a number of unknown peoples live in diverse climates separated by deserts. In this geographic context, the Romans and their empire are negligible. All the more despicable is human glory when considered from a cosmos full of sentient, superior beings. Cicero's fictional world, which is consistently depicted following ancient scientific knowledge, delivers his readers a stark lesson in relativism, while it spurs their imagination to conceive of not only the overwhelming greatness of the cosmos but also the reality of alien intelligences in it, with whom humanity, in the person of Scipio Aemilianus, is confronted. Accordingly, readers are tacitly asked to abandon their prejudices and to adopt an encompassing view of the whole using both reason and imagination in a speculative way, in order to watch their place in the cosmos from outside and afar.

According to Adam Roberts, 'the fable's sense of wonder (stars "larger

than we have ever imagined ... the Earth seemed to me so small that I was scornful of our Roman empire, which covers only a single point, as it were, upon its surface") rather overpowers the ethical moral of the whole' (Roberts 2006: 24). The moral and philosophical content of the work can be read as a by-product of a primarily literary endeavour, which is based on a conscious use of an awe-inspiring cosmos to produce a particular aesthetic effect: the sublime. Sense of wonder is seen as a distinctive feature of (hard) science fiction by Cornel Robu: 'overwhelmed by the immensity of the physical universe, man is compelled to resort to non-physical reaction, to the idea of his free mind – a faculty standing above the senses, irreducible to nature and above it' (Robu 2012: 30). In Cicero, Scipio Aemilianus's visionary journey has shown both him and the readers how small are the Earth and humanity's petty concerns compared with the whole universe, but this humbling experience can also become morally and psychologically inspiring. Cicero's dreamer and the astral voyagers of Stapledon, Wells and Flammarion share a worldview influenced by a sublime which is ultimately comforting, because the human mind is shown as being able to reach out to a potentially cognizable universe due to its material, natural and objective state. Even if this attempt at fitting mind to cosmos, and cosmos to human mind, fails as it does for Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the visionary cosmic voyage delivers its lesson, helping its readers to adopt a new intellectual approach to reality through rational imagination. The genre's speculative nature is already paramount in Cicero's pioneering work, whose core philosophical and ethical content is also similar to the intellectual postulates of later visionary cosmic voyages. In addition, *The Dream of Scipio* creates its central literary design by infusing its Platonic model with a science-based realism inherited by later authors from Kepler onwards. This realism was already properly recognized in ancient times as one of its main tokens of originality, as Favonius Eulogius states in his commentary from c. 396 CE):

When, in imitation of Plato, Cicero wrote a treatise on the republic, he also retold the episode of the resurrection of Er the Pamphylian (Plato tells us that Er, after being placed on a pyre, revived and revealed many mysteries from the underworld). However, instead of concocting an incredible fiction, as his predecessor had done, Cicero resorted to a somewhat rational fable, imagining an ingenious dream.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the scientific realism, often considered proper to science fiction, combines in *The Dream of Scipio* with a series of features essential for the taxonomic description of the genre. These features appear fully in Cicero's work of fiction, as well as in *Star Maker* and in the visionary cosmic voyages

written in the years between them. These features include:

- a) first-person focalization;
- b) relative irrelevance of personal characterization or evolution in a context where moral growth is not told in detail, but only shown, if not implied;
- c) prevalent descriptive formal mode with argumentative and historical/narrative passages embedded in the primarily descriptive discourse;
- d) movement in a dynamic spatial landscape (or mindscape) which tones down time as a vector of the ancillary or absent storyline, while it secures variety by zooming views out or in;
- e) description of outer space, including of Earth from a cosmic perspective and its inhabitants, if any; thematically, this is crucial. This astronomical perspective entails both cognitive estrangement and sense of wonder, as the readers are given descriptions of what the voyager feels when s/he is elevated to a higher dimension of being.

Given the fact that all these defining features are common to *Star Maker* and *The Dream of Scipio*, it is possible to consider the latter as the taproot not only of the visionary cosmic voyages written by all the aforementioned authors but, perhaps, of science fiction as a whole. If we believe that *Star Maker* is science fiction, or more precisely, a scientific romance, we might very well argue that *The Dream of Scipio* is also science fiction *avant la lettre*.<sup>4</sup> It inaugurates its own sublime mode several centuries before the *True History* by Lucian: 'the Classical author most consistently cited as a "father of science fiction"' (Roberts 2006: 27). It is not unreasonable to suggest that this parallel history in which modern speculative fiction emerged from the visionary cosmic voyage, as defined by Warren W. Wagar as 'any work of fiction, including drama and narrative poetry, that specializes in plausible speculation about life under changed but rationally conceivable circumstances, in an alternative past or present, or in the future' (Wagar 1982: 9). As I have tried to demonstrate, Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio* fits this description whilst the genre of the visionary cosmic voyage, from Cicero to Stapledon, in verse or in prose, has successfully coexisted with the novel and other narrative forms in the (science) fictional realm.<sup>5</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> All quotations given in the text from Cicero, *De re publica; De legibus*. Ed. and trans. C.W. Keyes. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, there are some secular descriptions of the afterlife of which Stapledon's neglected work, *Death into Life* (1946), is perhaps the most interesting example. Although formally similar to *Star Maker*, its focus on the soul or spirit distinguishes it from its earlier, more materialistic counterpart.

<sup>3</sup> Favionius Eulogius, *Disputatio de Somnio Scipionis*. Ed. and trans. Roger E. Van Weddingen (Brussels: Latomus, 1957), 13. The original reads: *Imitatione Platonis Cicero de re publica scribens locum etiam de Eris Pamphylii reditu in uitam, qui, ut ait, in rogo impositus reuixisset multaque de inferis secreta narrasset, non fabulosa, ut ille, assimulatione commentus est, sed sollertis somnii rationabili quadam imaginatione composuit*. The English translation is mine.

<sup>4</sup> This contention partly follows John Rieder's recommendation that 'the project of comprehending what SF has meant and currently means is one to be accomplished through historical and comparative narrative rather than formal description' (2010: 206). Despite its closeness to Suvin's definition, Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio* would hardly qualify as sf. There is, however, a historical and comparative line which links it with works such as *Star Maker*, which are usually considered as science fiction by the genre's practitioners. Although science fiction might have no single point of origin, the very existence of the line here described could justify consideration of Cicero as one of the main forerunners to sf, at least in its longest 'historical and comparative narrative'.

<sup>5</sup> My special thanks to Adám Gerencsér, Leimar Garcia-Siino and Luis Unceta Gómez for their useful and insightful corrections and comments.

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# Time Travel to Roman Britain

Cara Sheldrake

Unlike the many studies in narrative and philosophical causality (for example Lem 1974: 143–54; Richmond 2001: 305–18 and 2008: 35–46), this article does not address the purpose or impact of travelling through time; instead it considers the role for both characters and readers of the specific destination of such travel. By considering the stylistic choices made in the portrayal of the past and the thematic function that the location serves, not only are contemporary ideas about the time-period highlighted afresh but new approaches to its study can also be found. This article will examine five examples of time travel to Roman Britain, on screen and in print, in order to demonstrate some of the ways in which the episodes further the themes of their texts and the implications those usages have for conceptions of historical Roman Britain.

A few theoretical points should be raised before examining specific examples. First, throughout this article the term 'text' is used to denote both written and visual work, and although there is some consideration of the effects of medium on the presentation of the time period, in such a limited range of material I do not seek to offer an overarching comparison between the written and the visual. Additionally, I do not seek to actively distinguish any philosophical differences raised between more traditionally sf modes of time travel (typically involving a quasi-scientific device) and more fantastic modes (which may involve magic). Partly, this is because several of the texts examined encompass aspects of both, and partly because questions of genre in time travel have already been covered elsewhere (Yang 2013) and are beyond the scope of this article.

Secondly, within these texts time travel is used to create various shared overarching effects for the audience. Non-linear chronology can be used to create dramatic tension, and manipulation of time is often used to draw attention to the temporality of either the characters or the audience itself. More specifically, time travel raises philosophical issues about the nature of time in terms of linearity and causality, and, more pertinently, opens up discussions about historicity and historiography by subjectifying events and emphasizing the ways that narrative shapes comprehension in all of those genres. David Lowenthal suggests that 'Five reasons for going or looking back dominate time travel literature: explaining the past, searching for a golden age, enjoying the exotic, reaping the rewards of temporal displacement and foreknowledge, and refashioning life by changing the

past' (Lowenthal 2003: 22). He argues that these also broadly represent popular approaches to the past, which in turn fuel the heritage industry and are also apparent in, for example, both historiography and historical fiction. However, the immersive nature of historical fiction, which allows the reader to gain subjective empathy, means that the internal characters do not deal with any implicit critique raised by the setting; in contrast time travel stories actively seek to showcase transitions, contrasts and the ways that characters deal with the differences that they encounter. The temporal shifts allow the author to make overt social criticisms, as their characters encounter new attitudes, for example, to the role of women or slavery, and so also serve as a key component in character development. This means that time travel is particularly popular for children's writers, who can exploit its didactic potential to not only offer history lessons but also provide a safe space for the child protagonist to challenge his/her social and familial assumptions and learn self-sufficiency, in a similar way to physical journeys in the *bildungsroman*.

Finally, the choice of Roman Britain connects the texts to a distinct geographical as well as temporal location. The sample of texts is necessarily small, and although most have reached an international audience, they are strongly British (perhaps even English) in origin. This partially represents interest in the topic as a localized sense of connection to place but is also entangled in the way that an iconography of key moments in British time has been constructed within national public rhetoric including, for example, the National Curriculum for schools. Classical texts represent the first textual evidence of Britain and, from the seventeenth century onwards, serious histories of Britain (or at least England) have taken the control of Britain by the Romans as a starting-point. This positioning has served to attract more popular writers to this period. Scholarship surrounding the Roman invasion and occupation of the British Isles has become far more detailed and undergone significant changes, not least the reimagining of the relationship between natives, settlers and soldiers and the concept of 'Romanization' (Haverfield 1912; Hingley 2008: 316–23). These concerns also repeatedly occur within the sample texts.

Although the texts examined all include time travel and make some kind of representation of Roman Britain they vary considerably in content and tone. The examples range from 1906 to 2010 and cover comedy and political commentary, alternate history with aliens and Celtic mysticism. The first two examples, *Blackadder: Back and Forth* (1999) and the *Doctor Who* episode, 'The Pandorica Opens' (2010), make use of the visual iconography of Roman soldiers to explore how the idea of imperial Rome

is commonly understood. The next three, E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), Susan Cooper's *The Silver on the Tree* (1977) and Julia Jarman's *The Time-Travelling Cat and the Roman Eagle* (2001), use the native viewpoint, even as they look at the position of incoming soldiers, to address issues of empire, tolerance and integration.

## **Model Soldiers**

In all these examples the presence of Roman soldiers is for the main protagonists a key signifier of temporal location. It is impossible to consider Roman Britain without mentioning the military. In archaeological terms, forts and garrisons form a substantial amount of the remains in Britain, and one of the principal literary sources (Tacitus) is particularly concerned with military campaigns in the province. These pieces of evidence regularly serve as points of inspiration for fictional treatments (see, for example, the proliferation of historical tales revolving around the rebellion of Tacitus's Boudicca). Furthermore, the trappings of Empire are a key feature of ancient Rome in the popular imagination (see, amongst others, Joshel et al 2001; Hingley 2008: 12–13), and Roman soldiers as agents of conquest offer a strong representation of the active presence of empire in Britain. In the absence of the architectural clues offered by Rome itself, the distinctive physical appearance of the Roman legionary offers a swift visual signal as to temporal setting, even in rural Britain.

The film *Blackadder: Back and Forth* (1999), based upon characters from the 1980s British sitcom, was commissioned to be shown at the Millennium Dome. This historical satire has remained popular in Britain, being voted in 2004 by British viewers as one of the best television shows of all time, despite more recent criticism of the way in which its satiric critique has become embedded in national consciousness as fact (Badsey 2009: 37–54). All four series of *Blackadder* and its accompanying specials followed a distinctive pattern whereby the protagonists and their predefined relationships appeared in different historical periods. In her discussion of the first series, Katherine Lewis characterizes it as 'a representation made up of tropes derived partly from certain ideas about the medieval past and the ways in which medieval history has been written, but which is also shaped by the conventions of sitcom and historical film' (Lewis 2007: 114). In a similar way, the other series employ stereotypical characterisations and behavioural motifs within (pseudo-)historical frameworks.

In the film, the rascally Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson) and his foolish sidekick Baldrick (Tony Robinson) build a time-machine to scam money from

their dinner guests. Unfortunately, it actually works, except that Baldrick has forgotten to put labels on the controls so their travels through British history begin as superficially random. Later, when they realize that their comments and thefts have changed their own present, they attempt to rewrite the past in a more organized fashion. During their first trip they stop briefly at Hadrian's Wall and steal a centurion's helmet to prove that they were there. This section crams in plenty of clichés – the Romans are men in skirts defending a three-foot high wall against a horde of ginger maniacs, Stephen Fry speaks Latin, and an unspecified emperor has poisoned his mother and married his horse.

Visually, the segment relies on the clothing of the soldiers (note that it is the helmet that is chosen as a recognisable souvenir) and the setting at Hadrian's Wall to fix the location. These are then reduced to absurdity, first by feminizing the Romans, next by suggesting that they will be especially ineffectual in their conquest. The men are standing on a tiny fortification, waiting for the uncivilized Scots (who are themselves a recurring stereotype throughout the series) to emulate the film *Braveheart* (1995). The viewer is expected both to recognize the Wall and to be aware that the characters are occupying its ruins. As well as reminding the viewer of the fictional absurdity of the whole segment, these allusions draw attention to the passage of time and the knowledge that Roman influence was limited temporally as well as physically. The audience is further reminded of that transience by the subsequent dialogue that tells them that the officers will shortly be abandoning Britain to go and sort out the problems in Rome caused by the emperor. This trope of imperial matricide and lunacy deliberately conflates several of Suetonius' bad emperors, via Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* (1934) and its BBC television adaptation (1976), and elides several centuries of occupation into this single moment. It has less to tell us about the iconography of Roman Britain than about the way that much of later Roman history has been ignored in traditional syllabi that focus on literary evidence whilst glossing over the periods which are more abundantly represented in British archaeology.

The nature of the commission as a feature specially written to celebrate the turn of the Millennium is appropriate to both the device of time travel and its ability to showcase the characters across British history. Furthermore, the writers (Richard Curtis and Ben Elton) have chosen to be irreverent rather than subversive or political, so that the feature is both accessible to visitors to the Millennium Dome and in keeping with its national(istic) setting: the choice of temporal locations becomes a kind of historical 'greatest hits'. As well as representing familiar aspects from the television series,

the people and moments visited are regarded as significant within British history and embedded within the nation's existing historical consciousness. The production team rely heavily on a pre-existing awareness of each time period, whether from genuine knowledge or memories of school history lessons and fictional representations, in combination with a lack of realism and comic absurdity. The choice of images for Roman Britain suggests that the public retains an underlying notion of a succession of mad emperors, combined with an uncertainty about the overall legacy of the occupation, and that contrasting the imagery of order and masculinity of Roman soldiers with the buffoonery inherent in *Blackadder* can still be expected to raise a laugh.

In the *Doctor Who* episode, 'The Pandorica Opens' (2010), the Doctor (Matt Smith) and his companion, Amy Pond (Karen Gillan), follow a complex set of instructions encoded through time to arrive at a Roman army encampment outside Stonehenge in 102 CE. Like *Blackadder*, this segment relies on the idea of expectations and prior understanding in order to work. However, the creative team deliberately showcase and confuse the existing knowledge and beliefs of the characters in order to prefigure plot points. This segment and its conclusion in the next episode are filled with dramatic tension, and the temporal element is less about the real-world historical timeline or Roman Britain and more about the nature of paradoxes within a fluid construct of time.

Once the Doctor and Amy arrive at their destination, they are invited to meet Cleopatra, who turns out to be the recurring character River Song (Alex Kingston). They are required to investigate the opening of the fearsome Pandorica – a box that legend claimed contained the most feared thing in all the universe. Over the course of the episode, the viewers gradually discover that the Romans were Amy's favourite topic at school and the story of Pandora's Box was one of her favourite books. The audience is also confronted with the sudden reappearance as one of the Roman soldiers of Amy's fiancé, Rory (Arthur Darvill), who had previously been erased from history and Amy's memory. It emerges that the appearance of all of these elements is linked to both Amy's life and imagination because of a rift in time and space. The Roman soldiers are not historical Romans but are duplicates created by aliens from residues of her memories at different points in time, which means that not only do they think and act like her conception of them from a children's fact book, but also that there is space for Rory's return. He is then able to combine his imprinted 'Roman-ness' with his devotion to Amy, to overcome his existence as a mere replica and guard her for almost 2000 years, protected inside the Pandorica, until

she can be healed in the next episode.

The Romans in this sequence are important in two ways: first, they represent an integral part of Amy's historical consciousness and by extension that of several generations of the British public through their inclusion in the National Curriculum; and secondly, through the development of Rory's character and the growth of attributes that are associated with his Roman persona some subtle assumptions about what it means to be a soldier are made.

Unlike in *Blackadder* where historical inconsistencies are glossed over or used to comic effect, *Doctor Who* points out some of the historical issues. For example, one of the characters draws attention to the oddity of Cleopatra's existence in Britain (the discrepancy is explained by River's flair for dramatic deception) and the Doctor comments on the timing of the Roman invasions and the number of soldiers in a legion. Interestingly, whilst the Roman soldiers fix the general date, instead of a setting like Hadrian's Wall, the production team uses Stonehenge which is carefully positioned as an existing ancient monument, as mysterious to the Romans as to us. In this episode the odd juxtaposition of the monument, the alien artefact and the disciplined soldiers alerts the viewers to the fact that this is not a simple historical setting, despite the Romans as indicators. As Fiona Hobden comments, this playful attitude towards the signifiers of the ancient past is also demonstrated in 'The Fires of Pompeii' (Hobden 2009: 147–63), but this does not mean that the choice of Romans is arbitrary.

Specifically, it appears that being recreated as a Roman soldier allows Rory to strengthen his relationship with Amy. First, he is fulfilling Amy's fantasy as a centurion, both in her childhood imaginings and in a more sexual way (as demonstrated by the fact that he wears the outfit for their honeymoon in 'A Christmas Carol' (2010)). Secondly, he displays the dedication and commitment of a good soldier when he chooses to guard her for two millennia, which develops into an active, aggressive militarism in 'A Good Man Goes to War' (2011). Rory's Roman aspect seems to express Classical conceptions of masculinity – discipline, order, loyalty and strength – and although these are partially inherent in characterisations of soldiers generally, this identity is also indebted to the portrayal of Romans in popular history, which returns the viewer to the fact that these Romans are based upon Amy's inculcated idea. Later, Rory is able to dress as a Roman and recreate the image according to *his* terms. Penny Goodman suggests that, by drawing attention to the way Amy endows her soldiers with their identity in 'The Pandorica Opens', the audience is forced to confront the fantasy of the whole time travel narrative and to assess the level of fantasy

in their own receptions of Rome (Goodman 2010).

## Imperial Fantasies

Roman soldiers, therefore, are symbols not just of their time but of a broader imperialism that has relevance across different eras. As symbols of empire, the presence of soldiers also emphasizes Britain as a subject nation and their uniform is what actively differentiates them from the indigenous population. However, the role of soldier allows them also to be portrayed as subjects of the Empire in their own right and their visible discrepancy from their environment emphasizes the distance from the centre of the Empire to the peripheries, both in terms of personal displacement and with regard to shifts in expected norms and behaviours. As characters, the soldiers are required to negotiate the consequences of imperialism and, as outsiders, offer an alternative viewpoint on Britain. Comparing and contrasting the soldiers with the native Britons and examining their relationships allows authors to offer more complex pictures of the experience of imperialism.

E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) was heavily influenced by her friend H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and the works of F. Anstey (Thomas Anstey Guthrie). In the book, four children (Cyril, Robert, Anthea and Jane) search for the missing part of a magical amulet by using the part that they have found to visit different time periods. Their adventures include ancient Egypt, Babylon and a utopian future that draws upon Nesbit's Fabianism (cf. Rahn 1985: 124–44). In chapter ten, the children find a young girl destined for the workhouse in their own time and in order to find her a home, where she will be wanted, they travel to ancient Britain before visiting Julius Caesar in Gaul and accidentally encouraging him to invade. Although strictly speaking, 55 BCE is not a Britain under the rule of the Romans, it is relevant here because the audience is encouraged to contrast Edwardian London with the welcoming but rustic lifestyle and mud huts of the Britons who take in the young girl, and the experience of meeting Caesar himself where 'Two golden eagles on the top of posts stood on each side of the tent, and on the flaps of the tent which was very gorgeous to look at were the letters S.P.Q.R.' (Nesbit 1996: 192).

The initial focus of this section is finding a home for the abandoned girl. The Psammead tells the children: 'You don't suppose anyone would want a child like that in YOUR times – in YOUR towns? [...] You've got your country into such a mess that there's no room for half your children – and no one to want them' (Nesbit 1996: 186–7). It is clear from her description of the simple ancient British lifestyle that Nesbit is extolling the pre-industrial

rural idyll and community spirit. She does not actually give a great deal of detail about the lives of the ancient Britons, but briefly tells the readers that they lived in mud huts, wore blue and white robes and beast-skins, and offered the children beds of fern to sleep on. More importantly, however, she writes that the honours and kindnesses bestowed on the children were better than all the luxuries they had experienced in Babylon. The criticism of the excesses of richness is unsubtle but Nesbit complicates this picture in the next sequence by having Jane describe to Caesar all the things that make Britain great in her own age.

Nesbit cleverly sets up a situation where Jane tries to prevent Caesar from going to Britain because, as she has just seen, the people living there are kind and should be spared invasion, only for her tales of England's future glory to inspire Caesar's campaign. Nesbit allows her readers to wonder what if Caesar had never come: would all the fine monuments and proud empire that they know have been the same? As well as illustrating the temporal paradox of trying to change history, Nesbit implies that, even though the indigenous Britons were good people, in order for the present to happen the Romans needed to invade. In this there is a somewhat more subtle inference that imperialism can act as a civilizing force – an idea which appears at various points throughout the Psammead trilogy. Although there is some critical discomfort surrounding Caesar's interest in guns and aggressive militarism (Smith 2009: 304–6), the children's colonialist tendency to bring their moral values to less civilized places or times is exposed when those less civilized subjects intrude upon their lives (Bar-Yosef 2003: 5–28).

