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Negotiating the real: Culture and fantastical fiction 1843-1973

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the growth and practice of two distinct reading

techniques, with reference to fantastical fiction from 1843 to 1973. While

acknowledging that specific reading practices are not exclusive to particular groups

or individuals, it is proposed, broadly, that readers fall into two categories: those

who tend to be distanced from the text and approach it analytically; those who tend

to embrace the text and immerse themselves in its narrative. These two groups,

critical readers and experience readers, have their reading habits determined by

basic philosophical assumptions. One aim of the dissertation is to explore the link

between this division and divisions within the literary hierarchy, articulating a

methodology/typology of reading.

Criticism of texts in this dissertation involves discussion of the above

hypothesis, assessing the value assigned to literary works by each group of reader

and considering how the texts themselves investigate the hypothesis. Various

theories and critical concepts are engaged with, including those of Marxist

aesthetics, psychoanalysis, liberal humanism, cultural studies, and postmodernism.

The aim is to demonstrate the practice of both reading techniques and to draw

conclusions concerning their respective psychological and social significance.

The dissertation argues that fantastical fiction is often a site of interaction

between such binary opposites as realism/fantasy, high/popular, ideas/escape, and

polemic/amusing. The struggle between these opposites may provide a dialectic of

"critical" and "experience" reading.

Negotiating the Real:

Culture and Fantastical Fiction 1843-1973

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Declaration

Introduction

As a rule, an aesthetic preference is either something completely inexplicable or it is so corrupted by non-aesthetic motives as to make one wonder whether the whole of literary criticism is not a huge network of humbug.

George Orwell[1]

And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

William Blake[2]

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[1] George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," <u>An Age Like This: 1920-1940</u>, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 1 of <u>The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell</u>. (London: Secker, 1968) 449.
[2] William Blake, "The Garden of Love," <u>Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul</u>, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) 150.

The historical division of culture into high and low or popular has been problematic both ideologically and aesthetically. Often, popular works have been considered less significant or even worthless, a judgement that may be aesthetic or politically-based. However, much literary criticism on both sides of the political spectrum sees "true" or "real" or "important" literature as that which challenges pre-conceptions. Arguably, by dismissing popular fantastical works, these critical positions abandon one source of that challenge: the fantastic.

This term – "the fantastic" – is here used to describe any literature that departs from consensus reality.[3] The departure may be in the content of a piece, the obvious example being a story about magic or wholly imaginary worlds. These works of fantastical content, which will be labelled "fantasy", should not necessarily be confined to the popular genre of the same name (i.e. the so-called sword and sorcery novel); soap operas, romance fiction, and detective stories are just a few other manifestations of fantasy. Seemingly, fantasy is a common, perhaps definitive, feature of the popular. Of course, not all fantasy fiction can be classed as popular culture. Critics who deride genre fantasy, for whatever reason, are less likely to be hostile to texts like Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis. In order to distinguish high and popular fantastical literature, the term "popular-fantastic" will be applied where appropriate. While "fantasy" is distinct from "phantasy", a compensatory performance of wish-fulfilment emerging from unconscious drives, the former can be seen as a literary expression of the latter. Hence, "popular-fantastic" also conveys a link between the popular and wish-fulfilment, what is usually called "escapism".

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[3] To avoid confusion when an adjective is called for, the word "fantastical" will be used.

The fantastic can also deny apparently objective reality through its form. An ostensibly realist work, one which could not be considered fantasy, might qualify as fantastical through, for example, a style of description in which realism is undermined by overt use of metaphor and/or unusual language. Certain literary techniques and effects may thus confuse the real and the unreal. Although "popular-fantastic" generally defines works of fantasy (works with fantastical content) not considered high literature, it may also include popular fiction in which the fantastic occurs through form rather than content.

If the popular is dominated by fantasy and wish-fulfilment, then this may explain critical reaction toward it. When critics sympathetic to the popular and/or the fantastic are compared to those who are less approving, there is a bewildering opposition: the same justification, the same acknowledgement of the preponderance of escapism, is utilised in evaluations by both sides in this critical divide. Thus, the popular-fantastic has been labelled trivial and profound, damaging and beneficial. It has been regarded as part of the culture that imprisons us, and a means of liberation from that culture. If the same texts generate these disparate positions then it is likely that differing criteria are being used for their assessment. This dissertation argues that such differences result from a fundamental philosophical (that is to say, epistemological) assumption that informs how an individual reads.

The majority of readers who begin from a position of materialism tend to favour text-based, analytical reading and contemporary high culture.[4] This

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[4] In this dissertation, the term "materialism" will chiefly be used in connection with Marxist and other critical reading strategies. See Appendix.

"critical reading" is not necessarily to be considered synonymous with close reading, which can be associated with the attempt to transcend the materiality of the text or even materiality itself, as is the case with biblical exegesis. A useful example of critical reading is that employed by members of the Marxist group the Frankfurt School (including critics such as Theodor Adorno). Their self-aware negation of the conventions of capitalist society often depended on reading against a text and analytically considering literary effects rather than actually experiencing them. It was believed that, through this, social ideology could be deconstructed. These critics would therefore see escapism as a kind of sleep in which individual readers are ignorant of the real conditions of their lives.

Opposing critical reading are readers allowing for transcendence, the possibility of to some extent escaping material, deterministic forces. They incline toward a more immersive reading style, what might be called "experience reading". Readers in this group actively, sometimes fully self-consciously, embrace escapism and are at least open to the popular-fantastic on its own terms (as opposed to those cultural critics who use the popular to expose ideological trends). This approach can be seen in the Robert Louis Stevenson essay "A Humble Remonstrance" (1884). Gently arguing with Henry James, Stevenson contrasts the novel of character with what he calls the "dramatic" novel. This passion-based fiction is opposed to realism. Stevenson talks of the creative artist and thinker as someone whose method "is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality." He states that the novel exists through its

"immeasurable distance from life".[5] Most significantly, he sees two distinct types

of reading, favouring the former: "The luxury, to most of us, is to lay by our

judgment, to be submerged by the tale as by a billow, and only to awake, and

begin to distinguish and find fault, when the piece is over and the volume laid

aside."[6] Obviously, allowing oneself to be "submerged" by a story and

suspending judgment "only to awake [. . .] when the piece is over" is utterly

opposed to the method of critical reading outlined above. The experience reader

does not take a detached stance, analysing narrative; he or she embraces the text

and experiences narrative. Thus the term "experience" is used (rather than

"escape", for example) to emphasise that literary effects are performed by the

reader and are a part of his or her consciousness. One way to understand the

distinction between the critical and experience reader is to see it as analogous to

the differentiation between reading analytically and reading for pleasure.

Although, in the example of the Frankfurt School, there are readers who

consciously follow materialistic philosophy, many critical and experience readers

may arrive at their respective positions unconsciously. Furthermore, the proposed

existence of these two reading methods and the people who tend toward them

does not mean that they are mutually exclusive or that one kind of reader is

unable to read as the other does. Experience readers may read critically and vice

versa. It is even possible that both readers can exist within the same personality,

vying for dominance. Similarly, literary works that appear to be suited to one

reading practice may be read using the criteria of the other or of both

[5] Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," Victorian Criticism of the Novel, eds. Edwin M. Eigner and George W. Worth (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 217.
[6] Stevenson 218.

simultaneously. Other factors may also be involved, such as a materialist outlook creating a desire for escape. However, this dissertation suggests that, generally, each individual reader will have a preference for one of the reading schemes. A reading method that opposes philosophical assumptions may seem less "natural", aesthetically rewarding, or politically viable.

There are exceptions to the above model of reading practices, but it forms a useful schematic with which to examine the polarisation of culture in relation to the popular-fantastic. Thus far three binary oppositions have been introduced: 1) fantastic/realist; 2) high/popular; 3) critical/experience. Each of these will be considered separately in the theoretical overview that makes up the bulk of this introduction. At this stage it may be useful to illustrate how they relate to each other. Put simply, each is linked by the assumptions and requirements of readers. For example, an individual tending toward a critical approach will not be as attracted to the popular-fantastic as to those high-cultural works that (seemingly) provide greater opportunities for critical appraisal. The experience reader follows a similar path (though obviously on the opposite side of the three binaries). Therefore, in this model high culture may be considered "critical" writing, while popular fiction is "experience" writing (although the critical and experience positions are performed by the reader, certain works of fiction are apparently more suited to one than the other). Each reader, at least to some extent, is defined in opposition to the other. It is, however, most important to note that there is a degree of prejudice inherent in the choices made by readers: those who have a propensity for one side of the high/popular binary may be somewhat ignorant of

the other and what it can offer. In this dissertation fantastical texts are studied in terms of how they reflect the confrontation between opposites. The literary criticism in the chapters that follow sees both the writing and reading of fantastical fiction as a site of struggle between materialism and transcendentalism,[7] realism and imagination.

Starting with the assumption that neither materialist nor transcendentalist philosophies are supported conclusively by empirical or ontological evidence, this dissertation will attempt to maintain dialectics between these positions and between the reading practices that emerge from them, reveal what they have to offer a reader, and explore how useful they are in determining the nature of a literary work. It will be seen that fantastical texts include discussions on the fundamental basis of reality, the development and nature of the self, the form society should take, the validity of scientific and political models, and the fate of humankind. Regarding the experience of individual readers, it will be argued that the fantastic offers tools to combat alienation both internal and external, providing, through its pleasures, transgression of social constraints, access to the childhood self and to new selves and possibilities, as well as both a hint of the unknowable and a sense of immediacy. These two elements – debates carried out in the text and effects occurring in the psyche of the reader – suggest that a dialectic of materialist and transcendentalist thinking may be possible.

As a prelude to the main body of the dissertation, the bulk of this introduction is a theoretical overview relating to these three binaries. The first

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[7] This does not specifically refer to the American nineteenth-century literary and philosophical movement known as transcendentalism.

section investigates fantasy. It outlines Sigmund Freud's essay "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" and then describes work by several critics of fantastical fiction, including a detailed exposition of criticism by C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. Following this is a section exploring the high/popular cultural divide. This contrasts those who uphold the privileged position of high culture with those who seek acknowledgement of the popular. Thinkers considered include Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, F. R. Leavis, Richard Hoggart, and various cultural studies critics. A final section on experience reading attempts to provide a theoretical framework for what can seem a somewhat vague concept. This will consider the principles of reading theorists Stephen Greenblatt and Wolfgang Iser, and study some of Jacques Derrida's ideas, suggesting solutions to the question: what is reading pleasure?

In some cases, the dissertation appropriates ideas from a theorist under discussion. This is because some thinkers limit ideas of defamiliarisation and convention-breaking to the avant-garde or high modernism. As indicated in the first paragraph of this introduction, this limitation means that much of the fantastic, a potential challenge to preconceptions, is banished from the debate. Consequently, the arguments of some theorists are expanded to include the popular-fantastic.

Fantasy

The <u>Oxford English Dictionary</u> defines fantasy as:

1) In scholastic psychology: a. a mental apprehension of an object of perception; the faculty by which this is performed. b. The image impressed on the mind by an object of sense.

2) A spectral apparition, a phantom; an illusory experience.

3) a. Delusive imagination, hallucination; the fact or habit of deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions or reminiscences. b. Day-dream arising from unconscious wishes or attitudes.

4) a. Imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present. b. A mental image. c. A product of imagination, fiction, figment. d. An ingenious, tasteful, or fantastic invention. e. <u>esp.</u> in <u>Music</u>; a fantasia. f. A genre of literary compositions.

5) A supposition resting on no solid grounds; a whimsical or visionary notion or speculation.

6) Caprice, changeful mood; an instance of this; a caprice, whim.

7) Inclination, liking, desire.[8]

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[8] <u>The Oxford English Dictionary</u>. 2nd ed.

Thus there are two areas of meaning: fantasy is a mental process or object (verb or noun); fantasy is a particular type of art. In order to differentiate between the two, this dissertation uses the word "phantasy" to signify relevant mental processes or objects. "Fantasy" is used to specifically refer to literary works in which the content diverges from consensus reality. This is distinct from "the fantastic", which can refer to content and/or form. The "popular-fantastic" is a popular form that defies consensus reality and immerses the reader in a fully-realised fictional world, providing "escape".

* * *

Phantasy is a term from Freudian psychoanalysis. It defines an activity of the mind in which the unsatisfied desires emerging from unconscious drives are, in a limited and compensatory sense, gratified through a process similar to childhood play. A child, Freud suggests (1908), plays in order to control the immediate world. Play for the child is not frivolous; its opposite is therefore not the serious but the real,[9] which has implications for both fantastical and popular literature. Play involves the projection of imagination onto physical objects, and this is the very thing that distinguishes it from the phantasising of the adult.[10] As people mature they no longer play, but play is not actually given up – it is sublimated: "In the same way, the growing child, when he stops playing, gives up nothing but the link with real objects; instead of playing, he now phantasises. He builds castles in the air and creates what are called day-dreams." That is not to

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[9] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," trans. James Strachey, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, eds. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, vol. 9 (London: Hogarth, 1959) 144. Although it might be more accurate to say that for Freud the frivolous was not frivolous.

[10] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 144.

say the adult's phantasy is unrelated to play, however. On the contrary, adults are ashamed of their phantasies because they are childish.[11] Thus there is a conflict of the Pleasure and Reality principles.

Phantasy is a reaction to dissatisfaction with reality: "We may lay it down that a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one. The motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality."[12] Phantasy (particularly when self-reflective) may therefore be related to critical thought, to the critique of society.[13] Relating to childhood and reacting against the present, a phantasy is a projection of wish fulfilment into the future.[14] In this sense a phantasy, based in a childlike pastoral, reacting against society, can be revolutionary thought.

Fiction, Freud explains, can provide an alleviation of the adult's shame at his or her own phantasies. His use of the word "fiction" refers to work by popular authors, "not the writers most highly esteemed by the critics, but the less pretentious authors of novels, romances and short stories, who nevertheless have the widest and most eager circle of readers of both sexes."[15] This is a description of the form and readership of the popular-fantastic. Readers of these works identify with a central character and are given a sense of security by that character's simplicity and strength. This reveals, Freud believes, "[...] His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and every story."[16]

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[11] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 146

[12] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 146.

[13] "Critical" in the Frankfurt School sense: a self-aware negation of the conventions of capitalist society.

[14] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 147.

[15] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 149.

[16] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 150.

Presumably, Freud chooses the popular romance because he believes this genre most strongly relates to those attempts at control exhibited in childhood play and adult phantasy: literature read as compensation, a substitute for gratification. However, Freud extends the model to encompass "psychological" novels. He argues that the subjective ego position is occupied by a narrator, and that multiple character viewpoints are "the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes."[17] Novels in which the "hero" plays little part other than as an observer correlate to day-dreams in which the ego is a spectator.[18] With these two qualifications Freud suggests the two narratives of Bleak House, perhaps not completely unknowingly: it is known that he read the novel, though he disliked both the character and narrative of Esther.[19] Arguably, then, all literature could have the function of wish-fulfilment/gratification, if read in an appropriate way. However, it should be noted that, though Freud enlarges his conception of the literature of compensation beyond the simple romance, popular fantasy in particular is driven by unconscious desire. Works of this kind are "derived from the popular treasure-house of myths, legends and fairy tales. [. . .] it is extremely probable that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the secular dreams of youthful humanity."[20] Thus, in Freud's account phantasy, fantasy, and the popular are closely related.

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[17] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 150.
[18] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 151.
[19] Bert G. Hornback, "The Narrator of Bleak House," Dickens Quarterly 16.1 (1999): 3.
[20] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 152.

Freud implies that reading pleasure is the product of the fantastic in literature. This pleasure is the result of barriers between egos disintegrating as the revulsion of one ego at the phantasies of another evaporates (Freud does not explain why this should bring pleasure). Because phantasy is disguised, because it is offered within a "bribe" of mere aesthetic pleasure (when in fact it is a deep psychological pleasure that literature provides), it becomes acceptable.[21] To associate this process with liberation from alienating social pressures is not unreasonable. As Freud puts it, "our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds. It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer's enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame."[22]

* * *

Favouring a psychoanalytic and structuralist approach, Tzvetan Todorov (1973) believes the fantastic lies in a reader's hesitation over whether an event can be explained by consensus reality.[23] He suggests that this should derive from the hesitation of a character in the text, and that the reader must reject any kind of allegorical or poetic interpretation,[24] presumably because the fantastic is (by his definition) inexplicable. Of course, reading is more complicated than this – a reader might be capable of maintaining uncertainty at one level, and on another consider allegorical possibilities.

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[21] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 153.
[22] Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 153.
[23] Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. Richard Howard, The Cwru Press Translations (Cleveland, OH: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1973) 31.
[24] Todorov 33.

When the reader arrives at an explanation of narrative events, the fantastic

collapses and the text falls into one of two categories. If the events are considered

explicable from within consensus reality the story is "uncanny"; if events

genuinely contradict what is known, the story is "marvellous".[25] Thus, the

fantastic has no autonomous existence: "Here we find not the fantastic in the strict

sense, only genres [uncanny and marvellous] adjacent to it."[26] Todorov's

conception of the fantastic must be a performative moment of production, and

thus of experience reading. Interestingly, Todorov compares the uncanny, the

fantastic, and the marvelous with past, present, and future. The uncanny is based

on what is known (past), the marvellous on what might be (future), and the

fantastic on the experience of hesitation (present).[27] This is similar to Freud's

model of phantasy, and, indeed, Todorov pursues a psychoanalytic theory of the

fantastic, saying that there is "not an entire coincidence" between his uncanny and

Freud's.[28] The Freudian uncanny is a disturbing sensation caused by reading

certain literature. Freud dismisses the idea that this is based on hesitation, and

proposes that it is a reminiscence of "doubling" occurring in early development:

> The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance
>
> of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental
>
> stage - long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a
>
> more friendly aspect. The 'double' has become a vision of terror,

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[25] Todorov 41.
[26] Todorov 42.
[27] Todorov 42.
[28] Todorov 47.

just as after the fall of their religion the gods took on daemonic shapes."[29]

Whatever the validity of Freud's speculations, it is clear that the link between his and Todorov's categories of the uncanny is sensation arising from an encounter with the repressed past. Freud expands the idea by proposing the existence of a "repetition-compulsion" in the unconscious, always drawing out the uncanny.[30] Ultimately, the Freudian uncanny is associated with a horror of, and fascination for, regression. One factor that may cause it is a circumstance that makes the world seem numinous, thus reminding us of a stage in our mental development when we indeed saw the world in such a way.[31] In this respect, the uncanny is closer to Todorov's idea of the marvellous, except that it again refers to the past.

For Todorov, the fantastic allows an author to discuss taboos with impunity;[32] this mirrors Freud's claim that fantastical writing permits people to phantasise without guilt. Just as Freud links fantasy with the popular, Todorov notes, "[t]here exists a curious coincidence between the authors who cultivate the supernatural and those who, within their works, are especially concerned with the development of the action, or to put it another way, who seek above all to tell stories."[33]

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[29] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," Literary Theory: An Anthology, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Revised ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998) 163.
[30] Freud, "The Uncanny" 164.
[31] Freud, "The Uncanny" 165-166.
[32] Todorov 159.
[33] Todorov 162-63.

Oddly, despite Todorov's "structural approach" and his criticism for those who focus on the reader's experience,[34] experience reading plays a large part in his theory. In this sense he is similar to Roland Barthes, a structuralist/post-structuralist who nevertheless saw reading as rewriting, who championed the reader's input. The hesitation Todorov believes constitutes the fantastic is clearly an uncertainty the reader experiences. Uncertainty is an emotion or a mental state, not an analytical observation, and it does not have a material textual existence independent of the reader (while the genres of the uncanny and the marvellous are, arguably, present as material categories). Thus, it is distinct from critical analysis of the text and actually involves an acknowledgement of the reading process. Indeed, Todorov's insistence that hesitation relies on the reader rejecting allegorical or poetic interpretation implies that the fantastic requires a shunning of the analytic in order to exist. If we consider the fantastic to have a textual existence, other views are possible.

* * *

Writing on the fantastic in 1957, Northrop Frye uses a detailed approach of categorisation, based on the various Modes of what he calls Mythoi (singular: Mythos). Mythoi are the forms of fiction in which the fantastic may be present. They are: comic, romantic, tragic, and ironic. It is the Mode of a Mythos that determines whether it is fantastical. For example, the four Mythoi are all fantastical when written in the mythic Mode, while in the ironic Mode it is only the ironic Mythos that is (probably) fantastical. In this mode the other three Mythoi may only contain fantasy sardonically. Frye's treatment of the ironic

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[34] Todorov 35.

mode is particularly interesting. It uses what he terms "demonic" imagery: "the

world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion [. .

.] the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of

torture and monuments of folly." In this world heaven is inaccessible, and there is

the flavour of hell, either supernatural or secular, in the imagery.[35] Irony is to be

seen as distinct from satire, the latter having a clear moral framework while the

former is morally ambiguous.[36] The ironic Mythos in the ironic Mode is

particularly downbeat, showing "human life in terms of largely unrelieved

bondage."[37] Indeed, as Katherine Hume points out, the ironic Mode leaves

realism behind: "Once we reach the ironic mode, we have passed beyond the

world of realism. The picaro or trickster or stumblebum or any other type of anti-

hero usually embodies some negative realistic qualities, but he interacts with a

world that is a demonic caricature of the one we accept as real."[38] Put simply,

once negativity reaches a certain level it ceases to relate to consensus reality and

acquires the fantastical quality of such works as Kafka's The Trial. It is

interesting that, despite adopting what appears to be a structuralist perspective,

Frye sounds rather like an experience reader. He says, "[t]he world of literature is

a world where there is no reality except that of the human imagination;"[39] and

says "[i]t seems very difficult for many people to understand the reality and

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[35] Northrop Frye, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957) 147.
[36] Frye, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths" 223.
[37] Frye, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths" 238.
[38] Kathryn Hume, Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature (New York, NY: Methuen, 1984) 154.
[39] Northrop Frye, The Educated Imagination (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964) 96.

intensity of literary experience."[40] In fact, Frye was a committed Christian (and

thus transcendentalist), which may explain his sympathy for the experience

position. As was suggested earlier in this introduction, reading/writing practices

emerge from a fundamental philosophical assumption or presumption on the

nature of reality.

Influenced by Frye, Kathryn Hume also breaks the fantastic down into

types. In Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature

(1984), she states that a work of literature has one of four positions on reality.

These are: illusion, vision, revision, and disillusion. Illusion literature is escapist,

and Hume uses the pastoral as an example of it. While in what she calls

"outsider-pastoral" the characters visit arcadia with knowledge of what exists

beyond its borders,[41] "insider-pastoral" characters are natives, and the form

"encourages readers to draw upon personal [childhood] recollections."[42] By

contrast, the literature of disillusion (associated with modernism and roughly

analogous to Frye's category of the ironic mode) attempts to create a sense of

uncertainty and relativism. Revision literature is didactic. Its opposite, the

literature of vision (linked to postmodernism), is "a kind of mean between

escapist and didactic literature," operating not through force or flattery, but

through an invitation to the reader to accept another interpretation of reality.[43]

Works written in this latter form "make us feel the limitations of our notions of

reality, often presenting one that seems more rich, more intense, more coherent

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[40] Frye, The Educated Imagination 101.
[41] Hume 63.
[42] Hume 62. An example of this might be found in the work of A. A. Milne, one which correlates
with Freud's theory of phantasy.
[43] Hume xiii.

(or incoherent), or somehow more significant."[44] While these categories have some validity, their application to modernism and postmodernism is flawed. Modernism, for example, can certainly have the qualities of "vision". Similarly, postmodernism is so bound up with uncertainty and relativism that Hume's assertion (uncertainty and relativism belong to another classification) is hard to understand. Another possible flaw in Hume's four-category model of fantastical literature is that she presents them as mutually exclusive. A work by Dickens, it could be argued, can utilise all four categories.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

Unlike the critics thus far discussed, C.S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien quite overtly begin with a transcendentalist philosophical assumption, and this leads them to favour experience over critical reading.[45] Though their work has been referred to as a "nostalgic, humanistic vision",[46] and the polysemic adjective "bourgeois" can be applied to their thinking, it is wrong to therefore position them on the political right. Certainly, they violently disagree with intellectual Marxism, but they also imply in their beliefs an ethical socialism.[47] They would agree that the popular-fantastic has the function of escapism, but their opinion on what constitutes escapism is a positive one. For them, experience reading has a spiritual dimension, and, arguably, they see a work of (particularly fantastical) literature as akin to a sacrament.

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[44] Hume 82.

[45] The views expressed here come from a series of Lewis's essays published from 1947-1958, and Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories", which was originally given as a lecture in 1939.

[46] Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1988) 2.

[47] The concept of ethical socialism will be explored in the next chapter. In the case of Tolkien and Lewis, this is based on the gospels (certainly a source of early socialist movements). Also an older ideology may be just as subversive as an emergent one.

According to Tolkien, a fairy-story is one that draws on Faërie, a "realm" that seems to be the arena from which experience of fantasy emerges. Reference to it creates a subjective "Secondary World" into which the reader enters. While this may sound like a mystification of Freud's conception of phantasy, the Freudian model is itself open to question. The Secondary World is created through the willing suspension of disbelief,[48] though Tolkien calls the process by which designer and spectator actually enter it "Enchantment".[49] He does not offer any evidence for such a theory, but does draw from it the conclusion that Faërie is not open to analysis.[50]

Tolkien discusses those who study fairy-tales in order to determine their (the fairy-tales') common features. Because Faërie is inaccessible to critical scrutiny, these people are not really aware of what a fairy-tale is – they simply study its most superficial features:

> Such studies are, however, scientific (at least in intent); they are
>
> the pursuit of folklorists or anthropologists: that is of people using
>
> the stories not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from
>
> which to dig evidence or information, about matter in which they
>
> are interested. A perfectly legitimate procedure in itself – but
>
> ignorance or forgetfulness of the nature of a story (as a thing told

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[48] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen, 1983) 133.
[49] Tolkien 143.
[50] Tolkien 114.

in its entirety) has often led such inquirers into strange

judgements.[51]

Lewis expresses similar views. Although, as a literary critic, he obviously

favours the exploration of literary texts, he finds literary theory alien to its object

of study: "The literary world of today is little interested in the narrative art as

such; it is preoccupied with technical novelties and with 'ideas', by which it

means not literary, but social or psychological, ideas."[52] Indeed, one of the

reasons Lewis prefers the fairy-tale to other forms is what he considers to be its

resistance to analysis.[53] As an author himself, he has the advantage of having

read criticism of his own work. He suggests that to have one's own material

criticised reveals that the knowledge a critic claims to possess "almost always"

clashes with that which the author has.[54] Doubts exist over whether an author can

have knowledge of his or her own work, but Lewis's argument has some validity.

He points out that some aspects of a text that a critic sees as, for example,

revealing a repressed desire, may have a more prosaic explanation the critic is not

aware of. As he says,

> [i]t may well be that there is much in every book which comes
>
> from the unconscious. But when it is your book you know the

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[51] Tolkien 119. This might be a resistance to such works as Frazer's The Golden Bough.

[52] C. S. Lewis, "On Juvenile Tastes," Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 41.

[53] Lewis, "Fairy Stories," Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 36-37.

[54] C. S. Lewis, "On Criticism," Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 49.

conscious motives as well. You may be wrong in thinking that these often give the full explanation of this or that. But you can hardly believe accounts of the sea bottom by those who are blind to the most obvious objects on the surface. They could be right only by accident.[55]

He believes much of what the unconscious contributes is a potential substance worked on by the autonomous self, selected or rejected by the conscious mind.[56]

Lewis and Tolkien both make a point of stating that there is no direct connection between literary fantasy and childhood, that a liking for fantasy fiction is not in any way immature or indicative of regression. Tolkien explains that the association of the child with the fairy-tale is "an accident of domestic history."[57] According to Lewis, a wish to be "grown up" and not childish, while healthy in children and adolescents, is for adults "a mark of arrested development." He says: "When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up,"[58] pointing out that growth is building on what has gone before, not rejecting it for something else.[59] Two things should be noted here: 1) this denial of a connection between childhood and fantasy may indicate that alleviation of shame Freud suggests the popular-fantastic offers to the phantasying adult; 2) the paraphrasing of St Paul reveals a

[55] Lewis, "On Criticism" 51.
[56] Lewis, "On Criticism" 51.
[57] Tolkien 130.
[58] C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 25.
[59] Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" 25-26.

Christian dimension to Lewis's work on fantasy, as well as the desire by an imaginative mind to take issue with the traditional interpretation of Paul's statement.[60]

Having established that a liking for fantasy is a human, not only a childhood, characteristic, Lewis and Tolkien go on to describe the processes of fantastical fiction. Tolkien talks of "sub-creation", the creative use of language to produce a "new form". This is "the power of making immediately effective by the will the visions of 'fantasy'."[61] The writer becomes like a cook, selecting ingredients from the "Cauldron of Story" (an intertext of myth to which new elements are constantly added) in order to sub-create a fantastical work.[62] Lewis believes that fantasy adds to the perception of reality by making the real seem enchanted,[63] that it adds to life by supplying experiences outside the real,[64] and that fantastical characters serve as shorthand to explore various aspects of humanity.[65]

If there is an alignment between fantasy and the popular, it can be argued that a positive interpretation of the former will create sympathy for the latter. Certainly this is the case for Lewis, who believes the reader of even the most basic sensation literature might be "receiving certain profound experiences which are, for him, not acceptable in any other form."[66] This startling rejection of

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[60] Lewis did not require a literal belief in the historical truth of the gospels. For him, God revealed Himself in the mythic power of their narrative.
[61] Tolkien 122.
[62] Tolkien 125-28.
[63] Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" 30.
[64] Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" 38.
[65] Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" 27.
[66] C. S. Lewis, "On Stories," Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 15.

intellectual suspicion toward the popular is, this dissertation argues, related to an inclination for experience reading on Lewis's part, because it is by using the criteria of the experience reader that he considers the possible merits of even the lowest pulp novels. A reader of these works must be gaining more from them than the excitement of unfolding narrative events, Lewis reasons, if he or she rereads: "If you find that the reader of popular romance – however uneducated the reader, however bad the romances – goes back to his old favourites again and again, then you have pretty good evidence that they are to him a sort of poetry."[67]

Tolkien believes that experience reading might involve the reader in some sense entering another world. It becomes clear that this spiritual dimension he and Lewis emphasise is part of a theistic agenda. The 'other world' the reader constructs is, Lewis believes, drawn from "the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit."[68] Ever sympathetic to the popular, Lewis provisionally accepts that reading Rider Haggard has been akin to a religious experience for many.[69] This suggestion seems unlikely, but disputing it would be difficult, requiring knowledge of the inner thoughts and experiences of readers. As Lewis has already explained, it is impossible to know what profound experiences readers may gain from even "bad" romances. Read critically, Haggard's work is obviously racist and sexist, but the other possibilities it may offer are lost. A dialectical reading style which could acknowledge Haggard's dubious politics while gaining pleasure from the narratives themselves would provide a more complete picture.

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[67] Lewis, "On Stories" 17.
[68] Lewis, "On Stories" 12.
[69] Lewis, "On Stories" 16.

This spiritual effect of literature is expanded on in Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories". He claims that, through their mythic effect, fairy-tales "open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe."[70] This, then, is the Secondary World born of the willing suspension of disbelief. Tolkien even implies this place is the Kingdom itself when he says that to enter it one must have the heart of a child.[71] It should be noted that by this he means one must have an attitude of innocence and humility, but not necessarily uncritical perception. He concludes his essay by introducing the term "eucatastrophe". He uses this to signify the typical happy ending of the fairy-story, which does not deny sorrow and defeat, "it denies their final triumph."[72] Thus, the fairy-tale suggests Redemption: "The birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. The story begins and ends in joy."[73] While Tolkien's argument is informed by Christian theology, it should be noted that his idea of eucatastrophe resembles the inevitable "end of history" inherent in teleological Marxism. Furthermore, Christianity can inspire ethical values consistent with socialism, as will be seen when considering Dickens in the next chapter.

Bearing these sentiments in mind, it is hardly surprising that Tolkien and Lewis are hostile to a Frankfurt-Marxist conception of literature, but this becomes

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[70] Tolkien 129.

[71] Tolkien 136.

[72] Tolkien 153. Bruno Bettelheim puts forward a similar argument, though for him the happy triumph with which a fairy-tale ends has a psychoanalytic function, permitting the child to understand there is a future resolution to the psychodrama of the story and thus their own unconscious desires snd anxieties. Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (London: Penguin, 1978).

[73] Tolkien 156.

particularly significant with regard to escapism. Far from acting as apologists for

the escapist elements of the popular-fantastic, Lewis and Tolkien embrace and

celebrate them. Lewis points out that science fiction tales, with their ability to

widen our perception beyond conventional material reality, can make political

concerns seem trivial:

> Hence the uneasiness which they arouse in those who, for
>
> whatever reason, wish to keep us wholly imprisoned in the
>
> immediate conflict. That perhaps is why people are so ready with
>
> the charge of 'escape'. I never fully understood it till my friend
>
> Professor Tolkien asked me the very simple question, 'What class
>
> of men would you expect to be most preoccupied with, and most
>
> hostile to the idea of escape?' and gave the obvious answer: jailers
>
> [. . .] Fascists, as well as communists are jailers; both would assure
>
> us that the proper study of prisoners is prison.[74]

Tolkien himself believes that the term "escape" is misused or misunderstood:

> Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he
>
> tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he
>
> thinks and talks about other subjects than jailers and prison walls?
>
> The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner

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[74] Lewis, "On Science Fiction," _Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories_, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 67.

cannot see it. In using Escape in this way the critics have chosen

the wrong word, and what is more, they are confusing, not always

by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the

Deserter. Just so a Party-spokesman might have labelled departure

from the misery of the Führer's or any other Reich and even

criticism of it as treachery. In the same way these critics, to make

confusion worse, and so bring into contempt their opponents, stick

their label of scorn not only on to Desertion, but on to real Escape,

and what are often its companions, Disgust, Anger, Condemnation,

and Revolt.[75]

Indeed, Tolkien proposes that this nonmaterial escape holds the seeds of

revolution within it. By defamiliarisation and making the familiar appear new, all

those perceptions that have become dulled by familiarity "fly away like caged

birds",[76] or, as Lewis puts it, reading about enchanted woods "makes all woods a

little enchanted."[77] The Frankfurt-Marxist position typically suggests that

immersion in myth can, on the contrary, lead to imprisonment in false realities

and phenomena such as Fascism, but that rather depends on the nature of the myth

involved. Furthermore, Lewis points out that because the fairy-tale offers

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[75] Tolkien 148.

[76] Tolkien 147.

[77] Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" 30. All art has the potential to accomplish this effect of defamiliarisation, as we will see when examining Victor Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique."

something beyond reach, it is a less dangerous form than that apparently plausible wish-fulfilment in realist fiction.[78]

Tolkien's theme of escapism suggests something remarkably close to a Marxian conception of alienation: "Many stories out of the past have only become 'escapist' in their appeal through surviving from a time when men were as a rule delighted with the work of their hands into our time when many men feel disgust with man-made things."[79] Tolkien's notion of escape thus includes reference to unproblematic desire in the past, dissatisfaction in the present, and wish-fulfilment positioned outside the present. It has much in common with Freud's model of phantasy, and may even contain the potential for revolution. This is precisely because the escapist does not have the Marxist concern with materiality and economic determinism. He or she "does not make things (which it may be quite rational to regard as bad) his masters or his gods by worshipping them as inevitable, even 'inexorable'."[80]

* * *

The idea that literature can be a means of escaping an alienated perception is found in Victor Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique" (1917). Although not a commentary on fantasy but a critique of the notion that poetic language is imagist language, the essay has a similar position on the function of defamiliarisation in art to those of Lewis and Tolkien. Shklovsky favoured high modernism for this role, but his ideas correlate so well with concepts by Lewis and Tolkien that they can be considered to also apply to the popular-fantastic. Like Tolkien, Shklovsky

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[78] Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" 29.
[79] Tolkien 151.
[80] Tolkien 149.

believes human perceptions become habitual and automatic. In a process akin to the method of algebra, onetime directly-perceived objects eventually develop into mere symbols of those objects, their main characteristic coming to represent the whole. This may have some relevance to the notion that the defamiliarised awareness brought about by the fantastic is associated with childhood perception. The mechanical understanding described by Shklovsky provides "the greatest economy of perceptive effort."[81] This "over-automatization" can, however, be undermined through art:

> Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone <u>stony</u>. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. <u>Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important</u>.[82]

Considering prose to be literally prosaic, Shklovsky states that it is automatic (i.e. operating through an algebraic system of representation), where

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[81] Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, <u>Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays</u>, Regents Critics Series (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1965) 11-12.

[82] Shklovsky 12.

poetry is not,[83] an assertion that is questionable because it relies on the notion of a

"pure" prose, totally utilitarian and isolated from art (or Shklovsky's definition of

art).

The notion that making perception difficult and thus more immediate may

seem to apply only to high modernism and other experimental forms, but, as

Robert Scholes demonstrates, the popular-fantastic can also have this effect.

Scholes, referring to Shklovsky's essay, explains how this process operates in the

fantastical genre of science fiction: "In the worlds of SF we are made to see the

stoniness of a stone by watching it move and change in an accelerated time-scale,

or by encountering an anti-stone with properties so un-stony that we are forced to

investigate the true quality of stoniness."[84] This method involves what Shklovsky

is alluding to when he says: "An image is not a permanent referent for those

mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to

make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object – it

creates a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as means for knowing it."[85]

Similarly, Hume describes fantasy as being central to the creative

imagination. Like Freud, she believes that a culture of myth is central to this

fantastical element in literature, the non-traditional phantasies of today's fiction

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[83] Shklovsky 23.

[84] Robert Scholes, Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future, University of Notre Dame Ward-Phillips Lectures in English Language and Literature Vol. 7 (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1975) 46. This sounds like a science fiction equivalent of what Lewis says about reading of enchanted woods making all woods seem enchanted. While Scholes refers to the rediscovery of qualities actually inherent in the stone and Lewis discusses the projection of a quality that is not inherent onto an object, both propose that fiction can allow us to perceive in a new way.

[85] Shklovsky 18.

having the power of the mythic through imitation or echo.[86] From this she goes on to make the point that "[fantasy] provides the novelty that circumvents automatic responses and cracks the crust of <u>habitude</u> [. . .] it helps us envision possibilities that transcend the purely material world which we accept as quotidian reality."[87] This relates to Shklovsky's ideas on the role of art, as well as the Secondary World of Lewis's and Tolkien's theories.

Like Lewis and Tolkien, Scholes takes issue with intellectuals' attacks on escapism. Concurring with Freud, he considers "imaginative" fiction to be a means of sublimation by which our anxieties can be restructured into a manageable shape:

> Sometimes this function of fiction is called a dirty and degrading word: 'escapism.' But it is not exactly that, any more than sleep is an escape from being awake, or a dream is an escape from not being in a dream, from being wherever we are when we are asleep and not dreaming [. . .] A healthy person sleeps and dreams in order to awake refreshed [. . .] Even the label 'escapist' acknowledges that fiction is connected to our actual existence precisely by offering us relief from its problems and pressure.[88]

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[86] Hume 88. Marcuse, with his assertion that artistic alienation relates to a pre-technological pastoral, obviously sees the power of myth as significant.

[87] Hume 196.

[88] Scholes 5. This is Freudian, in effect. Scholes may use the word "healthy" to mean happy and well-adjusted (with sleep and dreams acting as a "cure" for frustrated desire). Freud considered some degree of neurosis to be universal, and certainly saw phantasy as a habit of the unsatisfied and unhappy mind.

Scholes assumes that all fiction has the effect of removing us from the "real" world ("To enter a book is to live in another place"), but suggests that the wish-fulfilment involved in escapism is more evident and more effective in popular-fantastical fiction. This is simply because other issues (the concerns of idea-based fiction, probably) are not as present and therefore not able to disguise it.[89] It is this that Scholes believes has led to even the lowest pulp forms of the popular-fantastic becoming essential:

> For instance, to the extent that the dominant realistic novel has
> abandoned the pleasures of narrative moment for the cares of
> psychological and social analysis, a gap in the system has
> developed which a number of lesser forms have sought to fill [. . .]
> But when the dominant canonical form fails to satisfy such a basic
> drive, the system becomes unbalanced. The result is that readers
> resort secretly and guiltily to lesser forms for that narrative fix they
> cannot do without [. . .] We do call people 'addicts' if they seem
> inordinately fond of detective stories, or even of science fiction.
> But the metaphor of addiction is a dangerously misleading one.
> For this is emotional food, not a mind-bending narcotic, that we
> are considering.[90]

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[89] Scholes 27-29.
[90] Scholes 40.

This position leads Scholes to the (perhaps utopian) assertion that a fiction satisfying both emotional and cognitive needs is required for healthy reading.

High and Popular Culture

Scholes states that the narrative pleasures of the popular are important for our mental wellbeing. Other thinkers provide equally forceful arguments to the contrary, suggesting that popular culture is extremely detrimental on the levels of both society and the individual. It is appropriate at this stage to examine some differing ideas on the role, significance, and importance of high and popular culture.

Unless otherwise stated, the high culture under discussion is that which supports the dominant critical ideas of modernist culture. In this dissertation, "high culture" is largely given the Frankfurt-Marxist definition (though this is very similar to other definitions of high culture, such as that found in much liberal humanism): works that alienate the common reader, works which by design rather than accident expel immersive narrative from their structure. Several types of novel might thus qualify as "high": the novel of ideas; the novel of character; the experimental novel; the polemic novel.

High culture is characterised by a conscious opposition to popular culture. The latter is frequently seen to be superficial, often damagingly so. In the high-cultural agenda, the popular represents decay of mental faculties. It can be

accused of blinding people to their real social conditions, or of degrading their

sensitivities. High culture, then, is based around awakening people to social

reality and stimulating new ways of perceiving it and the human beings within it.

The common reader himself or herself may well view the situation entirely

differently. To him or her, the popular is psychic nourishment, a welcome respite

from the day's toil or the more harsh events of one's life. Analysis, in the sense

of a detached examination of the text, is therefore devalued in favour of escapism.

The immersive quality of the popular narrative is considered to be positive, and

experience of it is the purpose of reading. Thus the literature of high culture can

seem, from the perspective of the common reader, to be a failure.

Each of these two cultural categories has its own corresponding reading

type: critical (high) and experience (popular). There are distinct cultural products,

novels, fitting the descriptions high and popular, and each is accepted or

dismissed on the basis of conflicting sets of criteria.

However, the above definitions are extremely simplistic. While the form

of a text may imply that its intended reader uses analytical criteria, it might be

read "against" this implication and enjoyed for its narrative. Similarly, a popular

text may be read from a critical perspective. Furthermore, real texts and real

readers are not as absolutely definable as the models described so far. There will

generally be a degree of crossover between the high and the popular, though, also

generally, there is a tendency toward one or the other.

This section outlines several cultural theorists and positions. Marxist

aesthetics is represented by the work of Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max

Horkheimer, and Rosemary Jackson. These leftwing thinkers' political objections

to the popular are acknowledged, but so are some of their valuable ideas on the

role of defamiliarisation, ideas that can be used for readings of the popular-

fantastic if they are expanded beyond the limits that have been imposed on them

(reference to the avant-garde alone). Q. D. Leavis's investigation of public

reading habits, emerging from a more conservative viewpoint, is explored as an

example of ideology traditionally associated with critical reading. Her study

suggests the existence of a hierarchy of readers and literary works, and

consideration of it provides insight into an entrenched high-cultural position. In

addition, surprising similarities between Leavis's beliefs and those of the Marxists

examined earlier in the section are revealed. The section concludes by examining

the ideas of several cultural studies theorists who propose more positive

interpretations of the popular. These advocate a role for the reader in creating the

meaning of popular cultural products and discuss possible beneficial effects of

this.

* * *

Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of

Advanced Industrial Society (1964) asserts that technological society has caused

the distinction between the subjective and the objective to be lost. Absolute

empiricism has made reason material and thus removed reason's ability to liberate

people from convention. What might be termed subjective thought is impossible,

because only that which is empirically verifiable, only that which is object, can

exist.[91] Because this material-reason is also believed to be Truth,[92] it is inevitable

that any opposition to it will be seen as irrational.[93] Art, Marcuse argues, can

provide an alternative to this worldview.

While a technological society may be ostensibly democratic, it is

nevertheless totalitarian, because its productive methods actually determine the

"needs and aspirations" of the individual.[94] These "false needs" indoctrinate

subjects fundamentally, even at the level of the instincts.[95] Due to the dominance

of empiricism, the prevailing ideology of society is one of simple materialism,

and it must therefore be this that is inculcated so deeply. As a consequence, the

self is projected onto objects and alienated.[96] There is no "private space" or

"inner freedom," because the ego itself has been "invaded" by technological

reality.[97] Subject and object now mirror each other. Thus, "[t]he soul contains

few secrets and longings which cannot be sensibly discussed, analysed, and

polled."[98]

Marcuse associates Marxian[99] alienation with psychological alienation in a

more direct and overt way than Marx's own notions of reification and

commodification. For example, he examines the relationship between social

alienation and mental "health". In Eros and Civilisation he asserts that both

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[91] Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1991) 13.
[92] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 123.
[93] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 9.
[94] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society xlvii.
[95] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 5-6.
[96] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 9.
[97] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 10.
[98] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 71.
[99] The term "Marxian" is used in this dissertation to identify concepts drawn directly from Karl Marx.

patient and analyst experience social alienation, which is therefore not

acknowledged. This alienation actually constitutes the "healthy" psyche of

industrial capitalism: "When the process of alienation is discussed, it is usually

treated, not as the whole that it is, but as a negative aspect of the whole."[100] As

will be seen, acknowledging a link between Marxian and psychological alienation

is useful when considering the fantastic.

"Desublimation" is the name Marcuse gives to this process of dual

alienation when it operates in art. Marcuse states that, through desublimation,

"[t]he Pleasure Principle absorbs the Reality Principle,"[101] by which he means

differences between the two have broken down: "In the mental apparatus, the

tension between that which is desired and that which is permitted seems

considerably lowered, and the Reality Principle no longer seems to require a

sweeping and painful transformation of instinctual needs."[102] Instinctual needs

are now the false needs of technological society, and this is reflected in that

society's art. Even high culture – "another dimension of reality" – and its

bourgeois ideals of freedom, individualism etc. (which, as Marcuse points out,

were a source of opposition and liberation for the emerging bourgeoisie) is

identified with the object and thus conventionality. "High" culture is now part of

mass culture: "This assimilation of the ideal with reality testifies to the extent to

which the ideal had been surpassed. It is brought down from the sublimated

realm of the soul or the spirit or the inner man, and translated into operational

[100] Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization (London: Routledge, 1998) 253.
[101] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 72.
[102] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 74.

terms and problems. Here are the progressive elements of mass culture."[103] Mass

culture, then, is a manifestation of desublimation. Interestingly, one way Marcuse

distinguishes the art of his day from that of the pre-technological world is by

identifying a pastoral quality in the landscape of the latter.[104] He refers to its

"valleys and forests, villages and inns, nobles and villains," and "those who

wander or ride in carriages, who have the time and pleasure to think."[105] Though

ideal, Marcuse's pastoral does relate to a genuine historical past pre-existing

alienated labour. Fredric Jameson believes he revives the notion of utopia

because it is only by opposing "practical thinking" that the present hegemony can

be confronted. In fact, for Jameson, Marcuse's "nostalgia" seems, in keeping

with received Frankfurt School ideas, to be based in the future: "The impulse of

fantasy, in which alone the pleasure principle remains pure and unrepressed, now

negates the existing real world, the 'realistic' world, and prepares for that world a

future."[106] Obviously, Jameson cannot be talking about "fantasy" in terms of the

literary genre. He is referring to "phantasy", but, bearing in mind that (for

Marcuse) even the instincts are determined by technological capitalist ideology,

and that a distinction between the pleasure and reality principles has broken

down, it is hard to see exactly what separate "fantasy/phantasy" can exist. It may

be more accurate to suggest that, while based in a the past prior to alienation,

Marcuse's conception of the pastoral involves wish-fulfilment projected into the

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[103] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 56-58.
[104] This is similar to F. R. Leavis's conservative critique of modernity, indicating that different political/cultural positions of the early twentieth century were responses to mass culture and social alienation.
[105] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 59.
[106] Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature, 1974 ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1971) 110-11.

future. Indeed, it parallels Freud's belief that adult phantasy is rooted in childhood play, in the past, while having a future potential.[107] While it might appear that the idyllic historical past Marcuse refers to is distinct from the actual past of the self in childhood, he clearly associates the two. In a phrase recalling the Freudian model of phantasy/play, and relevant to this dissertation's discussion of the fantastic, Marcuse says, "only dreams and childlike regressions " can recapture the pre-technological idyll.[108] Such a view is romantic, and, indeed, the function of art in this imaginary lost pastoral was romantic, the polar opposite of desublimation. Sublimation produces the effect of "artistic alienation," a phenomenon that can be thought of as an alienation from Marxian alienation,[109] and thus a transcendence of capitalist ideology and discovery of non-alienated human essence. The Freudian argument that reading brings pleasure by, among other things, breaking down the barriers between egos, therefore correlates to artistic alienation.

Claiming that the avant-garde is an attempt to retain art as a medium of contradiction, Marcuse says (referring to Brecht and the estrangement effect) that art should cause the familiar to become unfamiliar.[110] The "familiar" is the false perception of those alienated in the way Marcuse has described. Freud's conception of play – the projection of imagination onto objects – might result in

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[107] It should be noted, however, that where Freud sees the process of play as the projection of imagination onto objects, Marcuse believes the projection of reason (and, presumably, imagination also) onto objects to be a fundamental of alienation in industrial capitalism.

[108] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 59.

[109] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 60.

[110] Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society 66-67. Freud might use the word "uncanny" rather than the word "unfamiliar".

the conventional becoming strange. Furthermore, as thinkers in the last section

noted, the popular-fantastic may also have this effect of defamiliarisation.

* * *

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Marcuse's fellow Frankfurt

School theoreticians, disparage popular culture in <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u>

(1947). Where Marcuse's critique is an even assessment of the relation between

mass entertainment and the mindset of the proletariat in capitalist society, Adorno

and Horkheimer take the stance of a more generalised opposition to popular

culture. A typical example of this is their labelling the audiences at talkie films

"victims".[111] They repeatedly criticise jazz, describe Ernest Hemingway as part

of the culture industry, and compare the acceptance of a popular song with the

methods used by fascists to control the state's language.[112]

Interestingly, much of what they say parallels the beliefs of conservative

critics such as Q. D. Leavis. For example, they emphasise the role of conformity

in art (though, unlike Marcuse, they perceive this even in the <u>avant-garde</u>), and

state its effects are harmful.[113] They explain that culture is based on adherence to

the norm.[114] They make blanket statements on the use of language: "All the

violence done to words is so vile that one can hardly bear to hear them any

longer."[115]

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[111] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u>, trans. John Cumming (New York, NY: Herder, 1972) 126.
[112] Horkheimer and Adorno 165.
[113] Horkheimer and Adorno 128.
[114] Horkheimer and Adorno 133.
[115] Horkheimer and Adorno 166.

Possibly the most significant parallel with Q. D. Leavis (and F. R. Leavis, her husband) is Horkheimer and Adorno's denial of amusement. Their work frowns on the amusement derived from popular culture (the pleasure Freud describes) even when it leads to catharsis (perhaps especially when it leads to catharsis).[116] They claim that experiencing amusement affirms the status quo, because it prevents one being critical in one's thinking: "The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and from negation."[117] Thus it is possible to see a distinction made between the popular, which encourages mere amusement, and those cultural forms that allow critical thinking.

* * *

Not all Marxists have rejected popular fantasy: writing in 1981, Rosemary Jackson sometimes embraces it, though she does so from a critical perspective. She directly attacks the notion of transcendence, bemoaning the fact that "transcendentalist criticism" can seem appropriate with regard to fantasy. She regards such criticism – by C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, for example – as "part of a nostalgic, humanistic vision."[118] Arguably, this reveals a naïve teleological assumption: the automatic rejection of modes of thinking that existed prior to Marxism. Combining sociological and psychoanalytical concepts, Jackson argues that fantasy aims to achieve compensation for an individual lack imposed by culture.[119] Thus she links Marxian and psychological alienation. She

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[116] Horkheimer and Adorno 142-44.
[117] Horkheimer and Adorno 144.
[118] Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1988) 2. Jackson's rejection of nostalgia would seem to distance her from Marcuse.
[119] Jackson 3.

points out that the unreal of fantasy is identified in relation to the cultural real,[120]

by which she means that fantasy is negatively defined by reality, and thus does

not transcend but merely inverts reality. Yet, if the cultural real is a site of social

alienation, is not an inversion of this a positive step?

While Jackson makes some comments on the popular similar to those of

Horkheimer and Adorno,[121] many of her observations on fantasy are more

positive. So, although she does not really discuss best-selling fantasies – "not

simply through prejudice against their ideals," but because they are not subversive

enough[122] – she sees admirable qualities in other literary fantasy, such as the

potential for unconscious discourse.[123] She draws many parallels between fantasy

and modernism, particularly focusing on of the former as a precursor of the latter.

Discussing the idea that fantasy allows for the widest possible perception (thus

denying the limits of the real), Jackson says, "from this perspective, fantastic

works of the last two centuries are clear antecedents of modernist texts such as

Joyce's Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, with their commitment to disintegration."[124]

In fact, she even allows the popular-fantastic to play a part in this equivalence of

fantasy and modernism, comparing H. P. Lovecraft with Samuel Beckett.[125]

The project of disintegration that the fantastic shares with modernism is,

of course, the divided self of modernity. Jackson proposes two forms of fantastic

"threat" to the self: an external threat from otherness; a subjective threat from too

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[120] Jackson 4.

[121] Memorably, she says of the gothic: "Its horrors, transgression and sexual 'licence' are exploited by many Victorian novelists to deter a bourgeois reading public from political revolution, even as it provides them with a temporary fulfilment of ungratified desire." Jackson 124.

[122] Jackson 9. My italics.

[123] Jackson 22.

[124] Jackson 22.

[125] Jackson 110.

much knowledge or a flaw of character.[126] This contradicts her earlier assertion that the fantastic operates on an inner lack imposed from without, and is not born out by literature: Dracula, for example, involves a single threat to the self stemming from both from the Count's otherness and his victims' own desires. External and subjective "threats" can not be easily disentangled. Thus, when Jackson says that in the subjective threat the "self becomes other through a self-generated metamorphosis, through the subject's alienation from himself,"[127] it should be acknowledged that the catalyst for this process was external, and that this psychological alienation was brought about by sociological alienation.

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Suspicion of popular culture is not restricted to the leftwing, nor is a material, text-based approach to literature or a bias toward works that emphasise fractured social and psychological states. Originally published in 1932, Fiction and the Reading Public is an assessment of reading habits in the United Kingdom. Q. D. Leavis states that initially both the aristocracy and the working classes (this latter group were able to appreciate such things as Elizabethan drama) could enjoy popular culture in English society. She claims that various social phenomena – beginning with nineteenth-century serial fiction and continuing through mass literacy, lending libraries, cheap editions, book clubs, and modern journalism – have overturned the old social order and led to a degraded working class and a debased popular fiction that almost obscures real contemporary literature (a small

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[126] Jackson 58. By "knowledge", Jackson is presumably referring to, for example, existential angst. It is, of course, a debatable point whether such threats to the self are internal, bearing in mind the knowledge ultimately comes from without (if mystical/Platonic models of knowledge are excepted).
[127] Jackson 59.

number of modernist works). The purpose of reading has become mere escapism

for those, primarily the working and lower-middle classes, disenchanted with

modernity, but the compensations offered by the popular are presented within an

affirmation of the society from which the reader seeks to liberate him or herself.

By contrast, good literature operates through disturbing the reader, and requires

tremendous effort to read.

Reading Leavis seventy years later there is much to take issue with in her

argument. Among the writers she attacks are: Rudyard Kipling;[128] Willa Cather,

Thornton Wilder, and J. B. Priestley, who, though skilful, "bring nothing to the

novel but commonplace sentiments and an outworn technique;"[129] and Ernest

Hemingway, whose success she bases on the attractiveness of conformity, an

attraction which must be strong, she reasons, for him to have become accepted

even in some highbrow circles.[130] Even Dickens does not escape her contempt.

Time has, then, shown some of Leavis's opinions to be more questionable than

she perhaps supposed, exposing the historical contingency of literary canons in

general. However, her argument provides a useful structure of reading

types/methods and reveals the nature of a fixed high-cultural position.

Leavis's definition of popular or general fiction can be seen in her

comments on magazine writing. She says it is "fiction that requires the least

effort to read and will set the reader up with a comfortable state of mind [. . .]

fodder for odd moments, travelling and after business hours, glanced through with

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[128] Q. D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London: Chatto, 1965) 230.
[129] Leavis 36.
[130] Leavis 200.

a background of household chatter or 'the wireless'"[131] Popular writers – by

which she means writers in collusion with, rather than opposition to, degraded

twentieth-century popular culture – may attempt to deal with serious concepts, but

the result is to reduce such concepts. The bestseller can "debase the emotional

currency by touching grossly on finer issues."[132] She seems outraged that such

contaminations take place: "nearly all popular novelists are now trying to

dramatise problems of feeling and sentiment far too complex for their handling,

and in an idiom which inevitably vulgarises whatever it has to convey."[133]

Leaving aside the rather obvious question of how exactly Leavis is aware of what

"nearly all" popular novelists are doing, the hint of the caste system and

untouchability, of "finer issues" being left unclean through contact with the

popular, is significant and symptomatic of the hierarchical system of literature

Leavis promotes.

Who, then, are the consumers of this corrupting literature? Leavis says

they are that group which has "acquired the reading habit while somehow failing

to exercise any critical intelligence about its reading."[134] These are people who

have been indoctrinated with the values of popular culture: "The training of the

reader who spends his leisure in cinemas, looking through magazines and

newspapers, listening to jazz music, does not merely fail to help him, it prevents

him from normal development [. . .] partly by providing him with a set of habits

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[131] Leavis 27-28.
[132] Leavis 67.
[133] Leavis 244.
[134] Leavis 7.

inimical to mental effort."[135] Apparently the popular is not only self-indulgent on

the part of both writer and reader, does not only prevent critical thinking, but it

actually causes lasting damage to the individual. For such people, reading has

become a dependent habit like drug addiction (obviously, this is the viewpoint

opposed by Scholes). The conventional escapism Leavis believes is inherent in

the bestseller leads to a stifling of development as prejudices are confirmed and

made more concrete in the reader.[136] Thus: "a habit of fantasying will lead to

maladjustment in actual life."[137] Leavis even suggests that the poor are compelled

to read despite being unable to afford it.[138] These "addicts" are absolutely

separated from high culture, part of a hierarchy that has more in common with a

caste system than it does with the limited mobility of a class system.   This

separation is exactly what Scholes objects to.

Identifying three groups – lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow – Leavis

uses the circulation figures and critical tendencies of periodicals catering for

different categories of reader to argue that each reading faction is utterly

uninterested in the material the others enjoy.[139] Highbrows exclusively read

works by such writers as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce; lowbrows read only

primitive pulp novels. Middlebrows, who make up much of the reading public,

are less easy to define.[140] In Leavis's time they were, according to her, reading

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[135] Leavis 224.

[136] Leavis 51-42.

[137] Leavis 54. A self-indulgent and harmful habit of compensatory pleasure? There seems much in common between Leavis's position on the reading of popular fiction, and puritanical ideas on masturbation.

[138] Leavis 7.

[139] Leavis 20.

[140] Ironically, this group is mostly based in the petit-bourgeoisie. Leavis herself was the daughter of a draper and hosier, and she seems to be excluding her own original class from the literary elite.

authors like Willa Cather, J. B. Priestley, and Thornton Wilder, the latter of whom

Leavis calls "insignificant".[141] Today such work might be termed "mainstream",

including in it the best genre fiction. For Leavis, these texts create the illusion (to

the "uncritical") of being literature, and "their readers are left with the agreeable

sensation of having improved themselves without incurring fatigue." Works of

this sort are, she says, "the staple reading of the middlebrow."[142] Highbrow

material is exclusive, because readers from other groups do not have the

necessary faculties to understand it; a culture of popular entertainment has left

them ignorant.[143] Even if they do read a highbrow work, they will not understand

it because they approach it using criteria suitable for their own category of fiction.

For example, the general reader's decision to read Joseph Conrad might be based

on a liking of stories about the sea. Leavis refers to this as a "complete ignorance

of values."[144] It is this ignorance which causes these readers to be essentially

estranged from real literature. When readers claim to prefer popular fiction

because it is not as negative as modernism, Leavis explains, "[t]hese people

clearly mistake the relief of meeting the expected, and being given the desired

picture of life, for the exhilarating shock that a novel coming from a first-class

fully-aware mind gives."[145]

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[141] Leavis 233.
[142] Leavis 37.
[143] Leavis does not mention that sufficient leisure time (and the inclination to use it as a continuation of the day's toil) as well as adequate faculties are needed, if highbrow works are as difficult as she claims.
[144] Leavis 6. Conrad himself was in fact very fond of adventure stories of the sea, admiring the fiction of Captain Marryat. Joseph Bristow, Empire Boys: Adventure in a Man's World, Reading Popular Fiction (London: Harper-Collins, 1991) 153.
[145] Leavis 74.

High culture, then, is associated with defamiliarisation, with the undermining of preconceptions and the making-new of the familiar. Its readers are "the critical minority to whose sole charge modern literature has now fallen."[146] Leavis does not say whether she finds this responsibility irksome, but she does imply highbrow fiction itself is a trying experience to read. She talks of "the painful effort required in reading good poetry."[147] This contrasts with the more pleasant practice of the middlebrow reader. Of course, as she has already hinted in her comments on Conrad being read as a purveyor of sea stories, it is not necessarily a work of high culture that is difficult, so much as the way it is (properly) read. Specifically, critical reading is strenuous and disturbing. Not only that, it has a peculiarly lifeless quality to it. Leavis believes it is a prejudice that well-drawn characters are essential for a novel, saying this prejudice "is generally at the bottom of failure to respond to the finer novels."[148] Indeed, strong characterisation and narrative are more features of popular fiction and experience reading than they are of the novel of overt ideas and critical reading. Thus it is that the skilful bestseller writer (Hemingway, for example) has a certain perverse attraction for the highbrow. Leavis refers to "the fascinated envy of an ever-intellectual novelist for the lower organism that exudes vital energy as richly as a manure heap."[149] Note again that hint of the untouchable in the popular writer: the "lower organism" that can be associated with faeces. These best-seller writers, despite a certain narrative power, are "not harnessed in the service of

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[146] Leavis 35.
[147] Leavis 231.
[148] Leavis 60.
[149] Leavis 63.

literature," because they are the products of their age (i.e. an age of popular entertainment, mass literacy etc.).[150] A producer of what is ultimately mere amusement does not contribute to art. Modern writers of real literature thus struggle against the imperatives of the culture around them. To the Lighthouse, for example, "is especially calculated to baffle the general public of the twentieth century."[151] For Leavis, highbrow fiction and the faculty of critical reading required to appreciate it are based on the following: constant vigilance; sustained effort; denial of amusement. It hardly needs pointing out that this perspective has much in common with Puritanism, but there are also parallels with a Frankfurt School Marxist conception of the cultural products and critical practices that in some way transcend the culture industry of industrial capitalism.

Leavis appears to share in the Marxist contempt for the popular and the Marxist conviction of the importance of critical thinking. Much of what she says could have been lifted from a Marxist work, such as when she states, "only the unusually self-disciplined can fight against their environment and only the unusually self-aware could perceive the necessity of doing so."[152] The similarities are specific as well as general. Like Horkheimer and Adorno, Leavis emphasises the conformity of popular art and its adherence to the norm, makes blanket criticisms of popular forms such as jazz, lists Hemingway as a part of the popular culture industry, and frowns on amusement as numbing critical faculties. Horkheimer and Adorno's declaration that "[a]ll the violence done to words is so

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[150] Leavis 63.
[151] Leavis 222.
[152] Leavis 225.

vile that one can hardly bear to hear them any longer,"[153] is mirrored by Leavis's

assertions that the idiom of the general public is "crude and puerile"[154] and that an

attempt to use this idiom to express thoughts and feelings is "[a] failure of such a

kind that a sensitive reader winces."[155] In the same way Jackson proposes that the

fantastic functions as a compensation for an individual lack imposed by culture,

Leavis says, "fantasy fiction is the typical reading of a people whose normal

impulses are starved of the means of expression."[156] Another principle she has in

common with many Marxists is the assumption that those who employ the method

of experience, rather than critical, reading do so from ignorance. This is not to

say, of course, that Marxists therefore embrace Leavis. As Lesley Johnson points

out, while the first issue of the Leavisite journal Scrutiny declared itself to be

apolitical, F. R. Leavis confirmed Scrutiny as anti-Marxist in 1940.[157]

There is little doubt that much of Leavis's analysis of the popular is based

on prejudice and elitism. That does not in itself invalidate her conclusions,

merely the argument that lends weight to them. Having stated that a literary work

must be read as a whole, its faults being seen in context because it is unlikely it

will be consistent,[158] she brushes this consideration aside when discussing

examples from popular novels, saying "few of the novels under discussion are

subtle enough to merit such close scrutiny or are worth reading save for

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[153] Horkheimer and Adorno 166.
[154] Leavis 255.
[155] Leavis 262.
[156] Leavis 168.
[157] Lesley Johnson, The Cultural Critics: From Mathew Arnold to Raymond Williams, International Library of Sociology (London: Routledge, 1979) 100.
[158] Leavis 211.

anthropological reasons."[159] It is safe to read extracts from popular writings out

of context because, Leavis says, "though good novelists can not infrequently be

caught nodding, I have never found a bad novelist write above or much below his

own general level; the bestseller style is uniform and consistent."[160] This is the

"bestseller style" that includes such writers as Cather and Hemingway. Aside

from the objection that what Leavis "has found" to be the consistency of "bad"

novelists is hardly a compelling argument, no evidence is presented to indicate

that she is well-read enough in best-selling genres to be able to pronounce them

"uniform and consistent".

To automatically equate "best-selling" with "formulaic" reveals ignorance

of the huge and varied number of novels of which she seemingly claims absolute

knowledge. Even the assumption that the formula novel must necessarily be a

uniform genre is questionable, as the development of science fiction, for example,

in the last century demonstrates. The difficulties inherent in Leavis's model of

contemporary reading tend to flow from the fact that she apparently bases much

of the discussion on personal sentiment.

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Criticism of Leavis's position comes from many sources, but perhaps the

most influential is that of Richard Hoggart. In The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of

Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments,

first published in 1957, Hoggart appears to be broadly in agreement with Leavis.

Like her, he accuses popular contemporary literature of being formula-based and

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[159] Leavis 231.
[160] Leavis 234.

conformist, and he bemoans mass culture's degradation of the working classes.

Hoggart considers "Mass culture" to be the corrupted culture of the present,

though he differs from Leavis in that he sees the working-class culture of his

childhood as a genuinely (i.e. of the people) popular culture. Speaking of mass

culture, he says,

> [i]t is not possible that people could positively, could actually
>
> enjoy this; there is nothing for them to be engaged with, to be
>
> positively reacting to. Since nothing is demanded of the reader,
>
> nothing can be given by the reader [. . .] These publications must
>
> aim to hold their readers at a level of passive acceptance, at which
>
> they never really ask a question, but happily take what is provided
>
> and think of no change.[161]

At this stage Hoggart believes that, for the working classes, art functions as

escape; it is not designed to comment on reality.[162] However, by 1961 Hoggart

begins to call the general condemnation of mass culture "convenient and self-

flattering".[163] Denouncing Leavis's whole system of literary hierarchy, he says,

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[161] Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments (London: Penguin, 1958) 237.

[162] Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments 238.

[163] Richard Hoggart, "Culture: Dead and Alive," About Society, vol. 1 (of Speaking to Each Other. London: Chatto, 1970) 131.

[i]t carries into new and confused areas of cultural activity the old, comfortable grading by height of brow. It can be reinforced, as it has often been reinforced in the past, by an implied social or educational grading. 'Lowbrow' culture was that enjoyed by 'the lower orders'; 'mass culture' is that enjoyed by the 80 per cent who have not been to a grammar school [. . .] Any analysis, by social class or educational background, of the audiences for some of the more successful forms of 'mass culture' (the most popular newspapers, certain television programmes) makes this distinction untenable. More important, such a distinction prevents us from understanding the peculiar problems of cultural change today. In using it, most 'highbrows' show themselves out of touch with cultural change, and as much deceived as the 'lowbrows' they feel sorry for.[164]

The distinction that should be made is not between high and low cultures, but between what is high and low within so-called high and low cultures.[165] Using television as an example, Hoggart speaks of life and death in art:

'Life' may show itself in 'serious' or 'light' programmes, as scepticism and irony or as broad emotion or as firm intelligence – but will always be disinterested and honest. 'Death' may show

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[164] Hoggart, "Culture: Dead and Alive" 131.
[165] Hoggart, "Culture: Dead and Alive" 132-33.

itself as trivial and slick (even though it may be purporting to be serious), cynical, against the mind and afraid of the heart – but will always be interested and out to persuade [. . .] Perhaps we should stop talking about 'mass culture', since the phrase invites us to stick to the old categories. Perhaps we should speak about 'synthetic culture' or 'processed culture' – and then remind ourselves that our job is to separate the Processed from the Living at (to use the old grading) all 'levels' [. . .] Living culture, even if many people are enjoying it at the same time, speaks to individuals or to genuine communities, and cuts across boundaries of age or class or status.[166]

It is difficult to understand these terms fully. When Hoggart says that dead culture is "always out to persuade", does he mean that overt didacticism is a "dead" form of art? Or is he simply referring to what might be thought of as commercial culture? The most useful aspect of Hoggart's argument is the distinction is between "creative" life and "mechanically twitching" death. Leavis implies that the form of fiction/reading she favours is "lifeless" when she attacks the notion of well-drawn characters, and H. G. Wells's later, excessively polemical, work certainly seems to lack the vitality of his early scientific romances.

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[166] Hoggart, "Culture: Dead and Alive" 132. [166] The idea of "living" culture suggests the childhood pastoral alluded to by Marcuse and implied by Freud, and the "organic" society of Leavisite thought, a remarkable correlation of distinct theories. It seems these thinkers all share a nostalgic desire (whether that be religious, historic/political/ideological, psychoanalytic, or cultural).

Hoggart concludes his discussion on high and low culture by appealing for

a common, not universal, culture that is free of the divisions Leavis uses, and

which, "though it is varied and allows a free movement of interacting minorities,

has this common ground: that it gives room for individuality, idiosyncrasy, the

play of mind true to its own observations and to the substance of things

observed."[167] Two years later, Hoggart expressed the belief that any imaginative

writer, no matter how apparently immature or perverse will "provide some

insights if we read him disinterestedly, with a 'willing suspension of disbelief'".

He suggests that this writer may well have beliefs contrary to the reader, but care

should be taken when attacking those beliefs that the critic does not assume they

necessarily reflect the writer's literary merit. Similarly, there is a danger that the

critic may praise a weak writer whose views match his or hers.[168] Hoggart

recommends "intellectual openness and charity" and the attempt to experience the

world from the writer's perspective,[169] a position apparently opposed to the

detached practice of critical reading. He claims that an insight into the life of an

age can be gained, not by using works as "quarries" from which to mine

information, but by books being "[r]ead in and for themselves, with an openness

to the author's imagination and art."[170]

Seven years after his initial censure of mass culture as a degradation of the

working class, Hoggart attacked <u>Fiction and the Reading Public</u>. While offering

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[167] Hoggart, "Culture: Dead and Alive" 134.

[168] Richard Hoggart, "Why I Value Literature," <u>About Literature</u>, vol. 2 (of <u>Speaking to Each Other</u>. London: Chatto, 1970) 14-15. These assessments can be a problem with political criticism in particular, a phenomenon that we will see outlined by George Orwell in Chapter Two.

[169] Hoggart, "Why I Value Literature" 15.

[170] Richard Hoggart, "Literature and Society," <u>About Literature</u>, vol. 2 (of <u>Speaking to Each Other</u>. London: Chatto, 1970) 20. Tolkien also uses the metaphor of the quarry (in his case to describe the anthropological reading of fairy-stories), as we will see.

some praise for Leavis's seriousness and focus, Hoggart ridicules her

romanticisation of peasants and apparent nostalgia for Arcadia, and even

questions the link between literature and society that lends Leavis's book a sense

of purpose and urgency: "Some of our guiding assumptions (about 'brows',

'levels', 'cultivated taste') have become rigid, and obscure the cultural

complexities. We are led to underestimate the other-than-literary ways in which

human beings can express the quality of their lives, and so we infer too much

from changes in popular literary taste." [171]

* * *

Cultural studies has engaged with popular culture and reached some

conclusions very different to those of critics such as Adorno and Leavis. The

examination of the popular has lead to some interesting studies and conclusions.

John Storey (1998), for example, provides several assumed definitions of popular

culture. These are: culture enjoyed by many people; that which is not high

culture, which is inferior; that which is mass culture (i.e. commercially based and

absorbed by passive consumers); the culture by and for the people, the masses.

Storey reveals the questions raised by these views. What number of sales

constitutes "popular"? Why do popular artists of the past (Shakespeare, Dickens)

become elevated as high culture? Why does high culture become popular and

thus "degraded" (Pavarotti's hit single of Nessun Dorma)? Why do 80-90 percent

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[171] Richard Hoggart, "On Cultural Analysis," About Society, vol. 1 (of Speaking to Each Other. London: Chatto, 1970) 129-103. In fact, detailed studies of the activities and pastimes of various groups "effectively demolish" Leavis's picture of shared culture in the Elizabethan period. Johnson, 99.

of heavily-advertised cultural products fail? How is it that the (popular) Americanisation of 1950s British culture was actually a source of liberation for the young from conservative attitudes? Who exactly are "the people"?[172]

Storey goes on to assert that the common factor of all the definitions is a cultural rift brought about by industrial and urban development: "Before industrialization and urbanization, Britain had two cultures: a common culture which was shared, more or less, by all classes, and a separate elite culture produced and consumed by the dominant classes in society."[173] Majority culture was controlled and seen as a kind of barometer for social unrest. However, a change of relations between workers and employers, the geographical separation of classes caused by urbanisation, and the driving underground of radicalism and trade unionism brought about by association with the French Revolution, created a separate cultural space in which new forms could develop. Thus, "[t]hose with power lose, for a crucial period, the means to control the culture of subordinate classes. When they begin to recover control, it is culture itself, and not culture as a symptom or sign of something else, that becomes, really for the first time, the actual focus of concern."[174]

It is perhaps because of this view of the historical inception of popular culture that Storey favours a neo-Gramscian hegemonic theory of the popular. In this model, popular culture is an arena in which the intentions of capitalists and the counter-intentions of the proletariat, social agendas from "above and "below",

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[172] John Storey, <u>Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction</u>, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Prentice-Pearson, 2001) 6-10.
[173] Storey, <u>Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction</u> 14.
[174] Storey, <u>Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction</u> 17-18.

clash and merge, producing "a shifting balance of forces between resistance and incorporation." As well as involving some resistance in its form, popular culture also has an element of resistance in its reception: "The commercially provided culture of the culture industries is redefined, reshaped and redirected in strategic acts of selective consumption and productive acts of reading and articulation, often in ways not intended or even foreseen by its producers."[175] This conception of popular culture as a grouping of commercial products read seditiously by their "consumers" is a fundamental base for several cultural studies theoreticians who sympathetically examine the popular. In the following pages, an outline of the work of Janice Radway, John Fiske, Scott McCracken, and Ien Ang will be considered.

In <u>Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature</u> (1984), her study of popular romance aficionados ("romance" in this instance refers to formulaic stories of romantic love), Janice Radway identifies reading as wish fulfilment. For her, the popular romance novel is an example of what this dissertation refers to as the popular-fantastic – in this case, immersion in the phantasy of an ideal male partner, providing a sense of escape from patriarchal norms. Superficially, this escape is a momentary liberation from domestic drudgery (by developing the private space used to read), but more fundamentally it is the reader's recognition of "a fairytale where a heroine's similar needs are accurately met."[176]

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[175] Storey, <u>Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction</u> 106.
[176] Janice A Radway, <u>Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature</u> (London: Verso, 1987) 93.

Apparently uncomfortable with the idea of pleasure as something

theoretically unquantifiable (as is the case with Tolkien and Lewis), Radway

attempts to provide a psychoanalytic explanation by drawing on Nancy

Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering (1978). Chodorow proposes a

model for development in which the socialisation process is not restricted to the

psyche of the infant, but is a symbiosis of mother and child where the woman

actually projects her repressed memories of her own mother onto the infant: "The

exclusive symbiotic mother-child relationship of a mother's own infancy

reappears [. . .] she recreates for herself the exclusive intense primary unit which a

heterosexual relationship tends to recreate for men [. . .] Mothering, moreover,

involves a double identification for women, both as mother and child."[177] For

Radway, the popular romance novel provides the phantasy figure of an ideal,

nurturing male, a sexual partner who can recreate the mother/child dyad. Thus

the pleasure of reading popular romance is the momentary gratification of the

desire Chodorow describes.[178] Clearly, Radway believes that these novels –

commercial products of patriarchal capitalism – are read in a manner which

conflicts with the ideology of the system that created them, though they also to

some extent reinforce conventional social and gender roles (marriage, for

example). Significantly, she notes that this apparent contradiction actually

emerges from two different methods of reading – experience reading and

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[177] Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (London: U of California P, 1979) 201-204.
[178] Aside from Radway's unquestioning use of what can charitably be described as the unrestricted speculations of psychoanalysis, the (again unquestioned) assumption that a nurturing male can only exist as a phantasy perhaps says more about certain forms of feminism than it does about actual gender issues.

detached study of the text.[179] Radway ultimately positions herself against a

restrictive textual reading (i.e. detached analysis of a text as an object, separate

from its readers) for two reasons. Firstly, she argues this reproduces

> the reifying tendencies of late capitalism and its supportive
>
> perceptual and analytical strategies [. . .] [assuming] either that
>
> perceptible, tangible things alone are worth analyzing or that those
>
> commodified objects exert such power and influence on their
>
> consumers that they have no power as individuals to resist or alter
>
> the ways in which those objects mean or can be used.[180]

Leading on from this, she continues with the second point: "Commodities like

mass-produced literary texts are selected, purchased, constructed, and used by real

people with previously existing needs, desires, intentions, and interpretive

strategies."[181] Despite her reservations and her own detached position as

researcher, Radway ends her study by conceding that the commercial ideology of

the culture industry and the way its products are read are not necessarily

synonymous. She thus allows for the reader's input in generating meaning.

John Fiske's (1989) ideas on the uses of mass cultural products are

similar. He uses the term "mass culture" specifically to designate the material

products of the capitalist culture industry. "Popular culture" is a use of those

products in which meanings opposing the ideology of capitalism are produced.

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[179] Radway 210.

[180] Radway 221. This is an accurate description of Leavis's and Horkheimer/Adorno's position.

[181] Radway 221.

These two terms are related to two "economies" of culture identified by Fiske: "the financial (which circulates wealth in two subsystems) and the cultural (which circulates meanings and pleasures)."[182] He gives television as an example. The produced and distributed programme itself generates an audience that is then sold to advertisers, but parallel to this economy of financial exchange is the cultural economy of meanings and pleasures (produced not by the studio or even the programme, but by the audience). Fiske believes that, while authentic folk culture may be gone, the industrially produced objects of mass culture are transformed, in the act of reading, into a genuine popular culture (i.e. genuinely of-the-people). Popular readings are based on pleasure, and the site of the popular is the arena of hegemonic conflict described by Storey: "Popular pleasures arise from the social allegiances formed by subordinated people, that are bottom-up and thus must exist in some relationship of opposition to power."[183] Fiske argues that because popular culture is an act and based on experience, it is resistant to theory. It is based in "moments of production" and unique characteristics of the reader and is thus in a relationship of opposition to the structuring and generalising of theory.

Scott McCracken shows some agreement with Storey, Radway, and Fiske. In Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction (1998), he argues that popular culture is not passively absorbed, but is responded to critically. This is because it is not homogenous, but must operate within the context of the individual reader, and the world in which both it and the reader exist. It has the positive feature of

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[182] John Fiske, Understanding Popular Culture, (London: Routledge, 1989) 28.
[183] Fiske 49.

providing a stable sense of self in modernity/post-modernity and, through the potential for transgression, of suggesting new possible selves. Mirroring what Tolkien states and Freud implies, McCracken suggests a revolutionary dimension to the popular-fantastic:

> the negotiation between world, reader and text does not simply smooth over the contradictions and conflicts of contemporary society. It may well do the opposite and provoke a feeling of dissatisfaction, a sense that 'something is missing'. This sense of lack often has the opposite of a sedative effect. It can prompt the reader to look for something different, something better. The pleasures and transgressions involved in the experience of popular fiction are a constant reminder that a better, more fulfilled life is a possibility. Popular fiction engages in modernity's need to colonise the future, to project new worlds for ourselves [. . .] In this vision, the world, its texts and we ourselves are incomplete and have the potential to be remade. [. . .] If popular fiction turns the mind to mush, then that mush is also the fertile compost for new growth.[184]

Note that McCracken uses the metaphor of compost, a similar one to that used when Leavis refers to the popular writer as a "manure heap". But where she sees the "vital energy" produced by this disgusting object as trivial and damaging

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[184] Scott McCracken, Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998) 13.

to its readers, McCracken proposes that an actual growth of the self is the result of

the "compost" the popular deposits in the mind. The possible benefits do not only

extend to the individual but also "gesture to a better world".[185] In fact, overt

politics is obviously part of the mix in the compost: as McCracken points out,

cultural changes – the rise of feminism, for example – alter the content of popular

texts.[186] It should be added that the modernist literary techniques praised by

Leavis were also added to the heap and absorbed, albeit in a thinned form. In the

same way that Jackson argues fantastical works pre-empt modernism through the

exploration of altered perception, McCracken explains science fiction can be seen

as "the popular counterpart to modernism's enthusiasm for new possibilities in

perception." He suggests that it is not technique but the literary caste system that

distinguishes one from the other: "The relationship between modernism and

science fiction is complicated by modernism's inauguration of a divide between

high culture, which moves toward elitist, difficult art, and mass culture, which

would include popular fiction."[187] As has been shown, this "elitism" exists in

both conservative and leftwing criticism, and functions to isolate the fantastic, a

form that is to some extent transgressive (in the case of science fiction, by

discussing radical shifts in perception). McCracken even argues, in a similar way

to Freud, that the pleasure obtained from the popular (a feature of experience

reading) in itself contravenes boundaries: "Pleasure is always transgressive

because it oversteps convention, taking us out of the realm of conformity and into

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[185] McCracken 13.
[186] McCracken 30.
[187] McCracken 107. Frankenstein is often considered to be the earliest work of science fiction, predating modernism.

a more dangerous zone."[188] Of course it could be suggested that, while pleasure

may be related to transgression, it perhaps merely acts as a substitute for material

subversion. This position relies on the assumption that pleasure is an easily-

understood process of gratifying biological desires.

Ien Ang's work follows the strategy of reading commercial products

against the culture industry's intentions, but she adds several other concepts to

form a comprehensive model of the issues surrounding popular culture and its

reception. A feminist and academic, Ang is nevertheless deeply suspicious of any

elitist cultural position, as her book Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the

Melodramatic Imagination (1985) demonstrates.[189] Ang directly opposes Radway

on at least two significant points: firstly, she is not distanced from her own test

subjects (Ang's book is based on letters she received after placing an

advertisement asking for views on the television programme Dallas – she herself

is a "fan"); secondly, she does not resort to psychoanalysis or any other theory to

fully explain pleasure. Beginning with the assumption that people watch Dallas

simply because they enjoy it, Ang dismisses the analytical or critical approach of

attempting to assess "the social, economic and psychological characteristics of the

public" and instead asserts that an inquiry into the actual experience of watching

the programme is more relevant. This is because "[i]t is in the actual

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[188] McCracken 154.

[189] Indeed, there is some suggestion that the book is an attempt to reconcile two halves of her identity. Ang speaks of ambivalence: "This ambivialence is on the one hand connected with my identity as an intellectual and a feminist, and on the other hand with the fact that I have always particularly liked watching soap operas like Dallas." Ien Ang, Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination, trans. Della Couling (London: Routledge, 1989) 12.

confrontation between viewer and programme that pleasure (the word

"jouissance" might be used here) is primarily generated."[190] As she puts it,

> theoretical constructions by definition can never coincide with
>
> experience [. . .] Experiencing pleasure is not a conscious, directed
>
> activity (although one can strive for it), but something that
>
> 'happens', something which comes over the viewer according to
>
> his or her own feelings [. . .] generally viewers do not approach
>
> Dallas as text. For them watching it is first and foremost a
>
> practice. Certainly in this practice the Dallas text occupies a
>
> central place, but the practice itself comprises more than that.
>
> Therefore it is somewhat misleading – or at any rate inadequate –
>
> to deduce the pleasure of Dallas totally from its characteristics as a
>
> text.[191]

Thus, Ang's position is again that of positing a distinction between commercial

cultural products and the way in which they are read. She discusses this in

specifically Marxist terms, contrasting Marx's conceptions of "exchange value"

and "use-value". What Ang calls "the current Marxist idea", the typical Frankfurt

School position on popular culture, is presented as simplistic economic

determinism that ignores use-value altogether:

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[190] Ang, Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination 10.
[191] Ang, Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination 83.

Mass culture is the extreme embodiment of the subjection of culture to the economy; its most important characteristic is that it provides profit for the producers [. . .] But this is a one-sided presentation of the case [. . .] one cannot succeed in selling a commodity if it does not have a certain usefulness. And it is here that the contradictory character of the capitalist mode of production lies. From the standpoint of production the product features only as a commodity, but from the standpoint of consumption the same product features as use-value. The way in which a cultural product is consumed can therefore not be directly deduced from the way in which it is produced.[192]

John Storey makes the same point,[193] and Terry Lovell describes the idea in more detail. She notes that use-value only exists when a product is actually consumed,[194] something that backs up Ang's focus on the experience of watching Dallas.

Marx's discussion of use-value is based on products satisfying basic material wants (such as food), not, as is the case with cultural products, desires. This creates an even greater gulf between exchange value and use-value (for cultural items) because there is a "lack of intrinsic connection between the usefulness to the consumer of a particular type of cultural artifact, and the

[192] Ang, Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination 18.
[193] Storey, Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction 190.
[194] Terry Lovell, "Cultural Production," Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader, ed. John Storey (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice, 1998) 476.

physical form of the commodity under which it is sold."[195] Thus, the value for the

capitalist is material; the value for the consumer is not so simply defined.[196] This

fact calls into question the notion that popular culture in itself inculcates capitalist

ideology in those who make use of it.[197] Probably referring to economic

competition, Lovell even suggests that capitalism in itself will generate a variety

of wants, some of which will oppose capitalism and/or be difficult to control.

One problem with this position is that, while it assumes a certain autonomy from

ideology for the readers of popular culture, it sees its producers as exclusively

serving capitalism. This dissertation suggests that motives other than the

generation of capital may influence the popular.

Why is use-value so different to the actual text being read? One reason is

apparently the nature of that text itself. In order for <u>Dallas</u> to be seen as different

from itself, for it to be read in a way opposed to capitalist ideology, the readers

must be immersed in it as a real world, they must experience it as a kind of

reality: one of their own making. Because the programme is quite clearly

fantastical on several levels, this is not realism that involves an apparent mirror of

the "real world", what Ang calls "empirical realism"; rather, it is reality at the

level of connotation not denotation – at the level of denotation the programme is

patently unreal.[198] This connotative realism is psychological and not based on

consensus reality. Furthermore, it emerges from experience, not merely the text:

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[195] Lovell 477.

[196] Though Marcuse might argue that the empiricism of technological industrial capitalist ideology means that desires are indeed identical to the material object.

[197] Lovell 479.

[198] Ang, <u>Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination</u> 42.

it is "a subjective experience of the world: a 'structure of feeling'".[199] As has

been noted, for Ang pleasure is not something open to theorisation. And if

pleasure is unquantifiable, so is displeasure, though it may be rationalised: the

letters Ang received criticising <u>Dallas</u> are in general quite definite, unlike the

more ambiguous and uncertain responses of the programme's fans. These viewers

have not experienced connotative realism. They are detached from the

programme, see it as unreal, and read it as a text at the denotative level.

Displeasure, anger, hate – emotional reactions – are frequently presented in the

letters as if they naturally emerge from a rational critique of capitalism, mass

(American) culture, etc. The letter-writers felt, Ang believes, that they were

justified in responding with "an uninhibited display of anger".[200]

Ang's explanation for this is what she terms the "ideology of mass

culture",[201] a socially indoctrinated belief in the inferiority of mass culture so

totally ingrained that it is not questioned. This is <u>ideology</u>, not merely the

preoccupation of a handful of academics, and permeates all society. For example,

the negative responses in Ang's survey were hardly all from cultural critics, yet

they automatically refer to the categories used in the IOMC because it "even

extends to the commonsense of everyday thinking".[202] The IOMC instantly

explains and rationalises one's aversion to a mass cultural product. Therefore,

those who take pleasure in a mass/popular cultural work (unless that pleasure is

genuinely ironic) must attempt to reconcile this with the IOMC, an ideology that

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[199] Ang, <u>Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination</u> 45.
[200] Ang, <u>Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination</u> 92.
[201] Hereafter referred to as the IOMC. This differs from Fiske's definition of mass culture.
[202] Ang, <u>Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination</u> 95.

they themselves are also subject to (though Ang did receive one letter from someone who apparently did not comprehend anything at all illicit in enjoying Dallas). If hating mass culture allows one, via the IOMC, to construct an identity as "'a person of taste', 'a cultural expert' or 'someone who is not seduced by the cheap tricks of the commericial culture industry',"[203] then a lover of mass culture must feel himself or herself to be the opposite of these things. Ang proposes four methods to counteract a negative self-image caused by the IOMC: 1) to assert an awareness of the faults and dangers of the popular while enjoying it; 2) to claim that a particular work is not mass culture, that it has, in fact, substance; 3) to use irony as a mask for the genuine enjoyment of a popular work on its own terms; 4) to subscribe to the "ideology of popularism".[204] This final position relates to those who believe themselves to be oppressed or forced to feel shame, emotional immaturity, or intellectual inferiority by the IOMC, and respond by rebelling against it. The IOP, of course, easily leads to chaotic relativism, and is based on a defensive reaction to the IOMC. The IOMC is theoretical and detached; the IOP relies on actual experience of culture. Ang, possibly speaking of herself, points out that both ideologies can be present in the same consciousness, and that both always exist in a dialectic in which the strengthening of one brings about the strengthening of the other.

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[203] Ang, Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination 102.

[204] Hereafter referred to as the IOP. In practice, individuals presumably use a mixture of these strategies.

Critical and Experience Reading

Because the term "critical reader" is here set in opposition to "experience reader", the impression might be given that the activity of the critical reader does not involve the imaginative faculties but is purely intellectual. Obviously, this is not the case. In the sense that all reading is a conscious mental process, the analytical practices of critical reading take place within individual awareness. It is "experienced" even if only at the level of text (in that the reader may be distanced from it, while still having the conscious experience of analysing the text). Perhaps solely text-based reading is ultimately as transcendent as experience reading – indeed, it could be argued that the very existence of "text" is reliant on a reader. Without a conscious reader, a text has no meaning, like the silent fall of a tree in a deserted forest. It must be performed to rise above its status as a mere material object, a quantity of wood pulp and ink (in the case of a book).

However, while a reader producing meaning from a text does not necessarily involve experience reading, the entry into an immersive fictive world, what Ang calls "connotative" realism, does. This is what separates the critical from the experience reader: the former is detached and analytical; the latter is immersed and experiences, rather than analyses, literary effects. This section will explore the idea in more detail.

Two theorists of reading, Wolfgang Iser and Stephen Greenblatt, are studied here in relation to critical and experience reading. Building on Roman Ingarden's phenomenological aesthetics, Iser uses reception theory (texts are a

space in which meaning is produced by the reader; they are not absolutely objective). Greenblatt is a New Historicist, understanding the reader's experience of a text as dependent on its historical context. These thinkers are relevant to this dissertation's argument; because they both consider the importance of the reader in generating meaning, and both propose the existence of two reading techniques.

Jacques Derrida's ideas on the limits of language are also considered, in terms of how they impact on reading experience. Drawing on elucidations of deconstruction Derrida made during the 1990s, this section relates his concept of an "other" of language outside understandable discourse and thought to his comments on reading pleasure.

* * *

Wolfgang Iser (1978) explores the history of reading and fiction, such as the changing role of the fictive in philosophical discourse and the psychoanalytic interpretations of literature. He sees the most significant element of traditional criticism, which still survives in many of today's more radical critical strategies, as the search for a hidden and definite meaning within a text. In this model, texts might be used as no more than sources of information, and weakened as a consequence. This describes the process of critical reading, a method that can differ from close reading in that the latter may be focused on understanding reader experience or even on transcending the materiality of the text itself (as is the case in biblical exegesis). Iser explains texts should be read in order to experience the information they contain:

construed as a testimony to the spirit of the age, to social

conditions, to the neuroses of their authors, and so forth, they were

reduced to the level of documents, and thus robbed from that very

dimension that sets them apart from the document, the opportunity

they offer us to experience for ourselves the spirit of the age, social

conditions, the author's neuroses, etc.[205]

Iser proposes that this kind of experienced and direct communication transcends

whatever context texts happen to be in, even "when their message has long since

passed into history and their meaning no longer seems to be of importance." In

fact, the continued ability to communicate in this way is a "vital feature" of the

literary text.[206] Iser thus defines literature as a form that in some sense is not

bound by the material forces of history. The reason that the traditional paradigm

of textual analysis and information gathering survives today, Iser believes, is that

the reader creates meaning by developing a sense of wholeness in reading the

text.[207] The search for meaning is actually a search for homogeneity.

The reader must generate unity in his or her reading, because texts are

intrinsically fragmented and cannot be perceived as a whole at any one time. Iser

talks of a "wandering viewpoint" that operates within the reading process and

organises shifting perspectives. He believes that the memory of read narrative

events and the expectation of narrative events to-be-read are projected upon one

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[205] Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response, trans. David Henry
Wilson (London: Routledge, 1978) 13
[206] Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response 13
[207] Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response 16

another to form a complete picture of a text that is in fact a collection of signs. As he points out, memory and expectation are not part of the text; they are faculties of the reader.[208]

The reading process involves more than producing a sense of wholeness from disparate textual elements, however. There are "blanks" within the text, areas of uncertainty that the reader automatically attempts to fill with meaning. Yet, these blanks themselves form the basis for the system of memory and expectation outlined above. The wandering viewpoint follows and anticipates the series of blanks throughout a text. As the reader fills each blank with meaning and it becomes an "image" within consciousness, it "imprints itself on its successor, even though the latter is meant to resolve the deficiencies of the former."[209]

Textual meaning therefore emerges from a dialectic of text and reader: "It is called aesthetic response because it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus."[210] This is not to say that historical context is utterly irrelevant. As Iser notes, there are two relationships in which a text is involved. One is between it and its historical environment; the other is between it and the "potential dispositions" of the reader.[211]

Iser discusses two different manifestations of reading, which he calls the "fictive" and the "imaginary". The fictive is a reading "act", an actual physical

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[208] Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response 135
[209] Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response 203
[210] Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response x
[211] Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response 14

event – it is therefore wrong to associate it with unreality. The imaginary is what

the fictive activates in the reader, though it is distinct from the faculty of

imagination.[212] Both of these, the fictive and the imaginary, operate at the level

of experience, though the former is a deceptive account of the real (i.e. the

empirical world), while the latter involves an "imaginary life of dreams,

daydreams, and hallucinations."[213] Drawing on Coleridge, Sartre, and

Castoriadis, Iser proposes that imagination requires some form of stimulation in

order to come into play. This stimulation may come from within the "self", but is

external to the imaginary. The fictive is something that can activate the

imaginary, the former acting as a material expression of the latter: "By opening up

spaces of play, the fictive compels the imaginary to take on a form at the same

time that it acts as a medium for its manifestation [. . .] Consequently, play arises

out of the coexistence of the fictive and the imaginary."[214]

Despite this association between the fictive and the imaginary, the two are

distinct. While the fictive is simple to identify, relating to the real (even while it

subverts the real by representing it and thus making it fictional), the imaginary

escapes definition. As Iser explains, it is "basically a featureless and inactive

potential, which accounts for the failed attempts to grasp it cognitively."[215] Terms

such as fancy, fantasy, and imagination have been used to describe the imaginary,

but, Iser argues, these are "specific, context-bound demarcations" of something

that evades such categorisation. Presumably, the potential of the imaginary is

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[212] Wolfgang Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 305
[213] Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary xiii
[214] Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary xvii
[215] Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary xvii

actualised by the stimulation of the fictive; thus it acquires form through the fictive.

Art plays an important role in the exploration of human identity. Iser says it is essential because it leads to "human self-exegesis".[216] Through literature we can encounter various selves, what Iser refers to as the "shapes" of "human plasticity", exploring our urge to become "present to ourselves".[217] Human plasticity, the malleability of the self, is motivated by the need to gain a shape, but this operates with the qualification that the self must not be imprisoned in any of the shapes experienced. Texts do not literally provide new selves for the reader, of course. Rather, what a text "stages" is appearance, appearance that cannot become present because it is indeterminate. This indeterminacy entices the reader while it "eludes the grasp".[218]

*   *   *

Stephen Greenblatt (1990) also outlines two separate categories of reading, what he calls "resonance" and "wonder". "Resonance" relates to the cultural context and content of an object; it evokes "dynamic cultural forces" in the object's viewer. The viewer thus draws cultural meaning from the object through its resonance, though this meaning is not fixed and alters over time. The object's resonance is therefore based on "the historical circumstances of [a text's] original production and consumption [. . .] this is not a simple material process

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[216] Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary xiii
[217] Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary xi
[218] Iser, The Fictive and the Imaginary 297

but is one of changing and conflicting material conditions."[219] Thus, while this is

an analytic practice, conscious experience is directly involved in "awakening in

the viewer a sense of the historically contingent construction of art objects."[220]

The more mysterious order of "wonder" is "the power to stop the viewer

in his tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted

attention."[221] One might assume that resonance could have this result, but

resonance is opposed to it, actually diminishing the effect of the artistic object.[222]

Unlike Iser's category of the imaginative, wonder does not transcend history – it

is as subject to cultural change as resonance – but it is more than simply the

impact of historically conditioned awareness. Once, wonder was based around

status, the aura an object had through the kudos lent to it by its owner. This has

now changed in the West into a "mystique" conveyed to an object by "the creative

genius of the artist."[223] But no matter what the underlying cause (or what

Greenblatt believes to be the underlying cause), wonder is the power of an object

to inspire awe.

If the object in question is the written text, "resonance" can be equated

with critical reading (or one version of it), while "wonder" is close to the concept

of experience reading. While the production of awe is historically contingent for

Greenblatt, the experienced phenomena itself is not historically determined.

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[219] Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," Modern Literary Theory: A Reader, eds. Phillip Rice and Patricia Waugh, 4th ed.(London: Arnold-Hodder, 2001) 313.
[220] Greenblatt 315.
[221] Greenblatt 313.
[222] Greenblatt 322.
[223] Greenblatt 320.

Greenblatt asserts that "almost" to be effective, cultural objects must have "elements of both" resonance and wonder.

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Thus far, various explanations of the pleasures gained through reading the popular-fantastic have been outlined. Marxist and liberal humanist approaches might see these pleasures as an encounter with the expected, while psychoanalytic models use the idea of compensatory gratification. Without arguing their case rigorously, Tolkien and Lewis consider the pleasures to be spiritual. Some of the cultural critics examined above are unforthcoming about the nature of pleasure, except to suggest it is mysterious and resistant to theory. This critical overview will conclude with a theoretical model of pleasure that could be regarded as transcendent. Some of the ideas of Jacques Derrida, who himself positions pleasure "outside" normal discourse, will be explored.

Derrida's project, if it can be called such, is a kind of inverted philosophy, seeking to expose the metaphysical assumptions of Western thought. Subverting the notion of being as presence, or, indeed, the pursuit of a grounding being prior to ideas of full and complete self-presence,[224] Derrida reads such thinkers as Plato, Saussure, and Rousseau with particular interest in their privileging of speech over writing. For him, this emerges from their agenda of ensuring fully self-present meaning through the association of the signified with presence, and the signifier with the absence of a signified presence, even positing that the notion

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[224] Seán Burke, The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998) 117.

of "being as presence" is made possible by the repression of writing.[225] In this

conception, writing is made into a mere sign of spoken language to conceal that it

is in fact the signifier that has primacy. Metaphysics attempts to consider the

signifier as completely external to meaning while at the same time assuming it

unproblematically refers to meaning. Speech creates the illusion that there is a

presence, a speaking self, actually present within language. Derrida counters this

by showing that a text privileging speech over writing in fact requires a pre-

originary "writing" that contradicts that text's scheme.[226] This counter to the

metaphysics of presence is called "deconstruction", a term that is often not used in

quite the same way in literary criticism.

Derrida does not actually attack the possibility of reference. Rather, it is

the <u>accepted notion</u> of the sign that collapses in his model. It would seem that it is

confusion on this point that has produced some of the absolutist literary-critical

positions (meaning cannot exist; the only possibility is the play of signs in a

system of difference) that Derrida attacks in the first place. His actual "project" is

the deconstruction of the model of the sign informed by the metaphysics of

presence, not an assertion of the non-referentiality of language. As he himself has

emphasised:

> I never cease to be amazed by critics who see my work as a
>
> declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are
>
> imprisoned within language; it is, in fact, saying the exact

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[225] Burke 118.

[226] Burke 116. This is what Derrida calls "arche-writing", a common root from which indistinguishable speech and writing stem.

opposite. The critique of logocentricism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language'. Every week I receive critical commentaries and studies on deconstruction which operate on the assumption that what they call 'post-structuralism' amounts to saying that there is nothing beyond language, that we are submerged in words – and other stupidities of that sort [. . .] [T]o distance oneself thus from the habitual structure of reference, to challenge or complicate our common assumptions about it, does not amount to saying that there is <u>nothing</u> beyond language.[227]

He points out that it is what he calls "truth" (the quality of a statement, a judgement or an intuition) that is internal to language. "Facts" (the real?), although they relate to truth, are extra-linguistic.[228]

What, then, is "the other of language" that Derrida's critique searches for? It is associated with the deconstruction of the metaphysical model of the sign. Timothy Clark explains that Derrida sees language as a site of the "other", which is "what knowledge must concern itself with once the disjunction of between being and knowing is acknowledged."[229] However, there can be no full knowledge of this other, because "what is to be 'known' no longer falls within the

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[227] Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," <u>States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind</u> (interviews by Richard Kearney. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995) 173.

[228] Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," <u>Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy</u>, eds. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999) 77.

[229] Timothy Clark, <u>Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida's Notion and Practice of Literature</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 9 and 10.

scope of the received understanding of knowledge."[230] Because any "access" to

the other of language requires the deconstruction of the received (metaphysical)

understanding of knowledge, this would seem to be unavoidable. Otherness is

that which is unthinkable within the metaphysical model of language. It has no

substance in itself but is a disturbance at the boundaries of language.

Deconstruction allows otherness to be "felt". It is "giving oneself over" to the

unknowable, non-rational other.[231] The other is the outside of language.

Derrida's thought has relevance to a discussion of the relationship between

literature and pleasure. He says that literature "can make the limits of our

language tremble".[232] He talks of the enjoyment, the experience, of reading,

implying that reading pleasure is itself an act of deconstruction (and thus an

"engagement" with otherness): "Every time there is 'jouissance' (but the 'there is'

of this event is in itself extremely enigmatic), there is 'deconstruction' [. . .]

[T]here is no efficient deconstruction without the greatest possible pleasure."[233]

Perhaps pleasure is linked to deconstruction because pleasure is inherently against

closure.[234] A deconstructive literary criticism faithful to Derrida's principles

would involve the suspicion of simplistic reference married with an awareness of

reading pleasure as a (partial) engagement with otherness.[235] Literature for

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[230] Clark 10.

[231] Clark 189.

[232] Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other" 162.

[233] Jacques Derrida, "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida," Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992) 55-56.

[234] It should be noted that "pleasure" here is different to a Freudian conception of pleasure as the satisfaction of (ultimately biological) desire. There is no suggestion that engagement with the other of language is a simple compensation. Derridean pleasure appears to be closer to the sublime.

[235] There is some similarity to ideas on literature held by Julia Kristeva. Drawing on the ideas of Jacques Lacan, Kristeva postulates that the ending of the mother/child dyad with the resolution of

Derrida is not simply the closed system of non-referential signs that some of the literary-critical exponents of "deconstruction" believe; it is far more: "Experience of Being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It's the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world."[236]

Outline

The following chapters analyse a range of texts from the years 1843-1973, focusing on the above issues. There is a biographical element to this process, in the sense that the life and intentions of authors will be examined, and the readings will attempt to reveal to what extent authors have used the medium of fantastical fiction to express anxieties, desires, and philosophical beliefs. Some attention is given to the changing status of the popular-fantastic as its position shifts over time within the cultural hierarchy. In all cases, the binaries of realism/fantastic, high/popular, and critical/experience – and possible dialectics that may exist – are explored.

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the Oedipus complex involves an entry into language and the social domain. The two appear to be synonymous, and this social/language position is termed "the symbolic". However, the prior unconscious order of bodily drives, "the semiotic", remains as a site of pleasure in a mature human, and exists in a dialectic with the symbolic. Literary pleasures occur through the semiotic irrupting into literature via non-verbal signifying systems, such as rhythm. While she thus locates pleasure outside language, Kristeva therefore associates it with bodily drives and thus the material. Consequently, her position is quite different to Derrida's

[236] Derrida, "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida" 47.

Chapter One examines work by Charles Dickens. Dickens provides a useful starting point for this discussion for several reasons. His position as the popular novelist of his day, coupled with the increase in literacy at this time and the serial format of his novels, makes him an important figure in the rise of modern popular culture. Yet he also features prominently in the canon of high literature. The chapter considers the importance of the fantastic and the popular as themes and strategies used self-consciously by Dickens. This is compared and contrasted with the Dickensian agenda of realism and social comment. As a writer, Dickens dealt with the fantastic both as fantasy and as form. Consequently, three of the Christmas Books are examined as works of fantasy, and fantastical form in Bleak House is discussed. The role of social realism in all texts will be examined.

Chapter Two deals with the major scientific romances of H. G. Wells. Notable biographical and historical links between Wells and Dickens are revealed. For example, continuing to emphasise the importance of increased literacy, it is shown that Wells is writing at a time when the first beneficiaries of the 1870 Education Act made up the greater part of the reading public. While acknowledging the importance of Wells as a trained scientist and political commentator, the chapter concentrates on those fantastical works that dominated his early career. These scientific romances are seen as areas of interaction between the terms of the binary oppositions proposed above.

As scientific romance, the fantastic occupied a respectable middle position on the cultural hierarchy. Chapter Two sees this position slip with the rise of pulp

science fiction. The history of the pulp magazine is detailed with suggestions on the differences between scientific romance and science fiction and the development of the former into the latter. Social and economic factors are taken into account, as are the functions pulp magazines had for their readership. The chapter then goes on to consider novels by three writers who emerged from the pulps to gain a higher status: John Wyndham's The Day of the Triffids, Brian Aldiss's Non-Stop, and J. G. Ballard's The Drowned World. It will be demonstrated that each of these works contains strands of escapism and entertainment at the same time as they discuss social and psychological ideas.

Where Chapter Three deals with early novels by Aldiss and Ballard, Chapter Four's enquiries are aimed at their more mature works of the 1970s: Frankenstein Unbound and Crash. Together with Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, these novels form the basis for an examination of postmodernism. This chapter not only deals with the literary form of postmodernism, but also the social condition of postmodernity, in which the real has been "aestheticised" and become confused with the fictive. Consideration is given to how this development is affected by the binaries of realism/fantastic, high/popular, and critical/experience.

* * *

This dissertation proposes that the divides between realism and the fantastic, high and popular culture, and critical and experience reading are in fact parts of the same schism, one intimately related to how individuals view the world. The most unfortunate consequence of the separation is that readers of on

each side of it are denied (to a full extent, at least) the perspective of those on the other, and are thus deprived of a more complete appreciation of literature. Even when both reading strategies exist in the same person, it is probable that they don't occur simultaneously, and possible that the decision to employ one or the other is based on the category of text being read.

In its most overt form, the schism has an identifiable historical basis, beginning in the 1920s/30s with the birth of modernism and the rise of mass literacy. Many of the critics looked at in this introduction foreshadowed, helped to instigate, or emerged from debates surrounding the high/popular divide.[237] Though writing in 1908, Freud already saw the cultural split and noted the psychological significance of the popular. The utterly opposed Leavis and Tolkien both wrote in the 1930s, while the first of the Lewis essays drawn on above was published in 1947, the same year as <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u>. The attempt to understand and define has continued, and there is some evidence of a effort to resolve the cultural rift, of apparently disparate theorists agreeing in their condemnation of modernity and capitalism and in their appeals to a pastoral past. Furthermore, critical and experience reading can be seen as issues in cultural studies and theories of reading.

It will be suggested that both reading methods have value, for two significant reasons: 1) utilising the two schemes together allows for a fuller perception of literature; 2) though the material and transcendental perspectives on which they are based seem to be opposed, both are in fact useful approaches to the

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[237] An example not touched on here is New Criticism, which, despite an avowed focus on reading experience, in practice employed close analysis of texts.

understanding of reality. Thus, a reading technique that incorporates both critical

and experience strategies is desirable, and the following readings attempt to do

this.

Chapter One: Charles Dickens and the Fantastic

The peasant may play cards in the evening while the poet
writes verses, but there is one political principle to which
they both subscribe, namely, that among the half dozen or
so things for which a man of honour should be prepared, if
necessary, to die, the right to play, the right to frivolity is
not the least.

W. H. Auden[1]

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[1] W. H. Auden, "The Dyer's Hand," The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays (London: Faber, 1962)
83-89.

Romanticism contained a varied and changing set of concepts, but one

thing that can be said to have integrated these was reaction against the rationalism

of the Enlightenment.[2] Philosophically, Romanticism could be an attempt to rise

above alienation and disillusionment. There is an emphasis on restoring "unity

with oneself, others and nature."[3] In literary terms, this project was to be

achieved through imagination. Coleridge, for example, believed the romantic

imagination could act to unify divided modern societies. Some Romantics,

finding the absence of God in their age intolerable, sought to discover a new

system of signs with which to re-establish a link with the divine.[4] Robert Higbie

believes literature had a similar agenda far into the Victorian period. He asserts

that nineteenth century writers operate within a post-Enlightenment dichotomy of

reason/imagination, arguing that writers of Dickens's era struggle to access the

ideal, a project inherited from the Romantics. However, Dickens and his

contemporaries also attempt to interrogate the problematics of the project, namely

those surrounding the issue that the ideal (and its implied spirituality) cannot be

known as fact if it is disassociated from reason. Dickens's own concept of

imagination relates to both idealist and realist strands of Victorian thought.[5]

Higbie identifies four groups of Victorian writers: idealist-realists, seeking

the ideal in reality; disillusioned idealist-realists, seeing realism as the negation of

the ideal; antirealists, given over completely to imagination; negative antirealists,

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[2] This is not to say that the romantics rejected the rational (as was perhaps more the case in the post-romantic movement); rather, they rejected rationalism, responding to science, for example, in imaginative terms.

[3] Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2000).

[4] J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963).

[5] Robert Higbie, Dickens and Imagination (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1998).

clinging to imagination while making art from imagination's failure to achieve the Romantic project. He suggests Dickens belongs to all four groups.[6]

Charles Dickens was, among other things, a fantasist and a populist. His work typified a period of social change. As Leavis proposes, the emergence of the high/low cultural divide was in part caused by nineteenth-century serial fiction.[7] Dickens is therefore a useful starting point for our discussion. This chapter will examine the background to and motivations for his use of the fantastic. It will be shown that Dickens believes the fantastic to be a liberating medium, releasing human beings from the psychological effects of industrial society. Intimately connected with this belief is his need to commune with his readers, and his demand for popular culture. It will be suggested that there is a bond between fantastical literature and popular culture in Dickens's work.

The Fantastic and Dickens's Childhood

Dickens's biography immediately reveals that fantastical literature played a significant part in his young life. Harry Stone reports that children's fiction at the time of Dickens's childhood was primarily realistic, materialistic, and rationalistic, intended to inculcate these "improving" qualities.[8] Evangelical Christianity distrusted imagination,[9] and imaginative literature was attacked by

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[6] Higbie 26.
[7] Q. D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London: Chatto, 1965) 160-161.
[8] Harry Stone, Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Novel-Making (London: Macmillan, 1980) 19.
[9] Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900 (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1957) 108-15.

the utilitarians.[10] There was, however, a subversive underground of "rather lurid popular literature aimed at children, the untutored and the naïve."[11] Unsurprisingly, children were usually shielded from this material,[12] and so it is quite possible to imagine "how exciting and liberating that forbidden jungle must have been to any imaginative child."[13] Dickens was such a child, and, whether through liberality or incompetence on the part of his parents, he had access to the fantastic. Were this not the case his later writings might have been very different.

Stone points out that Dickens was exposed to the fantastic before he could read, through the oral storytelling of his grandmother Elizabeth Ball Dickens and nursemaid Mary Weller. The tales told by the latter were excessively morbid and macabre.[14] A weak child, whose attacks of pain (probably related to a kidney problem) led to periods of lassitude, Dickens could often only observe the games of other children. Throughout these interludes he read prose classics such as Tom Jones and Robinson Crusoe, and works of overt fantasy. Foremost among the latter was The Arabian Nights. The impact of this book on his future life and work was considerable. Stone emphasises the radical effect of these exotic fairy-tales:

> "It would be difficult to exaggerate the enchantment that The Arabian Nights cast on the Georgians and the Victorians, or the revolutionary nature of its intrusion into English children's literature. Into the latter world, for the most part so literal and chilling, came magic lamps, all-powerful genies, fairy-tale palaces,

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[10] Altick 129-40.
[11] Stone 21.
[12] Presumably such treatment of the young belonged to a specific class ideology.
[13] Stone 23.
[14] Stone 33-34.

incredible treasures, sinuous dancing girls, bold robbers, mythical

kingdoms, veiled maidens, ingenious strategies, and magical

transformations [. . .] The <u>Arabian Nights</u> was alien and liberating

[. . .] The Eastern tales were designed to entertain, to elicit

amazement and wonder [. . .] This was no prosaic land of grey

skies and stern teachings."[15]

This sounds like Marcuse's notion of artistic alienation: the liberation of a mind,

through art, from materialistic and empirical ideologies that alienate the self from

subjectivity.

It is the skewed but also liberating vision of <u>The Arabian Nights</u> that

Dickens was to carry into his adult writings. As George Gissing reveals, "Oddly

enough, Dickens seems to make more allusions throughout his work to the

<u>Arabian Nights</u> than to any other book or author. He is not given to quoting, or

making literary references; but those fairy tales of the East supply him with a

good number of illustrations, and not only in his early novels."[16] Indeed, Dickens

reread <u>The Arabian Nights</u> – at home, on railway journeys, and during holidays –

his entire life.[17] Gissing goes on to speculate that this may "illustrate that habit of

mind" that led Dickens to describe London so romantically.[18]

This is an interesting observation. It implies Dickens's outlook was such

that he imposed a fantastical vision on the material world around him, attaching

his desire to it, which is exactly how Freud describes childhood play, and how

Lewis, Tolkien, and, to an extent, Shklovsky explain defamiliarisation. It almost

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[15] Stone 25.
[16] George Gissing, <u>Charles Dickens: A Critical Study</u>, The Victorian Era Series (London:
Blackie, 1898) 30.
[17] Stone 56.
[18] Gissing 30.

seems Dickens's perceptions were not so much mediated by consciousness as remade by it. Stone suggests that this was in fact the case for the author during his childhood. According to Stone, the sense of transcendence the young Dickens gained from reading was carried into everyday life, causing him to endow material objects "with the magic and radiance of fairyland."[19] As we will see, much of Dickens's fiction involves an implied or even literal regression to this childhood, a link between imagination and the child denied by Lewis and Tolkien. As Leavis disparagingly remarks, "[t]he peculiarity of Dickens, as any one who runs a critical eye over a novel or two of his can see, is that his originality is confined to recapturing a child's outlook on the grown-up world, emotionally he is not only uneducated but also immature."[20] This method of viewing reality was to be useful, perhaps even vital, to Dickens during his time at Warren's Blacking warehouse. As we have seen, the fantastic initially provided a means of escape from childhood isolation. At Warren's it was to be a source of liberation from alienated labour.

Dickens's job in the warehouse became a menial one of sealing the pots of blacking and pasting labels to them. As an adult he confessed to John Forster that this experience was deeply traumatic:

> The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly
> neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the
> misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I
> had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy

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[19] Stone 53.
[20] Q. D. Leavis. Fiction and the Reading Public (London: Chatto, 1965) 157.

and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be

brought back anymore; cannot be written.[21]

Unhappy, dissatisfied with his present situation, it is possible that Dickens coped

by resorting to the childhood regressions alluded to by Marcuse, Freud

(phantasy), and Hume. He used his imagination in an attempt to reach out to his

workmates, beguiling them with what he could remember of his reading;[22] he

created "astonishing fictions about the wharves and the tower" to entertain an

orphan who worked at the Marshalsea.[23] As well as producing his own tales,

Dickens also sought to ease his sorrow and debasement with an escape into

underground literature, perhaps using it to support a sense of self in the manner

described by McCracken. Stone discusses one of the penny magazines Dickens

bought at this time. The Terrific Register was, Stone argues, a means of

imaginative connection with Dickens's childhood because it focused on the same

horrific images as those of Mary Weller's tales.[24]

Dickens's experiences at Warren's, and his strategy for escaping them,

helped to confirm his fantastical perception of the real. As Stone puts it, "The

streets and their thronging crowds, the darkness and the flaring gas, were now the

substance of his own fairy tales, his own Arabian Nights, his own

transformations, his own storytelling, his own Gothic fancies, and his own

nightmare imaginings."[25] Dickens's presentation of urban wonders and horrors

has been called "new Gothic" and "Dickensian Gothic".[26] A synthesis of the real

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[21] Dickens qtd. in John Forster. The Life of Charles Dickens (London: Hazel, n.d.) 133.
[22] Forster 334.
[23] Forster 334.
[24] Stone 64.
[25] Stone 67.
[26] Michael Hollington. "Boz's Gothic Gargoyles." Dickens Quarterly 16.3 (1999): 160.

and the fantastic was to determine much of Dickens's agenda as a writer, and

upholds Higbie's suggestion that Dickens's fiction relates to both idealism and

realism.

Dickens the Author and the Popular-Fantastic

Leavis believes the (for her) current reading habits of the masses began

with nineteenth-century serial fiction. Obviously, the serialised novel was more

accessible financially, selling for around a shilling a number. The rise of the

periodical would make fiction still more affordable. Leavis argues that, as fiction

became cheaper, members of the uneducated classes, moulded by Dickens's serial

fiction, became its main consumers. "Serious" novelists – read by the smaller,

educated class – could no longer receive a return for their work.[27] Thus, "[t]his

new kind of fiction flourished because it was written for a new, naïve, public, not

that of the old circulating libraries or that could afford to buy Scott but for the

shopkeeper and the working man."[28] The group that Leavis identifies is the

nineteenth-century "working class", encompassing both the lower and lower-

middle classes (three quarters of the population).[29] As Leavis puts it, "one has

only to remember the tone of the references to Dickens in Cranford and The Heir

of Redclyffe to realise that his serial numbers were considered the fiction of the

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[27] Leavis 160-61.
[28] Leavis 156. It should be noted that public libraries began in the 1850s (the act for them being passed in 1850), but were not widespread until the end of the century.
[29] Altick 82.

uncultivated and inherently 'low.'"[30] Saying, "Dickens stands primarily for a set

of crude emotional exercises." Leavis goes on to state that he provides the

"laughter and tears" formula of all succeeding popular fiction, from the bestseller

to Hollywood[31]

    While there is much to question in Leavis's analysis (later in her career

she became more sympathetic to Dickens's work) it seems reasonable to agree

that the advent of the serial novel opened the fiction market to a larger reading

public, many of whom were of a lower class than traditional consumers of

literature (users of circulating libraries, for example) and favoured works that

would elicit an emotional response. They enjoyed, in other words, experience

reading, and it would be surprising if the fantastic did not play a part in this. That

Dickens's fictions are only half realist can scarcely be doubted. His writings

contain minute observation of the material world he and his readers knew, and in

that sense can be associated with realist fiction; but in terms of both content and

style they far exceed the bounds of realism. A tendency to explore the unreal was

often not well-received by Victorian intellectuals. One reviewer, clearly irritated

by the fantasy of the Christmas Books, states Dickens has abandoned the realistic

style of his early novels and sketches and now "is remarkable for finding 'tongues

in trees,' or any other inanimate things."[32] Gissing is similarly dismissive,

emphasising that Dickens was too fond of the far-fetched. He believes this is due

to Dickens's love of the theatre (the theatre was far-fetched for Gissing), which

"was assuredly a misfortune to him, as author and as man."[33] Speaking of

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[30] Leavis 153. Leavis's interpretation of these references is open to question.
[31] Leavis 156.
[32] "From an Unsigned Article, 'Boz Versus Dickens', Parker's London Magazine," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 170.
[33] Gissing 45.

Dickens in his days as a journalist, Gissing tells us, "[a] conjurer, a fortune-teller, a shabby acrobat, a cheap-jack – one and all were irresistible to him; he could not pass a menagerie, a circus, a strolling troop of players; the squeak of Punch had as much charm for him as for any child,"[34] which reveals that Dickens's childhood preoccupations were still with him as an adult. As Dickens himself says of Blackfriars Road, during his time at Warren's, "I have been seduced more than once, in that street on a Saturday night, by a show-van at a corner; and have gone in, with a very motley assemblage, to see the Fat Pig, and the Wild Indian, and the Little Lady."[35] It seems the capacity to be "seduced" by such a spectacle never left him.

As is well known, Dickens was passionate about the fantastic, outlandish, sentimental, and bizarre. His correspondence with Forster on the writing of The Chimes suggests his emotional state. He reports he is "in regular, ferocious excitement,"[36] "very shaky from work,"[37] and has "undergone as much sorrow and agitation as if the thing were real."[38] Upon finishing The Chimes he writes, "I have had what women call 'a real good cry!'"[39] And this emotional involvement was not unique. Of The Haunted Man he writes, "I finished last night, having been crying my eyes out over it – not painfully but pleasantly as I

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[34] Gissing 39.

[35] Dickens qtd. in Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens 335.

[36] Charles Dickens, "To John Forster, [?Mid-October 1844]," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Four 1844-1846, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 201.

[37] Charles Dickens, "To John Forster, [?21 October 1844]," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Four 1844-1846, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 207.

[38] Charles Dickens, "To John Forster, [?21 October 1844]," 207.

[39] Charles Dickens, "To John Forster, 3 and [4] November 1844," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Four 1844-1846, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 210.

hope the readers will – these last three days,"[40] and he says he was "very much affected" by A Christmas Carol.[41]

Dickens's attraction to imaginative fiction was not solely based on emotion, nor on ignorance or a lack of self-awareness and critical faculties. His relationship with the fantastic developed into a conscious philosophy of human selfhood in opposition to contemporary society. Thus it is that the fantastic, for Dickens, holds the key to liberation from alienation. Stone puts this point succinctly:

> The fairy story was also inextricably associated with childhood; it shaped the very character of future generations. In Dickens's lexicon the fairy tale was becoming a shorthand way of emphasizing a contemporary danger and suggesting an essential solution. The lesson, Dickens felt, was clear. In an age when men were becoming machines, fairy stories must be cherished and must be allowed to do their beneficent work of nurturing man's birthright of feeling and fancy.[42]

So, the fantastic must be retained in order to combat alienation with human essence. This belief is hinted at in the "Preliminary Word" to Household Words, in which the proposed philosophies of the new journal are stated. It is here that Dickens, using imagery from The Arabian Nights, refers to the fantastic in the

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[40] Charles Dickens, "To William Bradbury, 1 December 1848," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Five 1847-1849, eds. Graham Storey and K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981) 451.

[41] Charles Dickens, "To Charles Mackay, 19 December 1843," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Three 1842-1843, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (London: Oxford UP, 1974) 610.

[42] Stone 4-5.

modern world: "The swart giants, Slaves of the Lamp of Knowledge, have their thousand and one tales, no less than the Genii of the East." [43] In addition, Dickens now constructs himself as a fantastical character. He talks of himself like a sorcerer who can "people the sick room with airy shapes 'that delight and hurt not,'" and as a heroic figure in a world of immanent objects: "All the voices we hear cry Go on! The stones that call to us have sermons in them, as the trees have tongues, as there are books in the running brooks, as there is good in everything!"[44] Note that as well as drawing on The Arabian Nights, Dickens also quotes from another fantasy – The Tempest – and the pastoral of As You Like It.

Dickens realised the fantastic was a source of liberation in his own imaginative life, and apparently believed he could share it. So when George Cruikshank decided to publish a series of fairy-tales modified to promote temperance, Dickens was disturbed and angered: "Half playfully and half seriously, I mean to protest most strongly against alteration – for any purpose – of the beautiful little stories which are so tenderly and humanly useful to us in these times when the world is too much with us early and late."[45] Dickens wrote this while completing the supposedly disillusioned Bleak House. As Stone points out, Cruikshank's rhetoric of alcohol as the cause of all social ills was likely to inflame Dickens further,[46] but Stone is perhaps mistaken to assume this would be solely due to Dickens's belief that the cause of drunkenness was social deprivation (not simply the existence of alcohol). Temperance also challenges

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[43] Charles Dickens, "A Preliminary Word," "The Amusements of the People and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of Dickens' Journalism. (London: Dent, 1996) 178.

[44] Dickens, "A Preliminary Word" 178.

[45] Charles Dickens, "To W. H. Wills, 27 July 1853," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Seven 1853-1855, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 121.

[46] Stone 12.

something almost synonymous with Dickens's conception of the fantastic: the
right of people to be amused. Indeed, Dickens sees amusement as a means to end
alcohol abuse. While he does assert that "ignorance, indecency, squalor, filth,
neglect, and desolate wretchedness" are what result in drunkenness,[47] Dickens
does not believe a simple increase in living standards will solve society's
problems and end alienation. He observes that in mining villages, where wages
are higher, "occupation is of an exhausting kind; a state of lassitude succeeds, and
demanding some relief, and having none [. . .] their only refuge is in that accursed
vice."[48] The alternative refuge, the one that Dickens favours, is popular culture:
the right to be amused.

In "The Amusements of the People" parts one and two, Dickens explores
popular culture in the theatre. Perhaps the most significant argument is his
assertion that a desire for this kind of entertainment is fundamentally human. He
talks of the common people's "innate love" for dramatic entertainment.[49] This
innate love is, it appears, the faculty of imagination exercised through popular
culture:

> There is a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of
> steam engines will satisfy; and which The-great-exhibition-of-the-
> works-of-industry-of-all-nations, itself, will probably leave
> unappeased. The lower we go, the more natural it is that the best-
> relished provision for this should be found in dramatic

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[47] Charles Dickens, "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence," "The Amusements of the People
and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of Dickens'
Journalism. (London: Dent, 1996) 166.
[48] Dickens, "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence" 169.
[49] Charles Dickens, "The Amusements of the People (1)," "The Amusements of the People and
Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of Dickens'
Journalism. (London: Dent, 1996) 180.

entertainments; as at once the most obvious, the least troublesome, and the most real, of all escapes out of the literal world.[50]

Dickens then associates this innate human desire with a (by implication innate) human right: "We will add that we believe these people have a right to be amused [. . .] We have already intimated that we believe a love of dramatic representations to be an inherent principle in human nature."[51] Thus we see three strands linked: 1) imagination is inherently human; 2) imagination is freed through popular culture (the fantastic); 3) this liberation is a matter of social justice. As Tolkien puts it, "[f]antasy remains a human right."[52] Just like Freud, Lewis, Tolkien, and Scholes, Dickens does not see popular culture as frivolous. Perhaps frivolity itself was serious to him: the role of the circus in Hard Times indicates that he thought merriment to be vital for the health of human beings. Dickens's view on the consumers of popular theatre is not dissimilar to Lewis's assertion that readers of popular romances may gain profound experiences from them.

Dickens's position as a popular writer is well known. His popularity and apparent pandering to his readership's tastes resulted in derogatory remarks by reviewers, such as: "Charles Dickens writes to the hearts, not the heads, of his readers,"[53] and "[a]s it is, he must be content with the praise of amusing the idle

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[50] Dickens, "The Amusements of the People (1)" 181.
[51] Charles Dickens, "The Amusements of the People (2)," "The Amusements of the People and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of Dickens' Journalism. (London: Dent, 1996) 196.
[52] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen, 1983) 145.
[53] "From an Unsigned Review, Illustrated London News," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 289.

hours of the greatest number of readers."[54] These observations, which concur

with Ang's idea of the IOMC, were intended to be cutting, but it is possible that

the author who wrote,

> We have considered what an ambition it is to be admitted into
>
> many homes with affection and confidence; to be regarded as a
>
> friend by children and old people; to be thought of in affection and
>
> happiness; to people the sick room with airy shapes 'that delight
>
> and hurt not,' and to be associated with the harmless laughter and
>
> the gentle tears of many hearths,[55]

would not be overly concerned. Dickens actively desired popularity, not merely

due to egotism, and certainly not for purely financial reasons, but, it can be

suggested, to attempt a communion with his readers at the level of imagination,[56]

and imagination is, for Dickens, coterminous with the fantastic (or a fantastical

realism). K. J. Fielding notes that Dickens's power over his readers was his

ability to engage their imaginations, to "conjure" his fictions into life,[57] which

sounds at least superficially like Tolkien's idea of sub-creation. Gissing believes

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[54] George Brimley, "George Brimley, from an Unsigned Review, Spectator," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 286.

[55] Dickens, "A Preliminary Word" 178.

[56] Imagination is here used in the Coleridgian sense of "the livng Power and supreme Agent of all human Perception , and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." This is to be distinguished from Fancy, which for Coleridge is a faculty of memory and therefore "must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association". Samuel Taylor Coleridge, On Humanity, Coleridge's Writings, ed. Anya Taylor, vol. 2 (of Coleridge's Writings. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994) 227-28. Though "fancy" is the word frequently used by Dickens – perhaps because memory, or at least a reference back to childhood, is so important to him – what he is describing is closer to the Coleridgian notion of imagination. Andrew Sanders maintains that Dickens did not himself distinguish between Coleridge's two terms. Andrew Sanders, Charles Dickens (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 89.

[57] K. J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1965) 123.

Dickens simply had no wish to disturb his readers with realism, except where

social injustice was concerned.[58] He mentions Dickens's "touching deference to

the voice of the crowd," and points out that Dickens never thought of his

populism as writing down to his audience.[59] Patrick Brantlinger describes a

remarkably close relationship between Dickens and his readers:

> Of all the major Victorian novelists, the one who established the
>
> greatest rapport with his readers was undoubtedly Dickens. The
>
> instances in which Dickens altered his novels in the middle of their
>
> serial publication because of sales figures or, even more
>
> dramatically, because of fan mail or direct reader response are
>
> evidence that, at least for himself and several other successful
>
> novelists, the relations between reader and writer could be
>
> dialogical, almost conversationally familiar.[60]

It seems that in some ways Dickens considered himself on the same level as his

readers, their friend and confidant. What is remarkable is that he apparently

believed his affection for them, and theirs for him, took place through the faculty

of imagination.

Dickens links the fantastic and the popular, and sees both as representative

of essential humanity. His early reading and fictions, his metaphysical and

political philosophy, and his works as the foremost novelist of the middle-

Victorian period were closely aligned with them. The fantastic and the popular

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[58] Gissing 67.

[59] Gissing 72.

[60] Patrick Brantlinger, The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-
Century British Fiction (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1998) 13.

were a source of liberation from the isolation of his sickly childhood and the

alienation and anomie of his time at Warren's. This lends some support to the

argument that the binaries of realism/fantastic and high/popular belong to the

same schism. With reference to Hume's four fantastical categories, the following

readings of the Christmas Books and Bleak House will explore this schism and

consider the relevance of critical and experience reading.

The Christmas Books

Aside from short stories, or segments within longer works (such as "The

Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton" in The Pickwick Papers), the four

fantastical Christmas Books are Dickens's only overt works of fantasy. That is

not to say they are his only fantastical works (when Bleak House is examined

later in the chapter it will be argued that its form is fantastical), nor does it mean

he had any aversion to notions of the paranormal. Indeed, his attitude to the

supernatural was complex and ambiguous. A sceptic on such matters as

spiritualism, he was a believer in ghosts and mesmerism, in some writings

upholding the very things he parodied in others.[61] This suggests a combination of

materialist and transcendentalist philosophies, and Dickens's work supports this.

Several themes are unified by the Christmas Books' fantastical form: the

liberating and redeeming power of imagination; the demand for amusement;

social critique; despair; expanded perception. Focusing on A Christmas Carol

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[61] Tore Rem, "Fictional Exorcism?: Parodies of the Supernatural in Dickens," The Dickensian
96 (2000): 14-28.

(1843), <u>The Chimes</u> (1844), and <u>The Haunted Man</u> (1848), this section will

examine the Christmas Books' discussion of illusion, disillusion, vision, and

revision. The Christmas Books negate the mutual exclusivity of Hume's four

categories, and by determining the degree to which each category appears in a

text, and the degree to which they overlap, it may be possible to understand how

the terms of the three binaries can coexist and even support each other.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</p>

It would be only a slight exaggeration to suggest that <u>A Christmas Carol</u> is

loved by many who read or watch a film adaptation of it. While part of the high-

cultural literary canon, it is also clearly popular culture (as indeed it was before it

gained canonical status). A Frankfurt School Marxist interpretation of this might

be that the <u>Carol</u> is simply a part of the bourgeois Christmas ritual, that it dulls

thought by its familiarity. But its reception in 1843 when it was new and

unfamiliar (when it was, in fact, a new form of fiction) bordered on the ecstatic.

William Makepeace Thackeray, who could be dismissive of his successful rival,

famously said: "Who can listen to objections regarding a book such as this? It

seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a

personal kindness. The last two people I heard speak of it were women; neither

knew the other, or the author, and both said, by way of criticism, 'God bless

him!'"[62] Thackeray goes on to describe spontaneous acts of friendship inspired

by the novella, including a "Scotch philosopher" (Thomas Carlyle) who made a

sudden decision to celebrate Christmas.[63] Indeed, there have been many

transformations brought about by reading the <u>Carol</u>. Ruth Glancy alludes to

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[62] W. M. Thackeray, "[W. M. Thackeray], from 'a Box of Novels', from <u>Fraser's Magazine</u>," <u>Dickens: The Critical Heritage</u>, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 149.

[63] Thackeray 149.

people who wrote of the book's "good influence" upon them, and mentions

material events it brought about in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: a home

for disabled children in Alton built with funds from sales of the book; Tiny Tim

cots paid for by charity all over London; Dickens and others giving public

readings of the Carol for charity; a Boston factory owner who, upon hearing a

reading on Christmas Eve in 1867, was moved enough to close his works and give

each employee a turkey, that and every succeeding Christmas day; the Queen of

Norway annually sending presents to disabled children in London in the early

1900s with "Tiny Tim's Love"; a reading of the Carol in the trenches on

Christmas Day, 1914.[64] These actions indicate that the fantastic can have material

effects. Furthermore, it is sentimentality and not critical thinking that is implicit

in these deeds, indicating that they are the result of experience reading, of

people's lives being suddenly halted by what Greenblatt calls "wonder" as they

experience the emotional events of the story. The effects brought about the Carol

are, however, linked to a critical awareness of social conditions, and thus

experience and the critical are blurred. Thackeray concludes his comments on the

Carol by saying of Tiny Tim, "[t]here is not a reader in England but that little

creature will be a bond of union between the author and him; and he will say of

Charles Dickens, as the woman just now, 'GOD BLESS HIM!'"[65] The sense of

an imaginative link between Dickens and his readership is clear, implying that the

belief in this odd relationship extended beyond Dickens's own desires to those of

his readers also.

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[64] Ruth Glancy. Introduction, Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas," Christmas Books. ed. Ruth Glancy, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 31.
[65] Thackeray 150.

That the <u>Carol</u> is a pleasing story is obvious, but what does the text contain that could have lifted people's spirits to the extent that it did, and brought about transformations in its readers? It seems quite valid to suggest, as Stone does, that the reader's identification with Scrooge's bitter alienation and subsequent redemption is what gives the narrative its power. Considered within McCracken's model of the popular, the conversion of Scrooge is "experienced" via escapism (illusion) and becomes a new, potential, non-alienated self for the reader. Thus, through a fantastical story, Dickens offers his readers the same means of liberation as those he gives to Scrooge. As has been often noted, Scrooge's childhood isolation, which he revisits with the Ghost of Christmas Past, mirrors Dickens's own. Scrooge's escape from it is identical to Dickens's, even including <u>The Arabian Nights</u> as the fantasy offering liberation: "'Why, it's Ali Baba!' Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. 'It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he <u>did</u> come, for the first time, just like that.'"[66] It is childhood regression, according to Marcuse one of the routes to artistic alienation, which helps restore Scrooge to humanity. In <u>A Christmas Carol</u>, Dickens simultaneously: makes readers conscious of their alienation, illustrates the means he believes will liberate them from alienation, and actually provides the means to do so in the fantastical story being read.

Stone explains that the world of the <u>Carol</u>, before any supernatural event, is meaning-laden and animated.[67] Readers are presented with a dreamy London of fog and premature darkness, in which "candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices" and the fog "was so dense withal, that although the

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[66] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 31.
[67] Stone 121.

court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms."[68] With an

idea akin to Iser's conception of the wandering viewpoint, Karen Petroski points

out that Dickens invites the reader to make sense of the images, suggesting he

places readers as spectators at a magic lantern show.[69] The magic lantern was a

popular entertainment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and not totally

dissimilar to the toy theatre Dickens had as a small child. Petroski's observation

thus combines childhood, the popular, and the magical and unreal imagery of the

Carol. This disturbed perception pre-empts the opening imagery of Bleak House

with its descriptions of a London that might be from an alternative reality. The

fantastical form of the Carol offers its readers illusion and escape through the

category of vision, and confuses the real and the fantastic.

Yet the novella blends this visionary liberation with a material one that its

original readers were familiar with: the pleasures of balls, Christmas feasts, and

parties. Here we see Dickens extolling people's right to be amused. Indeed, one

of the more openly didactic moments in the Carol is a criticism of the

unavailability of popular entertainment on Sundays,[70] a theme which Dickens was

later to explore in essay form.[71] In a reply to Mrs. Charles Wilson's letter in

support of temperance, Dickens argues against confusing use with abuse by

drawing on the Carol: "I am certain that if I had been at Mr Fezziwig's ball, I

should have taken a little Negus – and possibly not a little beer – and been none

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[68] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 7.
[69] Karen Petroski, "'the Ghost of an Idea': Dickens's Uses of Phantasmagoria, 1842-44," Dickens Quarterly 16.2 (1999).
[70] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 50.
[71] Charles Dickens, "The Sunday Screw," "The Amusements of the People and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of Dickens' Journalism. (London: Dent, 1996).

the worse for it, in heart or head."[72] The world of Mr Fezziwig is one in which

the material has been made fantastical and a site of transgressive pleasure. In

contrast to this, Scrooge and Marley's grim materialism is associated with their

absence of imagination, and materiality without imagination is a succinct

description of Marcuse's assessment of capitalist society. It can be seen in the

determination not to be amused, when Scrooge refuses his nephew's invitation to

Christmas dinner. Marley, as Stone has noted,[73] is bound by the mind-forg'd

manacles of "London" by William Blake, another visionary writer who believed

in entertainment and amusement. When Scrooge wonders at the fetters, Marley

asks, "Is it a strange pattern to you?" Of Scrooge's own chain Marley says, "It

was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have

laboured on it long, since. It is a ponderous chain!"[74] If, as is commonly thought,

the manacles of "London" are a symbol of capitalist ideology and alienation

(certainly possible in Marley's case, in which the fetters are actually made from

steel cash-boxes, ledgers, deeds, and purses), then it is these that the fantastic and

popular entertainment release Scrooge from by remaking the material. This view

absolutely contradicts Leavis and the Marxist critics we have examined, but is in

agreement with Lewis and Tolkien.

Revision (the didactic) in the Carol is tinged with disillusion, though many

commentators seem to be as delighted by the social message as they are by

Scrooge's conversion, particularly as regards the story of the Cratchets. The

Carol's critical revelation of society is thus emotional and linked to the experience

of reading the story. Lord Jeffrey wrote to tell Dickens that the novella

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[72] Charles Dickens, "To Mrs Charles Wilson, 25 March 1847." The Letters of Charles
Dickens: Volume Five 1847-1849, eds. Graham Storey and K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Oxford
UP, 1981) 46.
[73] Stone 122.
[74] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 20.

"prompted more acts of beneficence [. . .] than can be traced to all the pulpits and confessionals in Christendom, since Christmas 1842,"[75] and Dickens himself approaches social problems with the optimism of the reformer, writing in March of 1843 that he believes the book will create a "Sledge hammer" blow on the poor's behalf "twenty times the force" of a pamphlet he had been intending to write.[76] In one sense, readers are relieved from the social problems in the book by Scrooge's redemption, but it is wrong to think, as Forster does[77] that the Carol is a story of individual rather than social wrong. Scrooge's callous comments about prisons, workhouses, treadmills, and the Poor Law, his opinion that the poor should die to "decrease the surplus population"[78] – observations similar to the insensitivities that allegedly emerge from laissez-faire capitalism – indicate that in part he symbolises social irresponsibility (thus linking such irresponsibility with a rationalistic outlook). Only in part, because readers must have surely been aware that, though Scrooge is redeemed, the workhouse and the Poor Law continue to exist within the world of the Carol, as they do in the extra-textual world. What is considerably darker, and more in keeping with disillusion, are the terrible beings of which the workhouses and Poor Law are mere consequences: Man's children Ignorance and Want, who cling to the Ghost of Christmas Present "appealing from their fathers."[79] The Ghost warns Scrooge to beware Ignorance the most

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[75] Lord Jeffrey, "Lord Jeffrey on a Christmas Carol, in a Letter to Dickens," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 148.

[76] Charles Dickens, "To Dr Southwood Smith, 10 March 1843," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Three 1842-1843, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (London: Oxford UP, 1974) 461.

[77] John Forster, "[John Forster], from a Review of the Chimes, Edinburgh Review," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, eds. and Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 162.

[78] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 11-12.

[79] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 67.

"for on his brow I see that written which is Doom."[80] Ignorance was, for Dickens,

always associated with "crime, disease, and misery",[81] and here it threatens to

destroy the whole society. Again, the Carol pre-empts Bleak House, in which

disease spreads from the ignorant Jo. Want and Ignorance threaten the happiness

of A Christmas Carol, existing outside its brighter images. It may be that Dickens

suggests the threat can only be dispelled if it is illuminated by the same

redemption that saves Scrooge.

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While there is a significant presence and blend of realism/fantastic,

high/popular, and critical/experience in the Carol, its successor The Chimes

(1844) is not so rich and successful. For all its overt didacticism and depiction of

social degradation, there is nothing in The Chimes conveying the same degree of

disillusion as Ignorance and Want in the Carol. While there may be a great

degree of social realism in the events depicted in The Chimes (at least one is

based on a true incident), they are portrayed as emerging from the beliefs of the

story's cast of villains: Mr Filer, Alderman Cute, Sir Joseph Bowley, and the

gentleman who extols the "good old days." Thus reform appears eminently

possible, and is not as connected to a genuinely critical position. Furthermore, the

novella's ultimate message is that hope and self-belief are essential for both

spiritual and material happiness. Despair is therefore presented as inappropriate,

even though there is a despairing tone to the scenes of social privation and

injustice. The fantastic in The Chimes is mostly a device (what one reviewer

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[80] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 67.

[81] Charles Dickens, "Ignorance and Crime." "The Amusements of the People and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of Dickens' Journalism. (London: Dent, 1996) 94.

tellingly refers to as the novella's "machinery,"[82]) used to propel the plot, display social wrong, and bring about Toby Veck's self-examination. This contrasts with the Carol, in which the reader's experience of the fantastic is integral to a reading. However, The Chimes does employ fantasy at the level of vision.

The more obvious didacticism of The Chimes excited the politically minded in a way the Carol did not. A reviewer in The Northern Star, the foremost Chartist newspaper, went so far as to say, "MR DICKENS enters the public arena, as the champion of the people!"[83] The book was said to represent the condition of England.[84] While writing it, Dickens wrote to Forster, "Shall I confess to you, I particularly want Carlyle above all to see it before the rest of the world."[85] This motivation, it might be said, made social critique in The Chimes somewhat conventional. Thus, Will Fern becomes a habitual prisoner, Richard a drunkard, and Lillian a prostitute.

The only character whose fate is not as stereotypical is Meg, and the depiction of her descent into suicidal despair is a major theme in the plot. It is foreshadowed by Toby reading in a newspaper of a woman who, in desperation, had killed her child and then herself: "'Unnatural and cruel!' Toby cried. 'Unnatural and cruel! None but people who were bad at heart, born bad, who had no business on the earth, could do such deeds."[86] Toby believes that the poor, of whom he is one, are "born bad," and he is therefore alienated from himself and

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[82] "From an Unsigned Review of the Chimes, the Times," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 155. "Machinery" is a term Dickens employs in a preface to the Christmas Books to describe narrative construction.
[83] "From an Unsigned Article, 'a Christmas Garland', the Northern Star," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 157.
[84] "From an Unsigned Review of the Chimes, the Economist," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 165.
[85] Charles Dickens, "To John Forster, [?1-2 November 1844]," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Four 1844-1846, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 209.
[86] Charles Dickens, "The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang an Old Year out and a New Year In," Christmas Books, ed. Ruth Glancy, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 136.

his class. He and (as Dickens no doubt intended) the reader will be encouraged to think otherwise before the novella's conclusion. Dickens was outraged that a woman who had failed to commit suicide with her children (she and one child survived, the other drowned) was given the death sentence, and wrote a letter parodying the views behind this decision, implying that they were based on a fear of rebellion by the poor.[87] In The Chimes he attempts to explain the social forces that woman was the victim of, an explanation intended to liberate Toby and the reader from dislike of the poor.

As has been stated, the overt fantasy of the Chimes was considered merely the device necessary to make a political point. The novella's less obviously fantastical element, the vision of its descriptions, was criticised by some of the same people who praised the book's social critique. A reviewer who is favourable to Dickens's didacticism criticises The Chimes for lacking descriptive reality, saying, "[a] sort of haziness which is spread over the entire tale is its grand demerit."[88] This unreality is established in the book almost immediately when the wind, in what seems to be a development of the fog in the Carol, is described as a living thing, trying doors, reading inscriptions, laughing, and crying. The Chimes themselves, outside Toby's fantastical vision (a mere dream), also have a mysterious life. Always unseen by Toby, they seem to speak to him. This is imagination on his part, but that does not lessen the significance for him: "If I hear 'em, what does it matter whether they speak or not?"[89] He seems to find the experience itself important. In Toby's mind the Chimes can sound "like

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[87] Charles Dickens, "Threatening Letter to Thomas Hood from an Ancient Gentleman by Favour of Charles Dickens," "the Amusements of the People and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, vol. 2 (of Dickens' Journalism. London: Dent, 1996) 68.

[88] "From an Unsigned Review of the Chimes, the Times," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 154.

[89] Dickens, "The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang an Old Year out and a New Year In" 104.

voices in the clouds."[90] Other than Toby's initial encounter with the Chimes themselves, his dream of social degradation is less visionary and more realist than what is ostensibly the story's presentation of his waking reality. Only the Spirit of the bells (the agent that will liberate Toby from alienation by allowing him to think well of himself and his class) remains, as a fantastic guide through the experience. Naturally, the Spirit is a child "innocent and radiant."[91]

* * *

The Haunted Man (1848) appears to be quite different to the Carol: it has little of the lightness and humour of the first Christmas Book. But it is closer to the Carol than it is to The Chimes. Revision is again merged with disillusion to produce a figure that might be the Ignorance of the Carol given actions and dialogue. Another theme repeated from the Carol is memory. Redlaw, like Scrooge, discovers he must remember the past in order to be fully human. The fantastical reversal in The Haunted Man – the magical loss of all sorrowful memory, which alienates characters by removing their capacity for any kind of empathy and sympathy – is a visionary perspective: Dickens intends for readers to sample for themselves the deadened emotional state this would entail. This in turn leads to illusion and escape, as the story closes by assuring its readers that the happy scenes of the party are reliant on past experiences of sorrow. The final words of "LORD! KEEP MY MEMORY GREEN!"[92] recall the sentiment of the Carol's "God bless us, Every One!"[93]

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[90] Dickens, "The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang an Old Year out and a New Year In" 127.
[91] Dickens, "The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang an Old Year out and a New Year In" 161.
[92] Charles Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time," Christmas Books, ed. Ruth Glancy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 472.
[93] Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas" 90.

As had become standard in the fantastical Christmas books, <u>The Haunted Man</u> opens with a world in which material objects are alive and mysterious. The shadow of a lamp is "a monstrous beetle on the wall", and flasks of chemicals "tremble at heart".[94] Redlaw's depressed state is projected out onto the objects that surround him. As the narrator puts it, "Who might not, by a very easy flight of fancy, have believed that everything about him took this haunted tone, and that he lived on haunted ground?"[95] The "vault-like"[96] home of Redlaw is reminiscent of a ruined gothic building. We hear that its twilight shadows "stole from their retreats, in the likenesses and forms of faces from the past, from the grave, from the deep, deep gulf, where the things that might have been, and never were, are always wandering."[97] This description occurs before there has been a single supernatural event. Dickens justified the language and images by saying, "I think a little dreaminess and vagueness essential to its effect [. . .] People will take anything for granted, in the Arabian Nights or the Persian Tales, but they won't walk out of Oxford Street, or the Market place of a country town, directly into the presence of a phantom."[98] Thus, the "dreaminess" of the prose is intended to disrupt the reader's construction of reality so that a new perspective may be accepted. This is the literature of vision.

As well as extended perception, readers are also offered an alternative subjectivity. Dickens attempts to convey the sense of confusion the loss of humanity engenders. All who receive the "gift" are initially stunned and uncertain: "He looked confusedly upon his hands and limbs, as if to be assured of

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[94] Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 374.
[95] Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 374.
[96] Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 374.
[97] Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 377.
[98] Charles Dickens, "To the Earl of Carlisle, 2 January 1849," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Five 1847-1849, eds. Graham Storey and K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981) 466.

his identity [. . .] for there was strangeness and terror upon him, as if he too were lost."[99] We are told Redlaw "sat down in his chair, covering his face like one who was frightened at himself. For now he was, indeed, alone. Alone, alone."[100] Alienation is again the theme, and although it is a fantastical event that has brought about this state, Dickens suggests it has relevance to his readers' own lives: the child Redlaw encounters is similarly alienated, but not by supernatural intervention. The child is alienated by society, and thus psychological and sociological alienation are linked. As we saw when assessing Jackson, certain external and subjective threats to the self are associated.

This is what links vision to revision: it seems the alternative perspective, or self, Dickens believes he offers to the reader is that of the utterly degraded poor. Disillusion is also involved, for the savage child in the Haunted Man is like Ignorance set free from the robe of the Ghost of Christmas Present. The child is immune to the "gift", because he has no humanity to lose: "'No softening memory of sorrow, wrong, or trouble enters here, because this wretched mortal from his birth has been abandoned to a worse condition than the beasts, and has, within his knowledge, no one contrast, no humanising touch.'"[101] The child is a prototype for the more sympathetic Jo in Bleak House, arguably Dickens's most disillusioned book (though Our Mutual Friend and Little Dorrit could also be given this label): just as the narrator of Bleak House says in relation to Jo, "What's home?"[102], when the child in The Haunted Man is asked where he lives he replies, "Live! What's that?"[103] Similarly, the area the child takes Redlaw to –

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[99] Dickens. "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 396.
[100] Dickens. "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 399.
[101] Dickens. "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 447.
[102] Charles Dickens, Bleak House, Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 162.
[103] Dickens. "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 398.

"the waste piece of ground on which the houses stood, or rather did not altogether

tumble down, unfenced, undrained, unlighted, and bordered by a sluggish

ditch"[104] – will become Tom-all-alone's in <u>Bleak House</u>.

But all this is dispelled, perhaps literally, in the party at the novella's

conclusion. As the characters' alienation dissolves through their memory of their

human essence, the deadly world that has made up much of the book also

disappears, and in its place is a reality transformed by the fantastic: "the shadows

once more stole out of their hiding-places [. . .] gradually changing what was real

and familiar there, to what was wild and magical."[105] Again Dickens implies that

the fantastic is associated with the intrinsically human.

*   *   *

In the <u>Carol</u>, revision, vision, illusion, and disillusion are at work. The

fantastic and experience reading transform the reader, even to the extent of

bringing about material actions. Through an immersive act of identification, the

reader follows Scrooge's path to redemption, and is liberated from his or her own

alienation as a result. A childhood pastoral of innocence and imagination is

evoked. In part, this experience is based on the fantastical form of the novella.

The presentation of the world is on the one hand visionary – materiality is

meaning-laden – but on the other it is an exploration of social injustice and simple

pleasures and amusements. The necessity of popular culture is argued in the form

of Mr Fezziwig's ball, and the need for Sunday entertainment. This escapist

pleasure, where the material is mingled with, and tempered by, imagination, is

contrasted with the imprisoning materialism of Scrooge and Marley in which

imagination is absent. This can be seen as corresponding to capitalist ideology,

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[104] Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 432-32.

[105] Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time" 472.

especially in the model Marcuse offers. The fantastic provides escape from this by remaking the material.

By contrast, <u>The Chimes</u> does not show such an integral use of the fantastic, nor a crossover of Hume's categories. Here, the fantastic is used as merely a plot device to structure plot and theme, and thus the politics of <u>The Chimes</u> are arrived at didactically, not through immersive reader experience. (The one possible exception to this is liberation from dislike of/alienation from the poor.) The novella's fantastical quality stems largely from a visionary use of language.

Experience becomes a significant factor once more in <u>The Haunted Man</u>. Like Scrooge, Redlaw must remember the past in order to be liberated from a state of alienation. The visionary prose of the novella is intended to undermine conventional reality for the reader, in order to make him or her more receptive to the fantastical events of the story. This leads to a new, disillusioned perspective: a dislocation from human essence. Because this latter state is seen as "natural" for the savage child, an argument can be made that this has a revisionist function and that Dickens's intention is to convey, through reading experience, the brutalised state of the poor.

Bleak House

As suggested above, <u>Bleak House</u> (1852-1853), in its third-person narrative at least, is arguably Dickens's most disillusioned novel, and a departure from the optimism of the Christmas Books. However, the third-person narrative

is also, this section will suggest, a work of illusion, vision, and revision.

Similarly, there are some elements of disillusion in Esther's mostly illusionist

narrative. Dickens's famous assertion in the Preface, that he has "purposely dwelt

upon the romantic side of familiar things,"[106] which Fielding calls a "welcome

sign that he had come to recognize that he was never intended to be a realist,"[107]

seems to actualise itself in the third-person narrative particularly. Thus that

narrative is allied to the literature of illusion and is therefore a source of liberation

from alienation.

It seems that high and popular culture meet unthreateningly in the Bleak

House. The novel is a complex work in terms of theme, form, and even content:

merely keeping track of its multitude of characters and plots, and fully

understanding their interconnectedness, can be difficult for a first-time reader. It

could be seen as a work of high culture in the both the Leavisite and Frankfurt

School senses. So it is interesting that the book was a huge success with the

general reader (as Dickens says, "I believe I have never had so many readers as in

this book."[108]). This could be partially attributed to interest by the readership of

the previous novel, David Copperfield, but the serial form Dickens used makes it

unlikely those readers would have continued to buy Bleak House up to and

including the final number, if they were unsatisfied with it. An expression of such

dissatisfaction is demonstrated by the gradual decline in the readership of Our

Mutual Friend (the number of copies printed and/or stitched for each number fell

from 40,000 to 19,000).[109] In contrast to the popular acceptance of Bleak House,

the reaction from critics and reviewers could be hostile. Dickens was accused of

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[106] Dickens, Bleak House 6.
[107] Fielding 147.
[108] Dickens, Bleak House 6.
[109] Robert L. Patten, Charles Dickens and His Publishers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978) 308.

poor plot construction,[110] and of creating characters only suitable for stage

farces.[111] It appears that the novel's very complexity was perceived as inept

writing. This section will argue that the popular success of Bleak House was

based on vision, disillusion, and (to a lesser extent) revision, all occurring within

the context of illusion and escape.

* * *

From its opening words, Bleak House is identifiable as belonging to the

literature of vision. In the abrupt, almost hardboiled prose used habitually

throughout the third-person narrative, readers are confronted with the voice of a

consciousness different from their own, and a fantastical perception of reality

different to their own. As will later be suggested, this style relates to certain

preoccupations Dickens had at the time of writing. The confusion of dogs

"undistinguishable in mire",[112] horses, and people, the image of the

Megalosaurus,[113] which can be visualised in this scene, the striking description of

the fog (the language used is proto-modernist – the word "fog" appears thirteen

times in one paragraph; it is in every sentence, usually as the first word; here we

see an instance of the association, asserted by Jackson and McCracken, of the

fantastic with modernist techniques), the animation of material objects into, for

example, gas lights that seem to know they have been lit early to combat

premature darkness, the Lord High Chancellor within "the very heart of the

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[110] "From an Unsigned Review, Illustrated London News," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 280-81.
[111] Brimley, "George Brimley, from an Unsigned Review, Spectator" 284-85.
[112] Dickens, Bleak House 11.
[113] The mud, which gives the impression that waters have just retired from the face of the earth, and the Megalosaurus, link with the essay "On Duty with Inspector Field". Field, who is said to have been the model for Inspector Bucket, patrols the British Museum at night, "recognising the Ichthyosaurus as a familiar acquaintance, and wondering, perhaps, how the detectives did it in the days before the flood." Charles Dickens, "On Duty with Inspector Field," "The Amusements of the People and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of Dickens' Journalism. (London: Dent, 1996) 359.

fog"[114] – all contribute to a world which unsettles the reader's preconceptions, and yet is somehow also realist observation (as Ang might say, it is connotative rather than empirical realism). As we saw Lewis, Tolkien, and Shklovsky point out, seeing the material in this new, what Lewis might have called "enchanted", way paradoxically makes it more real. Note that the all-pervasive weather and apparently living objects are also features from the openings of the fantastical Christmas Books. In <u>Bleak House</u> the familiar world is made strange, "invested with [. . .] the magic and radiance of fairyland;"[115] exactly what Marcuse claimed would produce artistic alienation in an age of desublimation. Perhaps the effects of the opening passage emerge from its suggestions of something beyond ordinary language, such as Derrida's conception of the unknowable other. Thus it is that Henry Fothergill Chorley said, "[w]ere its opening pages in anywise accepted as representing the world we live in, the reader might be excused for feeling as though he belonged to some orb where eccentrics, Bedlamites, ill-directed and disproportioned people were the only inhabitants."[116] Gissing also attacks the novel for grotesquery: "<u>Bleak House</u> is the supreme example of his recklessness. It seems never to have occurred to him, thus far in his career, that novels and fairy tales (or his favourite <u>Arabian Nights</u>) should obey different laws in the matter of incident."[117] However, this integration of the fantastic into the real is more conscious decision than ineptitude on Dickens's part. There is also an element of popular entertainment to the picture Dickens paints: as we have already seen, he found the grotesque spectacle of the sideshow irresistible.

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[114] Dickens, <u>Bleak House</u> 12.
[115] Stone 53.
[116] Henry Fothergill Chorley, "[Henry Fothergill Chorley], from a Review in the <u>Athenaeum</u>." <u>Dickens: The Critical Heritage</u>, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 276.
[117] Gissing 57.

The mixture of the real and the fantastic is part of what gives <u>Bleak House</u> its effect. So, although Krook's death by spontaneous combustion is the most obviously fantastical moment in the text (it is, in fact, a period of hesitation for the reader, what Todorov describes as truly fantastic), Dickens insisted that spontaneous combustion was a real phenomenon, simply a part of the natural world, an assertion that developed into a genteel row with George Lewes. Yet in the novel, Krook's fate is described in terms of cosmic retribution: "The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done."[118] Even for Dickens, it would seem, Krook's end is as fantastical as it realistic. This adds weight to Higbie's assertion that Dickens's work combined reason and imagination, reality and the ideal.

Dickens's first recorded mention of the novel is not the promise of social critique, or enthusiasm at the prospect of a series of well-observed sketches but "the first shadows of a new book hovering in a ghostly way about me."[119] And just as the tone and language of the third-person narrative is unreal, so its content is also disturbing, and not just in particulars such as Krook's death. On one level, the fragmentation into so many apparently unrelated characters and plot lines is a disorientating break with convention; on the other, the ultimate interconnectedness of this disparate narrative, in which events and characters are all somehow associated with the Chancery suit, is even more bizarre. Of course, many of Dickens's novels rely on outrageous coincidence, but the coincidences of

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[118] Dickens, <u>Bleak House</u> 479.
[119] Charles Dickens, "<u>To</u> Miss Mary Boyle, 21 February 1851," <u>The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Six 1850-1852</u>, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 298.

Bleak House seem to be more credible (and thus, ironically, more fantastical; this

may be an example of reason supplying belief in the ideal), in part because they

are embedded within an intricate design, and in part because the suit of Jarndyce

and Jarndyce is an integral theme as well as a mere device to link plot strands.

The novel's extreme popularity raises the question of how general readers

navigated the plots, subplots, and cast of characters. Perhaps they understood the

interconnectedness "instinctively" through experiencing the fantastical vision

being offered to them.[120] These readers of the novel employed the wandering

viewpoint alluded to by Iser, drawing the plots into a whole via the memory and

expectation of narrative events.[121]

Intrusions of the unreal into the real – Tulkinghorn's death, the Ghost's

Walk, etc. – are unusual in the nineteenth century (other examples include events

in domestic/gothic novels such as Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights),[122] and this

possibly explains the reaction of the critics. That the general reader could accept

the fantastical vision of Bleak House implies, perhaps, a link between the popular

and the fantastic that transcends literary fashion. If Dickens was correct in

believing imagination to be inherently human, that would certainly be the case. It

is possible that the fashionable nineteenth-century view was something Dickens

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[120] This may be similar to what Gissing is referring to when he says, "[t]he very boldness of the thing prevents readers from considering it; indeed most readers take the author's own view, and imagine every artificiality to be permitted in the world of fiction." Gissing 57.

[121] By contrast, many of the intelligentsia, reading more critically, perhaps, than general readers, came to some insensitive conclusions. George Brimley, for example, states, "[t]he great Chancery suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce [. . .] has positively not the smallest influence on the character of any one person concerned; nor has it any interest of itself." Brimley, "George Brimley, from an Unsigned Review, Spectator" 283. However, Forster takes the opposite stance, seeing Jarndyce and Jarndyce as linked to "every part of the book," John Forster, "[John Forster], from an Unsigned Review, Examiner," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 291.

[122] Another interpretation is that the mixture of realism and fantasy seems more unusual here because other examples of it, such as the romances of Rider Haggard later in the century, do not have same canonical status as Bleak House. Also, it would seem that retrospective analysis tends to position more fantastical works as "popular", though, as this dissertation has been at pains to point out, at the time of its initial publication Bleak House was an extremely popular work.

reacted against, that he saw those who rejected the visionary as akin to the ignorance of Judy Smallweed, who "never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played a game," or of Jack Smallweed, who "knows no more of Jack the Giant Killer, or of Sinbad the Sailor, than he knows of the people in the stars."[123] Though these children have never been offered the fantastic, there is an implication that, having missed this vital part of their childhood, they will willingly reject fantasy as adults.

*   *   *

It is not easy to disentangle revision from disillusion in Bleak House. No matter what the progressive Dickens may have intended, much of the third-person narrative is rather gloomy. Philanthropy itself is frequently mocked in the novel. However, there are signs of effective philanthropy as well as impotent or hypocritical philanthropy. Obviously there are the many kind acts of John Jarndyce and Esther, but there is also a benevolent and effective philanthropy implied negatively by Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle. As we will see, these contradictions are necessary.

Dickens links the philanthropist with the childlike but responsible adult, in whom an ethical imagination provides the ability to see the place of the other. If the childlike qualities that are preserved into maturity include absolute self-interest, however, they become, while still delightful, ultimately destructive. Harold Skimpole illustrates this state. Skimpole presents himself as a romantic innocent, but shows several of the manipulative qualities of a real child: he attempts to seduce by amusing and touching those around him; he plays other characters off against each other; he pleads ignorance. He is "innocent" only in

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[123] Dickens, Bleak House 309-10.

the sense that his desire is absolutely demanding. Higbie believes Skimpole represents imagination totally divorced from reality, thus seeking a facile escape to, rather than belief in, the ideal.[124] Perhaps Jarndyce is the genuine innocent, because he chooses not to see the true nature of his friend: "'The idea of Harold Skimpole with designs or plans, or knowledge of consequences. Ha, ha, ha!'"[125] But Jarndyce is responsible as well as innocent, and thus his philanthropy is positive, unlike that of Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle. Mrs Jellyby, it is true, has the capacity to imagine Africa, but in other respects she is as excessively practical as Mrs Pardiggle. As regards their accessibility to amusement, Pardiggle and Jellyby are similar to Scrooge and Marley: neither seem to have the imaginative capacity to comprehend the plight of the poor around them, as Mrs Pardiggle's visit to the brickmaker clearly shows. The children of both women are almost as constrained as Jack and Judy Smallweed have been. Elsewhere, Dickens discusses self-interested children such as the bestial child in The Haunted Man, and responsible children such as Amy Dorrit. The necessary relationship of realism with imagination suggests a linking of critical and experience reading.

Just as there are revolutionary possibilities in the Freudian model of phantasy – the contrast of childhood desire with dissatisfaction in the present projecting wish-fulfilment into the future – Dickens's polemic may relate to a child's sense of justice (or injustice). Effective philanthropy links with imagination and the comprehension of alternative selves, with the ability to understand the other; in the same way, an ethical socialism can emerge from transcendentalism.

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[124] Higbie 115.
[125] Dickens, Bleak House 93.

Esther reports Jarndyce had remarked to her "that there were two classes of charitable people; one, the people who did a little and made a great deal of noise; the other, the people who did a great deal and made no noise at all."[126] Thus it is not philanthropy itself that Bleak House satirises, but a different activity that calls itself philanthropy, a revelation that is reserved for Esther's narrative. Several people were confused by the novel's apparent deriding of philanthropy. Dickens wrote a lengthy letter to the Hon. Mrs Edward Cropper, explaining to her that ridiculing Mrs Jellyby's attentions to Africa was not to be seen as dismissing, for example, the plight of black slaves. He points out that those who make showy displays of charity "damage the objects taken up (often very good in themselves) and not least by associating them with Cant and Humbug in the minds of those reflecting people whose sympathies it is most essential to enlist, before any good thing can be advanced."[127]

It is clear that the possibility for reform still exists in Bleak House, and that the novel therefore has a revisionist component. Successful philanthropy relies on the faculty of imagination in tandem with responsibility.

*   *   *

Dickens, then, retains a progressive agenda in Bleak House. However, the disillusion associated with revision in A Christmas Carol and The Haunted Man is not only present, but magnified. The visionary language and imagery of damp decaying squalor, whether it is at the bottom of society in Tom-all-alone's, or the top of society in Chesney Wold is everywhere present. One reviewer wrote,

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[126] Dickens, Bleak House 113.
[127] Charles Dickens, "To the Hon. Mrs Edward Cropper, 20 December 1852," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Six 1850-1852, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 825.

"There is nothing, indeed, more remarkable in <u>Bleak House</u> than the almost entire absence of humour."[128]

There is some indication that Dickens's politics were pessimistic during the writing of <u>Bleak House</u>. He wrote that he sees in it elements which are probably "identical things that D'Israeli sees looming in the distance. I behold them in the months ahead, and weep."[129] The novel portrays the poor as ignorant, bestial, and living in intolerable conditions. Not only that, but the threat of Doom from the child Ignorance has actualised: disease spreads up from the underclass. This, taken together with the decaying world of the novel, can give the impression of a socially generated apocalypse, and it may be that Dickens's thoughts had moved in that direction. In 1849 he wrote, comparing the English poor with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's image of the American slave as a blind Samson:

> Like the strong man of old, he is led by a child – an ignorant child.
> Like him, he has his sinewy arms – one branded Pauperism, and
> the other Crime – already round the pillars whereupon the house
> standeth. Let us beware of him in time, before he makes his awful
> prayer to be avenged upon us for his blindness, and brings the
> edifice down upon himself, and us – a heap of ruins![130]

The collapsing (bleak) house is a frequent event in Tom-all-alone's, perhaps serving as a symbol of a more widespread destruction to come. An article in

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[128] "From an Unsigned Review, <u>Illustrated London News</u>," <u>Dickens: The Critical Heritage</u>, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 288.
[129] Charles Dickens, "To Miss Mary Boyle, 22 July 1852," <u>The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Six 1850-1852</u>, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 721.
[130] Dickens, "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence" 169.

<u>Household Words</u> (December 1850) discusses the poor at Christmas, recalling the

savage child of <u>The Haunted Man</u> and airing what will be one of the main themes

of <u>Bleak House</u>:

> I saw a poisoned air, in which life drooped. [. . .] I saw
>
> innumerable hosts fore-doomed to darkness, dirt, pestilence,
>
> obscenity, misery, and early death. [. . .] I saw, from those
>
> reeking and pernicious stews, the avenging consequences of such
>
> sin issuing forth, and penetrating to the highest places. I saw the
>
> rich struck down in their strength, their darling children weakened
>
> and withered, their marriageable sons and daughters perish in their
>
> prime. I saw that not one miserable wretch breathed out his
>
> poisoned life in the deepest cellar of the most neglected town, but,
>
> from the surrounding atmosphere, some particles of his infection
>
> were born away, charged with heavy retribution on the general
>
> guilt.[131]

This motif is repeated in Dickens's speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary

Association (May 1851) –

> the air from Gin Lane will be carried, when the wind is Easterly,
>
> into May Fair [. . .] if you once have a vigorous pestilence raging
>
> furiously in Saint Giles, no mortal list of Lady Patronesses can
>
> keep it out of Almacks [. . .] What avails it to send a Missionary to

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[131] Charles Dickens, "A December Vision," <u>"The Amusements of the People and Other Papers": Reports, Essays and Reviews</u>, ed. Michael Slater, vol. 2 of <u>Dickens' Journalism</u>. (London: Dent, 1996) 307.

me, a miserable man or woman living in a fœtid Court where every
sense bestowed upon me for my delight becomes a torment, and
every minute of my life is new mire added to the heap under which
I lie degraded? To what natural feeling in me is he to address
himself?[132] –

in which Jarndyce's use of the "East Wind" to describe anything that disturbs him
is explained, the spread of disease is again discussed, impotent and inept
philanthropy exposed, and an of idea ignorance as emerging from squalor and
deprivation is outlined (already implied in the alliance of Ignorance with Want in
the Carol). The third-person narrator of Bleak House tells us of Tom-all-alone's,

[b]ut he has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers, and
they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of
Tom's corrupted blood but that propagates infection and contagion
somewhere [. . .] There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic
inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or
degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a
brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through
every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the
highest of the high.[133]

The highest of the high indeed, for, through fantastical interconnectedness, the
metaphorical miasma contaminates everything in Bleak House, even the political

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[132] Charles Dickens, "Metropolitan Sanitary Association," The Speeches of Charles Dickens,
ed. K. J. Fielding (London: Oxford UP, 1960) 128-29.
[133] Dickens, Bleak House 654-57.

activities of Lord Coodle and his various colleagues.[134] The condition of England

represented in the novel is one in which social neglect has undermined the

foundations of society, and disease both literal and fantastical connects everything

and threatens to breach class barriers to the detriment of all. To be sure, as well

as encompassing an undeniably realist vision, the picture painted is so absolutely

appalling on so many different levels, from the material to the psychological to

the (absence of the) spiritual, that it can be said to be fantastical, operating

through Frye's ironic Mode.

Hume believes that the literature of disillusion functions by: 1) calling

attention to the limitations in an individual's perception; 2) to our inability to

communicate fully; 3) misanthropy; 4) attacking the reader with weapons of

exaggeration and caricature; 5) unresolved contradictions (this is something that

can be unwittingly produced by the author).[135] Hume also suggests a writer of

disillusion may destabilise the reader's assurance by causing him or her to

question how much their own perception of reality is to be trusted: "In such

narratives the hero is relatively normal. His world, however, is twisted. When

the distortion is slight, we cannot draw a line between reality and fantasy."[136]

That (with the exception of an identifiable hero, unless Esther can be said to fill

that role) is certainly the case in Bleak House.

Dickens wrote to W. H Wills on completing the final number of the novel,

saying it would have to be lightened: "I read it last night, and had a Nightmare. I

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[134] Dickens, Bleak House 589-90.

[135] Kathryn Hume, Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature (New York, NY: Methuen, 1984) 125.

[136] Hume 137.

doubt if anything so heavy (except stewed lead) could possibly be taken, before going to bed."[137]

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Yet Dickens also wrote to the Hon. Mrs. Richard Watson on completing Bleak House: "To finish the topic of Bleak House at once, I will only add that I like the conclusion very much and think it <u>very pretty indeed</u>."[138] It can be argued with not too much difficulty that there are two agendas in the novel, which can be roughly separated into the two narratives.

Higbie sees the dual narrative as representative of the dichotomy he believes informs much nineteenth century writing, the third-person narrative embodying realism, Esther's corresponding to imagination or idealism. As we will see, the ideology of each infiltrates that other. The third person narrator and Esther may be respectively real and ideal in terms of their intention/agenda, but their styles are the opposite, with the third person narrator using considerably more fanciful description. Higbie notes that the two narratives reflect a duality within Dickens: the search for an ideal coupled with the awareness that reality opposes this.[139] Thus, the Chancery (material) world seems so negative because it is reality viewed from the perspective of idealism. Dickens had come to realise, Higbie suggests, that realism and idealism cannot exist in the same space, and so he creates Esther's narrative, where the ideal is in effect protected from reason's doubts.[140] However, Higbie is mistaken if he considers this protection adequate:

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[137] Charles Dickens, "<u>To</u> W. H. Wills, 5 August 1853," <u>The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Seven 1853-1855</u>, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 124.

[138] Charles Dickens, "<u>To</u> the Hon. Mrs Richard Watson, 27 August 1853," <u>The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Seven 1853-1855</u>, ed. Graham Storey (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 134.

[139] Higbie 112.

[140] Higbie 113.

as we will see, Dickens deliberately breaks the quarantine to allow infection: realism contaminates idealism.

Reviewers, it seems, universally hated Esther's narrative. While, as Forster points out, most commentators enjoyed something in Bleak House,[141] Esther's goodness and self-effacement were apparently not liked by any of them. One anonymous reviewer in Bentley's Miscellany thinks Esther's character and good nature are unreal,[142] a position agreed with by George Brimley, Chorley,[143] James Augustine Stothert,[144] and Gissing.[145] Even Forster raises an objection, saying, " we suspect that Mr Dickens undertook more than man could accomplish when he resolved to make her the naïve revealer of her own good qualities."[146] None explore the possibility that Esther's narrative was not intended to be realistic, but to function as a foil to the third-person narrative; that it is equally unreal because it contains fantastical illusion where the third person narrative contains fantastical disillusion.[147]

Esther's story begins in an isolated house. A severe disciplinarian and puritan, her aunt (wicked stepmother) controls every aspect of her life. Esther is alienated from herself, struggling to understand what her sin is; and from her contemporaries, forbidden to socialise. Esther's childhood is thus similar in some respects to Dickens's own. Then, through Jarndyce (fairy Godmother), she is suddenly liberated. It seems, however, that this liberation is only partial: Esther's

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[141] Forster, "[John Forster], from an Unsigned Review, Examiner" 290.

[142] "Unsigned Review, Bentley's Miscellany," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 289.

[143] Chorley, "[Henry Fothergill Chorley], from a Review in the Athenaeum" 276.

[144] James Augustine Stothert, "[James Augustine Stothert], from 'Living Novelists', the Rambler," Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1971) 295.

[145] Gissing 58.

[146] Forster, "[John Forster], from an Unsigned Review, Examiner" 291.

[147] In fact, the clamouring of Dickens's reviewers for realistic fiction in this and other cases suggests the foundations for realism as a form were being laid at this time.

upbringing has constructed her character as one that is self-effacing and often self-deprecating. The polar opposite of the worldly-wise third-person narrator, she approaches her environment with innocence (though, as we will see, sometimes this is feigned).

Yet Esther has as much realism mingled with her fairy-tale narrative and the illusion of her perceptions, as her third-person opposite has idealism and illusion interwoven into the disillusion of its perceptions. A thing that is rarely noted, often missed, in fact (no reviewer of Dickens's time noticed it, apparently), is that Esther is something of a fraud. For all her protestations of being "not clever" and insignificant, she is often shrewd and insightful. A case in point is that of Skimpole. Esther becomes suspicious of him before any of the other characters (except those minor characters he owes money to), and even comes close to confronting him over his claim to be a mere child. Of his "guileless candor", she says "I could not satisfy myself that it was as artless as it seemed,"[148] and when Skimpole says he cannot be responsible, Esther tells him, "'I am afraid everybody is obliged to be,'" unconvincingly adding, "said I, timidly enough: he being so much older and cleverer than I."[149] Such instances are, it can be suggested, devices designed to inform the reader of the complexities of Esther's character.

Moments like the incident with Skimpole, the rejection of Guppy, and the satirical description of Mrs Pardiggle at the brickmaker's house ("Mrs Pardiggle [. . .] pulled out a good book, as if it were a constable's staff, and took the whole family into custody."[150]) all display a strength of character not usually recognised in Esther. As Richard A. Currie argues, passion (sexuality and anger) exists in

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[148] Dickens, Bleak House 549.
[149] Dickens, Bleak House 557.
[150] Dickens, Bleak House 122.

Esther, repressed but habitually emerging. Thus the character both draws upon and subverts the ideal image of the female in nineteenth-century conduct-books.[151] Why did Dickens choose to break with convention in such an underhand way? Perhaps her mixture of realism and fantastical goodness makes the character of Esther more palatable and credible. Higbie might consider this an attempt to combine imagination with reality, providing belief in the ideal. Through the illusion of such absolutely good figures as her and Jarndyce, Bleak House creates the possibility for escape from its own disillusioned worldview. Esther's narrative is a space, feminine and domestic and removed from the horrific social world, in which, perhaps, Dickens felt his idealism could exist. Does this mean that the utopian elements of the novel are unconnected with reality? Not necessarily, for the novel asserts that the connection between imagination and positive philanthropy is real.

* * *

It was on the 21st of February 1851 that Dickens wrote of the "first shadows" of Bleak House. Two months later his father and daughter were dead. At the start of October he wrote to tell W. H. Wills, in the same abrupt tones as the third-person narrator, that he had stared work on the novel: "WEATHER. Very stormy, and a prodigious sea running. BLEAK HOUSE. Just begun."[152] The style of the third-person sections can therefore be said to relate to Dickens's preoccupations at the time of writing. The double shock of two close relatives dying meant Bleak House commenced in an atmosphere of gloom. Arguably, Dickens began to feel childhood imagination beyond his reach: Gillian West notes

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[151] Richard A. Currie, "Against the Feminine Stereotype: Dickens's Esther Summerson and Conduct-Book Heroines," Dickens Quarterly 16.1 (1999).

[152] Charles Dickens, "To W. H. Wills, 5 October, 1852," The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Six 1850-1852, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 773.

that street names such as "Chancery Lane" and "Lincoln's Inn Fields" refer to a

pastoral landscape now utterly submerged beneath the dirty streets of the city,

emphasising that Miss Flite's flowers are cut into Nosegays for the Lord

Chancellor.[153] And yet, as Peter Ackroyd argues, during the book's writing

Dickens became more cheerful, manifesting his usual high spirits. Ackroyd

speculates, "Bleak House cured the very malaise responsible for its

composition."[154] Can this be possible?

As has been proposed above, the two narratives of Bleak House have

different functions, and expose different attitudes. They are so unlike that it is

pertinent to question which one is closest to Dickens's own philosophical and

social views. The third person narrator is disillusioned, and observes society with

a cynical view of that society's members and the possibility of reform. It is a

critical perspective. The third-person narrative verges on the misanthropic.

Esther, on the other hand, has an optimistic interpretation of what she sees, and a

charitable belief in the qualities of other human beings, a view opposed to the

critical. This is not a complete picture: the third-person narrator is capable of

sympathy and is frequently visionary, illusionist, and even didactic (Higbie claims

imagination in the third person narrative allows Dickens to "smuggle in" idealist

values);[155] Esther can exhibit disillusion (she says of the brickmaker and his

family, "between us and these people there was an iron barrier"[156]). In general

terms the division is there.

However, in Bleak House everything connects. It is again through the

metaphor of disease that one narrative is linked with the other. Esther contracts a

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[153] Gillian West, "The Macabre Use of the Pastoral in Bleak House," The Dickensian 93.442 (1997): 133.
[154] Peter Ackroyd. Dickens (London: Minerva, 1991) 684.
[155] Higbie 121.
[156] Dickens, Bleak House 122.

fever, presumably smallpox, from Jo (through Charley). Arguably, this symbolises her having to confront the world of the third-person narrative. Just as Dickens – an optimist and believer in innocence – had to face mortality during the writing of Bleak House, with all the doubt and anomie that can involve, so Esther must lose (be liberated from?) her illusions of human nature. Significantly, Esther lives through the fever. The experience scars her, but she survives it, and even gains from it (the incident in which she challenges Skimpole occurs shortly after her recovery). Higbie comes close to this when he says that by working with Inspector Bucket Esther demonstrates idealism can work with realism and return to its own world without giving in to despair.[157]

Dickens novels were never as joyful after Bleak House, but to suggest that he acquired the cynicism of Bleak House's third-person narrator would be incorrect. Like Esther, he recovered. Like her he was marked by the experience. Though Dickens's endings became less happy, even tinged with pathos, his writing continued in populist fairy-tale form, producing resolutions and poor children made rich. The post-Bleak House novels' conclusions are tempered, not overtaken, by disillusion, in the same way that Esther's charitable view of humanity is modified rather than destroyed. Higbie proposes that the schism of the narratives in Bleak House is intended to create a sense of wrongness and a desire in the reader to unite the opposite views.[158] It may be that Dickens successfully achieved this within himself, finding dialectics of realism/fantastic, high/popular, and critical/experience.

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[157] Higbie 116-17.
[158] Higbie 113.

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Chapter Two: H. G. Wells's Scientific Romances

The culminating man was a realist. He had a great contempt for
Idealism, and it chanced that a passing Seraph from another sphere,
who chanced to hear him boast to that effect, became interested,
as a naturalist might become interested in the instincts and motives
behind the movements of a little crawling insect in the dirt.

H. G. Wells[1]

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[1] H. G. Wells, "Mind at the End of Its Tether," Journalism and Prophecy 1893-1946, ed. W.
Warren Wagner (London: Bodley, 1964) 312. This excerpt in Journalism and Prophecy 1893-
1946 is from a previously unpublished appendix to Mind at the End of Its Tether.

On 8th June 1870 Charles Dickens died, the same year the Education Act,

which was to continue the transformation in general readership begun by serial

fiction and the rise of the lower-middle classes, became law. H. G. Wells was just

three years old at this time, and he would live to see the schism between groups of

readers described by Leavis. As a young writer Wells actually had some similar

beliefs to Leavis. In 1896 he critiqued the romances and novels of Sir Anthony

Hope Hawkins, attributing their success to sociological factors such as mass

education.[2] He bemoaned the rise of book clubs and cheap editions and the "book

wars" that arose from them, suggesting that writers of true literature would soon

no longer exist.[3] Yet, among Wells's early, and many would say best, works are

the major scientific romances: The Time Machine, The Island of Doctor Moreau,

The Invisible Man, The War of the Worlds, and The First Men in the Moon.

These are works of popular fiction both literally (i.e. in terms of sales) and, in

many ways, stylistically. For example, Israel Zangwill, reviewing The Time

Machine in 1895, complains, "his Time Traveller, a cool scientific thinker,

behaves exactly like the hero of a commonplace sensational novel."[4] Such a

protagonist is exactly the type Freud refers to when he talks of readers identifying

with, and being given security by, popular romance heroes. The narrative of The

Time Machine would perhaps not hold together if the protagonist were not of this

sort, because it is a narrative carried by the conventions of adventure tales. In

fact, all the major scientific romances have a large element of this. They are not

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[2] H. G. Wells, "Popular Writers and Press Critics," H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism, eds.
Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) 74.
[3] H. G. Wells, "To the Editor, Daily Mail," The Correspondence of H. G. Wells, ed. David C.
Smith, vol. 2 (1904-1918) (London: Pickering, 1998). Indeed, John Carey reports that Wells
had some extreme views on the masses and mass culture. John Carey, The Intellectuals and
the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligensia 1880-1939 (Chicago, IL:
Academy, 2002) 118-134.
[4] Israel Zangwill, "Israel Zangwill on Time Travelling," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage,
ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 39.

examples of the popular-fantastic simply because of association with the later genre of science fiction. To a certain extent they use the form of fantastical popular fiction (the sensation novel), and can be read in that way – i.e. experienced by the reader. However, they are also allegories, and contain didacticism. This is revealed through critical, textual reading.

The apparent dichotomy of popular and serious is just one of many binaries to be found in the major romances. There are several others, though all connect. Firstly, as their label implies, the novels combine science with romance. From this follows the merging of determinism with agency, pessimism with optimism, didacticism with escapism, and realism with the fantastic. Thus, in Wells's as in Dickens's work, it is possible to see Hume's categories of illusion, disillusion, vision, and revision exist together. Much in the romances, not least their use of adventure story conventions, allows for artistic alienation in the form of escapism (perhaps through Freud's idea of the ego's pseudo-gratification via phantasy), but often the fantastical situations serve to reveal characters' – and, arguably, readers' – alienated states to themselves. This chapter will explore the major scientific romances from the perspective of the contradictions they themselves discuss.

As a deeply politicised individual who exploited the didactic possibilities of literature and yet produced exciting fiction, and a scientific materialist who could see the limitations of materialism, Wells is a significant figure to study with regard to development of that liberating and/or oppressive nature of the fantastic, particularly as he influenced much of the fantastical writing in the twentieth century. This chapter will examine some of the contradictions and ambiguities in the man and his work, and consider how they are resolved.

An Imaginative Child

Like Dickens, Wells came from a lower-middleclass background, and also had a childhood period of immobility during which he read to forget his confinement. He sustained a broken leg between the ages of seven and eight, spending much of his convalescence engaged in escapism. As he says: "I had just taken to reading. I had just discovered the art of leaving my body to sit impassive in a crumpled up attitude in a chair or sofa, while I wandered over the hills and far away in novel company and new scenes."[5] This can be seen as escape from a psychological lack externally imposed. The parallel with Dickens is obvious, and it should be noted at once that the young Wells approached books as an experience reader. As Norman and Jean Mackenzie explain: "Words became a passport to experience – but to a special kind of vicarious experience in which Bertie's imagination could take flight and carry him away from Bromley to other lands, as in <u>The Time Machine</u> where the Time Traveller was carried through the coming millennia without stirring from his seat."[6] The idea that the child Wells was transported to another place by his reading seems to relate to Tolkien's notion of the Secondary World, though, to be precise, Wells's recurring phantasy is one of the mind being liberated from the body. This is experience reading. Therefore, if the arguments presented thus far in this dissertation have validity, we would also expect to find in Wells some liking for the fantastic. Although Wells says he

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[5] H. G. Wells, <u>Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)</u>, vol. I (London: Gollancz, 1934) 77. Indeed, the <u>Experiment in Autobiography</u> begins with the adult Wells telling the reader that he has begun the project in order to escape a malaise.

[6] Norman Mackenzie and Jean Mackenzie, <u>The Time Traveller: The Life of H. G. Wells</u> (London: Weidenfeld, 1973) 27. This comparison implies that <u>The Time Machine</u> itself is to some extent escapist.

cannot remember what many of the books he read were, he does recall the vivid

images some of them left him with, indicating at least that he drew phantasies

from them. For example, he became frightened of the illustration of a gorilla in a

book on natural history "which came out the book at times after dark and

followed me noiselessly about the house."[7] As an older child he would dwell on

vivid and violent phantasies of himself as a republican military leader: "no one

suspected that a phantom staff pranced about me and phantom orderlies galloped

at my commands."[8] If Wells's use of reading to "escape" his helpless situation as

an invalid were not indication enough, then this admission arguably confirms at

least a connection between phantasy and the desire for control. Clearly Wells had

an active imagination, and it is perhaps a signal of the potency of formative

experience that the images of both ape and republic would haunt his later fiction.

Around 1880, as his family began to suffer financially, Wells left school

for the first time (he was to return to education on several occasions). Like his

brothers, Wells was sent to work as a draper's assistant, with a view to becoming

an apprentice. In his autobiography he movingly describes how his brother

Freddy played one final game of "marble runs" as a symbol of the conclusion of

his childhood before he (Freddy) began employment at a draper's. As can be

extrapolated from One Dimensional Man, the end of the childhood pastoral

signals the beginning of alienated labour. Confronted with this situation himself,

Wells describes his grief in similar terms to the ones used by Dickens upon his

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[7] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866) 77.
[8] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866) 101.

entry to Warrens:[9] "Now it was my turn to put the things away, put the books away, give up drawing and painting and every sort of free delight, stop writing stories and imitations of Punch, give up all vain hopes and dreams, and serve an employer."[10] Although "put the things away" recalls Freddy Wells putting the marbles away at the end of his final game, the resemblance to St Paul's statement that he put away childish things is perhaps too apparent to ignore. As we saw suggested by Lewis, the imaginative mind rebels against such an idea. Perhaps Wells's pain at the loss of childhood is that it implies a loss of phantasy (which, as Freud tells us, adults are ashamed to indulge in; it may be that phantasy is one of the "childish things" St Paul alludes to), and thus a loss of even illusory control.

Wells's situation in the draper's only lasted a matter of months, however, and he became a pupil teacher. This was also short-lived, as the school quickly closed. He then spent some time with his mother at Up Park, where she had recently become housekeeper. While snowed in there he "gave a shadow play to the maids and others, in a miniature theatre I had made in the housekeeper's room."[11] This is another connection between Wells and Dickens, the latter of whom liked to entertain with a toy theatre. During this time Wells read such books as Gulliver's Travels and Plato's Republic, both of which obviously had a great influence upon him. The simultaneous activities of amusement (the toy theatre) and "serious" reading (Plato's vision of utopia) might be said to prefigure the scientific romances that Wells was to write, though Jonathan Swift already

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[9] In another parallel with Dickens, the Mackenzies suggest Wells felt betrayed by his mother for removing the education that would allow him to climb out of his position in society. Mackenzie and Mackenzie 30.

[10] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866) 116.

[11] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866) 135.

provided this model of literature. Combining the fantastic with didacticism, and the planning of utopias, were both to dominate Wells's most important work.

Although Wells himself was not a product of the mass state education ushered in by the 1870 Education Act – in fact, he says of the National Schools, "[i]n spirit, form and intention they were inferior schools, and to send one's children to them in those days, as my mother understood perfectly well, was a definite and final acceptance of social inferiority"[12] – he did eventually benefit from a new government scheme to provide scholarships for teacher training. His subsequent year of study under T. H. Huxley, in which he learned principles of natural selection, was to prove significant in the development of his view on humanity and its place in the universe.

Scientist

Wells's epistemology is generally considered to have been atheistic scientific materialism. His time with Huxley certainly helped him to shake off the remains of the fundamentalist Christianity he had grown up with, and in many ways his concerns – whether they related to technology, politics, or the origin and fate of the human species – always remained material.

Central to his scientific worldview was the theory of natural selection, the discipline he learnt from Huxley. Much of Wells's fiction discusses the precarious position of humanity in the face of deterministic forces certain to make it extinct. His political beliefs to some extent emerged from the need to combat

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[12] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866) 93.

this process. Wells realised that, physiologically, the human animal is

disadvantaged in comparison to more adaptable species:

> It is no exaggeration to say that there are organisms which in the
>
> course of one year turn over as many generations as mankind has
>
> done in the whole period of written history, and which in the space
>
> of a human lifetime are as capable of as much modification – if
>
> changing circumstances require it – as the human animal has
>
> undergone since the hairy cave dweller made his first celebrated
>
> sketch of a mammoth with a flint on a bone [. . .] The fact is that
>
> the large forms of one group are never superseded in a subsequent
>
> epoch by their own descendents, but are ousted by some previously
>
> insignificant group, that each leading type of animal has worked
>
> out its structure in obscurity, risen in its day to supremacy,
>
> stamped itself upon the fossil record, and passed away.[13]

Dominant species are in danger because the simple arithmetic of lifespan and

population size makes them less able to deal with environmental change.

Humankind, Wells believes, faces the same danger, and thus the nature of Wells's

warnings about our evolutionary destiny implies that he sees no distinction

between human and animal. He even goes so far as to seek a Darwinian

explanation for human characteristics that have no discernable survival value,

suggesting that such preoccupations as literature and art are mere evolutionary by-

products, the redundant features of mutations that are otherwise useful. However,

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[13] H. G. Wells, "The Rate of Change in Species," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 129-30.

he qualifies this by adding, "Heaven forbid that we should say that actually the thing is so."[14] In fact, Wells considered human beings to be different to other species, and his view of human evolution, which can be seen as in a sense dualistic, reveals that he actually perceived limitations in materialism and mechanism. As Patrick Parrinder notes, "Men are puppets at the mercy of social and cosmic forces: the idea constantly occurs in Wells, though it is usually presented only to be transcended."[15] The word "transcended" is significant and revealing. Cosmic and social forces are aspects of blind mechanism, the sole motivatior of the material universe – what therefore can transcend this, other than something immaterial? As we will see, Wells considered human consciousness to be distinct or isolated from the material realm.

In his essay "Human Evolution, An Artificial Process", Wells explores duality in the human evolutionary process, considering the development of body and mind as very different. So, while the human is slow to adapt physiologically and has probably changed little since the Palaeolithic era, there is much that distinguishes modern humans from those in the Stone Age, and this distinction is not, Wells argues, an inherited characteristic.[16] The characteristic he refers to is the acquired social self. Wells calls this the "artificial man". The "natural man" is the body, including animal instincts, and is indistinguishable from the entire being of our ancestors.[17] Importantly, Wells does not see modifications to the artificial human as the selection of random mutations. Alterations are brought

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[14] H. G. Wells, "Bye-Products in Evolution," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 205.

[15] Patrick Parrinder, H. G. Wells, Writers and Critics (Edinburgh: Oliver, 1970) 18.

[16] H. G. Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) 216.

[17] Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" 217.

about by "the agency of eccentric and innovating people, playwrights, novelists, preachers, poets, journalists, and political reasoners and speakers."[18] Agency is something that transcends the mechanistic and material, and, arguably, allows humanity to combat material processes. This can be thought of as imagination mingled with science, the former allowing for liberation from the constraints of the latter. The image that Wells creates is of a humanity within but not of the material, mechanistic universe: "In other words, in a rude and undisciplined way indeed, in an amorphous chaotic way we might say, humanity is even now consciously steering itself against the currents and winds of the universe in which it finds itself." Among other things, the agents who drive the evolution of the artificial human are responsible for the development of morality.[19] Wells describes these individuals as the "apparatus of moral suggestion".[20] Arguably, his later conception of the Samurai (a group of experts who will benevolently run nondemocratic society, rather like Plato's Philosopher Kings) is based on this belief that extraordinary individuals further the evolution of the artificial human.

In "The Rediscovery of the Unique" (1891), Wells attacks absolutism and seems to support open thinking. The essay's theme resembles Shklovsky's desire for an end to automatic perception, and seeks to illustrate the distinction between generals and particulars. Wells draws attention to the uniqueness of all things and suggests that ignoring this fact has led to widespread error, even in the sciences. Mathematics, Wells believes, prevents uniqueness from being acknowledged. His argument is that abstract generality is imposed on the particularity of the real:

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[18] Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" 218.
[19] Wells probably drew this idea from Huxley, who saw ethical progress as the result of humanity's struggles against the mechanistic forces of cosmic evolution. Thomas Henry Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics," Evolution, ed. Mark Ridley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 396.
[20] H. G. Wells, "Morals and Civilisation," Morals and Civilisation, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 228.

When we teach a child to count, we poison its mind almost

irrevocably. When a man speaks of a thousand of bricks, he never

dreams that he means a unique collection of uniques that his mind

cannot grasp individually [. . .] He is inoculated with the

arithmetical virus; he lets a watch and a calendar blind him to the

fact that every moment of his life is a miracle and a mystery.[21]

Using the words "miracle and mystery" to describe life hardly seems appropriate

for a scientific materialist, one who believes each aspect of human existence is

merely a link in a causal chain. According to Wells, science is also guilty of

ignoring uniqueness, deliberately averaging out differences – in the ratio of

hydrogen to oxygen in water, for example – in order to create the appearance of

universal truths.[22] A surprisingly distrustful and ambiguous attitude to the

scientific mind is revealed when Wells says of the rediscovery of the unique,

"[a]mong other things, after half a century of destructive criticism, it reinstates

miracles and prophecy on their old footings. It shows that those scientific writers

who have talked so glibly of the reign of inflexible law have been under a serious

misconception."[23] Thus, the essay is a critique of scientism.

The scientific romances are contradictory in that they contain both fantasy

and realism, but there is a perhaps more significant contradiction: Wells the

scientific materialist promoting anti-materialist notions. His outline of the

relative nature of perception is devastating to a position of absolute materialism.

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[21] H. G. Wells, "The Rediscovery of the Unique," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 26.

[22] Wells, "The Rediscovery of the Unique" 28.

[23] Wells, "The Rediscovery of the Unique" 22.

He explains that, "[i]n a metaphysical sense, it is true, there is no external world outside us; the whole universe from the furthest star to the tiniest chemical atom is a figment of our brain." The "external" world, which we distinguish as separate from ourselves in what Wells calls a "grosser sense", is, to some extent at least, manufactured by fallible sense perceptions. As Wells explains, through our senses we "guess" at the nature of something not ourselves:

> Are these senses of ours the only imaginable probes into the nature of matter? Has the universe no facets other than those she turns to man? There are variations even in the range of our own senses. According to the rate of its vibrations, a sounding column of air may be shrilled up, or boomed down beyond all range of human hearing; but for each individual, the highest and lowest audible notes differ. Were there ears to hear, there are harmonies and articulate sounds above and below the range of man [. . .] On either side of the visible spectrum of light rays there stretch active rays invisible to us. Eyes in structure very different to ours might see, and yet be blind to what we see. So it is with all the senses.[24]

If anything, Wells does not go far enough in these comments, stopping short of drawing final conclusions. What may be deduced from them is doubt of the very existence of matter. Our dubious senses are not simply "probes" into the nature of matter; they are the only tools we have to verify a material basis of reality in the first place. Sound and the visible spectrum, to take Wells's two examples, do

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[24] H. G. Wells, "Intelligence on Mars," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 177.

not have an existence absolutely independent of conscious perception; they are symbolic representations of whatever is external to the mind. There is no such thing, for instance, as colour (which is an abstract symbol representing a frequency of radiation, it is believed) outside consciousness. With the possible exception of a priori knowledge like mathematics, all our understanding of the universe is ultimately extrapolated from sense perceptions. Thus, to doubt the evidence of the senses is to doubt materialism. This is similar to Albert Einstein's "closed watch" principle, which is worth quoting in full:

> Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavour to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears its ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility or meaning of such a comparison. But he certainly believes that, as his knowledge increases, his picture of reality will become simpler and simpler and will explain a wider and wider range of his sensuous impressions. He may also believe in the existence of the ideal

limit of knowledge and that it is approached by the human mind.

He may call this ideal limit the objective truth.[25]

However, doubting the material is one thing, believing it to be non-existent is another, and might lead to the self-indulgence and total irresponsibility of Skimpole in Bleak House. There is, as Wells puts it, a "metaphysical sense" in which the nature of reality might be considered as relating to consciousness, and a "grosser sense" in which reality is considered to be material. To the latter belongs such themes from the scientific romances as politics, social justice, and the survival of the species, to the former belongs ideas about the immateriality of consciousness in the New Review serialisation of The Time Machine, and the relationship between self and infinity in The First Men in the Moon. Wells's legacy for fantastical fiction may be that he provided a blue-print for the both the material/ideological and pseudo-idealist strands of science fiction. In his case, these two strands were often present simultaneously, and could be said to exist in a dialectic.

Political Thinker

As has already been stated, Wells's fears for the future of humankind, fears emerging from the inevitability of extinction, informed his politics. It is well known that Wells's personal ideas of socialism clashed with formal

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[25] Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, The Evolution of Physics: The Growth of Ideas from the Early Concepts to Relativity and Quanta, (London: Cambridge UP, 1938) 33.

socialism and Marxism, and this led to his dissatisfaction with those political groups – such as the Liberal and Labour parties, and the Fabian Society – that he briefly supported or even joined. It seems likely, given his ideas on how the artificial human evolves (i.e. through the agency of certain individuals), that he found the unqualified social determinism in some doctrines unacceptable. Notions of an end of history would similarly not appeal to Wells: for him, a species must constantly evolve or become extinct. He disliked democracy, but thought the freedoms it provided vital enough for him to draft a declaration of the Rights of Man, eight years before the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in order to protect citizens in the collectivist state he hoped was approaching. He believed in private property, and was suspicious as well as desirous of an engineered society. For him socialism was an ideal of human co-operation, education, and mutual respect, freedom of thought and belief, equality before the law, and equality of opportunity. He wanted a state based on collectivism, not on Communism.

Wells reports that his thought "has run very close to communist lines, but my conception of a scientifically ordered class-less society is essentially of an expanded middle-class which has incorporated both the aristocrat and plutocrat above and the peasant, proletarian and pauper below." Far from experiencing any socialistic embarrassment at his own lower-middle class roots and education, he is glad to have had such an opportunity and baldly states that he sees nothing to admire in the lower classes.[26] He ridicules Lenin for finding him "incurably middle class", and says of both Lenin and Trotsky that they "were of the same vital social stratum; they had indeed both started life from a far more

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[26] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866) 94. While it is possible to agree with Wells on the brutalising effects of poverty and poor education, this sentiment seems arrogant.

advantageous level than I had; but the discolouration of their stream of thought by Marxist pretences and sentimentalities, had blinded them to their own essential quality."[27] Clearly an admirer of middleclass individualists, Wells makes his protagonists inventors, entrepreneurs, poorly-paid scientists, and writers. In his comedy/realist novels The History of Mr. Polly and Kipps, the central characters are, at points in the narratives, draper's assistants. But his admiration for the middle classes (specifically the lower-middle classes) does not mean that he allows the ideologies of his characters to go unchallenged. In the scientific romances the familiar is made strange, and Wells's bourgeois heroes encounter fantastical situations that shatter their comfortable mindsets. As Hume says, the fantastic "cracks the crust of habitude."[28]

Fantasy is also used in the romances to illustrate the dangers and horrors of natural selection and explore possible alternatives to the social structures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Parrinder notes: "The history of the future, however much the future is claimed to be novel and different, is inevitably modelled to a great extent on the history that we already know."[29] Extremes of pessimism and optimism, connected with contrasting beliefs about human beings as victims of determinism and as agents of their own destiny, drive much of the politics in Wells's fantastical fiction: "Wells's scientific romances alternate the ideas of hope and despair, mastery and slavery, release and submission, and in doing so they reflect the opposing images of predetermined

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[27] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866) 94-95.

[28] Kathryn Hume, Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature (New York, NY: Methuen, 1984) 196.

[29] Patrick Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1995) 65.

life and utopian life which guide his social thought."[30] These oppositions revolve around a dialectic of fantasy and reality, trancendentalism and materialism.

Fantasy and Reality

As was the case with the early Dickens, the first phase of Wells's writing career, when the major scientific romances were written, was prolific. An examination of the scientific romances makes it clear that another trait Wells and Dickens share as writers is the habit of combining the fantasic with realism, though Wells's approach to both differs from that of Dickens. Wells makes the familiar strange, but this transformation is brought about by "scientific" means. His treatment of the world has a realistic basis, and the prose used to describe it, while vivid, only rarely carries the sense of dreaminess that can be found in Dickens.[31] The fantasy Wells employs is given a "rational" explanation and, within the context of the novel in which it is present, purports to be not only real, but also realism. Fantasy in Wells can therefore be taken seriously, even at face value. Parrinder recognises this when he says, "H. G. Wells saw his early scientific romances as involving the displacement of magic by a new, more plausible kind of spell."[32] But it can be suggested that what is involved is more than naturalisation of the fantastic. Wells's early romances also serve the paradoxical function of mystifying science in order to reflect reality. As he points

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[30] Parrinder, H. G. Wells 23.

[31] Even here it has a rigid scientific support, such as the vision of the dying Earth in The Time Machine. As John St Loe Strachey comments in an 1898 review of The War of the Worlds: "Mr. Wells when he is most giving wings to his imagination is careful to be concrete and specific." John St Loe Strachey, "Unsigned Review in Spectator," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 64.

[32] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 11.

out in "The Rediscovery of the Unique", science contains false universalities, and mathematics can cause distinctive entities to be placed in homogenous groups. Arguably, the romanticisation of science may liberate it from these difficulties of convention. The Mackenzies state: "What emerged from the counterpoint of the absorbed reader in Atlas House and the observant boy idling through the meadows beside Ravensbourne, was a distancing from real life, the projection of packaged ideas about history, geography, science and the cosmos into everyday experience."[33] The early scientific romances transform material designed for critical reading (such as political science) into subjects suitable for experience reading (such as adventure stories). This trangression of utilitarian discourse by fantasy and literary pleasure, a subversive disturbance at the borders of language, may relate to Derrida's comments on the other of language or the "facts" of the real as opposed to the false "Truth" of language). As we saw Lewis and Tolkien suggest in regard to the fantastic, and Shklovsky propose in regard to art, experience reading allows for the disruption of conventional and automatic ways of thinking in order to genuinely perceive the world, to, it might be said, rediscover the unique. Wells tells us in that essay, "Thus, with a brief paragraph and a minute's thought, the scales drop from the reader's eyes and he makes the rediscovery of the unique."[34]

The fantastic also allowed Wells to leap beyond the limits of science in order to explore possibilities that lay outside what was known. The remarkable technologies in the scientific romances do not emerge directly from the science of the time in which they were written, but Wells has an ability to make it seem as if

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[33] Mackenzie and Mackenzie 28. In other words, Wells was transforming generalities into paritculars – the theme of "The Rediscovery of the Unique".
[34] Wells, "The Rediscovery of the Unique" 236.

they are the missing links at the end of an already acknowledged causal chain. As Parrinder points out,

> The romances are the work of a visionary with the acute observation and descriptive power of a realistic novelist; and they show a remarkable skill in controlling the reader's response to fictitious science, either by concealing the logical objections (to time-travelling, for example), or more importantly by the startling revelation of the deductive consequences of an idea.[35]

The explanations for the wonders in Wells's tales are similar in style to popular science, and phenomena like time travel or invisibility become strangely plausible, seemingly mixing the fantastic and the real unproblematically.

The allegories contained in the scientific romances are an important connection with the real and, as we will see, they are to a large extent didactic in nature. Yet the romances are escapist stories, and this causes some tension if they are also to be regarded as, for example, political pamphlets. Dickens's love of escape and entertainment can be linked to his social agenda without too much difficulty, but for Wells the two often clash as opposed forms of writing. Indeed, as Wells's work became increasingly focused on social commentary, the romance in it grew progressively paler until he abandoned it altogether.[36] In a sense, the later romances become what Hoggart calls "dead" culture: "interested and out to

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[35] Parrinder, H. G. Wells 17.
[36] H. G. Wells, "Preface to the Scientific Romances," H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism, eds. Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) 244.

persuade."[37] However, the major romances, which are the works to be examined

in this chapter, are vibrant with a confrontation of the "serious" and the popular-

fantastic. Parrinder explains that "[i]n many of his early stories the theme of

escape is paramount,"[38] and goes on to note an association between the home

counties of Wells's childhood and the garden worlds that can be found in his

novels.[39] As he says, "it is this prophetic sense of otherness imposed on

Englishness, of an old world irresistibly giving way to an imagined new one,

which inspires some of Wells's best writing."[40] The older Wells may have seen

escapism in literature as something trivial, but, even if this view were to be

accepted, that would only be true of his own early work if its escapist elements

were examined in isolation from its didactic ones. In fact, the two operate in a

kind of symbiosis, the fantastic permitting escape from convention in order to

make the reader's mind to open to a political agenda. The "message" in didactic

fiction can usually be reduced to a few sentences – why write a novel at all if the

message is the only element with any importance? Through the act of immersive

reading, romance in the scientific romances allows readers to experience the

information Wells wants them to learn, a technique far more effective than simple

preaching.

  That is not to say that the poetry of Wells's work really is meaningless in

isolation from the politics. There is a sense of wonder in the scientific romances

that communicates his awareness of something beyond the confines of material

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[37] Richard Hoggart, "Culture: Dead and Alive," About Society, vol. 1 (of Speaking to Each Other. London: Chatto, 1970) 132. Examples of this argument are In the Days of the Comet (1906) and Men Like Gods (1923).
[38] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 86.
[39] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 93.
[40] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 95.

existence. In examining the romances we will see examples of this, but the words

of Lovat Dickson should be mentioned here before specific texts are explored:

> several things make these books different from anything written
>
> before or since, and mark them as the work of a mythmaker. One
>
> is the majestic sense of something greater than humanity
>
> overshadowing our familiar world. Another is the sweep and force
>
> of the descriptive writing, which rises at points to wonderful
>
> heights. There are moments of unsurpassable majesty - the death
>
> of the world in The Time Machine, the howling in the twilight on
>
> Primrose Hill of the last Martian left alive in devastated London,
>
> the death of the Invisible Man, the lunar landscapes of The First
>
> Men on the Moon [sic], the chanting of the beasts in The Island of
>
> Doctor Moreau. Moments, in fact, when the language becomes an
>
> incantation, and one is aware of surrendering to some emotion not
>
> ordinarily felt in reading. Language alone could not do this; it is
>
> the accompaniment to the theme. But it lifts the imagination to a
>
> level at which the reader not only surrenders disbelief, but
>
> positively wills belief, and is conscious of participating in the
>
> action, not just being an observer of it.[41]

Such a use of language seems to be what Tolkien is referring to when he talks of

sub-creation, or what Greenblatt calls the wonder of a text. Perhaps the "emotion

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[41] Lovat Dickson, H. G. Wells: His Turbulent Life and Times (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 102.

not ordinarily felt in reading" is the jouissance of deconstruction alluded to by

Derrida, the partial awareness of/engagement with the other of language.

* * *

This chapter will discuss the dialectic of materialism-critical-

high/transcendence-experience-popular in Wells's major scientific romances. The

binaries in Wells's work and beliefs, already explored, will be related to this.

Through reading the romances with a view to revealing the fundamental

assumptions within them, the potential for alienation and liberation in the novels

will be investigated.

The Time Machine

When Wells's first novel The Time Machine appeared in the mid 1890s,

critics and public alike greeted it with approval. The author was hailed as a "man

of genius"[42] compared favourably to Edgar Allen Poe and Jonathan Swift,[43] and

the book called "that rarity which Solomon declared to be not merely rare but

non-existent - a 'new thing under the sun.'"[44] In 1895 the bound novel was

released after two newspaper serialisations had already been published.

Nevertheless, it sold 6,000 copies by Christmas.[45]

The Time Machine allows for an analysis of all the ideas discussed thus

far in this chapter. It is didactic and yet also an escapist adventure story; it

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[42] "Unsigned Notice, 'a Man of Genius', Review of Reviews," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 33.
[43] "Unsigned Notice, 'a Man of Genius', Review of Reviews," 33. "Unsigned Review, Daily Chronicle," The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 38. Zangwill, "Israel Zangwill on Time Travelling," 40.
[44] "Unsigned Review, Daily Chronicle" 38.
[45] Dickson 89.

illustrates the outcome of deterministic processes on humanity and discusses the responsibility inherent in agency; it draws together realism and fantasy. It is hard to say which of these contradictions most accurately embodies the theme of the book, but the relationship between determinism and agency is central. Agency, in fact, is a prerequisite for social responsibility, and social responsibility is the novel's political agenda.

On one level the novel is an attack on Darwin's claim that natural selection "will tend to progress towards perfection,"[46] and engages sceptically with any assumed equation of change and progress. Huxley had already noted that the processes of evolution are not necessarily benevolent, as they will lead ultimately to our extinction,[47] but he distinguished this "cosmic evolution" from the human struggle against it. He says "the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running from it, but in combating it [. . .] the dwarf bends the titan to his will."[48] As has been shown, Wells acknowledges this position himself. However, in The Time Machine he points out that human struggles against deterministic processes are as uncertain of a positive result as are the "improvements" Darwin believed were inevitably brought about by natural selection. The situation discovered by the Time Traveller in the year 802,701 is actually the result of resistance to the cosmic. One of the first things he notices is the artificiality of the world in which he finds himself. He notes "delicate and wonderful flowers countless years of culture had created."[49] There are hybrid fruit for the Eloi to eat, and the Eloi themselves are a

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[46] Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life, 6 ed. (London: Murray, 1920) 459.
[47] Huxley 398.
[48] Huxley 397.
[49] H. G. Wells, The Time Machine, ed. John Lawton, New Centennial ed. (Everyman Paperbacks. London: Dent-Orion, 1995) 22.

foodstuff and a uniform race that the Morlocks "probably saw to the breeding of."[50] The underground environment of the Morlocks is synthetic, too, parodying Victorian industry. Thus, the artificial human has destroyed itself: members of one class gain a life of ease, leading to physical, mental, and moral weakness; members of another class are brutalised to the extent that they actually become brutes and a literal underclass. Ultimately, the competitive conditions that will allow natural selection are restored. As the Time Traveller memorably puts it, "I grieved to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been. It had committed suicide."[51] This may imply that Wells is writing disillusioned literature in the ironic mode, but in fact there is a potentially more positive, revisionist message. The situation in the far future is the result of <u>agency</u> – the novel clearly ascribes blame to human beings (specifically, to people in late nineteenth-century society).[52] It seems that, because human agency is responsible for the evolution of the artificial human, this agency is capable of bringing about its own degeneration to the point that it actually annihilates itself. The judgmental tone implies that Wells is asking people to avoid self-destruction. As it is therefore not blind determinism that is responsible, the possibility exists that the future may not be as bleak as the one the novel presents. A dystopia does not have to be a purely cynical work; it can serve as a useful critique of society: "hope has its foundation in lack of hope, the desire for utopia has its beginning in despair or dystopia."[53] Determinism and agency, pessimism and optimism are thus placed in a complimentary relationship.

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[50] Wells, The Time Machine 56.
[51] Wells, The Time Machine 69.
[52] Agency is, as we have seen, is linked to transcendence (and the fantastic).
[53] Scott McCracken, Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998) 104.

Readers see the fantastical world of 802,701 through the startled eyes of a

bourgeois Englishman in a smoking jacket, and it is quite possible the Mackenzies

are correct when they say this is a device used by Wells to shock that class from

its complacency.[54] It is, no doubt, the fantastic's ability to unsettle fixed ideas

that Wells makes use of in The Time Machine, but his target may be wider than

the bourgeois mindset. It may be that all manifestations of teleology are under

attack in this text. The Mackenzies go on to draw attention to the fact that Wells

"inverts the optimism of the Marxist theory of class struggle as he had already

inverted Darwin. His vision of the future becomes as shocking to the socialist or

humanist as to the bourgeois reader."[55] The novel shocks via an image of

humanity stripped of ideological preconceptions. It is no coincidence that the first

significant object the Time Traveller sees in the future is a winged sphinx. As

Parrinder indicates, this foreshadows the question that the novel will answer: the

sphinx's famous riddle, the answer to which is "a man".[56] Not only does the

sphinx perform this function, but, together with the neoclassical palaces and

gardens, it serves to remind the reader of those utopian romances Wells

critiques.[57] If the Time Traveller is correct, then the world of 802,701 is the end

result of a utopia (albeit one in which there was a slave class). It is the absence of

struggle that has produced the pathetic Eloi. Thus the gardens are wild, the

palaces are in ruins, and the sphinx is weatherworn and gives "an unpleasant

suggestion of disease."[58] John Lawton summarizes this aspect of the novel when

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[54] Mackenzie and Mackenzie 122.
[55] Mackenzie and Mackenzie 123.
[56] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 16.
[57] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 42.
[58] Wells, The Time Machine 19.

he wryly says, "The Time Machine is Bad News From Nowhere."[59] The riddle of

the sphinx is solved in such moments as the one in which the Time Traveller first

sees a retreating Morlock in the flame of his match and begins to understand that

the truth science reveals does not necessarily serve humankind's vanity:

> Science is the match that man has just got alight. He thought he
>
> was in a room – in moments of devotion, a temple – and that his
>
> light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with
>
> wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems
>
> wrought into harmony. It is a curious sensation, now that the
>
> preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his
>
> hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on
>
> visible, and around him, in place of all that human beauty and
>
> comfort he anticipated, darkness still.[60]

The face of the human being exposed by the light of scientific enquiry is not

bourgeois, nor is it suited to the utopian ideas the novel critiques. It is merely the

face of a socialised animal. On this level, the fantastic operates within Frye's

ironic mode, and the novel fulfils the Leavisite and Frankfurt School Marxist

demands for fiction to be disturbing. Arguably, what The Time Machine reveals

about humanity is its alienation from its own self-image.

However, despite the impression given that the Time Traveller's

investigations are a study of a Victorian society – Lovat Dickson describes them

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[59] John Lawton, Introduction, The Time Machine, By H. G. Wells, ed. John Lawton, New
Centennial ed. (Everyman Paperbacks. London: Dent-Orion, 1995) xxxvii.
[60] Wells, "The Rediscovery of the Unique" 31.

as "typical nineteenth-century anxiety to get at the economic facts"[61] – they apply

to a fantastical world, not reality. Socio-political conclusions drawn from the

novel are therefore uncertain, because the Time Traveller's biological and

political speculations are non-fiction discourses interpolated into fantastical

fiction.[62] They might even be considered naïve anthropomorphisms. The Eloi's

group behaviour has more in common with the defence mechanisms of a prey

animal than it does with communism or a humanity made weak through

decadence, and while the Morlocks are perhaps more human (they have a dim

understanding of machinery and even take their own lives when cut off by the

forest fire: "Thrice I saw Morlocks put their heads down in a kind of agony and

rush into the flames."[63]), they are described as vermin, spiders, apes, lemurs, and

ants.[64] Darwin proposes that "forms now generally acknowledged to be merely

varieties may hereafter be thought worthy of specific names,"[65] and the Time

Traveller says, "Man had not remained one species, but had differentiated into

two distinct animals."[66] In fact, the Time Traveller is the only human being in the

year 802,701. He has been freed from his historical moment via the fantastical

device of time travel, and proceeds to impose his human ideology and authority

on a place where there are no humans, in much the same way as he writes his

name inside the Palace of Green Porcelain. Parrinder believes the Palace

functions as an echo of the nineteenth-century natural history museums that told

the stories of the rise and fall of other dominant species. He calls the fall of the

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[61] Dickson 83.

[62] The Time Traveller bases his analysis of the "world" of 802,701 on assumptions gained while exploring a small section of the Thames Valley!

[63] Wells, The Time Machine 68.

[64] It is interesting that the Time Traveller imagines the Morlocks "on their anthill going hither and thither [. . .]" Wells, The Time Machine 53. This image of the proletariat in a mindless collective exploiting their old masters may refer to Wells's dislike of Marxism.

[65] Darwin 456.

[66] Wells, The Time Machine 42.

human in Wells's fiction "dethronement", an image he draws from the Editor's

facetious question about whether the Time Traveller suffers from

"Nebuchadnezzar phases".[67] A reading of <u>The Time Machine</u> reveals a startling

example of this theme: the seat of yellow metal atop the hill that metonymically

suggests the Time Traveller's attempt to reclaim the abandoned throne of

humankind. This is a potent space where opposites meet. As the Time Traveller

observes the world from the elevated position of the seat and speculates (thus

bringing scientific and political ideas into a fantastical world), determinism and

agency, materialism and transcendentalism, science and romance, non-fiction and

fiction, realism and the fantastic, popular and high culture, assemble and merge.

<u>The Time Machine</u> appears to embody the dialectic this dissertation seeks.

Much has been made of the apocalyptic end to the Time Traveller's

adventures. Even if humanity were to transcend determinism and emerge

victorious in the battle against natural selection, nothing would prevent cosmic

process eventually bringing about the end of the world.[68] It is the sheer

inevitability of the planet's decay and demise that lend the final few pages of the

Time Traveller's journey such power. The language used conveys scientific and

poetic ideas of the world's end. It includes both resonance and wonder, in that it

has a cultural context and content while producing transcendent awe in the reader:

> The earth had come to rest with one face to the sun, even as in our
>
> own time the moon faces the earth [. . .] I cannot convey the sense
>
> of abominable desolation that hung over the world. The red

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[67] Parrinder, <u>Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy</u> 49.

[68] Wells was presumably imaginative enough to have considered the possibility that humankind might escape the planet, but the idea of entropy, which was well known at the time, prevents any permanent refuge. Arguably, the end of the world here serves as a symbol for the universe's heat death.

eastern sky, the northward blackness, the salt Dead Sea, the stony

beach crawling with these foul, slow-stirring monsters, the uniform

poisonous-looking green of the lichenous plants, the thin air that

hurt one's lungs [. . .] I moved on a hundred years, and there was

the same red sun – a little larger, a little duller – the same dying

sea, the same chill air [. . .] I realized that an eclipse was

beginning. Either the moon or the planet Mercury was passing

across the sun's disc. Naturally, at first I took it to be the moon,

but there is much to incline me to believe that what I really saw

was the transit of an inner planet passing very near to the earth [. .

.] From the edge of the sea came a ripple and whisper. Beyond

these lifeless sounds the world was silent. Silent? It would be

hard to convey the stillness of it. All the sounds of man, the

bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that

makes the background of our lives – all that was over [. . .] At last,

one by one, swiftly, one after the other, the white peaks of the

distant hills vanished into blackness [. . .] A horror of this great

darkness came on me.[69]

A bland and purely scientific account would never provide as accurate a picture as

this vivid use of language. The fantastical narration actually conveys the "reality"

of the situation: "it grips the imagination as it is only gripped by genuinely

imaginative work."[70] It could be said that the prose itself has a transcendent

power over the reader, what Tolkien calls sub-creation, and that this allows the

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[69] Wells, The Time Machine 73-76.
[70] "Unsigned Review, Daily Chronicle," The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 39.

reader to experience the world's demise. An example of the literature of vision, the inevitability of the scene also serves to face the reader with the certainty of something utterly alien to themselves, perhaps even more so than his or her own mortality. Of course, such an intense image of otherness also creates reading pleasure, and thus a deconstructive jouissance. Furthermore, it should be noted that, despite some "sophistication", this is essentially a work of popular fantasy, which, as Freud notes, emerges from myth. The apocalyptic moment is thus mythic while being ostensibly factual, effectively portraying the final downfall of hubristic humanity. As in other works, such as The Invisible Man, the mythical nature of the scene undermines its naturalisation by science.[71]

Wells grappled with the idea of an "Unknown" outside human knowledge of the universe (something which sounds rather like Derrida's notion of the "other" of language – that which is literally unthinkable within the terms of conventional reference), a difficult task for a committed atheist.[72] The almost incomprehensible death of the world at the end of The Time Machine resonates with these feelings. As will increasingly become apparent, Wells aligned human consciousness with something beyond the conventional scientific view of the universe. In the New Review serialisation of The Time Machine the Time Traveller's opening exposition of his theories includes a discussion of the "Rigid Universe": "If you understood all natural laws, the present would be a complete and vivid record of the past. Similarly, if you grasped the whole of the present, knew all its tendencies and laws, you would see clearly all the future." An

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[71] Other elements of The Time Machine have the effect of undermining a naturalisation of the fantastic. For example, Tolkien says the "Eloi and Morlocks live far away in an abyss of time so deep as to work an enchantment upon them [. . .]", J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen, 1983) 116.

[72] Wells did become a theist during the First World War, but soon returned to atheism.

omniscient observer "would always perceive exactly the same thing. He would see, as it were, a Rigid Universe filling space and time - a universe in which things were always the same."[73] This model of the universe is, of course, deterministic. Human consciousness transcends this: "our minds do not represent the conditions of the universe – why should they? [. . .] From my point of view the human consciousness is an immaterial something falling through this Rigid Universe of four dimensions, from the direction we call 'past' to the direction we call 'future'."[74] At the level of consciousness, human beings are thus not determined (hence the agency-driven evolution of the artificial human) – they are within but not of the material universe. This relationship may be central to Wells's conception of reality's fundamental nature.

The Island of Doctor Moreau

Among the upbeat concluding remarks of Darwin's The Origin of Species is the statement: "When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Silurian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled."[75] This reveals that he not only considered natural selection to be progressive, something that "works solely by and for the good of each being",[76] he actually saw a possible moral dimension to this. As we found with the degeneration of the human species in The Time Machine, Wells did not share this confidence, or even, necessarily,

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[73] H. G. Wells, "The Inventor," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 93.
[74] Wells, "The Inventor" 94.
[75] Darwin 458.
[76] Darwin 459.

Huxley's optimistic ideas about human intervention in the processes of evolution.

Where Wells's first novel depicts the consequences of such intervention, The

Island of Doctor Moreau shows readers the process in action, providing horrors

on several levels.

It may simply have been the temporal proximity of this new fantastical

world that caused the almost general revulsion expressed by reviewers.[77]

Arguably, where The Time Machine is based in a fantastical space into which

reality is inserted, The Island of Doctor Moreau is a mixture of reality and

fantasy. The world of the Eloi and Morlocks is made distant by almost eight

hundred thousand years, but, as Dickson notes, "Doctor Moreau was here and

now, and the evolutionary theory was still a very sore subject in contemporary

terms for those who were ready to accept the gifts of science but unwilling to

admit that its fundamental discoveries embraced human life and its origins as well

as the world we lived in." Not only that, but Moreau's work implies that our

mental as well as physical structure has no transcendence from the material world,

and that human traits can be both implanted and eradicated.[78] Could it be this –

rather than the accounts of Moreau's surgery, the extremities of survival, and

bestial license – that offended so many of the novel's critics? There is very little

suggestion of this in the reviews of the time, except a comment in The Guardian:

"one is inclined to think the intention of the author has been to satirise and rebuke

the presumption of science; at other times his object seems to be to parody the

work of the Creator of the human race, and cast contempt on the dealings of God

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[77] Darwinism was still highly controversial at this time, but, as Brian Aldiss points out, the novel is highly relevant now: "The spirit of Doctor Moreau is alive and well and living in the late twentieth century. These days, Moreau would be state-funded." Brian Aldiss, Introduction, The Island of Doctor Moreau, By H. G. Wells, ed. Brian Aldiss (Everyman Paperbacks. London: Dent-Orion, 1993) xxxiv.

[78] Dickson 87.

with His creatures."[79] Most reviewers did not deal with this aspect of the novel. The focus is generally upon the visceral shocks Wells paints. Reviewers, such as Chalmers Mitchell, can see this as "lowering" the work to the level of the popular-fantastic (i.e. sensationalism): "It may be that [. . .] a public attuned to Mr. Rider Haggard's view of the romantic may demand the insertion of details physically unpleasant; but, for my own part, I feel that Mr. Wells has spoiled a fine conception by a greed of cheap horrors."[80] This seems a little unfair. While Wells himself confesses, "It is a trifle gruesome,"[81] he also wrote to Elizabeth Healey, "I do hope that you don't think [it] merely a festival of 'orrors."[82] However, there is some justification in Mitchell's assessment of The Island of Doctor Moreau as a sensation novel. It is a discussion of the fragility of the artificial human, true, but it is also a tale of shipwreck, fantastical creatures, and adventure. Wells may have made the novel contemporary by setting it in the 1880s, but he distanced it from the reader geographically. In fact, like a magical realm, the exact location of the island remains a mystery. Charles Edward Prendick explores the possibility that the island visited by his uncle is Noble's Isle, but his speculation is "without confirmation."[83] Perhaps the name "Noble's Isle" can be seen as an ironic reference to Darwinian notions of enoblement. Referring to the island, Montgomery says, "[s]o far as I know, it hasn't got a

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[79] "Unsigned Review, Guardian," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 53.

[80] Chalmers Mitchell, "Review in Saturday Review," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 45. Wells did not despise Haggard's work.

[81] H. G. Wells, "To J. M. Dent," The Correspondence of H. G. Wells, ed. David C. Smith, vol. 1 (1880-1903) (London: Pickering, 1998) 228.

[82] H. G. Wells, "To Elizabeth Healey," The Correspondence of H. G. Wells, ed. David C. Smith, vol. 1 (1880-1903) (London: Pickering, 1998) 261.

[83] H. G. Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau, ed. Brian Aldiss (Everyman Paperbacks. London: Dent-Orion, 1993).

name."[84] Wells positions the island outside the realist experience of his readers while grounding it in their historical moment. As in The Time Machine, the novel's power emerges from a relationship between opposites.

The Island of Doctor Moreau examines the idea that humanity is at the mercy of deterministic forces, and it does so far more directly than The Time Machine. Most obviously, this is performed through discussing biological determinism in natural selection. Moreau may seem to be a human agent artificially controlling the forms of animals, but in his attempts to create the human from the animal the reader can see the deterministic forces he is also subject to. Darwin himself uses the artificial selection of varieties to introduce his ideas on evolution: "Breeders habitually speak of an animal's organisation as something quite plastic, which they can model almost as they please."[85] Moreau says, "[t]o that – to the study of the plasticity of living forms – my life has been devoted,"[86] and claims that breeders of horses and dogs are among his precursors. His project to transform an animal into a rational creature is actually one of Darwinian ennoblement, and Wells argues that such an attempt will fail because the assumptions behind it (Moreau's assumptions that he controls the process, that ennoblement can emerge from the it) are incorrect. Moreau is the victim of the same hubris that overcomes Victor Frankenstein, when he states, "I will make a rational creature of my own."[87] His research and experimentation can be interpreted in one of two ways: 1) he is an autonomous agent consciously altering deterministic processes; 2) he is simply a tool of those processes. In the case of the former, his vivisections are acts of creation, suggesting the work of a

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[84] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 10.
[85] Darwin 90.
[86] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 69.
[87] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 76.

freethinking, non-analytical artist. There is much, however, to imply that this is

an illusion, and that the latter is in fact the case. The seemingly poetic language

Moreau uses to describe his technique – "I dip a living creature into the bath of

burning pain"[88] – may be even more egocentric than it at first appears. Moreau's

"bath of burning pain" is not, perhaps, the result of his own will, but merely a

manifestation of the suffering species must undergo in order to adapt. As Wells

puts it in his essay "Bio-Optimism", "[i]n brief, a static species is mechanical, an

evolving species suffering – no line of escape from that impasse has as yet

presented itself. The names of the sculptor who carves out the new forms of life

are, and so far as human science goes at present they must ever be, Pain and

Death."[89] It is the pain that sculpts, not what wields the scalpel. In fact, there is

less of an overall sense of condemnation than there is in The Time Machine, less

of a sense that things could be otherwise, and this implies that although there is

human "intervention" in natural selection, it is not autonomous intervention.

Wells seems to suggest that apparent human agency is simply one variable in the

system of selection, and thus that Moreau and every other human are nothing

more wonderful or terrible than a cog in the machine:

> A blind fate, a vast pitiless mechanism, seemed to cut and shape
>
> the fabric of existence, and I, Moreau (by his passion for research),
>
> Montgomery (by his passion for drink), the Beast People, with
>
> their instincts and mental restrictions, were torn and crushed,

[88] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 76.
[89] H. G. Wells, "Bio-Optimism," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 209.

ruthlessly, inevitably, amid the infinite complexity of its incessant wheels.[90]

Again we see the fantastical negativity of Frye's ironic mode and Hume's category of disillusion. Montgomery expresses this disillusioned vision in more simple and disturbing terms: "What's it all for, Prendick? Are we bubbles blown by a baby?"[91] Yet there is a third possibility – that Moreau is both agent and tool, that what we see played out through him is a dialectic between science and art, realism and fantasy, and thus between determinism and agency. The oxymorons in his explanation of what motivates him suggest this: "You cannot imagine the strange colourless delight of these intellectual desires."[92]

The physical transformation of animals into "Beast People" actually provides much of the novel's popular-fantastical visual impact (as well as a good deal of those horrors the reviewers baulked at). At the same time, it implies the kind of nihilistic determinism alluded to above. However, the most interesting feature in The Island of Doctor Moreau is not the biological determinism conveyed by the Beast People's physicality, but the social determinism/construction enforced by the Beast People's Law. The capacity for language is important here for two reasons. Firstly, it distinguishes the human from the animal mind. In the Course in General Linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure asserts that language is required to give thought structure:

Psychologically our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists

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[90] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 93-94.
[91] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 104.
[92] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 73.

have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs

we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction

between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague,

uncharted nebula.[93]

This is remarkably similar to Moreau's belief: "the great difference between man

and monkey is in the larynx, he said, in the incapacity to frame delicately different

sound-symbols by which thought could be sustained."[94] In The Time Machine we

are told that the Eloi's language is chiefly composed of sentences containing only

a single noun and verb. This extremely basic speech (which would, of course,

make subject-verb-object clauses impossible) reflects their decadence. In the

same way, when Prendick is left alone on the island with the Beast people, he sees

their reversion back to an animal state as the loss of language: "Can you imagine

language, once clear-cut and exact, softening and guttering, losing shape and

import, becoming mere lumps of sound again?"[95] The idea that thought is

synonymous with language is another attack on agency: language pre-exists an

individual, and therefore would determine thought. The second reason language

is, it can be argued, a theme in the novel's discussion of social

determinism/construction is that it has a role in the development of human beings.

As already stated, Wells suggested that the most sophisticated human traits

(which have no survival value and should therefore not have evolved via natural

[93] Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. Wade Baskin, eds. Charles
Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Reidlinger (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 111-12.
[94] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 71.
[95] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 120. Patrick Brantlinger implies that, in The Time
Machine at least, this waning of language as a symptom of degeneration may be associated
with the perceived decay of culture at this time. Patrick Brantlinger, The Reading Lesson:
The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction (Bloomington, IN: Indiana
UP, 1998) 193.

selection) are evolutionary by-products. In "Human Evolution, An Artificial Process" he speculates that some of the preoccupations of the civilised mind are side-effects of the development of language.[96]

In addition to being psychologically moulded by language, the Beast People are socially determined/constructed through ideology. When Prendick encounters the Sayer of the Law, a foundational relationship between the human subject and ideology is presented: "It is a man. He must learn the Law."[97] It could be said that, psychologically, the Beast People <u>are</u> the Law, and that suppressed beneath this Law are the physical instincts of the body – the Beast People parallel exactly the Wellsian dualist conception of the artificial and natural human being. In "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process," Wells says the artificial human is "highly plastic."[98] Such a model could seem misanthropic and hopeless indeed. If we consider the process of social construction to be a deterministic one (and, as we have seen, the novel does express the fear that reality is absolutely mechanistic), we can see it actually does not differ from biological determinism in any meaningful way. In fact, Wells describes "educative" techniques such as hypnosis in surgical terms, as the transplantation of ideas:

> In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a
> possibility of replacing old inherent instincts by new suggestions,
> grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas. Very much
> indeed of what we call moral education is such an artificial
> modification and perversion of instinct; pugnacity is trained into

[96] Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" 216-17.
[97] Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" 56.
[98] Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" 217.

courageous self-sacrifice, and suppressed sexuality into pseudo-religious emotion.[99]

It is quite possible to see ideas as objects that can be manipulated. Richard Dawkins claims that ideas are actually a sort of social/psychological equivalent to genes, and labels them "memes". These memes "propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation."[100] Obviously, ideas change, but this is because they mutate and compete with one another, exactly like genes: "Cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission in that, although basically conservative, it can give rise to a form of evolution."[101] If the human is a set of acquired ideas, and Wells's model of the artificial human seems to fit that description, then Daniel C. Dennet is correct to say, "our selves have been created out of the interplay of memes."[102] Of course, Wells, as we have seen, allows for the process to be transcended, because for him new ideas emerge from the agency of exceptional people. Yet this aspect of human evolution is mostly lacking from The Island of Doctor Moreau, and we are left with Dawkins's model, in which innovation is the result of pure mechanism constructing human beings. This biological view of social determinism thus mirrors the structuralist Marxist views

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[99] H. G. Wells, "The Limits of Individual Plasticity," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 39. If the metaphor of surgical transplantation is extended, the failure of the Beast People's conditioning could be thought of as tissue rejection. As an indication of how closely some central ideas in the novel parallel Wells's own, it should be noted that Prendick uses the above quotation almost word for word in order to describe the basis of Moreau's social engineering. The only difference is that where the essay uses "pseudo-religious", the novel merely says, "religious". Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 70-71.

[100] Richard Dawkins, The Selfish Gene (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976. [1978 reprint, corrections added]) 206.

[101] Dawkins 214.

[102] Daniel C. Dennet, Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life (New York, NY: Simon, 1995) 367.

of Louis Althusser: "ideology has the function, which defines it, of 'constituting' individuals as subjects."[103] As Wells puts it, education is "the careful and systematic manufacture of the artificial factor in man."[104] Althusser's comment, "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects [. . .] an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born,"[105] could be expressed in Dawkins's model by saying the memes that constitute an individual pre-exist him or her, in the same way the genes that comprise that individual's physiology do. In Wellsian terms, the artificial human is made up of the social knowledge that has accumulated over many millennia. Social construction is what we see in the case of the Beast People's Law, and a comment by Prendick indicates that Wells uses the Beast People as symbols to imply that human beings are also animals imprisoned within social codes: "I had here before me the whole balance of human life in miniature [. . .] they stumbled in the shackles of humanity."[106]

However, the novel has at least one judgmental aspect (and thus ideas of responsibility and autonomy). The Beast People revert to the animal spontaneously, but Montgomery chooses this course for himself. Augustin Filon calls the imagined spectacle of Montgomery's bacchanal with the Beast People a "combination of bestial instinct and civilised vice."[107] In a dark moment Prendick might consider Montgomery to be just one more victim of mechanism, but he ultimately judges him to be responsible for his own fate: "You've made a beast of

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[103] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Essays on Ideology (London: Verso, 1984) 45. Althusser saw ideology as material practices and institutions. His notion of relative autonomy contradicts this somewhat.
[104] Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process", 217.
[105] Althusser 49-50.
[106] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 93.
[107] Augustin Filon, "Article in Revue Des Deux Mondes," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 56.

yourself. To the beasts you may go."[108] Prendick's statement that Montgomery had "burnt the boats to revenge himself upon me and prevent our return to mankind"[109] may symbolically suggest that Montgomery has chosen the animal for both himself and Prendick.

Once in back in civilization, however, Prendick becomes what Parrinder calls "insanely misanthropic".[110] In these final pages the disguises are cast aside, and the narrative begins to openly discuss what it has been metaphorically tackling all along: "I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls, and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial mark and then that."[111] This bleak perception is also turned inward: "And even it seemed that I, too, was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain, that sent it to wander alone, like a sheep stricken with the gid."[112] This reveals the problem of Jackson's distinction between objective and subjective threats to the self: Prendick has the subjective threat of having too much knowledge, but he also now has a threat from the otherness of his fellows. To make this even more complicated, he acquired the knowledge that threatens him from an encounter with otherness on the island, and has internalised this objective threat, seeing himself as other. Thus he is objectively alienated from those around him, and subjectively alienated from himself. His sociological and psychological alienations are thus determined by each other. As in The Haunted Man, the fantastic has revealed Prendick's state of alienation to himself. Because the novel

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[108] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 105.
[109] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 109.
[110] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 120.
[111] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 128.
[112] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 129.

deals with human society and socialisation, this objective/subjective alienation is intended to be seen as a universal condition. If the Beast People are a symbol of humanity, then perhaps the "insanely misanthropic" Prendick is an everyman, representing a general alienated state that includes the novel's readers. Certainly, his descriptions of the London he sees about him again echo Blake's poem of the same name.

But in the final paragraph we learn that Prendick has been mostly liberated from this situation, and these eight sentences speak of transcendence. As we have seen, Dawkins and Althusser see our minds as socially determined, but Wells does not. He considers advancements in the artificial human to be the result of the agency of remarkable individuals, not some memetic facsimile of natural selection. For Wells, ideas are immaterial, transcendent, and thus escape Althusserian structures of social determinism. As he says,

> Civilisation is not material. If, in a night, this artificial, this impalpable mental factor of every human being in the world could be destroyed, the day thereafter would dawn, indeed, upon our cities, our railways, our mighty weapons of warfare, and on our factories and machinery, but it would dawn no more upon a civilised world.[113]

Prendick, then, can take comfort from "wise books, bright windows in this life of ours lit by the shining souls of men."[114] Here we see combined: artistic alienation, the Lewis-Tolkien position on escapism, Derrida's notion of literary

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[113] Wells, "Morals and Civilisation" 221.
[114] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 129.

jouissance as an interaction with the outside of language, and the practice of experience reading. Prendick also feels relief from his despair through the Wellsian sense of the Unknown: "There is, I do not know how there is or why there is, a sense of peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven."[115] The urgent question posed by The Time Machine – how do we responsibly escape the pain natural selection brings us and the extinction that it inevitably holds in store for us – is also what The Island of Doctor Moreau asks, although its focus is to concentrate on the precarious position of agency in the face of deterministic forces. It is uncompromisingly honest, but its ultimate message is one of hope. As Brian Aldiss puts it:

> Dark though the vision of Doctor Moreau is, it carries an inner light, since it is addressed to us, the readers, in the conviction that we will understand and that we too, conscious of 'the universe, the All', will appreciate it not only as a splendid example of storytelling but as one of those cautions we can apply to ourselves, warding off the ever-incipient Beast-flesh.[116]

The paradox of Wells the scientific materialist, who could see an Unknown beyond the material,[117] and an artificial, immaterial element in the human is perhaps best summed up in one of Prendick's closing remarks: "There it must be, I think, in the vast and eternal laws of matter, and not in the daily cares and troubles of men, that whatever is more than animal within us must find its

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[115] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 129.
[116] Aldiss, The Island of Doctor Moreau xxxvi.
[117] See Appendix.

solace and hope."[118] It is not in matter that this solace can be found, but in the immaterial laws that govern it.

The Invisible Man

Wells wrote his next scientific romance about another amoral scientist. But unlike Moreau, who may or may not be mad, Griffin is obviously unstable at the start of The Invisible Man , and he degenerates into insanity. The novel can be viewed as an attack on the irresponsible use of knowledge, but more relevant to this dissertation are its attempts at naturalising the supernatural, and its depiction of alienation.

It can be suggested that it is in this novel that a certain detached cynicism began to emerge in Wells prose, and the romance began to fade from his work in other ways. For example, the ironic third person narration distances the reader somewhat from the action. The Time Machine and The Island of Doctor Moreau both contain recognisable adventure narratives and heroes, where The Invisible Man barely even has a central character. Griffin is the character that features most, but his invisibility extends to him being unseen by the reader: other than the section during which he tells Kemp of his history, there is virtually no description witnessed from his viewpoint or filtered through his perception. In many ways he is like a ghost, haunting the novel.

However, there is still much to engage the reader (the sociological ideas that came to dominate the scientific romances do not really become overt until the final section of The First Men in the Moon). The Invisible Man is still a

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[118] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau 129.

fantastical story, and its narrative has the feel of myth, the origin, according to Freud, of the popular-fantastic. Like the other early scientific romances, it remains a book that can be read for escapist enjoyment, and thus a catalyst for the popular pleasures Ang and others discuss, as Clement Shorter, writing in an 1897 review points out: "The story, which is bound to be popular, has not a suspicion of preaching about it, and in a quite unpretentious way will help to pass an amusing hour or so. I have not been so fascinated by a new book for many a day."[119] The lack of "preaching" may also make the novel fit into Hoggart's category of "living" culture. In addition to this, The Invisible Man provides a startling picture of an alienated self.

When the novel begins with Griffin's arrival in the Coach and Horses at Iping, the reader is shown the kind of amused exasperation at village life seen in Wells's realist comedy The History of Mr Polly. This time there is no transportation to the fantastical worlds of the distant future or the island home of talking animals. In some ways, The Invisible Man is a satire of poorly-educated and petty people. But within this mundane place is Griffin, a fantastical creature, a griffin, interpolated into a realist satire, and thus we once more see the dialectic of fantasy and reality. Initially, some slightly mysterious events in the narrative create Todorov's conception of the fantastic (i.e. reader hesitation), but soon the conventional is transgressed by an eruption of fantasy. Griffin's sudden unmasking is an obvious example of this (particularly in terms of the unsettling rapidity of the scene), and is what Rabkin calls "anti-expected", but his disruption of the village may be more significant, because with that the entire world of the

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[119] Clement Shorter, "Review in Bookman," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 59-60.

novel seems transformed. This is artistic alienation: the familiar made strange. The spectacle of the villagers enjoying Whit-Monday – the bunting and holiday clothes, the tent where the women make tea, the coconut shies and steam organ – seems slightly absurd. We hear of Mr Hall and Teddy Henfrey "discussing in a state of cloudy puzzlement the one Iping topic."[120] But when Griffin disturbs all this, his presence alone is all that is required to change the world into a fantastical space. As he progresses through the centre of the village "smiting and overthrowing, for the mere satisfaction of hurting,"[121] the holidaying villagers rush to hide and an unreal desertion remains: "And then the whole tumultuous rush has passed and the Iping High Street with its gauds and flags is deserted save for the still raging Unseen, and littered with coconuts, overthrown canvas screens, and the scattered stock in trade of a sweetstuff stall."[122]

When writing to Wells of The Invisible Man, Conrad famously addressed him as "Realist of the Fantastic!"[123] (Parrinder calls this "a representative comment")[124], and, while this is accurate so far as it goes, it is misleading to think that the novel therefore transforms the fantastic into the real. If anything, the opposite is the case. Invisibility has always been the subject of fantasy – from folk tales right up to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels – and while Wells attempts to naturalise this magical ability by basing it on scientific principles (manipulation of the reflecting and refracting characteristics of matter) this attempt is undermined by the book's mythic events. The very opening image, of the mysterious stranger emerging from a snowstorm to take up lodgings at an inn,

[120] H. G. Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance, ed. Macdonald Daly (Everyman Paperbacks. London: Dent-Orion, 1995) 50.
[121] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 53.
[122] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 54.
[123] Joseph Conrad, "Joseph Conrad's Impression," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 60.
[124] Parrinder, H. G. Wells 17.

suggests both the gothic and the folk tale. Todorov's ideas on the fantastic apply

here, because, initially, the reader is uncertain of what is behind some of the

events in and around Iping. However, once the "rational" explanation for

Griffin's invisibility is revealed, the narrative still does not collapse into the

uncanny, but continues to hover between uncanny and marvellous. As his name

implies, the stranger, Griffin, is fantastical, rather than a mere scientific curiosity.

He says of himself, "I had become a wrapped-up mystery,"[125] and the narrator

sometimes refers to him as "the Unseen", a similar noun to the Unknown, which

Wells experimented with as a term to label the "power" that created the

universe.[126] Griffin's death (and his cry of "Mercy! Mercy!")[127] is pathetic and

degraded and contrasts so much with his earlier hubristic plans for tyranny that

the mythic is again suggested. Parrinder proposes that the punishment of hubris is

a common feature of the scientific romances:

> The Time Traveller who goes beyond the period of his own death
>
> only to witness the death of the species, the lunar explorer
>
> imprisoned and possibly killed by the Selenites he so much
>
> admires, the Martian invaders destroyed not by humanity but by
>
> terrestrial bacteria – what are these but illustrations of hubris
>
> followed by nemesis, of a logic so neatly rounded that it speaks of
>
> poetic even more than scientific or cognitive justice?[128]

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[125] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 112.
[126] Wells, "Mind at the End of Its Tether" 319.
[127] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 134.
[128] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 11.

For Griffin to be beaten to death by the people he feels most superior to would fit

in with the ironic punishments mentioned above. At the novel's conclusion,

Marvel is in possession of Griffin's books, and we are left with the feeling that he

is an individual with a similar passion for power, in much the same way that

Robert Walton in <u>Frankenstein</u>, another mythic story, seems to share Victor's

ambition. Thus, the story has a cyclical quality. Griffin's books are, of course,

forbidden and occult. They are comparable to other imaginary texts within the

fantastic, such as Prospero's books or <u>The Necronomicion</u> of Lovecraft's Cthulhu

Mythos stories. Marvel says they are "full of secrets".[129] It is unlikely that he

will ever decipher them, if only because they are written in occult language and

deal with occult knowledge. Some pages have been washed blank when the

books were hidden in a ditch, and so parts of Griffin's secret have themselves

become invisible, fantastical. These mythic elements in the novel conspire to

undermine any naturalisation of the supernatural. As Shorter's 1897 review says,

"[Wells] gives us a fairy tale with a plausible scientific justification. The

imagination is everything, the science is nothing."[130]

     Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel <u>Invisible Man</u>[131] deals with the alienation of

the black male in post-war American society, but it can be read as a discussion of

the general sense of alienation in modernity. Wells too explores the alienated

state of his central character. There are obvious examples of this following

Griffin's change to invisibility, most notably his experiences with the crowds in

London (nightmarishly repeated when he is killed by a mob during the novel's

climax), but there is much to suggest his isolation while still visible. Griffin tells

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[129] Wells, <u>The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance</u> 138.
[130] Shorter 59.
[131] <u>Invisible Man</u> is not overtly fantastical, but in order to indicate the insanity of the central character, the language and scenarios can be Kafkaesque, with the protagonist fleeing underground into a situation not dissimilar to "The Burrow".

Kemp, "In all my great moments I have been alone."[132] Upon visiting his home

village, now a town, for the funeral of his father (whose suicide Griffin has

brought about) he says,

> I remember myself as a gaunt black figure, going along the
>
> slippery, shiny pavement, and the strange sense of detachment I
>
> felt from the squalid respectability, the sordid commercialism of
>
> the place [. . .] It was all like a dream, that visit to the old places. I
>
> did not feel then that I was lonely, that I had come out from the
>
> world into a desolate place. I appreciated my loss of sympathy, but
>
> I put it down to the general inanity of things.[133]

The "sordid commercialism" and "general inanity of things" suggest it is

capitalist society that alienates Griffin. It is possible that he actually has an

unconscious terror of invisibility because it symbolizes his alienated self.

Certainly, when we first see him he is desperately trying to find a way to reverse

the process, and his first ever experimental success with living matter (turning a

cat invisible) has some interesting effects on him: "I lay awake thinking weak

aimless stuff, going over the experiment over and over again, or dreaming

feverishly of things growing misty and vanishing about me until everything, the

ground I stood on, vanished."[134] Following his own transformation to invisibility,

Griffin's initial sense of liberation – "I felt as a seeing man might do, with padded

feet and noiseless clothes, in a city of the blind."[135] – soon passes and he is left

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[132] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 83-84.
[133] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 85.
[134] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 87-88.
[135] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 94.

truly alienated. As Roslynn D. Haynes notes, "the limitations of physical circumstances press upon him and show that his freedom is illusory."[136] He complains that "the rows of London houses stood latched, barred, and bolted impregnably,"[137] and, while having a nightmare in which he is inaudible as well as invisible and is buried along with his father's coffin, he says, "Nobody heeded me, nobody was aware of me."[138] As in earlier romances, a fantastical event serves to expose an individual alienation that is the result of societal pressures.

The War of the Worlds

Wells's next scientific romance also took place in familiar surroundings, and was also contemporary. Griffin's intrusion into the realist comedy world of Iping demonstrates the power of the fantastic to undermine conventional thought by making the recognisable strange, but the Martians achieve this effect to an even greater extent. While it is true that colonialism is a theme, Wells's main concern in The War of the Worlds is complacency. It is another warning of humankind's fragile position as the dominant species. It also explores ideas of reality and political philosophy, and seeks to illustrate the limits of human understanding. Wells's return to the first person significantly dampens any sense of detached irony, and although The War of the Worlds is, if anything, a more potent satire on humanity than The Invisible Man, it has a hero and uses adventure tale conventions. John St Loe Strachey, writing in 1898, reveals that,

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[136] Roslynn D. Haynes, H. G. Wells - Discoverer of the Future: The Influence of Science on His Thought (London: Macmillan, 1980) 134.
[137] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 99.
[138] Wells, The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance 102.

like the other major romances, the novel is an example of the popular-fantastic,

providing the kind of emotional nourishment Scholes describes:

> the book is one of the most readable and most exciting works of
> imaginative fiction published for many a long day. There is not a
> dull page in it, and virtually no padding. One reads and reads with
> an interest so unflagging that it is positively exhausting. The War
> of the Worlds stands, in fact, the final test of fiction. When once
> one has taken it up, one cannot bear to put it down without a
> pang.[139]

Freud's conception of the popular-fantastic is that it is a form which allows the

ego to shamelessly indulge in phantasies of control. In this novel, the author

seems to exercise his own violent childhood phantasies.

The action of The War of the Worlds may take place in the Home

Counties and London, but the Martians transform these familiar scenes into

fantastical landscapes, making them unfamiliar. The real is breached by the

fantastic via intense imagery likely to result in the pleasure of experience reading.

For example, London is left almost deserted, and this, together with the howling

of the last Martian and the layer of Black Smoke, now settled upon the ground as

powder, causes the capital to become bizarre and sinister. The narrator describes

the city covered in black powder as London "lying in state, and in its black

shroud."[140] In addition to the incomprehensible destruction the Martians leave in

their wake, reality is submerged beneath the rapidly-growing red weed. We hear

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[139] Strachey 66.

[140] H. G. Wells, The War of the Worlds, Everyman Paperbacks (London: Dent-Orion, 1993)
158.

that "the ruined villas of the Thames Valley were for a time lost in this red swamp."[141] The particular power of The War of the Worlds thus comes from the fantastic overtaking the realistic, but, of course, as a scientific romance the novel attempts to naturalise this reversal. With an interesting use of language, R. A. Gregory's review talks of Wells gathering "material from the fairy-land of science," and says "[u]pon a groundwork of scientific fact, his vivid imagination and exceptional powers of description enable him to erect a structure."[142] The realist elements seen in The Invisible Man (the presentation of a familiar world) are again at work. An 1898 reviewer said, "The consistency and definiteness of the descriptions create an adroit illusion. And, in any case, given the scientific hypotheses, the story as a whole is remarkably plausible. You feel it, not as romance, but as realism."[143] In his review, published on the same day (29th January), Strachey describes the persuasiveness of mixing the fantastic with realism (in some ways a transgression by the former of the latter):

> He brings the awful creatures of another sphere to Woking
>
> Junction, and places them, with all their abhorred dexterity, in the
>
> most homely and familiar surroundings [. . .] When the Martians
>
> come flying through the vast and dreadful expanses of
>
> interplanetary space hid in the fiery womb of their infernal
>
> cylinders, and land on a peaceful Surrey common, we come to
>
> close quarters at once with the full horror of the earth's invasion.
>
> Those who know the valleys of the Wey and the Thames, and to

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[141] Wells, The War of the Worlds 139.

[142] R. A. Gregory, "Review in Nature," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972).

[143] "Unsigned Review, Academy," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 71.

whom Shepperton and Laleham are familiar places, will follow the advance of the Martians on London with breathless interest. The vividness of the local touches, and the accuracy of the geographical details, enormously enhance the horror of the picture. When everything else is so true and exact, the mind finds it difficult to be always rebelling against the impossible Martians.[144]

Indeed, some of the realist touches in the novel are not merely geographical details or accurate observations, but are actual events drawn from reality. Interestingly, these are sometimes linked to Wells's own work. The narrator refers to "a great light" seen on Mars during the 1894 opposition, speculating that this was the casting of the gun used to fire the Martian cylinders into space,[145] and in Wells's 1896 essay "Intelligence on Mars" there is the mention of "a luminous projection on the southern edge of the planet" seen in 1894, thought by some to be the Martian's attempts to signal to us.[146] Similarly, when the novel's narrator describes the physiology of the Martians he says,

It is worthy of remark that a certain speculative writer of quasi-scientific repute, writing long before the Martian invasion, did forecast for man a final structure not unlike the actual Martian condition. His prophecy, I remember, appeared in November or

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[144] Strachey 64.
[145] Wells, The War of the Worlds 7.
[146] H. G. Wells, "Intelligence on Mars," H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction, eds. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1975) 175.

December 1893, in a long-defunct publication, the <u>Pall Mall Budget</u>.[147]

Wells's essay "The Man of the Year Million", published in 1893, describes future human as having an enlarged brain and completely atrophied body, with the exception of the hands.[148]

Wells's insertion of himself into the novel is significant, for the destruction that is wrought upon the Home Counties may be him playing out his own childhood phantasies of violence and control. In the "Experiment in Autobiography", Wells describes how, during those daydreams of being a military leader, he conducted "orgies of bloodshed,"[149] bringing down shells upon fantasy troops in a manner not dissimilar to the Martians laying low soldiers with their canisters of Black Smoke. Of <u>The War of the Worlds</u> he writes to Elizabeth Healey, "I'm doing a little serial for Peason's new magazine, in which I completely wreck and destroy Woking – killing my neighbours in painful and eccentric ways – then proceed via Kingston and Richmond to London, which I sack, selecting South Kensington for feats of peculiar atrocity. . ."[150] This is harmless and mischievous sadism, of course, there is also, perhaps, a desire for wish-fulfilment (and hence, as can be extrapolated from Freud, control). The devastation the Martians bring, fantastical in its speed and degree, does mirror the impossible feats of Wells's childhood phantasies, in which enemy soldiers were

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[147] Wells, <u>The War of the Worlds</u> 120.

[148] H. G. Wells, "The Man of the Year Million," <u>Journalism and Prophecy 1893-1946</u>, ed. W. Warren Wagner (London: Bodley, 1964). Such a drastic physical alteration contrasts with Wells later position (in "Human Evolution, An Artificial process") that, for human beings, physiological evolution was almost at a standstill. This image of a swollen brain and atrophied body, repeated in <u>The First Men in the Moon</u> by the physiology of the Grand Lunar, may be associated with the Wellsian phantasy of the mind becoming liberated from the body.

[149] Wells, <u>Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)</u> 101.

[150] Wells, "To Elizabeth Healey" 261.

"mown down by the thousand."[151] This motivation calls into question the idea

that Wells is merely a conduit of ideology in an economically determined "culture

industry", as Storey, Radway, Ang, and Fiske might have us believe (obviously,

the presence of Wells's didacticism in the popular-fantastical romances similarly

undermines the culture industry theory of production).

If the carnage and ruin in the novel serves to provide the author with a

kind of artistic alienation, it has the opposite effect on the characters. Thus there

are two strands – illusion and disillusion – of fantasy in the fantastical violence of

The War of the Worlds. The sudden reversals in the life and environment of the

narrator result in anomie and alienation. His alienation seems to emerge from the

fantastical transformation of the world, but perhaps it is simply that his encounter

with the fantastic has revealed an already present alienation to him. In the empty

London he is "intolerably lonely."[152] As the day ends he says, "Night, the mother

of fear and mystery, was coming upon me."[153] The Martians have transformed

London and the narrator is now separated from it. Recalling Griffin's experience,

the city has become other: "London gazed at me spectrally. The windows in the

white houses were like the eye-sockets of skulls. About me my imagination

found a thousand noiseless enemies moving."[154] Finally, despite the ultimate

defeat of the Martians, the narrator is left with moments of anxiety, perhaps, while

they last, as severe as the terrors that plague Prendick. The narrator has been

made aware of the alienated state of society, and is unable to forget the truth about

humanity that he has learned:

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[151] Wells, Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary
Brain (since 1866) 101.
[152] Wells, The War of the Worlds 158.
[153] Wells, The War of the Worlds 159.
[154] Wells, The War of the Worlds 160.

I must confess the stress and danger of the time have left an

abiding sense of doubt and insecurity in my mind [. . .] I see again

the healing valley below set with writhing flames, and feel the

house behind and about me empty and desolate. I go out into the

Byfleet Road, and vehicles pass me, a butcher boy in a cart, a

cabful of visitors, a workman on a bicycle, children going to

school, and suddenly they become vague and unreal [. . .] Of a

night I see the black powder darkening the silent streets, and the

contorted bodies shrouded in that layer; they rise upon me tattered

and dog-bitten. They gibber and grow fiercer, paler, uglier, mad

distortions of humanity at last [. . .] I go to London and see the

busy multitudes in Fleet Street and the Strand, and it comes across

my mind that they are but the ghosts of the past, haunting the

streets that I have seen silent and wretched, going to and fro,

phantasms in a dead city, the mockery of life in a galvanized

body.[155]

This lifeless motion, "the mockery of life in a galvanized body", brings to mind

Marxian alienation within a society of industrial capitalism, and the narrator's

internal alienated state is therefore linked to his alienated relationship with this

society.

Another alienating feature of the novel is the otherness of the Martians

themselves. Their technology – the Heat-Ray, the giant fighting-machines, and

the eerily lifelike handling-machines – is fantastical, but their physicality and

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[155] Wells, The War of the Worlds 171-72.

psychology have a greater impact on the reader. In "Intelligence on Mars" (1896) Wells explains that, if there is elementary life on Mars and it has evolved "there is every reason to think that the creatures on Mars would be different from the creatures of earth, in form and function, in structure and habit, different beyond the most bizarre imaginings of nightmare."[156] Wells thus describes the difference as fantastical even while he uses scientific ideas to infer it. In The War of the Worlds these creatures are the logical consequence of natural selection, but they are also monsters of myth inserted into late Victorian England: "A sudden chill came over me [. . .] I saw astonishment giving place to horror on the faces of the people about me [. . .] Those who have never seen a living Martian can scarcely imagine the strange horror of their appearance."[157] The Martians are "vital, intense, inhuman, crippled and monstrous."[158] These words represent the first shocked impressions of the narrator, but his more considered observation of the Martians (when he is buried in the ruins of a house demolished by the nearby impact of a cylinder) also convey their otherness: "They were, I now saw, the most unearthly creatures it is possible to conceive."[159] That the Martians are simply heads containing giant brains and wearing different bodies "just as men wear suits of clothes"[160] is shocking enough, but their method of feeding by sucking living blood directly into their veins is horrifying and recalls that other mythic creature: the vampire. The facts that they do not sleep and appear to be asexual remove them from two of the most significant human acts. These physical traits render them alien, but what is perhaps more significant is that they see blue and violet as black, and, the narrator believes, communicate

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[156] Wells, "Intelligence on Mars" 177.
[157] Wells, The War of the Worlds 19.
[158] Wells, The War of the Worlds 20.
[159] Wells, The War of the Worlds 118.
[160] Wells, The War of the Worlds 123.

telepathically. Differences in perception truly distance them from humankind, and also reveal the limits of our own understanding.[161]

It is important to note that, while characters within the novel may be alienated and experience anomie, the effect of this otherness upon the reader is very different. As has already been suggested, the Martians presence in (and subsequent fantastical reversal of) the realistic world painted by Wells is an invasion beneficial to the novel's readers. There are several ways to explain this, but they all seem to a certain extent related. It is valid to say that the novel provides the escapism discussed by Tolkien and Lewis, the emotional nourishment Scholes mentions, and Greenblatt's category of wonder. It allows the reader to produce and experience popular pleasures and meanings, and thus "engage" with the outside of language via deconstructive jouissance. Ultimately, this popular-fantastical novel causes defamilarisation and artistic alienation. Thus The War of the Worlds, even as it perhaps reveals to the reader a universal alienated state, offers an escape from it. The novel is not misanthropic or nihilistic. Wells only presents negative aspects of human society in order for readers to contemplate change.

As already stated, The War of the Worlds is a critique of human complacency, including the preconceptions of pride and religion. When the narrator confidently tells his wife of the weakness of the Martians in their pit on Horsell Common, despite their demonstration of the Heat Ray, his severe underestimation of them is due to the ignorance and arrogance of humankind. As he says in the narrative, "[s]o some respectable dodo in the Mauritius might have lorded it in his nest, and discussed the arrival of a shipful of pitiless sailors in

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[161] See Appendix.

want of animal food. 'We will peck them to death tomorrow, my dear.'"[162] Wells

provides his readers with this critique in order to change their minds – he thus

implies that the attitudes he attacks are not innate, but are part of the artificial

human, are, in other words, societal and subject to change via agency. When the

Martians destroy the structure of society they destroy false confidences. As the

artilleryman puts it, "[j]ust like the parade it had been a minute before – then

stumble, bang, swish!"[163] In the figure of the curate (termed by one reviewer a

"needlessly farcical element"[164]) Wells attacks organised religion. When the

curate rhetorically asks what the Martians are, the narrator responds, "[w]hat are

we?"[165] This at least hints at doubt over the divine origins of the human race.

Perhaps the very existence of the Martians is also meant to cast doubt on this.

However, there is ambiguity. The narrator himself prays, though the exact

meaning of this moment is hard to decipher:

> I had uttered prayers, fetish prayers, had prayed as heathens mutter
>
> charms when I was in extremity; but now I prayed indeed, pleading
>
> steadfastly and sanely, face to face with the darkness of God.
>
> Strange night! Strangest in this, that so soon as dawn had come, I,
>
> who had talked with God, crept out of the house like a rat leaving

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[162] Wells, The War of the Worlds 31. Complaceny of this sort is a theme in The Battle of Dorking (1871). This tale of a German invasion of the south of England may have been a major inspiration for The War of the Worlds, particularly as regards the shock of war to a supposed sanctuary: "The whole town was quite still – the lull before the storm; and as I let myself in with my latch-key, and went softly up-stairs to my room to avoid waking the sleeping household, I could not but contrast the peacefulness of the morning – no sound breaking the silence but the singing of birds in the garden – with passionate remorse and indignation that would break out with day." George Tomkins Chesney, "The Battle of Dorking," The Tale of the Next Great War 1871-1914: Fictions of Future Warfare and of Battles Still-to-Come, ed. I. F. Clarke (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1995) 35.
[163] Wells, The War of the Worlds 50.
[164] "Unsigned Review, Academy," H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage, ed. Patrick Parrinder, The Critical Heritage Series (London: Routledge, 1972) 71.
[165] Wells, The War of the Worlds 64.

its hiding place – a creature scarcely larger, an inferior animal, a

thing that for any passing whim of our masters might be hunted

and killed. Perhaps they also prayed confidently to God.[166]

This could be said to be blasphemous, and yet, the micro-organisms that kill the

Martians are called "the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon

this earth."[167] This is of particular importance when it is born in mind that, while

on the novel's opening page human beings are compared to bacteria, it is bacteria

that defeat the Martians.[168] Whatever its possible religious overtones (and Wells

was an atheist almost his whole life, it should be remembered), the novel, despite

what Parrinder calls the Wellisan "dethronement" of humankind, carries a

message of hope and agency. Those societal structures that cause laziness of

thought and complacency can be destroyed. Thus: "It may be that in the larger

design of the universe this invasion from Mars is not without its ultimate benefit

for men; it has robbed us of that serene confidence in the future which is the most

fruitful source of decadence."[169] The only example the novel gives of a new

society is that proposed by the artilleryman, in a chapter that illustrates how

revolution and phantasy/fantasy may be linked.

The artilleryman, the mouthpiece of revolution in the novel, is an

unreliable and untrustworthy character – he is shown to be a fraud, and the

narrator apologises to the reader for being momentarily taken in by him – but his

plan for a new society is not challenged. A swift examination of it reveals that it

contains both anti-intellectualism and elements of a strangely fascistic anarchism.

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[166] Wells, The War of the Worlds 143.
[167] Wells, The War of the Worlds 161.
[168] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 76.
[169] Wells, The War of the Worlds 170.

The artilleryman tells the narrator, "[t]here won't be any more blessed concerts for a million years or so; there won't be any Royal Academy of Arts, and no nice little feeds at restaurants. If it's amusement you're after, I reckon the game is up." This is something other than realistic pragmatism, because if it is the case that there will not be the time and resources for such extravagances as art and music, how can the artilleryman's notion that the new race may "be able to keep a watch, and run about in the open when the Martians keep away. Play cricket, perhaps,"[170] be justified? Clearly this is cultural snobbery, even censorship, on his part. Far more disturbing is the artilleryman's proclamation that "[w]e're not going to pick up any rubbish that drifts in. Weaklings go out again [. . .] Life is real again, and the useless and cumbersome and mischievous have to die. They ought to die. They ought to be willing to die. It's a sort of disloyalty, after all, to live and taint the race."[171] Included in his definition of weaklings are "those who go weak with a lot of complicated thinking."[172] Of these strong people who will resist the Martians, the Mackenzies comment, "[t]hey are the nastiest kind of Nietzschean supermen, and the Artilleryman's remarks read like a stump speech by a fascist yahoo."[173] The artilleryman's dreams of the new society certainly lend some weight to the alleged connection between fantasy and fascism. However, it would be grossly unfair to Wells to suggest that he held these beliefs himself. At the very least, he must have completely opposed ideas even slightly similar to these by 1940, when he wrote "The Rights of Man". However, there is much in the artilleryman's social critique – which attacks convention and complacency – with which Wells could have agreed. The artilleryman's elite are

[170] Wells, The War of the Worlds 151.
[171] Wells, The War of the Worlds 150-51.
[172] Wells, The War of the Worlds 149.
[173] Mackenzie and Mackenzie 129.

a parody of the Samurai that Wells would later discuss in <u>A Modern Utopia</u>,[174] and that he saw as a possible means for the advancement of the artificial human. Wells, as we have seen, had phantasies of power. It may be that he felt guilt on some level for allowing these phantasies limited freedom in the writing of <u>The War of the Worlds</u> and so he gives them to the artilleryman in order to mock them. Through the use of a fighting-machine, the artilleryman desires the same fantastical level of power as the Martians: "Fancy having one of them lovely things, with its Heat Ray wide and free! Fancy having it in control!"[175] It is not difficult to imagine similar sentiments from the young Wells, but as has been suggested, the adult author only expresses this in order to satirize it. He was aware of the dangers of such phantasies, and even refers to that period of his childhood – during which his imaginary enemies included "non-Aryans"[176] – as "my Hitler phase."[177]

The First Men in the Moon

<u>The First Men in the Moon</u> can be regarded as a transitional novel. It represents the shift from those scientific romances that are truly works of fantasy, to those in which the fantastic is used almost grudgingly to convey sociological and political ideas.[178] Parrinder is correct to say, "[i]maginatively, <u>The First Men</u>

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[174] Mackenzie and Mackenzie 129.

[175] Wells, <u>The War of the Worlds</u> 151.

[176] Wells, <u>Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)</u> 101.

[177] Wells, <u>Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)</u> 103.

[178] This is not meant to imply that Wells writing per se deteriorated after <u>The First Men in the Moon</u>. The high point of his work probably came eight years later with <u>Tono-Bungay</u>.

in the Moon is polarised between grotesque satire and exploratory wonder."[179] The narrative shifts from wonder and adventure, to disillusionment, and finally to the didactic study of an engineered society. The book's closing chapters, in which Cavor describes the Selenite society, are valuable, for they again reveal an ambiguity in Wells's beliefs, but it is the discussion of less tangible ideas that makes the novel suited to a study of the fantastic. As the Mackenzies note, there are some scenes, such as the lunar dawn, that are "comparable to the best in the earlier romances."[180] There are, indeed, several powerful descriptive passages. Fantastical transgression and transformation occur even before Bedford and Cavour leave the earth: a section of the English landscape is made unfamiliar, blown apart by the first making of Cavorite. What is also significant is the sense of the infinite that Bedford encounters. This relates to the limits, as Wells sees it, of the human knowledge of reality.

"It was not like the beginning of a journey; it was like the beginning of a dream."[181] With these words Bedford starts his description of the expedition to the moon. It is his lone return journey that most disturbs his sense of the real, but the familiar also becomes strange for him on the outward voyage. For example, his perception is confused at seeing the moon through the sphere's windows beneath him: "And as I stood and stared at the moon between my feet, that perception of the impossible that had been with me off and on ever since our start, returned again with tenfold conviction."[182] Sunrise on the moon is greeted with wonder and awe by the explorers, and has the promise of rebirth. In The Time

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[179] Parrinder, H. G. Wells 35.
[180] Mackenzie and Mackenzie, The Time Traveller: The Life of H. G. Wells 151.
[181] H. G. Wells, The First Men in the Moon, Sf Masterworks (London: Gollancz-Orion, 2001). This may be a reference to a seventeenth-century account of a lunar journey – Somnium (The Dream) – by the astronomer Johannes Kepler.
[182] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 36.

Machine the eclipse witnessed by the Time Traveller signals the world's end, but here the image is reversed. "At last, one by one, swiftly, one after the other, the white peaks of the distant hills vanished into blackness,"[183] becomes "[g]rey summit after grey summit was overtaken by the blaze, and turned to a smoking white intensity."[184] As in the description of the world's end in The Time Machine, scientific details become poetic images:

> He turned me about and pointed to the brow of the eastward cliff, looming above the haze about us, scarce lighter than the darkness of the sky. But now its line was marked by strange reddish shapes, tongues of vermilion flame that writhed and danced. I fancied it must be spirals of vapour that had caught the light and made this crest of fiery tongues against the sky, but indeed it was the solar prominences I saw, a crown of fire about the sun that is forever hidden from earthly eyes by our atmospheric veil.[185]

The eclipse suggests Apocalypse; the lunar sunrise suggests Genesis. This is the kind of writing that may liberate a reader from jaded perception, as Tolkien and Lewis claim can happen from reading fantastical fiction (Shklovsky makes this claim for art generally). In this case a reader may achieve a direct rather than an automatic perception of a sunrise. In addition, this scene may represent the beginnings of overt optimism in Wells's work. While the eclipse is symbolic of death, the lunar sunrise quite literally brings new life: "It was like a miracle, that growth. So, one must imagine, the trees and plants arose at the Creation and

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[183] Wells, The Time Machine 75.
[184] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 45.
[185] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 45.

covered the desolation of the new-made earth."[186] This reference to myth undermines the naturalisation of the fantastic invoked by the careful exposition of scientific concepts. All of the fantastical imagery is seen through the curved glass of the sphere, "towards the edges magnified and unreal."[187] Evocative language such as this perhaps produces a deconstructive "encounter" with otherness to create something beyond everyday perception and reference, just as the lunar images are beyond the sphere's glass wall. It may be what Tolkien refers to as sub-creation. The language is visionary, allowing the reader, as Hume says, to experience "a new vision of reality."[188]

Bedford's escape from the moon leaves him alone in the sphere and, because of this, he faces the infinite unaccompanied and goes through a period of transcendence. He immediately feels "astonished, dumbfounded, and overwhelmed,"[189] having what can only be called a spiritual experience. Wells takes one of his middle-class characters and does not merely create a sense of defamiliarisation by shocking him with fantastical otherness – he causes Bedford to encounter that which is outside of human reality altogether. Bedford becomes aware that the sphere is "a little speck of matter in infinite space",[190] and is transformed from being a rather petty-minded and acquisitive Englishman into that infinity. He says, "it seemed as though I sat through immeasurable eternities like some god upon a lotus leaf,"[191] and develops an awareness of the "infinite littleness"[192] of his life to such an extent that he becomes detached from it,

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[186] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 51.
[187] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 51.
[188] Hume 100.
[189] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 133.
[190] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 134. This may be a reference to Hamlet: "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams." William Shakepeare, Hamlet 2.2.262-263.
[191] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 135.
[192] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 135.

depersonalised. This is alienation of a sort, but in this case it is alienation from an alienated self. If this state of mind had been brought about by an encounter with art, this would be artistic alienation in its purist form: the setting free of an individual from the projection of self onto the material. It is a rare example in the major scientific romances of a character being liberated by an encounter with the fantastic. This is unpleasant in retrospect. Bedford mourns his lost illusions (though he does not consider them to be such) – "I doubt if I shall ever recover the full-bodied self-satisfaction of my early days."[193] While it is experienced, however, the disillusionment is neither disagreeable nor pleasurable:

> "But at the time the thing was not in the least painful, because I had that extraordinary persuasion that, as a matter of fact, I was no more Bedford than I was any one else, but only a mind floating in the still serenity of space [. . .] Do you know, I had a sort of idea that really I was something quite outside not only the world, but all worlds, and out of space and time, and that this poor Bedford was just a peephole through which I looked at life? . . ."[194]

This visionary experience seems so close to the "enlightenment" of Buddhism – the movement from <u>samāra</u> (the alienated mind of the self and changing ideas) to <u>nirvāna</u> (the "Buddha nature" of pure consciousness and mind without self) – that it is hard to believe it is not a deliberate reference. Bedford's liberation is linked to his sense of something beyond the material universe. It is the momentary

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[193] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 135.
[194] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 135. According to Tolkien, fairy-stories "open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe." Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories" 129. For Tolkien, entry into the Secondary world is a spiritual experience.

belief that he is immaterial himself, as Wells judged human consciousness to be. The self that belongs to the material universe – "Bedford" – is the social and alienated mind. A moment of altered perception like this is what McCracken is referring when he compares science fiction to modernism.

In the closing chapters of disillusion and revision, descriptions of an alien race are used purely for social critique. Briefly, the engineered society of the Selenites is one in which citizens are directed from birth into a particular role. As Cavor puts it, "every citizen knows his place [. . .] each is a perfect unit in a world machine . . ."[195] Wells, who certainly did not know his place in the sense that he did not allow himself to be subject to societal conventions, would presumably have baulked at the first concept, but perhaps not the second. His own ideas of human collectivism to some extent match Selenite society. There is a multiplicity of roles in the lunar collective, though these can be gathered into two groups: thinkers and doers. Manipulating their young (exaggerating some physical attributes and retarding others) by a process Cavor refers to as "technical education",[196] and using conditioning, the Selenites manufacture a variety of castes in a manner Aldous Huxley would employ thirty-one years later in Brave New World. Cavor finds these "educational methods" disagreeable (though feels the guilt of the social relativist for doing so), but he also considers them superior to the human capitalist system: "it is in the end a far more humane proceeding than our earthly method of leaving children to grow into human beings, and then make machines of them."[197] Similarly, Cavor finds that the Selenite practice of drugging workers unconscious while they do no work – switching off the machine when it is not required, as it were – preferable to the human unemployment

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[195] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 166.
[196] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 169.
[197] Wells, The First Men in the Moon 170.

problem. The human social problems represented here (people turned into machine-like workers; the poverty and starvation of unemployment) are easily open to criticism, but the Selenite alternative is clearly unacceptable for humanity. Wells again shows ambiguity, as he is suspicious of an engineered society while at the same time proposing one as a solution to the world's wrongs: "The satirical ambiguity of The First Men in the Moon is evident from the fact that both Bedford's commercial fantasy and the ant-hill state of the Selenites approximate to the world government of which Wells himself dreamed - yet they are also deeply and intentionally repugnant."[198]

The First Men in the Moon thus begins with adventure, develops into a meditation on the nature of human reality, and ends by presenting us with two undesirable yet philosophically opposed alternatives for the future of society. It contains both escapist and didactic elements, and so presents interest for both experience and critical readers.

* * *

By combining science with romance, Wells brought other dialectics into play. Realism, determinism, pessimism, and didacticism collide and compete with fantasy, agency, optimism, and escapism in the works this chapter has considered. The ambiguity in some of the themes reflects an ambiguity in the central beliefs of Wells himself. His fiction and non-fiction writing both contain affirmations of a materialistic/mechanistic model of the universe and humanity, while at the same time arguing for human autonomy and the limits of the material.

The scientific romances add weight to the suggestion that in literature the above binaries are in fact all symptoms of the same rift in culture and reading

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[198] Parrinder, Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy 77.

methods. It is interesting, therefore, that the scientific romances themselves straddle high and popular culture both at the time of their writing and today.

Partly as a consequence of the ambiguity in his work, Wells became extremely influential in the development of science fiction in the twentieth century. He served as a canonical figure for both stands of sf. His themes of humankind's folly and precarious position in the universe have been an intellectual foundation for many of the more sophisticated writers, while his lurid tales of time travel, extraterrestrial invasion, mad scientists, and alien cultures have inspired some stock plots of popular-fantastical fiction. The next chapter will consider these successors of the scientific romances, and how they relate to the cultural divide.

Chapter Three: Twentieth Century Science Fiction

I think therefore I am: I dream therefore I become.

Brian Aldiss[1]

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[1] Brian Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life (Kent: Hodder, 1990) 95.

From technical innovation and natural selection through to the limits of perception and the nature of consciousness and reality, H. G. Wells provided a number of fruitful themes for the science fiction writers of the twentieth century. Soon, however, fantastical fiction arrived at arguably its lowest cultural status, a position it has still not fully recovered from. Several factors, including the circumstances of production, caused the fantastic to lose much "middlebrow" respectability, although the position of a fantastical work in the cultural hierarchy was by no means static and could be elevated quite abruptly. It is likely that a central problem for the writers of this material was the format in which it was published: the novels were typically serialised in speciality fiction magazines often despised by even the mainstream reader.

These magazines, the "pulps" as they are known,[2] began in the United States. Until the inter-war period they were solely an American cultural phenomenon, though British speciality magazines also existed. Crucially, the content of the American pulps influenced British magazines, and in fact many British writers of the fantastic began their careers by selling to the American market. George C. Wallace started to write for popular American magazines as early as the 1890s, and his stories appeared in the US pulp Amazing Stories from 1928.[3] Writers such as John Wyndham and Arthur C. Clarke established themselves in the United States before their science fiction was published in Britain.

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[2] The name derives from the cheap wood pulp paper used. However, it is not true that this type of paper was used by all the magazines, or even consistently by the same publications. "Pulp" has come to be a generic label or a value judgement. This in itself creates difficulties, because a decision on what is and is not "pulp" can be highly subjective.

[3] Mike Ashley, The Time Machines: The Story of the Science-Fiction Pulp Magazines from the Beginning to 1950, Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies, vol. 1 of The History of the Science-Fiction Magazine. (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000) 125.

The generalisation has often been made that American science fiction tends to be optimistic, where British science fiction is pessimistic. In his many books on magazine sf, Sam Moskowitz finds the relationship between the two unproblematic. While he does note differences between British and American sf,[4] he tends to think of both as pursuing the same fundamental themes. This is a very different position to that of Brian Stableford, who disagrees openly with Moskowitz on several points, asserting that American science fiction and British scientific romance are two separate entities and should therefore have separate labels.[5] He claims that the American response to Wells differs from the British one because "instead of creating a new literary niche he was instead absorbed into one that was indigenously formulated." In the UK writers exploited the ideas in Wells's original scientific romances, where in the US it was the entertainment value of his work that was focused on.[6] It is possible to argue with this position, however. A reprint of Wells's "The New Accelerator" was the featured story in the first edition of the first American science fiction pulp magazine (Amazing Stories), and his work consistently appeared in this type of publication. His role seems to have been that of a canonical writer of respectable sf, and as such it seems very likely he would have had an influence on the development of the form in the US. Stableford goes on to make the point that stories based on evolution would have been unpopular in America, due to a greater difficulty in accepting Darwinian thought.[7]

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[4] Sf, or science fiction, is a term that did not actually come into being until the 1920s, however, the form itself arguably predates this. Brian Aldiss, for example, posits Frankenstein as the first science fiction work.
[5] Brian Stableford, Scientific Romance in Britain 1890-1950 (London: Fourth, 1985) 4. Indeed, it is true that "science fiction" is an American term, coined by Hugo Gernsback (the creator and first editor of Amazing Stories) in 1929. Sam Moskowitz, Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1974) 11.
[6] Stableford 4.
[7] Stableford 6.

It is interesting to compare Moskowitz's definition of science fiction with Stableford's definition of scientific romance. Moskowitz: "Science fiction is a branch of fantasy identifiable by the fact that it eases 'the willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of its readers by utilizing an atmosphere of scientific credibility for its imaginative speculations in physical science, space, time, social science, and philosophy."[8] Stableford: "A scientific romance is a story which is built around something glimpsed through a window of possibility from which scientific discovery has drawn back the curtain."[9] The two positions are quite similar. While Moskowitz's is literal where Stableford's is more metaphorical, there is a fundamental equivalence between them. It can be posited that "a window of possibility from which scientific discovery has drawn back the curtain" corresponds to the willing suspension of disbelief through the presence of scientific credibility. Most significantly for this dissertation, both concepts seem to be based on defining the form via reader experience (the willing suspension of disbelief; the sense of the possible). There are other, more definite, similarities between Moskowitz's and Stableford's discussions, such as the origins they give to scientific romance/science fiction. Stableford places scientific romance in the historical context of earlier literary traditions like imaginary voyages,[10] and Moskowitz suggests that science fiction is based in ancient travel tales in which myth was blended with fact to appear more probable.[11]

Bearing these convergences in mind, what follows is a short history of magazines publishing fantastical works (chiefly science fiction) that considers

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[8] Moskowitz, <u>Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction</u> 11.

[9] Stableford 8. Actually, Stableford argues on page 3 that scientific romances cannot be defined but merely have resemblances to each other. He then goes on to apparently contradict this by offering a definition.

[10] Stableford 18.

[11] Moskowitz, <u>Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction</u> 11.

developments on each side of the Atlantic in parallel, where those developments

apply to British writing. Stableford's position will not be completely silenced, but

his thesis that British and American sf should be thought of and studied

independently will play little part. The pressures of culture and production will be

outlined, as will shifting trends and cultural status. Attention will be given to

discovering what function the fiction had for its readers, whether this differed

between countries, and how it may have changed over time. The chapter will then

explore work by three British writers who emerged from the pulp magazines to

acquire reputations as mainstream fantastical novelists.

Fiction Magazines 1891-1925

While the American science fiction pulp magazine did not emerge until

the 1920s, its origins are in British publications of the 1890s. Stableford asserts

that, because the three-decker novel was the sole format of mainstream late

Victorian fiction,[12] any work too brief, as much speculative fiction was, inevitably

became banished to the margins. Magazines such as The Strand, Tit-Bits, and

Pearson's Weekly emerged to provide a space for shorter middlebrow works, and

thus brought speculative fiction into the mainstream.[13] While Stableford's

dismissal of the middle ground that had been occupied by such writers as Dickens

and publications as Household Words is unpersuasive, and his assertion that the

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[12] This is inaccurate. In 1894 circulating libraries began a policy of paying less for each volume of a work, and insisting that, if they bought a novel, publishers would be unable to issue a cheap edition until at least a year later. The result of this was that the three-decker novel became uneconomic to produce. Consequently, the single-volume format quickly took the place of the three-decker. There were 184 three-decker novels published in 1894, 52 in 1895, 25 in 1896, and 4 in 1897. In fact, there had been an argument against the three-decker for some time by this point, and single-volume works were not uncommon. Peter Keating, The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914, (London: Fontana, 1991) 25-27.

[13] Stableford 13-16.

three-decker novel was the sole format for mainstream fiction in this period is

incorrect, it seems clear that when The Strand appeared in 1891, it did so to cater

for middlebrow readers. Imitators quickly began to be published. As well as Sir

Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, The Strand also published more

overt fantasy, beginning in 1892 with Jules Verne's Dr. Trifulgus – A Fantastic

Tale. The same year, some of Wells's short stories were printed in The Pall Mall

Gazette and The Pall Mall Budget, and in 1895 The New Review serialised The

Time Machine.[14]

1896 saw a new development in America. Frank A. Munsey, who

published a number of magazines, re-invented a boys' title, dropping its pictorials

etc. to create an adult-orientated magazine dealing exclusively with works of

adventure fiction. Many consider this periodical, The Argosy, to be the first pulp

(similar publications soon followed). The Argosy did publish science fiction, but

it was restriced by the conventions of the adventure narrative. It is possible that

the publication's origins as a boy's magazine influenced its content. Moskowitz

argues that magazines such as The Argosy, containing adventure-based sf for an

adult audience, were targeted at male readers. By contrast, the mass-publication

mainstream titles, like Cosmopolitan, had a feminine slant. Indeed, Moskowitz

suggests that British fiction magazines – also publishing some science fiction

(The Strand, Pearson's, The Idler) – "were eventually reduced to the level of

secondary publications as a result of the tide of lush and prosperous women-

orientated periodicals."[15]

[14] Though a different version (in some ways more akin to the final form of The Time Machine) of the novel had already appeared in The National Observer (1894).
[15] Sam Moskowitz, Science Fiction by Gaslight: A History and Anthology of Science Fiction in the Popular Magazines, 1891-1911 (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1974) 38. It is interesting to note that adventure-based romance in the late nineteenth century, such as the work of Rider

Stableford makes the point that the quality of British fiction periodicals

and American pulps differed. Where British magazines had replaced the penny

dreadfuls with better quality work, the ethos of the American "dime novel" was

actually absorbed into the pulps.[16] Some of mainstream magazines would also

occasionally print sf (though the "science fiction" label had yet to be coined), but

the form was again being pushed to the margins. Both social and economic

factors (the feminisation of material in the mainstream market) meant that almost

all science fiction, whatever its actual standard, was classed as low culture.[17] As

Moskowitz observes, "It is evident that as the years progressed, many of the

science fiction artists as well as writers would have to shift to the pulps for a

living even though their artistic and literary talents were equal to the top markets

of the day."[18]

The inter-war period saw changes to the scientific romance in Britain.

The rise of cheap books at this time had an effect on the sales of fiction magazines

and thus short story writing in general.[19] Stableford believes that because

America was not as greatly affected by World War One, and because it emerged

from the conflict economically strengthened where Europe had been weakened,

there was a divergence in the outlooks of people on either side of the Atlantic –

Haggard, was itself a reaction against more feminine romance. Elaine Showalter, Sexual
Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin De Siecle (London: Virago, 1992) 79.

[16] Stableford 146.

[17] One exception was Wells, who continued to be published in both mainstream and pulp
magazines (though in the latter case it was usually republishing of work that had previously
appeared elsewhere). In 1897 The War of Worlds was serialised by Pearson's Magazine, and
Pearson's Weekly serialised The Invisible Man. The War of the Worlds was also serialised in
the US by Cosmopolitan. When The First Men in the Moon began in The Strand in 1900,
Cosmopolitan's serialisation of it was simultaneous.

[18] Moskowitz, Science Fiction by Gaslight: A History and Anthology of Science Fiction in the
Popular Magazines, 1891-1911 48.

[19] Stableford 144.

the American public was more receptive to speculative fiction based on the opportunities the future offered.[20]

The Science Fiction Magazines

The first fantastical fiction pulps were The Thrill Book (1919) and Weird Tales (1923). These magazines' stories of horror and the bizarre entered Britain surprisingly quickly, with the annual anthology series Not at Night starting in 1925. Science fiction pulps began to be published in April 1926, when Amazing Stories appeared in the US, featuring a reprint of Wells's "The New Accelerator" in its first edition. Amazing Stories' original editor Hugo Gernsback, creator of the term "science fiction", wanted to entertain while informing readers about science,[21] and perhaps did not anticipate that the more sensational stories would come to dominate. As Mike Ashley notes, the magazine's main readership was revealed through its letter page:

> What Gernsback may not have realized, but which soon became
> apparent, was that most fans of science fiction were relatively
> lonely children given more to imaginative flights of fancy than to
> active adventures with friends [. . .] This was the real secret of
> Gernsback's Amazing Stories and is the cause of the popularity of
> science fiction. He had tapped into the secret dreams of a nation,

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[20] Stableford 150.
[21] Ashley 50.

and mostly the young, and allowed them a channel for expression.[22]

Yet again the concept of popular-fantastical fiction as an escape from an alienated existence is reinforced. Of particular interest is that, like Dickens and Wells, the audience of Amazing Stories were isolated children. These young readers of Amazing Stories experienced reading pleasure, manifested as what Scholes calls "emotional food". They fed their need to be amused; they produced subjective readings for their own purposes. There are even shades here of Freud's assertion that myths represent "wishful phantasies of whole nations."[23] Thus we see social implications in the desires of Amazing Stories' readership, as both a collective and as individuals: as was argued earlier in this dissertation, social alienation and psychological (or individual) alienation are related, in that the latter emerges from the former. Marcuse saw mass culture as alienating, as the epitome of desublimation, and an obvious manifestation of industrial capitalism, but here it becomes the source of artistic alienation for the lonely child. Unfortunately, tailoring the magazine to this market caused Gernsback inadvertently to label the science fiction magazine, in the eyes of mainstream readers, as something only suitable for children. Yet Amazing Stories did not only contain juvenile work: for example, When the Sleeper Wakes was published in the first Amazing Stories Quarterly (1928).

The Wall Street Crash did not stop the new magazines, and 1930 saw the first issue of Astounding Stories of Super Science (this new publication rejected

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[22] Ashley 53-54.

[23] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," trans. James Strachey, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, eds. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, vol. 9 (London: Hogarth, 1959) 152.

the ethos of supplying its readers with scientific information, and sf "began to

plummet" towards trashiness[24]). The appearance of new American magazines

gives some support to Stableford's assertion that the Depression hit Europe far

harder than America, widening the rift already created by the differing

consequences of World War One:

> The kind of speculative fiction which began to appear again in
>
> Britain after 1930 was not at all like the American science fiction
>
> of the late twenties: it was an anxious and often deeply embittered
>
> kind of fiction, in which the world of the future loomed as a
>
> nightmarish threat far more frequently than it beckoned as a
>
> wonderland of opportunity.[25]

However, it was also during the 30s that American science fiction began to

develop a fan base in Britain.[26] Meanwhile, another Gernsback-owned magazine,

Wonder Stories, started publication (1931). Wonder Stories developed the ethos

that sf should be based on something realistic, and should explore future

civilization.[27] From this point on, American science fiction became increasingly

sophisticated. 1932 saw another horror-orientated British anthology periodical,

similar to Not at Night, called The Creeps; "The Lost Machine" by John Beynon

Harris[28] (in the April edition of Amazing Stories); and, incidentally, Aldous

Huxley's Brave New World. Astounding Stories gained a new editor, named F.

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[24] Ashley 69-70.

[25] Stableford 150. The masculine adventure-based romance of British fiction magazines was often connected with Empire, and it is possible that anxieties over this added to pessimism in stories of the future.

[26] Stableford 152.

[27] Ashley 73.

[28] Later known as John Wyndham.

Orlin Tremaine, in 1933. He designed the magazine's content to be more akin to today's intellectually stimulating sf.[29]

Britain had been left behind somewhat, only starting its first dedicated science fiction magazine in 1934. Scoops was initially aimed at a juvenile audience, but attempted to combine this with mature readers and failed after twenty issues.[30] More magazines quickly followed (even as the British horror anthology periodicals died). Tales of Wonder, the first official British science fiction magazine, published John Beynon, who had previously appeared in American pulps. Tales of Wonder went on to publish several noted British science fiction writers of the next generation. In the United States that year, the editor who is widely credited with moulding American science fiction into an ideas-based form, John W. Campbell, took over at Astounding Stories (a job he would continue until 1971).

1938 signalled the beginning of the so-called Golden Age of science fiction in America.[31] British magazines suffered from the onset of war, but nine new titles were released in the US. Weird Tales began to publish sf, but this was possibly an attempt to stay afloat after losing such writers of the macabre and uncanny as H. P. Lovecraft. It was overtaken by a new publication inspired by British fantastical writing. John W. Campbell had the idea for this new magazine – Unknown – after reading Eric Frank Russell's novel Sinister Barrier, and began to edit it himself in 1939.[32] Magazines of fantastical fiction multiplied in the US, while in Britain their number diminished.

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[29] Ashley 81-85.
[30] Ashley 127.
[31] Ashley 111.
[32] Moskowitz. Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction 338.

Just following the declaration of war (September 1939), definite pessimism

emerged in British science fiction. <u>Tales of Wonder</u> asked its readers to predict

the war of the future and received responses that were mostly of the opinion that

advanced technology would bring about humankind's self-destruction.[33]

American sf continued its "Golden Age" (though the war itself did lead to an

increased seriousness of the form), while in Britain the magazines mostly ceased

publication around 1942 (science fiction continued to be read and written in

wartime Britain, though it was usually only available via American publications

and reprints[34]). Orwell's anti-Stalinist fantasy <u>Animal Farm</u> was published in

1944, and in the mid-forties American writers such as A. E. Van Vogt, Clifford D.

Simak, Henry Kuttner, C. L. Moore, and Fritz Leiber pioneered more mystical,

psychological, and transcendent sf.[35]

Changes in production saw a further cultural shift for science fiction after

the war: the best stories from the pulps became anthologised in book editions and

placed in lending libraries. This widened the audience "particularly those happy

to acquire books for themselves or their children when they would never have

sanctioned the low-grade pulps."[36] Science fiction periodicals endured as a form,

however. In 1946 three new British magazines were published, most notably

<u>New Worlds</u>. <u>New Worlds</u>' production schedule appears to have been sketchy,

and stopped altogether after issue 3 in late 1947, but British sf fans collaborated to

form their own publishing company – Nova Publications – in order to publish

issue 4 of the magazine in the Spring of 1949 (the year that also saw the

publication of Orwell's <u>Nineteen Eighty-Four</u>). It continued for another twenty

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[33] Ashley 132.
[34] For example, in 1941 John Beynon Harris published the Story "Phoney Meteor" in
<u>Amazing Stories</u>.
[35] Ashley 170.
[36] Ashley 197.

years. This is an obvious example of the flaw in the culture-industry theory of production: in the case of Nova Publications, a capitalist enterprise is begun not primarily to create surplus-value, but use-value (reading pleasure). Consequently, can the "products" resulting from such an enterprise be seen as having only the exchange value of mass culture, until use-value is produced by their (subversive) reading as popular culture? Do they not at least have a potential use-value directly as a result of the nature their production? John Beynon Harris was one of Nova Publications original directors.[37]

As American science fiction became increasingly sophisticated in the 50s, C. S. Lewis wrote stories for <u>The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction</u>. Stableford notes, perhaps with regret, that by the 50s the British scientific romance was essentially dead in that it was no longer possible to consider British speculative fiction as distinct.[38] In Britain, the paperback revolution of the post-war period, coupled with the continued paper shortage had effects on sf. The near monopoly of Penguin Books, with its policy of publishing "rather upmarket 'middlebrow' novels", kept most speculative fiction from the paperbacks.[39] While in Britain the paperbacks evolved from the hardbacks, in America they were the competitors of the pulp magazines. However, those British paperback publishers who did not have access to the works produced by the hardback companies and Penguin began to concentrate on genre fiction and "look for inspiration to the American pulps". Major paperback releases of science fiction were originally a British phenomenon.[40] It was perhaps through the reprinting of American pulps and anthologies that the more sophisticated science fiction began

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[37] Ashley 204-05.
[38] Stableford 321.
[39] Stableford 322.
[40] Stableford 323.

to influence British writers. The 50s opened up new perspectives in Britain, as

New Worlds published such writers as Brian Aldiss and J. G. Ballard.

John Wyndham and **The Day of the Triffids**

John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris[41] was born on 10th July 1903

in a village in Warwickshire, his father a barrister of law of Welsh descent and his

mother the daughter of a Birmingham ironmaster. His early life was "chronically

unsettled"[42] when, at the age of eight, he saw his parents separate. He met his

mother only periodically after this. During a brief career in advertising he wrote

some pieces for London newspapers before publishing his first story in an sf

magazine: "Worlds to Barter," Wonder Stories, May 1931. His first novel, The

Secret People was serialised in 1935. Under the pseudonym John Beynon Harris

he published a number of short stories in the American pulps, and, later, in British

magazines, writing as John Beynon. Wyndham also published a detective novel

in 1935, and then the sf novel Stowaway to Mars in 1936. He wrote little during

the war (though he was not completely silent, as the 1941 Amazing Science

Fiction story "Phoney Meteor" proves), and by the post-war period the market, as

we have seen, had changed:

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[41] Harris used several pseudonyms (all drawn from his generous collection of names), notably John Beynon Harris, John Beynon, and John Wyndham. For convenience he will be referred to throughout as John Wyndham, the name by which he is commonly known as a writer.
[42] Sam Moskowitz, Seekers of Tomorrow: Masters of Modern Science Fiction (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1974.) 119.

Science fiction had changed greatly since John Beynon Harris,

reborn John Beynon, was the first choice for England's leading

science-fiction writer. A more sophisticated brand of fiction, much

more comfortable in the depths of the galaxy than in the solar

system or on the planet Earth, prevailed. In this new fiction, action

was often only implied and the plot could turn on a psychological

quirk, a Freudian slip, or a philosophical misinterpretation. The

circumstances leading up to the story were frequently taken for

granted, resulting in stylized backgrounds. Explanations, logical

or otherwise, of the wonders that abounded, were often simply

omitted.[43]

Wyndham's first story in this new mould was the aptly named "Adaption"

(Astounding Science Fiction, July 1949, released shortly after Nova Publishing,

of which Wyndham was a director, had produced the fourth edition of New

Worlds), though it wasn't until "The Eternal Eve" (Amazing Stories, September

1950) that he began using the "John Wyndham" pseudonym. The reconstructed

author in a sense straddled both entertainment-based and sophisticated science

fiction. Stableford embraces him as "a writer who contrived to combine the

traditions of British scientific romance and American science fiction."[44] He goes

on by saying that Wyndham's novels after this point "clearly owe part of their

inspiration to the ideas and literary strategies of pulp science fiction, and part to

the peculiarly ambivalent disaster stories that emerged within the traditions of

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[43] Moskowitz, Seekers of Tomorrow: Masters of Modern Science Fiction 127.
[44] Stableford 326.

scientific romance."[45] Wyndham can be seen as significant in the development of popular science fiction because he is a bridge between Wells and later sf, and also a transitional writer in the movement from pulp to sophisticated sf, from experience-based to analytically based writing. He is therefore representative of the two writing/reading methods this dissertation sets out to explore, and this adoption of both strands of sf produced his finest novels. Certainly, few would disagree that Wyndham's best work came after he adopted his new pseudonym, beginning with The Day of the Triffids in 1951. This section will outline The Day of the Triffids' role as a work of the popular-fantastic, its upward movement in the cultural hierarchy, and through analysis of the novel, reveal its exploration of ideology, traditional mores, and individual and social alienation.

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During the 40s writers like Ray Bradbury began to have work published in the so-called "slick" magazines. The label ostensibly refers to the quality of the paper – smooth as opposed to the rough surface of wood pulp paper – but in fact it is a value judgement of the content. The slicks were middlebrow magazines. This represents yet another cultural shift for science fiction, and for Wyndham may well have been the turning point of his career:

> Probably the best-known emergence from the pulps to the slicks
> was the case of John Wyndham, the new pen name for John
> Beynon Harris, who sold his novel 'The Revolt of the Triffids' to
> Collier's Weekly where it began serialization on 6 January 1951.
> This novel, better known in book form as The Day of the Triffids,

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[45] Stableford 327.

is one of the best-known of all science-fiction novels, partly

because of its appearance outside the pulps.[46]

Recently the novel has again been "upgraded" with its publication as a Penguin

Classic, including the critical apparatus of an introduction.

The alleged origin of Wyndham's idea for the triffids is what can only be

thought of as the survival of childhood imagination into adulthood. One night he

was "startled" by a wind-blown sapling that appeared to be "making jabs" at

him.[47] The novel's links to childhood are also present in the lurid pulpiness of its

imagery, particularly the triffids themselves. For those who have never read The

Day of the Triffids it seems difficult to understand how walking, murderous,

carnivorous plants can possibly have any place in serious science fiction, except,

as Barry Langford suggests (and dismisses) in his introduction to the Penguin

Classics edition, as parody.[48] The triffids are, however, only one of the story's

bizarre elements. The novel is actually a combination of two fantastical events: 1)

the vast majority of humanity is blinded by an atmospheric display that may have

been cometry debris, or may, the protagonist belatedly realises, have been the

malfunction of an orbiting Cold War weapons platform; 2) prior to this disaster, a

new kind of plant (genetically created by the Soviet Union in order to produce a

vegetable oil surpassing fish oils) – the seven-foot-tall, walking, killing triffid –

has appeared on the earth. The first of these events, while improbable, seems to

belong properly to "serious" science fiction and, as is the case with Wellsian

scientific romance, can serve as a useful tool to analyse social structure, as

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[46] Ashley 196.

[47] Moskowitz, Seekers of Tomorrow: Masters of Modern Science Fiction 128.

[48] Barry Langford, Introduction, The Day of the Triffids, By John Wyndham, ed. Barry.
Langford (Penguin Classics. London: Penguin, 2000) vii.

civilisation in the novel inevitable collapses. The second is a transgression into this naturalised fantasy of something more overtly fantastical (chronologically, the triffids emerge many years before the mass blindness). Genetic modification of plants is now a reality, but to use it to explain the existence of the monstrous triffids is shaky at best, and not much more plausible than suggesting they were created by magic. The triffids to a large extent belong to that dubious though entertaining tradition of pulp sf in which, for example, the principle of genetic mutation via radioactive bombardment becomes an excuse for giant insects to threaten the planet. For a detached reader the triffids can only be ridiculous. However, to the experience reader there is, potentially, no implausible in the world of fiction: the earnest yet measured first-person narrative takes the triffids so seriously, integrating them into the world preceding and succeeding the mass blindness, that they complement rather than detract from the novel's social themes, even while lending it that element of pulp entertainment alluded to above. As Langford notes, "the novel is no mere compendium of cliché, neither melodramatic nor unduly gruesome, and though not short of narrative incident, it is principally the Triffids' meditative and discursive qualities which have earned it recognition as a genre classic."[49] Indeed, it is often where the narrative pauses for reflection that the concepts it explores become apparent. This in itself distinguishes the novel from most works of pulp, in which the narrative never pauses.

In Trillion Year Spree, Brian Aldiss asserts that it is with The Day of the Triffids that Wyndham became "master of the cosy catastrophe", and that the novel is "totally devoid of ideas". He goes on to call Wyndham's subsequent

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[49] Langford viii.

writing "urbane and pleasing".[50] As Langford observes, "this is a reputation he

scarcely deserves."[51] "Cosy" is hardly an appropriate adjective for the suicides,

cries, and hysterics of the slowly-starving blind, and such grim moments as Bill

finding, in the surgical ward of a hospital, a blind man with nightclothes soaked in

blood from his own unhealed incision. The social ideas alone in The Day of the

Triffids belie Aldiss's uncharacteristically narrow assessment. Like Wells before

him, Wyndham provides us with a cautionary tale of the fragility of humankind's

dominance on the planet. Langford, calling the novel "a strict Darwinian parable"

and "a tragedy of species hubris", quite correctly notes the significance of the

triffids' relative harmlessness – while humans have a biological advantage over

them.[52] As the triffids, through nothing other than pure chance, move from being

a form of vegetable cattle, corralled and "milked" of their oil, to aggressive

predators and usurpers of territory, the novel illustrates how sudden

environmental change can reduce the survival capabilities of the prevailing life

form while favouring a species more adapted to the new circumstances. Yet, as

Langford briefly states, this is "unnatural selection".[53] The huge numbers of

industrially farmed triffids and the orbital weapon(s) that it is assumed cause the

mass blindness (and the mysterious plague that follows it) are the results of

human agency – specifically, of capitalism and Cold War politics. The

judgemental tone of Wells's early scientific romances is also present here. The

triffids themselves are born in a Soviet Union that has acquired biological

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[50] Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction (London: Stratus, 2000) 279. Elsewhere, Aldiss has said, "Wyndham invented the Safe SF Read." Although meeting him during his mature writing phase, Aldiss's assessment of the man is not exactly complementary: "Nothing of this you could detect from Wyndham's manner. He might have been a tea-cosy salesman for the Home Counties." Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 69.
[51] Langford viii.
[52] Langford ix.
[53] Langford ix.

techniques in order to reclaim its deserts, steppe, and northern tundra for food

production, and are then disseminated across the globe as a plane, crossing the

Pacific in an attempt to steal seeds of the plant for a Western company,[54] is blown

up at high altitude. That the novel conspicuously uses both of the world's

competing ideologies to inflict the triffids upon humankind can hardly be an

accident, just as the struggle between those ideologies causing the mass blindness

(a metaphor?) is an obvious condemnation of the Cold War.

Langford refers to the quaint "attitudes to class and gender" in the novel,[55]

and here he seems to miss some of Wyndham's more radical observations, though

he does go on to explain how Bill's and Josella's abandoning of their social roles

from before the disaster suggests that "until the scales were lifted from their eyes

they too were implicated in the world's death wish."[56] It should be added that

The Day of the Triffids makes similar points about gender (the presentation of

which is at times far from quaint or comfortably bourgeois). In fact, one of the

novel's more interesting features is its subversion of gender roles. During their

first night together, sheltering from the mobs of the blind and the triffids, Bill and

Josella share a meal. They mourn the lost traditions of a world that has suddenly

ended. Josella appears at the table in almost a parody of feminity:

> She was wearing a long pretty frock of palest blue georgette with a
>
> little jacket of white fur. In a pendant on a simple chain a few

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[54] Indeed, an aspect of corporate strategy is deliberately exposed in this section of the book. Palanguez, who covertly approaches the Artic and European Fish-Oil Company with an offer to provide seeds for them (the actual plant is unknown to the world at this time), observes that it is desirable to prevent a new competing product from coming into being. We are told that "[t]he managing director nodded. He knew plenty about that." Wyndham, The Day of the Triffids 22.

[55] Langford vii-viii.

[56] Langford x.

blue-white diamonds flashed, the stones that gleamed in her ear-

clips were smaller but as fine in colour. Her hair and face might

have been fresh from a beauty parlor. She crossed the floor with a

flicker of silver slippers and a glimpse of gossamer stockings [. . .]

Something more was needed. I knew this was a display which had

little or nothing to do with me. I added 'You're saying goodbye?'

[. . .] I stretched out my hand and lead her to the window. 'I was

saying goodbye too – to all this.'[57]

It seems that it is a cultural model of the feminine to which Josella is bidding

farewell. The word "display" is significant. The implication is that femininity

(and therefore masculinity also), in its social manifestation at least, is merely a

performance that has no place in the changed circumstances and can therefore be

abandoned, an implication that the novel goes on to reinforce. The group of

social engineers who propose a new society based on a kind of polygamy, with

women's role as little more than motherhood, are one expression of this. Another

is the lecture given by Coker (himself a hybrid of intellectual and working-man's

leftwing politics) to a young woman who complains that technical/physical labour

is difficult or even impossible for women:

'I'll differ there,' Coker told her. 'It's not only your fault – it's a

self-created fault. Moreover, it's an affection to consider yourself

too spiritual to understand anything mechanical [. . .] Ordinarily

it's a pose that's not worth anyone's while to debunk. In fact, it

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[57] Wyndham 71.

has been fostered. Men have played up to it by stoutly repairing the poor darling's vacuum cleaner, and capably replacing the blown fuse. The whole charade has been acceptable to both parties. Tough practicability complements spiritual delicacy and charming dependence [. . .] In spite of generations of talk about the equality of the sexes there has been much too great a vested interest in the dependence of women to dream of dropping it.'[58]

The novel interrogates social structures at several levels. Complacency, as has been stated above, is a theme, but this is specifically dealt with in terms of the atomised and alienated ideology of capitalism: "Each one of us so steadily did his little part in the right place that it was easy to mistake habit and custom for the natural law [. . .] Looking back at the shape of things then, the amount we did not know and did not care to know about our daily lives is not only astonishing, but somehow a bit shocking."[59] Of course, the narrative views events retrospectively. At the time of the disaster the shock is actually at the ease and speed with which that ordered society has utterly disintegrated, and many are unable to accept it. As Bill points out to Coker, who cannot understand why people will not "see reason", this is due to "habit" and "previously trained feelings".[60] This socially constructed belief system, which, like the Althusserian conception of ideology, had been invisible, is brought into focus by the disaster (though most of the world remains quite literally blind to it). Also, the blindness allows what might be a symbolic representation of acquisitiveness: though the novel never directly states it, because people believe themselves to be unseen they unconsciously expose raw

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[58] Wyndham 148-49.
[59] Wyndham 9.
[60] Wyndham 151.

emotion on their faces. We hear descriptions of blind individuals such as "[h]is expression was vastly cunning,"[61] and "[h]e had a gloating expression on his face."[62] The novel's overall picture of society may be summed up in Bill's encounter with the throng of blind in the hospital:

> There was a tight-packed mob of men and women, nearly all of them in their hospital nightclothes, milling slowly and helplessly around. The motion pressed those on the outskirts cruelly against marble corners or ornamental projections. Some of them were crushed breathlessly against the walls. Now and then one would trip. If the press of bodies allowed him to fall, there was little chance that it would let him come up again.[63]

A vision of society indeed! But if it seems fanciful to suggest this is a deliberate metaphor, consider Bill's meditation when he returns years later to find supplies in a deserted London:

> When I was by myself in the country I could recall the pleasantness of the former life: among the scabrous, slowly perishing buildings I seemed able to recall only the muddle, the frustration, the unaimed drive, the all-pervading clangour of empty vessels, and I became uncertain of how much we had lost . . .[64]

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[61] Wyndham 50.

[62] Wyndham 129.

[63] Wyndham 13.

[64] Wyndham 198. The scene and the sentiments expressed recall scientific romance, and this moment is almost a pastiche of Wells.

This is a sentiment that occurs throughout the novel, implying perhaps that The Day of the Triffids' social critique to a large extent makes the story a fortunate catastrophe (at least in Bill's eyes). Bill has barely had time to become aware of the disaster when this begins to occur to him ("[a]ll the old problems, the stale ones, both personal and general, had been solved by one mighty slash."[65]), and once he is established in a small country community he tells Josella, "I'm happier inside me than I ever was before."[66] Josella later expresses identical sentiments: "I've been happier here than ever in my life before."[67] The survival group that the novel tacitly approves of, Michael Beadley's social engineers, is obviously (perhaps aggressively) intent on building a world that fits their leftist and undemocratic politics, taking advantage of the disaster: "We aren't out to reconstruct – we want to build something new and better. Some people don't take to that. If they don't they're no use to us. We just aren't interested in having an opposition party that's trying to perpetuate a lot of the old bad features."[68]

Personal (psychological) alienation is a theme in The Day of the Triffids, possibly referring to both the novel's social agenda and its author's unsettled and (from the age of eight) motherless childhood. The triffids themselves are agents of this. It is impossible to feel anything other than revulsion toward the clumsily lurching, poisonous, and carrion-eating plants. They are an alienating presence, but, as we saw with Wells, that which alienates a novel's characters can be so outlandish for the reader that the conventional nature of signs is made strange and

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[65] Wyndham 47.
[66] Wyndham 209.
[67] Wyndham 223.
[68] Wyndham 220. Other positions are presented. In clear opposition to Beadley's group are Miss Durant's reactionary conservative Christians and, conspicuously, they fail. Liberalism is present in the form of Dennis Brent, who is sceptical of the lack of democracy in Beadley's community. There is also a right-wing group who intend to enforce a feudal system on the country.

artistic alienation takes place. For example, Bill's prosaic description of the triffid that grows in his garden when he is a child breaks violently into the fantastic with the single-sentence paragraph, "It was some little time later that the first one picked up its roots, and walked."[69] This narrative event in The Day of the Triffids, so baldly stated, certainly startles the reader, providing what Greenblatt's phenomenon of wonder, and there is perhaps an instant of deconstructive jouissance as the other of conventional reference is "felt". For Bill the triffids are far from liberating (in the way that the mass blindness is), and they are other, made by the Soviets and disseminated by Western capitalism. Yet the alienated language and imagery the novel uses may well produce reading pleasure and artistic alienation:

> Triffids were at large. Sometimes I saw them crossing fields or noticed them inactive against hedges. In more than one farmyard they had found the middens to their liking and enthroned themselves there while they waited for the dead stock to attain the right stage of putrescence. I saw them now with a disgust that they had never roused in me before. Horrible alien things which some of us had somehow created and which the rest of us in our careless greed had cultured all over the world. One could not even blame nature for them.[70]

It is interesting that immediately after Bill has these thoughts he discusses his sense of loneliness and isolation. He stops his car for as little time as possible so

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[69] Wyndham 28.
[70] Wyndham 167.

that he will be able to hear at least an engine, and considers that there must be some survivors around the country who believe themselves utterly alone: "I felt as sorry for them as anyone else in the disaster."[71] As themes, loneliness, isolation, and alienation frequently appear in the novel, starting at its very opening – when Bill, his eyes bandaged in hospital, listens in terror to world that seems to have gone inexplicably mad (this in itself can be seen as a source for reading pleasure: the reader is in suspense, awaiting an explanation for the mystery; it is the experience of hesitation Todorov refers to) – and culminating in the fear of being trapped by the encroaching triffids in a small "reservation", never able to leave. The references to loneliness imply that it is a state Wyndham has had reason to consider. For example, Bill says, "[c]omplete loneliness was the worse state I could imagine just then. Alone one would be nothing."[72] At a later point in the narrative this notion is explored in more detail:

> Until then I had always thought of loneliness as something
> negative – an absence of company, and, of course, something
> temporary . . . That day I learned that it was much more. It was
> something which could press and oppress, could distort the
> ordinary, and play tricks on the mind. Something which lurked
> inimically all around, stretching the nerves and twanging them
> with alarms, never letting one forget that there was no one to help,
> no one to care. It showed one as an atom adrift in vastness [. . .]
> To deprive a gregarious creature of companionship is to maim it, to
> outrage its nature [. . .] when the herd no longer exists there is, for

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[71] Wyndham 168.
[72] Wyndham 78.

the herd creature, no longer entity. He is part of no whole; a freak without a place. If he cannot hold on to his reason, then he is lost indeed; most utterly, most fearfully lost, so that he becomes no more than the twitch in the limb of a corpse.[73]

It is interesting that Bill's loneliness is almost tangible, existing in the wider world around him. Again we see that alienation from without causes alienation within. The final image is startling similar to that used by The War of the Worlds' alienated narrator when he sees the London crowds as "the mockery of life in a galvanized body."[74]

The Day of the Triffids is an entertaining story and satisfies a desire for what Dickens called "amusement" in the form of its adventure narrative and, of course, with those pulp monsters themselves, the triffids. However, inserted into this popular format are analyses of ideology, social mores, and alienation. Even the triffids are more than the comic book apparitions they may at first appear to be. Aldiss's assessment of The Day of the Triffids as "totally devoid of ideas" is a hasty one.

Brian Aldiss and Non-Stop

Brian Aldiss's recollection of early childhood is remarkably detailed and vivid, and reveals a dream life that borders on the visionary. In particular, Aldiss

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[73] Wyndham 177-78.
[74] H. G. Wells, The War of the Worlds, Everyman Paperbacks (London: Dent-Orion, 1993) 171-72.

speaks of a nightmare involving distorted reality and an unbearable entity, in language that is at times close to Lovecraftian:

> My inner life has always been a somewhat stormy sea. Sometimes I have feared to be overwhelmed [. . .] In my early childhood nights, I endured [. . .] torments centered about distortions in space or time. Of course, no words can approach the terror of these dreams. In one dream, I lay helpless in bed, knowing that a Deity stood at the other end of the corridor beyond my bedroom door. That Deity was after me, for a reason of its own. It had merely to run down the corridor and snatch me out of bed. The Deity was flaming and terrible, like a vision from Blake's or Fuseli's paintings. It could run infinitely fast. It started running with a machine-like motion. The distance of the corridor was no distance. Yet it was also infinite, a terrifying corridor at least as dreary and forbidding as the Deity. Only infinite speed could conquer it – and that the Deity possessed. So the Deity was <u>simultaneously</u> very distant and up against my very door. The way he ran! – that irresistible velocity! – nothing could stand against it. This contradictory visitant I was forced to await, powerless, prone in bed.[75]

[75] Aldiss, <u>Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life</u> 90.

This Deity, may, Aldiss believes, be some distant race memory of primal origin.[76]

It is interesting that he felt "powerless" during these imaginings. Whatever the

Deity represented, it seems to have been a threat to the self. Aldiss also describes

a very different dream from his youth, one that he still experiences and that seems

to refer to the childhood pastoral. In it, he is welcomed into a cottage made from

the ruins of a church. He interprets this as having a quasi-religious significance,

explaining that the cottage, "however small", represents something that can be

built from what remains after an "early sense of loss."[77] As has been suggested

earlier in this dissertation, the work of the fantasist may be an attempt to provide,

through phantasy, a link with infant plenitude. The motif of comforting

acceptance into the surreal cottage, with its phoenix-like construction of old

church stones (childhood faith), recalls an appeal to childhood found in the

theories of Freud and Marcuse.

Aldiss began life in middleclass surroundings. His grandfather owned a

gent's outfitters in East Dereham, and though this seems to have been a stable

environment for a time, Aldiss was removed from it on two occasions: first to his

grandmother's, then to prep school. The former of these incidents, instigated by

the arrival of a baby sister, was particularly traumatic, and here we begin to see

some remarkable parallels: "My grandmother's house was to me what the

blacking factory was to Charles Dickens. So greatly did that enforced stay fill me

with guilt and dismay, that I dared speak of it to no one until I was well into

adulthood."[78] Understandably, the infant Aldiss seems to have felt himself

rejected by his parents in favour of their new daughter, and lived for this time in

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[76] Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 90.

[77] Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 93.

[78] Brian Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman (London: Little, 1998) 105.

an alienated state. For many years he believed the stay at his grandmother's to have been six months in duration, but upon checking the facts (after he left the army), he discovered it to have been only six weeks.[79]

Upon the death of the grandfather, Aldiss's father and uncle inherited the shop. It soon became clear, however, that the finances of the business had been left in a poor state, and the uncle bought the father's half. Thus, a move to a poorer area and a more frugal life became necessary. This caused some mixed feelings. Removal from the (for the child Aldiss) fantasyland of the shop was intensely painful: "To be exiled from it was to experience a burden of inexpressible loss. Of that loss I could speak to no one."[80] Freud might claim that removal from the shop was an exclusion from the objects of play, and therefore caused feelings of powerlessness and lack, but the situation was more complex than this: the shop held with it a threat for Aldiss's future, and another fascinating parallel: "Already, before we left Dereham, I could feel the prison shades closing in on me; well do I know how H. G. Wells felt in his draper's shop, for I was destined for the same fate."[81] So, although the family had "come down in the world, from prosperity in East Dereham to a cramped little terraced house called Number Eleven,"[82] Aldiss had perhaps escaped this threatened future, and he describes a pleasant childhood in the Norfolk coastal town of Gorleston-on-Sea. However, this period was not entirely idyllic. At one point Aldiss was confined during an episode of illness. As in the cases of other writers discussed thus far, he resorted to fiction, in effect becoming a writer due to this time of captivity:

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[79] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 105.
[80] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 67.
[81] Brian Aldiss, "Magic and Bare Boards," Hell's Cartographers: Some Personal Histories of Science Fiction Writers, eds. Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison (London: Weidenfeld, 1975) 182.
[82] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 16.

> When I fell ill and was confined to bed, I wrote and illustrated a
> long verse drama set in Victorian times. The story moved freely
> from a stage play into real life and back. Where I got the idea from
> I do not know; now it is a commonplace of the deconstructionalists
> - a word unknown in the thirties. It was my first sustained piece of
> writing. Its subject was the question of appearances: something
> was happening but – wait! – it was merely being acted![83]

This at least suggests that the content of this early piece had an element of
escapism, one that was a reaction to the feeling of being trapped, seemingly a
common childhood experience of the fantasist. Also, the themes of
"appearances" and the blurring of reality and fiction prefigure work such as Non-
Stop as well as Aldiss's later postmodern/intertextual novels (Frankenstein
Unbound, for example, which we will consider in the next chapter).

Another, and more serious, complication during the Norfolk period is
associated with Aldiss's education. Aldiss despised his school, Framlingham
college, which, as well as being "Gradgrindian", had an aggressive homosexual
atmosphere. He says he believed the school "spelt spiritual death for me."[84]
Although Aldiss does not make the connection, his suggestion that "[p]erhaps my
storytelling in that dorm, at which I became so successful, protected me from
further insults of the kind,"[85] again evokes the image of Dickens in the blacking
factory. Thus, the coming of World War II and the family's subsequent

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[83] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 16.
[84] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 18.
[85] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 18.

movement around the country – "Thank you, God, thank you, Hitler!"[86] – was a time of liberation for Aldiss. Indeed, his war experiences, both as a boy and, in particular, as a young soldier serving in Asia, seem to have been crucial for his development as a writer, providing that defamiliarising effect that "can crack the crust of habitude". Like the destruction wrought by the Martians in The War of the Worlds, German bombing transformed the familiar into the strange. After Exeter was flattened, Aldiss's father took him to see it: "Nothing remained. Nothing, except the cathedral, which stood alone on an unearthly flat plain [. . .] In this surreal landscape, Air Marshall Goering had done Salvador Dali's work."[87] The blackout "lent an enchantment to banal streets"[88] and allowed the stars to be seen without light-pollution. Like Dickens's perception of London and its horrors, Aldiss's reading of these events is almost magical. This projection of desires onto the external world, while part of a universal human strategy to negotiate reality, is particularly pronounced in Dickens and Aldiss (and in other writers who do not create realist fiction). Referring to the clear night skies of the blackout, for example, Aldiss says, "[s]urely in the marvellous beauty of the night sky lay some hope for humanity, war or no war."[89] This echoes the use of the stars in Wells's scientific romances (such as The Island of Doctor Moreau) – symbols of hope and transcendence.[90] During this period Aldiss read sf

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[86] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 19.

[87] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 23. This is an uncanny echo of Aldiss's dream of the rebuilt church, and also relates to J. G. Ballard's preoccupation with surrealism.

[88] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 26.

[89] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 27.

[90] "There is, I do not know how there is or why there is, a sense of peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven." H. G. Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau, ed. Brian Aldiss (Everyman Paperbacks. London: Dent-Orion, 1993) 129.

magazines like <u>Astounding</u>. He recalls that his maths teacher destroyed one,

calling it rubbish: "I had been in the middle of a Theodore Sturgeon story."[91]

When Aldiss actually became a combatant, in the Burma campaign, he

found himself in an alien landscape. He calls the world he and his fellows

inhabited an "enchanted zone": "What remains is the beauty of the day, bringing a

sense of sorrow as the sun set. Tousled heads of trees would be silhouetted

against the bright western sky as if cut from metal. The scene was mercilessly

remote from man's ordinary affairs."[92] Aldiss saw this fantastical backdrop to his

military service as somehow primordial, possibly stirring up "promptings" toward

self-awareness.[93] Interestingly, he connected this with his childhood fantasies of

being a native American ("[t]he small wild urchin in a Red Indian suit was freed

again").[94] Yet again, it is possible to see a pastoral landscape linked with the

childhood pastoral. This connection, which, as the reader will recall, Marcuse

makes when describing what he means by artistic alienation, implies that at this

time Aldiss had stopped perceiving in a conventional or (as Shklovsky would

term it) "algebraic" way. The argument could be that Aldiss's childhood self has

been freed because in this moment he perceives directly, like a child does, seeing

the stoniness of the stone. Aldiss's naming of Asia as an "enchanted zone" is an

inverted form of Lewis's belief that reading about enchanted woods makes "all

woods a little enchanted."[95]

The end of the war thus signalled the end to a period of liberation in

Aldiss's life. Where Asia had been fantastical to him, the England of 1947 was a

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[91] Aldiss, <u>The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman</u> 36.
[92] Aldiss, <u>The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman</u> 159.
[93] Aldiss, <u>The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman</u> 160.
[94] Aldiss, <u>The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman</u> 185.
[95] C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," <u>Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories</u>, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 30.

"drab competitive world";[96] the life there was "thin gruel";[97] the people

"bloodless".[98] Thus, it appears that the return to England was akin to mundane

reality after heightened awareness. As we will see, Aldiss came to use imagery

from his wartime experiences to convey, paradoxically, the restricted and self-

deluding society he perceived around him. He began work in a bookshop, and it

was while he was employed here that he wrote a series of sf stories that were

published in a trade paper and then in book form. Another collection of stories –

Space Time and Nathaniel – followed, and then the novel Non-Stop was

published. For a time he was, of course, more popular in America than Britain

but, when writing for the British sf magazines, he did not, as many of his

contemporaries did, write with an assumed American voice.[99]

The science fiction Aldiss developed is, he says, contemporary ("Science

fiction is NOW, not THEN"[100]), though by "contemporary" he seems to mean a

genre based in post-Enlightenment/post-Romantic thinking, rather than one

directly concerned with current affairs. As is well known, Aldiss posits

Frankenstein as the first work of science fiction. He sees those who position sf's

origin in classical literature as claiming "too much", while those who site its

beginnings in the twentieth century pulps as claiming "too little".[101] Having said

that, Aldiss's fiction implies that this historical location of sf is thematic: the

circumstances those themes explain can be very much of the moment. In fact,

Aldiss has said that sf's "greatest successes [. . .] deal with man in relation to his

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[96] Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 66.
[97] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 200.
[98] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 199.
[99] Aldiss, "Magic and Bare Boards" 191.
[100] Brian Aldiss, "The Origin of Species," Science Fiction: The Academic Awakening, eds.
Willis E. McNelly, Jane Hipolito and A. James Stupple (CEA Chap Book. Shreveport, LA:
CEA, 1974) 36.
[101] Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 162.

changing surroundings and abilities [. . .]"[102] Thus, sf chronicles humankind's

evolution, a premise H. G. Wells certainly understood. Perhaps this dialectic

between a "permanent" thematic structure and a content that shifts with present

issues and concerns can be best summed up in a classification of sf outlined by

Aldiss: "Science fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the

universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge

(science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould."[103]

Nevertheless, Aldiss acknowledges that science fiction "has its strong fun

side."[104] He doesn't see himself as an entertainer, but does have an attitude to

literature that arguably derives from an experience-reading position:

> The difference between fiction and non-fiction is the difference
>
> between magic and bare boards. Imagine you're going to the
>
> theatre. The auditorium fills, the orchestra plays, the lights dim,
>
> the curtain goes up . . . . The stage is bare, or cluttered with old
>
> and dusty props. Flats lie shuffled at the rear. A light dimly burns.
>
> Something has gone wrong. There will be no play tonight, no
>
> magic.[105]

Dickens would have felt comfortable with exactly the same analogy, and, just as

Dickens saw the need for entertainment as innate and necessary, so Aldiss

associates the attraction of certain romances and fantastical fictions with the

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[102] Aldiss, "The Origin of Species" 37.
[103] Aldiss, "The Origin of Species" 35.
[104] Aldiss, "The Origin of Species" 35.
[105] Aldiss, "Magic and Bare Boards" 173.

human expansionist instinct: "The longing for foreign places – or alien planets – has survival value in evolutionary terms. It kept the tribes on the move."[106]

* * *

Aldiss's first novel, Non-Stop (1958), was in a sense written in the American sf tradition. It was, to a limited extent, a response to Robert Heinlein's Common Sense, a novel with a similar plot device, but one that Aldiss believes to be poorly written. Both books deal with characters that are unaware the world they inhabit is in fact a vast spaceship, but, where the revelation of this situation is the purpose of Heinlein's narrative, Non-Stop uses the scenario for more sophisticated purposes. In general terms, the "twist" is strongly implied from the outset and fully revealed sooner than halfway through the novel. Nevertheless, the exact nature of the novel's world is only aquired gradually through what Iser decribes as the reader's wandering viewpoint. While the book is an early work and does not belong to the mature phase of Aldiss's writing (Aldiss refers to its "juvenile blemishes"),[107] it is nevertheless representative of the increasingly intellectual direction of science fiction throughout the post-war period.

Non-Stop tells the story of a group of "dizzies". They live aboard a generational spaceship slowly returning to Earth, the descendants of its long-dead crew. The crew had contracted a disease that altered them genetically, decreasing their height and speeding up their metabolisms (and thus decreasing their lifespans) by a factor of four. Several generations have come and gone since the catastrophe, and a general suspicion of knowledge among the ship's current occupants means that the old disaster (and its consequence) is unknown to the characters at the start of the novel. Mutated plants from the hydroponics bay have

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[106] Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 65.
[107] Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 72.

grown throughout the ship, and animals – livestock and experimental – have

colonised this jungle. Artificial lighting and life-support run automatically. To

the dizzies, this is simply their world. In other words, the dizzies are an alienated

society in an artificial (technological) environment. Their true circumstances are

hidden from them.

Upon reading Aldiss's works of autobiography, it soon becomes apparent

that such a spaceship world reflects his particular perception of reality. For

example, the family shop in Dereham seems (for the infant Aldiss) to have been a

large place of corridors and interconnecting rooms, "[f]ull of horror as well as

pleasurable excitement."[108] Similarly, on his way to Asia in World War II, Aldiss

lived on the bottom deck of a troop ship (this deck was actually carved into the

keel), an utterly enclosed environment. Such surroundings should have been

oppressive, but, characteristically for Aldiss at this time, they actually created an

atmosphere of escapism for the young man: "Of all the troops aboard ship, I

seemed alone in enjoying the voyage. In the warrens of the ship, looped about

with grey pipes of every bore, coiling along the bulkheads or snaking overhead, it

was easy to imagine we were on a giant spaceship, heading for unknown planets.

It was an enthralling fantasy."[109] Compare this to a line of description from <u>Non-</u>

<u>Stop</u>: "Above and around them, four feet wide, the inspection ways here became a

washer between two wheels of deck, its width crossed by a veritable tangle of

girders, braces pipes and ducts."[110] The tangled "'ponic" jungle on the ship may

well be a description of the Indian subcontinent, and may also be metaphorical –

Aldiss has described science fiction as an overgrown forest of strange themes.[111]

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[108] Aldiss, <u>The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman</u> 63.
[109] Aldiss, <u>The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman</u> 7.
[110] Brian Aldiss, <u>Non-Stop</u>, Sf Masterworks. 33 (London: Millenium-Orion, 2000) 218.
[111] Aldiss, "The Origin of Species" 35.

Non-Stop deals with the imprisonment and control of people who are largely unaware of their situation. Undoubtedly, Aldiss's sense of being trapped by the constraints of 1950s Britain played a large part in this theme,[112] but there is a more general expression of alienation and repression than this in the novel. Michael Collings suggests the ship actually symbolises Earth[113] (which is, of course, a closed system moving through space). Collings goes on to propose that the novel is "a parable of the human condition,"[114] and it is tempting to see the dizzies' situation as that of humanity, desiring utopia and the pastoral (but confounded in even fully acknowledging this desire), imprisoned within an artificial society. The dizzies are in some ways models of Marcuse's One Dimensional Man, brutalised into an alienated state by the synthetic world they occupy. As the protagonist, Roy Complain, observes, "[s]hip or world, what's the difference?"[115]

A not-quite-conscious desire is suggested continually: the dizzies play a game called "Travel-Up", in which they attempt to move counters into areas on a board with names such as "Orbit" and "Milky Way"; they engage in grotesque revels; they sense an unformed longing within themselves. Complain is always frustrated at not having the "Big Something": "always something missing, missing. Again – as he had done since a child – Complain whirled furiously round his brain, searching for a factor which promised to be there and was not, ever."[116] There are forces, however, that keep desires in check by not allowing

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[112] As Aldiss says, "I had found a way of balancing the two sides of my life, and of the conscious and unconscious. The jungle represented my secret longing for the freedoms of the Far East. The encasing spaceship represented the actual life I was then forced to lead." Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 72.

[113] Michael R. Collings, Brian Aldiss, Starmont Reader's Guide 28 (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont, 1986) 9.

[114] Collings 11.

[115] Aldiss, Non-Stop 66.

[116] Aldiss, Non-Stop 10.

them to be fully recognised. Chief among these is the "Teaching", a hostile form

of psychoanalysis begun by a mentally ill crewmember called Bassit during the

original crisis. For the dizzies (particularly those who live in the "Quarters" zone

of the ship-world) it is an unquestioned faith that produces automatic responses,

such as violent demonstrations of anger. Portraying psychoanalysis as a secular

religion is satire on Aldiss's part, and the Teaching's role in social control is

indicative of an unfavourable assessment of the theory (or how it has been

employed). Ironically, the Teaching is based on the principle of expressing

desire, or, at least, on the instant purging of such emotions as fear or anger.

However, the result is actually fear of the self:

> The Teaching warned him that his mind was a foul place. The
>
> holy trinity, Froyd, Yung and Bassit, had gone alone through the
>
> terrible barriers of sleep, death's brother; there they found – not
>
> nothing, as man had formerly believed – but grottoes and
>
> subterranean labyrinths full of ghouls and evil treasure, leeches,
>
> and the lusts that burn like acid. Man stood revealed to himself: a
>
> creature of infinite complexity and horror. It was the aim of the
>
> Teaching to let as much of this miasmic stuff out onto the surface
>
> as possible. But supposing the Teaching had never gone far
>
> enough?[117]

The effects of the Teaching are self-hatred, self-interest, and the belief that desire

and emotion are a kind of evil that must be expelled from the mind. Thus,

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[117] Aldiss, Non-Stop 88.

repressed anger is "sin", while murder is virtuous. If the ship is indeed a metaphor of Earth, and the dizzies a metaphor for the human condition, one line in an ancient captain's log is significant: "In this morgue, it is easier to put faith in psycho-analysis than God."[118] The society of the dizzies is an alienated one, with grudging cooperation rather than community. In fact, the Teaching actively encourages the former.

The psychological condition of the dizzies is thus rather poor, and it is not uncommon for one of them to suddenly become dangerously insane, like a medieval peasant falling under the influence of Satan. As has been seen often in the texts thus far examined, social alienation is shown to promote psychological alienation, and vice versa. The psychoanalysis religion of the Teaching estranges individuals from each other and from their own selves. They may be instructed to vent "negative" emotions, but such things as sentiment are seen as something to eradicate from both the community and the self.

This dialectic of alienated society/alienated individual in Non-Stop – automatic behaviour within an artificial environment in which the dizzies, as we eventually learn, are the subjects of a vast anthropological experiment – may have its roots in a remarkable piece of childhood thinking. The young Aldiss became fascinated by an advertisement in a grocer's window – a mechanical model of the Mad Hatter pouring Alice a cup of tea over and over:

> [. . .] I think to myself that possibly Alice and the Mad Hatter have feelings: since they look human, perhaps they feel human. Perhaps they are forced to pour and drink, pour and drink - and all the

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[118] Aldiss, Non-Stop 170.

while, smiling, they don't wish to. The existential dilemma

overwhelms me. I cannot think my way out of the riddle. This

enforced behaviour - all this enforced smiling - has wider and

uncomfortable implications. [. . .] after all, we humans go on day

by day, doing the same things automatically. Supposing we

merely think we are real, the way Alice does in Hurn's window [. .

.] Are we stuck in a window with God outside, watching us go

through the motions?[119]

If this speculation is expressed in <u>Non-Stop</u>, who or what is "God"? Collings

suggests that the absence of a Captain or controlling force represents a Godless

universe,[120] however the novel's conclusion, in which it is revealed that the ship

returned to Earth orbit several generations ago and is now very much under

control, the object of anthropological research, confounds this interpretation.

Collings seems to dismiss the conclusion as pulp in order to maintain his reading.

In fact, there are candidates in the book to fill symbolically the role of God as

observer. The Outsiders (thought to be supernatural beings, but actually

anthropologists living secretly among the dizzies) and the Giants (normal sized

humans serving as maintenance staff, surreptitiously repairing the ships systems,

but occasionally spotted) are both possibilities. As Tom Henighan notes, true

humans, significantly called "Outsiders", are the aliens in the story[121] – if the

spaceship represents Earth, who are the external observers/controllers, if not God?

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[119] Aldiss, <u>The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman</u> 71.
[120] Collings 12.
[121] Tom Henighan, <u>Brian Aldiss</u>, Twayne English Author's Series No. 555 (New York, NY: Twayne, 1999) 14.

There is another possibility that critics seem to have overlooked: the dizzies and their world represent the complexities of a single human psyche. Note that Aldiss sees the ship as the constraining life of England, and the <u>conscious</u>; while the 'ponic jungle within the ship is his "secret longing for the freedoms of the Far East", and the <u>unconscious</u>.[122] As for the characters:

> We are taught to regard our lives as a continuity. Yet I can look back on several discarded versions of myself, their life-cycles dictated from within as well as by external circumstance. The body continues, ageing, shaped by the sedentary life of the writer; perhaps the personality is discontinuous. Perhaps personalities live and die and others are reborn, all within the same ageing body, like Roy Complain and company within the giant ruinous spaceship of <u>Non-Stop</u>.[123]

So the ship, as well as conscious and unconscious, is actually one individual composed of disparate personalities. Many characters certainly seem to be symbolic, and to be aspects of one being (something like the crew of the Pequod in <u>Moby Dick</u>). In addition to this, the conflict of conscious and unconscious is focused on. A journey into the 'ponic jungle is momentarily called "a fruitless attempt to return to the ancestral womb"[124] The Teaching is opposed to the unconscious; "expansion to your ego" are the words of greeting among dizzies. Thus, the entire world of the ship is a confrontation of conscious and unconscious. Quarters is "a great cavern, filled exhaustingly with the twitter of many voices.

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[122] Aldiss, <u>Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life</u> 72.
[123] Aldiss, <u>Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life</u> 72.
[124] Aldiss, <u>Non-Stop</u> 43.

Nowhere any real action, only the voices, dying voices."[125] As Complain notes

upon discovering that the dizzies are no longer considered human, "[a]ll that

we've suffered, hoped, done, loved . . . it's not been real. We're just funny little

mechanical things, twitching in a frenzy, dolls activated by chemicals . . ."

Aldiss's concept of discontinuous personalities and his thoughts on the

mechanised Alice and Mad Hatter may be related.

However, <u>Non-Stop</u> surprisingly ends as a story of hope, liberation, and

rebirth. The close of the novel, in which moths inside the ruined control boards

inadvertently activate the Ultimate Emergency Stop, clearly points to this.

Collings refers to the conclusion as a shift "from allegory and analogy to science

fiction,"[126] perhaps because it undermines the bleakness he wishes to foreground.

In actual fact, there are moments in the narrative that pre-empt this climax. The

alienated existence of Roy Complain is presented throughout the novel as a

barrier that he can breach. The development of Complain's character, away from

the divisive and neurotic dogma of the Teaching and towards an acceptance of

self and community, is a major theme. This can be seen when he tells the "priest"

Marapper (a kind of cleric-analyst) that he is "out of date" and begins to

concentrate on the good of the entire ship.[127] Upon their meeting with the

(relatively enlightened) people in the "Forwards" zone of the ship, Complain and

Marraper, once united by the Teaching, begin to diverge: "Where Complain had

found himself, the priest was beginning to lose himself."[128] Complain begins to

move toward non-alienated selfhood. Indeed, the fact that Complain is actually a

descendant of the missing Captain is surely significant.

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[125] Aldiss, <u>Non-Stop</u> 38.
[126] Collings 13.
[127] Aldiss, <u>Non-Stop</u> 140.
[128] Aldiss, <u>Non-Stop</u> 149.

On a broader level, the events of the novel defamiliarise several characters, jolting them out of their alienated states. A description of a group of dizzies' first glimpse of space and the Earth (through an airlock window) illustrates this assertion: "Still nobody spoke. They were silent as the crescent crept wider and the splendid sun broke free from behind it. They could not speak one word for the miracle of it. They were struck dumb, deaf and dizzy by its sublimity."[129] Other images are used to imply renewal. The telepathic moths that have evolved on the ship circle the characters at the end, "radiating hope"[130]. It seems fair to propose that they symbolise the concept of escape from an alienated existence – it is the moths (within the control boards, causing short circuits) that trigger the Ultimate Emergency Stop, meaning that Earth will have to accept the dizzies onto the planet's surface. Thus, the spaceship's Long Journey (and the novel) is brought to a close, and there is a new start for the characters: "It was as if everyone was about to be born."[131] Aldiss has suggested that the cottage/ruined church of his recurring dream may have become the spaceship of Non-Stop,[132] which rather favours the argument that the book is intended to be a story of hope. The careful reader might, as the Emergency Stop breaks the ship apart into its separate decks, recall an earlier detail that appears inconsequential when it is revealed one hundred and seventy pages earlier: "The plan showed the ship to be shaped like an egg."[133]

It would be an appropriation to suggest that the destruction to the ship and the liberation of its characters in any way represents the dying of the body and survival of the self (selves). However, Aldiss, while an atheist, seems to share

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[129] Aldiss, Non-Stop 201.
[130] Aldiss, Non-Stop 240.
[131] Aldiss, Non-Stop 241.
[132] Aldiss, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life 92.
[133] Aldiss, Non-Stop 70.

with Wells a sceptical approach to notions of absolute materialism. At one stage the Aldiss family lived in a house called St Withburga. This house had a presence – all the family heard ghostly footsteps and felt an attending sense of inexplicable dread. Aldiss recalls actually seeing a phantom also, but says this may be a trick of his memory. Later, he began to look at the phenomenon as subjective, a projection of the family's troubles. Yet, upon returning to the house years later, when it had been converted into council offices, Aldiss was startled to discover that the office workers there didn't like the building because it was "haunted by an evil spirit." They too heard the footsteps and felt the terror that came with them. Aldiss, citing this as "objective proof of the ghost's existence", reports that the house now stands empty. His explanation seems to be a Jungian one: "Could this dreaded St Withburga thing be in some way a projection of the shadow side of human life, of unhappiness [. . .]? One can only say that as yet science has tunnel vision and cannot see or explain many manifestations, such as mind itself, which do not submit to instruments."[134]

*   *   *

Because escape is ultimately the theme and content of Non-Stop, it is worth pointing out that there is some similarity between the dynamic of its narrative, and that of A Christmas Carol: through artistic alienation the reader shares the characters' liberation. There is even some suggestion of release from the constraints of the material. As we saw with Wells, Aldiss's philosophical position is somewhat ambiguous on these matters, a phenomenon that can also be found in the materialistic mysticism of J. G. Ballard.

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[134] Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 139-45.

J. G. Ballard and <u>The Drowned World</u>

As was the case with Aldiss, World War II – the conflict in Asia especially – had a profound impact on the life and writing of J. G. Ballard. Ballard, however, was too young to be a combatant: he spent three years of his childhood in an internment camp of the Japanese Imperial Army.

Born on 15 November 1930 in Shanghai, Ballard lived in the American-controlled sector of the city. His father was the managing director of a textile firm, and this, combined with the pseudo-colonial situation, meant that the young Ballard enjoyed a relatively privileged lifestyle. This ended in 1942 when, after a gradual build-up of hostilities between Japanese invaders and foreign nationals in Shanghai (following Pearl Harbour), the Ballard family were imprisoned in Lunghua camp. One might expect this to have been a traumatic situation for Ballard, but children at the camp responded to incarceration differently to the adults. Referring to the start of his internment, he says, "so, in many ways, began my real life."[135] The camp possibly provided an escape from the strict social codes of English society in Shanghai, becoming a kind of playground for the children held there. Ballard describes his experience of the "freedoms" and strangeness of the camp as an encounter with something fantastical: "I was enthralled."[136]

In fact, the camp became a kind of childhood pastoral. There was a period of uncertainty toward the end of the war. The guards deserted and, before new guards arrived, some people attempted to escape the camp. Ballard's own reaction is revealing: "I looked back at the camp, at the intense, crowded world

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[135] J. G. Ballard, "The End of My War," <u>A User's Guide to the Millennium</u> (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 290.
[136] Ballard, "The End of My War" 290.

that for so long had been my home. Freedom and the war's end seemed fraught

with danger, like the silent sky. I ran back to the wire, glad to be within the safety

of the camp again."[137] Even after the final defeat of the Japanese and the

liberation of the camp, Ballard found himself hitching lifts back there on

American jeeps: "Standing between the bunks, I knew this was where I had been

happiest and most at home, despite being a prisoner living under the threat of an

early death."[138] As with Aldiss, the war provided a paradoxical sense liberation

and identity for Ballard, and, again as with Aldiss, the end of hostilities meant the

return to a closed social system barely perceived before.[139]

As we have so often seen with the other writers examined so far, Ballard

responded to anomie with an escape into literature: "Trying to find my way

through the grey light of post-war, austerity Britain, it was a relief to step into the

rich and larger-spirited world of the great novelists."[140] Indeed, it was his early

childhood reading that had "prepared"[141] him for the England of 1947. Ballard

reports that, even as an adult in his sixties, the books he read as a child are more

vivid than books he read relatively recently.[142] This is not, it seems, solely the

result of the heightened perceptions of childhood – on a thematic level, the

darkness of some children's literature struck a chord with the young Ballard that

would resonate in his later fiction. While he enjoyed <u>Treasure Island</u>, it was other

stories that truly gripped him:

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[137] Ballard, "The End of My War" 284.
[138] Ballard, "The End of My War" 294.
[139] Similar sentiments are expressed in Ballard's novel <u>Empire of the Sun</u>.
[140] J. G. Ballard, "The Pleasures of Reading," <u>A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews</u> (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 178.
[141] Ballard, "The Pleasures of Reading" 181.
[142] Ballard, "The Pleasures of Reading" 178.

[. . .] I suspect <u>The Water Babies</u> and all those sinister fairy tales

played a far more important part in shaping my imagination. Even

at the age of ten or eleven I recognized that something strangely

morbid hovered over their pages, and that dispensing this chilling

miasma might make more sense of the world I was living in than

Stevenson's robust yarns.[143]

After attending school, Ballard had an unsettled time at university,

changing institutions and his course before dropping out. His initial studies were

in medicine (chosen because of an interest in psychiatry), and the ill-fated transfer

was to English. He began to publish in 1956 , and edited the journal <u>Chemistry</u>

<u>and Industry</u>. Ballard, in fact, has an unusually solid and accurate grasp of the

scientific principles he explores in his fiction. By 1962 he had begun to publish

science fiction that is held in the highest critical esteem today.

It is likely that a psychoanalytic reading of fairy tales is what Ballard

refers to when he talks of the "strangely morbid" feel of some children's

literature. Psychoanalysis, and its relation to surrealism, is fundamental to his

fiction. He refers to the images of surrealist art as "the iconography of inner

space" and "landscapes of the soul".[144] This concept, that the vistas of surrealism

engage with and exteriorise the archetypes of the unconscious, finds expression in

Ballard's science fiction: the landscapes that are created by fantastical events are

themselves surreal.[145] His novel <u>Crash</u> (examined in the next chapter) argues that

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[143] Ballard, "The Pleasures of Reading" 180.
[144] J. G. Ballard, "The Coming of the Unconscious," <u>A User's Guide to the Millennium:</u>
<u>Essays and Reviews</u> (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 84.
[145] One is reminded of Aldiss's assessment of the bombimg of Exeter: "Nothing remained.
Nothing, except the cathedral, which stood alone on an unearthly flat plain [. . .] In this surreal

modern technological society is the future existing in the present, and thus the world is a surreal landscape, rich with symbols of the unconscious and transformations of the self. However, in the early, disaster narrative, stage of his writing, deep-seated changes in character mirror similar changes in the environment. In Ballard's novels such metamorphoses seem to be the attainment of self-knowledge, positive adaptations to a changing world, or, as he puts it, "an attempt to confront a patently meaningless universe by challenging it at its own game."[146] All of this is based around surrealist imagery. As David Pringle has noted, he is "an author with a painter's eye rather than a poet's tongue."[147]

Interestingly, this agenda, intellectual and opposed to the desires of the experience reader, is for Ballard a fundamental of the popular-fantastic. As he says, "[a]ll this is the stuff of popular culture, and science fiction is the folk literature of the twentieth century, with the folk tale's hot line to the unconscious."[148] This seems to have at least some connection with those "populist" cultural studies theorists who see the popular as a means of experimenting with desires and new/ideal selves. Michael Delville speaks of Ballard's fiction as something that "reconciles critical and commercial recognition – far-out experimentalism and the conventions of popular fiction – does not let itself be assimilated to traditional generic categories, either within or outside the boundaries of so-called 'genre' fiction," and refers to both Ballard and Aldiss as novelists "writing across high and low, literary and popular

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landscape, Air Marshall Goering had done Salvador Dali's work." Aldiss, The Twinkling of an Eye, or, My Life as an Englishman 23.

[146] J. G. Ballard, "Cataclysms and Dooms," A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 208-09.

[147] David Pringle, Earth Is the Alien Planet: J. G. Ballard's Four Dimensional Nightmare, The Milford Series: Popular Writers of Today (San Bernardo, CA: Borgo, 1979) 6.

[148] J. G. Ballard, "Back to the Heady Future," A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 193.

paradigms."[149] Pringle notes that popular fictions (especially the fantastical, from

the Gothic to science fiction), so often opposed to those realist novels occupying a

higher cultural status, allow for the "fundamental symbolism" that a writer with

Ballard's themes requires.[150] Ballard himself has considered science fiction to be

the true twentieth century literature, providing an imaginative response to the

new, reflecting optimism, mass-marketing, and naivety. Modernism, by contrast,

is a retreat from the new, based in countering the monolithic forces of the

nineteenth century, and "the rationlization of guilt and estrangement."[151] A

perusal of both leftwing and conservative strands of modernist thought (Adorno

and Leavis) will reveal some rather reactionary responses to such developments

as radio and cinema. Ballard regards science fiction as naïve art, a form that for

him includes such figures as Dali and Wells. By naïve artists, he means "those

taking imagination and reality at their face value, never at all sure, or for that

matter concerned, which is which."[152]

Ballard's work, then, contains elements of the popular. Superficially, it

might seem that the terrifying transformations undertaken by his characters are far

removed from something as liberating as the redemption of Scrooge. However,

Ballard, like Dickens, also responded to the fundamental "human nature" inherent

in the fairy story. Informed by the speculations of psychoanalysis, this belief

perhaps manifested itself in an altogether darker way in his fictions.

Nevertheless, those fictions are stories of escape, because they tend to involve

personal change as a means of counteracting the "death of affect". This modern

condition of a mostly emotionless state, characterised by detachment, alienation,

[149] Michael Delville, J. G. Ballard, Writers and Their Work (Plymouth: Northcote, 1998) 2.
[150] Pringle 17.
[151] J. G. Ballard, "The Innocent as Paranoid," A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 93.
[152] Ballard, "The Innocent as Paranoid" 97.

and derealisation, is what Delville is alluding to when he mentions Ballard's "obsession with extreme forms of psychological alienation."[153] