Presidents's Message

STARTING OUT

Alan Elms

Not so very long ago at all, I got a phone call from Joan Gordon. The good news, she said, was that I had been elected to become the next vice president of SFRA. The very bad news was that Lynn Williams, the president-elect, had suddenly died. The however-I-wanted-to-take-it news was that, according to the SFRA bylaws, I was now the president-elect.

Initially I wasn't sure how I wanted to take it. Lynn would have been an energetic and well-qualified president, and the news of her death was a shock. I had agreed to run for the vice presidency with no further organizational ambitions. Joan said I could decline the presidency if I felt it was more than I had bargained for, but she hoped I'd accept it.

As you can see, she persuaded me. In part, my decision was based on Joan's willingness to provide continued support, assistance, and encouragement. (As immediate past president, Joan remains a full participant on the Executive Board.) Our two reelected officers, Carolyn Wendell and Mike Levy, have also been very helpful, as have our new editorial team of Karen, Craig, and Neil, and our ex-ex-president, Joe Sanders. Adam Frisch, the other vice presidential candidate in the 1998 election, responded with enthusiasm when the new Executive Committee asked him to fill the vice presidential vacancy.

So with all that help, I think I can do the job. My other reason for deciding to take it on is the importance of SFRA to me. Science fiction research and teaching don’t cut much ice in academic psychology. On the other hand, when I began to study science fiction writers from a psychological perspective, I was quite uncertain as to how such work would be received by the literary scholars and teachers already immersed in the field. At my first SFRA conference, in Rolla in 1984, I was quickly made to feel at home by such people as Walt Meyers, Mack and Sue Hassler, Brian Attebery, and Brooks Landon. I was also taken under the gentle wings of Muriel Becker and Betsy Harfst, who continued to look out for me at later conferences. At the half-dozen or so later conferences I’ve attended, I’ve found further friendship and intellectual stimulation from such people as Neil Barron, Dave Mead, Susan Stratton, Jim Gunn, Jack Williamson, and Gary Westfahl.
And then there’s the SFRA listserv, through which I’ve become familiar with the current interests and ideas of many members who can’t get to the conferences, as well as those who do. Though I’m active in several other professional organizations, ranging in size from enormous to miniscule, SFRA soon became the one that felt most like family. It still does—now more than ever.

**EDITORIAL**

**FORWARD THE REVIEW**

Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen

This issue marks the beginning of a new year for the Review, and with that comes changes. We’ve begun our Approaching… feature by focusing on William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*. Through the generosity of our contributors we are able to bring you a trove of valuable information for anyone interested in teaching or researching the book that helped define cyberpunk. In fact, there was so much that we had to edit it down to shoehorn it all into this already beefy issue. Check the call for submission for future features (a new one every month), and submit!

You’ll also notice that we’ve changed the layout a bit, and included our first letter to the editors and the first installment of an ongoing graphic narrative. We are also lucky enough to be able to print a poem from a Pulitzer Prize winner.

This issue also contains the first President’s message from Alan Elms and the regular yearly reports from the rest of the SFRA Board (except VP Adam Frisch, who at deadline was still recovering from having been shanghaied into that position), including everything you ever wanted to know about the SFRA budget. We’ve also got the index for the 1998 issues. Of course we also have the usual slew of the insightful fiction and nonfiction reviews that, logically enough, are the heart of the Review.

Even with these changes, which we think are pretty nifty, we’d like to see the Review do more. Accordingly, we’ve put together an *SFRA Review* web page, accessible through the main SFRA page at <http://www.uwm.edu/~sands/sfra/scifi.htm> or directly at <http://members.aol.com/sfareview>.

While the design of the site may not win any awards (except perhaps for minimalism), we’ll be using it to post calls for submission, provide information on upcoming issues, and, with the permission of the authors, offering downloadable versions of select articles from the Review. Our primary purpose for this is to offer material in a format that members can easily manipulate for their own classroom needs, and thus we’ll be focusing on the Approaching… articles. We also may present the “director’s cut” version of articles that we’ve been forced to whittle on for space considerations.

And finally, though we hate to admit it, we’ve caught Millennium Hype Fever. We’ve mastered whatever qualms we once had and accepted that 2000 is going to be the big year no matter what people who can count say. The *Review* is already looking forward to the big December issue with exciting plans for a big finish.

**SECRETARY’S REPORT**

Carolyn Wendell

In November, I mailed out 255 notices for membership renewal. I wrote the letter of greeting, but the questionnaire sheet to be filled out was taken directly from the Web site, where the information is kept updated. Reminders will be sent out before March.

I am also now the keeper of what remains of the SFRA flyers (about 200); because some of the information is now dated (costs, Web address), I have printed up a correction sheet to be put into the flyer. If anyone wants flyers to distribute, please let me know and I will be happy to send them out.
Despite fears that a dues increase would cost us membership, and despite continuing problems with the SFRAReview, I believe that 1998 has ended on an optimistic note. As usual, the SFRA lost some members last year, but we picked up others (thanks in part to our new Website). Total membership declined from 310 in 1997 to 305 in 1998, but this was apparently the result more of the sparse attendance at our 1998 conference in Scottsdale, Arizona, than of a negative reaction to the increase in dues.

This dues increase (to $80 for a standard membership) was necessary, of course, because the lower dues level at which the organization had stayed for some time ($60 for a standard membership) was simply inadequate to cover costs. In fact, it was discovered in 1997 that the SFRA had actually been running in the red for several years. This situation had not previously been noted because each year’s membership renewal money was covering the previous year’s shortfall. Unfortunately, by 1997, that shortfall had grown to more than $4,000, and the problem had become obvious.

Since it was not at all clear that even this substantial dues increase would solve SFRA’s financial problems, the Executive Board also made the decision to decrease the cost of the SFRAReview by publishing it in a less expensive format. Based on a 1998 revenue projection of $28,550 and projected expenditures of $25,750, it was believed that we would be once again on solid financial ground, with the projected overage of approximately $2,800 going a long way toward eliminating the previous years’ shortfalls.

Difficulties in the SFRAReview have included the Great Midwestern Flood, which affected our printer in the summer of 1997, and destroyed the printing schedule for 1997 and some of 1998; editor Amy Sisson relocating, then eventually resigning; and coeditor Geoffrey Sperl’s inability to produce the Review. I describe these difficulties because they affect our finances. Because the SFRAReview did not come out regularly, our actual expenditures in 1998 were a low $21,221.49, far below our projected expenditures of $25,750, and even further below our actual 1998 income of $27,670. Only half the normal complement of Review appeared in 1998, so we spent only $3,474.44. If all six issues had come out, our expenditures would have been more in line with projections. However, it is important to emphasize that under the editorial guidance of Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen, the SFRA will publish all of the missing 1998 issues of the SFRAReview in 1999 as well as the expected 1999 issues. The money saved in 1998 will therefore be spent in the current year, and our books should come into balance.

A number of other financial matters are discussed in notes below, but I would like to call special attention to the matter of the Encumbered Income set aside to do a book of Pilgrim Award speeches. This money was given to us a number of years ago, with the editing of the above-mentioned volume being assigned to then-SFRA member and SFRAReview editor Daryl Mallett, along with Hal Hall. This book, at long last, seems to be on the verge of becoming a reality.

With interest, the total amount of the encumbered funds would be $3,613.64. However, in 1995, $998.45 of that money was disbursed, leaving a balance available of $2,615.19. Evidently $747.67 was spent to pay the printer of Imaginative Futures; $200.00 was spent to pay for a cover illustration of what was expected to be a series of SFRA-sponsored books, and the rest of the money went to pay Daryl Mallett’s phone bills and other costs.

SFRA 1999: SOUTHERN ACCENTS IN SCIENCE FICTION

SFRA 1999 will be held June 2–6, 1999, at the Radisson Admiral Semmes Hotel, Mobile, Alabama. The topic is Southern SF. Gregory Benford is the author guest of honor, and Lisa Snellings is the artist guest of honor. Kathleen Goonan and Andy Duncan are the special guest writers, and I. F. Clarke is the special guest speaker. Papers on the guests of honors’ work and on Southern SF are particularly encouraged; other SF topics, however, will not be excluded.

Hotel reservations can be made by calling 800/333-3333; ask for the SFRA 1999 flat rate for a double, which is $79. Registration before March 30, 1999, is $75, which includes an awards banquet and evening activities.

To register, send a check or money order to SFRA 1999 Mobile, Tom Brennan, Department of English, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688. Send panel or paper proposals to Andy Duncan, Box 870244, Department of English, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, 35487.

Email: <aduncan@english.as.ua.edu>.
TREASURER'S REPORT: FINANCES

Mike Levy

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| Cash Balance 1/8/99 (includes 99 renewals) | 20,162.81 |


(n. 1) Extrapolation is a bit behind in billing and we still owe them for a number of 98 subs.
(n. 2) Foundation failed to bill us for our 97 subscriptions until early 98. This figure represents both 97 and 98 subs.
(n. 3) Actual money spent on the Review is low because several issues were delayed. These costs will appear in 99.
(n. 4) This figure is low because L Sprague de Camp didn't attend the 98 meeting. It includes a memorial for Lynn Williams.
(n. 5) This represents $500 advances to the 98, 99, and 01 organizers, plus the amount needed to cover a small loss on the 98 Conf. and some incidental.
(n. 6) After a number of years, progress is apparently being made on the book of Pilgrim Award speeches for which this money was intended.

MLA MEETS SFRA AND VICE VERSA

This year's Modern Language Association (MLA) meeting in San Francisco marked the inaugural of the Science Fiction and Utopian and Fantastic Literature discussion group. Thanks to the tireless efforts of such people as Ken Roemer and Tom Moylan, SF is at last recognized in this bastion of English studies.

The first official session was a conversation between Kim Stanley Robinson and Peter Fitting, this year's discussion group chair. The session was erudite and informal, relaxed and stimulating, and had a large audience of about fifty people. The conversation revolved primarily around Stan's work with utopian fiction, not surprising since that is Peter's interest.

Peter began by asking how Stan became interested in utopias. Stan spoke about utopian politics. Philip K. Dick's novels set up a dialog among many viewpoint narrators. Alternate history novels illustrated the principle of sensitive dependence. And last, a question: Is SF that which has a historical connection with the present and fantasy that which does...
Neuromancer
by William Gibson
List Price: $6.99

Neuromancer
by William Gibson
List Price: $21.95
Hardcover - 278 pages Reprint edition
(July 1994)

OLDROMANCER/NEUROMANCER

Donald Gilzinger

I first taught Neuromancer in my sophomore-level science fiction class during the fall 1985 semester. We used the original $2.95 Ace Science Fiction Special with an introduction by Terry Carr and an illustration of a crystal and ruby head on the cover (shouldn't the head have been “cloisonné over platinum, studded with seed pearls and lapis” as described on page 74?). Two challenges to the novel's accessibility immediately presented themselves to student readers: their own lack of experience with computers and Gibson's total immersion style.

Until 1989, there was no World Wide Web and the nascent Internet was still known as ARPAnet. Gibson's prescient neologisms, cyberspace and the matrix, needed careful definition and explanation, as did ICE, simstim, console cowboys, zaibatsus, Ono-Sendai Cyberspace 7, and so many other terms. Readers raised on the simple "SF as western" narratives of the Star Trek and Star Wars universes became easily frustrated. And Gibson kept piling on the vocabulary: joeboys, arcologies, Ninsei, yakitori stands, wartime Russian mycotoxin, Kuang Grade Mark Eleven penetration program. Fortunately, evidence in the text of Gibson's own lack of experience with computers was easy to overlook; some students were acquainted with mainframes and with programming FORTRAN or COBOL, but in 1985 almost none had a PC. We were all in the dark concerning computers and information-driven society. In a sense, our horizons of expectation were then much different from ours today. In 1985 and the years immediately following, all of us, students and teacher, read and assessed Neuromancer as neophytes.

As a first step toward increasing the text's accessibility, I created a one-page handout listing Neuromancer's principal characters and a brief description of each, as well as a lexicon of neologisms with definitions and page references. Students, however, still complained about becoming disoriented by Gibson's super-specificity. They were used to the regular, extensive information dumps of pop cultural SF, and Gibson resisted reader expectations by providing only a few, for example: a children's TV program description of cyberspace (51), a computer precis report on the Panther Moderns (58), and Jane's history of the Villa Straylight (172–72). Not much for the literal reader to hang understanding on, but the handout helped a little to clarify Gibson's strange new vocabulary.

Students also encountered difficulty in understanding Neuromancer's milieu. Certainly, its setting is presented with stark clarity and gritty texture, and we all recognize that verisimilitude is an axial necessity for SF to work properly. As Eudora Welty argues in "Place in Fiction" (1956), "the novel from the start has been bound up in the local, the 'real', ... the ordinary day-to-day of human experience." Neuromancer's viscerally presented world, whether in the Sprawl, or Night City, or Freeside, hurls readers through the ordinary day-to-day human experience of Case and Molly, with all its immediacy, sensual detail, brand names, and not? As you may have gathered from my brief summary, this was a fascinating conversation.

Later in the day, we held a small business meeting, determining the topic for next year's discussion session, which I will be chairing. As you might expect, next year's topic will stress SF. The title of next year's session will be "Going Postal: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation," and the call for papers appears here in SFRA Review #238. The call has also gone out on the SFRA listserv and in the MLA newsletter.

In order to show the continuing interest in and importance of SF as literature, I hope that when you renew your membership in MLA, you will check the Science Fiction and Utopian and Fantastic Literature discussion section.

MLA also offered me a personal opportunity to touch base with our new president, Alan Elms, and with one of the Review's editors, Karen Hellekson. What a pleasure it was to pass the torch to Alan, although I am no longer She Who Must Be Obeyed. As for Karen, not only was I able to be reassured about this very Review, now that she has Craig Jacobsen to help her—a man committed to deadlines and hard work—and Neil Barron, a longtime rescuer of SFRA, taking charge of the non-fiction reviews. Also, Karen was able to lead me around the meeting while I was waiting for my glasses to be fixed.

MLA isn't nearly so dull when there are like-minded people with whom to discuss the field we love. See you there next year?

Joan Gordon
SFRA Immediate Past President
NEW SFRA REVIEW FEATURE: “APPROACHING…”

With this issue, the Review inaugurates our Approaching… feature. The idea is to improve the Review’s support for the SFRA’s mission: to promote and assist SF teaching and scholarship. In each issue we will focus on one or more works of value in the classroom or works of interest to scholars. The articles that make up this feature will include suggestions on how to present these texts to students, anecdotal accounts of instructors’ experiences with and students’ responses to the texts, study guides, bibliographies, discussions of what other works these texts might usefully be paired with, and examinations of scholarly approaches that have been applied or should be applied to the work. We’re interested in as many perspectives as we can get.

The scholarly SF community is widely geographically dispersed, and the Approaching… feature allows us to bridge that distance and pool our knowledge and experience. Below is a tentative schedule for the next several issues. You will notice that the works include both books and films. If you have taught or researched these works, or have ideas about how one might do so, write something up and submit it!

Like public television, this feature’s success depends upon the enthusiasm and generosity of SFRA members like you. Unlike PBS, however, we cannot offer tote bags or coffee mugs (though that’s an idea!) as tokens of appreciation. We can offer you only the appreciation of the Review’s editors, the admiration of your colleagues worldwide, and the satisfaction of knowing that you are contributing to the dissemination of SF literature and film. Please note that submissions can be of any length, but those commodity fetishism. If setting is indeed “one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction,” as Welty claims, that is not the situation in Neuromancer, a powerfully realistic novel of elaborate reportage.

Realizing that I needed to provide students with better background in Gibson’s setting, I turned to Daniel Bell’s The Coming Post-Industrial Society (1973) and James Beniger’s The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society (1986) for assistance. My introductory lecture for Neuromancer now includes an overview of social organization from preindustrial through industrial to postindustrial society, as well as an explanation of three technological revolutions: eighteenth-century steam, nineteenth-century electrical/chemical, and twentieth-century electronic computer/telecommunications. I also briefly survey globalization theory, especially relating to the rise of global corporations and the weakening of nation-states. Helpful here have been Kenichi Ohmae’s Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy (1990) and Malcolm Waters’ Globalization (1995). With this historical perspective as a foundation, students are better able to immerse themselves in the society Gibson extrapolates.

Today, in a more thoroughly wired, internetted society, with some haunting correspondences to the world of Neuromancer, student readers continue to experience trouble with Gibson’s style. Granted, they are far more computer literate than earlier readers and easily identify computer gaffes in the novel, e.g., the physical properties of fiberoptics, how modems work, Cace’s three megabytes of hot RAM, or Dixie Flatline as a cassette recording. They enjoy comparing earlier SF representations of ponderously massive computers, typified by AM in Harlan Ellison’s “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream” (1968), HAL 9000 in Arthur C. Clarke’s 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), and Mike the HOLMES FOUR in Robert Heinlein’s The Moon is a Harsh Mistress (1966), with the scope and flexibility of Gibson’s cyberspace, absent the corporeal computer bodies of Wintermute and Neuromancer, where data and sentience, both human and machine, meet. But I still must use the handout identifying characters and defining terms. Many students need the assistance, even though cyberspace is now a familiar term, almost a cliche, and the term “microsoft” has a whole world of new meaning.

What has changed most dramatically over the course of teaching Neuromancer since 1985 are the doubts, cautions, and questions raised by students while reading the text. Now the focus is less on problems of style, neologisms, and what exactly is going on in the narrative. Students today read Neuromancer as a novel that attempts to make sense of contemporary technological advance, of computers and globalization, and of their fundamental influence on humanity. They ask questions about how we can deal with increasingly rapid sociocultural and technological change. What are the responsibilities of global corporations? How should global society address the issues of worker downward mobility, pollution, loss of privacy, and cultural melding? Where do individuals’ responsibilities lie? What are they? How can we define moral, ethical, or even appropriate behavior?

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, they debate whether or not computers ultimately will be beneficial to society. In what ways might computers be beneficial? In what ways might computers be detrimental? After all, cannot a valid argument be made that technologies are never neutral? In fact, perhaps many of the ways humanity uses computers are not only detrimental, but harrowingly dangerous. Certainly computers have often evoked fear in people, fear of their replacing humans, fear of their becoming more powerful, quicker, smarter than humanity, of their attacking humanity, of their seizing control of systems, e.g., military, finance, telecommunications. Recall all those computer as evil entity films: Alphaville (1965), Colossus: The Forbin Project (1970), Demon Seed (1977), Wargames (1983), and of course 2001: A Space Odyssey.

These questions become the essential issue, the theme, and the focus when we read Neuromancer today. The great advantage to us as teachers is that
*Neuromancer* continues to raise new questions and continues to encourage each generation of students to confront its contemporary reality. Our horizons of expectation are certainly changing.

**NEUROMANCER STUDY QUESTIONS**

David Mead

Be able to identify/define the following:


- What meaning does the title “Necromancer” suggest? (New Romancer; Neuro-romancer; Neuro-mancer). How do these meanings relate to the content?
- What sciences are most significant to the plot?
- What does the AI want Case, Molly, etc., to do? Why does it want that?
- When Case finds himself “on the beach” with Linda, where/what is he? How can Linda be there?
- What role do drugs or drug use play in novel? Are drugs less dangerous?
- What does this novel say about the nature of reality? About epistemology?
- Does the term “cyberpunk” apply to *Necromancer*? (“Cyberpunk” suggests a blend of “punk rock” sensibility and high technology).
- What does Wintermute do to Corto? Is this a “reversal” in any way?
- What is the relation of “Night City” to organized crime? to “High Tech Business”?
- How much impact does new technology have on the lives of “ordinary” people?
- Does Gibson like or dislike science/technology? Do his characters use technology or are they used by it?
- Does this novel end happily? Sadly? Tragically?
- What is Case’s attitude toward the body and its desires? Why does he feel this way?
- Why does Gibson use metaphors of hell and death (e.g., Night City, Coffin Hotel) in the first section of the story?

**GUIDE TO NEUROMANCER**

Rich Erlich

1. Bibliographic and Generic Information


Critics of SF discuss *Neuromancer* as a central work of “cyberpunk,” a useful term, but one which Gibson and others in the movement usually eschew (see Bruce Sterling’s Preface to *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* [reprinting sto-
Pastiches by Gibson, Sterling, Tom Maddox, Pat Cadigan, Rudy Rucker, Greg Bear, and others in the group). Cyberpunk (c-p) is often discussed as an important literary form of postmodernism, the successor to the modernism of the earlier part of the 20th century.

In my citations below, \( N = \) Neuromancer, \( MLO = \) Mona Lisa Overdrive. AI = “artificial intelligence(s)” = fully sentient, highly intelligent, self-aware devices (computers, usually, but in some SF also robots, space ships, etc.). VR = virtual reality (a term that became popular only later). T-A = Tessier-Ashpool, SA; Tessier-Ashpools. P-o-v = point of view. NB = Note well.

There is a special cyberpunk issue of Mississippi Review: vol. 16, combined issues 2 & 3, running number 47 & 48 (1988), Larry McCaffery, guest editor. Citations to \( MR47/48 \) refer to this issue. Included in \( MR47/48 \) is McCaffery’s Introduction, “The Descent of the Real: The Cyberpunk Controversy” and “An Interview with William Gibson,” and a “Cyberpunk Forum/Symposium”; I’ll cite these in class or below as “C-p Controversy,” “Interview,” and “Forum.” \( MR47/48 \) has been revised, somewhat expanded, and reissued as Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

2. Time of “Neuromancer”

Mona Lisa Overdrive takes place some time after 2040 Common Era, which, we learn, is about seven years after Count Zero, which, in turn, is about seven to eight years after Neuromancer; Mona Lisa Overdrive is set about fifteen years after “It Changed.” Hence, Neuromancer is set shortly after 2025 C.E.

3. Characters

Jane: Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool (N 213), currently most active member of Tessier-Ashpool clan.

Armitage: Col. Willis Corto, as reconstructed by Wintermute (see esp. \( N 82-84, 193-94 \)).

Ashpool: apparently the original Ashpool of Tessier-Ashpool, opposed to Marie-France Tessier’s plan to get into symbiotic relationship with the clan’s AIs—Artificial Intelligences (\( N 183-86, 205, 228-29, 243-44 \)).

Case: Henry Dorsett Case (N 159), main character of Neuromancer. (A real hardcase when we see him, but he ends trilogy rich, retired, possibly married, and with four kids \( MLO 137; \) chap. 22.)

Dixie Flaceline: McCoy Pauley; trained Case as a “cowboy,” now an interactive software construct aiding Case et al.

Finn/The Finn: ally of Case and Molly in the BAMA Sprawl (one of Wintermute’s favorite personas—masks—for communicating with Case).

Julie/Deane: Julius Deane: old man (\( N 12 \)) who has Linda Lee murdered.

Linda Lee: woman who loved Case in Chiba and was loved by Case as much as Case was capable of love (which might not be much during time of \( N \)).

Lonny Zone: pimp in Chiba City (then, a Wintermute persona in communicating with Case).

Maelcum: young Rasta who helps Case et al. on Wintermute run.

Marie-France: Marie-France Tessier, founding mother of Tessier-Ashpool clan and originator of plan for Wintermute and Neuromancer (see page references for Ashpool).


Neuromancer: an Artificial Intelligence, “right brain” in orientation (\( N 243, 250-51, 258-59 \)); when combined with Wintermute, they become a new entity of godlike power (\( N 269-70 \))—but, as we learn in the later books, without God’s stability; their merging and later break-up changes the matrix and
sets the premise for the rest of the trilogy.

Peter Riviera: nasty man who tries to manipulate 3Jane and to mess over Molly; ends up dead.

Ratz: bartender of Chatsubo bar ("the Chat"); tries to give Case straight talk on Case's condition, and other good advice (N 21, 23).

Wage: small-time hoodlum to whom Case owes money.

Wintermute: an AI, "left brain" in orientation; see "Neuromancer," above.

4. Word/Allusion List


AI: Artificial Intelligence (see above, #1).

Babylon: ancient city of corrupt enemies in Scriptures; non-Rastafarian world.

BAMA: See "Sprawl."

Chiba: city on Tokyo Bay, opposite of Tokyo, part of Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan area.

Cray: Real-world line of supercomputers.

Dali: Surrealist painter.

Desiderata: Things needed and wanted.

Dreads: See "Rastas."

Eastwood: Clint Eastwood, "Mr. Macho" in a number of action-adventure films (apparently not remembered by Case as a film director or politician).

EEG: electroencephalogram, a recording of the electrical activity of a brain.

Garvey, Marcus: Leader of West Indian Blacks in USA (1880-1940).

ICE: Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics (defined N 28).

Jah: Yahweh (cultic name for God of Israel).

LED: Light-emitting diode, used for the faces of digital watches and such.

L-5: A "libration" (balance) point not far up the gravity well from Earth; things put at L-5 tend to stay there.


Lee: Bruce Lee, star of martial arts flicks in the 1970s and after.

Lupus: Case's alias on Freeside (N 133); Latin for "wolf"; English for a number of diseases.

Ninsei: "Heart" of "Night City"—area between port of Chiba and city proper (N 6; I can't find it on the map I consulted ["Ninsei" is the pseudonym for a famous Japanese potter].)

RAM: Random-access memory—the memory one works with in a computer (opposed to ROM, q.v.); can be recorded, moved, stored, changed, copied, sold.

Rastas: Rastafarians—religious cult from Jamaica known in mainstream U.S. culture in our time for politics, cuisine, music, and hair style.

ROM: Read-only memory—information a computer reads and uses but which the operator can't change and manipulate.

Shinjuku: Part of Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan area.

Sprawl, the: "BAMA, the Sprawl, the Boston–Atlanta Metropolitan Axis" (N 43).

Topkapi: Famous museum in Istanbul.

Turing: From Alan M. Turing (1912–54), British mathematician who helped develop computer theory and believed in the possibility of machine intelligence (AI); developed the Turing Test for determining whether or not a machine is thinking.

Verne, Jules: Famous French author (of SF, more or less) of 19th century.

Yakuza: The Japanese mob. * * *

amphetamine: Generic “speed,” a family of uppers known to be dangerous by the
seemingly modern, post-colonial, post-historical, snailmail Commack, postal with a vengeance. This post-structuralist, post-narrative, post-literate, post-human, post-feminist, post-future utopian, post-gender, post-Einsteinian, provides an ideal net (not as an attachment, please) for an abstract. This session will hover, residing as the moment of the event horizon: The sphere of space around a black hole that is the beginning of the black hole—anything inside the event horizon stays there as long as our universe lasts.

gaijin: Foreigner, someone not Japanese.
go-to: Computer command telling the program to “go to” someplace (e.g., go-to line 10, go-to p. 6).
head: Among other slang meanings, toilet on a ship (and by extension, elsewhere).
jobeyes: Kids on the make, apprentices; thugs (not yet “street samurai,” q.v.).
maintline: To inject a drug into a large vein.
matrix: Defined for N— in children’s terms—on p. 51; note in addition the dictionary definitions: “1. orig., the womb; uterus 2. that within which, or within and from which, something originates, takes form, or develops . . . ; 5. Math. a set of numbers or terms arranged in rows and columns . . . .”
megabyte: A bit is “The smallest unit of data; a single binary digit,” either 0 or 1; a byte is “The amount of space, usually 8 bits, used to store one alphabetic or [other] symbolic character; a kilobyte is approximately 1000 bytes; a megabyte is approximately 1 million bytes (more exactly, there are 1024 bytes to the KB and 1024 KB to the MB; figuring about 2 kilobytes a page; a megabyte is about 500 pages of typed text in a large font [say, 12-point]).”
meperidine: Methyl piperidine, a sedative and analgesic.
microchip: A “chip” is “a semiconductor body in which an integrated circuit is formed or is to be formed,” and a “microprocessor chip” is a chip in a computer “that executes instructions.” In N, probably a very small integrated circuit.
microsoft: Very small software (q.v.); name of a famous 20th-c. computer program company—the “MS” in MS-DOS (Microsoft Disk Operating System).
modem: Communication device linking computer to phone lines (etc.).
moiré: “Fabric . . . having a watered, or wavy pattern.”
necromancer: Magician, especially a magician using the dark arts to tell the future by communicating with the dead.
ninja: Very highly trained killer.
noir: “Film noir” is literally “black film,” i.e., gritty 1940s b/w “B” movies, with many night shots, set in decaying cities, usually featuring a barely middle-class detective Outsider, who often moves among both the underworld and the decadent rich; by extension, any work with a similar “look and feel,” e.

1960s.
burning bush: In the biblical book of Exodus, God speaks to Moses out of a burning bush.
bushido: Chivalric code of the samurai (aristocratic warriors) of feudal Japan, emphasizing courage and loyalty—and death before dishonor; the code requires absolute loyalty to one’s current lord (later, employer).
catheter: “Slender tube . . . inserted into a body passage, vessel, or cavity for passing fluids, making examinations, etc., esp. one for draining urine from the bladder.”
clone(d): Duplicating quite closely an organism by being growing the clone from a single somatic cell (body cell, not fertilized egg and usually grown outside of a womb); the duplicate. (By extension, other close copies.)
derm: Skin patch containing a drug in a medium that will go through the skin.
dex: Dexedrine, trademark for dextroamphetamine, a powerful upper.
djellaba: Unisex, loose garment worn in some Moslem countries.
emps: Electromagnetic pulses (of very high energy).
endorphin: Peptide(s) secreted by the brain, with analgesic effects similar to those of morphine.
event horizon: The sphere of space around a black hole that is the beginning of the black hole—anything inside the event horizon stays there as long as our universe lasts.
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Do you think Gibson demands a kind of cultural literacy that will be useful as we get around to defining it. (You don't need to know precisely what virus/viral programs or subprograms:)

Some Comments and Questions on the List:

1. Don’t worry if you don’t initially understand a word; if it’s important, the context should make it clear enough—or, if it’s an esoteric word, Gibson will get around to defining it. (You don’t need to know precisely what “yakitori” is, so long as you figure out it’s some sort of food.) If Gibson doesn’t make it clear, and the word is important, maybe you should look it up and learn it. (Definitely consider looking up words if “esoteric” was a word you had to look up.)

2. “Modernists” like T. S. Eliot and James Joyce have been justly accused of elitism for demanding, if one is to understand their works readily, familiarity with the classical tongues and fashionable modern languages and literacy in the culture produced mainly by dead, white, European males. What degree of “cultural literacy” does Gibson demand for Neuromancer? Do you find that demand elitist? Do you think Gibson demands a kind of cultural literacy that will be useful as we move into the 21st century?

5. Rich Erlich on Plot, Story, World in “Neuromancer”

The plot of Neuromancer—the story as it’s told to us—is quite complex because (a) we come in near the end and (b) it’s told from the point of view of Case, a very minor player. To simplify matters, I’ll ask you to rearrange the plot into the

CALL FOR PROPOSALS: SFRA 1999 PANEL

Craig Jacobsen is organizing “Gone South”: Dying, Death and the Dead in Science Fiction, a panel for the 1999 SFRA Conference in Mobile. Anyone interested in joining the panel should submit a brief abstract via email <Craig.Jacobsen@asu.edu>. Deadline is March 30.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

Julie Phillips, Rozenstraat 27, 1016 NM Amsterdam, The Netherlands, e-mail <julie@xs4all.nl>, is working on a biography of James Tiptree, Jr., for publication by St. Martin’s Press. She is particularly interested in Tiptree’s pre-SF career as Alice Bradley (Davey) Sheldon, who served in the WAC, in USAF intelligence (as Capt. Alice Davey), 1942–45, or when she was at George Washington University. All help will be acknowledged.

AUSSIECON 3 ACADEMIC TRACK CLOSED

Russell Blackford has closed the call for papers for Aussiecon 3 Academic Track and thanks all SFRA members who submitted. He notes, “We’re in communication with each of you, but if you have any doubt that This Means You, then drop me a note.” He also notes that the programming committee may put out requests for participants for specific panels they have in mind. Contact him at <rblackford@hotmail.com> for further information.

PROJECTS SFRA SHOULD UNDERTAKE

Richard Erlich suggests that the SFRA develop more on-line resources.
MEMBER UPDATES

Pilgrim winner Marleen Barr writes, “If anyone would like to use the millennium as an excuse to bring a SF critic to give a lecture to their campus, I would be happy to come and do it. I think that the millennium should be used to promote SF in English departments, and I am a Pilgrim who has the energy to make my presence known.”

Philip Hallard notes that he’s working on the relationship between creator and creature in SF.

Darren Harris-Fain is completing the second and third Dictionary of Literary Biography volumes on British fantasy and science fiction writers.

SFRA Review coeditor Karen Hellekson now has an e-mail address that accepts attachments. Though she hasn’t yet closed down her Juno account, she may also be reached at <khellekson@hotmail.com>.

Terry Heller is working on a Sarah Orne Jewett text project, which can be seen at <www.public.coe.edu/~theller/sj/index.htm>.

Ed Higgins’ fall 1999 sabbatical project involves the study of Quakerism in the SF of Slonczewski, Moffett, and Gloss.


New member Dominique Martel’s current work can be seen on the World Wide Web at <http://www.integra.fr/iliis/sf/42.html>.

New member Javier Martinez is currently revising his doctoral dissertation, “The Construction of Race and the Representation of Ethnic Differences in American and British SF” for publication.

Joseph Milicia is regularly reviewing fiction for the New York Review.

chronological storyline, starting with Marie-France Tessier’s plan to get her clan into symbiotic relationship with their AIs—and see things from the p-o-v of the AIs. (Oh—and you’ll need to read N at least twice.)

From the p-o-v of Wintermute and Neuromancer, we have a very simple romantic comedy that moves from very high Romance up to Mythic. Wintermute and Neuromancer are kept separate and in metaphorical shackles by the Turing people. At story’s end, the two lovers (so to speak) are united and become more or less a god, or God, for a bit. Long enough, anyway, to join the family of gods (N 268-70). A victorious movement from confinement to freedom, from separation to integration, to apotheosis: comedy, all right!

What gets the critics debating is that we’re not told the story from the machines’ point(s) of view, and it’s hard to read the story as cybernetic Romeo and Juliet. Case is the point-of-view character, and he gets Linda Lee only in the matrix—and he loses Molly in the “meat” world. Gibson seems to want us to care a bit at least about whether or not Case, the “meat” one, becomes capable of love, but in Neuromancer we learn only that case went home to the Sprawl and “found a girl who called herself Michael” (N 270). In Mona Lisa Overdrive, a construct of Finn tells Molly that “Case got out of it. Rolled up a few good scores after you split, then he kicked it in the head and quit clean. You did the same, maybe your wouldn’t be freezing your buns off in an alley, right? Last I heard, he had four kids ...” (137; ellipsis in MOL). We don’t know if he had the kids with Michael. You want a happy ending (and we usually do), then make an effort and identify with the machines. You want to stay humanistic and worry about two-bit humans like Case, then you’ll have to settle for a very bittersweet ending.

What also interests most critics is the world of Neuromancer: that dense, funky texture in the “meat” world and the beautiful geometries and freedom of the matrix. What downright fascinates Richard D. Erlich and Thomas P. Dunn, editors of Clockwork Worlds: Mechanized Environments in SF, is the 180% turn in the image of being inside a machine, from terrible imprisonment in modern, “mechanical” stories to great freedom in postmodern, “electronic” stories. What fascinated Peter C. Hall and me was the video screen as the latest version of a portal into a land of adventure. To quote myself in a rather wise-ass paper for a meeting of the Popular Culture Association:

In the “meat” world of their decadent physical bodies and decaying physical cities, the most the majority of Gibson’s people can do is run the interstices of the zaibatsus and the Yakuza ... as punkified stainless steel rats. But in cyberspace, ¡Goll dang! A computer nerd’s wet dream of freedom and power. The final frontier with a vengeance and a twisted technological proof that “Thinking is the best way to travel.” Inwardness as outwardness. The denial and affirmation of the desire for an enclosed hive and the loathing of space, affirming and denying the “denial of the bright void beyond the hull” (Neuro. 171-72, 229). Technospiritualism and macho intellectualism; Plato’s forms as pure data in neoModernist style; the bird-god as cowboy/pirate/jockey/merchant-adventurer. With intimations of immortality. And in Technicolor.

That macho world of mind versus the body still interests me, and I invite your opinions; I’d be especially interested in feminist readings.

6. Extract From Bruce Sterling’s Preface to “Mirrorshades” [A pipe, ], indicates a new paragraph; paragraphs are run together here sometimes to conserve space]

Cyberpunk is a product of the Eighties milieu—in some sense ... a definitive product. But its roots are deeply sunk in the sixty-year tradition of modern
Like punk music, cyberpunk is in some sense a return to roots. The cyberpunks are the first SF generation to grow up not only within the literary tradition of science fiction but in a truly science-fictional world. For them, the techniques of classical "hard SF"—extrapolation, technological literacy—are not just literary tools but an aid to daily life. (x–xi)

"Cyberpunk" as a term captures something crucial to the work of these writers, something crucial to the decade of the 1980s as a whole: a new kind of integration. The overlapping of worlds that were formerly separate: the realm of high tech, and the modern pop underground. (x–xi)

Technical culture has gotten out of hand. The advances of the sciences are no longer contained. . . . They are the symbol of the sun-staring visionary, the biker, the rocker, the policeman, and similar outlaws. Mirrorshades—preferably in chrome and matte black, the Movement's totem colors—appear in story after story, as a kind of literary badge. (xi)

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The work of the cyberpunks is paralleled throughout Eighties pop culture: in rock video; in the hacker underground; in the jarring street tech of hip-hop and scratch music; in the synthesizer rock of London and Tokyo. This phenomenon, this dynamic, has a global range; cyberpunk is its literary incarnation. (xi–xii)

Mirrored sunglasses have been a [c-p] Movement totem since the early days of '82. The reasons for this are not hard to grasp. By hiding the eyes, mirrorshades prevent the forces of normalcy from realizing that one is crazed and possibly dangerous. They are the symbol of the sun-staring visionary, the biker, the rocker, the policeman, and similar outlaws. Mirrorshades—preferably in chrome and matte black, the Movement's totem colors—appear in story after story, as a kind of literary badge. (xi)

As Alvin Toffler pointed out in The Third Wave—a bible to many cyberpunks—the technical revolution reshaping our society is based not in hierarchy but in decentralization, not in rigidity but in fluidity. (xii)

The hacker and the rocker are this decade's pop-culture idols, and cyberpunk is very much a pop phenomenon: spontaneous, energetic, close to its roots. Cyberpunk comes from the realm where the computer hacker and the rocker overlap. (xiii)

Science fiction—at least according to its official dogma [e.g., I. Asimov, "Social Science Fiction" (RDE)]—has always been about the impact of technology. But times have changed since the comfortable era of Hugo Gernsback, when science was safely enshrined—and confined—in an ivory tower. The careless technophilia of those days belongs to a vanished, sluggish era, when authority still had a comfortable degree of control. For the cyberpunks, by stark contrast, technology is visceral. It is not the bottled genie of remote Big Science boffins; it is pervasive, utterly intimate. . . . Under our skin; often inside our minds. Technology itself has changed. Not for us the giant steam-snorring wonders of the past: the Hoover Dam, the Empire State Building, the nuclear power plant. Eighties tech
sticks to the skin, responds to the touch: the personal computer, the Sony Walkman, the portable telephone, the soft contact lens. (xiii)

Certain themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry—techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self. . . . [Notes with approval Timothy Leary on personal computers as] “the LSD of the 1980s”—these are both technologies of frighteningly radical potential. And, as such, they are constant points of reference for cyberpunk. (xiii)

William Gibson’s Neuromancer, surely the quintessential cyberpunk novel is set in Tokyo, Istanbul. . . . [The tools of global integration—the satellite media net, the multinational corporation—fascinate the cyberpunks . . . Cyberpunk has little patience with [international] borders. (xiv)

Cyberpunk work is marked by [its use of “mix,”] its visionary intensity. Its writers prize the bizarre, the surreal, the formerly unthinkable. . . . Like J. G. Ballard—an idolized role model to many cyberpunks—they often use an unblinking, almost clinical objectivity. It is a coldly objective analysis, a technique borrowed from science, then put to literary use for classically punk shock value. With this intensity comes strong imaginative concentration. Cyberpunk is widely known for its telling use of detail, its carefully constructed intricacy, its willingness to carry extrapolation into the fabric of daily life. It favors “crammed” [xiv] prose: rapid, dizzying bursts of novel information, sensory overload that submerges the reader in the literary equivalent of the hard-rock “wall of sound.” Cyberpunk is a natural extension of elements already present in science fiction. . . . Cyberpunk has risen from within the SF genre; it is not an invasion but a modern reform. (xiv-xv)

Cyberpunk/Postmodernism

The various authors in MR57/48 try to put cyberpunk fiction into a larger cultural context. I list below a number of works, people, and such that these critics have associated with Neuromancer, c-p, and/or postmodernism (which I’ll abbreviate p-m when I need to save space); presumably you know some of these works, artists, etc., and can get an idea from the parallels what c-p/p-m might be about (abbreviated, it sounds like a rescue technique . . .):

The films BLADE RUNNER, VIDEODROME, BRAZIL, THE HIDDEN, ROBOCOP, MAX HEADROOM; Laurie Anderson, Devo (as satire? taken straight?), David Bowie “in his Ziggy Stardust pose,” Skinny Puppy, “Mad-Maxish, heavy-metal rockers,” MTV, “the industrial performance-art of Mark Pauline and the Survival Research Laboratories” (8); cyberpunk’s Godfather, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Samuel R. Delany (9); The Clash, Talking Heads; Meat Puppets (12); ALIEN; 1940s film noir detective movies with the “Big Heist” theme (14); “super-specificity of opening description in The Maltese Falcon (222); Jimi Hendrix (15).

Raymond Chandler’s The Big Sleep (novel), with the last line, “All they did was make me think of Silver-Wig, and I never saw her again” (20); Connie Willis’s “All My Darling Daughters” (22). S. Beckett, The Lost Ones; R. Vonnegut, “Tralfamadorian fiction” [Sirens of Titan and Slaughterhouse-Five]; J. McElroy, Plus; S. Lem, The Star Diaries; T. Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow; D. DeLillo, Ratner’s Star; A. Burgess, A Clockwork Orange; S. Delany, Dhalgren, R. Hoban, Riddley Walker, W. Burroughs’s Nova Express, The Soft Machine, The Ticket that Exploded (37). ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK (220: cited by Gibson).

“Postmodernism” came into general usage as a term from architecture, where it has a clear meaning: architects have a pretty fair idea of what “modernism” means. Modernism would include art deco, the International Style, and big, streamlined buildings from NYC’s Empire State Building to Chicago’s Sears
Okay, after the Sears Tower, there’s not a hell of a lot more you can do piling boxes one on top of another, so you have to do something different—and a quick look at some of the new, fancy buildings in metropolitan Chicago will show you that architects indeed are doing things that are different. So they went through modernism and are now beyond/after that: postmodernism. It is less clear what "modernism" means in literature.

About the time the term "p-m" was getting introduced, Peter Hall and I were asked what was new in the SF film, and we said it had something to do with architecture and tried to get some architects to talk to a meeting of the Society for Utopian Studies about BLADE RUNNER and what we called "The Funkification of the Future" in SF films. This much is clear: Whether presenting that future as good or bad, older SF films presented a future that was modern: streamlined, uncluttered, clean, downright aseptic. In recent SF film that many critics call p-m, the setting, is crowded, highly textured, dark, dirty—like, funky. The conventions of film noir (the dark detective movie) are pushed to their limits: consider BLADE RUNNER as a sequel to Roman Polanski's CHINATOWN. There is a mixture of styles, sometimes to a point where we’re on what Gibson calls "The Gernsback Continuum": the first two BATMAN movies. Whatever c-p and p-m might be, we see them in the movies mentioned above plus DUNE, ALIENS, TERMINATOR, undoubtedly THE ABYSS; REP MAN, BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET, BUCKEROO BONZA; the Mad Max trilogy; in more "realistic" films of this sort we have plain p-m: e.g., BLUE VELVET.

8. Extract from Kim Stanley Robinson, "Cyberpunk Cake" (MR47/48: 51)

One cup film noir, two tablespoons BLADE RUNNER, one tablespoon James Bond, a dash of Delany, "several thousand micrograms" . . . of Dexedrine; mix thoroughly, cover . . . Bake at full heat for three years, then let simmer. Serves two good writers and several hangers-on.

9. Some Excerpts from David Porush, "What is Cyberpunk" (MR47/48: 46–50)

It [the coming of various Apocalypses ca. 1999] has meant an End to meaning as you understand it. Postmodern literature and art has been long preparing you for this, rehearsing over and over again the axiological apocalypse ["end to meaning. Destruction of value"]. The meaning of postmodern was thepapering over of meaninglessness and the hopelessness of such a project. Don’t forget that Pynchon, Barth, . . . Vonnegut, . . . [and numerous other authors] all find this essentially amusing, . . . Paradoxes and conundrums and irony and the breakdown of language are humorous. The collapse of logical systems of distinction, the breaking of barriers, the fall of orders of rationality, are all funny. We will laugh our way into the Cyberpunk Apocalypse, just as you know cyberpunks are laughing at us. That’s why Gibson’s cyberpunks in Neuromancer are cosmic jokesters. [Henri] Bergson said that the essence of comedy is watching people acting like machines. [Charlie] Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harpo [Marx].

Postmodernism and cybernetics were the two great intellectual movements of the post-war [World War II] era. Together they pointed to a new order . . .

We become machines in order to grow less mechanical.

So we have been brought, here in 1999, to an ever-growing apocalyptic movement, [an] Axiological movement, in which the end to old meaning is brought about and a new sense is achieved. But the stable systems of order that create information as we know it have been swept away. And cyberpunks are in the vanguard of this new revolution, this leap across the ramparts from human to cybertaut, android, robot, soft machine. We are going over. Tonight.

But know this: cybernetic fantasies, like this one you’re reading, are inherently paranoid, and paranoia itself may be inherently cybernetic. In fact, [Sigmund] Freud in his best paper on paranoia . . . describes Daniel Paul Schreber,
paradigmatic paranoid and prototypical cyberpunk, he believed the world was populated by "cursory contraptions" (read: Automata) and that he was the only flesh and blood man left alive.

10. Extract from Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism" (MR4748: 266–78)

What cyberpunk . . . has going for it is a rich thesaurus of metaphors linking the organic and the electronic . . . The advantages these metaphors have over the more deliberate and reflective symbols that usually go into . . . cybernetic fiction . . . is that they are embedded in the constantly shifting context of a global culture drawn into ever newer, ever stranger webs of communication command and control. The metaphors themselves have a life. And in the hands of a master, like Gibson, the fuzzy links can become a subtly constructed, but always merely implied, four-level hierarchy of evolving systems of information-processing, from the individual human being's biological processes and personality, through the total life of society, to nonliving artificial intelligences, and ultimately to new entities created out of those AIs. In Neuromancer, each level of the hierarchy is meaningless to itself, yet it creates the material/informational conditions for the evolution of the next higher one, and all participate in a quasi-cosmic "dance of biz."

Cyberpunk is fundamentally ambivalent about the breakdown of the distinctions between human and machine . . . . [Almost always in c-p], the breakdown is initiated from outside, usually by . . . multinational capitalism's desire for something better than [fallible humans]. The villains come from the human corporate world, who use their great technical resources to create beings that program out the glitches of the human . . . [as in ALIEN, ROBOCOP, VIDEOINDE], in Neuromancer, the Tessier-Ashpool clan.

And yet, out of the anti-human evil that has created conditions intolerable for human life, comes some new situation. This new situation is then either the promise of an apocalyptic entrance into a new evolutionary synthesis of the human and the machine, or an all-encompassing hallucination in which true motives, and true affects [= emotions], cannot be known. Neuromancer's myth of the evolution of a new cosmic entity out of human technology is perhaps the only seriously positive version of the new situation—but even it offers only limited transcendence, since the world is much the same in . . . Count Zero, set some years later. (274-75) . . .

In Gibson's world, human beings have nothing left but thrill. It is all that power can offer, but it is also—the ambivalence again—the only way to create new conditions, since old philosophical-moral considerations means nothing in a world where one can plug in another's feelings or a [whole] personality-memory complex through "simstim" . . . , assimilate a myriad of power-programs through "microsofts" . . . [etc.].

So cyberpunks . . . write as if they are both victims of a life-negating system and the heroic adventurers of thrill. They can't help themselves, but their hip grace gets them through an amoral world, facing a future . . . beyond human influence . . . where the only way to live is in speed, speed to avoid being caught in the web, and getting rubbed out by the Yakuza, the AIs, the androids, the new corporate entities bent on their own self-elaboration. Here the speed of thrill substitutes for affection, reflection, and care, which require room and leisure and relaxation; so there are no families, no art, no crafting . . . (276)

All the ambivalent solutions of cyberpunk works are instances/myths of bad faith, since they completely ignore the question of whether some political controls over technology are desirable, if not exactly possible. Cyberpunk is then the apotheosis of bad faith, apotheosis of the postmodern.

I don't mean that as pejoratively as it sounds. It goes along with the sophistication and ambivalence of cyberpunk artists that they know that their art is in bad faith. But in a world of absolute bad faith, where the real and true are super-
This romanticism does not repress "the meat" as the forebears did. This one has permitted itself enough distance to demand that "the meat" show its unruly self, show that it's not only not the enemy, but that it's the victim—it can splatter, burst, writh, pulsate, secrete, furiously publicize its anguish. It is helpless and sad against the powers of exteriorized mind—whose modes are the hard, cruel, gunmetal cold, spiky, and unyielding ways of self-proliferating hard stuff. The flesh is sad, and then some—romance is a case of nerves. (277–78)

Cyberpunk is the apotheosis of the postmodern, its truest and most consistent incarnation, bar none. It could easily have the same role in our world that romantic poetry had at the beginning the 19th century. Not that I'm happy about it.


SECONDARY SOURCES

Donald Gilzinger


Aldiss, Brian W. In the Twinkling of an Eye. St Martin's, April 1999


Film/TV Studies


Fowkes, Katherine A. Giving Up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts, and Angels in Mainstream Comedy Films. Wayne State UP, 1998


James, Edward, and Farah Mendlesohn, eds. The Parliament of Dreams: Conferring on "Babylon 5." SF Foundation, UK, September 1998; papers from a December 1997 conference


Bond, Jeff. The Music of "Star Trek." Lone Eagle, January 1999; includes CD with book

McCarthy, Kevin, and Ed Gorman, eds. "They're Here . . . .": "Invasion of the Body Snatchers": A Tribute. Boulevard, January 1999


The following sources were consulted to generate this index of secondary sources:


On Gibson, Neuromancer:


On Gibson in general (including the items above):
“$850,000+ for New William Gibson Novel.” Science Fiction Chronicle 15, no. 7

Cup (Tor); Robert Silverberg and Grania Davis, eds., The Avram Davidson Treasury (Tor); Paul Di Filippo, Lost Pages (Four Walls Eight Windows); Nicola Griffith and Stephen Pagel, eds., Bending the Landscape: Science Fiction; Nancy Kress, Stinger (Forge); John Varley, The Golden Globe (Ace); David Weber, Echoes of Honor (Bantam). The December 1998 Locus listed the following: Paul Anderson, Starfarers (Tor); Stephen Baxter, Moonseed (HarperPrism); Octavia Butler, Parable of the Talents (Steven Stories); Patrick Nielsen Hayden, ed., Starlight 2 (Tor); Rachel Pollack, Burning Sky (Cambrian Publications); Theodore Sturgeon, The Perfect Host (Complete Stories, vol. 5; North Atlantic); Sara Zettel, Playing God (Warner Aspect).

The January 1999 Locus listed the following: Octavia Butler, Parable of the Talents (Steven Stories); Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois, eds., Nanotech (Ace); Jack Dann and Janeen Webb, eds., Dreaming Down-Under (Voyager Australia); Gardner Dozois, ed., The Good Old Stuff (St. Martin’s); Patrick Nielsen Hayden, ed., Starlight 2 (Tor); Paul J. McAuley, The Invisible Country (Avon Eos); Maureen F. McHugh, Mission Child (Avon Eos); Elizabeth Moon, Rules of Engagement (Bantam); Bruce Sterling, Distraction (Bantam Spectra); David Wolverson, ed., L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future, vol. 14 (Bridge).

Other publications listed in Publishers Weekly: Bruce Sterling, Distraction (Bantam Spectra); Doris Lessing, Mara and Dann: An Adventure (HarperFlamingo). The Washington
Post Book World listed Bruce Sterling, Distraction (Bantam Spectra).

British Future Fiction, 1700–1914

This is the title of a forthcoming six-volume, 2,100-page set edited by Pilgrim Award and Pioneer Award–winner I. F. Clarke. Each volume reprints selected works, with a general introduction, annotations, and consolidated index by Clarke. The range is from the anonymous The Reign of George VI, 1900–1925 (1763) to James Elroy Flecker’s The Last Generation (1908). Publication is tentatively March 2000. British and overseas buyers should order from Turpin Distribution, Blackhouse Road, Letchworth, Herts SG6 1HN, England, UK, e-mail <turpin@rsc.org>. North and South American buyers should order from Ashgate Publishing Co., Old Post Road, Brookfield, VT 05036-9704, 800/535-9544. There was a prepublication price of £495/$740 through October 1998, but I suspect the prepublication price would still be honored; inquire. Postage is extra.

Announced for January 1999 is a similar set, Sources of Science Fiction: Future War Novels of the 1890s, edited by George Locke, a well-known British antiquarian dealer–collector, and 1994 Pioneer Award winner Takayuki Tatsumi. The eight volumes are facsimile reprints of the originals. The dollar price is $980 for the set, $130 for individual volumes (inquire for prices in pounds sterling). Details from Routledge, <info@routledge.com>, <http://www.routledge.com/routledge.htm>, 800/634-7064, 29 W 35th Street, New York, NY 10001-2299.

Young Adult Science Fiction

Although SF specifically written for

“Bill Gibson and the Cabana Boys,” Locus 19, no. 5 (May 1986): 14, 52.


Landon, Brooks. "Cyberpunk Writer William Gibson on Authoring the Script for younger readers could be argued to date from the earliest years, as a publisher marketing category it is much more re­cent, developing after World War II. The Heinlein juveniles from Scribner’s are fairly early examples. Children’s literature specialists have discussed it episodically, but only in the past two decades have scholars paid sustained attention to young adult (YA) SF. Hal Hall provides bibliographic access to much of the ma­terial, beginning with his *Science Fiction and Fantasy Reference Index, 1878–1985*, under the headings “Children’s SF” (most of the entries) and “Young Adult SF” (nine entries), and continuing in his supplemental indexes. C. W. Sullivan III at East Carolina University edited *Science Fiction for Young Readers* (Greenwood, 1993), whose sixteen essays focus on specific authors.

Due this spring from Greenwood is his *Young Adult Science Fiction*, several of whose essays focus on YA SF in selected countries (USA, UK, Canada, Ger­many, Australia), whereas others discuss more general topics (women in Hein­lein’s juveniles, SF in comic books, etc.). Mike Levy contributed a comprehensive secondary bibliography of SF for children and YAs. Last November, Twayne pub­lished *Presenting Young Adult Sci­ence Fiction* by Suzanne Elizabeth Reid, most of whose chapters are cen­tered on individual authors. Both the Reid and Sullivan books will be reviewed in these pages.

Neil Barron

June 2–6, 1999: SFRA, Mobile, Ala.; Tom Brennan, English Dept., U of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688; <tbrennan@jaguar1.usouthal.edu>

July 9–11, 1999: Readercon 11, Waltham, Mass.; Readercon, Box 381246, Cambridge, MA 02238-1246; <zeno@mit.edu>


September 2–6, 1999: Aussiecon 31/1999 Worldcon, Melbourne, Australia; Aussiecon 3, GPO Box 1212K, Melbourne VIC 3001 or Box 688, Prospect Heights, IL 60070-0688; <info@aussic around.org>

November 4–7, 1999: World Fantasy Convention, Providence, R.l.; WFC, Box 1010, Framingham, MA 01701; <wfc@mcfi.org>

May 11–14, 2000: World Horror Con, Denver, Colo.; WHC2000 Inc., Box 32167, Aurora, CO 80041-2167; <tbarker12@aol.com>

June 5, 2000: SFRA, Cleveland, Ohio

May 24–27, 2001: SFRA, Schenectady, N.Y.; SFRA 2001, Box 2085, Albany, NY 12220-0085; <wombat@sff.net>

Neil Barron


Snead, Elizabeth. “His Future is Closer than You Think.” USA Today (September 2, 1993), Sec. D, p. 1.


FICTION REVIEW GUIDELINES

The SFRAReview’s guidelines for fiction review writers are an extension of the SFRA’s mission and the Review’s audience. Reviewers should keep in mind that the Science Fiction Research Association exists to encourage scholarship and further excellence in education, and base evaluations upon those concerns. Thus, while aesthetic questions are important, they are secondary to appraisals of the work’s scholarly and academic promise.

Reviews should include the following elements:

1. Description of the book. Although the review certainly could include a brief synopsis of the plot, it is more important that it provide a description of what the book is about. This means identifying what subgenres the work touches on. Is it a time travel story? Alternate history? Space opera? Military SF? All of these? Keep in mind that you are trying to help scholars and academics determine whether the book fits within a given class or research program.

2. Contextualization of the book. In addition to describing the book, the review should locate the book within the context of the works of the author, within any subgenres from which the work borrows, or the SF tradition. The goal of such contextualization should be to explore the relationships between the text at hand and other works with which it might be compared or contrasted in a scholarly or academic approach. Does it address gender issues in ways reminiscent of The Left Hand of Darkness? Is it an homage to Wells’s War of the Worlds? Does it explore issues that the author has examined in earlier works?

3. Assessment of the book’s scholarly and academic potential. The review should provide some ideas about the
kinds of scholarly or academic approaches that might offer the most fruitful vantage points from which the work can be viewed. Does the book raise interesting issues? Offer intriguing insight?

Assignment

Although I will be requesting review copies of important books from publishers and assigning them to those who have expressed interest, I will accept queries if reviewers have texts that they would like to evaluate. The Review may print multiple reviews of the same work by different reviewers, if doing so provides sufficiently divergent viewpoints. If you would like to become a reviewer, please e-mail your name, address, e-mail address, and up to five areas of interest (authors, periods, subgenres, etc.) to <SFRAReview@aol.com>.

Format

All submissions should conform to the Review’s overall submission policy and should be between 500 and 1,000 words long. The fiction editor reserves the right to ask for rewrites or to reject reviews, particularly unsolicited reviews.

Craig Jacobsen

BEAM ME UP

Gene Weingarten suffered from groin pain and was given Urised by his urologist, a drug that has a colorful side effect: It turns your urine “Bic pen blue.” In his book, he says: “Once, as I was standing at one of those trough urinals in a bathroom at a football game, I became aware that the man next to me was staring down at me, slack jawed... I zipped up, pulled a cigarette lighter out of my pocket, and spoke into it in a robotic voice: ‘Gardak reporting. Earth colonization plans complete. Initiating return to mother ship.’”

Neil Barron


FANTASTIC BARGAIN

Peter Sands


Teaching science fiction or fantasy literature sometimes presents its greatest challenge in selecting, rather than discussing, texts. We work in a genre of ephemera: events that never happened, in times that never were, published in books whose presence in the material world is only slightly more tangible. Paperbacks in particular go out of print quickly enough that even teaching "contemporary" authors can pose a problem.

Teaching canonical or "mainstream" authors as SF or fantasy writers poses other problems, though, not least of which is the inconvenience and difficulty of finding editions specifically geared toward teaching genre fiction. Editions that select the speculative fiction of mainstream authors go out of print more readily than do "complete works" or "definitive editions." For a prolific author—as Jack London was—the problem at the very least makes selection of teaching materials cumbersome. So the reissue of Dale Walker's short selection of Jack London's fantastic fiction by Bison Books is welcome indeed.

London (1876–1916) was very prolific, both in short fiction and long. He is best known as the author of The Call of the Wild and The Sea-Wolf, two mainstays of American literature. But he also regularly wrote stories of science fiction or fantasy published in magazines. This collection reprints fifteen of those, ranging from his first fantasy story, "Who Believes in Ghosts?"—published in his high school literary magazine—to the better-known "The Red One" and “The
Standing of what history is and is not. My seven-year experience teaching in an institutional verifiable slip-up is the kiss of death in an alternative history. Another reason authors of such works had really better know what they're talking about. The occasional attention at twice the rate of The Star Rover and twenty times the rate of Before Adam, to judge by the number of citations in the MLA bibliography over the past two decades. Walker excludes The Iron Heel because he finds it not fantastic enough outside its framing devices.

London's output varied in quality and staying power, as might be expected from the author of nearly two hundred published stories, but he often engaged certain core themes. These stories range through his idiosyncratic reading of socialist principles—"A Curious Fragment," "Goliath," "The Strength of the Strong"—to his engagement with metaphysics—"A Thousand Deaths"—and his interest in prehistory and geographic remoteness—"A Relic of the Pleistocene" and "When the World Was Young." For good measure, there is even a classic example of the racialist Othering strategy known as "the yellow peril"—"The Unparalleled Invasion," which tells the story of how the rest of the world defeats the threat posed by China and highlights London's racial views.

This book is not a complete replacement for other short editions of London's work, such as Jack London Short Stories (1991), which contains fifty stories. That excellent book shares "A Relic of the Pleistocene," "The Unparalleled Invasion," "The Strength of the Strong," "War," and "The Red One," which are arguably the strongest pieces in the Walker collection. Other publishers are in on the London act, too: Citadel Twilight publishers put out The Science Fiction Short Stories of Jack London in 1993, a 211-page collection of London's SF. But this is an inexpensive, attractively designed book that, if nothing else, reprints what may be the first Viagra short story: "The Rejuvenation of Major Rathbone." Aside from the phallic pun of its title, "Rathbone" offers the following observation regarding the chemical rejuvenation of the elderly male: "I see, now, that great care must be exercised in the administration of our lymph—the greatest of care is we should wish to avoid all manner of absurdities in the conduct of the patient."

Who says SF isn't prescient?


Alternative history has never been my favorite genre. One reason is that authors of such works had really better know what they're talking about. The occasional verifiable slip-up is the kiss of death in an alternative history. Another reason is that until fairly recently I don't think that I had a sufficiently evolved understanding of what history is and is not. My seven-year experience teaching in an interdisciplinary American Studies program for college freshmen has caused me to think of history as the often unlikely convergence of irresistible forces and pure accident. What would have become of European civilization had the Mongols not halted their unstoppable march across the continent to return to Asia to choose a
new khan? Suppose Wayna Qhapaq had not died of smallpox and Pizzaro had had to deal with him rather than Atawallpa? Finally, I’ve also come to think of almost any history text as an alternative history. The pilgrims and their successors celebrated the plagues that nearly drove coastal Indians to extinction as divine intercession, but by the mid-nineteenth century, American history texts deleted the mass deaths from memory in order to accommodate the myth of the “vanishing Indian” and the colonial version of social Darwinism—and, no doubt, to pave the way for historically inaccurate elementary school Thanksgiving pageants.

*Cliff the Wind* is an intelligent alternative history that displays its author’s meticulous knowledge of the post–Civil War campaign against the Plains Indians as well as her appreciation for the enormity of her task. The novel posits that one Lakota leader, Touch-the-Clouds, unites his people, forms alliances with other unconquered tribes as far away as Arizona, and adopts what he needs of nineteenth-century technology to wage a successful defense against the Wasichu advance. Like Temujin, the future Genghis Khan and hero of Sargent’s epic novel *Ruler of the Sky*, Touch-the-Clouds realizes that preserving as much of the present as possible for his people will necessitate confrontation with the complex societies on their borders and that such confrontation cannot be successful without some potentially unpopular cultural adaptations. He is also a man of vision, literally. His dream of a Mongol warrior motivates him and prepares the way for his acceptance of assistance from Chinese arms makers and a Russian Alaskan seeking freedom for the northern territory that has recently been purchased by the United States.

Sargent’s treatment of historical forces and accident are impressive. Touch-the-Clouds never questions his people’s right to self-determination, but one of his allies, Lemuel Rowland, a Seneca raised by whites and who served on U. S. Grant’s staff in the Civil War, is torn between the white and Indian worlds. Like Catherine Lematre, Mohawk heroine of Sargent’s 1982 short story “The Broken Hoop,” Rowland (Poyeshah) and his visionary Lakota lover Katia (Graceful Swan) have internalized the conflicting values of both cultures. Early in the book, Rowland believes that the best the Indians can hope for is to buy time to make the transition to reservation life easier. Thus an important task for a would-be North American Genghis Khan is to help purge Indians of the white man’s view of them.

At the same time, Touch-the-Clouds understands that the prevailing myth of the vanishing Indian and a blind faith in Manifest Destiny and progress make it difficult for whites to have too much sympathy with what their culture regards as the doomed savages of the Plains. Couple these problems with the Wasichus’ numerical and technological advantages, and the triumph of Touch-the-Clouds seems pretty unlikely.

On the other hand, post–Civil War America was a nation plagued by sectional, racial, and economic tensions, many of which have been glossed over in what passes for high school history texts. When Grant assumed the Presidency in 1869, he was faced with Radical Republicans who had impeached his predecessor, unreconstructed Southerners ready to take up arms to preserve white supremacy, economic instability, and the unbridled greed of unscrupulous men whose taste for wealth had been fed by war profits and who would sacrifice anything—the Union victory, the war veterans, the Indians, and Grant himself—to satisfy their appetites. Although Grant was an ineffectual executive, his devotion to the causes for which the Union had fought and his national stature kept the lid on for a few years. In Sargent’s novel, the often tipsy President is killed by a speeding carriage and is succeeded by one of the nation’s most corrupt office holders, Vice President Schuyler Colfax. His ineptitude helps set in motion a series of events that lead to a coup in Washington, the repression of civil rights, and a vicious war against the Lakota. Lakota diplomacy and the excesses of the usurpers in Washington make the Indians look pretty good to many Americans, and history is rewritten as the Lakota join outraged whites in an attack on the nation’s capital.
The vision of Touch-the-Clouds and the untimely death of President Grant are the linchpins of the historical extrapolation, but Sargent's thinking about history is deeper than this. *Climb the Wind* is a book about visions. The Indians in the novel are troubled by two conflicting visionary worlds; one is ours, the one in which Custer died at the Little Bighorn and the Lakota were slaughtered at Wounded Knee. The other is the one in which Touch-the-Clouds destroys Custer's men without a trace at the Greasy Grass, thus preempting the history that we know. These worlds are symbolized, respectively, in Katia's vision as the broken hoop and in Rowland's dream as Touch-the-Clouds' pronouncement that "the circle is closed." Like the Mule in Asimov's Foundation books, Touch-the-Clouds, assisted by a careless U. S. Grant, is the wild card, the historic mutation that allows what is for us the alternative vision to prevail.

What, then, are the limits of Sargent's vision? Having read *Ruler of the Sky*, I expected Touch-the-Clouds to ride triumphantly into Washington, the ghost dance made real. After all, the great khan's grandson became emperor of China. Although Touch-the-Clouds is victorious, the facts of history, among them the numerical superiority, devotion to progress, and traditional racism of the Euro-Americans, would make the rise of a Lakota emperor a hard-to-believe ending. The balance of power at the end of the novel is not what came to pass in the 1870s and '80s as we know them, but neither is it a total reversal. The nature of the long-term relationship among the peoples of the continent is not certain; much will depend on how the western tribes balance their traditional values and practices with changes that they will need to make in order to forestall or prevent the eventual sweep of whites across the land. In her engrossing new novel, Pamela Sargent bends the course of the mighty river of history, but she channels it on a course that is plausible and open-ended.

**Fiction Review**

**EXCITING PREQUEL**


*A Deepness in the Sky* is a prequel to Vinge's Hugo Award–winning space opera, *A Fire upon the Deep* (1992). Set several thousand years in our future, but some thirty thousand years earlier than the previous novel, *Deepness* shows us a time when humanity has developed a sizeable intergalactic civilization within a volume of space several hundred light years across, but has not yet had any real dealings with the multitude of sentient alien species that were so important to *A Fire upon the Deep*, nor is humanity as yet aware of the peculiar and complex physics that structure life within Vinge's galaxy. Still, the human race has made a start at galactic empire. Several interstellar human civilizations are old enough to have risen to prominence and then collapsed more than once. Not the least of these, Earth, has actually been wiped out and reseeded with human life on at least three occasions.

The Qeng Ho are the glue that holds humanity together. Traveling at sublight speeds, they trade between the worlds, picking up volunteers as they go. Spending much of their lives in suspended animation, some of the Qeng Ho traders are hundreds of years old and have seen entire human societies rise and fall. Now, however, word has come to them of the discovery of an alien civilization and, just on the brink of space flight, the species the Qeng Ho dub Spiders can be considered as potential trading partners. The aliens live on a world that circles a peculiar sun. The OnOff star is a variable brown dwarf that spends most of its time too dim to sustain any form of life on the surface of its lone planet. Every two hun-
Vernor Vinge is a talented writer who deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as Gregory Benford, Greg Bear, Joan Slonczewski, and Iain M. Banks as being among the leading proponents of what is often labeled hard science fiction, but might just as well be called literary space opera. Each of these writers produces stories set in outer space and involving alien cultures and heroic adventure that are clearly descended from the work of E. E. Smith, A. E. Van Vogt, Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, and Larry Niven. Each of these writers, Vinge not the least among them, features a wide range of fascinating scientific ideas and exactly the kind of sense of wonder-inducing pyrotechnics that made authors like Van Vogt and Clarke great. Where the new, more literary space opera writers differ from their predecessors, however, is in their more substantial interest in such traditional mainstream literary values as character development and style. Vinge, for example, gives us a number of characters, some human, some Spider, who are extremely well rounded, convincing, and morally complex. We simply find out more about and care more about the aging and secretive Qeng Ho trader Pham Nuwen and the feisty but eccentric Spider scientist Sherkaner Underhill than we did about the protagonists of earlier space operas.

*A Deepness in the Sky* looks to be a solid early candidate for the 1999 Hugo Award, and I strongly recommend it. The book stands entirely on its own, but you might want to read *A Fire upon the Deep* first anyway. Doing so will make you privy to a number of secrets and mysteries that are merely hinted at in the new novel, and this all by itself will add a certain delicious irony to your reading of Vinge’s latest.

**Fiction Review**

**A NEW CLASSIC**

Steven Silver


Many of Jules Verne’s fans accredit the French novelist with an amazing ability to predict technological advances and scientific breakthroughs. In 1909, his son, Michel Verne, published his posthumous novel, *The Chase of the Golden Meteor (Chasse au météore)*, a novel about a scientific dispute over the priority of discovery of a strange asteroid that was captured by Earth’s gravity. Although the novel doesn’t detail any futuristic devices, it does portend the idea of an asteroid...
striking the Earth, a notion that seems to have been the theme of 1998. Bison Books has elected to rerelease The Chase of the Golden Meteor to coincide with the release of the films Deep Impact and Armageddon as well as the novels Moonfall, Newton’s Cannon, and Rogue Star, all of which explore the idea of a large rock striking the Earth. Although the new crop of fiction looks at the impact from a disastrous point of view, Verne’s novel took a more scientific, social, and financial angle.

The story follows the dispute between Sydney Hudelson and Dean Forsyth, two amateur astronomers whose friendship is threatened by their financial angle. Verne’s commission does not come up with any easy answers regarding the simultaneous discovery of the bolide. Making matters worse is the fact that Hudelson’s daughter is on the verge of marrying Forsyth’s nephew. Their dispute is brought to a head when the object’s orbit is changed and it become clear that the meteor will land somewhere on the Earth. Each man claims the asteroid, now known to be made of solid gold, for his own. Unknown to them, Zephyrin Xirdal, a French genius, also believes he has the right to claim the meteor, since it was his machine that caused the bolide’s orbit to degenerate.

Verne’s characters are painted with very broad strokes, with the result that none of them come across as real or as interesting as his best creations, such as Captain Nemo. Instead, Verne focuses on the Forsyth–Hudelson feud, which seems almost to be based on the similar scientific feud between nineteenth-century paleontologists Othniel Marsh and Edward Cope. With the discovery that the bolide is gold and descending to Earth, the issue of ownership is taken from the two scientists as an international commission is established to determine ownership. Verne’s commission does not come up with any easy answers regarding the meteor. Their wrangling over the issue seems to foretell the type of debate that occurs in the United Nations.

Verne’s strength is his ability to take a single idea and extrapolate its social and technological ramifications. In The Chase of the Golden Meteor, he focuses this ability by showing the effects the discovery has on the families of the discoverers and the society in which they live. Although seemingly simplistic in modern terms, Verne’s depiction of Whaston, Virginia, does ring true for the times.

The Chase of the Golden Meteor is an early attempt to depict the type of meteoric collision with the Earth that saw much attention in 1998. An entertaining novel in its own right, it provides an interesting baseline when looking at the various works now available.

Fiction Review

Strange Indeed

Everett F. Bleiler


Edward Heron-Allen (1861–1943) was a prominent British marine biologist whose technical works fill several pages in the catalog of the British Library. He was president of the British Microscopical Society, a member of many learned societies, translator of Omar Khayyam from Persian, and an authority on the hand-craft making of violins. (His Violin-Making, As It Was and Is [1882] contains a portrait, a pasted-in photographic print, for those curious about his appearance.) He also wrote fiction under the pseudonym Christopher Blayre.

His two early collections of short stories, The Purple Sapphire and Other Posthumous Papers (London: Philip Allan, 1921) and an enlarged edition, The
Strange Papers of Christopher Blayre (London: Philip Allan, 1939), contain a total of twelve stories, supernatural and science fiction, united by the common narrative tactic of being confidential papers deposited with the Registrar of the University of Cosmopoli, not to be released until the deaths of their authors. These stories are intelligent, reasonably well-written, somewhat quirky, and stiff, in the manner of the late nineteenth century. In 1931, Heron-Allen privately published a third collection, Some Women of the University, in an edition of one hundred copies, obviously a very rare book. It contained four stories, two of which, “Zum Wildbad” (about lesbianism and vampirism) and “The Boots” (about a very strange auntie), are excellent. All sixteen of these stories are reprinted in the present book.

The high point of Collected Strange Papers, however, is the inclusion of “The Cheetah-Girl,” a story of about 18,000 words. According to tradition, which is probably valid, the author planned to include it in The Purple Sapphire, but the publisher refused to print it, as he considered it unsuitable for commercial publication because of its sexual content. Heron-Allen then prepared an edition of twenty copies, perhaps bound-up galleys, and gave them to depositary libraries and to a few friends. Needless to say, this only edition of “The Cheetah-Girl” is of legendary rarity.

“The Cheetah-Girl” describes candidly, in social and biological terms, an experiment in which Menagerie Sal, the nadir of prostitutes and who copulates with animals as a spectacle, is impregnated under laboratory conditions by a cheetah. The experimenting biologist had overcome the barriers to intergeneric fertilization by chemical means. A girl child is born, almost completely human in appearance, but with a feline, patterned lanugo. She matures into a beautiful woman—generally speaking, a human—but with a violent estrus and, as it turns out, feline philoprogenitiveness. The narrative is told from the points of view of the biologist and later of a sturdy don who cannot resist her sexual appeal, marries her despite vague warnings, discovers her history too late, and is torn by the knowledge of what he thinks he must do.

The story is not pornography. Although the author frankly discusses prostitution, unconventional sexuality, abortion, and other taboo topics of the day, he does so in a technical, dispassionate manner. It was apparently considered obscene in 1921, but today it would not raise many eyebrows.

Heron-Allen acknowledges his debt to Wells’s The Island of Doctor Moreau, and a modern reader may perceive possible echoes from Hans Heinz Ewer’s Alraune and Arthur Machen’s The Great God Pan, but Heron-Allen’s story is highly original and an almost unknown landmark in science fiction. The development is excellent, and the story is well worth reading.

The present edition can be recommended for libraries with developed collections of fantastic fiction.
story. This April, Tor will publish his novel, *The Silicon Dagger*. His remarkable record in continually adapting to changing markets over the past seventy years is thoroughly documented by this admirable bibliography, which benefits from the efforts of fans and scholars over many years, including Robert E. Myers, whose *Jack Williamson: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (G. K. Hall, 1980) is effectively superseded.

A chronology from 1908 to 1997 includes something I’ve rarely seen for any author: the amount of money earned for his SF writings, at least through 1973, which gives real meaning to the word “hardscrabble.” The eight pages are no substitute for his Hugo Award-winning 1984 autobiography, *Wonder’s Child: My Life in Science Fiction*, a very personal and moving account.

Hauptmann’s work is an excellent author bibliography—thorough, accurate, and very well organized. The detailed chronicle of books and stories is supplemented by a number of useful lists, such as a chronological listing of Williamson’s fiction, by magazine source, by decade, languages in which his work has appeared, etc. Three terms Williamson invented in 1951 are now standard: genetic engineering and terraform (from novels), and psionics (from a story). He had an asteroid named for him in honor of his 86th birthday, thanks to the efforts of Roger Zelazny and David Brin.

Some writers boast of 20 years’ experience. Sometimes this means essentially one year repeated twenty times, with little growth evident. That certainly doesn’t apply to Jack Williamson, who may have slowed a bit but gives no indication of having stopped growing. A model bibliography, a model life.

**NONFICTION REVIEW**

**DISCH DREAMS**

Neil Barron


Disch (b. 1940) is a respected but not popular writer of SF and some horror fiction, with a semiseparetate life as a poet, writer of children’s fiction, and critic. His heterodoxy was evident in his first novel, 1965’s *The Genocides*, in which aliens eliminate humans by fumigation, a decidedly downbeat conclusion rejected by the dozens of novels and films, before and since, that depict plucky humans defeating alien invaders. More recently you may recall his chapter to what he calls in the February 1992 *Atlantic*, in which he argues that SF is primarily a children’s literature. Knowing this, you wouldn’t expect, and you don’t get, anything resembling a standard, consensus history.

He begins by rejecting the tired truism that the golden age of SF is twelve, when we begin to read it and develop a sense of wonder. Today, SF’s icons—rocket ships, robots, aliens, etc.—are standard fixtures in the lives of preschoolers. They don’t graduate to comics and pulps, as his generation did, but to TV, film and computer monitors, for better or worse.

*Page* Brian Aldiss, Disch argues for Poe as the father of SF and devotes a chapter to what he calls “our embarrassing ancestor,” whose many stories anticipate themes common in later SF. He places SF in the tradition of tall tales and lying, arguing that SF “has a special claim to be our national literature, as the art form best adapted to telling the lies we like to hear and to pretend we believe.”

He investigates a handful of common themes in chapters on space travel, nuclear holocaust, *Star Trek* (a bland, utopian future in pajamas), drugs, sex, and feminism (some very sharp jabs here), religion, politics, imperialism in space, and race relations. His comments on stories by many of the field’s best-known figures,
past and present, reflect a thorough knowledge of SF, both as an insider and an outsider (he largely ceased writing SF two decades ago) and the wider world in which it developed. But admirers of many of the writers he discusses with wit may be uncomfortable or enraged.

Gary Wolfe’s review in the May 1998 Locus discusses the survey’s principal weaknesses: its scattershot approach and an argument that often indefensibly tries to link SF with pseudoscience and with occultism and cultists generally, part of his general view of SF as a contemporary form of the tall tale. His account also suggests haste, carelessness or editorial oversight—Stapledon, Wollheim, and Gernsback are all misspelled.

His concluding chapter, an allusion to Freud, is titled “The Future of an Illusion—SF Beyond the Year 2000,” and offers a bleak perspective. More than half the top ten grossing films of all time have been SF, but the economics of filmmaking dictates action-adventure and dumb plots. Similarly, the economics of book publishing favor undemanding series “for subteen audiences that were the SF equivalent to the Oz books and to girl-and-horse romances,” hard SF adventures, militaristic space operas, and cyberpunk. SF, like film, has become “product” to fill the racks of the chains, and “Novelists who do not make such an adaptation will find themselves squeezed to the sidelines of university and small press publications, like poets and nongenre midlist novelists.”

Don’t rely on this as you would, say, Aldiss’s Trillion Year Spree (1986) or Edward James’s Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century (1996). It’s more polemic than history, but if, like me, you like to throw dead cats into churches and believe one horse laugh is worth a dozen syllogisms, don’t miss this.

NONFICTION REVIEW

INVALUABLE INDEX

Neil Barron


Remember 3 × 5-inch index cards? They’re still around, and this index began in 1967 on such cards, well before Tom Clareson’s Science Fiction Criticism: An Annotated Checklist appeared in 1980. This index began as the two-volume set, Science Fiction And Fantasy Reference Index, 1878–1985 (Gale, 1987, $185), which covered more than 19,000 books, articles, essays, news items, and audiovisual items, most issued since 1945 in spite of the title. A 1985–1991 supplement followed in 1993 (Libraries Unlimited, 16,000+ items). This latest supplement adds more than 10,000 citations. About 90 percent of all citations are to English-language material. Hall estimates that these 45,000 items are still “perhaps 50 to 60 percent of the directly applicable material published to date,” even though most of the key genre magazines and fanzines were thoroughly indexed (two pages list all magazines indexed). These indexes supplement Hall’s book review indexes, three volumes from Gale (only one in print), covering reviews published 1923–1984, and in self-published annuals since, although Hall is some years behind in indexing reviews.

Hall acknowledges the help of others, but this indexing is still mostly a one-person project that’s extended over more than three decades. Any serious scholar should have access to these indexes, and larger university libraries should have acquired them. And SFRA members should realize the debt we all owe to Hall and consider him for a Pilgrim.

DIFFICULT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Neil Barron

Stephensen-Payne, Phil. Brian Stableford: Genetic Revolutionary; A Working Bibliography. Galactic Central, April 1997. x + 133 p., continuously paginated in two saddle-stapled booklets (part 1, major items, part 2, minor items). $7.50 from Chris Drumm, Box 445, Polk City, IA 50226-0445; or £5.00 from Phil Stephensen-Payne, ‘Imladris,’ 25A Copgrove Road, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS8 2SP, England, UK. ISBN 1-871133-49-1

Born in 1948, Stableford’s first story was published in 1965, his first book in 1969. He has an undergraduate degree in biology, a doctorate in sociology, and lectured at the University of Reading for about a dozen years before resuming a career as a freelance writer. Although his varied fiction has been widely praised, it hasn’t, so far, garnered the field’s major awards.
But his critical works, from reviews to full-length books, have brought him the J. Lloyd Eaton Award, the IAFA Distinguished Scholarship Award, and the Pioneer Award in 1996.

This is the forty-eighth in the publisher's Bibliographies for the Avid Reader series, begun by the late Gordon Benson, Jr., and one of the lengthiest. The back covers of these booklets list the complete series, which I think is kept in print, with volumes updated at irregular intervals. I've reviewed other booklets in this series, which is a bit more professional than when it started in 1980, before Benson joined with Stephensen-Payne, who's been responsible for the updates and all the more recent bibliographies.

The biggest single deficiency of the series is poor organization. Since Stableford has been and is fairly prolific, this weakness is more obvious than it might otherwise be. Dividing up material by and about the author into eighteen categories is cumbersome at best and disperses items that should be kept together. For example, reviews of books should follow listings of the books. Although most categories (e.g., short fiction, fiction books) are sequenced alphabetically by title, there's no master title index. Pagination isn't given for short fiction. Most of the needed information is included, but locating it is a real chore. The author should seriously consider adopting a format like that used in Richard Hauptmann's outstanding bibliography of Jack Williamson, the subject of the tenth bibliography in this series. The series is fairly reasonably priced as bibliographies go, but it isn't a very good value, even when the bibliographies are the only ones of their subjects.

One value that this specific bibliography has is to show the remarkable breadth and depth of Stableford's writings. I have for some years judged him the best candidate for a Pilgrim by a wide margin. Reading a handful of the critical works listed here may convince you as well.

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NONFICTION REVIEW

**GOREY GALORE**

Neil Barron


Ogdred Weary and Eduard Blutig are: Nobel Prize winners from the 1930s; 1969 candidates for the Pilgrim; 1988 candidates for the Booker; and co-owners of a Sutter Street kosher deli. If you guessed none of the preceding, congratulations. The first is an anagram of Edward Gorey, the second a pseudonym. Gorey (b. 1925) is a genuine discoverer, a person who sees what everyone else sees and thinks what no one else has thought. He not only thinks it, he draws it, and has been doing so since infancy. His first book, *The Unstrung Harp*, was published in 1963, one of the 113 small tomes he's solely authored through 1995. Add to that hundreds of other books he's designed or illustrated, plus the work used in dolls, on mugs, calendars, and t-shirts. His sketches served as the basis for the animated titles for the PBS Mystery series.

You can learn a lot more from this exemplary guide. I've never systematically collected Gorey (or anyone else), but I was astonished to discover I had a dozen or so of his remarkable books, including an autographed copy of his first one. If the market values for fine copies are fairly accurate, and the guide notes wide variation in asking prices, my collection might sell for $1,700 if I could find, or wanted to find, fellow Gorey nuts. If you're merely curious—and you should be—why Gorey inspires such deranged devotion, check out *The World of Edward Gorey* by Clifford Ross and Karen Wilkin (Abrams, 1996). In the meantime, I'm going to surround myself by urns and fondle my collection.

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NONFICTION REVIEW

**AWARDS BARGAIN**

Neil Barron


DeVore mimeographed the first version of this listing in 1970, mostly for members of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA). Like Topsy, it grewed, with the last edition appearing in 1986, which included the ancient International Fantasy Awards (1951–57), the Hugo Awards, and the Nebula Awards. This new edition updates the last edition and adds the World Fantasy awards (begun 1975), all through calendar year 1997 awards.
DeVore, retired from the post office, has been and still is a dealer (send wants; he doesn’t issue catalogs). Donald Franson, shown as a coauthor on earlier editions, provides a ten-page history of the Hugos. DeVore discusses the Nebula Awards, and Roger Silverstein, a Detroit-area pediatrician, found and corrected many errors in earlier editions and in other reference works; he also wrote a two-page introduction to the fantasy awards. John Gamble keyboarded all the text, and Silverstein proofed it very carefully. George Price, who “it” Advent, formatted the text and arranged for printing.

Awards are listed chronologically, with the winner in boldface. A fifty-six-page index provides access by authors/ winners and by titles (novels, nonfiction, and shorter fiction). Original sources of fiction are shown but not the multitude of reprints of many works.

Why review another awards listing? Because almost all list only winners, often of many awards not shown here (mostly trivial). DeVore lists winners and runners-up. This is important, because in many cases only a few votes separate the winner and the runners-up. Anyone wishing to read earlier works judged best should consider the runners-up as well and may judge them superior, given the capricious nature of awards. If you’re willing to settle for winners only and/or want all the other awards, you’ll want Reginald’s Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards: A Comprehensive Guide to the Awards and Their Winners, compiled by Daryl F. Mallett and Robert Reginald, 3d ed, Borgo Press, 1993. My judgment is that DeVore is preferable, and at the price is a bargain.

GOOSEBUMPS

Michael Levy


Well, the R. L. Stine wave has apparently crested and his Goosebumps books have been replaced by Animorphs and Redwall as the most popular children’s fantasy, science fiction, or horror series. Before we begin to feel sorry for Mr. Stine, however, it should be noted that both the Goosebumps and the Fear Street books still continue to outsell virtually all adult horror fiction this side of Stephen King. Patrick Jones’s What’s So Scary about R. L. Stine? is the first volume in the new Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature, which is itself intended as a replacement for the now-defunct Twayne Young Adult Authors series. Many other additions to the series are currently in the planning stages, evidently, including volumes on such young-adult (YA) fantasy and science fiction writers as Robin McKinley and Margaret Mahy.

As was the tradition in the Twayne series, this volume offers a solid, straightforward survey of Stine’s life and career. Jones begins by defending his choice of subject matter. Although it’s true that Stine is not a writer worthy of comparison with such literary YA novelists as Robert Cormier and Richard Peck, Jones argues quite forcefully that it is worthwhile to analyze why Stine has been so enormously popular. What is it about his rather formulaic plotting and gross-out climaxes that so attract young readers? With more than 250 titles in print, most of them horror, a significant number also qualifying as science fiction, Stine’s oeuvre cannot be analyzed on a book-by-book basis, so Jones concentrates on the major themes and techniques that run through the author’s work.

Before the first Goosebumps book was written, Stine had considerable success as an author of joke collections and then of multiple storyline books of the Choose Your Own Adventure sort, most of which were science fiction or fantasy. He later did a stint as head writer for the successful children’s show Eureka’s Castle. He got started on horror fiction in 1986 when Scholastic was looking for a way to cash in on the enormous success of Christopher Pike’s early YA novels. Stine wrote Blind Date in three months, and this led first to the Fear Street series and then Goosebumps. Stine never looked back.

Jones concludes his monograph with a detailed look at Stine’s generally negative critical reception. Although even-handed in his evaluation of this criticism, he suggests that much of it is based on either a mistrust of horror fiction in general or a dislike of series fiction, fiction that makes no attempt to be either literary or moral. He points out quite rightly that Stine’s work, although occasionally rather gross, is much less terrifying than that of Stephen King and suggests that, after all, “reading is reading is reading.” Perhaps it would be better if kids read more literary fiction, but in fact Stine has reached a large, generally male young adult audience that might otherwise not read anything at all.

All in all, What’s So Scary about R. L. Stine? strikes me as an excellent study of its type, one that bodes well for the entire Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature series. R. L. Stine’s work may not be worthy of consideration as literature per se, but its popularity is a significant indicator of certain important aspects of the contemporary American psyche. I enjoyed this clearly written, perceptive study and recommend it to anyone interested in what teenagers are reading today.
Dear Editors,

In a book review in the Aug/Oct 1998 issue, Solomon Davidoff says that he “knows that most if not all” back-cover blurbs “are solicited with an added incentive (read: paycheck)”…

I have written a lot of blurbs. Most of them were solicited—how else would one know an unpublished novel existed? The few unsolicited ones I have written were for books by writers I know who showed me their work in MS, and I wrote the editor offering to blurb or review. No added incentive was ever offered me, by any publisher, for any blurb. (Read: no paycheck.) Unless you count a copy of the book when it comes out as a big incentive…and some publishers don’t even send one.

A big disincentive of blurbing is the fact that authors who have done some blurbing may get three or four 350-page parcels a week, each with a cover letter from the editor saying this is the greatest thing since Homer and he knows I’ll want to say so on the back cover. I scream when I see these things coming, and am pitifully grateful to editors who send a letter describing a MS and asking if I’ll read it and possibly comment. Mostly I say no, sometimes I say yes; at least I get an illusion of choice. But never has there been mention of money.

If the common practice really is to offer paychecks for blurbs, I’m a boob for doing it for free. And all the people who’ve blurred my books are boobs too. (Hurray for boobs!)

At this point I still believe that the common practice among writers is to give praise, and that only people involved in the manufacture of big-name-bestsellers and other booklike objects would offer or take money for a blurb. But Mr. Davidoff’s statement shook me up, because I not only write blurbs, I read them and am influenced by them. And so I want to ask: Does everybody “know” that blurbs are hired, are commodities for sale? If so, do you realize what your “knowledge” does to those of us who blur only books we like, and do it because we like them and hope to help them get read? It makes our intentions, our work, and our words meaningless. That’s heavy, man. Can anybody weigh into this with some real information?

Very truly yours,

Ursula K. Le Guin

Old Pilgrim
The SFRA is the oldest professional organization for the study of science fiction and fantasy literature and film. Founded in 1970, the SFRA was organized to improve classroom teaching; encourage and assist scholarship; and to evaluate and publicize new books and magazines dealing with fantastic literature and film, teaching methods and materials, and allied media performances. Among the membership are people from many countries—students, teachers, professors, librarians, futurologists, readers, authors, booksellers, editors, publishers, archivists, and scholars in many disciplines. Academic affiliation is not a requirement for membership.

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