The complexities of Nesbit's conceptions of the role of heritage in Britain's present, and her depictions of class and colonialism are studies in their own right (see also Rheimer 2006: 39–62), but *The Story of the Amulet* neatly introduces some of the anxieties about the role of empire in Britain that become more prevalent over the course of the twentieth century. The Romans are a sharp reminder that even when the past seems better than the present, change and progress and perhaps conquest are inevitable. Indeed, they help to blur the line between the conquering and the conquered.

Susan Cooper's quintet, *The Dark is Rising* (1965–77) depicts an ongoing battle set in Britain between the powers of the Dark and the Light. It involves three human children (the Drews) and a group of undying magical Old Ones (including the young Will Stanton) who can move through time. All the books tend towards high fantasy and are heavy with Celtic mysticism, Arthurian medievalism and Anglo-Saxon imagery, but in *The Silver on*

*the Tree* – the final novel in the sequence – there is a brief foray into a Roman location. By using the visual trigger of a Victorian print, Will is able to transport himself to Roman Britain in order to retrieve an object of power that he and Merlin/Merriman have hidden away. The picture shows Roman soldiers building a complex building at Caerleon in Wales, and when he arrives in the past Will finds himself at the construction of an amphitheatre. Cooper takes the opportunity to describe the process of the construction, complete with sweaty slaves and blocks being rolled on logs. There then follow some musings from Merlin/Merriman and the supervising Roman on the relative differences between Britain and Rome:

The soldier looked at him reflectively. 'A strange land,' he said. 'Barbarians and magicians, dirt and poetry. A strange land, yours.' [...] 'Rome has many talents,' [Merriman] said. 'We have some skill with stone, here, and none can match our great stone circles, with their homage to the Light. But the skill of Roman builders for the daily life of men as well as for worship – your villas and viaducts, your pipes and streets and baths ... You are transforming our cities, friend, as you have begun transforming the pattern of our lives.' (Cooper 2007: 575)

In offering a discussion of the role of the Romans in Britain, Cooper does not present empire as unproblematic for either side. Although the idea of its possibility as a civilizing force is apparent in Merriman's commentary, Cooper presents the skills of the British as of equal value to those of the conquerors, albeit different in style, and there is a general tone of mutual respect between the centurion and the native. It is worth noting that Cooper draws attention to the fact that the soldier talking is not from Rome but the countryside, which makes him less of a representative of an élite. Although he says, 'Rome is the Empire and the Empire is Rome' (Cooper 2007: 576), and attention is drawn to the fact that the amphitheatre will be the same design as everywhere else in the Empire, the soldier is clearly aware of the personal and practical differences and, by implication, their impact on the presentation and effects of empire. The role of the empire is as different from Rome to Britain as from Britain to India.

Unlike in *Doctor Who* and *Nesbit*, the emphasis is not on the Roman's military or masculine characteristics. The soldier is further made relatable by discussing the family and countryside that he misses. It is the sense of homesickness that links the past to the present day, when Will is able to travel back by identifying similar feelings in a young American archaeologist working on the excavation of the amphitheatre, who is missing his girlfriend and the flowers of Florida. The readers are invited to reflect on the similarities demonstrated by individuals across history but also

to note how both descriptions of home are specifically about the land and the people that they miss. It is unclear as to whether there is any relevance to the fact that he is an American and therefore a far-removed cousin of the British Empire. By this stage in her life Cooper had herself moved to the U.S. and was an exile in her own right (a fact which surely has a bearing on her idealistic images of Britain), so that she seems to be reinforcing the link between self and birthplace. The soldier, for example, contrasts himself with those second and third-generation Romans who were born out in the frontiers of the empire and who are, literally and metaphorically, better acclimatized to being in Britain.

Later, Barney Drew is transported to medieval Wales where he meets Owain GlynDwr, trying to repel the English. The forces of Dark are compared to invading forces like the Vikings and Saxons although, notably, the Romans are not mentioned. In response, Barney laments that he is a mix of all those races and must therefore be bad himself. However, his companions tell him that since he has inherited a blend of all of those peoples and more, and because he has the benefit of temporal distance from the invasions, he is himself blame-free (Cooper 2007: 704–5). In this way, Cooper not only acknowledges the plurality of Britain's past but also actively praises it and, as with the idea of second-generation Romans born on the imperial fringes, possibly allows this section to act as an apologia for the British Empire.

Ideas about empire and history are also subtly articulated through Cooper's use of place and landscape. The importance of place in children's literature, and Cooper especially, has been noted by various scholars (see Butler 2006 and Carroll 2011). Places are connected with the events that happened there and more broadly to the stories told about them, and importantly, they contain all of those times, stories and events simultaneously. It is worth noting that Cooper dismisses linear time in the books, explaining that the Old Ones can shift between historical periods because those times all happen at once. The children, however, tend to experience lapses from their own time as echoes or reflections where they recognize people or places (or both), enacting events that have already happened but which are relevant to their quests. In this way, places and time periods are experienced concurrently: attention is drawn to the multiple interpretations of sites and the way that the past is read through the present.

In her foreword, Cooper notes by way of apology that she has changed the date of Mortimer Wheeler's excavation at Caerleon to fit with her timeline. It is interesting that she has chosen to connect the action of the novel with this identifiable real-world event and to place it next to the

magical elements. Cooper may have felt that enough was known about Roman Britain that she could not slip wholly into the realm of fantasy. Caerleon is appropriate for the books both because of its location in Wales and its legendary association with King Arthur. Cooper was perhaps inspired by the strong media presence of Wheeler during the 1970s; his work may have been something that readers (or their parents) recognized. As with *Doctor Who*, attention is drawn to audience participation and the malleability of the past. It helps to provide, depending on the reader, either a real-world anchor that allows for suspension of disbelief or an explicit metatextuality. More generally, the embedding of historical consciousness in a specific location allows Cooper to emphasize the ongoing importance of place over the course of time and to encourage readers to identify real-world lessons amongst the fantasy.

In the section in Caerleon, empire, invasion and conflict are deliberately refocused into a shared sense of experience and homeliness. It chooses to focus on the deliberate linking of the past and present. As well as having the same sense of homesickness across the centuries, it also draws attention to the same physical objects and even the process of physical labour in the construction and excavation of the site. Cooper suggests that it is the people over history that are important rather than the grandeur of empire as embodied by the ordinariness and identifiability of the centurion.

Julia Jarman's *The Time-Travelling Cat and the Roman Eagle* (2001) forms part of a series of books in which the protagonist, Topher, is transported to different times by his magical cat, Ka. Jarman's work is consciously written in such a way that it supports the National Curriculum, and there are links to lesson plans associated with some of the books on her website. In this particular story, Topher is immersed in the life of a young British boy caught up in a conflict between local tribes-people and the Roman ruling governors and settlers. The local Atrebatan inhabitants of Calleva (Silchester) are worried that the Romans are taking over their way of life, especially when the Romans want to build a road through their sacred grove. Only through hard work from Topher and negotiation between the native chieftain and the Roman governors is a solution reached without bloodshed. The main focus of Jarman's narrative is on forgiveness, co-operation and friendship, and the book uses the past to demonstrate moral lessons for the present. Towards the end, Topher explains what he has learnt: 'What's the point of bearing grudges? [...] What's the point of tribalism and fighting to the death? Of racism and revenge? You've only got to look at the news to see what happens when people carry on wars their ancestors started hundreds of years ago. It's crazy. We've got to learn to get on together'

(Jarman 2001: 152).

This book is more similar, than either Cooper or Nesbit, to an historical novel with most of the action taking place in the past. Jarman fills her book with educational snippets that can be externally verified by readers and teachers. She uses specific tribe and place names, and offers very detailed descriptions both of the town and the differences between British and Roman life. Furthermore, some of the artefacts Topher sees are real-world remains that can be found in the Reading Museum (Jarman 2009). During the story, Jarman questions the extent and consequences of Romanization – physical impacts like roads and bath houses, and its emotional tensions including the fear of the loss of the traditional and the experience of being a subject people.

Not unlike Cooper's depiction, the natives are characterized as more superstitious and passionate than the Romans who tend to be portrayed as bullies. Jarman emphasizes the positive benefits that the Romans offered to the native Britons and stresses the bloodshed caused by rebellions and conflict. Although the sequence in the past begins with a battle and features the arrival of more legionaries towards the end, the main Roman character is the son of a mosaic-cutter and not a soldier. Like Cooper, Jarman also touches on the sense of displacement felt by Romans far from home – the main Roman characters have left their womenfolk in Pompeii and they are keen to go home. However, what is less clear in her work than in Cooper's is a sense of what the modern people of Britain have inherited from that time period – or any idea that they are the successors. Instead, the past is only accessible to the children in the present through heritage sites and museums and not as part of themselves. Topher's journey emphasizes his own personal development without being symbolic of a broader national growth. At the end of the book Topher muses: 'It was good to visit the past, but not to live there. You have to move on' (Jarman 2001: 154).

## **Conclusion**

Despite the popularity of time travel in speculative fiction, and particularly timeslip narratives in British children's fiction, Roman Britain is under-represented. Although a brief study, this sample demonstrates the iconic role of the Roman soldier in popular historical fiction and the flexibility of the time period for storytelling. As Cosslett suggests, historical novels function as a way of reading reconstructions (2002: 243–53). Although *Blackadder's* satirical presentation of the Romans focuses on inefficacy of their conquest, it also emphasizes their presence in modern consciousness.

Likewise, *Doctor Who* concentrates on the concept of Romans as historical and popular figures; however, it introduces an element of social commentary by highlighting issues of militarism and historical reality versus imagination. Jarman, because of her novel's more utilitarian function, avoids the element of criticism by creating a sense of historical distance and accepts both the conquest and the process of cultural appropriation. In a more nuanced way, Nesbit and Cooper share a paternalistic sense of British power and responsibility even whilst they critique social attitudes to poverty and immigration respectively. The episodic nature of these time travel narratives does not lend itself to detailed historical commentary; however, it does mediate the concerns of the authors, including the social contract, the nature of home and family, and the resolution of conflict. Furthermore, the self-conscious representation of past offers a commentary on perceptions of history and its function, including the nature of empire and power, the cultural discourse of a shared civilisation and Classical tradition, and a more nuanced consideration of hybridity, appropriation and the reimagining of history.

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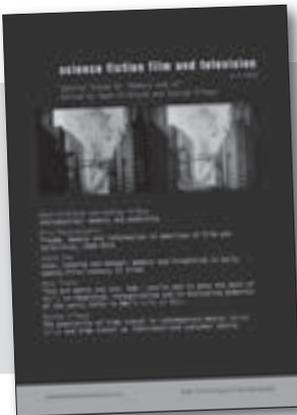
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# Lost as Atlantis Now: Classical Influences in the Work of C. L. Moore

Andrew J. Wilson

In the early 1930s, C.L. (Catherine Lucille) Moore challenged readers of American pulp science fiction and fantasy magazines by introducing a greater level of emotional depth and literary sophistication, not least by drawing on Classical sources. Today, Moore's stories can still surprise and delight readers with her graceful turns of phrase and swashbuckling disregard for generic conventions (see Jodell 2011). Moore's *œuvre* and self-reflections raise questions about her influences and intentions as well as authorial identity and reliability. For example, in an interview Moore gave in 1980, she insisted that she had simply channelled her work: 'Nothing I have ever written was given the slightest deliberation. It was there in the typewriter and it came out, a total bypassing of the brain' (Ross 1982: 327). Moore must be considered, however, to be an unreliable witness when it comes to her life and work. Even as she suggests that no forethought was involved in her creative process, she slyly invokes the Muses of Greek mythology by suggesting that her inspiration came from something other than herself.

Twenty years after Moore's 1933 *Weird Tales* debut entitled 'Shambleau', the American literary critic M. H. Abrams published *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953). In this work, his central argument is that literature serves not just as a mirror that a writer uses to reflect the world, but that it also functions as a lamp that casts light on the human condition. Abrams contends that the mimetic view of literature, which had held sway from antiquity, was challenged by the advent of the Romantic Movement, whose members believed that it allowed the light of the writer's inner soul to shine on the world. Whether we agree or disagree with Abrams' characterization of Classical literature as essentially reflective, the issue of whether specific works of literature reflect existence, illuminate it, or do both at the same time, is further complicated when we examine Moore's work. It is solidly in the Romantic tradition, but she readily acknowledged that she had been influenced by Classical mythology. Moore exploited and reimagined ancient stories and histories to create her tales of other and future worlds. The extent to which the stories of the Classical world can help us to imagine what has yet to come is made even more difficult when we acknowledge that we are examining yesterday's

visions of tomorrow. This necessary shuttling back and forth between times both real and imagined means that any attempt to interpret Moore's work holistically, in the manner suggested by Abrams, runs the risk of being the critical equivalent of a photographer using a flash in a room full of fun-house mirrors. *Caveat emptor!*

Moore's self-mythologizing can be found in print as early as 1936, when *Fantasy Magazine* published an untitled autobiographical sketch that outlined her apprenticeship as a writer: 'They found me under a cabbage plant in Indianapolis on the 24th of January, 1911, and I was reared on a diet of Greek mythology, Oz books and Edgar Rice Burroughs, so you can see I never had a chance' (quoted in Moskowitz 1974: 306). Chronic childhood illness allowed her more than enough time to do this reading.

Although she attended Indiana University for two years, Moore dropped out during the Great Depression in order to support her ageing parents. She found a secretarial job at a local Indianapolis bank, and, according to her afterword to *The Best of C. L. Moore*, she began her first story while doing typing exercises at work: 'Well, I was adequate, but typing was something practiced in every spare moment. And this is where "Shambleau" began, halfway down a sheet of yellow paper otherwise filled up with boring quick-brown-foxes, alphabets, and things like "The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly," to lighten the practice' (Moore 1975b: 306).

Like so much of her work, this is a good story, but it is simply not true. We now know that Moore's love of myths and legends went as far as creating ones about herself. In 2013, PDF scans of an Indiana University student magazine called *The Vagabond* were posted online (Liptak 2013). Among the contents are not one but four short stories by Moore that were published in 1930 and 1931. These wry fables draw from the European fairy tale tradition rather than the Classical one, but they have all elements of subtle subversion that would characterize Moore's later professional work. This quartet of apprentice pieces signals her career-long interest in deconstructing European mythology from the long-distance perspective of twentieth-century America – new lamps for old, if you will.

The untitled autobiographical sketch that *Fantasy Magazine* published in 1936 outlines Moore's apprenticeship as a writer:

Nothing used to daunt my infant ambitions. I wrote about cowboys and kings, Robin Hoods and Lancelots and Tarzans thinly disguised under other names. This went on for years and years, until one rainy afternoon in 1931 when I succumbed to a lifelong temptation and bought a magazine called *Amazing Stories* whose cover portrayed six-armed men in a battle to the death. From that moment on I was a convert. A whole new field of

literature opened out before my admiring gaze, and the urge to imitate it was irresistible. (quoted in Moskowitz 1974: 306)

She is referring, quite accurately for once, to Leo Morey's cover for the September 1931 edition of *Amazing Stories*, which illustrates 'Awlo of Ulm', a novella by S. P. Meek (and collected in Isaac Asimov's anthology series, *Before the Golden Age*). Moore describes a Damascene conversion to the fledgling genre of sf at about the same time that her first work was appearing in print in *The Vagabond* – although, as she admits to having read Burroughs, it would be surprising if she had not already encountered his *Barsoom* series. Those stories from Moore's student days would be written out of her history only five years later, by which time she was one of the field's rising stars. This was not the first time she deployed her skills as a writer of fiction in crafting her authorial persona or, indeed, personae, and neither would it be the last. Furthermore, while the four *Vagabond* tales were published under the name 'Catherine Moore', after her first professional sale, she substituted her initials for her first name.

According to Moore's official line, 'Shambleau' came to her at work. Nevertheless, even in recounting the creation of this story, she describes herself typing lines from Robert Browning, Lord Byron and John Keats for practice, and hints not just at the influence of the Romantic tradition but these poets' own debts to Classical literature. The eponymous character of Shambleau is a seductive but parasitic creature. The alien's special powers and vulnerability echo those of Medusa, and it is suggested that her species may have inspired the Gorgon myth. The story also introduces Northwest Smith, one of two serial characters who defined Moore's early work. Smith is an anti-hero, an interplanetary outlaw whose complete adventures represent a space odyssey in themselves.

His adventures are set mostly in a future in which the human race has colonized the solar system. However, Moore's introduction to the story stresses that humanity also explored space in the distant past, and that much of its mythology is based on ancestral memories of what was found by those prehistoric astronauts: '*Man has conquered Space before, and out of that conquest faint, faint echoes run still through a world that has forgotten the very fact of a civilization which must have been as mighty as our own. There have been too many myths and legends for us to doubt it*' (Moore 2007a: 17, original in italics).

In a camp-town on Mars, Smith encounters a strange female figure wearing only a ragged leather dress and a tightly-bound turban. He rescues her from a murderous mob of Earthmen and aliens who scream: 'She's Shambleau, I tell you! Damn your hide, man, we never let those

things live!' (Moore 2007a: 20). The mystified Smith insists that the girl is his. Surprisingly, this assertion of possession breaks up the rabble who choose to leave in disgust. However, Smith is warned that, although the townsfolk will let him keep the Shambleau, he must keep her out of sight.

As I have written elsewhere: 'The dramatic set-up for "Shambleau", so redolent of pulp cowboy adventures, gives way to something much richer and stranger. The damsel in distress has eyes like a cat and speaks only in broken English. She may be female, but she is not human and neither is she Martian. Smith too is more complex than his two-dimensional tough-guy persona would suggest. He may earn his living by breaking the law, but he follows his own moral code' (Wilson 2013: 97). The Earthman returns to his squalid lodgings with the Shambleau, and the story becomes progressively more claustrophobic and obsession-driven. As Smith attends to his shady business and waits for Yarol, his Venusian partner-in-crime, the girl stays put but refuses to eat. Furthermore, while the Shambleau slumbers on the floor, Smith has troubling visions of snake-like appendages that stroke his throat, eliciting both pleasure and revulsion. During the day, the relationship between the man and the girl is as broken and confused as the creature's efforts to speak English, but she assures her rescuer that she will talk to him in her own language before long.

The complexity of Northwest Smith's character is typified by his refusal to take the Shambleau into his bed. In the context of the level of censorship prevalent at the time of the story's original publication, this denial can be read as showing that he is man enough to resist the temptation to abuse the Shambleau. Smith's fundamental humanity goes unrewarded because the alien female has no such qualms. The phallic tendrils that appear in his nightmares unman him, but these visions are his unconscious mind warning him about the awful truth.

The turban that the Shambleau wears hides a Gorgonian horror, but rather than snakes, the monster has a mane of worms. Smith finally understands what he has become involved with, but this insight comes too late. The Shambleau's gaze may not turn the hero to stone but her psychic powers do paralyze him. He is addicted to his relationship with the vampiric alien. Moore inverts the conventions of pulp fiction with this revelation; it is the Earthman who assumes the victim's role, not the Shambleau, who instead holds him in her thrall.

This twist would have resonated with the readership of *Weird Tales*, who would have seen it as echoing the stories of H. P. Lovecraft and others (cf. Wilson 2013: 98). The trope of protagonists who uncover the truth behind uncanny events too late to save themselves is a staple of weird fiction.

However, this climax can be read another way: Smith has assumed the role of victim traditionally assigned to a woman. If the Shambleau was a damsel in distress in the beginning, she has manipulated events to swap roles with the Earthman by the end. She becomes a version of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, herself a figure like Circe; both destroy the lovers that they draw to them using their supernatural powers. It is Smith's partner Yarol who saves him from the creature and from himself.

As Thomas Bredehoff has argued, while Brian Aldiss has made the case for Mary Shelley being the mother of science fiction, Moore would seem to be, at the very least, the godmother of feminist sf (Bredehoff 1997: 369–86). The Shambleau's agency and assertiveness would be adopted by Moore's other female protagonists. Nevertheless, even as Moore's work and, as Jennifer Jodell notes, general acceptance within the field anticipates the future of science fiction, every one of these characters has roots in the archetypes of antiquity.

It is interesting to compare Moore's creation with her source of inspiration. Although best known now for her fatal encounter with Perseus, Medusa was described by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 4.794–801) as having originally been a gorgeous maiden who suffered a terrible fate at the hands of the Gods:

Her beauty was far-famed, the jealous hope  
of many a suitor, and of all her charms  
Her hair was loveliest; so I was told  
By one who claimed to have seen her. She it's said  
Was violated in Minerva's shrine  
By Ocean's lord. Jove's daughter turned away  
And covered with her shield her virgin's eyes,  
And then for fitting punishment transformed  
The Gorgon's lovely hair to loathsome snakes.<sup>1</sup>

Although there is no evidence that Moore actually read Ovid, what these parallels mean is that we can at least imagine a background story for the Shambleau beyond the hints that Moore drops that she is a member of a race that is dying out or being hounded to extinction. A beautiful woman has been raped and then mercilessly cursed as a result of this abuse, which she suffered through no fault of her own. In this light, it is no wonder that the Shambleau, like the Gorgon, should seek revenge. And that those that slay them – Perseus and Yarol – should seem more mercenary than heroic. At least Smith, morally ambiguous as he is, retains our sympathies. At the end of the story, Yarol the Venusian speculates about the Shambleau:

These things – they've been in existence for countless ages. No one knows when or where they first appeared. Those who've seen them, as we saw this one, don't talk about it. It's just one of those vague, misty rumors you find half hinted at in old books sometimes... I believe they are an older race than man, spawned from ancient seed in times before ours, perhaps on planets that have gone to dust, and so horrible to man that when they are discovered the discoverers keep still about it – forget them again as quickly as they can.

And they go back to time immemorial. I suppose you recognized the legend of Medusa? There isn't any question that the ancient Greeks knew of them. Does it mean that there have been civilizations before yours that set out from Earth and explored other planets? Or did one of the Shambleau somehow make its way into Greece three thousand years ago? If you think about it long enough you'll go off your head! I wonder how many other legends are based on things like this – things we don't suspect, things we'll never know. (Moore 2007a: 45–6)

'Shambleau' not only launched Moore's writing career but also made a considerable impact. Understandably, she followed it up with more stories featuring Northwest Smith, and time and again variations on Classical themes occur. The titular 'Julhi' (1935) is a Cyclopean alien female, and again Moore is explicit about her familiarity: 'she was one of that very ancient race of one-eyed beings about which whispers persist so inescapably in folklore and legend, though history has forgotten them for ages' (Moore 2007a: 156). The Classical allusion is explicit in 'Nymph of Darkness' (1935) while 'Yvala' (1936) envisions an incarnation of Circe the Enchantress: 'Lovely Circe on her blue Aegean isle – Yvala on her haunted moon under Jupiter's gaze – past and present merged into a blazing whole' (Moore 2007a: 257).

It must be noted that, having broken with pulp tradition in 'Shambleau', the formula that Moore embraces as she charts her anti-hero's odyssey becomes all too obvious when these stories are read in chronological order. Nevertheless, readers should remember that this is not how her work would originally have been either written or presented in the pulp magazines. Months often passed between the publication of individual stories in the Northwest Smith series, and after the fourth instalment, 'Dust of Gods' (1934), these alternated with a new sequence of stories featuring another, drastically different character, Jirel of Joiry:

'Black God's Kiss' introduced the beautiful but ferocious Jirel, a warlord – or more properly, a *war-lady* – in medieval France, who was sword and sorcery's first heroine. As capable a fighter as she is, it is her indomitable will that is her greatest weapon. Red-headed and yellow-eyed, she is not just a match for any man, she will challenge supernatural forces with extraordinary bravery. Perhaps that strength comes from her literary

DNA, which fuses both Northwest Smith and the Shambleau to create an Amazonian archetype. (Wilson 2013: 100)

Although the Jirel stories are ostensibly set in the Middle Ages, 'Black God's Kiss' and its direct sequel, 'Black God's Shadow' (both 1934), describe Jirel's explorations of a bizarre underworld beneath her castle. She is forced to embark on these perilous expeditions because she and Joiry have been captured by robber baron Guillaume the Conqueror. Jirel escapes from her own dungeons, but rather than attempting to leave her castle, she descends into a land of the dead to find the means of reclaiming her birthright. This eerie world-within-a-world is populated with ghostly echoes of Greek and Roman mythology. Significantly, Jirel must disregard her priest and take off her cross in order to enter. Even as this subterranean space represents the ruins of the Classical world that served as the foundations of the medieval one, it also symbolizes Jirel's own unconscious mind, which she must access in order to gain the power to overcome her enemy.

The netherworld has lower gravity than normal, which means that the mistress of Joiry can travel as swiftly as if she has Hermes' winged feet. The uncanny environment, redolent of the Asphodel Meadows, is filled with traps that Jirel avoids by using her wits. Ultimately, she comes to a temple containing a Cyclopean statue: 'It was a semi-human figure, crouching forward with outthrust head, sexless and strange. Its one central eye was closed as if in rapture, and its mouth was pursed for a kiss' (Moore 2007b: 42). Jirel kisses the idol, something that she refused to allow Guillaume to do to her, and something goes into 'her very soul' (Moore 2007b: 43). She is overwhelmed by the true horror of this hell, and desperately retraces her steps, fleeing an unnatural dawn that may represent a terrible kind of self-awareness. Jirel returns to Joiry to find that Guillaume and his men are waiting for her, but she now lets the Conqueror take her in his arms. As their lips touch, the black magic that entered her when she kissed the statue leaves her and fatally consumes Guillaume. The price of her victory is that she has damned the warlord to the netherworld below, and Jirel now realizes that she has killed the only man she could ever love.

Moore inverted the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in this story, but she had not finished with it. 'Black God's Shadow' was published only a month after 'Black God's Kiss'. In this work, Jirel is haunted by her actions, and in her dreams, Guillaume's soul implores her to release him. She goes back to the land of the dead, but discovers that it is now different, perhaps symbolizing the change of heart that she has undergone. She finds that Guillaume has been punished by being turned into a statue himself (a fate more in keeping with classicism than that of Northwest Smith's paralysis in

'Shamblau'). The outline of the sculpture parodies his once living form: 'The jealous black god manifests itself, but Jirel's essential humanity lets her fend off its psychic assaults so that she can help Guillaume's soul find peace. In doing so, she also redeems herself, completing the journey begun in 'Black God's Kiss' from enslavement to the Conqueror and her own emotions to independence and redemption' (Wilson 2013: 102). If these stories play with the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, then the next in the sequence, 'The Dark Land' (1936), evokes the myth of Hades and Persephone. Here the entity that rules a parallel world claims Jirel as his bride, but once again Moore's subversion of genre conventions also applies to her use of tradition. Unlike the mortals of Classical mythology, preyed upon and subject to the whims of the gods, the war-lady wins the otherworldly battle.

With Henry Kuttner, Moore wrote 'Quest of the Starstone' (1937), in which Jirel and Northwest Smith meet. After this collaboration, Moore and Kuttner not only married but also formed a creative partnership that produced, under several pseudonyms, a prodigious amount of science fiction and fantasy literature. Arguably, when writing under such aliases as Lawrence O'Donnell or Lewis Padgett, Moore was echoing the uncertainty of Classical scholarship as to whether the work of figures such as Homer refers to the creation of one or many authors. According to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*:

Most of Moore's and Kuttner's works between 1940 and his death in 1958 were to some extent collaborations; each writer reportedly being able to pick up any story where the other had left off, and it has proved futile to attempt to determine who may have been the sole or senior author of many tales published under their own or their several shared names. (Stableford et al 2014)

Moore, though, would still publish some fiction under her own name, almost certainly indicating sole authorship, and this material continues to draw inspiration from antiquity.

Direct literary descendants of Jirel and Smith appear in her short novel, *Judgment Night*, which was originally serialized in *Astounding Science Fiction* in August-September 1943. The haughty and impetuous Juille is the heir to Lyonese, a declining interstellar empire with its capital on the planet Ericon. However, Ericon is also the home of the Ancients, a species of aliens with nearly omnipotent powers, and whose fickle sponsorship of younger races decides who or what rules this dominion. Despite her better judgement, Juille finds herself increasingly attracted to a man who turns out to be the ostensible leader of the H'vani, the people who now vie with her own for control of the empire. Egide is a daring rogue

with a hint of Northwest Smith, and, in confirmation of Moore's Romantic nihilism, he too finds himself drawn to Juille, even as he meets his match in her. The perverse mating dance that Juille and Egide perform leads to the destruction of entire worlds, far outstripping the damage that Jirel and Guillaume inflict on each other and those around them. The struggle for supremacy between these two humanoid races is echoed in the violent courtship between their wayward representatives. And if love is blind, as Moore seems to believe, so are the lovers unable to recognize the essential truth; their passions obscure the bigger picture.

Even as crumbling Lyonese falls to the barbaric H'vani, humanity is judged ruthlessly by the elder race: 'Neither will win [...] Man has run his last course in our Galaxy. [...] We plan no pogrom against mankind [...] Man himself attends to that' (Moore 1952: 154). As *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* argues:

The darkness of the tale, its use of the conventions of Genre SF to expose the tragic failure of the human species to understand itself, and its weighting towards a deep, engendering past against which present actors seem shallow puppets dancing on a darkening stage, marks it as a significant predecessor to (and probable direct influence upon) a wide range of writers, including Leigh Brackett, Margaret St Clair, Jack Vance, Gene Wolfe, and later figures like Michael Moorcock. (Stableford et al 2014)

As with Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series (1942–50), the historical inspiration is the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, but there is no Seldon Plan here to ameliorate the situation. Rationality is abandoned for emotion; love does not conquer all, it surrenders almost everything except itself. This is a Dionysian nightmare rather than an Apollonian vision. A major contribution to the Golden Age of science fiction, *Judgment Night*, also represents a refinement and culmination of the elements that Moore explored in her earlier weird fiction.

The Roman influence is also apparent in 'Vintage Season' (1946), in which mysterious figures are discovered, too late, to be time travellers from the future. Just as Nero supposedly watched Rome burn, they are witnesses to a disaster that will bring about the collapse of civilization. Again, there is a Dionysian aspect to the story: the tourists from the future eventually admit that they could prevent the catastrophes they visit, but refuse to do so. This is not just because such interference would change history and erase their culture from it, but because one of their number, Cenbe, is composing a 'symphonia' using the images derived from the unfolding events. This opus engages all the sensory faculties of its future audience, whose existence

and civilization both depend on historical tragedy:

And suddenly Oliver realized from across what distances Cenbe was watching him. A vast distance, as time is measured. Cenbe was a composer and a genius, and necessarily strongly empathic, but his psychic locus was very far away in time. The dying city outside, the whole world of now was not quite real to Cenbe, falling short of reality because of that basic variance in time. It was merely one of the building blocks that had gone to support the edifice on which Cenbe's culture stood in a misty, unknown, terrible future. (Moore 1975a: 304)

As Moore wrote in her afterword, the germ of the idea was the question, 'What if time travelers from the future visit epic events of our era simply as tourists, here to make a Roman Holiday of our personal disasters?' (Moore 1975b: 308).

'Vintage Season' unlocks not only one of Moore's recurring themes, but also the root of her Classical influences: she views all civilizations as doomed to fall. However, she also believes that new cultures will be built using the ruins of the old. What she portrays is a cycle of what the economist and political scientist Joseph Schumpeter terms 'creative destruction' (1994: 139). The world that Moore knew was built on the remains of the Classical world, and since all things must pass, it too would be superseded; cf. Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* (*Somnium Scipionis*) (c.52 CE) described as 'The earliest surviving text that takes a strictly cosmic rather than merely aerial view' (Roberts 2006: 23):

For that which ever moves is eternal; but that which imparts motion to something else and itself receives its motion from some other source, since it admits of an end to its motion must needs have a limit to its life. Therefore that only which moves of itself, as it never abandons itself so it never ceases to move. More over this is the source, this is the original cause of motion to all other things that move.<sup>2</sup>

Moore's pessimism is also evident in other science fiction stories such as 'The Code' (1945) and 'No Woman Born' (1944). In both tales, men create new forms of life using artificial means, but discover to their cost that a high price has to be paid for assuming a role that is almost exclusively the preserve of the female of the species in nature. Even if Moore was not directly influenced by Ovid, but came to him secondhand, 'No Woman Born' uses robotics to interrogate the story of Pygmalion. The brain of a beautiful female dancer called Deirdre is transferred to a robot body after in a terrible fire in a theatre. The cyborg is able to perform again, but her manager and the scientist who saved her have misgivings. To quote Ovid

on Pygmalion:

His heart was torn with wonder and misgiving,  
Delight and terror it was not true!  
Again and again he tried his hopes –  
She was alive! The pulse beat in her veins! (326)

In fact, the unhappiness that Moore's male characters sense in Deirdre is her fear that she is no longer human, but what we would now call trans- or post-human. Yet, she is condemned to this new existence.

Kuttner's early death prematurely ended Moore's career in science fiction and fantasy. Having finally completed her university studies twenty years after matriculating, she became a lecturer who supplemented her income with television scriptwriting. She remarried, oversaw the reprinting of her and her first husband's work, and continued to support younger authors in the genre; however, her heart had gone out of writing in the field she had done so much to advance.

The Classical influences that permeate Moore's work are clear and ever-present, but what do these tell us? According to Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, 'Transmission and the construction of meanings through time is emphasized in chronologically structured histories but each reception is also located synchronically in a wider context of lateral relationships that may extend across space rather than time or may be a common feature in a number of receptions, irrespective of timeframe' (Hardwick and Stray 2011: 5). The mirror that Moore holds up to Classical myths is a distorting one because she was driven to make these ideas her own. In contrast, the light she shines on them shows why they had, still have and always will have power. As she said herself:

If you have read past *Shambleau* to *Jirel*, you will probably have noticed what a close relationship the two women bear to one another. I realize now that, unconsciously, no doubt, both were versions of the self I'd like to have been. (Moore 1975b: 308)

Moore gave Northwest Smith an ending of sorts in 'Song in a Minor Key' (1940). In this brief vignette, he is allowed to return home at last. On one of the green hills of Earth, he thinks about the future he might have had, and describes the boy he was as 'lost as Atlantis now'. Then he straps on his gun and heads off, no doubt into space again, but just as certainly into myth. After all, as she puts it: 'Even if he could go back and start all over, the tale would be the same' (Moore 2007a: 378).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 98. All subsequent references given in the text.

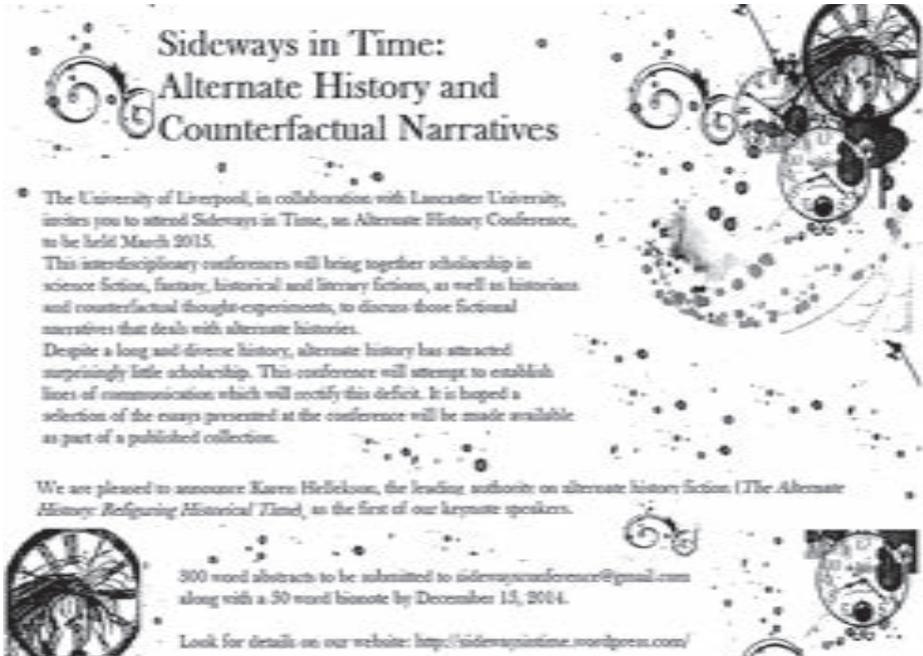
<sup>2</sup> Cicero. *Somnium Scipionis: The Dream of Scipio Africanus Minor, Being the Epilogue of Cicero's Treatise on Polity*. Trans. W.D. Pearman (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1883), 13.

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## Sideways in Time: Alternate History and Counterfactual Narratives

- The University of Liverpool, in collaboration with Lancaster University, invites you to attend Sideways in Time, an Alternate History Conference, to be held March 2015. This interdisciplinary conference will bring together scholars in science fiction, fantasy, historical and literary fictions, as well as historians and counterfactual thought-experimenters, to discuss those fictional narratives that deals with alternate histories. Despite a long and diverse history, alternate history has attracted surprisingly little scholarship. This conference will attempt to establish lines of communication which will rectify this deficit. It is hoped a selection of the essays presented at the conference will be made available as part of a published collection.

We are pleased to announce Karen Hellekson, the leading authority on alternate history fiction (*The Alternate History: Reshaping Historical Time*), as the first of our keynote speakers.

300 word abstracts to be submitted to [sidewaysconference@gmail.com](mailto:sidewaysconference@gmail.com) along with a 50 word bio-note by December 15, 2014.

Look for details on our website: <http://sidewaysintime.wordpress.com/>

# The Creative and the Critical: On Inspiration

## 1) How Many Miles to Babylon? Researching 'The Bordello in Faerie'

Michael Swanwick

Some years ago I wrote a story titled 'The Bordello in Faerie', in which a young man in a weary old redbrick factory town takes to crossing the river to visit the eponymous establishment and over the course of a few seasons learns some hard truths about himself. This sort of tale usually glosses over the actual sexual acts in such places. But for artistic reasons, I thought it worthwhile to be explicit. When my friend and fellow fantasist Greer Gilman asked to read the newly-finished typescript, I cautioned her about the graphic nature of its depictions and handed it over. The next day, returning the text, she drew herself up straight and in an amused simulation of shock, said, 'Sir!!!'

A dream I had recently prompted me to reflect on the fact that I had never put down on paper the odd method I had employed to research this story. So I thought I would share.

As I was working on the story, I visited Faerie in a series of lucid dreams which I induced not every night but often enough to gain new material. As I was drifting off to sleep I would imagine myself crossing the railroad bridge from Ironbeck (an avatar of the Winooski, Vermont, of my youth) and then following the tracks into Faerie. At a railroad signal light – one red light and one green; I never saw a train – I would turn left and go down the cindery slope to a gravel path. Listening to the sound of gravel crunching underfoot, I would walk down it, counting the narrow dirt trails leading down through the trees to my right. At the fifth one, I would plunge into the undergrowth. A short, winding way later, the path brought me to a red lacquered Chinese bridge crossing a small, dark pond – the Crim Dell of my college years at William and Mary. Halfway across the bridge, I would pause and stare down into the black water.

Deep, deep beneath the water lived giants – female, voluptuous, naked. Dropping a coin in the water and waiting while the ripples bounced off the shore and converged again would summon them. When they came rolling up from the darkness to squeeze their breasts at me, to spread their orchids and turn their cheeks, tumbling away again in disdainful sexual display, I was free to move on.

Not far from the bridge, the land opened up into fenced meadows. In one was a horse named Dobbin. He was the guardian of the forest border. Picking up an apple from the ground, I would feed him it. (Dobbin

was clearly a merger of the horses in Hopewell Village, a recreated Revolutionary War foundry, which my young son delighted in feeding twenty years ago, and an old plow horse which my wife and I met in the Irish countryside in 1982 and whom we nicknamed Old Fred.) Sometimes we talked, sometimes he was silent. But Dobbin was the angel with the fiery sword at the gateway to the Garden. Without his permission, without his being offered and accepting the apple, I could go no further.

Then I was in the Forest of Faerie and it was night. As Dobbin had directed me on my first visit, I reached overhead and broke off a leafed twig from a tree. As if I had flicked a switch, every leaf in the forest glowed as bright as an incandescent light.

By then, I was fully asleep.

The way to the bordello was as described in the story. The acts that I forged in the laboratory of my imagination were as documented therein. 'The Bordello in Faerie' was published in the autumn 2006 issue of *Postscripts*, uncensored, with neither blush nor apology.

In our dreams we are not only free but licentious. So, too, must we allow ourselves to be in our writing.

The night before composing this brief piece, on a kitchen table in a vacation cottage in Maine, I had a dream. In it, I entered the Forest of Faerie without following any of the rituals or protocols: no bridge, no giantesses, no Dobbin, no electric leaves. Striding through a forest that might have been any northeastern American forest, I saw the bordello on the forest floor.

Stooping, I picked it up.

The bordello was small, hard, and so dark a brown as to be almost black. It looked exactly like a walnut. I placed it in my pocket and strode on, presumably to plant it in fertile soil elsewhere.

## **2) The PKD Grid Revisited**

Tony Wolk (Portland State University)

March 21, 1979; and just returning from a quick trip to Paris, my daughters, pre-teen and teen, greeting me, 'excited as can be.' 'You got a letter from Philip K. Dick!' An unforeseen moment, though not so in hindsight.

If I may back up. The scene was North London where I was on sabbatical leave from Portland State University, my family along for the ride. I thought I would be working on linguistics, but a contorted series of events swivelled (swibbled?) me back in the direction of science fiction, especially that of Dick. What precipitated Dick writing *to me* was a letter on February 27

from Mark Hurst at Berkley Publishing – Hurst having just completed his edit of *The Golden Man*, an anthology of Dick's short stories. Hurst's opening paragraph read: 'I've misplaced your letter (after reading it), but not your article, which I enjoyed reading, and am passing along to Phil, as I'm sure he'd enjoy it.'

Luckily, I have carbons of my share of the correspondence, as did Dick for his share. My letter wasn't exactly misplaced; it went along with my article to Dick, then living in Santa Ana. The article in question had as a working title 'Wub Makes the World Go Wound.' In it I did my best to speak cohesively about Dick's short fiction, which no one at the time, so far as I know, had addressed. Dick's letter of March 13 said much the same: 'To my knowledge this is the first article written about my short stories'.<sup>1</sup> I did not set off to write the article with *Foundation* in mind, but sometimes things work out for the best, and within a year it appeared in F18 (January 1980), with a more formal title, 'The Sunstruck Forest: A Guide to the Short Fiction of Philip K. Dick.'

So far so good, or not ... The article published in *Foundation* was not quite what Dick had seen. Here's the second paragraph of Dick's letter:

Your grid was especially fascinating to me. When my antithetical themes are laid out that way I can see that there is a very positive basis in my work; choice, responsibility, care, help, garden, music, empathy, etc. I suppose it could not work out any other way, by definition, but I find myself in complete agreement with the themes I affirm. The negative elements (e.g. weapon, machine, greed, fakes, drugs, tomb, masks, etc.) certainly are matters to abominate. I seem to be on the side of the angels.

Dick's paragraph was like music to my ears, as though Shakespeare having seen my little article from *Shakespeare Quarterly* had written me a note saying, 'You nailed it.' The grid that Dick references I have used whenever I teach one of his stories or novels (figure 1).

Except, imagine yourself in a library reading Dick's letters and deciding to check out the grid in F18. Alas, you would come up empty-handed. Instead, on page 26, you would find what I will call a less immediate version of the grid. It wasn't that the editors thought the grid inadequate; rather that they didn't have a convenient way to reproduce it. I did what I could, foregoing my hand-drawn diagram for something like a prose version of Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel. Meanwhile, my imaginary reader has returned to his or her table, wondering, 'Grid, what grid?' Hence this small article, more than thirty years after the fact. While I am at it, there is another question raised by Dick's letter. He writes:

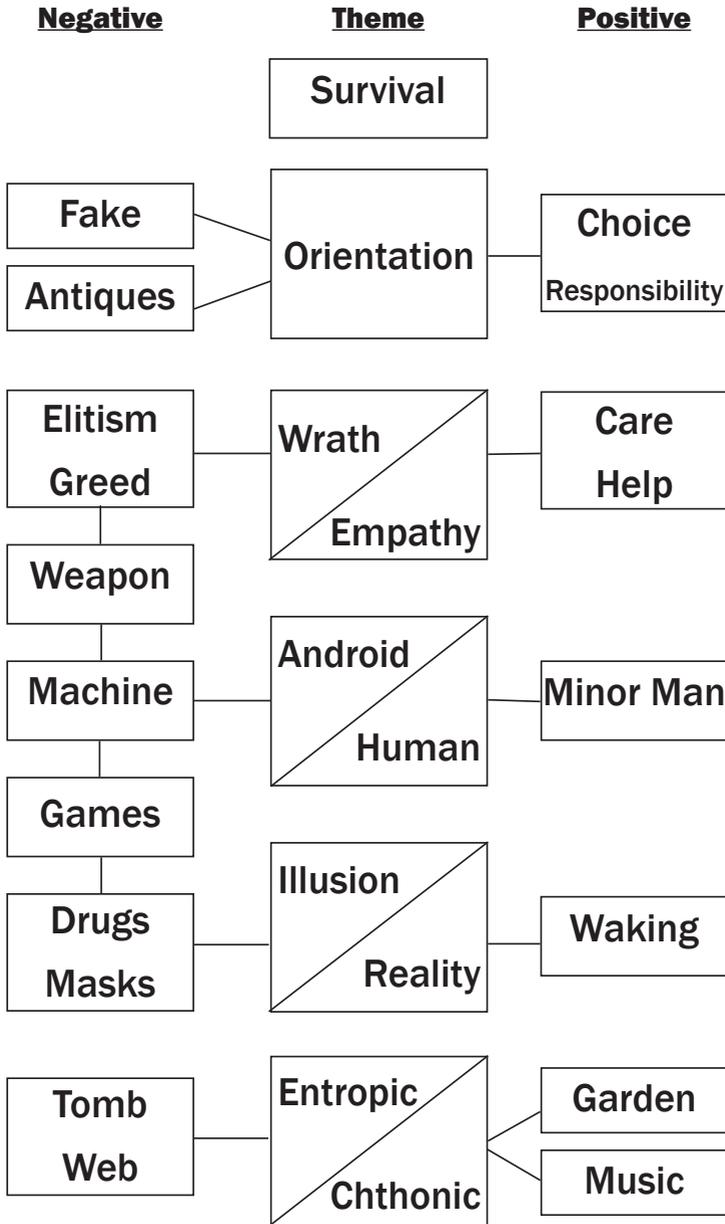


Figure 1

Of particular interest to me is mention of another article, which you wrote with George Drake, called 'The Flowering of Darkness', dealing with my novels. Could you by any chance send me a copy of this? I know this is a lot to ask, but frankly I'm dying to see it. It would mean a lot to me.

The article in question – really more like a monograph – had been written by me and George Drake, at the time one of my students, focusing on Dick's novels and exploring, one might say, applications of the grid (George currently is a Professor of English at Central Washington University). It nearly made it into print, first with a collection of essays on Dick edited by Martin Greenberg for Taplinger, then for *Science Fiction Studies* (its length nearly gave Darko Suvin a heart attack; his suggestion to add brevity to it I didn't have the heart for), and finally as a chapbook by Borgo Press.

On a last note, I am wondering, is the grid self-evident? Although I have Dick's assurance that it is, I will have to leave that judgement to the reader.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup>The letter is reprinted in *The Selected Letters of Philip K. Dick, vol. 5: 1977-1979*, ed. Don Herron (Novato: Underwood-Miller, 1993), pp. 215–6. In addition, for March 28, 1979, there's a letter to an unknown addressee which begins with a salutation to 'Dear Susan': 'Please tell your husband that I got a lot out of his article but must read it again several times inasmuch as it contains so much. I spent the whole day with it. If I can get my act together I will write him at length, but I am a bad letter writer (I mean, my letters are okay but I just don't write them.)' 'Susan' is Susan Stanley, my wife at the time who had written a short article on Dick for the British magazine, *Company*.

# Comics Unmasked: Art and Anarchy in the UK

The British Library, 2 May – 19 August 2014

Reviewed by Tony Venezia (Birkbeck College, London)

This extremely popular and well-publicized exhibition has much to interest sf and fantasy fans and scholars, but also has much more to offer beyond restrictive typologies of genre. That said, comics are a relatively overlooked and potentially fertile field in sf studies, even more so when non-Anglophone iterations (particularly, but by no means exclusively, *bandes dessinées* and



manga) and non-superhero genres are taken into consideration. This exhibition is an excellent place to start thinking about sf comics and their position in broader comics networks and traditions. The exhibition space itself contributes to a distinct sense of off-kilter perspectives: all sharp angles and sloping ceilings. This is further emphasized by the witty and pleasingly disturbing use of mannequins dressed up in *V for Vendetta* Guy Fawkes masks, now familiar from their appropriation by cyberactivists. These figures haunt the exhibition, none too discreetly watching over the shoulders of the spectators.

These figures tie the sf element to the subtitle of the exhibition. It must be said that this description does not really do the show any favours. It put me in mind of numerous stodgy expositions, such as *Rule Britannia: British Comic Art* (2010), which repeatedly wheel out the usual proto-comics in an attempt to provide a spurious and linear genealogy of classic eighteenth century satire through to *Viz*. Although *Comics Unmasked* references some of the usual suspects here (Hogarth, Cruickshank), it largely avoids this sense of fuss to favour a more fragmented but completist collection that mixes the well-known with the half-forgotten with the what-were-they-thinking.

Although the dystopian *V for Vendetta* is associated with the writer and anarchist, Alan Moore, an imposing figure whose work has done much to explore the engagingly complex potentialities of comics as sophisticated narrative devices, it should be pointed out that the Fawkes mask was as much the creation of *V* artist Dave Lloyd. For this reviewer (and possibly for

any comics reader hitting forty), Moore's work throughout the 1980s and 1990s provided an introduction not just to comics but also to sf and the Gothic. I read Moore and Ian Gibson's *Ballad of Halo Jones* before I had any idea about Marge Piercy and Ursula Le Guin. Moore is, unsurprisingly, well represented here, but his presence is contextualized along with that of many of his precursors and contemporaries.

Rather than emphasize a dominant linear historiography, the display is instead broken up into thematic chunks which are themselves chronologically arranged. The six distinct but overlapping thematic sections are: Mischief and Mayhem; To See Ourselves; Politics: Power and the People; Let's Talk About Sex; Hero with a Thousand Faces; and Breakdowns: The Outer Limits of Comics.

Mischief and Mayhem focuses on slapstick and violence, which have regularly provoked moral outrage and campaigns for censorship. Figures like the tricksterish Mr. Punch have periodically catalysed moral panics in their carnivalesque upsetting of order. This section also emphasizes the importance of the printing press in Victorian literary culture.

To See Ourselves examines the social aspects of comics. An important reference point is Ally Sloper, represented both in comics form and by an artfully placed ventriloquist's dummy. *Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday* presented the eponymous character as a boozy, work-shy stereotype for a largely working-class audience. While far from progressive, the character proved familiar and popular with its readers. Ally Sloper's ideological connotations may have been missed or ignored, but later comics, especially following the explosion in the 1960s and 1970s of small presses and self-publishing (long an established practice in comics) led to a variety of often marginalized and politicized viewpoints. Sloper's direct descendents can be found in *Andy Capp* and *Viz*, with their casual representations of domestic violence and social stereotypes. But this section places them as part of a spectrum that includes Suzy Varty's highly personal feminist *Heröine*, and the serialized story *Third World War* from the anthology comic *Crisis*.

Politics: Power and The People naturally follows on from this. Moore's *V for Vendetta* features heavily, as do the intimidating mannequins. Scripts from *V* and audio from Moore himself contribute to the feeling of an installation. But as this section reveals, comics have been used for both progressive and reactionary ideologies, notably in the 1980s by both neo-Nazi National Front sympathizers and the Anti-Nazi League.

Let's Talk About Sex revels in the erotics of the comics page. Precedents can be found in eighteenth century pornography and the late Victorian Decadents (especially Aubrey Beardsley). With post-war permissiveness

there has been a general acceptance of adult content, and comics, underground and top shelf, have played a role in this.

Hero with a Thousand Faces nods toward Joseph Campbell in its title, alluding to the ubiquity of highly masculinized heroic figures. Much of this section is given over to superheroes, a genre as American as jazz and the Western but one that has seen some of its best known examples written and drawn by Europeans. I was pleased that the importance of the sf anthology comic *2000AD* was acknowledged here: the comic is still published today, and has undoubtedly acted as an incubator of British (and, at times, non-British) talent. The character Judge Dredd, as much anti-hero as hero, features heavily, but there was also an older heroic sf tradition that included the post-imperial *Dan Dare*.

The 1980s saw key superhero comics start to examine their own ideological assumptions, often working to actively subvert them. This coincided with the so-called 'British Invasion' of artists and writers moving to America to re-work established characters (as well as Moore, we can mention Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, Bryan Talbot, Dave McKean, etc.). This tradition continues today in the Anglophone mainstream with the work of writers like China Miéville (on *Dial H for Hero*, a revamp of an older DC comic), the hugely successful Mark Millar, and artist Doug Braithwaite who started out at *2000AD* before moving to Marvel.

The exhibition concludes with *Breakdowns: The Outer Limits of Comics*. This section highlights more experimental comics, starting with the odd preponderance of comics influenced by magic and Aleister Crowley which attempt a verbal/visual derangement of the senses. Some of these will no doubt be familiar: Moore and J.H. Williams III's *Promethea*, Morrison and McKean's revisionary Batman tale *Arkham Asylum*, and Morrison et al's Pynchonesque *The Invisibles*. But included alongside these experiments in form are examples of experiments as objects. Woodrow Phoenix's *She Lives!* is a remarkable one-off. A one-metre square giant comic book that tells a wordless story set in a 1940s circus whose meditative splendour owes as much to its striking material form as to its immersive narrative. The exhibition concludes with a selection of webcomics, which coming after Phoenix's immense contribution seems a little underwhelming.

The British Library's idiosyncratic exhibition space lends itself well to the comics on display. The thematic arrangement gives the sense of chronological rewinding with each new section, and purposefully asks the viewer to make their own connections between individual comics, overriding themes, and shifting contexts. This is not to suggest that the exhibition is under-organized. Implicit is the now party-line in comics studies

that comics are essentially a nineteenth-century phenomenon, one whose sufficient and necessary conditions of emergence included new print technologies, an emerging literate, urban and mainly working-class audience, and recognisable visual features such as recurring characters. This is not to elide the importance of what we might, unsatisfactorily but necessarily, term proto-comics. The proto- prefix implies a sense of teleology, of a trajectory of visual culture leading more or less directly to comics as we understand them today. Instead, implicit in the exhibition, we get a strong sense of what W.J.T. Mitchell has termed 'imagetexts', those composite works that combine the visual and the verbal, as well as the contexts that precede, inform, and anticipate comics' material design. These objects – tapestries, illustrated bibles, woodcuts etc. – may look like comics to our eyes, and make use of tabular and sequential arrangements, narration, and word balloons, but, crucially, they would not have been considered by contemporary audiences to be what we now call comics. Similarly, as comics have increasingly accrued cultural value over the past thirty or so years artists have taken advantage of the form to experiment and to push the comic book closer to the art object, while digital media often seems to bring comics and video games closer together.

Despite the exhibition's overall strength, a couple of valid criticisms can be made. The exhibition emphasizes the British aspect but transnational currents are felt throughout. For example, Mr. Punch's Italian origins are under-played. The influence of European artists is similarly de-emphasized. This has been felt both directly – see, for instance, the work of Spanish Carlos Ezquerro and Italian Massimo Belardinelli for *2000AD* – and indirectly – for example, the artistic influence of French Jean Giroud/ Mœbius. The over-reliance of Anglophone comics on the American market and on American publishers (notwithstanding a thriving small press scene) could also have been drawn out more. Finally, while iPads are located at convenient intervals allowing spectators to sit down and read digitized versions of physical comics it was a shame that there were not more comics to pick up and touch: comics are surely characterized as much by their material tangibility as by their mixing of image and text. Even *She Lives!* was buried under a sterile display case.

That said, the curators, broadcaster and journalist Paul Gravett and author/artist John Harris Dunning, deserve full credit for their efforts. Gravett in particular has long been a fixture on the UK comics scene, proselytising on behalf of the form. Together they have managed to bring together proto-comics, comics, and post-comics into a coherent display and with a wide appeal for both *cognoscenti* and beginners.

# Conference Reports

## **Embattled Heavens: the Militarization of Space in Science, Fiction and Politics, Freie Universität, Berlin, 10-12 April 2014**

Reviewed by Katherine Boyce-Jacino (Johns Hopkins University)

The history of the Space Age is typically told within the framework of military projects – the launching of the V2 rocket in 1942 by German military scientists from Peenemünde or the ‘Star Wars’ Strategic Defense Initiative of the 1980s. The space race between the US and the Soviet Union looms large in this narrative; thus the field of space history has been dominated by political and military histories of space operations carried out by the US and the USSR during the Cold War. ‘Embattled Heavens’ challenged this tendency. As co-organizer Dr Tilmann Siebeneichner explained in his portion of the introductory address, traditional historical narratives of the military in space tend to focus exclusively on the technological and political facets – the technical history of satellites, for example, or the political decisions that led to the Star Wars program – and follows the general path of space history in focusing primarily on the Cold War superpowers. As Daniel Brandau concluded, the history of the militarization of space is ‘more complex than just the history of two competing superpowers. There were dynamics on local, national and transnational levels, in politics as well as in popular culture.’ The goal of the conference was a two-fold reorientation of space history, focusing attention on Europe rather than the US-USSR contest, and expanding the history of militarized outer space away from traditional military and political history, and instead considering it in the context of an astroculture that emerged in the twentieth century out of the complex interactions of science, policy, and fiction.

The participants came from a wide variety of disciplines. Among the space historians were scholars of sociology, media studies, cultural history, and design. The diversity represented at the conference was, as Dr Alexander Geppert explained in the introduction, a deliberate effort to expand the boundaries of the traditionally narrow field of space history. ‘Our mission’, he said, ‘is not to revitalize space enthusiasm and invent reasons why we should return to the Moon or go to Mars, but rather to make something normal which many still perceive as exotic, but which was absolutely central to societal self-understanding in the twentieth century’.

Geppert is the director of a research group at the Freie Universität called ‘The Future in the Stars: European Astroculture and Extraterrestrial Life in the Twentieth Century’. His two co-organizers, Daniel Brandau and

Tilman Siebeneichner, are senior members of this group. The overall aims of the group's project are to characterize astroculture in the mid-twentieth century, and to recontextualize the history of space enthusiasm in terms of Europe. While previous conferences hosted by the group have focused on different articulations of astroculture, this was the first to focus explicitly on the military aspect, or, as Geppert put it, 'the dark side of astroculture'.

Central to the framing of this conference was the 'dual-use' character of space. As Siebeneichner articulated in the introduction, the 'dual-use' theory argues that outer space has been a place of two simultaneous, often conflicting discourses – the political, or military, and the civilian. Thus any moment in the history of outer space is to be understood as a product of these two discursive forces. For example, in his presentation on the history of the Global Positioning System, Paul Ceruzzi argued that while GPS was initially developed as an American military navigation system, the satellite frequencies were increasingly opened to civilian use, turning the GPS into an international, public tool. The gradual shift in utility of the GPS was an example, as Ceruzzi put it, of the 'social construction of technology'. Paweł Frelik pointed to early space combat videogames as another example of the dual-use nature of outer space: what started as a simulation for computer testing gained a faithful following among early video gamers. These space invader games were part of what Frelik called the 'military industrial media entertainment network.'

Regina Peldszus made the dual-use nature of outer space projects especially clear in her analysis of mission control centres connected to the European Space Agency. Their designs often had their roots in war rooms, with the military influence visible in both the layout and the small details of design and language within the room, such as the use of buttons marked 'Arm'. An extreme demonstration of the dual-use nature of space projects during the Cold War was the collaboration between psychics and the CIA, known as the Stargate Program, that Anthony Enns described in his presentation on their 'remote viewing' project. In the early 1970s, the CIA developed a network of psychics to whom they would give the coordinates of suspected Russian military sites; the psychics, using their remote viewing ability, would describe the site in detail. As Enns observed, the psychics' descriptions were never used alone, and were always verified by satellite imagery, but despite this apparent redundancy, the programme was supported for years. These psychics were treated as civilian satellites, able to 'zoom in' from space onto an assigned target; thus even the CIA was influenced by the 'dual-use' character of space.

As the breadth and complexity of these examples suggests, the 'dual-

use' nature of space in this period was never a static relationship between civilian and governmental impulses. Rather, it was an ongoing and dynamic process that shaped both the popular and political culture of the period. As Colleen Anderson demonstrated in her presentation on East and West German political cartoons in the early years of the Cold War, many artists situated their commentary in a heavily militarized outer space, even when the events to which they referred were not explicitly to the Space Race. This displacement of Cold War aggression into outer space, and the prevalent imagery of a militarized space, demonstrates how outer space and the imagery of the Space Race came to stand in for other Cold War tensions.

As Greg Eghigian further observed, the displacement of Cold War tensions into outer space was especially apparent in the excitement surrounding a rash of flying saucer sightings in East and West Germany in the early post-war period. The consistency of the reports led many at the time to conclude that whether or not people were seeing flying saucers, they were certainly seeing something. The question of what they were seeing was answered differently in East and West Germany. While West Germany suggested that they were witnessing Soviet testing of captured rockets, East German writers claimed that the UFO panic was fostered by the US as anti-Soviet propaganda. In both cases, writers and witnesses were working under the assumption that if space was not yet weaponized, either by the US, the USSR, or UFOs, then it very soon would be.

Nevertheless, while imagery of a militarized outer space was prevalent in this period, as Alex Roland observed, space itself was never actually weaponized. He argued that although it seemed like it would become an inevitable dimension of Cold War politics – the Space Race itself was an explicit hybrid of military, technological and civilian interests – a combination of political *détentes* and prohibitive costs prevented weaponization from ever coming to pass. Despite this, there were many military projects during the Space Age that prepared for the possibility of weaponization. Jordan Bimm cited as an example the short-lived 'Mars Jars' astrobiology programme developed by Hubertus Strughold for the US in 1956. The Mars Jars were a series of simulations that Strughold developed and popularized which attempted to recreate the atmosphere of Mars. These simulations, as Bimm argued, marked both an early exercise in imagining the domestication of Mars, as well as an early iteration of astrobiology research, a field that incorporated scientific research with military projects.

Phillip Theisson identified a different vector of astrobiology research in his discussion of space suit designs, in which he argued that imaginary versions

operate as metaphors for different cosmologies and world views: 'our understanding of the cosmic order has a retroactive effect on the body concepts we develop to cope with it.' Thus the space warfare in *Starship Troopers* turns the uniformed bodies of the soldiers into crypto-fascists, and the scientist J.B.S. Haldane can suggest in 'On Being the Right Size' that the ideal astronaut body is that of a man with his legs sawn off.

The space suit, like the vision of a domesticated Mars, was one of the many motifs which repeatedly resurfaced during the course of the Space Age. Another enduring motif identified by Isabel Shrickel was that of the space mirror, or 'sun gun', which was first attributed to the German army by a 1945 *TIME* magazine article. By the 1950s, the German rocket scientist who first suggested the idea, Hermann Oberth, was working for the United States, and was increasingly vocal in his support for the construction of a space mirror, which he suggested could be used to alter the temperature of Earth. Later appearances of the sun gun included the James Bond film, *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), as well as many science fictions novels.

These recurrent motifs hovered at the intersection of scientific research, military projects, and popular reception. As Diethard Savicki argued in his presentation, this potent combination of institutional research and popular culture gave life to conspiracy theories and myths, such as the theories surrounding the stimulation of the ionosphere. In 1961, the United States sought to create an artificial layer within the ionosphere that could be used to further manipulate broadcasting waves. This project, which was poorly received by the public, combined with the founding of an ionosphere study office in a remote corner of Alaska, fueled conspiracy theories for several decades. Savicki pointed to Nick Begich's 1995 book *Angels Don't Play This HAARP*, as well as to numerous *X-Files* episodes, as examples of the pervasive power of this conspiracy theory and its enduring presence in contemporary popular culture. The flourishing of conspiracy theories concerned with the representation of space is not often a subject of historical inquiry, as Savicki observed. However, they exist at the point when the 'idealized dichotomy between scientists and lay people' breaks down. These myths, motifs and theories are marginalized in traditional histories of the military and outer space, but become vital elements of Space Age narratives when approached from an interdisciplinary perspective that concerns itself with the reciprocal relationship between science, politics and popular culture.

In the second keynote of the conference, Michael Sheehan explained the significance of this relationship for the militarization of space. As he

observed, countries that went into outer space brought with them 'intellectual baggage.' From the beginning of the move into outer space there were competing attitudes about its use. There was a deep-seated resistance to the militarization of space from those who viewed it as a safe haven from terrestrial war, while those in favour argued that space was a crucial strategic area that demanded a military presence. The middle position defined by Sheehan offers a conception of space first and foremost as an *environment*: it is not destined for either a military or a pacifist fate, but rather is a dynamic place open to interpretation. In this view, the role of science fiction and popular culture more broadly assume greater significance, as popular culture gives meaning to military and political decisions.

Thus the vision of outer space that emerged in the course of the conference was one of a dynamic place, constituted by an unstable relationship between the military and popular culture. Furthermore, the traditional framework of the Cold War was destabilized; the Space Age emerged as a framework in its own right related to the Cold War but nonetheless unique. The interdisciplinarity of the conference pointed to the approaches required to understand the history of outer space in the twentieth century – neither purely militaristic nor purely fictional, the outer space of the Space Age was modern, unstable, and radically open to interpretation.

### **Report on Waveform NW50: The Science Fiction 'New Wave' at 50, University of East Anglia, 31 May 2014**

Mark P. Williams and Jacob Huntley (University of East Anglia)

The conference set out to examine what defined the New Wave's beginnings, its subsequent development and its critical and creative heritage – was it really a wave or more of a singularity? did it end, collapse, decohere? or did that particular and peculiar fusion of avant-garde aesthetics, counter-cultural attitude and reiteration of pulp traditions regenerate the genre? Our aims at the conference were to historicize and theorize the New Wave, consider the influence and effect it has had on subsequent science fiction, and to provide a forum to discuss texts well-remembered alongside those long-forgotten. Inevitably certain writers dominated both papers and discussion but the critical directions taken by various contributors enabled a rich variety of texts, writers, approaches and interesting interlocking themes to be aired and explored.

Delegates came from the UK, Europe and India and included

representatives from *Foundation*, *Science Fiction Studies*, Glyphi and also a contributor to the New Wave, Michael Butterworth of Savoy Books. Jayde Design and Savoy Books had a shared concessions stand in the foyer offering editions of *New Worlds* from Michael Moorcock's tenure as editor, a variety of New Wave-related books from other prominent *New Worlds* writers, and some of Savoy's own post-New Wave writings.

The keynote presentation was provided by Professor Rob Latham (UC Riverside), the editor of *Science Fiction Studies*, who is currently working on a book on the history of the New Wave, which links it to the underground and counter-cultural context of the Sixties and Seventies. His opening discussion established the breadth that characterized the whole day, dealing with the artistic and design context of *New Worlds* under Moorcock's tenure, and examined the creative decisions to link avant-garde photography, collage and play with textual layout. It not only set a clear stage for returning to the visual dimension of Moorcock's *New Worlds* but raised important problems for representation of women within the magazine, and within New Wave sf as a whole. The questions and answers concentrated on the problem of gender for New Wave writers: for all the fizz and jolt of the experimental turns taken throughout the pages of *New Worlds*, there are often surprisingly staid and stale stereotypes and assumptions underpinning the fractured, cut-up surface effects. What emerged from comparisons between the collages by Pamela Zoline and the photography employed in the experimental advertisements by J.G. Ballard prompted a thoughtful consideration that the presence of radical thought in one form did not exclude the possibility of conservative thought in another from manifesting in the same publication or within the work of the same writer or artist, and that the question of gender representation remained problematic.

The opening panel had papers on Moorcock's novel, *Behold the Man*, from Professor Rowland Wymer (Anglia Ruskin) and a discussion of the aesthetics of Cold War paranoia from Dr Christopher Daley (Westminster). Professor Wymer examined Karl Glogauer's time-travelling Messianism as an exploration of the principles of early Christianity, drawing out the discourse on Jungian principles from Moorcock's text. While Christopher Daley's paper took in a broad sweep of the cultural contexts of the 1960s, comparing the languages of the Welfare State and the 'Warfare State' in the popular consciousness of the time to ground his discussion of paranoid styles in *New Worlds* writing based on Richard Hofstadter's book *Paranoid Style in American Politics*. As examples he discussed *New Worlds* 174, featuring Charles Platt's cut-up of an Eduardo Paolozzi image and the juxtaposition of an essay on the positive possibilities afforded by the Space

Race alongside the more troubling imagery of an astronaut in Michael Butterworth's 'Concentrate 1'.

The Q & A speculated on how deep the intellectual engagement with technology and science was in *New Worlds* compared with other magazines of the time. Farah Mendlesohn raised the issue of the role of engineering as a significant route to training and social mobility from the 1950s onwards as a cultural context for the divergent attitudes towards technology – here too contrary undercurrents could be discerned in the New Wave. As discussion turned towards the question of gender and the representation of women it was pointed out that there is a significant overlap between sf writers and porn writers during the period. In the coffee break it was decided by general consensus that the Twitter tag for the conference would be #NW50 and with that the event took spontaneous flight on social media, an emergent speculative space entirely suited to the concerns of the conference.

The second panel dealt with comparative and alternative contexts for critically evaluating the innovations of New Wave writers. Dr Paul March-Russell (Kent) explored the connections between Moorcock's conception of the New Wave in the context of Modernism through Blaise Cendrars' *Moravagine* (1926). Dr March-Russell evaluated the relative radicalisms of Cendrars, taking account of the misogyny of *Moravagine* and compared it with the gender politics of *New Worlds*. Independent scholar, writer and publisher Nicholas Herrmann then delivered a paper comparing Golden Age and New Wave responses to the question of future-forecasting in sf. He examined the approaches of Arthur C. Clarke in *Profiles of the Future* and J.G. Ballard in *Vermillion Sands* to interesting effect, positing a shared sense of inevitability towards either failure of nerve or failure of imagination, alongside thought-provoking ideas about how these future-facing despatches can be read retrospectively.

After lunch panel three consisted of discussions of John Carnell's tenure as editor of *New Worlds* and his subsequent move towards *New Writings in SF* from Dr Andrew M. Butler (Canterbury Christ Church), providing insight into how individual tastes and personalities shaped or influenced the Wave. This was followed by a quantum theory inflected discussion of the conceptual problems involved in identifying the literary object 'New Wave' as a waveform by Dr Nick Hubble (Brunel). Both papers questioned the identification of a specific moment and/or movement by foregrounding the historical and theoretical leaps necessarily involved in either instance. Butler evaluated the function of the aesthetic break from pre-Moorcock *New Worlds* in contrast with Carnell's publishing a provocative manifesto

on the state of the form by Ballard. Hubble argued for using the term 'decoherence' to describe the collapse of aesthetic radicalism into an object of literary study in Colin Greenland's *The Entropy Exhibition* (1983), using the fiction of Christopher Priest to suggest ways of thinking of the New Wave which do not depend on the collapse or failure of its radical ambitions.

Panel four took in three different historical moments and aesthetic developments each connected to the New Wave. Gayadri Devi (Indian Institute of Technology) discussed the relationship between New Wave and cyberpunk from a cultural and theoretical perspective; Dr Mark P. Williams (UEA) explored the liminal phases between New Wave and New Weird through the 'minor literature' of UK small press anthologies *Savoy Dreams* and *The Starry Wisdom*; while Johnathan Barlow (Manchester Metropolitan) addressed *Savoy's* contentious and controversial *Lord Horror: Reverbstorm* through its relationship with Jerry Cornelius in *New Worlds*.

The final panel of the day combined two scheduled panels into what was quickly termed – with shades of Damien Broderick's megatext – a megapanel. This megapanel led everyone into a final enthusiastic and wide-ranging general discussion which rounded off the day. Christina Scholz (Graz) and Dr Sarah Dillon (Cambridge) presented very different perspectives on M. John Harrison's *Empty Space* trilogy, while Tom Dillon (UCL, no relation) and Dr Alex Anthony-Lewczuk (Lincoln) gave equally varying considerations of Jerry Cornelius as a figurehead and emblem of *New Worlds*.

Scholz's paper on 'Human Aliens and the Psychogeography of the Alien Event Site' connected Harrison's writing methods with the quantum problems explored by Nick Hubble through the function of transcendence and immanence, awe and horror in *Light*, *Nova Swing* and *Empty Space*. Sarah Dillon then analysed the technological familiar and the function of maternity in *Empty Space* fashioning the interaction of femininity and cats within Harrison's fiction into a provocatively Deleuzean assemblage of becoming-animal between alien species, together with Richard Doyle's philosophical examination of artificial life or 'A-Life' in *Wetwares* which treats literature as a 'rhetorical software' for people. Tom Dillon's paper on Jerry Cornelius from his first appearance in 'Preliminary Data' as a character oscillating between modernist and postmodernist, avant-garde and popular impulses drew on Frederic Jameson to ground speculations on the function of character and story in the Cornelius fictions. Alex Anthony-Lewczuk concluded the panel and the day, fittingly, with a discussion of *The Final Programme* as literary and filmic text firmly embedded within its

cultural moment as sixties 'Spy-Fi' which responds in interesting ways to twenty-first century readings in relation to metafiction such as *The Raw Shark Texts*. The concluding question and answer took off from these fruitful and interesting papers to range over the often problematic relationship of sf to broader issues of gender, sexuality and cultural politics, current debates that extend from, and beyond, the New Wave.

### **CRSF 2014, Gateway Conference Centre, Liverpool, 20 June 2014**

Reviewed by Charul Patel (Lancaster University)

With thirty-five presentations across thirteen panels, the fourth annual Current Research in Speculative Fiction conference was filled with a diverse variety of studies from across the field. As the only annual postgraduate conference of its type, the delegates not only represented much of the UK but also universities in Ireland, Europe, and North and South America. This impressive geographical spread demonstrates the global academic interest in speculative fiction and, in particular, the number of early-career scholars coming together to share their ideas. As a newcomer to the event, it was an honour to take part in a conference that is quickly becoming a regular feature for any up-and-coming academic working in the field of speculative fiction. I admire the tradition that CRSF is establishing, and hope to continue coming to the conference in future years.

CRSF 2014 welcomed Dr Mark Bould (University of the West of England) and Prof Roger Luckhurst (Birkbeck College, London) as its keynote speakers. Dr Bould opened the conference with a dynamic presentation on 'It Ain't No Jive, Trying to Stay Alive: Insurgency and Epidermality in Blaxploitation Sf'. His presentation showcased the intersections between sf and Blaxploitation cinema and. The talk was illuminating, as he emphasized the ways that films adapt traditional stories such as *Frankenstein* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* into the Blaxploitation genre. Using a number of theatrical trailers to highlight his thesis, and to add a touch of humour to the subject, Bould discussed the 'epidermalization of inferiority', drawing upon Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, and ending with instances of movies where characters change race; the transformation often treated as a monstrosity. Bould presented a fascinating lecture, delivered with good humour.

Prof Luckhurst sustained the high energy of the conference after lunch with a talk on 'Corridor Horror'. His talk examined the number and variety of corridors in speculative fiction and considered their role as liminal spaces. Beginning with Rudyard Kipling's 'At the End of the Passage', taking place

in a house in India with no corridors, Luckhurst surveyed the many different appearances of corridors in horror films and science fiction. He cautioned that his work on corridors was still in its early stages, but his enthusiasm for his subject was palpable.

The panels themselves were varied and interesting. In the 'Undead Narratives' panel – a topic that continues to be of interest each year – David Baird's (St Andrews) 'Towards a Zombie Hero' initiated a discussion of the zombie as hero, specifically in the need for them to have a conscience. Carys Crossen's (Manchester) 'You Can't Kill the Truth (or Zombies): The Zombie Apocalypse and Conspiracy Theory in Contemporary Horror Fiction and Film' continued the debate with an examination of the institutions and conspiracies that result in zombie apocalypse, suggesting that zombies threaten individuality by working as corporate drones. In contrast with other kinds of monster, which usually operate alone, zombies function as an impersonal collective. The panel was rounded off by Michal Horton's (Arkansas State) 'Rhetoric of the Inhuman Body: The Science Fiction Vampire of the 1980s'. All three panelists discussed the development of undead narratives, drawing together ideas on how they reflect upon our culture.

The panel on 'Video Games' similarly explored concepts of the players' relationship with narratives. Jennifer Harwood-Smith's (Trinity College, Dublin) 'Cakes and Potato Batteries: The Function of Truth and Lies in the *Portal* series' explained how this relationship is destabilized due to an inability to trust the narrator in *Portal* and *GLaDOS*. Dawn Stobbart's (Lancaster University) 'Playing the Dystopian Landscape: *Bioshock*, *Rapture*, and Political Ideology' explored how video games can use rhetoric and immersion to allow a player to explore ideological themes and decide for themselves if they agree or disagree with these ideologies. Both panels left me with the undeniable feeling that I have not experienced enough 'undead narratives' or video games, and a promise to myself to rectify this deficiency.

My own panel, 'Building Fantasy', ended the conference, and I was pleased to share it with Sandra Mänty (University of Oulu, Finland) and Arthur Newman (Ulster), both returning to the conference. I am told that the conference saw a greater number of fantasy papers than in previous years – a fact that pleases me greatly as an academic studying the genre and feeling that the field is sorely lacking in current research. Mänty's 'Good against Bad: Animal Helpers and Animal Adversaries in Tolkien's Stories' surveyed fantastic and non-fantastic creatures in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Newman's 'Far from the Madmen Crowd: Michael Moorcock's

Alternative Creations' discussed how Moorcock's works (and fantasy fiction in general) functions like a collective creation myth. The papers all discussed world-building in fantasy fiction, a facet that is so integral to the genre. The Q&A session following the panel also demonstrated the interconnectedness of the papers; the conference organizers did a great job in organizing panels that fitted so well together.

I also had the honour of chairing the panel on 'Performance'. Kristina DeAnne Bell's (Bangor) 'X-Men vs *Othello*: Marginalized Identities and Canon Evolution' suggested the abolition of the traditional canon structure. Grace Halden's (Birkbeck) 'Ascending or Descending? Debates Surrounding Mind Uploading as Discussed in *Stargate Universe*' examined the question of whether identity is based in the body or in the mind, and further, explored the ramifications of who owns the body. Susan Gray (Royal Holloway, London) ended the panel with 'All the Play's A World: Space and Worldbuilding in Science Fiction Theatre', discussing the methods through which conceptual space is created. All three panelists engaged with some idea of authenticity, of asking the question 'what is real?', and how we as readers and academics identify what is 'authentic', whether in terms of canon-construction, identity-formation or conceptual space.

The conference was preceded by an informal get-together at the historical Philharmonic Pub. The pre-conference social is, I gather, quickly becoming part of the tradition of the CRSF conference and an event to look forward to in itself. It allowed people to become comfortable with each other prior to the conference, which resulted in a more relaxed atmosphere the following day. The evening social was well attended, with the majority of the spacious room dominated by CRSF conference-members. And while the majority of the people at the pre-conference social were repeat-comers, undoubtedly those attendees who come next year will be sure to make it a priority. The conference also ended on a high note with a wine reception, followed by drinks and dinner, giving non-Liverpudlians a chance to experience some of what the city has to offer. But indubitably the best part of CRSF was meeting academics and fans who are inspired by and appreciate researching the same areas of the field as myself – and taking part in an event that continues to bring this community together. I look forward in anticipation to next year's CRSF.

### **Visualizing Fantastika, Lancaster University, 4 July 2014**

Reviewed by Rhianon Jones (Lancaster University)

Envisioned as an interdisciplinary postgrad conference, *Visualizing*

*Fantastika* sought to open up the discussion of fantastika in any and all mediums and forms. It included a keynote by graphic artist Bryan Talbot, with a further twenty papers delivered across seven panels.

The day began with a thought-provoking keynote from Lancaster's own Brian Baker entitled 'Zeppelins, Iron Towers and Brass Engines'. The insights he offered into the genre of scientific romance set the tone for the conference and provided an excellent frame of reference for the rest of the talks heard. Baker's study incorporated analysis from much of Talbot's works, particularly the *Grandville* series, whilst also proposing several key points to consider in reference to the current resurgence in popularity of the genre. He began by noting that exploration narratives were crucial to the development of British sf. The scientific romance worked ideologically by showing where the boundaries of empire fiction lay, especially in terms of what was permissible to be said with regards to war and technology. Analyzing the icons in the paper's title, Baker proposed that writers had returned to the scientific romance in the last decade as a response to current cultural conditions. The role of Zeppelins articulate anxieties concerning where force and power are situated; within recent narratives transportation equates to domination. The iron towers, on the other hand, represent cityscapes, their role being not to critique but to provide nostalgia, not for empires, but for a possible future. In *Grandville*, the brass engines of scientific romance become an emblem of the power structures that LeBrock must negotiate. Baker noted that they tend to represent a totalizing state rather than one with the potential for progress. In recent science fiction such 'infernal machinery' has the potential to descend into fascism, as systems of war become systems of state. Baker claimed that the increase of neo-scientific romances in recent years is due to the conditions of globalized late capital and Western military intervention in borders beyond their own. Given their images of war, invasion fears, anxieties about global networks of communication and transport, it is difficult not to mention issues of freedom, to see how such narratives have direct bearing on the world today.

The notion of fantastika as estrangement, intended to make us look at and evaluate the world we inhabit, was something that echoed throughout the day. Following the first keynote were two panels entitled 'Interacting with the Real World' and 'Fantastika on the World Map: Exploring National Identities.' Panel one included papers from Kenneth Fee (Abertay), which detailed his own experiences working as a digital artist within the gaming industry, and Glyn Morgan (Liverpool), which explored the use of anthropomorphic characters as a device for exploring the horrors of the

Holocaust, starting with the earliest known examples of the work – cartoons produced by Holocaust victims – and finishing with a detailed look at Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. Recurrent throughout Morgan's talk was the notion that by projecting a critique of such totalizing regimes and brutal atrocities into the mouths of animal characters, the writers were able to articulate ideas and opinions that would otherwise not have been possible. For those novels and pamphlets written during wartime, it especially allowed the writers to produce work that otherwise might have been banned, if not more severe punishments.

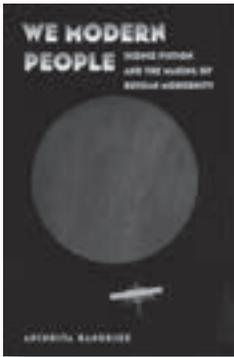
Morgan's paper prefigured the topic of the second keynote, from Bryan Talbot, who gave an interesting perspective on the anthropomorphic tradition in illustrated books and comics from an artistic perspective. As Talbot made explicit, anthropomorphic characters have existed for as long as people have been telling stories. Following the anthropomorphic tradition from early cave drawings, through religion and Aesop's fables, Talbot looked at examples including Beatrix Potter, Kenneth Grahame and Br'er Rabbit, as well as some lesser known figures such as Louis Wain, who painted psychedelic cats whilst an inmate of various mental asylums during the 1930s. Talbot also spoke about the use of anthropomorphic characters in political propaganda and satire, including the earliest printed example by Thomas Rollinson in 1784. His keynote ended by spending a few minutes demonstrating some of the references to this tradition within *Grandville*. In particular, he spoke about the influence of Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard and pointed out homages to Scrooge McDuck, Tintin and *The Absinthe Drinker* by Degas, as well as his own political satire in the form of a racist griffon named Nick.

Panel three was entitled 'Genre Makeovers'. Catherine Spooner (Lancaster) looked at the occurrences of Goth makeovers, both in reality TV shows such as *Gok's Style Secrets*, and films such as *Twilight: Breaking Dawn*. Spooner's focus was what these makeovers reveal about tensions between mainstream and subcultural ideals of beauty, and the boundaries surrounding the monstrously transformed self. Clare McNally (Northumbria) critiqued the use of romantic tropes in steampunk, interrogating how the genre both subscribes to and challenges female stereotypes. Jo Ormond (Lancaster) looked at the reworkings of classic fairytales through Mattel's new franchise of *Ever After High* Dolls, a spin off from their *Monster High* range. By examining the clothes and the dolls as physical objects, Ormond considered how the dolls recount and reimagine the fairytales that inspired them, and their implications.

A final panel looked at the role of costuming in the creation of

superheroes. Sunday Swift (Lancaster) scrutinized how the suits in the *Iron Man* films not only display but also glorify Tony Stark's disabilities. Swift argued that the suits worked to demonstrate both Stark's interior and exterior states, often standing in for what is lacking in the character's dialogue. This exhibition of weakness and imperfection also worked to normalize Stark as a superhero by presenting a flawed and broken character. Helga H. Lúthersdóttir (University College London) explored the costuming of Norse gods. Starting with the earliest surviving incarnations of them pictured in leather and wool, Lúthersdóttir suggested that their Romantic representation as Roman gods made them more remote from ordinary people. She developed this idea through the costumes of Marvel's comic book superheroes and their embodiment in the recent film adaptations of *Thor* and *The Avengers*. She proposed that their visual depictions, both in terms of clothing and colour palette, reflect not only the fashions of the times but also the needs of their creators. Thor's current costuming once again suggests the casual attire of mere mortals. Their current proximity to us marks a return to their earliest known depictions, suggesting that their social function has returned to something similar in pre-modern times. Alan Gregory (Lancaster) focused on depictions of the Penguin, and the temporary erasure of his deformities through costuming and prosthetics in both Tim Burton's *Batman Returns* and DC Comic's rendering of the character. For Gregory, Cobblepot's costuming provides a provisional respectability and normalcy by hiding his disabilities under fabric prosthetics. Ultimately, though, the character reclaims his identity by removing these fake appendages.

The mood of the day was extremely positive and the conference ended on a high note with an informal dinner. A special edition of the Lancaster postgrad journal, *The Luminary*, is planned for release at the start of next year, publishing papers from the day, and the fantastika conference returns next year with the title *Locating Fantastika*.



## Book Reviews

**Anindita Banerjee, *We Modern People: Science Fiction and the Making of Russian Modernity*** (Wesleyan University Press, 2012, 218pp, £19.00 pbk)

Reviewed by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay  
(University of Oslo)

The development of sf as a genre in the nineteenth century outside the Anglo-American and Western European world is gradually shaping up as an exciting area of research. Key to this generic emergence narrative is the way in which sf influences and is influenced by the momentous techno-scientific changes of the period. Multiple discourses, those of progress and synchronization, empire and knowledge transfers, nationalism and modernity, race and biopower, have fed into this narrative, highlighting similar processes of generic development from West to East Asia, Eastern Europe to Latin America, and more recently, Africa and South Asia. Anindita Banerjee's study of Russian sf looks closely at the way in which the genre is entwined with Russian modernity. Analysing a brief period from the 1890s to the 1920s, and looking at a wide range of texts in and around sf, Banerjee argues that it was one of the chief ways in which a modern and distinctly Russian identity was crafted and emphasized in literature, taking in both Russia's position between Europe and Asia as well as its changing political dynamic, and that Russian sf differs from its West European counterpart in the uniqueness that this emphasis entailed.

Banerjee's study is not an exhaustive study of pre-Soviet Russian sf but of thematic trends and patterns. The book is divided into four chapters. The first, 'Conquering Space', and the second, 'Transcending Time,' deal with two of the major axes of modernity: the nation-state and changes in the perception of time. The third, 'Generating Power,' focuses on electricity. The fourth, 'Creating the Human,' deals with the concept of the New Soviet Man and his making.

