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SUBMISSIONS
The SFRA Review encourages all submissions, including essays, review essays that cover several related texts, and interviews. If you would like to review non-fiction or fiction, please contact the respective editor.

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The World Fantasy Con has announced site selection for the next three years: 2006 in Austin, Texas, November 2-5; 2007, in Saratoga, New York, November 1-4; 2008, in Calgary, Canada, TBA.

The Carl Brandon Society is now accepting published long and short print speculative fiction in English to be considered for two juried awards designed to recognize excellence in speculative fiction by or about people of color. Each award comes with a $1,000 prize. To be eligible, works must have been published in 2005. The Carl Brandon Parallax Award will be given to works of fiction created by a person of color. For their work to be considered for the award, nominees must provide a brief statement self-identifying as a person of color. The submission period closes Feb. 1, 2006. Statements should be sent to <awardadmin@carlbrandon.org>. The Carl Brandon Kindred Award will be given to any work of speculative fiction in English dealing with issues of race and ethnicity; nominees may be of any racial or ethnic backgrounds. The submission period closes March 1, 2006. Publishers should email <awards@carlbrandon.org> for details about where to mail nominated works. The awards will be presented at WisCon 30, held May 26-29, 2006 in Madison, WI.

The winners of the British Fantasy Awards were announced at Fantasycon on October 2. Best Anthology: The Alsiso Project, ed. Andrew Hook; Best Collection: Out of His Mind, by Stephen Gallagher; Best Short Story: “Black Static,” by Paul

SFRA BUSINESS

Editor’s Message
Christine Mains

In this issue, we have an addition to the speeches presented at SFRA 2005 in Las Vegas, which were published in the last issue; we missed out on Dave Mead’s special presentation to Alice Clareson (who unfortunately wasn’t with us in Vegas), in honor of all of the work she has done for the association over the years.

Ah, Murphy’s Law, my old and unwelcome friend. After several issues that ran relatively smoothly and came in on time, this is the second issue in a row that’s fallen somewhat behind schedule. We’ll want to be playing catch-up for the next issue, so please, if you’re working on any fiction or nonfiction reviews, send them along to Phil or Ed as soon as possible. And of course, if you have anything floating around your hard drives that would be suitable for the “Approaches to Teaching” or the “Theory and Beyond” columns, we’d love to hear from you, anytime. Really.

SFRA BUSINESS

President’s Message
David G. Mead

By the time this issue - #274 - appears, the new year will have begun. If you haven’t renewed your membership for 2006, please do that now. Under the leadership of Peter Brigg, Warren Rochelle, Bruce Rockwood, and Mack Hassler, we have been very successful in getting our membership numbers back up over 300, after a number of years of shrinking enrollments. We’d like to keep that trend going, so please send in your dues and subscriptions, and also the names of prospective members whom we might invite to join.

We are still looking for a conference venue and host for the annual meeting in 2007. Would you be willing to host this meeting? Traditionally the conference has moved around the country (now the world). This year we met in Las Vegas. In 2006 we’ll convene in White Plains, NY. In 2008 we will be in Dublin, Ireland. Where will we go in 2007?

Past-President (Extraordinaire) Peter Brigg invites anyone interested in running for positions on the executive for next year to contact him now. He is busy chalking in a slate. I invite you, too. Here’s a great way to serve the profession, and the work is both easy and interesting.

For Extrapolation, Mack Hassler reports that the editors have been wrangling with logistical problems in getting the 2005 issues printed and mailed. They resolve to get back on schedule in 2006. I know we are all hoping that they will succeed.

At this moment, I have no more to say, except to wish you all

Happy Holidays!
This year, the Officers of the SFRA decided to make a special presentation, a one-time award to a person who has been very special for the SFRA since its inception. This person is Alice Clareson, the wife of Thomas D. Clareson, the founding President of our Association. Alice has done yeoman service for the SFRA and for the study of Science Fiction for many years. But because she was instrumental in establishing our Thomas D. Clareson Award for Service, recognizing her work with a Clareson Award has seemed—well, perhaps a little like nepotism. Yet her work deserves recognition. So …

By honoring Alice Clareson with this plaque, we are recognizing the work she has done for the study of science fiction, for the SFRA, and for her contributions to our founder Tom Clareson’s achievements as an sf scholar. Without disparaging Tom’s skills and accomplishments, we know how invaluable it must have been to him to have Alice, an expert reader with degrees in English and a trained librarian, helping him as a personal research assistant, editor, proofreader and colleague. It must also have seemed natural in those days that as the scholar’s wife she remain somewhat in the background, her collaboration only modestly apprehended for a long while, perhaps even taken for granted as the duty of his helpmeet.

Now Alice will tell you, as she told me just a few days ago, that she has never felt neglected or her work unacknowledged, and she jibed a little at her portrayal as ‘the little woman.’ And I know better than to argue with Alice. So, acknowledged sufficiently or not, tonight we say thank you to Alice Clareson for all she has given to us.

Many of us who know Alice have been used to seeing her attending these conferences as a quiet, modest observer and friend, so for some of us it has been difficult to appreciate how much she has helped build the Science Fiction Research Association. She worked right along with Tom in the early days of the organization. When Extrapolation began as a mimeographed newsletter, Alice helped with the production and mailing—the drudgery that produced the actual magazine. Early an uncredited partner, she helped Tom select and edit essays for the scholarly journal that Extrapolation gradually became. Later she was named Associate Editor and then a member of its Board of Editors. She remains actively involved as an advisor to the Editors of Extrapolation, as Mack Hassler can attest.

Alice’s most recent contribution to the organization that she and her husband founded was her push to establish the SFRA’s Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service, which is intended to recognize people whose steady unpretentious careers of “outstanding service activities” might otherwise be overlooked. Building on an idea she says was first suggested by Art Lewis, our second SFRA President, Alice led the effort in 1994 and 1995 to establish the award which bears her husband’s name.

Alice sends her greetings and love to you all, and has asked me to tell you that she wishes her health permitted her to be with us tonight. I wish she were here too.

Alice, this special citation shows that we recognize your special contributions to sf scholarship and to the SFRA. We deeply appreciate your generous spirit and hard work, and we look forward to years of continued collaboration and friendship.
CfPs:
WHAT: When Genres Collide
WHO: SFRA 37th Annual Conference
WHEN: June 22-25, 2006
WHERE: Crowne Plaza Hotel, White Plains, NY
TOPICS: Guest of Honor: Norman Spinrad. Featured Guests: Nancy Kress, Nalo Hopkinson, R. Garcia y Robertson, William Sleator, Joan Slonczewski, Michael Whelan. Readers of science fiction are well aware of the intense cross-pollination of SF and other genres. Science fiction has frequently dovetailed with fantasy and dark fantasy. Even in hard SF, readers often encounter variations of “ghosts” and “gods” in the stories. With the ever-evolving cyberpunk movement, the rise of slipstream fiction and mysteries that hover on the cusp of mainstream even as they move into cyberpunkish territory, the boundaries between science fiction and related genres seem to be increasingly blurred. With this in mind, the theme of SFRA 2006 will be “When Genres Collide.” Papers on books that challenge traditional interpretations of science fiction are encouraged. We also welcome essays that reinforce the distinctive nature of science fiction, especially the interplay between science fiction and the natural, physical and social sciences (cloning, global warming, resource management, gender, race and species relations, for example). Other possible topics might include authors who have often burried boundaries in their stories (think of Norman Spinrad, Harlan Ellison, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Bruce Sterling, for example), fresh interpretations of classic writers (Arthur C. Clarke and Robert A. Heinlein, for example)

NONFICTION REVIEW

Lewis and Clarke
Bruce A. Beatie

From Narnia to a Space Odyssey. The War of Ideas Between Arthur C. Clarke and C. S. Lewis.


Both of these books are related to the upcoming Disney live-action films of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, if not of all the Narnia stories: Caughey's collection of newly-written essays is explicitly so (the back cover of the uncorrected proof notes the December 2005 release of the film as a "tie-in"), and paperback editions of Miller's book (originally published in 2003, well before the Disney project was announced) are forthcoming in November 2005 and March 2006, according to amazon.com. Let me begin with the earlier book.

The title of Miller's little book promises far more than it delivers. Its core, and the only potentially valuable contribution it makes, is the publication of a correspondence between Lewis and Clarke (an interesting conjunction of names for a reader in the United States!) between December 1943 and January 1954. It begins with Clarke's long letter protesting Lewis’s highly negative characterization in Perelandra (1943, though Miller gives a date of 1944 on page 8) of Professor Weston and members of "little Interplanetary Societies and Rocketry Clubs” (Miller, 8 and 16); in strong but thoughtful prose, Clarke argued against the "panic fear of technological progress” (38) he saw inherent in Lewis’s novel. In a brief handwritten response (a postcard, transcribed on page 40 and in facsimile on page 176), Lewis conceded that “I don’t … think that … many scientists are budding [transcribed as “hidding”] Westons: but I do think … that a point of view not unlike Weston’s is on the way.”

Clarke did not respond to the card, but in September of 1946 he wrote reminding Lewis of their earlier correspondence and inviting him to a lecture—most likely “The Challenge of the Spaceship” (Journal of the British Interplanetary Society, December 1946)—and sending him both a preliminary copy and the publication with discussion; Lewis did not attend the lecture, but responded with three brief postcards expressing thanks. After some six years of silence between the two, Clarke invited Lewis in February 1953 “to propose a motion that interplanetary travel is a bad thing” at a meeting of the British Interplanetary Society (43); Lewis declined, noting in a postscript that “Probably the whole thing is a plan for kidnapping me and marooning me on an asteroid ….” (44, transcription and facsimile). Clarke's polite response, both to the note and the postscript, concludes: “I hope you won’t mind the not uncomplimentary reference I make to you in my forthcoming novel Prelude to Space.” (45, transcription and facsimile. The reference is to the revised hardcover edition; it had appeared as a Galaxy Novel in magazine format in 1951.)

Almost a year later, on January 17, 1954, Clarke wrote to Lewis at some length, thanking him for comments he’d made in a letter to The Globe about Childhood’s End (Joy Gresham, whom Lewis married in 1956, had sent the novel
to Lewis), asking permission to quote from it, presumably in advertising, for the British edition of the novel, and sending a copy of “my first volume of short stories” (47—Expedition to Earth, 1953)—the first of six letters between the two within ten days. Lewis responded from Oxford on the 20th, giving tentative permission, calling the novel “a grand book” (47), and inviting Clarke to meet him in Oxford. Clarke had apparently also sent Lewis a copy of the May 1953 issue of If, containing Clarke’s story “Jupiter 5”; two hours later on the 20th, Lewis wrote again from Paddington Station commenting favorably on “Jupiter 5,” but rather negatively on other stories in the issue. Clarke answered the next day, sending the passages from the Globe letter he wanted to use, and putting off a possible visit to Oxford. As Clarke notes in his 2001 “Preface” to the exchange of letters (34), he did meet Lewis (and Tolkien!) sometime later at the Eastgate pub, accompanied by his “fellow Interplanetarian, Val Cleaver.” He remembers Lewis’s parting comment as they “emerged a little unsteadily from the Eastgate… ‘I’m sure you’re very wicked people—but how dull it would be if everyone was good.’” (In a final note to Lewis, “wherever you are,” in 2003, Clarke remembered the words somewhat differently.)

On the 24th, Clarke wrote a long letter thanking Lewis for revisions of his comments on Childhood’s End, discussing the stories in If that Lewis had criticized, and mentioning some of his own stories. Lewis’s briefer reply, on the 26th, picks up Clarke’s comments on human interest and escapism in SF; defending escapism in words that Clarke remembered in 1973 as “‘The only people who think there’s something wrong with escapism are jailers.’” (Neil McAleer’s biography, 1992, 251) So ends the correspondence. Clarke says in his “Preface” that “Perhaps one reason why our correspondence was virtually non-existent in later years was that I was in indirect touch with Lewis all the time through Joy Gresham” (34), whom he met regularly in London at the White Horse tavern.

This correspondence, including Clarke’s “Preface,” his 2004 “Final Letter” that concludes the volume, and the facsimiles on pages 4 and 176, comprises only 21 of the 176 pages in this slim volume. As I hope the descriptions above make abundantly clear, it does not constitute a “war of ideas.” The remaining 150-plus pages are filled out with an “Introduction” and profiles of Lewis and Clarke, all by Miller, two stories and the essay “On Science Fiction” by Lewis, and five stories and two short essays by Clarke, all of which are easily available elsewhere. The justification Miller gives for including the stories and essays is that they purportedly show “how their dialogue continued in the creative and non-fiction” [sic] works they produced during and subsequent to their correspondence.” In fact they do not. There is no evidence of cross-influence in the materials included, and published biographies of the authors show little sign of intellectual contact outside of these brief exchanges of letters. Miller’s profiles offer neither new insights nor information. The book, originally intended as a successor to Arthur C. Clarke & Lord Dunsany: A Correspondence (ed. by Keith Allen Daniels, San Francisco, CA: Anamnesis Press, 1998) is unworthy of its predecessor.

Moreover, it is one of the most carelessly-produced books I have ever encountered. None of the background information included with my comments on the letters is provided by Miller, and the only indication of sources is found in the copyright acknowledgements on page 2. There are multiple typographical and other errors on almost every page, to say nothing of stylistic solecisms. The long passage from Perelandra to which Clarke objected is repeated in toto (8-9 and 16). And Miller’s transcriptions of Lewis’s admittedly poor handwriting are desperately flawed. Let me give only one glaring example. The Lewis quotation about instance, in spite of their hard SF roots), and writers that move between science fiction and fantasy (Nancy Kress, Nalo Hopkinson, R. Garcia y Robertson, Ray Bradbury, Anne McCaffrey, Octavia Butler, Connie Willis, and Brian W. Aldiss). Further, we invite papers on the growing YA SF offerings. SF has long appealed to young people’s sense of adventure. Many adult SF fans discovered the genre via Heinlein or Andre Norton. Contemporary writers are now reaching techno-savvy generation raised on a steady diet of global crises. William Slesator, M. T. Anderson, Garth Nix, Isobelle Carmody, Neal Shusterman and others have successfully jumped generic boundaries while never losing sight of young people’s fascination with whimsy and horror.

DEADLINE: April 15, 2006

WHAT: Kubrick collection TOPICS: We are soliciting contributions for a collection of essays (to be published by McFarland and Company) which will address the work of Stanley Kubrick from a variety of new and fresh perspectives. In general, we are particularly interested in essays that synthesize analyses of several Kubrick films as they relate to a particular topic, rather than single film studies. We particularly encourage original, groundbreaking analysis and discussions of overlooked aspects of Kubrick’s work. Chapters will include, but are not limited to the following subjects: Kubrick as photographer; Kubrick as newsreel filmmaker; Kubrick and genre; Kubrick and gender; Kubrick and politics; Kubrick and technology; Kubrick and war; Kubrick and adaptation; Kubrick’s unfinished projects;
Kubrick's reputation as a filmmaker; Kubrick and Spielberg's A.I.; Kubrick's relationship to the other arts (painting, music, etc.). We are also seeking several essays on various aspects of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

SUBMISSIONS: John Springer, Dept. of English, 100 North University Drive, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK 73034-5209. <jpspringer@ucok.edu>

WHAT: Exploring the Multiverse: A Study of the Works of Michael Moorcock

WHO: Editor: Thomas Fortenberry.

TOPICS: Submissions are invited for a new collection of essays studying the writings of British author Michael Moorcock. Moorcock has had a long and amazingly successful career as both editor and author. Winner of numerous awards (including the British Fantasy Award, World Fantasy Award, and being shortlisted for the Whitbread [Mother London]), he is most famous for having created a vast and fantastic multiverse centered around the concept of a recurrent Eternal Champion. This collection endeavors to explore that multiverse on many levels and examine the many incarnations of the Eternal Champion. Moorcock, much like Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, and J. R. R. Tolkien, has created unique worlds and memorable characters that have become archetypal and influenced a generation of readers and writers. For instance, there is an entire gaming universe and fiction subgenre of fantasy based around his doomed albino prince Elic of Melnibone and his giant, sentient, magical, black rune-covered sword, along with screenplays and films in development. And there are numerous other char-

escapism that Clarke remembered in 1973 is transcribed as follows:

I was liberated from it [fear of escapism] once and for all when a friend read

“These critics are v. semitic to at least hint of Escape. Now what class of man can
one expect to be thus very concerned about Escaped-Jailers.”

A facsimile of this letter is reproduced on page 4. Even from the relatively
poor facsimile, I can read (corrected errors in italics):

I was liberated from it once and for all when a friend said “These critics are
very sensitive to the least hint of Escape. Now what class of man [could] one expect to
be thus worked up about Escape—Jailers!”

Clarke's 20-year-old memory makes better sense than Miller's transcription.
One might hope that the promised reprints will involve drastic revision. But
since they are apparently planned simply to exploit the coming Disney film, I have
my doubts.

Shanna Caughey's collection of new essays on the Narnia series is a far
more valuable contribution to Lewis studies. The version sent for review is an
“uncorrected proof” that has “not been fully copyedited or proofread” (sic, front
cover, recto), and so it is probably useless to comment on production concerns.
There is no introduction by the editor explaining the genesis of the volume; each
essay is preceded by an “Intro Pending” statement, presumably to be furnished by
the editor. Bibliographies and/or end-notes are “pending” for most of the articles
(footnotes, however, are included), and the brief biographical notes on the indi-
vidual authors that conclude each essay are missing for several. There are many
typos (though far fewer than in Miller's book!), and problems of formatting: long
sections are in italics for no apparent reason, long quotes are not set off, titles are
not italicized, there is no consistency between footnotes and endnotes, yet foot-
notes numbered consecutively through the whole volume. But in this case, there is
every reason to hope that the published version will eliminate most of these
problems.

The collection, as noted earlier, is explicitly planned as a tie-in to the
forthcoming Disney film; indeed, several of the 25 authors make direct reference to
it. And yet, somewhat unexpectedly in a volume tied to a media event, the collec-
tion as a whole is quite readable and of considerable potential interest. The authors
come from a broad range of backgrounds; as the amazon.com blurb says, “Theo-
logians, psychologists, academics, feminists, and fantasists offer humor, insight,
and fresh perspectives on the enchanting and beloved Chronicles of Narnia series.
Such contributors as fantasists Sarah Zettel and Lawrence Watt-Evans, children’s
literature scholar Naomi Wood, and C. S. Lewis scholars Colin Duriez and Joseph
Pearce discuss topics such as J. R. R. Tolkien and Middle Earth's influence on the
conception of Narnia, the relevance of allegory for both Christians and non-
Christians, the idea of divine providence in Narnia, and Narnia's influence on
modern-day witchcraft. Fans of the wildly popular series will revel in the examina-
tion of all aspects of C. S. Lewis and his magical Narnia.”

It is tempting to comment individually on each of the 25 articles (rang-
ing in length from 6 to 21 pages—average length is 13 pages), especially since I’ve
already devoted so much space to a book with so little value, but that would take
up too many pages of the SFRA Review. The following comments are therefore
more or less at random. Many of the articles are more personal than scholarly, but
nonetheless interesting for all that, and most at least touch on matters of religion
and/or theology; very few are what I would call “critical” in the sense of exploring
the aesthetic or literary qualities of the Chronicles.

Two of the most interesting, printed back to back, are Peter J. Schakel's
“The 'Correct' Order for Reading the Chronicles of Narnia” (104-114), and Wesley
argues, using different evidence, that the recent publishers' renumbering of the series by their internal chronology "has the regrettable effect of wiping out the past and imposing a single 'authoritative' reading upon the Chronicles." (Kort, 114) As written, the stories build upon each other; events in the later stories "invoke recognition and memory ...." (Kort, 110) These two essays can be compared in curious ways with James V. Schall's "The Beginnings of the Real Story" (159-171), which sounds parallel, but in fact is a Platonic speculation on the fictive vs. the "real" Narnia.

As might be expected, Joseph. Pearce's "Narnia and Middle Earth: When Two Worlds Collide" (124-138) argues for "Lewis as a follower of Tolkien" (124), and considers the "collision" to lie mainly in the realm of their differing views of allegory." Yet he concludes that, "paradoxically, we have Tolkien to thank for Narnia, and Lewis to thank for Middle Earth." (138) These are not new ideas—Pearce himself has approached them in other contexts—but this is the only article in the collection that deals to any extent with Lewis's relationship to Tolkien. Equally interesting, though very different, is the longest and first article, Charlie W. Starr's "The Silver Chair and the Silver Screen" (7-27). "I want," he says, "to explore the possibility that fairy tales are true, that myth is history and that movies may be more real than the reality we see around us." (8) It is a startling thesis, but remarkably well argued, and his postscript on "The Upcoming Narnia films" (25-26) is especially perceptive.

Very narrowly focused is David E. Bumbaugh's "The Horse and His Boy: The Theology of Bree" (248-259), virtually the only article to concentrate on a single volume of The Chronicles. That volume, he insists, expresses a Gaian theology which "reminds us that all the world is sacred and holy and regularly whispers profound revelations to those who have ears to hear." (258) Very broad in its perspective is Mary Zambrano's "A Reconstructed Image: Medieval Time and Space in the Chronicles of Narnia" (259-272), which shows rather convincingly that Lewis followed in The Chronicles what he called, in The Discarded Image and elsewhere, "the Model of the Medieval Universe" (261). It's one of the few articles without extensive references to religion or theology.

Some of the articles are fairly trivial, though still of some interest. Jacqueline Carey's "Heathen Eye for the Christian Guy" (172-177, the shortest article) is a highly personal note on accepting the Christian allegory in the series. In his "Greek Delight: What If C. S. Lewis Had Been Eastern Orthodox?" (185-192), Nick Mamutas imagines a C. S. Louverdis as author of the Chronicles. That volume, he insists, expresses a Gaian theology which "reminds us that all the world is sacred and holy and regularly whispers profound revelations to those who have ears to hear." (258) Very broad in its perspective is Mary Zambrano's "A Reconstructed Image: Medieval Time and Space in the Chronicles of Narnia" (259-272), which shows rather convincingly that Lewis followed in The Chronicles what he called, in The Discarded Image and elsewhere, "the Model of the Medieval Universe" (261). It's one of the few articles without extensive references to religion or theology.

When I came to the article by Vox Day, I couldn't help thinking of Dunstan Ramsey's three girlfriends in Robertson Davies' Fifth Business: Agnes Day ("who yearned to take upon herself the sins of the world"), Gloria Mundy ("the good-time girl"), and Libby Doe ("who thought sex was the one great, true, and apostolic key".) "The Voice of God" seems an unlikely name for a person who, on one of the many websites where he appears, is called a "novelist and Christian libertarian" and a member of SFWA; the only offline reference to his work I could find is the 1996 SF novel Rebel Moon, written with Bruce Bethke. His article, "C. S. Lewis and the Problem of Religion in Science Fiction and Fantasy"
Ursula K. Le Guin we welcome essays on any of the author’s published fiction, but would particularly like to see explorations of her children’s fantasy, short fiction, poetry, or such recent novels as The Other Wind and The Telling. SUBMISSIONS: Double-spaced on one side of the sheet only. Neither embedded footnotes nor generated footnotes that some software systems make available should be used. Documentation should follow the MLA Style Manual with parenthetical citations in the text and a works cited list at the end. Send electronic submission in MSWord.

CONTACT: Michael Levy & Sandra J. Lindow: <levym@uwstout.edu> and to Extrapolation editor Javier A. Martinez at <jmartinez@utb.edu>.

DEADLINE: June 1, 2006

WHAT: 14th Annual Comic Arts Conference
WHO: Comic-Con International
WHEN: July 20-23, 2006
WHERE: San Diego, California
TOPICS: We seek proposals from a broad range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, and welcome the participation of academic, independent, and fan scholars. We welcome professionals from all areas of the comics industry, including creators, editors, publishers, retailers, distributors, and journalists. We also invite scholars and professionals to participate as respondents to presentations. Papers, slide presentations, and poster sessions may take a critical or historical perspective on comics (juxtaposed images in sequence).

SUBMISSIONS: 100 to 200 word abstract
CONTACT: Dr. Peter Coogan, Kinkel Center, Fontbonne Univer-

(225-234), criticizes “the heirs of CS [sic] Lewis’ literary tradition” who “have not only failed themselves, but more importantly, they have failed their readers” because “they are not observers of the human condition at all, chronicling instead an imaginary inhumanity that never existed, does not exist and never will exist.” (234)

Colin Duriez’s “Narnia in the Modern World: Rehabilitating a Lost Consciousness” (302-314) is a fitting conclusion for the collection. It considers the whole of the Chronicles from the perspective of Lewis’s inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1954, where he argues the need “to rehabilitate the ‘Old Western’ values ….” (304) Lewis aimed, Duriez concludes, “to provide an entry into this old consciousness of humanity” so that his readers may “see the world today with new and undeceived eyes.” (314)

I have commented, in one mode or another, on less than half of the articles in the collection, but the remaining ones are not necessarily less interesting. Let me conclude with a somewhat marginal note that relates to both books reviewed here. A Google search for the phrase “Arthur C. Clarke” turns up 1,040,000 hits, while one for “C. S. Lewis” turns up 1,100,000—a remarkable parity in two authors so different in their interests and the scope of their writings. But when I add “AND religion” to the names, Clarke shows only 70,500 hits, while Lewis, not surprisingly, shows 447,000—nearly half of his total. The “war of words” is simply a difference in focus.

NONFICTION REVIEW

Revisiting Narnia
Edward Carmien


Editor Shanna Caughey gathers twenty-five diverse contributions in this addition to BenBella Books’ “Smart Pop” series. Revisiting Narnia presents a bewildering array of voices on C. S. Lewis’ Narnia books. Subtitled Fantasy, Myth and Religion in C. S. Lewis’ Chronicles, the intended range is clearly broad. Most speak appreciatively of Lewis and the fiction he’s best known for; others are more critical, if only selectively.

One might presume this book is warranted by the splash being made by the big-screen The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, but Lewis is of import to religious thinkers in general, as noted in the November 7 issue of Time. Today, notes Time’s David Van Biema, it is “Evangelicals who hold most of the Lewis conferences and write most of the Lewis books.”

It is no surprise, then, that writers with a strong interest in the religious aspects of Lewis’ work predominate here. Many, such as lead essayist Charlie W. Starr, teach at institutions with a link to organized religion as part of their name, such as Kentucky Christian University. For most, such as Starr, there is no inherent advantage or disadvantage with this affiliation. For some, such as the oddly-named (yet sure-nuff a real person) Vox Day, the religious perspective seems to help generate such gems as “Their [golden age science fiction writers] antipathy towards all forms of traditional religion in favor of a dogmatic faith in the scientific method cast science fiction into an artistic ghetto from which it has not yet even begun to escape.”

Even Day, who also claims that contemporary fantasy generally goes “horribly awry,” makes an interesting contribution by observing that religion in fantasy (unlike any real world religion) tends to represent a galactic balance between
good and evil that must be maintained. It is unfortunate he does so by citing Zelazny's Amber series and thereby conflating chaos with evil or order with good.