In the first chapter, Banerjee focuses on three spaces of early Russian science fiction: Siberia in relation to the Trans-Siberian railroad, the skies in narratives of flight, and finally, other planets. Her discussion of the Trans-Siberian railroad is the highlight of this chapter. Siberia, as an undiscovered territory that was rich in resources, lent to Russian nationalism and Slavophilism its imaginary national identity. As Banerjee shows, through her

reading of Nikolai Danilevsky, Fedor Dostoevsky and others, by the end of the nineteenth century Siberia had come to represent the 'East,' a source of values that was the antidote to the decadence of Western modernity. Vladimir Odoevsky's novella 'The Year 4338' (1838-64) imagined a world with Russia at the centre, enabled by the resources of Siberia and allied with a subordinate China. The notion of an Asian Russia, forming other unions such as with India, also found a place in the sf imagination of poets such as Velimir Khlebnikov ('The Indo-Russian Union' and 'The Continent of ASSU') and Alexei Gastev. One wonders about the prescience of these imaginary tales in light of more recent geopolitical developments in Asia. Banerjee's discussion of 'air dramas' and extraplanetary voyages is somewhat briefer in comparison, although here she presents a study of art by Symbolists, Futurists and Suprematists that is engaging. In the last section, Banerjee also briefly skims over the work of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Alexander Bogdanov and Alexei Tolstoy.

Electricity, which for most of the century remained associated with a mystical or quasi-mystical force, became a way to assert the independent Slav spirit. In Konstantin Sluchevsky's 'Captain Nemo in Russia' (1898), Nemo arrives in a Russian island in the Arctic where a Russian has created farmlands out of frozen land with the use of electricity, which serves the needs of the locals. Banerjee argues that in the Russian's project, electricity serves a social function that implicitly criticizes the Vernian/Western hero who uses electricity for his own ends. In a gendered reading, Banerjee argues that the two modes of perceiving electricity, the male anode representing the values of the Enlightenment and the female cathode representing Romanticism, are united in the project, 'reconciling the spiritual orientation of Slavophilism with twentieth-century modernity' (105). Siberia reappears as the mythic land made visible by electrification. Banerjee also discusses the popular perception of electricity in *Nature and People*, a journal that features throughout her work, and compares it with the actual poor state of electrification of Russia to explore the discrepancy between technological possibilities and the reality of their manifestation. For many of these authors, while developments across the world and especially in Western Europe came to their attention through such journals, absences in Russia prompted these visionaries to lay out programmes, much like socialist utopia itself.

The second chapter, dealing with the function of time in the Russian experience of modernity, is at once the most significant and most expected part of the book. Studies of modernity and modernism as a movement in almost all contexts have focused extensively on the

technology and philosophy of time. Banerjee's contextual reading goes over familiar territory such as relativity in physics and Bergson's *durée*. She shows that themes, for instance dehumanization by the clock, whose iconic film representation is Fritz Lang's industrial worker struggling with the hands of the clock in *Metropolis*, had their Russian precedents in Valery Bryusov and other writers. Banerjee notes that the responses to altered perceptions of time, for instance decelerated and cut-up time made visible in chronophotography and slow motion in film, ranged from the enthusiastic and positive to negative and dystopic. While Russian Futurists such as Khlebnikov drew upon Nietzsche and Wells in their manifestos and fiction, embracing the speed that modernity entailed because it offered revolutionary possibilities of breaking the shackles of the past, other writers such as Simeon Belsky saw in acceleration the symptoms of degeneration, the quintessential fin-de-siècle obsession. The comet that could sweep away industrial civilization thus becomes a metaphor in Belsky's *Underneath the Comet* (1910). In a brilliant analysis in the last section of the chapter, Banerjee shows how Nikolai Fedorov's *An Evening in 2217*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and Alexander Bogdanov's *Red Star* are united in their critique of 'industrial clockwork ethics', and turn to intuitive 'feminized' time as a mode of resistance.

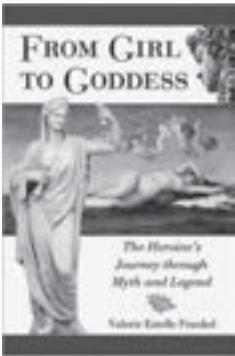
In the final chapter, Banerjee mainly focuses on two authors, Tsiolkovsky and Bogdanov. In Tsiolkovsky's 'panpsychism', Darwinism and evolution are placed in a cosmic backdrop. The nature of flight, touched on in the first chapter, now receives its full treatment as Banerjee shows how Tsiolkovsky used flight as the means to explore possibilities in biological engineering, including the transformation of humans into plant-like creatures, and finally self-sufficient space dwellers who move beyond the limits of the biological body. Before Olaf Stapledon explored similar concepts, Tsiolkovsky had already elaborated a programme for humanity's quest for the stars. Motifs considered 'eastern', such as reincarnation, also find their way into Tsiolkovsky's sf. Bogdanov's preoccupation with blood, the 'essence of life', and human immortality connects the latter half of the chapter to this theme. Banerjee demonstrates that Bogdanov's thought, from his philosophical and medical tracts to the sf of *Red Star*, exemplifies a unified lifelong vision.

A few things must be mentioned however *vis-à-vis* the overall content of Banerjee's work. First of all, unlike some other cases, Russian science fiction has not been the terra incognita of sf criticism. While it is true that most of these studies, as Banerjee points out, have focused only on later, Soviet science fiction and thaw literature, it is equally true that some of

the authors and works Banerjee looks at are recognizably canonical, such as Zamyatin, or are quite familiar to those interested in sf, such as Tolstoy's *Aelita*, Bogdanov's *Red Star*, or the contributions of Tsiolkovsky. Moreover, as Banerjee herself notes, many works that discuss later developments in the genre, for instance, Patrick L. McGuire's *Red Stars*, often begin with a brief prehistory of the genre. While this does not affect the force of Banerjee's argument or the contribution she makes to the study of sf, or even the range of new materials that she brings up for discussion, this aspect distinguishes the work from other genre emergence narratives. Moreover, the amount of cross-pollination between more well-known European texts and the Russian ones, as well as the nature of scientific transfer in the nineteenth century, also problematizes some of the claims Banerjee makes for Russian sf, including its baptism in Russia prior to its being recognized in the West as a genre. Public curiosity, wonder, and excitement around newer technological marvels, which Banerjee discusses in the Russian context as the crucible for sf extrapolations, have been discussed in many other early contexts, from the studies of Enlightenment electricity (e.g. Barri Gold and Martin Willis) to early flight (common in discussions of Edgar Allan Poe) and so on.

While claims about origin, precedence, commonality or distinction can often be tiresome and futile, the more useful way of characterizing Russian sf, as Banerjee herself seems to argue, quoting Steven Shaviro, that one may view Russian sf from the postmodern idiom of 'simulation' (159) The emphasis must be less on origins or precedence but on the ways in which these texts are embedded in networks of socio-historical relations and what functions they serve in their contexts. This also connects Banerjee's study to other recent emergence narratives, where a similar process may be observed: while sf in certain parts of the world emerged alongside larger techno-scientific changes, in the rest of the world, sf had a deeper role to play, substituting the absence of local change with imagined change and possibilities of future transformations. Thus, in Banerjee's work, sf itself is the genre of 'synchronisation' (11): it is a mode of representation whereby the normative (Western sf) and the non-normative (Russian sf) are brought into relation: but the ostensible challenge to the normative is mediated in the terms of the normative itself. This is the paradox of 'other sf': whereby all explorations of world/global sf happen in terms of normative Anglo-American and Western European tradition. If Banerjee's work does not move past this binary, then it is largely because her understanding of 'science fiction' itself is not subject to critique, in spite of the changed context (165 fn4).

In spite of this latter shortcoming, which is a product of the way in which genre criticism itself is framed rather than a problem with this work alone, *We Modern People* (a title she borrows from a phrase by Zamyatin) admirably fulfils the task it sets out to do: demonstrate 'the making of Russian modernity.' Banerjee's project of connecting diverse material – popular articles in journals, art works, manifestos of modernity, scientific texts, and philosophical works with sf fiction and non-fiction in prose and verse – in the context of Russia is remarkable in the sheer breadth of its ambition, and foregrounds a style of literary analysis that must be emulated more often.



**Valerie Estelle Frankel, *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey Through Myth and Legend*** (McFarland, 2011, x + 366pp, £28.50 pbk)

Reviewed by Lesley A. Hall (Wellcome Institute, London)

I was really not sure, on receiving this volume, whether to have a nostalgic little weep at the sight of something that might have featured on the tables at the long-departed Sisterwrite feminist bookshop in Islington in the late 1970s, or to be somewhat depressed that this sort of thing is still necessary. Do

we still need to be recovering the stories of women? The answer is probably yes, unfortunately: it is work that recurrently needs to be done.

To accentuate the positive, this book does provide an extremely useful primer of women in myths and legends, and commendably moves well beyond the stock and perhaps over-familiar North European tales to provide a varied sampler. It eschews the temptation to assume that the stories have one original, definitive form and considers much more recent rescensions of their motifs, even unto Disneyfication, to demonstrate how embedded some of these narratives are in our culture, and how pervasive they are. Many of the tales demonstrate girls and women taking up agency in some form or other, and counter the idea that the traditional heroine of folktale was merely a passive object, a victim to whom things happened, or a prize for the hero. Furthermore, Frankel is able to identify representations of female strength and agency in numerous stories in which women are positioned in essentially feminine roles, not merely in the also numerous tales of male masquerade, physical daring and women warriors.

Frankel, therefore, has done useful work in gathering together this vast

range of stories, both many which resonate through Western culture, and others from a much wider geographical and cultural reach, and on the basis of having provided this anthology of material, I might be inclined to recommend the work.

However, I found myself having qualms about Frankel's theoretical approach from very early on in the introduction. Are Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell the most helpful guides to this material? Both of them were notoriously gender-essentialist in their works and tend to have given a lot less consideration to female individuation, life-patterns, and narrative role than to those of male heroes. This is not to suggest that they may not indicate some productive ways of reading this kind of material. However, it is also possible that the seductive notion of the Hero's Journey as defined by Campbell potentially occludes other kinds of narrative or imposes the journey motif on more complex tropes, even when contemplating masculine stories. And, is an archetype derived from the venturings of heroic males something that can be simply gender-reversed in order to apply to stories of women?

While not suggesting that (in terms of psychoanalytic readings) we should go back to Freud (though doubtless it may be entirely possible to read myths and legends for women's penis-envy and final achievement of appropriate vaginal orgasm and the production of the desired penis by means of birth of a son – is it worth it?), a thought that did strike, confronted with the contrast between the benign and helpful Fairy Godmother and the Evil Stepmother/Wicked Witch, was that this was precisely what Melanie Klein formulated in her construction of the paranoid-schizoid position. Further contemplation, however, failed to suggest any traditional tales in which Klein's depressive position, accepting both aspects of the mother and the ambiguity this poses, really gets accomplished: apart from W.M. Thackeray's sophisticated and playful riffs on generic conventions in *The Rose and the Ring*, in which the Fairy Blackstick wishes her latest set of godchildren neither great good nor great harm, but simply 'a little misfortune', as beneficial to the development of their characters.

Is it always and only the case that 'the heroine's journey' is about emulating the Great Mother, 'the ultimate creator, the vessel of emerging power and source of all life', by 'forming a family circle they can rule as supreme nurturer and protector': is this 'universal and empowering'? The idea that the trajectory for women is from girlhood to a manifestation of the goddess within seems problematic: as the Aubrey sisters (in Rebecca West's *The Fountain Overflows*) complain of Ruskin: 'It's all about how every woman ought to behave like a queen. Why should she, when there are such

lots of exciting things to do?' Frankel's blanket claim in the introduction, however, is in practice undercut by the very diversity of the mythological and legendary figures discussed, unless the concept is broadened so much as to dilute it to an almost homeopathic level.

The diversity is praiseworthy, but does also raise potential problems. The figures discussed range from mythic goddesses, through traditional folktales, via literary creations such as H.C. Andersen's Little Mermaid, to actual historical women (Cleopatra, Joan of Arc) who have become legendary figures. It seems possible that certain category distinctions are being eroded by this otherwise admirably eclectic approach, with a segue from 'inspiring women' to 'archetypes'. Sometimes women and their stories are inspiring precisely because they fail to be archetypal and are saying something startling and different and breaking the conventional narrative flow: the Biblical story of Ruth and Naomi (not name-checked by Frankel) is an evocative yet unique example of mutual devotion between women of different generations, mother- and daughter-in-law, no less (more or less the antithesis of the Venus-Psyche relationship in the legend of Eros and Psyche).

In particular, the relevance of tales of goddesses to the lives of mortals may be far from direct, since goddesses are not bound by the same constraints: however much myths of the Greek gods present Hera as the jealous wife of a serial philanderer, she is not merely that and she has powers of her own which she deploys for her own ends. As scholars have noted concerning the cult of the Virgin Mary, adoring the sinless Mother of God does not necessarily have any repercussions on improving conditions for normal mortal women or attitudes towards them. It is not just that women lack the powers of goddesses: there are tales enough that specifically caution women to refrain from emulating or competing with them (as in the tale of Arachne, turned into a spider for daring to claim herself a better weaver than Minerva).

Frankel does consider some stories about women pernicious, citing the tales of female Catholic saints, in particular those of virgin martyrs (although I can think of writers who have suggested that these provided women with an empowering place to stand based on values that were not about reiterating the reproductive cycle). Even so, she does incorporate a number of tales and motifs which could be considered a good deal less than positive: for example, she depicts tales of terrible devouring mothers as awful warnings or responses to patriarchy.

This raises the more general issue of the extent to which these tales can be universally taken as valuable lessons for girls and women. Like

the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*, Frankel likes to point the moral that adorns her tale, to a degree that sometimes comes over as a desperate endeavour to find a take-home message. Her exegeses do strive, at times rather implausibly, to read the tales as at some level really about female empowerment or the attainment of a fully integrated maturity or at least as failed integration. Unfortunately we have to take on trust what happens after stories conclude with a marriage or reconciliation to a husband after peril and vicissitude. Not all the tales chosen do so end, but it is a rather persistent motif. I was therefore left with the feeling that while Frankel has done wonderful work in retrieving and retelling these stories, they sometimes feel forced into an analytical framework that irresistibly, in context, makes one think of the Ugly Sisters trying on the shoe.



### **Mark Bould, *Science Fiction***

(Routledge, 2012, 239pp, £17.99 pbk)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Working through Mark Bould's fascinating though often very dense analysis of science fiction film, two questions occur. Firstly, is science fiction criticism applied to film cognate

with science fiction criticism applied to literature? Secondly, are we even talking about the same thing: is the science fiction of film the same as the science fiction of literature? The answer to both questions would appear to be: no.

There is, of course, an obvious difference between the two forms: literature is text-based, film is image-based. (Confusingly, some academics will refer to an individual film as a text, though in this I think they mean something much broader, along the lines of 'object of study'.) The ramifications of this difference, however, go much further than I suspect we believe.

For a start, no critical consideration of a work of literature would fail to at least mention the author of the work. In this book Bould covers something in the region of 700 films, and probably 30 to 50 of them are dealt with in some detail. Yet no screenwriter is mentioned, and you could count on the fingers of one hand the number of directors named. Authorship, however that might be defined, is clearly not of primary importance in film criticism. However, every time a character is mentioned, Bould is scrupulous in naming the actor (one minor role in an early-twentieth-century film is

accompanied by a parenthetical 'uncredited'). Performance, therefore, is significant. And in that detail the focus of critical attention is shifted dramatically.

Furthermore, films are generally considered in isolation from any original source material. For instance, Bould is very careful to situate the 1931 film, *A Connecticut Yankee*, in relation to the socio-economic circumstances from which it emerged. Thus the protagonist

wisecracks about the Depression and the rise of Mussolini, and introduces Fordist industrial practices under his monopolistic control. The film also anticipates elements of President Roosevelt's New Deal and, in a darker vein, the imminent return of mechanised warfare, including artillery and aerial bombardments of civilians. (25)

What he doesn't mention is that, though the details are different, all of these elements are present in one form or other in Mark Twain's original novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). This does not alter the film's satirical commentary upon its own time, but it does add a nuance to the satire that is absent from Bould's reading. Similarly, his positioning of *Things to Come* (1936) is based very precisely upon the fact that it was

made while Italy invaded and annexed Ethiopia, and released just months before the fascist coup in Spain, the declaration of war between Japan and China and the German invasion of Austria and the Sudetenland. (25)

He is correct that the opening section of the film caught the growing fear of war, but he misses the point that the film was based upon a novel, *The Shape of Things to Come* by H.G. Wells, that appeared in 1933, and in which the drumbeat of war was even more explicit. It is not that the book ignores influence – Bould's account is filled with films that are based on other films, that are influenced by other films, that refer to or allude to other films (though I remain unconvinced that *La Jetée* (1962) contains an allusion to *The Birds* (1963)) – but connections between text and image seem to play no part in reading a film.

Throughout the book Bould refers to a large number of critics, of science fiction (Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Carl Freedman, John Rieder), of film, of society; to the extent that this is as much a handbook of film criticism as it is a handbook of film. As a Marxist critic, the analysis he offers and the views he extracts from these other critics tend to be based on economics; even when he looks at postcolonial readings of science fiction it comes down to questions of commercial power rather than social or political hierarchies.

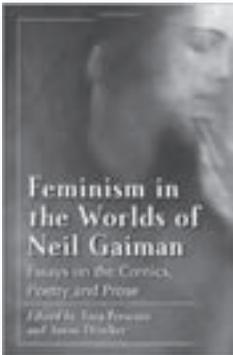
This is a now standard academic approach to science fiction, and Bould does make extensive use of work drawn from criticisms of science fiction literature on issues such as (to quote a couple of his subtitles), 'The social subjectivity of (mad) scientists' and 'Post-imperial melancholy in British sf'. But though issues such as the relationship of science to science fiction and portrayals of colonialism are of genuine concern in criticism of the literature, when applied to film they seem to take on a very different aspect.

It is, for instance, pretty well taken for granted that the science in science fiction is fictional science but in the literature most work tends to dress it with as much verisimilitude as possible, though in any case the focus both of the work and of the criticism tends to be on the social, cultural and personal effects of the science rather than on the science itself. Here, on the other hand, what comes across is that the very falsity, indeed the ridiculousness, of the science is deliberately knowing, is part of an unspoken contract between film and audience. Furthermore, probably because of the visual appeal of scientific instruments, retorts and computer screens and the like, the science itself is often what is in focus. In fact, the technology shown on screen often reflects the technology used to put it there; so much so, that Bould devotes some time to talking about the way that science fiction film has effectively been used as a marketing tool to sell the technology behind the effects for other military and industrial purposes. One might imagine that, in the film world, science fiction aspires to be science fact. Be that as it may, it would certainly seem to be the case that the relationship of science to science fiction in film is of a very different order to that in literature, and this in turn leads to very different critical approaches and standards.

Special effects are important not just as a display of the technology behind the film, but as an inextricable part of the narrative of the film. To the extent that, for a large part of this book, one is left with the distinct impression that special effects are a, perhaps *the*, defining characteristic of science fiction. Curiously, science fiction films that use little or nothing in the way of special effects are barely noticed in this book or are, as in the case of *Charly* for instance, entirely absent. The middle third of the book, the section that is literally central to Bould's entire discussion of science fiction film, is devoted to spectacle. Of course, effects can be used very well to present the sublime or the grotesque, which are a fundamental part of the critical approach to both literary and filmic science fiction. But Bould puts them on a par with camp, an aspect that is a persistent feature of sf on film but has little if any bearing on the literature. Camp is, in a sense, a deflation of spectacle, but it is integral to any reading of *Flash Gordon*, or *Barbarella*, or *The Abominable Dr Phibes*, or any of a host of other very popular sf films.

It is also there in most superhero films, which by their exploitation of effects are central to the notion of science fiction as film, though the superhero subgenre is rather more peripheral in literary science fiction.

The bombast of superhero exploits or the visceral thrill of explosions or ever bigger spaceships therefore become, through their engagement with the visual, key aspects of science fiction on film. The genre is, in effect, subdivided by degree or nature of spectacle; whereas divisions of science fiction according to the nature of the story being told, for example space opera, cyberpunk, or hard sf, are entirely absent from the book. It is not just that a critical approach mediated by the visual is necessary in any analysis of science fiction film; it is that the visual shapes what is being studied, so that the science fiction we see in films is not just held to a different standard, it employs an entirely different vocabulary to the science fiction we read. This vocabulary is very well explicated by Bould in this book; it makes it clear what it is we are looking at when we watch a science fiction film but it equally makes it clear that what we call science fiction on film is not what we call science fiction in literature.



**Tara Prescott and Aaron Drucker, eds.**  
***Feminism in the Worlds of Neil Gaiman:***  
***Essays on the Comics, Poetry and Prose***

(Jefferson: McFarland, 2012, 296pp, £28.50 pbk)

Reviewed by Sandor Klapcsik (Technical University of Liberec)

Neil Gaiman is undoubtedly one of the most well-known fantasy writers today. The criticism on his writings is extensive – recently, even the Open Court Press' Popular Culture and Philosophy series published a volume on his writings (Tracy Lyn Bealer et al, eds. *Neil Gaiman and Philosophy: Gods Gone Wild* (2012)). The recent McFarland book edited by Tara Prescott and Aaron Drucker discusses Gaiman's works in connection with feminism, which is plausible given Gaiman's roster of women characters. The contributors focus mostly on his comic books and short stories, which mean that, as the editors themselves admit, the film scripts and novels are not well represented in the volume. The upside, however, is that the reader receives a relatively full picture of his comics and several interesting analyses of the short stories.

Drucker and Prescott's introduction gives a short history of Gaiman's graphic books and explains the editors' broad and loosely defined

understanding of feminism. Besides lacking a properly defined theoretical framework, what is missed here is an overview of the previously published gender-related research on Gaiman. Although it would be a vain attempt to detail the existing criticism in its entirety, outlining at least those interpretations that involve or clash with the feminist understandings of Gaiman's writings would be sufficient and useful. These two problems are, in fact, occasionally detectable later in the volume: several contributors work with loosely defined theories and quite a few of them fail to convincingly incorporate previous criticism into their arguments.

Rachel R. Martin's 'Speaking the Cacophony of Angels' provides one of the most complex analyses in the volume. Interestingly enough, this is the piece that is perhaps the most critical towards Gaiman. Martin admits that Gaiman challenges the notion that comic books and graphic novels are mainly intended for male audiences, as he 'wrote (and continues to write) for and about women' (11). She also adds, however, that in Gaiman's comics, 'as in all phallogocentric discourse, no room abides for a language for women to speak' (13). She backs this argument by analyzing the Mother-Daughter relationship in *Coralline* (2002) and discussing Desire in *The Sandman* series, one of 'his androgynous characters [that] operate within the phallogocentric discourse and when in need of power their 'neutrality' becomes 'masculinity'' (26-7).

In contrast to Martin's view, Drucker, Prescott, Lanette Cadle, and Justin Mellette find characters and other elements in *The Sandman* series that show feminist insights. Mellette, for example, describes the contradictory characteristics of Delirium. On the one hand, the female character shows signs of neuroticism and madness, and usually appears as a comic relief: 'a character with little influence, constantly pitied, patronized, and at the mercy of stronger-willed characters such as Desire' (51). On the other hand, she is an extremely enigmatic character, as the reader never really finds out why she transformed from Delight into Delirium. Furthermore, several scenes reveal 'Delirium to be far more complex and stable than her normally neurotic personality suggests' (56), as she turns into a mythic hero on a quest in 'Brief Lives' and 'The Kindly Ones'.

It is a refreshing aspect of the book that, besides *The Sandman* series, three other graphic novels are analyzed. Renata Dalmoso interprets Gaiman's *Marvel 1602* (2003-4) as historiographic metafiction and associates its setting with Michel Foucault's heterotopia, while Coralline Dupuy analyzes *The Dream Hunters* (1999; a spin-off from *The Sandman* series) from a mythical perspective. Sarah Cantrell's meticulous analysis places *Black Orchid* (1988-9) in a complex theoretical and literary historical

framework. Cantrell connects it with autobiographical comics such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980-91) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000-3), claiming that *Black Orchid* was the 'first comic strip to incorporate a first-person narrative style into a female superhero title' (104). She associates the comic's narrative style with Monika Fludernik's 'experiencing self narrator,' while the female heroine's search for identity and precursors resemble Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's understanding of the position of nineteenth century women writers, who 'had to invent not only a new literary tradition that includes a space for women but also to invent herself, lacking, as she did, a literary "mother" in the canon' (109). This analogy may seem a bit odd at first, but Cantrell demonstrates it convincingly.

Two essays deal with, at least partially, the filmic works of Gaiman. Emily Capettini analyzes Gaiman's *Doctor Who* episode, 'The Doctor's Wife' (2011), revealing that although it has been indicated several times earlier in the series that the TARDIS is a sentient and probably female being, in Gaiman's episode the ship talks to the Doctor for the first time, invading the body and consciousness of a young woman. With this idea Gaiman gives voice to a female entity that was silent before, follows the madwoman tradition of feminist literature and criticism (since Idris, the ship's female avatar, behaves in an erratic way), and makes the relationship between the Doctor and TARDIS more complex than was previously assumed by the audience. Danielle Russell analyzes *MirrorMask* (2005; a film that was turned into a graphic novel with artwork by its director, Dave McKean) and *Coraline* in the light of mothering and motherhood and drawing on David Rudd's article, 'An Eye for an I: Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* and Questions of Identity' (*Children's Literature in Education* 39, 2008). Following feminists like Adrienne Rich, Russell emphasizes the difference between motherhood as institution, which remains under patriarchal control, and motherhood as practice, the actual relationship between mother and children, which is not necessarily linked to the oppressive forces of the society. Russell also points out that third-wave feminists take the discussion on ideologies of gender and motherhood even further, since these thinkers often 'embrace the potentially empowering aspects of motherhood' (162).

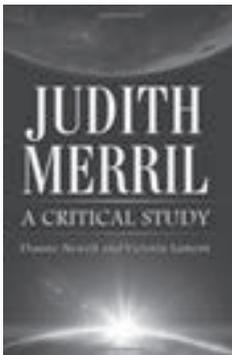
As mentioned before, the short stories are relatively well represented in the volume. Elizabeth Law interprets 'Snow, Glass, Apples' as a contemporary postmodern fairy tale revision; Jennifer McStotts gives a similar analysis of 'Chivalry'. Agata Zarzcycka analyzes 'Queen of Knives' and 'Chivalry', comparing how the narrative poem and the short story describe aging. Both stories subvert (and to some extent replicate) stereotypes about women-specific aging, partly because they can be read in terms of Farah

Mendlesohn's 'liminal fantasy', a subgenre that prompts ironic readings, ambiguity, and the acceptance of multiple realities coexisting side-by-side. Zarzycka claims that 'Queen of Knives' can especially be read in this way due to the 'blurred borders not only between the real and the fantastic, but also the subject and the object [of social mechanisms that affect womanhood] or the active and the passive' (240). Monica Miller examines Gaiman's short stories in *Who Killed Amanda Palmer: A Collection of Photographic Evidence* (2009), focusing on how the accompanying short stories make Palmer's iconoclastic and disturbing photographs even more ironic and ambiguous.

The last two essays of the book focus on the novels that Gaiman authored or co-authored. Jessica Walker connects Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's *Good Omens* (1990) with seventeenth-century women's memoirs, such as those of Anne Clifford and Ann Fanshawe. Walker demonstrates that *The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*, the fictional book in *Good Omens*, is similar to the memoirs in that the writers resisted linear historiographic narratives and created their works for their descendants, trying to preserve the female family line. Kristine Larsen gives an outline of Gaiman's novels such as *American Gods* (2001), *Neverwhere* (1996), and *InterWorld* (co-authored with Michael Reeves, 2007) from the perspective of multiple worlds theory.

Although several articles (for example, those of Martin, Cantrell, Russell, Zarzycka, and Walker) contain insightful criticism and turn out to be useful, the volume occasionally lacks an adequate level of academic rigor. Besides the numerous typos, several essays are damaged by incomplete references, loosely defined theories, the lack of a detectable thesis statement, and digressive or insipid analyses. While, for example, Prescott's, Drucker's and McStotts' analyses follow Gaiman's works too closely and hardly prove to be more than comments on the stories, Dupuy's and Larsen's essays are far too digressive. All in all, we should be happy that a book with this topic exists

and that certain contributors covered their topic quite well; the book will certainly become handy in some cases. Nevertheless, considering Gaiman's huge influence on readers, writers and critics, a more rigorously edited and constructed volume would have been apt and timely.



**Dianne Newell and Victoria Lamont, *Judith Merrill: A Critical Study*** (McFarland, 2012, 239 pp., £32.50 pbk) Reviewed by Andy Sawyer (University of Liverpool)

If, as Newell and Lamont claim, Judith Merrill has been neglected, there may be a number of reasons. One may be Joanna Russ' dismissal of most female sf writers in her 1972 essay, 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction'. Newell and Jenea Tallentire, in Farah Mendlesohn's *On Joanna Russ* (2009), write of a failure of 'meeting of minds' between Merrill and Russ which they argue affected the response of younger feminist writers and scholars influenced by Russ. Equally, Merrill's status as a champion of a 'New Wave' of sf – certainly equal to Michael Moorcock and Harlan Ellison – is overlooked by many. The title of her anthology championing British New Wave – *England Swings SF* (1968) – may be to blame: many British fans of a certain age still cluck exasperatedly at it. With its desperate pop-art trendiness it achieves all the taboo-breaking heights of Roger Miller's 1965 song of the same name (which may have inspired the title), which ascribes the atmosphere of 'swinging' England to bobbies on bicycles, Westminster Abbey and rosy-cheeked children. But Merrill's own series of 'Best SF' anthologies, scouring realms far outside the magazines for not only short stories but non-fiction and cartoons that showed an sf sensibility as a natural way of writing about the world, wears a lot better than *Dangerous Visions* in showing what sf was capable of.

Her own fiction certainly displays the clumsiness and domesticity of which she is sometimes accused: Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder* (1967) lambasted her 1960 novel *The Tomorrow People* for, among other things, allowing one of her characters to flip around the moon in a helicopter. Her first and perhaps best novel, *Shadows on the Hearth* (1949) was criticised at the time for its housewifely concerns – a criticism Merrill roundly rebutted in the March 1951 issue of *Future*, pointing out that the market comprising mothers-in-law, maiden aunts and housewives who listened to radio soap operas formed a large part of the population and, because of its size and because it was generally ill-informed on the issue of atomic war, it rather than the sf constituency was her prime target. (The novel was later adapted as a propaganda film, *Atomic Attack*, in 1954 and apparently put on civil defence reading lists). But Newell and Lamont set out to reclaim Merrill as much a shaper of the sf field as Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, or Robert Heinlein.

The book rather oddly – my initial reaction, forgetting that Merrill began as a writer of Westerns – opens with a discussion of the frontier myth in American literature. This proves to be not only one of the most interesting parts of the book but also a fundamental part of the argument as we are pointed to examples of the gendering of the frontier. It is suggested that first, the female presence on the frontier (and in Westerns) is yet another

example of 'suppressed' female presence (B.M. Bower was, we are told, as popular as Zane Grey), and second, that this presence was often a vital part of the controlling, domesticizing, colonizing transformation of the frontier. These apparently paradoxical nuances are central to the importance of a writer like Merrill, and comparisons with these other female genre writers continue throughout the book.

The second chapter sets Merrill in the context of the post-Hiroshima 'Atomic frontier' with examinations of early work such as her first published sf short story, 'That Only a Mother' (1948) and *Shadow on the Hearth*, which was compared to H.G. Wells and George Orwell in the *New York Times*. The 'Atomic frontier' image seems to centre upon the various debates about post-war technology in the 'atomic age' and the reconsideration of women's roles after wartime service had taken them out of the domestic sphere (and the rewriting of those roles to include the values instilled in the young by parents, especially mothers, as an active bulwark against Cold War threat). The clarity of the image could have benefited by a more literal summary of the ambiguities about nuclear weapons as 'essential' defence strategy, or the 'Atoms for Peace' movement designed to halt nuclear proliferation among nations and share technologies designed for cheap energy (while *building up* the arsenal held by the nuclear 'club'). The space stories discussed in chapter three conform more to the image of the 'frontier', especially in the way Newell and Lamont find echoes in the way writers of the 'American West' (such as Bower, Emma Ghent Curtis and Frances McElrath) 'also saw the frontier as a space for reworking gender categories' (49). 'The Survival Ship' (1951), 'Wish Upon a Star' (1958) and 'The Lonely' (1963), form a 'Survival Trilogy' in which the idea of space travel as an inherently *masculine* activity is undermined – if only because women have been conditioned to a mind-set which makes them more able to withstand the 'loneliness and confinement' of space travel. Putting the difficulties in *that* aside, we are shown how in these stories, and others, Merrill is presenting a space-frontier that allows thought-experiments in sex, gender and family relationships. The way gender-specific pronouns, for instance, are almost stripped from the text of 'Survival Ship' allows the reader to face up to something the unspoken assumptions of the space story of the time did not question. The 1952 novella 'Daughters of Earth' attempts to focus upon what it might be *like*, psychologically, to be a woman in space.

The fourth chapter examines Merrill's take on that other perennial 'frontier' myth, the alien, which at the time Merrill was writing becomes the alien *within*, the [communist] alien plotting to invade us, as well as

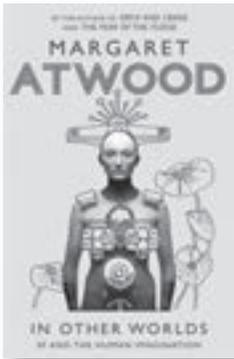
the colonised alien whom 'we' have invaded. 'Whoever You Are' (1952) critiques this discourse of alien threat by introducing aliens who are *either* trusting or benevolent or malevolent and mind-controlling. Mid-century short stories, such as 'Rain Check' (1954) and 'Exile from Space' (1956) use the device of 'woman as alien' to do more than make this idea a reductive symbol of the adolescent male's feeling of being threatened but to point out why her alien invader can be more easily hidden as a 'woman' than as a 'man', and explores the way such identity is a matter of *performance*. As with the alien, so perhaps with the readers of Merrill's story.

The final chapter of the first section considers Merrill's interest in psi and the paranormal, and the fictions using these themes. While this section opens up reasons for renewing interest in Merrill's sf, it is the second section which focuses upon the personal and literary context within which she was writing, and her anthology work, which underlines the book's value. We read about the 'Cyril Judd' novels (with C.M. Kornbluth), and other collaborative work, and the support network of fellow fans and writers. While this network was sometimes as much a sexual as professional one – the relationships between the Futurians fan group would make a moderately entertaining salacious soap opera – we learn much more about Merrill as anthologist and co-writer. Particularly interesting is her relationship with the 'New Wave' and what may be the fusion of ideological differences and personality which led to a clear rift between Merrill and Russ (their reciprocal reviews are discussed in chapter 7). Merrill left the USA – and eventually the American science fiction community – as Russ was becoming the new star in the firmament and the nature of feminism, and role of women writers in sf, were dramatically changing. Inevitably, individuals from an earlier tradition and a different political strand could be isolated. Merrill's fascination with Japanese science fiction, her broadcasting career in Toronto (famously following up episodes of *Doctor Who* as the 'un-Doctor' for evidence of the show's 'educational' qualities), and her presentation to Toronto Public Library of her sf collection as the 'Spaced Out Library' are all explored, as is eventually the memoir finally produced by her granddaughter Emily Pohl-Weary.

If her life beforehand wasn't maverick enough, the Canadian years might suggest a writer who almost deliberately avoided her full potential. It is certainly true that Merrill hardly did enough of almost anything to follow through to what she could have been. The section on 'essayist', for instance, covers just *two* essays, including the much-reprinted 'What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?' Her project to facilitate the translation of Japanese sf, fuelled by a fascination with the mechanics of translation

and the discovery of the richness of Japan's science fiction tradition, fizzled out. Stories were published in magazines but the planned showcase anthology never appeared. The account given of Merrill's memoir project, though, is fascinating, and Newell and Lamont argue with conviction that the memoir as constructed by Pohl-Weary is not so much a 'mess' as an innovative piece of life-writing prepared from a detail outline by Merrill and skilfully worked up by her granddaughter.

Merril's life and career covers what could arguably be regarded as the most interesting years of North American sf, and she herself ought to be regarded as one of the most prominent figures of this period. That she isn't could be due to a number of reasons, of which her inability to produce a string of popular novels could be one, and the lack of memory of the science fiction community (we are shown memoirs by people known to have been close friends where she is barely mentioned) could be another. Newell and Lamont's study should do much to restore her reputation, and is greatly to be welcomed.



**Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: Science Fiction and the Human Imagination***

(Virago, 2011, 255pp, £9.99 pbk)

Reviewed by Maureen Speller (University of Kent)

It is almost impossible to write about Margaret Atwood in relation to the science fiction and fantasy genres without reference to her now notorious 'squids in space' comment. What seems to have been originally an off-the-cuff remark on a TV morning chat show has been taken up by fans and commentators as the prime example of Atwood's ignorance of and lack of sympathy for contemporary sf. On the other hand, writers who want to use genre topoi while rejecting that problematic label now brandish the phrase as a shield against what they regard as the wrong sort of critical attention. In subsequent interviews Atwood herself has come back to versions of the phrase, though whether because she believes sincerely what she said, or because it has become part of her 'brand', or because she simply likes winding up genre critics is unclear.

Given there is no ignoring the presence of the cephalopod in the Atwood sitting room, how then does one address *In Other Worlds*, which might be taken as Atwood's definitive statement on the subject? The collection is comprised of three parts. First, we have the three Richard

Ellmann Lectures in Modern Literature given by Atwood at Emory University in 2010. Secondly, there is a selection of reviews of and introductions to science fiction novels, written by Atwood during the 2000s, with an outlier from 1976. Lastly, there is a selection of short fictions by Atwood which she has designated (confusingly, for reasons that will become clear later) 'science fiction'.

To begin with, we should be clear that Atwood knows what science fiction is, or rather, she knows what it is she points to and calls 'science fiction', in much the same way that most of us have a personal working definition of sf. Atwood's definition is distinguished by two things: its unusual rigidity and the fact that Atwood, as a public figure, is better placed than most to promulgate that definition. John Clute noted in his review of this collection in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* that during the 'squids in space' controversy he had argued 'that a person who had attained a public voice had a public responsibility [...] not to allow offhand comments to be understood as discourse'. Similarly, he reminded us that Ursula K. Le Guin 'made it clear that the squids-in-space *bon mot* was genuinely discourteous'. I see no reason to disagree with either statement. It may be that Atwood's comment was simply careless but it is a reminder to us of the power of words, and of the care that needs to be exercised in using them, not least that ten years later we cannot escape their effect.

Nor do I seek to frame this discussion in terms of an ongoing disagreement between Atwood and Le Guin about the nature of science fiction (although my sympathies would lie mainly with Le Guin, whose perception of genre is both more capacious and more nuanced than Atwood's). Yet Le Guin's presence looms over every page of this collection: from the dedication to her, through Atwood's discussion of Le Guin's review of *The Year of the Flood* and *Oryx and Crake*, which initiated another dispute as to what Atwood means by 'science fiction', to Atwood's inclusion of her puzzled review of Le Guin's *The Birthday of the World and Other Stories*.

In fact, let's start with that review, which very clearly articulates Atwood's unease with the term 'science fiction': 'it's an awkward box: it bulges with discards from elsewhere. Into it have been crammed all those stories that don't fit comfortably into the family room of the socially realistic novel or the more formal parlour of historical fiction, or other compartmentalized genres: westerns, gothics, horrors, gothic romances, and the novels of war, crime, and spies' (115). And that's before Atwood goes on to list the many subdivisions of sf and fantasy in tones of fascinated horror. Her choice of words is interesting, too – 'discards' carries with it a certain flavour of the orphan child, or the unacceptable by-blow, while 'awkward' and

'bulges' suggest a lack of neatness. All of these are clearly antithetical to the 'comfortably' that is associated with the 'family room' of the 'socially realistic novel'.

It is this last category that we should necessarily take note of. For Atwood's perception of sf is founded in part on her fierce need to distinguish between the social realist and the fantastical, and to make an equally fierce distinction between the novel and the romance. The novel belongs to social realism while the romance is the form associated with the fantastic. And for Atwood ne'er the twain shall meet. In theory at least, though in practice this becomes rather more difficult, for what then is one to make of *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel that most regard as science fiction, yet which is clothed in the trappings of the social realist novel, as defined by Atwood – texture, detail, character?

And this is where Atwood performs her great feat of legerdemain. First, she proclaims her own 'lifelong relationship' with science fiction, which she defines, from the outset, as 'not of this here-and-now Earth' (1). Yet, on the following page, Atwood admits that, as of 2008, she 'didn't really grasp what the term *science fiction* meant any more' (2). Four pages later, Atwood redefines science fiction again: 'What I mean by "science fiction" is those books that descend from H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* [...] whereas, for me, "speculative fiction" [Atwood's preferred term for her sf at this point] means plots that descend from Jules Verne's books' (6). Neither definition of sf is objectionable in and of itself; most critics and academics are able to hold both in their heads simultaneously. Atwood, however, seems to insist on dichotomy and so one must have one or the other but no kind of synthesis.

Yet Atwood, and despite her own protestations to the contrary, also seems to be driven by a need to keep making definitive statements about meaning, and this brings us back to Le Guin. In 2010, the two writers took part in a public discussion, during which Atwood, by her own account, found that what 'Le Guin means by "science fiction is what I mean by "speculative fiction" and what she means by "fantasy" would include some of what I mean by "science fiction." [...] When it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth across them with insouciance' (7). Again, these conclusions might seem unsurprising to scholars of genre, but with Atwood having apparently found her way to a broader understanding of the terminology, one might suppose that the matter would be finally closed.

Except that the Ellmann Lectures suggest that the situation is otherwise. Indeed, in 'Dire Cartographies', the third in the series, Atwood offers us

yet another new perception of her 'science-fictional' works. They should now be read as 'ustopias', a word Atwood claims to have coined by joining utopia and dystopia, on the basis that in each utopia is a latent dystopia, and vice versa. Her tone does smack rather of the clever if poorly read undergraduate coming up with a brilliant new idea, without taking due regard of the considerable body of criticism and analysis of utopian literature, yet it is clear from Atwood's account of her postgraduate studies that at some point she was more than passingly familiar with the state of utopian studies, even if she did not keep up with her critical reading.

Indeed, it is this facet of Atwood's account of her relationship with sf, or at any rate with utopian literature, which is the most interesting and revealing part of the lectures, in that we see a young and thoughtful Atwood putting together ideas that, while they may seem old hat now, were most likely fairly cutting-edge at that point, and one cannot help wondering how her storytelling might have turned out had she maintained a closer relationship with academe.

Similarly, the glimpses of the child Margaret are illuminating. We see two children (Atwood and her brother), with limited access to forms of culture we take for granted, pouring their imaginative energies into creating a race of rabbit superheroes. It is clear from Atwood's account that her early apprehension of science fiction is intensely visual, influenced as much by comic strips and the occasional film as by the drawing of the rabbits' adventures, and this is reflected in her later concern with the defining of sf ('if you put skin-tight black or silver clothing on a book cover along with some jetlike flames and/or colourful planets, does that make the work "science fiction"?' (2)), but also in her fascination with utopian literature, which she identifies as in part being about making lists and describing things. Indeed, it would seem that Atwood's understanding of sf is literally superficial, in that to her it is all about surface and appearance, whereas utopian or ustopian literature, despite its similar preoccupation with things, or perhaps because of its avowed interest in paraphernalia, has been transmogrified into a form of social realism after all.

Anyone who comes to this collection of writings in search of a definitive answer as to what it means when Atwood uses the words 'science fiction' is probably going to be disappointed. However, the Ellmann Lectures do provide a valuable glimpse into the foundations of Atwood's thinking on the issue. Having said that, it does seem that Atwood is using their quasi-academic context (addressed, so far as I can see, to a general rather than scholarly audience) as a means to establish a discourse in which her unusually narrow definition of sf is given a greater validity than it ultimately

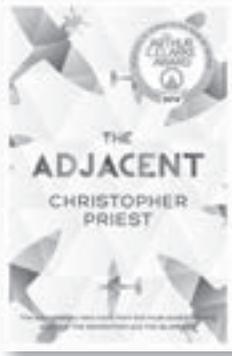
deserves.

Atwood returns to the same few exemplary texts over and over again, texts which are now extremely old. This is true of the lectures and of Atwood's reviews. Bruce Sterling and William Gibson get a mention apiece, as does Robert Silverberg, but it is clear that for Atwood, sf or utopian literature stopped dead in the 1950s, at the point when she abandoned her PhD. Similarly, looking at the selection of reviews offered here, one has the sense of Atwood constantly re-ploughing the same furrow. Perhaps the most revealing moment comes from seeing how little her view has shifted between her 1976 review of Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which Atwood insists is a utopia, to her most recent reviews where there is a sense of weary familiarity, as she again reaches for the set responses.

Scholars will also note the lack of a useful critical apparatus; footnotes are minimal and those that exist are often risible, as though their compiler had no sense of the audience for whom this book is intended, and there is no accompanying bibliography for those who want to read further. Indeed, the collection as a whole is not indexed so it is difficult to track repeated mentions of particular texts unless one takes notes.

If as I suspect, the Lectures were supposed to state Atwood's position once and for all, then they have failed in their intent. Or rather, the Lectures present a coherent argument in and of themselves, though one that it is easy to take issue with. It is when they are considered in relation to Atwood's reviews in this collection alongside the five stories, which she describes as 'science fiction' although all of them are clearly 'utopian' in nature, that Atwood's argument collapses yet again. (The inclusion of these reviews and stories or extracts is something of a mystery. Clearly the three Lectures were considered too insubstantial to form a book by themselves but one is left with the impression that Atwood literally went through her files, looking for anything mentioning utopian or science fiction, and included them to bulk things out.)

Presumably, Atwood will continue to formulate explanations of her work that insist that certain aspects of it are not, contrary to appearance, science fiction, and elements of the sf community will continue to express anger and frustration at her apparent wilfulness. The point is that try as she will, Atwood cannot control the reader's response to her writing, and for many commentators *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Year of the Flood*, *Oryx and Crake* and *Maddaddam* are as much science fiction as they are utopian, utopian, or speculative fiction, or whatever else Atwood chooses to call them. In the end, what they actually are has become almost less interesting than Atwood's attempts to tell us what they are not.



## Christopher Priest, *The Adjacent*

(Gollancz, 2013, 419pp, £8.99 pbk)

Reviewed by Dan Hartland

He doesn't need to, but Christopher Priest gets his defence in early: on only the third page of *The Adjacent*, this writer who has regularly been accused of writing bloodless prose has the recently widowed protagonist return to the family home of his deceased wife: 'They led him into their house, familiar to him from previous trips, but now it felt cold and remote' (5). That is, Priest foregrounds as squarely as he can

that quality of his fiction which is embedded in his style: alienation.

Few, perhaps, would argue for Priest's versatility. *The Adjacent* reads, however, like the most forceful case for those effects and motifs of which he is a master. Not much further into the novel, the protagonist, a photographer named Tibor Tarent who before the book begins was living with his wife in a dangerous part of a near-future Turkey, is driven across England by his government debriefers. Priest sketches a CIA agent: 'The man's self-absorption was like a black hole, neutralizing any attempt at contact' (29). Unbridgeable gaps define Priest's fiction, its coldness and occasional narrowness: even its very title *The Adjacent* evokes that which is near but not close.

Tibor Tarent returns to an England he does not recognize. Of mixed heritage and consequently uncertain roots, Tarent has never felt entirely 'British', but as the government officials ferry him across a landscape irrevocably altered by 'a new kind of climactic low-pressure system' (12), he begins to feel ever more distanced from the land he once knew. In London, he dodges flood systems and power cuts; in the countryside he is driven around in an armoured vehicle known as a Mebsher, since travel around this once green and pleasant land is now otherwise impracticable or simply foolhardy; and, abruptly, most people are Muslim now. Tibor has returned to the Islamic Republic of Great Britain.

Priest is uninterested – bar passing references to events such as the dissolution of NATO – in alternative history. His IRGB is simply presented for what it is, not explained or contextualized. This leaves the reader a little wary – it could be taken by some to endorse the absurdist fantasies of fringe groups who suppose imposed sharia law is only ever around the next corner – but it is of a piece with the novel's other dislocations. The lack of context is also an absence of gravity, and Priest intends his reader to

float, untethered, amongst the many possibilities and lacunae that form, counterintuitively, much of the fabric of his novel. We never uncover the history of the IRGB, or understand how it really works, just as Tibor never experiences the country that exists between the stops made by the Mebsher at various clinical, characterless military waystations. We are adrift.

So, too, is Priest's narrative. At the end of the novel's first part, we leave Tibor Tarent somewhere in a field in Lincolnshire and join Lieutenant Commander Thomas Trent, boarding a train for Belgium during the First World War. A stage magician, he will be asked by British servicemen to devise an illusion that can hide Royal Naval Air Service airplanes from German anti-aircraft guns. He will also enjoy two conversations with H.G. Wells, who in another twist of Priest's alternate history is also enjoying a temporary consultative commission (and has some creaky words to say about Churchill – 'still a Young Turk who doesn't mind bending rules from time to time' (85)). We return to Tibor almost before we have chance to absorb Tommy's failure on the fields of Belgium; we pass through a fourth part in which we witness a meeting between Tibor and Thijs Reitveld, a physicist responsible for the development of 'adjacency technology' in the IRGB timeline: a meeting Tibor in part three cannot remember, but in part six will recall without difficulty. In between, we will meet 'Floody' Torrance, a pilot in the Second World War who meets and falls in love with Krystyna Roszca, a Polish refugee and fellow pilot who will herself reappear, under a different name and in a different world, during part seven.

The Priest aficionado will spot much in all this which is familiar: the military vehicles of *The Separation*, the stage magic of *The Prestige*, the doubled lovers of *The Islanders*. In that different world somehow accessed by Roszca, of course, we also see the Dream Archipelago itself, as fully – and partially – imagined an expression as there is in Priest's work of his overriding interest in the attenuated and the liminal. Indeed, in *The Adjacent* the Archipelago manifests as a kind of permeable underworld for lost souls, in which a stage magician known as Tomak Tallant strives to perfect a trick, all the time being stalked through the streets by a woman named Kirstenya (she is jealous of Tomak's assistant, Rullebet, who without explanation or comment is referred to even by her father as Ruddebet as soon as Kirstenya takes over the narration). *The Adjacent*, then, is a work concerned with recursion and reiteration.

The Archipelago section also features a doctor who resembles in many ways a woman with whom Tibor Tarent has sex in the IRGB. (Priest is not at his best in his descriptions of what takes place in his characters' bedrooms: 'He

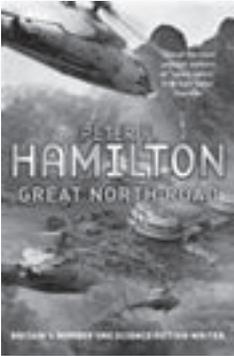
was uneasy at first, chilled by her mood swings, but they did it all again and this time their lovemaking took longer and was sweatier than before' (53).) It is this woman – in the IRGB she is known to Tibor as Flo – who first discusses adjacency technology: the system developed by Reitveld to neutralise every weapon, but used by the people always ready to pervert science towards aggression as a means of annihilating all matter in a target area. Just before Tibor returned to the IRGB, part of west London was entirely destroyed in this manner: 'Like most people, you probably don't realise we are at war,' Flo tells him, 'and this is one that we're not going to win' (55).

Disappearances – and the lights in the sky which seem to presage an adjacency attack – recur throughout the novel, but, like the history of the IRGB or the manner of Roszca's departure to and return from the Dream Archipelago, they are never really explained. Instead, the narrative becomes saturated with contradictory detail and sudden shifts: names, events, and people change their positions (and super-positions), the worlds of these stories altering as we watch them. This quantum flux appears to be eating at the fabric of the novel's reality: in the Dream Archipelago there is a slum known as Adjacent where 'people constantly arrive, so it's impossible to estimate the total population' (305); 'the population of London', meanwhile, 'has been declining for years' (258).

Many novels take as their focus an Armageddon: a zombie apocalypse, a nuclear war, a globe warmed into submission. *The Adjacent*, however, ends its worlds every other page, littering its narrative with innumerable miniature Ragnaroks, mirroring the impossible interconnectedness of our own age in countless moments of tessellating destruction. The death of Tibor's wife ends his existence as he has known it, reducing his past to 'a sort of fake nostalgia, something I must have made up or borrowed' (254); in the Poland of 1939 Roszca's lover Tomasz intones, 'That life we had has gone' (213); in the IRGB swathes of the country simply disappear, and yet life goes on regardless, shopkeepers shuttering their windows against the floods; on Prachous, no one remembers how they came to the island or why they are there. Worlds end every day, and at every moment. Tibor's camera has a quantum lens: does capturing the moment obliterate it?

Indeed, Tibor's photography is amidst all this change a constant: he has three cameras, each of which have an IRGB license, and he uses them to record all he sees: doppelgangers of people he had assumed were dead, RAF airfields suddenly materialized where once there was nothing. His only defence against his dead wife's accusation that photography is a passive activity was that 'Art had no practical function. It only was. It informed or it showed or it simply existed' (31). *The Adjacent* offers as pure

a distillation of Priest's peculiar art as he has yet produced, in which form matches subject and style substance. 'When the imagination dies, so does hope' remarks Wells (126); in this novel's world of flux, which occasionally, as its quantum kaleidoscope turns, refracts and reflects our own fragile, challenged present, impractical art such as this is an essential map of what once was, and what still might be.



**Peter F. Hamilton, *Great North Road***

(Pan Macmillan, 2013, 1104 pp., £9.99 pbk)

Reviewed by Jo L. Walton (Northumbria University)

Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2142. There is a body in the Tyne, and its autopsy suggests extraterrestrial incursion. When the case lands on Detective Sidney Hurst's desk, so do the nebulous agendas of innumerable civil, political, military and corporate elites. Meanwhile, through the shimmer of Newcastle's stargate, a military expedition strikes out into the vast unexplored jungles of St Libra, Sirius – oblivious to a mustering ecological cataclysm – in search of sentient life. Among them is civilian advisor Angela Tramel, fresh from serving twenty years for a brutal massacre which she has always maintained was the work of an alien life form; her team is headed by Colonel Vance Elston, the same spook who twenty years earlier tortured her and suppressed key evidence at her trial. We can expect that people on this trip will get crabby.

The relationship between crime fiction and science fiction is an extremely intricate one. Any work which is serious about synthesizing the two tends to discover its own distinctive pattern of complements, affinities, trade-offs and contradictions. Ronald Knox's fourth 'fair play' commandment for Golden Age crime writers ('No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end') suggests one way in which friction may emerge. To hide its solutions in plain sight, the clue-puzzle relies heavily on implication, on a shared social consensus. As often as not, it is not really until the last page of an sf novel that the reader knows enough about its world to start making clue-puzzle-style guesses about its secrets.

*Great North Road* is not particularly concerned with fair play. Data is supplied in whatever order is presumed to be most exciting. For much of the time, the novel solicitously stokes the possibility that Angela Tramel is

responsible for the brutal massacre she's been imprisoned. Eventually the backstory becomes interspersed through the main storyline, gradually rolling towards the alarming incident. The pattern of interleaved linear timelines is well established: when we expect to find Trameló either exonerated or recast as antihero, we instead confront ... an ambiguous aftermath. We have skipped the massacre. Trameló is scrabbling in panic, slicked with blood, her contribution still indeterminate.

It is especially awkward that *Great North Road* sustains such indeterminacy whilst we pay frequent visits to Trameló's consciousness. Of course, many crime authors invite us to peer into characters' heads without letting us glimpse their guilt or innocence. Guilty people are often experts at having innocent thoughts. But there must be a difference between allowing leeway for sleights-of-hand and excusing authors for withholding whatever they feel is convenient. So how might we formulate that difference? You could say authors should not *artificially* keep things from their readers. But that's only a mildly satisfying way of capturing it. Literature is artifice through-and-through: why does only some of it strike us as illegitimate?

Another approach holds that crime fiction should offer a consistent epistemology. That is, good crime fiction takes a stance on what knowledge is and how it can be achieved. As we read, we learn what happened, but we also learn something about learning itself. The electrifying story tacitly establishes parameters within which many other stories are feasible. Disclosures in *Great North Road*, by contrast, often seem artefacts of its formal idiosyncrasies. They give us very little that is portable or expandable. Sitting and waiting for it to be your turn to know is not a convincing model of how knowledge is produced. Readers work patiently and attentively through a towering stack of pages. Just like the police investigators they depict, we may be tempted to skim, but risk missing something important if we do. The meticulousness and staying power which the novel requires of us are the same virtues it valorises in Detective Sidney Hurst and his team.

It is interesting that the novel's dazzling socio-technological premises – interstellar wormhole tech, shapeshifter implants, an elite dynasty of clones, longevity treatments, drugs you take by banging them on your neck – don't radically reorganize its police procedural dimension. The novel does explore how detection is transformed by a regime of sophisticated forensics and ubiquitous surveillance and archiving. With all this advanced kit, must we basically watch our protagonist click 'solve', our only source of narrative tension the progress bar moving to 100%, with its cryptic contour of humps and downhill stretches?

But that is familiar territory for police procedurals with a contemporary or near-future setting. In *C.S.I.*, as in *Great North Road*, the detection function is distributed across a network of experts and technologies. The middle-ranking officer occupies the hero slot, though not in quite the same way as the classic sleuth. In integrating a variety of specialist perspectives, the managerial perspective is only *primus inter pares*, not a transcendental arbiter of salience. There is no subject who experiences every stage of the solution, nor could such calculations in principle be fully performed within human experience. This partial decentring of the detective is mirrored by a partial decentring of criminality; there is a heightened interest in its systemic context, and a decoupling of the execution of social justice from the determination of legal culpability.

*Great North Road* does not, thankfully, trouble us with the professional fetishism or the glossy state triumphalism of *C.S.I.* The atmosphere is perhaps more closely matched by *The Wire* (2002-8). Hurst must bargain, cajole, orate, gain leverage, bend rules, cash in favours. There are no faces, no heels, only tweeners. The priorities of individuals seldom harmonize with those of their job description. Bureaucratic and technological systems don't function as they should. *Great North Road* is uninterested in fair play conventions; nor does it seem fully committed to exposing the systematic context of its criminality. The politicking, loopholes, glitches and mercurial surges of social complexity tend to be dictated by storytelling imperatives, rather than providing storytelling with its scope and materials.

John Doe sloshing downstream, for instance, may be a reputable way of opening a contemporary police procedural yet it is unclear why anyone in 2142 should take such pains to put John Clone in the Tyne. The gangland body disposal team can anonymize cyborg corpses and hack into municipal surveillance systems. With relatively comprehensive surveillance of public space, shouldn't we expect such well-resourced criminality to shift to private space? Is melting a bit of meat and bone in a private apartment really beyond them? But the body is not put in the river by gangsters, to sink without a trace; it is put there by Hamilton, to be found.

The way of life shown in *Great North Road* is not always minutely reflective of its social, economic and technological infrastructure. There are exceptions, but to sloganize somewhat: *Far Future Tech, Near Future Customs, Manners, Mores*. This incongruously contemporary cultural atmosphere is not necessarily uncomfortable. A proudly Geordie stargate is, in and of itself, a very fine thing to contemplate. Moreover, it's possible that this atmosphere has not accumulated by unexamined failures of the imagination, but rather been deliberately wrought, as a self-styled clear-

eyed provocation that some *things never change*.

Exhibitions of extrapolative rigor are one widely acknowledged tactic by which science fiction negotiates its mandate. An awkwardness can cling to tacit claims of rigor when the axioms rigorously worked upon are conspicuously a legacy. New space opera is often spotted proving its seriousness by how responsibly it sponges off a trust fund established by cyberpunk. Less well attested but equally important is the tactic of exclusionary rigor. Here what is necessary is that nothing break the spell. The grizzled capsule pilot who, engrossed in the archipelago of an approaching asteroid field, so much as carelessly sparks up a Camel is in peril of losing his legitimacy as an image of our future. Superfluous innovations are as risky as superfluous relics. Just as nothing must improperly *last*, so nothing must improperly *change*.

In *Great North Road* not much seems to have changed about the aesthetics, habitus and culture of corporations and the military. No doubt such choices are mixed up with extrapolative worldbuilding to some extent but I suspect that how plausible they are is fundamentally a wager about their aesthetic intelligibility. That is, their plausibility solicits preferences and associations formed independently of the novel's future history. If men in green fatigues with machine guns don't look out-of-place milling around in front of a stargate, then that has little to do with how probable that scene really is, and everything to do with the saturation of the contemporary imagination by images of prevailing military institutions.

There is another front, also closely connected with taste, on which *Great North Road* doesn't play it quite so safe. One effect of the central mystery is to pose the question: is 'the alien' – in the sense of a monstrous, sentient extraterrestrial organism, perhaps the hegemonic trope of science fiction – still a legitimate sf figure? Or is the alien now a spell-breaker, rather like a rocket or a UFO? Eight hundred pages in, we still do not know for certain if we are reading a story with aliens in it. Instead, we are treated to a pageant of proxies. It is as though we are asked, will clones do instead? Or, genetically modified humans; won't they do? Cybernetically enhanced people; will *they* do? Extraterrestrial plant life, surely it will do? Then there is the Zanth. The Zanth is a sort of kaleidoscopic reality glitch, akin to an ecological catastrophe. But it receives the kind of treatment typically reserved for Heinlein's 'Bugs' or Wells' Martians. It even gets called an alien threat. So, will *it* do? What, exactly, do we need an alien *for*? And how badly do we need it?

In its collusion with the spectacle of multinational corporations and standing armies that just keep on standing, *Great North Road* invites a

critique of ideology, but it does make fairly safe wagers *vis-à-vis* evoking a convincing and immersive future history. The 'ET or not ET?' business is a bolder bet, but one which pays off. The alien that *might* be in this story could even be read as knowingly retro-futuristic, a nod to the far-fetched hominids of an earlier era, some horror confined to the shadows because budget is too low to show it in the light. We may realize we *do* miss this alien and are prepared, after all, to make some allowances.

But *Great North Road* makes another wager which is neither bold nor really pays off. Just as corporate life has proved robust, and standing armies are standing in pretty much the same pose we left them in back in 2013, so too gender institutions have changed very little. The drip-fed revelations of Trameló's past, for instance, exhibit sleazy glamour and borderline gratuitous fan service. As we try to conceive of a credible 2140s, we may want to ask – as a rough benchmark – how have gender and sexual politics changed from the 1880s to the present day? Yet *Great North Road* gives us a deeply binary and subtly hierarchical world, peppered with hokey truisms about boys and girls, men and women, husbands and wives.

Complexity is added, however, in the form of Hurst's sidekick, Detective Ian Lanagin. We first meet Lanagin on duty, flirting with a pair of scantily clad lassies: 'I'm in there, man. Did you see those lassies? Up for it they were, both of them' (9). Lanagin is a manifesto for cyborg misogyny, who abuses police data systems to stalk his targets and devise his pick-up strategies. As an institutionally fostered social type, and a case study in police sexuality at the intersection of voyeurism, chivalry and clout, Lanagin is one of the novel's subtler achievements. But the resolution of his plot arc is unacceptable. When Lanagin meets his match – gorgeous, rich and, discomfitingly, class-inflected – revisionist implications ripple back across his previous frightening behaviour. Boys will be boys, seems to be the official line, but some day they all grow up and settle down. Lanagin's emasculation is apparently being played for laughs. Are we soon to meet the predictable evolution of this comic character; grumbling, doting Lanagin under-the-thumb? Luckily, a monster slashes his throat out before we have to discover.

*Great North Road* is tricky to place ideologically. On balance, my impression was one of discreet Middle Englishness. Granted, the capitalism it portrays is one of corporate misdeeds, cronyism, corruption, decadence and precarity. Teamwork, even to the point of sacrificing oneself for a collective, rises and disports itself rather elegantly above this mire. But for all that the novel's capitalism resembles our own, it is an embroidered version of the current regime. What a left-wing reader could just about celebrate as a prophetic satire, a right-wing reader may still regard as a boundary

flag – as a pathological and dysfunctional extreme implying the relative moderation of the status quo. Perhaps Sid Hurst was a bit of an Ian Lanagin himself in his day! But now he is a decent, family man, doing what he has to do: possessive individualism and civil, vocational and familial privatism. We are supposed to like him, his long-suffering wife Jacinta, and their two impertinent kids. So if Hamilton is trying to please everyone, I think he catches the right-wing reader's eye oftener.

That said, thoroughgoing Middle Englishness could never really survive an act of imaginative expression of such scale and ambition. There is ultimately a great deal to like about this novel. There is merit in the bare fact of being able to turn out 1,000-plus pages of proficient prose. Certain economies of scale kick in: a plot thread simply left hanging long enough then seized up again can feel satisfying in the same way as a plot twist can; and though Hamilton does not achieve the stylistic variety of, for instance, Iain M. Banks' space opera, by the end of the novel a diverse grandeur has gradually accumulated.

There is some excellent interplay between passages of deliberately arduous information and often bloody action sequences. The St Libra narrative strand is dominated not so much by military science fiction as military logistics science fiction. The fine grain elaboration of its material culture is another of its admirable features, albeit at times a bit *Top Gear*. Hamilton is particularly proficient at contriving tense scenarios by layering together mundane and extraordinary mishaps. Sometimes the slow, detailed mode is also deployed as a crucible of tension in its own right. The plodding early phases of the expedition employs that mode, gradually establishing a potent sense of remoteness. There is a real sense that small decisions or acts of neglect can have tremendous consequences. The Zanth in particular is used sparingly but thrillingly; the novel's closing sentences are excellent. Part of me was left wondering, however, whether Hamilton could have cast his exacting eye a little oftener in the direction of the human (posthuman) heart? Or indeed, what might he have written had he permitted himself complete absorption by his unfolding material, bringing to bear his considerable talents – his comprehensiveness, his *copia*, his evident interest in pacing and his skill at convergence – in a manner less attentive to his presumed readers, and to their presumed appetites for worlds and thrills?

# Foundation

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