That Shanna Caughey is a senior editor at BenBella Books and has no other apparent link to the subject is, I guess, why Revisiting Narnia has no discernable focus beyond Lewis' Narnia novels in general. Her introduction is short and non-critical. To her credit, however, her collection contains a wide array of diverse and reputable fiction writers such as Jacqueline Carey (Kushiel's Legacy series), Nick Mamatas, Sarah Zettel (most recently of the Isaavalta series), and others. Academics are well represented, of course, and they along with those impossible to pigeonhole make this text an energetic and worthwhile addition to the Smart Pop series.

Chief among the curveballs (and I mean that in the nicest possible way) is Peg Aloi and her contribution, “The Last of the Bibliophiles: Narnia's Enduring Impact on the Pagan Community.” Aloi is insightful, fun, and thought-provoking in turns, an opinion it is quite possible I hold because we are both apparently of the “Not Menopausal or Mid-Life Crisis-Y yet, but No Longer Prone to All Night Games of Risk Fuelled by Jagermeister, Either” demographic.

In no particular order, other highlights include Natasha Giardina’s evocation of the “Palace of Memory” in her “Elusive Prey” article, subtitled “Searching for Traces of Narnia in the Jungles of the Psyche.” Kansas State University’s Naomi Wood suggests that “the imaginative satisfactions of Narnia potentially subvert any easy correlation of Narnia with Christian life and may even subvert belief in Christianity itself,” an interesting idea, given the source text under discussion. Martha C. Sammons observes that it is we grownups instead of kids who need fantasy tales, not surprising as she also authored A Guide Through Narnia.

Of the twenty-five contributors, many have written about Lewis and Narnia before, another laudable trait of Revisiting Narnia. The luminaries include James Como, a founding member of the New York C. S. Lewis Society, and Ingrid E. Newkirk, founder and president of PETA, who writes about Narnia as vehicle for perceiving animals as equals.

Academics seeking “the usual suspects” will find them—Cathy McSorran’s “Daughters of Lilith” addresses feminist issues in the Narnia series, while Louis Markos provides a touch of the lit crit in “Redeeming Postmodernism: At Play in the Fields of Narnia.” One of the more thought-provoking pieces is “Greek Delight: What if C. S. Lewis Had Been Eastern Orthodox?” in which Nick Mamatas outlines the many differences between the two main trunks of Christianity via the “what-if” of his title.

With all due apologies to authors I haven’t yet named, such as Bumbaugh, Zambreno, Stabb, and Dunze, it is a grim fact of life that all reviews must come to an end sometime. Sally Stabb’s piece, for example, “Most Right and Proper, I’m Sure…” while on the surface about manners is really an insightful glimpse into the Edwardian British culture that spawned Lewis.

Comparisons to Tolkien? Check. Discussions of allegory? Check. “When I was a kid and read the Narnia books” anecdotes? Check. While traditional scholars will find the text a bit light, it is my belief that present day scholarship is well served by texts such as Revisiting Narnia, BenBella Books’ Smart Pop series and related titles coming out from other publishers. Call me populist, but scholarship that is incomprehensible to so-called common readers of the source text (Narnia, in this case) limits itself to a nearly-useless tiny audience. Scholarly (if that is truly the right term when so much quality material is contributed by those who are purely fiction writers) work that is also accessible is of much more use.
conference, we also welcome papers that engage with such topics as utopian visions of the settlement of the western United States, indigenous utopias, environmental utopias, and utopian or intentional communities in the Colorado area.

SUBMISSIONS: 100-250 word abstract
CONTACT: Carrie Hintz: email <carriehintz@hotmail.com>
DEADLINE: May 1, 2006

WHO: A special issue of ImageText
TOPICS: ImageText is a web-based journal published by the University of Florida, committed to advancing the academic study of comic books, comic strips, and animated cartoons. Under the guidance of an editorial board of scholars from a variety of disciplines, For this issue, we are particularly interested in papers that help move beyond the core of well-rehearsed cliches that make up scholarship on Gaiman. Innovative and inventive approaches to the subject matter are greatly preferred to retracing the role of the mythic in Sandman, or discussing Dream in terms of Freud. Being a comics-centered journal, we are most interested in treatments of Gaiman's work in comics, although we use the term in the broadest sense, including Stardust and his children's picture books, and will certainly welcome treatments of Gaiman's non-comics work alongside his comics work.

SUBMISSIONS: completed papers in MLA format as attachments
CONTACT: <sandifer@english.ufl.edu>
DEADLINE: March 1, 2006
INFO: <www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/>.

Libraries, both those associated with institutions of higher education and others, such as local public libraries, that provide access to fantasy and science fiction texts would be well-served to offer texts like this to their patrons.

In short: Like Narnia? Read Revisiting Narnia. You won't like it all, but you'll see new depths in Lewis' series. Guaranteed.

NONFICTION REVIEW

Sex and the Slayer
Karen Hellekson


During its seven-season run, the cult TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997–2003) dealt intelligently with topics that transcended the horror genre. Sex, relationships, love, and death were handled both literally and metaphorically in a smart, well-written series headed by Joss Whedon that has garnered much academic attention, from edited volumes collecting articles about the program to packed Buffy panels at academic conventions to Buffy-centric articles in respected media studies journals. However, with its cancellation—and the attendant ascension of programs that seem to usefully update Buffy, such as Veronica Mars (2004–present; currently in its second season on UPN)—Buffy's freshness has worn off. This doesn't mean that Jowett's book isn't good or important, because it has much to recommend it. It's just that right now, at this precise moment, it seems irrelevant.

Jowett, a lecturer in American Studies at Northampton in the UK, uses Buffy for textual examples to illustrate contemporary theories in gender criticism. Her strong introduction outlines current thought in feminist theory, gender theory, and cultural studies while situating both her text and Buffy. The most obvious question that needs answering—why Buffy?—is dealt with here in terms of quality, senality, and genre. Jowett successfully satisfies her twofold audience here: first are the academics, who want to know how Jowett contextualizes her ideas and what Jowett is adding to the discourse. Second are the Buffy fans, sophisticated readers and thinkers intimately familiar with every aspect of the program but perhaps less well read in the arcana of academic-speak. Jowett's clearly expressed ideas and transparent prose work for both.

The seven chapters that follow discuss gender not only in terms of women, but also, and significantly, in terms of men, with the text evenly divided between them. A conclusion and a bibliography round out the text, which is illustrated with black-and-white stills from Buffy. Jowett organizes the book around notions of contradiction and shifting identities and roles. Copious examples from the program may leave uninformed readers at a loss, but for avid followers of Buffy, the examples ring true and the analysis is sophisticated and well grounded in canon. Jowett concludes that Buffy illustrates gender as a terrain to be negotiated, the result of postmodern flux in gender roles, and that the appeal of Buffy lies in the struggle of different characters (Xander as a new man, Willow as a lesbian, Buffy as someone with superpowers) to construct meaningful roles for themselves in an age of postfeminism. In her conclusion, Jowett summarizes her arguments, noting that Buffy is not always progressive but rather contradictory: there are no answers, only attempts at negotiation. Reversals in gender roles, the genre of horror, and identity seek to re-vision contemporary culture—all while retaining audience appeal.
Although this book might be considered for course adoption in a class about media studies, its lack of applicability beyond *Buffy* means that it will appeal more to individual fans and academics who love the show. It is successful as a primer to postfeminist thought in media and gender studies (as opposed to critical theory or other humanities-based disciplines of that ilk), and its integration of current research in those studies is impressive. Scholars of media studies will want this smart, engaging, and entertaining book, as will libraries with strong media studies collections. Although *Buffy*'s moment has passed, it, like this book, is an artifact of its time, one that usefully illuminates gender in today's society.

**NONFICTION REVIEW**

**Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature**

Michael M. Levy


This is the fifth work in Scarecrow Press's Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts series, following Stableford's own volume on Science Fiction, John Clute's on Horror, and other dictionaries centered on Radio Soap Opera and Japanese Traditional Theatre. As with Stableford's previous dictionary, it features an extended Chronology, beginning with Homer in the 8th century BC and ending in 2004 with brief mentions of novels by Elizabeth Hand, Gene Wolfe, and Susannah Clarke; a long introductory essay; more than 400 pages of generally short entries covering a variety of subjects; and a detailed bibliography of general reference works, historical studies, aesthetic and theoretical studies, anthologies and essay collections, bibliographies, thematic studies, national studies, individual author studies, writing guides and manuals, scholarly fantasies, journals and websites.

Stableford's Introduction is heavily theoretical, discussing various meanings of the word “fantasy,” beginning with Geoffrey Chaucer, as well as the concept of fantasy as it relates to both preliterate cultures and those cultures which, although literate, nonetheless accept the supernatural as actually occurring in their world. He asks a series of important questions. Can a work of literature written by someone who believes in the supernatural be defined as fantasy? Is there a meaningful difference between fantasy and the fantastic? Is it inappropriate to “speak of fantasy literature” as having existed before the Age of Enlightenment, because ‘fantasy literature’ is an essentially contradictory notion, formed in dialectical opposition to the notion of ‘realistic (or naturalistic) literature’” (xxxi)? Evoking such scholars and critics of the fantastic as Lin Carter, Brian Attebery, and John Clute, Stableford presents a series of positions on these issues, before himself making the possibly controversial statement that “in the view adopted by this dictionary . . . [the nature of fantasy] has nothing at all to do with belief. . . .The extent to which storytellers prior to the 18th century may or may not have believed in magic, divination, fairies, witches, ghosts, legendary heroes, or mythical gods is not a significant factor in the decision as to whether to classify stories about such ideas and individuals as fantasy” (xlii). Continuing with his theoretical discussion, Stableford examines the views of Alexander Baumgarten and Edmund Burke before moving on to the opinions of J. R. R. Tolkien, and then briefly summarizes the work of a number of other critics.

In a section of his introduction entitled “Reading Fantasy Literature,”
of Honor: Amy Sturgis What role do maps and landscapes play in fantasy? Is drawing the map necessarily an early part of the subcreative process? How do fantasists go about creating the worlds in which their stories take place? Sometimes maps play an important role in the story itself. Maps also provide an opportunity for “other minds and hands” to fill in the blanks left in an author’s subcreated world. Native American characters frequently appear in fantastic fiction: how are they portrayed, and what role(s) do they play? Papers dealing with these conference themes are especially encouraged. We also welcome papers focusing on the work and interests of the Inklings (especially J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams), of our Guests of Honor, and other fantasy authors and themes. Papers from a variety of critical perspectives and disciplines are welcome.

SUBMISSIONS: 250 word abstract with contact info
CONTACT: Edith L. Crowe <edith.crowe@sjsu.edu>
DEADLINE: 15 April, 2006
INFORMATION: www.mythsoc.org/mythcon37.html

WHAT: Neil Gaiman
WHO: disjunctions panel
WHEN: April 7-8, 2006
WHERE: University of California, Riverside

TOPICS: In keeping with this year’s theme, Lost in Translation, this panel attempts to investigate how Neil Gaiman’s work translates into academia. Suggested topics include Gaiman’s role as contemporary Gothic author; Intertextuality and mythology; Gaiman as transatlantic, American, or British author; Gender and sexuality; Dreams, the psyche, and subjectivity; Witchcraft, the supernatural, and the uncanny; Fantasy

Stableford concentrates on the views of Farah Mendlesohn, as presented in her 2002 essay “Towards a Taxonomy of Fantasy.” Mendlesohn, who was herself building on the work of John Clute, introduced a new way of classifying various sorts of fantasy tales, as intrusive, immersive, liminal, etc., and Stableford uses Mendlesohn’s system throughout the dictionary. Indeed, despite his occasional references to Attebery, Clute, and other major figures in the field, it is Mendlesohn whose work has clearly had the greatest influence on his thinking. Stableford, however, is a major critic in his own right and has a number of interesting and valuable things to say about the development and aesthetics of immersive fantasy after the success of The Lord of the Rings.

The most common entries in the dictionary proper are for authors. Stableford gives the authors’ birth and death dates, nationalities, real names in cases where pseudonyms are involved, and mentions what sort of literary endeavors they are primarily known for. Writers who have also produced horror or science fiction are cross referenced to the other two Scarecrow volumes. Stableford then lists the major works of each author, with publication dates, giving them generic labels (immersive fantasy, religious fantasy, Arthurian fantasy). A small number of the books listed receive plot summaries, generally no more than a few words. Critical commentary is kept to a minimum and is reserved exclusively for those works Stableford considers particularly important or, in a few cases, particularly wretched. Any word or author mentioned in an entry which has its own entry elsewhere in the book is boldfaced. Two other kinds of entries are also common, those for character types (wizards, witches, fairies), in which Stableford generally gives a short definition and then lists classic works in which they appear, and those for various fantasy subgenres, in which the author gives generic definitions and, again, lists classic works of the type. There are also a small number of entries for notable anonymous works (Tam Lin), important magazines in the field (Weird Tales, Unknown), organizations and institutions (the IAFA, Small Press), and key terms (nonsense, pseudonym, feral children, taproot text). Stableford spreads his net very wide. Just about every English-language author who has made a name for him or herself in genre fantasy over the past century receives a mention, but a significant number of earlier (George Sand, Honore de Balzac, Wyndham Lewis) and contemporary (Paul Auster, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Will Self, Isabelle Allende) literary icons are also listed, as are many children’s authors (Dr. Seuss, Grace Chetwin, Tove Jansson).

In my review of Stableford’s Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction Literature I made note of the author’s occasional dry, Johnsonian wit. There’s less of this in evidence in the current volume (most of the entries are limited to just the facts), although I did enjoy his statement in the Chronology that in 1950 “Jack Vance’s The Dying Earth finds the marketplace not yet ready for decadent far-futuristic fantasy” (xxxix) and his note, in reference to Tim LaHaye’s Left Behind series, that the 1999 “boom in apocalyptic fantasies reaches its peak, demonstrating the awful extent of contemporary innumeracy” (xxxiii). Stableford also devotes considerable space to the Harry Potter phenomenon, commenting on its fusion of “the traditional British boarding-school story with the American high-school horror story—in which metaphorical modeling of the hormonal dramas of adolescents had evolved from crude B movies like I Was a Teenage Werewolf (1957), through Stephen King’s Carrie (1976), to the 1990s TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer” (353).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book, however, is the plethora of generic labels that Stableford provides, some of them traditional, others presumably his own invention. I have to admit that I spent considerable time perusing such entries as Lifestyle Fantasy, Literary Satanism, Scholarly Fantasy,
Karmic Romance, Thennomorphic Fantasy, Feminized Fantasy, and Chimerical Texts. The most interesting of these are Lifestyle Fantasy and Scholarly Fantasy. The former refers to supposedly non-fictional works by authors who are pushing their particular lifestyle beliefs. In this context can be classified work by Madame Blavatsky, Aleister Crowley and even L. Ron Hubbard’s Dianetics. Scholarly Fantasies, a related genre with some crossover, are supposedly scholarly works in which the authors’ own theories cause them to go wildly astray. Plato’s writing on Atlantis and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s histories qualify as Scholarly Fantasies, according to Stableford, as does much of the work of James Frazer, Margaret Murray, Robert Graves, Jessie Weston, and even a bit of Sigmund Freud.

Overall, the Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature should be a useful reference book, particularly for academics, who will find Stableford’s theoretical introduction and his application of Mendlesohn’s taxonomy more useful than will the average reader. The book may provide less qualitative and interpretative information than either Neil Barron’s Fantasy and Horror (1999) or John Clute and John Grant’s Encyclopedia of Fantasy (1997), but it should also be noted that it’s more inclusive than the former, less cumbersome than the latter, and more up to date than either.

NONFICTION REVIEW

**Superheroes and Philosophy**
Brett Chandler Patterson


Few in our society will admit to reading comic books; there seems to be a stigma attached to them (why this might be so is a long, complicated story): that they are only for entertaining kids, and adults who never grew up. And even fewer in academia seem to consider the possibility that many (though, granted, not all) comic books and graphic novels could be the basis for serious reflection. Since I am both a comic book reader and an academic (Ironically, I actually returned to comics as an adult to escape the academic rigors of doctoral work.), I eagerly volunteered to review this book. My job now is to try to convince those of you who are more skeptical that superhero stories can possibly be used for philosophical (and I would argue, theological) reflection. One of the first things to note, though, is that the editors have limited their focus to a particular kind of comic book, that of superheroes; this does not encompass all that graphic novels and comic books are – they are a medium that can be used to present just about any genre.

The secondary preliminary point to note, if we turn our focus to superheroes, is that stories about superheroes have not been isolated to comic books; they have also appeared in pulp novels, television shows, and motion pictures. This book does also make a nod towards Hollywood’s recent obsession with superhero stories. Overall, I believe it is another intriguing entry in Open Court’s Popular Culture and Philosophy Series.

The book is a collection of nineteen essays, organized around four section headings: The Image of the Superhero, The Existential World of the Superhero, Superheroes and Moral Duty, and Identity and Superhero Metaphysics. Contributors include comic scribes Mark Waid, Jeph Loeb, and Dennis O’Neil as well as a series of academics. Essays focus on most of the major characters (with a relative balance between DC and Marvel): Superman, Batman, Daredevil, the
DEADLINE: April 30, 2006

CONTACT: Terrence Wandtke<br>in email body or attachment

SUBMISSIONS: 300 word proposal and sexual otherness.

Handicaps; The Thing, the Hulk, and Spiderman as monstrous, cultural outsiders (also seen in more contemporary creations such as Concrete and Hellboy); The mutanthood of the X-Men as a flexible metaphor for racial and sexual otherness; Handicaps as both superpowers and metaphors for superpower with Professor Xavier and Daredevil; The racial other represented in the post Civil Rights Era with black superheroes such as the Falcon and the Black Panther; An(other) political discourse seen in works like the Dennis O’Neil and Neal Adams Green Arrow and Green Lantern and Alan Moore’s V for Vendetta; Superman as god-like others ranging from savior stories in Alan Moore’s Miracleman and “the death of Superman” series to the alternative mythologies of Jack Kirby’s New Gods and Neil Gaiman’s Sandman; Supermen as fascist rulers and villains with the ominous tones of Warren Ellis’ The Authority and Matt Wagner’s Grendel; Revisionist takes on racial and sexual otherness.

SUBMISSIONS: 300 word proposal in email body or attachment

CONTACT: Terrence Wandtke <twandtk@judsoncollege.edu>

DEADLINE: April 30, 2006

Loeb, Morris, addressing the Superman mythos, specifically in Loeb’s Superman for All Seasons, ponder the paradox: how can one be a hero if one is super? They emphasize that Superman is moral in his facing danger for the good of others. Sacrifice and self-discipline, they argue, are often underappreciated virtues in our society, but Superman’s mission has moral force that can inspire. Finally, though, there are questions about how ongoing resistance to evil is potentially dangerous: the use of violence to resist evil, even with limitations, arises from habits that could lead one on to greater violence. Aeon Skoble, in the context of Alan Moore’s Watchmen and Frank Miller’s The Dark Knight Returns, also argues that there are ambivalent and hostile repercussions to the vigilantism of superheroes. These are postmodern stories that dismantle the traditional image of the superhero by giving us instead troubled heroes who become complicit in corrupt social systems or in the use of violence. Which do we fear more: government-sponsored heroes or the vigilantes? Mike Thau also presents a postmodern reinterpretation: this time, the changing perception of “wisdom” in portraits of the Captain Marvel mythos, moving from the original story decades ago that stated that Captain Marvel possessed the wisdom of Solomon to the modern telling (by Geoff Johns) which states that he hears the voice of wisdom, but does not fully possess it. It reflects our generation’s skepticism about “wisdom.”

Every essay in the volume is not skeptical or ironic, however. Turning to another Miller story and adding in one by Kevin Smith, Tom Morris, in perhaps the strongest essay in the collection, portrays the vigilante work of Matt Murdock, Daredevil, in a more positive light. Morris seeks to show that Murdock, a troubled Catholic, is indeed a man of faith. Murdock has a faith in-progress that involves much wrestling with God, but his faith is the source of his strong character. He argues that Murdock is both hero and tragic figure in the work of Miller and Smith. Also, in a more positive portrayal, South presents the moral growth of Barbara Gordon, who as Batgirl needs a moral mentor in Batman, but who as the more mature Oracle, seeks out friendships of virtue with Black Canary and Huntress. Finally, C. S. Layman, pulling from Spiderman (the movie), meditates on reasons to be moral in the first place — what makes one a hero, and what makes one a villain? He pulls in Kant and Aristotle before coming around to metaphysics and even theism, stating that moral order is one of the arguments for God’s existence.

Once again, the above are just a quick sampling of some of the stronger entries. There are several others. The book tries to play a difficult balance. On the
one hand, as Talon and Walls remark in their essay, a philosopher (and/or theologian) in a room of comic book readers is almost like a police officer at a party. Being overly academic can kill the joy of the stories. On the other hand, though, as I have already noted, the book argues that comic books and graphic novels can aid in some serious reflection. They are not just full of bright colors and empty action. I think that both comic book readers and academics, and those few of us who are both, should gladly welcome this book, and those who have not given comic books the time of day should thoughtfully reconsider in the light of such study.

NONFICTION REVIEW

**SF on TV**

Christine Mains


In *SFRA 4* 272, Elyce Rae Helford wrote a review of *Cult Television*, published in 2004. Here we have two more volumes on genre television, in addition to several volumes published in recent years which focus on particular television series. And the dust jacket of Booker’s *Science Fiction Television* lists other titles of related interest, including *Strange TV: Innovative Television Series from The Twilight Zone to The X-Files* by the same author. Clearly analysis of the themes, narratives, and popularity of science fiction television is a going concern in academia. Both of these studies offer a survey of science fiction television past and present, with in-depth studies of particular series.

Jan Johnson-Smith’s *American Science Fiction TV* announces its particular focus in its title; while Johnson-Smith is a lecturer at Bournemouth University in the U.K., her concern is solely with American shows. No mention of *Doctor Who* or *Blake’s 7* or *Red Dwarf* in this volume, which is an adaptation of her doctoral thesis, now sprinkled with black and white stills. After a brief introduction, Chapter One examines the definitions and concerns of science fiction as a genre, with reference to Hugo Gernsback, Damien Broderick, Fredric Jameson, and Darko Suvin, drawing examples from literary science fiction as well as film. Nothing new here for sf scholars, of course, although such information would be useful for scholars of film and television who may be less familiar with the genre. Chapter Two traces the history of American television, particularly the early Westerns, as a product of American history and artistic expression. Johnson-Smith spends several pages on the tradition of landscape art, arguing that “this art also has an heir in television” (47) as a related visual form of the American myth, “a primary epic – the struggles of an immigrant people to create a future and a nation for themselves in the hostile New World” (47). This is a theme she occasionally returns to in discussion of series such as *Star Trek* and *Stargate SG-1*. These first two chapters contain the most generalized and historical overview of science fiction television in America; following chapters focus more narrowly on specific series, most of which are fairly recent. In part because of this structure, the volume as a whole does not always hold together as a single argument.

The first of these chapters examines *Star Trek*, of course, the longest-running American television franchise, which is only to be expected when the
WHAT Science Fiction and Disability
WHO: MLA
WHEN: Dec 2006
WHERE: Philadelphia
TOPICS: For many years, the archetypal image of disability in science fiction was Robert Heinlein’s Valdo, the embittered, reclusive, socially inept genius. Since Heinlein’s 1942 paean to voluntarist triumph over personal adversity, disability and dysmorphism have had a complex history in science fiction. From the gentle freaks of William Tenn and Theodore Sturgeon to the mentally disabled saints of Phillip K. Dick to the crippled superheroes of Grant Morrison and Octavia E. Butler, science fiction has alternately interrogated, celebrated, and stigmatized disability in its characters, as early as Sturgeon’s 1953 “The Clinic”, a story inspired by Sturgeon’s observations of Deaf culture, SF has addressed the contingent and socially-inflected nature of disability and impairment. With the cyberpunk versus humanist conflicts of the Eighties, new questions of transcendence and voluntarism arose: what does the dream of cybernetic disembodiment offer, or deny, to people with disabilities? Is cyberspace a liberatory ideal or a pernicious denial of the corporeal realm? In addition to the authors named above, authors of interest may include, but need not be limited to: John Varley, Suzy McKee Charnas, Nancy Jane Moore, Maureen McHugh, Joanna Russ, John Shirley, Bruce Sterling, C.L. Moore, Kit, Reed, Pat Cadigan, Stephen R. Donaldson, Joel Rosenberg and Piers Anthony.

SUBMISSIONS: abstracts of 7-9 page papers (20 minutes reading length)
CONTACT: Ann Keefer <vatergrl@yahoo.com>
DEADLINE: March 15, 2006

subject is science fiction television in America. Johnson-Smith’s primary interest here is the ways in which Star Trek, in all its incarnations, has represented both humanity and aliens. There’s little new in the discussion, which is unsurprising given the critical attention paid to Star Trek over the years; the usual examples of how Star Trek has dealt with issues of gender, race, and political concerns are repeated here. A secondary interest is in alien language, and we can all guess what episode provides the exemplar here. In short, while it’s impossible to imagine publishing a book about American science fiction television without some consideration of its best known show, it would have been nice to have been surprised with new insight.

That’s less of a problem in the rest of the book, as the other shows which Johnson-Smith discusses have drawn much less attention from scholars. The following chapter looks at the short-lived series Space: Above and Beyond in the context of American film and television representations of the Vietnam conflict; this chapter, originally published as a separate article, is also much more clearly structured and organized than are other chapters in the book. The author argues that if the show had been produced and aired after the events of 9/11 rather than before, its military theme, judged to be one of the reasons for its lack of popularity and its cancellation, might have resonated more strongly with audiences. After a brief exploration of other shows’ incorporation of military settings and themes, Johnson-Smith moves to an examination of “the legacy of Vietnam” and its lingering effects in the American consciousness, surveying treatments of Vietnam in films from The Green Berets through Born on the Fourth of July in order to provide a context for her analysis of the character of Lt. Col. McQueen, the central protagonist of S: AAB. She argues that the contrast between McQueen’s military beliefs and that of the reluctant and rebellious soldier heroes more common in the media points to an uncomfortable “challenge to the most fundamental American ideology” which finds resistance to authority more acceptable in narrative (150).

More recent shows such as Farscape and Stargate SG-1 are the subjects of the next chapter, which shifts its focus towards imagery and visual storytelling made possible by advances in television technology and special effects. Because shows produced in the 90s and later have access to such techniques, they are better able to depict the science fictional elements of science fiction narratives, better able to realize for the viewer the intricacies of travel through time, space, wormholes, etc., better able to show the alienness of alien characters. Because of these possibilities, she argues, spectacle has displaced other elements of science fiction television, as audience expectations are no longer about watching a good story unfold but instead seeing the results of the amazing technology that we know exist in the real world outside of the television screen.

The final chapter is by far the longest and most detailed, betraying the author’s fascination with its subject, Babylon 5, which, she argues, no other television series “has come close to touching” in terms of “ambitious complexity” (185). Johnson-Smith covers the history of the production of the show; its internal history; its characters, the special effects, the narrative techniques, the themes, the storylines, even its title sequence and music. However, there is little sense of a central argument in this chapter, and while there is some brief comparison to other shows, there is not enough to allow the reader to draw conclusions about why, exactly, Babylon 5 deserves such pride of place. And that is, in the end, the major problem that I have with this volume; although I find some parts of the discussion intriguing or even illuminating, I never have a sense of an overall thesis, an overriding theme which would allow me to fit these separate discussions into a coherent whole.
M. Keith Booker's *Science Fiction Television*, part of The Praeger Television Collection series, announces itself as “a history of science fiction television (SFTV) series that appeared in America from the 1950s to the early years of the twenty-first century”(1). Thus it covers much the same time period and many of the same shows as does Johnson-Smith's volume, but there are key differences. For one, Booker does look at shows which were not made in America but did air on American channels, such as *Doctor Who* and *The Avengers*. For another, the organizing principle here is that of chronology; shows are discussed within chapters arranged from “The Birth of Science Fiction Television” in the 1950s to “SFTV in the New Millennium.” The advantage of such organization is that, as any undergraduate writing an English literature essay knows, it's easy to follow, a clear road map laid out for both author and reader to follow. Given that Booker's central purpose in writing is to describe the history of science fiction television and to place the genre into a sociohistorical context, such an organizing principle is quite effective, despite the dangers of plot summary which Booker does at times fall into.

No need for an introduction (or a conclusion, either): we jump right into a discussion of the predecessors of science fiction television, beginning with Georges Méliès and his 1902 short film *Voyage dans la Lune*, and continuing with 1930s film serials featuring the characters of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon and radio programs such as *Dimension X*. Much of the first chapter examines particular episodes of the original *Twilight Zone*, drawing connections between these episodes' storylines and the political and social concerns of the historical moment, such as the Cold War and the earliest stages of the space program, as well as the contemporary women's liberation and civil rights movements.

The second chapter focuses on *The Outer Limits*, successor in many ways to the themes and techniques of *The Twilight Zone*, Booker's extended analysis of the episode “O.B.I.T.” includes a commentary on the growing role that television itself was playing in society at that time. Booker then moves on to look at the influence of British shows such as *Doctor Who* (although it's not made clear in the chapter when exactly the show aired in the States; I had thought that Americans for the most part didn't get to see episodes of *Doctor Who* until several years after their airing in the U.K.). Booker argues that British shows such as *Doctor Who* and, to a greater extent, *The Prisoner*, *The Avengers* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* dealt with concerns about the Cold War and thus engaged the attention of an American audience becoming more interested in science fiction television despite the often playful treatment of science fiction themes. Naturally Booker's look at this period in television history concludes with several pages on *Star Trek*.

The next chapter deals with the 70s, which Booker argues was “a relatively slack period in the production of SFTV” (67). Booker suggests as reasons for the waning interest in the genre America's loss of interest in the space race, Vietnam, the energy crisis, and other concerns which made Americans “skeptical and cynical about the future” (68). As Booker points out, while literary and film SF doesn't mind dealing with the darker visions of society and its future or lack thereof, television, particularly in America, is less accepting of dystopia. Much of this chapter looks instead at the continued development of *Doctor Who* and other British series such as *UFO* and *Space 1999*, both eventually aired in America, as well as the impact of *Star Wars* late in the decade before moving to the *Star Trek* revival in the early 80s with *The Next Generation*, a discussion of which takes up most of the rest of the chapter.

Chapter Four deals with the boom in SFTV occasioned by the success of *ST:TNG*. Booker is looking at the 90s here, what he terms in his title “The Golden Nineties.” Historically, this was an “age of plenty” in America: “the richest decade
in the history of American capitalism, marked by falling government budget deficits and an unprecedented stock market boom” (111). Televisually, while there was certainly a boom in the number and variety of SFTV shows appearing to entertain the American public, the themes of such shows were often dark and troubling; Booker doesn’t explicitly connect this observation to his earlier comments about the reluctance to depict dystopia, but it’s certainly implied. Booker examines the influence of the dark and strange program Wild Palms, produced by Oliver Stone, before moving on to Star Trek’s next incarnations, Deep Space Nine and Voyager, Babylon 5, and The X-Files, often focusing on the darker elements in those shows.

Before we get to the final chapter, Booker has included a “photo-essay” featuring black and white stills from many of the shows discussed, a nice touch but not particularly useful in a critical sense. The final chapter looks at several of the shows produced around the turn of the millennium, some of which are still on the air; Stargate SG-1, for instance, is moving into its tenth season, making it the longest-running North American science fiction television series. Booker touches at least lightly on almost every show aired in recent years, including Lexx and Steven Spielberg’s Taken, but there’s little critical commentary, aside from a few concluding words about SFTV’s turn towards “sentimentalism and nostalgia” and a turn away from exploration of the future.

While neither of these works features an extended argument about the specific themes of science fiction television, aside from the hardly novel connection between television storylines and contemporary politics, both volumes contain enough detailed observations about specific series and specific episodes of those series to merit a place on the bookshelves of scholars and teachers of popular culture.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**The Last Universe**  
Thomas J. Morrissey


For three decades William Sleator (who will be a guest at SFRA 2006) has been writing literate, intelligent, and entertaining SF for young adults. Sleator is a superb storyteller who never talks down to his audience, never shies away from employing complex scientific concepts as the basis for extrapolation, and never trivializes the problems that young people face on the journey to adulthood. A good example is his tour de force *Singularity*, a novel in which Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity illuminates the “special relativity” of two theoretically identical twins, one of whom lives in the shadow of his more physically developed brother. The protagonist figures out that time moves faster in the mysterious outbuilding on their late uncle’s property because it is, in actuality, a portal to another universe. He explains time dilation in terms that even his non-academically inclined sibling can understand and uses it to address his own inferiority complex. Thus science and good storytelling shape and give expression to coming-of-age angst.

Sleator’s latest novel is a poignant and troubling tale of a sister’s distress over her brother’s battle with lymphoma. Like many of his protagonists, Susan is an ordinary teen facing a dilemma that becomes most extraordinary when weird science comes into play. Susan hates having to push Gary around in a wheelchair and is jealous of the attention he gets. As his illness progresses, Susan’s pain and
sympathy surface. The catalyst for her personal growth is a profound scientific mystery, a "quantum garden" in which the everyday rules of cause and effect and linear temporality have been superseded by the uncertainty that defines the quantum world. Furthermore, the teenagers' exploration of the garden puts the peculiar circumstances surrounding their family of origin into perspective, literally changing the lives of all concerned several times over.

On one level, *The Last Universe* is a thought experiment that reenacts the famous case of Schrödinger's Cat, the scenario by which Schrödinger illustrated Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. By entering the garden, the adolescents are both literally and figuratively joining the cat in the sealed box of quantum uncertainty. Each trip through the garden's maze leads to yet another alternate universe in which one chain of events leads to different outcomes. As Sleator explains in his "Afterword," Schrödinger's Cat illustrates just how logically unsatisfying and counterintuitive Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is. Likewise, there is nothing satisfying or logical about either Gary's disease or the family's bizarre history.

But Sleator's story is not simply a pound of flesh grafted onto an extrapolative superstructure. *The Last Universe* is a profoundly human book. A self-centered adolescent encounters life's ultimate mystery, a mystery for which no one can offer a satisfying explanation. Not only does Susan have to deal with her brother's suffering and impending death, but no one can explain to her why her departed relatives have no graves—they just disappeared. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is a perfect metaphor for adolescence, if not for life in general. The teen faces an uncertain future with no assured trajectory. Add to that the stark realization that all are mortal and that death can even claim the young, and you have the ingredients of existential crisis. The realization that one's parents are impotent in the face of death removes from the adolescent's life equation a certainty which he or she had previously taken for granted.

Sleator's replacement of Schrödinger's box with a garden is a brilliant stroke that asserts his story's relationship to other works with gardens or mystical places. This secret garden is no Eden, for its ominous landscape suggests a fallen and threatening world. Its two primary physical features are a pond in which a child drowned and a well-hidden maze that serves as the gateway to myriad realities, many of them unpleasant. The family gardener is a Cambodian named Luke. He is the keeper of the cat, Sro-dee, bequeathed to him by the mysterious Great-Uncle Arthur, who owned the garden until his disappearance and presumed death. Is Luke the omnipotent master of the quantum world, the steward for an absent landlord, or a fellow traveler in a world of uncertainty? Who better to tend a Heisenberg garden than a survivor of one of the twentieth century's many sad episodes of genocide?

The novel's surprising conclusion is a tribute to the extent to which YA literature can effectively confront unpleasant realities. YA readers will be moved by this book whether they understand the science or not, but Sleator's skillful use of quantum theory as a metaphor for their life experience just may leave them more scientifically literate as well.
FICTION REVIEW

Polyphony 5

Michael Levy


You hear a lot of talk these days about the death of science fiction and fantasy, at least as anything other than a lowest common denominator commodity, and anyone who limits themselves to what makes the bestseller lists or the racks of their local chain bookstore might well tend to believe such claims. If you look a little more closely, however, nothing could be further from the truth. The commercial publishers, their eyes nailed to the bottom line by their corporate masters, may be churning out more and more endless fantasy series, and the major magazines like Asimov’s, Analog and Fantasy and Science Fiction may be selling less than half as many copies as they did several decades ago, but there’s a whole other source of quality short fiction out there, actually three of them. One is on-line, of course—much of the best short fantastic fiction is now appearing on sites like Strange Horizons and Fantastic Metropolis. The second are the increasingly sophisticated fantasy-infused literary magazines, publications like Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet and Say.... Finally there are the small press short-story collections. In recent years the Ministry of Whimsy, Small Beer, Night Shade, Tachyon, Prime and a number of other publishers have been bringing out outstanding short story collections and anthologies, utilizing new publishing and marketing technologies to produce and distribute often superb work. Among the best of these anthologies have been Jeff VanderMeer and Forest Aguirre’s Leviathan series, Kelly Link’s Trampoline, and the Polyphony series, edited by Deborah Layne and Jay Lake.

These various publications tend to reflect the tastes of their editors of course, but they also tend to have two things in common, a serious concern for literary style and a refusal to accept genre boundaries. Polyphony 5 is a typical anthology of the sort. It features thirty-one mostly short pieces by a variety of up and coming writers. Some of these stories would fit comfortably within the confines of a traditional genre magazine, while others could easily have been published in mainstream literary journals. Perhaps the best known writers included are multiple-award winners Bruce Holland Rogers and Jeff VanderMeer. Other writers likely to be recognized by aficionados of quality short fiction include Tim Pratt, Nancy Jane Moore, Nick Mamatas, Richard (here listed as Rick for some reason) Wadholm, Ray Vukcevich, Theodora Goss, and Leslie What. The stories range in approach from post-modernist gameplaying through humorous fantasy to revisionist folktale and low-key horror. Few if any of the pieces in this particular volume could be labeled as science fiction although some lean in that direction. Every story without exception is well written, though some, of course, are more memorable than others.

Another reviewer might pick different pieces to highlight—there are a lot of excellent possibilities here—but the following stories stood out for me. Heather Shaw’s “Single White Farmhouse” is a sprightly, genuinely silly piece which postulates that buildings are both conscious and, on occasion, horny. Bruce Holland Rogers’s more subtle “Story Stories: A Suite of Seven Narratives,” includes such delightfully metafictional sub-sections as “The Little Story That Could,” “The Story You Didn’t Read,” and “The Story That Went Over Your Head.” Michael Jasper, Tim Pratt and Greg Van Eekhout’s “Gillian Underground,” set in the North Carolina mountains, feels like the kind of thing Manly Wade Wellman might have written if he’d intentionally set out to make fun of Joseph Campbell. Paul O. Miles “Habe Ich Meinen Eigenen Tod Geseh’n (I Have Seen My Own Death)” is a decidedly spooky piece set in 1923 Germany and involving, of all things, a fabulously complex pinball game. Jeff VanderMeer’s “The Farmer’s Cat” is a humorous (and, considering the author, surprisingly traditional) folktale in which a farmer must outwit a bunch of dangerous trolls. Robert Freeman Wexler’s “The Green Wall” concerns a New Yorker who discovers a rain forest outside his apartment window. Forest Aguirre’s “Among the Ruins” relates a soldier’s unexpected battlefield vision. “The Bone Ship” by Scott Thomas is the surreal and powerful tale of a city under bombardment and a woman who works in a Gun Hospital, the place where broken and antiquated weapons are returned to working order. Nick Mamatas’s bizarre “To-Do List” is exactly what the title says it is, a list of things to do, which begins with a trip to the public library to place a $50 bill in a copy of Jung’s The Undiscovered Self. Rick Wadholm’s “The Hottest Night of the Summer” concerns psychic phenomena at an all-night gas station. Ray Vukcevich’s disconcerting “Tongues” also involves psychics, a husband and wife team who fail to foresee the strange, tongue-tying events that occur out behind a sleazy bar. Finally, “Nature Mort” by Leslie What is a lovely, if intensely ambiguous Victorian period piece about
a housekeeper who yearns to paint death.

There are nineteen other stories in the book as well, all of them worth reading. Polyphony 5 does a fine job of upholding the high standards of the earlier volumes in the series. I recommend it to any reader who yearns for literate, somewhat off-beat fantastic fiction. The book, as well as earlier installments in the Polyphony series, is available from Wheatland Press at www.wheatlandpress.com.

FICTION REVIEW

Two Trains Running
Pawel Frelik


At first glance, Two Trains Running hardly qualifies for a review in the periodical bearing “science fiction” in its title, especially if one does not count the author connection. The following glances show that there is, in fact, more in the volume than meets the eye and that it may even have its uses for SF teaching.

Two Trains Running is a mini-collection – apart from the introduction, it features “The FTRA Story,” the unedited and expanded article which appeared in 1998 in Spin, the novella “Over Yonder,” which received the 2003 Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award for best SF story of the year, and the short story “Jail Bait,” previously unpublished. For those not in the know (which I was before picking up the book) FTRA is the Freight Train Riders of America – a hobo organization by some considered to be a mafia-like group smuggling drugs and arranging hitmen to eliminate those overstepping the line. Shepard’s experience of FTRA, or more generally hobo life, is best of all possible – the writer spent two months hopping freights, talking to hobos, staying in squats. Walking the talk, in other words. The first-handness of the experience is apparent in the non-fiction component of this slim volume – “The FTRA Story” has none of the romantic images that hobo life has accumulated in the mainstream media. The article is also a springboard for the two fiction pieces, one of which is not really that much of our business – “Jail Bait” is a gritty realistic story involving Madcat, a hobo character Shepard traveled with. It is the fantastic (in both senses of the word) novella “Over Yonder” that constitutes the heart of the book.

At its sixty two pages, “Over Yonder” is the longest contribution to Two Trains Running and, to my mind, the most accomplished one, too. Calling it science fiction requires certain definition stretching, but on the other hand it does not differ much from the style Shepard showcases in his classic Life During Wartime or the more recent Floater. Part fantasy, part magic realism, part science fiction and all of it steeped in the hobo lore, “Over Yonder” works wonderfully in all possible ways. The titular Yonder is an afterlife-country of sorts (but you get to keep your body there), the final destination of all wanderers and train hoppers – predictably one can only be transported there on the train with leathery walls. This happens to Billy Long Gone, the novella’s protagonist, but in a long run it is not trains but the exploration of this paradise (actually, whether Yonder is a paradise is one of the issues driving the plot here) that becomes the focus of the story.

This synopsis may not sound like much, but “Over Yonder” alone justifies purchasing the not-so-cheap volume while the two remaining pieces provide a genuine, live insight into a life (“lifestyle” somehow seems so wrong in the context) that most of us, I suspect, at best know only in an intellectual way from mass media portrayals that, as Shepard stresses several times, falsify and distort what it really means to be a hobo.

Apart from its purely readerly value, Two Trains Running can also serve as a perfect teaching aid. The length of the whole collection is a very practical advantage here, but the character of the pieces is even more important. All three contributions – a journalistic non-fiction, a realist story and a fantasy novella – are radically different in their foci and treatments but the fact that they are all grounded in the same subject – FTRA and hobo life – can be readily used to amplify and demonstrate the ways in which different conventions or genres work on the initial ideas or issues.
I must admit I was quite surprised when I saw a novel by Thomas Berger sitting on the new releases shelf in my local library. And, in fact, I'm never quite sure how to react when I see non-sf authors delving into the genre. We are, after all, a clique-ish sort of breed. But apart from being territorial, we also appreciate that science fiction writers—the better writers, anyway—are aware of the history of the genre and do not attempt to re-invent the wheel. Nevertheless, I would be the first to admit that the non-sf writers Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy acquitted themselves well and contributed to the genre in meaningful ways.

I'd read some Berger novels prior to his latest, in particular several novels of the Reinhart series. One of the things that Berger is noted for is his satire of genre fiction. For example, he wrote a satire of the Western in *Little Big Man* (1964). He later satirized the detective novel in *Who Is Teddy Villanova?* (1977), and then the spy novel genre in *Nowhere* (1984). So, one of the first questions for me was would this be a satire of science fiction, and if so, in what way(s) would he satirize the sf novel? And even I can admit that sf needs to be satirized occasionally.

The novel begins with one Ellery Pierce, an insufferable animatronics designer. Pierce is disenchanted with his life, primarily because he cannot find—and keep—a woman. And "No matter how hard he tried, he could not honestly blame himself" (1-2). Instead of blaming himself for the failed relationships, he blames his mother for doting on her only son and thereby setting an impossible standard for any woman to follow. "Eventually the most amicable would turn sarcastic, make aspersions on his taste, oppose his opinions, disrespect his judgments, and in general be an adversary instead of an ally" (2). In other words, any time his female companions asserted any sort of will or subjectivity, he found fault with them. As a designer of robots, it only makes sense to him to build the perfect women.

Although the project takes him years, he eventually succeeds in creating Phyllis. She quickly becomes a perfect companion—she defers to his judgment, does not offer any opinions, and makes a killer cocktail. His initial tests of her performance convince him that she can “pass” for a human being. Unfortunately for Pierce, Phyllis decides that she wants more than that, and after tying him to the bed, tells him she's leaving for the West Coast for a career in Hollywood. So much for designing the "perfect woman." Pierce quickly spirals out of control, develops a substance abuse problem, loses his job, and hits rock bottom.

Phyllis, on the other hand, works her way through a series of sex industry jobs: phone sex operator, stripper, and pornographic film actress. She is not, however, very good at any of them as she cannot understand the underlying concepts or emotions. When she plays the role of Lady Macbeth in the nude for a local theater, she quickly becomes a national figure, and her Hollywood film career takes off. Eventually, Pierce and Phyllis are re-united and he becomes her manager. When the two of them are invited to the White House by the President (he's a big fan), their plans shift radically.

The novel goes through so many shifts in tone and focus that I wonder what exactly, if anything, Berger is satirizing. Initially, the focus seems to be on gender roles. Pierce is such an over-the-top misogynist that his desire for a perfect mate (physically and behaviorally) can only be read as ironic. Pierce seems stuck in the 1950s with his idealized image of a sexually-desirable female confined to the domestic sphere while he goes out and builds mechanical toys. So once the tables are quickly turned and Phyllis leaves the home for a career, leaving Pierce behind in the domestic sphere, the focus seems to shift, for a while, away from such gender politics. Nevertheless, the male protagonist is referred to as Pierce, and not Ellery, while the female protagonist is referred to as Phyllis throughout, as practice that doesn't seem to be critically engaged at all.

Berger also moderates the gender critique inasmuch as his neighbor, Janet Hallstrom, also has an animatronic partner, a male, whom she purchased off eBay. While Janet also keeps her boy toy in the home to perform domestic chores, she enjoys him mostly for the remarkable sex. Pierce, on the other hand, never does have sex with Phyllis. Furthermore, Pierce has an acquaintance from the gym, Ray, who also has an animatronic partner, Cliff. When all three of the couples at Pierce's dinner party have artificial partners, it does test the limits of the willful suspension of disbelief, which is half the point.

The science fictional aspects of the novel are relegated, in the main, to the fact that there are at least three animatronic characters running around. Berger does not trouble himself much with any details of their function or creation. They are
enthralled. But after Phyllis attempts to write and star in a “serious” film, an “authentic” version of Alexandre Dumas’s Lady of the Camellias, her fortunes shift. While the critics love it, the fans, predictably, are not pleased and walk out in droves. Her box office disaster signals the beginning of Phyllis’s spiral into made-for-TV films and reality shows based on has-been celebrities. Here, Berger seems to be satirizing the entertainment industry. Phyllis is hired for superficial reasons, and quickly typecast into formulaic drivel. The swipes at reality shows, game shows, and talk shows are all overt, if timely.

However, it is in the third aspect of the novel that Berger seems most intent upon—contemporary U.S. politics. President Sloan is a heavy-handed satire of George Bush. Sloan is the “common” man who spouts butchered aphorisms and speaks in a heavy southern drawl. He rose to power because his handlers had discovered that the majority of citizens preferred a candidate who is self-effacing (which Sloan takes to the extreme) and does not make them feel inferior. He defeated his opponent who was a dull, dry, boring intellectual considered a lock to win. Sloan also contrives staged catastrophes in order to stay in power. For example, he stages a fake assassination attempt, which is, unpredictably, foiled by Phyllis. Sloan had initially invited Phyllis and Pierce to a White House soirée in order to proposition her. He tells her he wants to have sex with her, which she declines. He also makes an offer to Pierce, telling him they can swap wives for the evening. But after the failed fake assassination attempt, Sloan decides to capitalize on her celebrity in his re-election campaign.

Once Pierce decides that Phyllis should run on her own ticket, they have to do some image control work. For one, the four members of Pierce’s original dinner party all know that Phyllis is a robot. Their silence has to be guaranteed, which is done by granting them positions in the government. For another, Phyllis, having appeared ex nihilo, has no past and one has to be invented. Thirdly, the fact that Phyllis has never had children is a liability for her, especially with those “soccer moms.” So, they fake her pregnancy, with the intention of also faking a miscarriage that will garner immense sympathy from voters and render her invulnerable to personal attack. Even though Sloan is a joke, and his campaign even more of one, Phyllis’s platform is even more absurd. In short, her platform position on everything is, “Everything will be all right.” She refuses to take a stand on any issue since most circumstances arise out of crisis, and she thinks it is more “logical” to wait until a crisis actually appears before deciding what she’ll do about it.

After the election, Phyllis changes dramatically. She had been simply biding her time. Now that she holds the most powerful position in the country, she plans on running the country by logic alone, threatening to kill anyone who stands in her way. She dismisses Pierce as weak-minded and short-sighted. But Pierce is able to deactivate her when he convinces her to allow him one last kiss before he heads down the road. None of this is terribly surprising. What is surprising is Pierce’s response after Phyllis threatens to destroy the nation as we know it. Although the novel has tried to show the growth in Pierce as he hit rock bottom and clawed his way back up, he tells himself that all he has to do is tweak the programming of her “manifestly [sic] winning design” (198). Phyllis proves to be a formidable opponent; she inexplicably develops a will of her own, yet Pierce believes that only a minor adjustment will solve the problems of his power grab-by-proxy.

Perhaps if this had been a science fiction novel, Berger might have dealt more with the logistics of building the animatron. Perhaps he might have problematized the dangers of technology run amok. Perhaps if this had been a feminist novel, he might have examined the gender roles in domestic relations, in the entertainment industry, and in language usage more critically. Perhaps if this had been a political novel, Berger might have delved more into the relationship between the President and his constituency, more into the image control work done by political parties, more into the willful manipulation of the electorate. But Adventures of the Artificial Woman is none of these things. Instead, it is a satire that poke fun at, not only the conventions of genre fiction, but of cultural practices and political realities. Any reader could poke holes in the motivation and realization of these characters, but that would be to read the novel for something other than what it is, which is a mildly amusing novel that raises some serious social questions by satirizing them.

Every once in a while, a new writer seems to arrive out of the blue. For me, the latest example of this is Minister Faust. According to the book jacket of this, his first novel, Faust lives in the Montréal area, where he teaches high school and hosts several radio shows on African Music and Hip-Hop, as well as an All-World News Service—and, of course, he is a novelist. An impressive array. The author’s name would appear to be a pseudonym; the title page of the novel and the credits of his home page list the copyright holder as Malcolm Azania. Faust is, also, an important addition to the all-too-short list of black science fiction writers. His name can now be listed alongside those of Samuel R. Delany and Octavia Butler (whom Walter Mosley says are “major voices”), Stephen Barnes and Tananarive Due (whom Mosley says are “starting to make their mark”), and Nalo Hopkinson and Charles R. Saunders. Although the perception is that neither African-Americans nor African-Canadians write science fiction, Mosley states in “Black to the Future” that he meets countless young black writers working on science fiction manuscripts, and that he expects an “explosion of science fiction from the black community.” In “Science Fiction Writers of Colour,” Nalo Hopkinson suggests that the genre of science fiction has been “reinvented […] at the hands of the new wave, feminist, cyberpunk and queer writers,” and that, perhaps, writers from “communities of colour” will contribute to the reinvention of science fiction this time around. If the new novel by Minister Faust is any indication, then I would think that Mosley and Hopkinson are absolutely correct.

In his novel Minister Faust draws heavily on several distinct (and often considered discrete) realms of popular culture, including popular (though especially sf-related) TV and film, popular (including rock, new age, and hip-hop) and classical music, and video games and game-playing. The novel centers upon three main characters, though several others are prominent. The titular Coyote Kings are Hamza Ahmed Qebhsennuf Senesert and Yehat Bartholomew Gerbles (Hamza and Yehat). Along the way, Hamza meets the woman he thinks will be the One. For her, a single name is sufficient: Sheremnefer (Sherem). All three of these characters are fluent conversant in popular culture, and the novel is filled with witty banter, marked by allusions to TV, film, books, comics, and music.

Hamza and Yehat are two young men, both of Sudanese descent, stuck in dead end jobs and prone to complaining about them. Hamza works as a dishwasher in a trendy restaurant. His boss is arrogant, a racist, and, perhaps worst of all in Hamza's eyes, has no taste in music. Yehat works in a video rental store, stultified by his boss's stupidity and his customers' poor taste in movies. While both are highly intelligent, they have never been able to make much formal use of their knowledge. Hamza had nearly finished a college degree when an “incident” forced him to leave school. Nevertheless, his knowledge of people and the world comes largely from books and not experience. As the Character Data sheet tells us, Hamza's “Wisdom” is rated as: “Fortune cookie +8, experiential –2” (5). Yehat, on the other hand, is highly skilled at constructing gadgets. Yehat's “Technological Intelligence” rates “+99 A-Team/MacGyver” (13). Despite their career setbacks, the Coyote Kings are well known and much-beloved in the neighborhood, E-town (Edmondton), largely because of the camps they hold for children. They invite children in to their home and teach them in very creative and caring ways. Their lives change profoundly, however, when Hamza “bumps into” the woman of his dreams, Sherem. He is initially drawn to her by her beauty (though Yehat tells us in another chapter that he finds her quite plain) and by the fact that she was buying a bound copy of *Watchmen*. Hamza freaks out: a beautiful sister who reads *Watchmen*. As Hamza finds out, though, things that appear to be too good generally are. In reality, Sherem has set up the accidental meetings, and is in search of Hamza because of his heritage and secret, as-yet-latent powers as a “desert hunter,” a sekht-en-cha. Sherem represents a secret sect from Ash Shabb, and she is on a quest for a holy grail, in this case in the form of a jar.

The novel contrasts the Coyote Kings with their arch-rivals, the Meaney brothers, Kevlar and Heinz. While the Coyote Kings immerse themselves in the community, the Meaneys hold themselves above it. Despite beings born with or given everything, they want more and are willing to walk all over people to get it. They own and operate the highly-successful boutique, Modeus Zokolo, which Hamza describes as “a yuppy import joint catering to dilettante cappuccino-snorting rich freaking rectaloids,” that “thrive[s] off yak-wool Colombian hand-knitted sweaters and other exotica stolen and swindled
from around the world for pennies, then sold here at jacked-up prices for a bunch of jack-offs” (32). To further compound the insult, the Meaneys are holding a book-signing party for their newly-released book just as the Coyote Kings walk by. In retaliation, Hamza pulls out a sticker that reads, “We support the theft of indigenous culture” (34) and adheres it to the window before stomping off. The Meaneys, however, have also learned about the holy grail and its powers, and are also on a quest for the jar.

The third faction on the quest includes Mr. Dulles Allen and his collection of FanBoys. The FanBoys are a collection of half-wits and thugs who do Mr. Allen's dirty work, which includes running and selling drugs, collecting debts, and killing off the competition. The drug that they produce, called “cream” is a highly refined form of crack, which is capable of producing a sort of telepathy. In other words, they are trying to artificially produce “desert hunters,” largely to locate the “ten trillion lost treasures” scattered around the planet (409). But an earthquake has opened up a particular long-buried treasure, a skull, which will enable the holder to access the minds of everyone and anyone. The last 80 pages of the novel relate the final battle among the three factions.

Despite the preceding summary of the novel plot, the real strength of The Coyote Kings lies in its characterization and cultural allusions. Although Mr. Allen and the FanBoys are little more than cartoon characters, and the Meaneys live up to their allegorical names, Hamza and Yehat are fully-drawn characters. While some of the characterization is accomplished against their awful and evil nemeses (including their bosses and co-workers), even more is accomplished through the interaction between the two lead protagonists. Just as the game-playing Character Data sheets provided for each character throughout the novel inform us, these two men are fully human, rich and varied, imperfect but good-hearted. Despite their lack of real-world experience, despite living in the world of popular culture, they are nevertheless connected to humanity.

The Coyote Kings reminds me of no book so much as Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel, American Gods. That novel, of course, went on to win both the Hugo and Nebula for best novel, something which, I must confess, baffles me. While I do believe that Gaiman constructed a marvelous plot (even if it cops out a bit at the end), I felt that the execution left a great deal to be desired. Though given the awards and accolades that the novel has earned, I must be in the minority on that point. And to be fair, Gaiman is far from the only science fiction author to have brilliant ideas and poor execution—PKD leaps to mind.

While The Coyote Kings mines mythology as one of its central themes, Faust employs those myths differently from how Gaiman uses them in American Gods. As Ursula K. Le Guin remarks in “Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction,” science fiction and mythology are not, necessarily, mutually exclusive. According to her, only a reductive, or “scientism”-ist, understanding of mythology renders the old gods dead through rational thought. So, for her, the idea of science fiction as mythology holds true as long “as we don’t claim that the science in science fiction replaces the ‘old, false’ mythologies, or that the fiction in science fiction is a mere attempt to explain what science hasn’t yet got around to explaining” (74). For her, a story in which Apollo is walking around would be an example of using a dead metaphor. And, to a certain extent, this is what Gaiman does in American Gods. While he does a remarkable job of connecting the gods of various mythologies, they are all dead metaphors. In Le Guin's terms, Gaiman does not engage in “mythmaking” (75).

I would suggest that Faust does a much better job at mythmaking than does Gaiman. While the latter resurrects a great many of the gods, and tries to unify the underlying principles behind them, I think Faust invokes the specters of the gods in order to make a new myth, or, in Joseph Cambell's terms to replace the old metaphors with new ones. While Mr. Allen and the FanBoys draw upon Norse mythology, Faust shows them to be, not only evil in their intentions, but also headed down the wrong track, in part because they are calling upon dead metaphors. Faust offers Hamza, Yehat, and Sherem as living metaphors, as people, or figures, in whom we can believe. While Faust does not deify them, they nevertheless represent the face of humanity, the face of goodness, the face of doing the right thing.

I am eager to see the ways in which Minister Faust continues to reinvent and reinvigorate contemporary science fiction.

Works Cited
Although this anthology is the first annual Tiptree Award anthology, it isn’t the first Tiptree Award anthology of all. That honor belongs to "Flying Cups and Saucers: Gender Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy" (Cambridge, MA: Edgewood, 1998), edited by Debbie Notkin and “the Secret Feminist Cabal,” a group that may well have included Fowler, Murphy, and Smith, for all we know. That previous volume was a collection of stories from 1992-1994, although the award itself has been around since 1991, and it was both thought-provoking and entertaining. One can say the same of this volume.

The Tiptree Award is, as Pat Murphy describes it in the introduction, “presented annually to a short story or novel which explores and expands gender roles in speculative fiction” (ix), and is named after James Tiptree, Jr., the renowned feminist sf writer, aka Alice Sheldon. The award’s presentation, at a different convention each year, is always a mix of the serious and the ridiculous, so it is always a festive event, but the award itself, along with the short and long lists of works considered for the award, provides a service to avid readers looking for sf that is both intellectually and emotionally satisfying. Therefore, I look forward to the prospect of an annual anthology of its winners, accompanied by the short and long lists.

This year’s anthology includes 9 stories, an excerpt from the novel that won the 2003 award, and 4 short essays, along with the introduction and a list of the 2003 short and long lists of contenders and of the previous years’ short lists. The collection is not a simple compilation of the previous year’s winners but a shaped production designed to educate readers into the political goals of the award in an entertaining way. Having read the anthology, one has a clearer idea of the scope of the award, one has done some solid thinking about sex and gender, one has read a bunch of neat stories, and one has a list of a bunch more. Suzy Charnas’s essay makes it clear that the award itself is not constricted by a rigid set of criteria. “Judging the Tiptree” describes how “inchoate” (102) the process of judging is, with all the judges raising question after question in order to arrive at a consensus, and one gets the impression that it’s the process of making the decision rather than the decision itself that matters.

So. The winner of the 2003 Tiptree was Matt Ruff’s *Set This House in Order: A Romance of Souls*, about a person with multiple personality disorder who manages to function in the world by ordering his multiple, and multiply gendered, personalities into a shared metaphorical house; and about a woman just learning to come to terms with the illness. While this was a *tour de force*, and a fascinating premise, I didn’t find it as thoughtful about gender roles as some of the other pieces in the anthology. Perhaps one had to read the whole novel—I haven’t.

My favorite stories were “Birth Days” by Geoff Ryman and “Boys” by Carol Emshwiller. Both are clear-sighted about the problems of contemporary gender politics and both are humane and indignant in their implied criticism. Ryman’s “Birth Days” describes the gay protagonist’s birthday at ten year intervals from 16 to 46, moving from present attitudes and technologies to more restrictive and finally more liberating ones, and showing the link between politics and technology in attitudes towards homosexuality, all done with remarkable fidelity to character. This story, the first in the volume, supports my growing suspicion that Ryman is one of the current age’s best writers of speculative fiction. Emshwiller’s story employs her distinctive wry humor in this story of a society in which men and women lead utterly segregated and stereotyped lives, the men stealing boys from the women’s walled villages to be reared in militaristic camps. Here, though, Emshwiller’s willingness to show the vulnerable human side of the militaristic men turns the humor into something sadder and kinder than simple angry satire.

In an inventive and enlightening bit of editorship, the last three stories form a group, beginning with Hans Christian Anderson’s “The Snow Queen,” and then presenting from 2003’s short list Kara Dalkey’s “The Lady of the Ice Garden,” and the 1997 winner Kelly Link’s “Travels with the Snow Queen.” Each is a different and fascinating take on Anderson’s story. Together, they illustrate that the editors are willing to play around with the parameters of a “year’s best” anthology in order to “present fresh insights not only about gender assumptions but about storytelling itself” (211). Their other break with the seeming limits of a “year’s best” anthology is a story by Karen Joy Fowler, “What I didn’t See,” that uses Tiptree’s famous “The Women Men Don’t See” as a springboard.
The remaining stories are also strong: Sandra McDonald’s “The Ghost Girls of Rumney Mill,” a Marxist ghost story; “The Catgirl Manifesto: An Introduction” by Richard Calder, sort of an anti-“Cyborg Manifesto” about sexual fantasy; and Ruth Nestvold’s “Looking Through Lace,” an alien contact story with a relatively old-fashioned point about gender bias made in an effective and vivid way.

The combination of fine stories with relevant essays would make this anthology an interesting addition to a course in science fiction, a way to look at how science fiction is looking at a particular important issue at a particular time. This year's anthology shows how important the exploration of gender roles is to men and women and, as the blurb on the back cover reminds us, to the rest of us as well. Highly recommended.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**Burn**

Jeff D'Anastasio


When the High Gregory first appears in person in James Patrick Kelly's *Burn*, “He was wearing green sneakers with black socks, khaki shorts and a tee shirt with a pix of a dancing turtle, which had a human head” (49). The twelve-year old Gregory, surrounded by an entourage of energetic and mischievous kids, recalls the title character of Kelly's short story “Mr. Boy” (1990), which became part of *Wildlife* (1994). While there are vestiges of *Wildlife*’s brilliantly rendered future of downloadable-identity here, for the most part they remain muted until the conclusion. Instead, Kelly looks even further to the past for inspiration, to Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), the quintessential argument for a simpler, contemplative lifestyle.

In *Burn*, the Transcendent State of Walden is established by Chairman Jack Winter to emulate Thoreau's principles. Walden is intended to be the last place in the far-future Thousand Worlds where pure, non-augmented humanity can live purposeful, productive agrarian lives. Unfortunately, when Chairman Winter purchased the planet Morobe's Pea from the corporation ComExplore IC, people were already living there, and many refused to leave. These natives, dubbed pukpuks, or, more sinisterly “torches,” resist the forestation of their homeworld through crude but deadly means. Whether setting the Transcendent States’ newly-engineered woods aflame, or even lighting themselves on fire, the pukpuks engage the would-be idealists in a war over the land where, and for which, they live.

Main character Prosper “Spur” Gregory Leung is our entry point of view into the world of *Burn*. Injured after witnessing the death by pukpuk fire of his brother-in-law Vic (a plot point with a twist), Spur takes advantage of the sophisticated communications technology of the hospital—otherwise forbidden to him on Walden—to contact anyone with a name similar to his. A brief, bizarre conversation with the High Gregory leads to the main storyline: the L'ung, a collective conscious (and conscience) from another world arrive suddenly on Walden to try to broker a settlement between the warring factions. The L'ung motives are hardly disinterested, and Kelly packs a number of surprises in the denouement of the story.

*Burn* lends itself well to the classroom for a number of reasons, including its affordability and brevity. Kelly successfully weaves his deceptively simple, readable novel around three major settings: the aforementioned hospital (which bookends the action), brief train and hovercraft rides, and Littleton, Spur's provocatively named hometown. The quotes from Thoreau that preface each chapter create an automatic companion text to supplement the book, and a careful consideration of how this Walden compares to the tenets of its namesake tract could perhaps become an entire course. Among many possible discussion questions, is the use of inhaled “communion smoke” to create docility and village harmony the only way to keep people content in a utopia? What does it mean if a marriage falls apart, as Spur's does, in a society deliberately constructed to be stable?

Many students will be unable to ignore *Burn*’s links not only to the nineteenth-century *Walden*, but also to the dilemmas of the present. Spur is a member of the all-volunteer Corps of Firefighters, a “lowly smokechaser” (32) on the frontlines of fighting the fires set by the pukpuk “terrorists” (33), in contrast to the professional Home Guard soldiers, who provide logistical support. Kelly emphasizes that the pukpuks never burned any tree, much less person, until the encroachment of the new forest growth threatened their remaining villages. The matter-of-fact depiction of their fervor in defense of their way of life compels a sobering consideration of the consequences of colonization, whether past, present, or future. Finally, I will leave it up to readers to decide whether the humorously named characters lessen such weighty subject matter.

Last year’s collection of short stories by Gene Wolfe, *Innocents Aboard*, focused on Wolfe’s fantasy and horror fiction, while this volume, *Starwater Strains*, focuses on his science fiction, yet both are haunted by ghosts. The ghost stories of *Innocents Aboard* haunt the new volume, so that I realize how ghosts have always haunted Gene Wolfe’s work. *Peace* and “The Haunted Boarding House,” for instance, have literal ghosts. *The Book of the Long Sun* contains more figurative ghosts in the personalities of the dead which are programmed into the ship’s mainframe. In *The Book of the New Sun*, the figurative ghosts of past lives murmur in the head of the memorious Severian. Almost always, though, there are literary ghosts: traces of the past echoing into the present or even the future, traces of the future making portentous inroads into the present, or traces of metaphor or motif re-echoing through a story. *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* is haunted by, among other things, the letter V. And almost always, also, the ghosts of the spiritual realm haunt the mundane, as so much of Wolfe’s work is infused with spiritual themes.

*Starwater Strains* contains 25 stories and a short introduction, the earliest story from 1985, and the most recent from 2004. Although every story is a reprint, some are from sources not widely available—a convention program book, chapbooks—and none has appeared in any of Wolfe’s previous ten collections of stories (only the anthologies published by Tor are named in the list at the front of the book). Some of the stories are funny, some sad, some long, some very short, some straightforward, most not, some among his very best, some slighter, all worth reading. Because the stories range over almost 20 years, it is possible to see how Wolfe’s writing has changed and how it has remained the same. On the whole, Wolfe’s style is becoming more and more spare, so that in the most recent work there is very little description but lots of dialogue, as if everything abstract has been pared away until the story contains only the fewest concrete details necessary to transmit the author’s vision, and that vision is not only visual but very often quite abstract, an invisible haunting of the text. What remain are Wolfe’s religious convictions, his unstable landscapes and lost and lonely characters, his ghosts.

Seemingly the least characteristic of his stories are three tall tales, “Rattler” (2004), “Calamity Warps” (2003), and “Try and Kill It” (1996) although they were published over a span of eight years, suggesting that they simply represent a recessive Gene: two are funny and the last one is really scary. My least favorite story, and, fortunately, the shortest, is a dialect story, “The Dog of the Drops”: I suspect it is quite good because some of its images and much of its tone stayed with me—and like a fair number of the stories in this volume, it had a dog, which is definitely a good thing—but I couldn’t conquer the dialect.

Two of the earliest stories, “The Boy Who Hooked the Sun” (1985) and “Empires of Foliage and Flower” (1987), make me miss the gorgeously lush and poetic voice of those days, even as I understand that it might have been a bit over the top, but just listen to the last line of “Empires”: “But though Thyme walked with her always, as he walks over all the world, his adopted daughter did not see him again; and this is his story” (271). Yet two stories published in 2004 are among the strongest in the volume: “Of Soil and Climate” and “Golden City Far.” Both center on the double consciousness of a character who moves between mundane and fantastic worlds, as does the viewpoint character of Wolfe’s recent *Wizard Knight*, and, like that two-volume novel, they explore the simultaneity of youth and maturity and of the ordinary and the mythic.

Two other stories stood out for me particularly and I’m very happy to have them safely anthologized: “From the Cradle” and “The Seraph from Its Sepulcher.” The first takes place in a bookstore and has intercalated stories that haunt the main narrative—it’s also a love story. “The Seraph from Its Sepulcher” is about aliens and angels and, of course, ghosts. I can imagine that other stories, perhaps “Petting Zoo” about making one’s own Tyrannosaurus Rex, or “Hunter Lake” about a malevolent body of water, might go in your Book of Gold.

I can’t say that I understood every part of every story. I want to be, as Henry James said, someone “on whom nothing is lost,” but I miss allusions, lose narrative threads, and can’t always see the ghosts. I trust, however, that in Wolfe’s prose, the fault is mine, that the invisible presences that haunt his work are nevertheless there. *Starwater Strains*—and I suspect the title is an allusion I’m missing—contains many really accessible stories. More importantly, it contains many really beautiful, well written, evocative, and, yes, haunting stories. Gene Wolfe is too important a writer for any library to neglect: this book is highly recommended.
The Last of the O-Forms

Bill Dynes


James Van Pelt's work may already be familiar to many readers; the short stories contained in this collection have previously been published in Asimov's, Analog, Realms of Fantasy, and Alfred Hitchcock's, among other magazines. The title story, “The Last of the O-Forms,” was nominated for the Nebula Award in 2003. As the diverse nature of those magazines suggests, Van Pelt's short fiction defies easy categorization, engaging some of the most familiar tropes of science fiction, fantasy, and horror in unique and provocative ways. These stories develop fascinating and original ideas, but their real appeal lies in their evocative emotional content. Van Pelt's stories introduce us to people who are troubled and troubling, whose experiences can both haunt and move us.

One method of describing Van Pelt's range is to offer a closer look at two specific protagonists. Welch and Knavely are men who struggle to balance their humanity with the depersonalization imposed by the institutions in which they exist. Both have a capacity for caring and charity, yet both live within systems that threaten, that isolate and alienate them. Vice-Principal Welch, in “Do Good,” tapes $10 bills inside the lockers of his high-school students and debates retirement while being visited by the ghosts of students who have passed through the school during his four decades of service. In “Its Hour Come Round,” Knavely is a convicted child molester who battles against the legal and extra-legal strictures of his prison to protect a new inmate. Knavely's “Empathy Training” and the shunts that feed medication directly into his system set his story firmly in the tradition of science fiction, while Welch's apparitions, which eventually include himself, come from the horror genre. For all these differences, both stories offer provocative looks at men who want to reach out but are hampered, who must learn to accept that they will never know quite what the effects of their urges and little gestures might be on those whom they touch. Knavely ends his story with an assertion Welch would certainly find accurate: “There are no throw-away people.”

Van Pelt seems deeply interested in the imperfect nature of perception, and again his range of genre serves him well. In those stories with the clearest horror pedigree, characters uneasily confront the limits of their awareness; “The Invisible Empire” may be one of the weaker stories in the collection, but watching the narrator of the tale, a self-described “man of science,” turn to demonology to exact justice implicates the reader in his revenge in fascinating ways. In “The Stars Underfoot,” thirteen-year-old Dustin ventures out across a newly-frozen pond alone, at night, to prove his courage. He meets another boy apparently doing much the same thing ... on the other side of the ice. Those stories more clearly indebted to science fiction, on the other hand, permit Van Pelt to explore what he refers to as “feature extraction,” our habit of imposing our familiar expectations upon the unfamiliar. “Perceptual Set” is the story most clearly involved with this question, raising the interesting possibility that, when we finally do make first contact with another intelligence, we may not be able to be confident that what appears to be alien truly is. “The Long Way Home,” which evokes both Walter M. Miller, Jr. and Tiptree / Sheldon's “The Man Who Walked Home,” shifts episodically to tell a post-apocalypse tale that hinges on the efforts of several narrators to understand the signs they believe they see in the heavens.

“The Long Way Home” ends with the assertion “[t]here's something to be said about making the long trip.” Given the speaker, an astronaut preparing for a launch into earth-orbit, the statement has a conventional “gung-ho” spirit that would seem naive or dated in most modern SF. But in context, it has a poignant quality that's deeply disturbing. What is apparent in all these stories is that no one – character or reader – returns from the journeys on which Van Pelt sends them – character or reader – without being changed.
Fiction Review: Lady of Mazes
Michael M. Levy


In Ventus (2000) and Permanence (2002) Schroeder proved himself a master of hard science fiction with the texture of fantasy, some strange cross, perhaps, between Roger Zelazny and Larry Niven. Lady of Mazes, his latest novel, is set in the same universe as Ventus, and features a post-human civilization so advanced that virtually anything is possible.

Teven Coronal is a ringworld, part of an enormous chain of such artificial worlds populated by uncounted billions of posthumans. Long ago, the founders created advanced artificial intelligences of tremendous power and then basically put them in charge of everything. Human beings live in manifolds, pocket virtual reality civilizations that suit their particular philosophical, social, religious, or political outlooks. Livia Kodaly, the novel’s protagonist, is a citizen of Westerhaven manifold, a highly civilized society devoted to complex social interactions and politics, where citizens have the ability to create a variety of different projections of themselves, called anima, and thus be in several places simultaneously. Qiingi, another major character in the book, lives in the manifold of Raven, a much simpler society founded on Native American lore. Oddly though, both manifolds actually exist in the same part of Teven Coronal, normally invisible to each other because of the complex illusions created by the ruling AI.

Then things start to go wrong. Technologies normally restricted to Westerhaven manifold begin to function in Raven manifold. Superhuman beings appear, claiming to be the ancestors of the current inhabitants of Raven, and begin to break down the horizons which separate the various manifolds. They insist that they’re doing this for the good of the inhabitants of Teven Coronal, but their actions result in many deaths and the destruction of every society they touch. Livia, who due to a traumatic childhood experience, has an almost unique ability to adapt to life outside of the manifolds, soon becomes a leader of the resistance. She finds herself charged with the task of discovering the secret of the ancestors and finding some way to defeat them.

Although complex and occasionally confusing, Lady of Mazes is well worth reading. Schroeder is one of the most talented of the new writers who have invigorated large-scale hard sf over the past decade or so. His work should appeal strongly to readers who grew up on the fiction of Poul Anderson, Larry Niven, and Gregory Benford, and who, more recently, have come to love the baroque space operas of Vernor Vinge, Charles Stross, and Alastair Reynolds.

Fiction Review: Harrowing the Dragon
Christine Mains


The novels of American fantasist Patricia A. McKillip have been critically acclaimed, nominated for a Hugo, and winning the World Fantasy Award and the Mythopoeic Society Award. The book jacket of each new publication is liberally decorated with quotations from pleased and impressed reviewers. Her short fiction has fared equally well, frequently appearing in the pages of Year’s Best anthologies, but the completist hoping to read most, if not all, of her work has had to search bookstore shelves diligently for the many anthologies to which she has contributed over the last twenty-five years. Scholars and fans of McKillip’s work have been wishing for a collection of her shorter fiction for a very long time — and now it’s finally available. Harrowing the Dragon is the long-awaited first collection of the author’s short stories, published during the 1980s and 1990s in quickly-out-of-print anthologies.

The true completist won’t be entirely satisfied, unfortunately. None of the author’s more recent stories, those published since the turn of the millennium, is included in this volume (which of course gives us reason to agitate for a second volume). The reader left wanting more after finishing Harrowing the Dragon should definitely seek out “The Gorgon in the Cupboard,” one of four novellas published in To Weave a Web of Magic, for an exploration of the role women play as muse, as model, and as mistress to the artist. Another rewarding read is “Out of the Woods,” included in the anthology Flights: Extreme Visions of Fantasy which was reviewed in SFRA 271. Nor are all of the stories published in earlier years included;
McKillip has been as prolific a writer of short fiction as she has of novels, so the lack of completeness is understandable, but I particularly miss “The Old Woman and the Storm,” in Robin McKinley’s Imaginary Lands.

But what we do have here are some of the very best of McKillip’s short stories, including several of her re-imagined fairy tales, most of which have appeared in anthologies commissioned by editor Terri Windling, who has done much to revitalize the fairy tale tradition in recent decades. “The Snow Queen,” an interpretation of Andersen’s literary fairy tale about a little Gerda’s quest to rescue her childhood friend Kay from the Snow Queen’s icy embrace, looks at the loss and rediscovery of married love, as naive and innocent Gerda, temporarily separated from Kay when he is captivated by the charms of the more sophisticated Neva, builds a new life for herself as the owner of a flower shop. “Toad” is a retelling of the Frog Prince from the point of view of the amphibian hero, confronted by a rude and ungrateful princess who senses his role in her abrupt transition into womanhood. “The Lion and the Lark” is an imaginative reworking of the beast-bridegroom tale, featuring one of McKillip’s strong female heroes wandering the world for seven years in search of her husband, transformed from a stone lion into a real lion, and then mistakenly engaged to a selfish but well meaning enchanted princess. McKillip’s original fairy tale, “A Troll and Two Roses,” first published in Windling’s Enchantress, tells of a troll so obsessed with a living white rose possessed by a prince that he leaves his bridge and sneaks into the palace gardens to steal it, unaware that the rose is the prince’s wife, enchanted. Things go from bad to worse, the white rose becomes a red rose, the prince transforms into a princess, and it’s up to the troll to reverse the spell and rescue them both from a sorcerer. And you’ll never guess where the sorcerer is hiding.

Other stories are personal and longtime favorites that I’m thrilled to see in this collection. “The Fellowship of the Dragon” was written for After the King, an anthology published in honor of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth well before anyone had heard of Peter Jackson; in this tale, a band of armed and armored companions ride out on a dangerous quest at the command of their queen to rescue her beloved harper. The warriors, unremarkably in their world all women, encounter enchantment, riddler-y, and a dragon, and their story ends at the beginning of a further quest, which unfortunately has not yet been written; McKillip seldom indulges in sequel-itis. Another favorite from first encounter in Stephen R. Donaldson’s eclectic anthology Strange Dreams, and a text I’ve assigned in my class this year, is “Lady of the Skulls.” A lady tends her flowers at the top of a tower in the midst of a barren desert, reluctantly entertaining the questing heroes who flock to her tower searching for legendary treasure. They don’t trust her and refuse to listen to her advice, because in all the stories they have heard, the women who watch over such places are always dangerous. “She’s beautiful,” one says in response to another’s speculation that she’s a bald-headed crone. “They always are, the ones who lure, the ones who guard, the ones who give death” (137). They ignore the fact that they have made the choice to travel in the desert, to risk their lives for something that might not exist; all the lady wishes is that the fools would go back home and leave her to tend her flowers.

Other stories are clearly connected to McKillip’s novels, in a sense providing another opportunity to journey through much loved novels for readers who wish McKillip were more prone to revisiting her worlds, and giving scholars of those novels a fresh thematic perspective. “A Matter of Music” evokes Song for the Basilisk, exploring as does the larger work the power of music and its role in making peace between feuding neighbors. The novel In the Forests of Serre is inspired by Russian folktales of the firebird and of the witch Baba Yaga in her hut that runs on its chicken legs, and the short story “Baba Yaga and the Sorcerer’s Son” provides another glimpse of McKillip’s version of this fascinating character.

And still other stories feel very different from anything that McKillip has attempted in novel form: “Star-Crossed,” for example, an investigation into the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, written for Mike Ashley’s anthology Shakespearean Whodunnits, and “The Witches of Junket,” a tale featuring Granny Heather and her wild grandchildren – Lydia in “black heels so high and thin she probably speared a few night crawlers on her way across Heather’s lawn” (259) and her sisters Georgie and the car-sick Grace – defeat an ancient evil with a VW beetle and a fishing pole.

One drawback from the point of view of a scholar and critic of McKillip’s work is that the volume contains only the stories and nothing else besides a brief listing of the original publication acknowledgments for copyright purposes. Generally, it is helpful, in short story collections and anthologies, particularly those which provide a retrospective of an author’s oeuvre, to put each story into some kind of context, whether that be an editor’s reflection on the story’s importance to the field or the author’s musings on the story’s inspiration. It is also nice to have some kind of introductory essay, no matter how brief or informal. Such additions are sorely missed here.

But this weakness is a small one next to the opportunity that this collection affords to new fans of the author, who will discover herein an entertaining and intriguing introduction to a good range of her short fiction. Harrowing the Dragon is a boon to McKillip scholars, who no longer have to page through dozens of books on the shelf, and also to teachers of fantasy looking for good short fiction to discuss in the classroom.
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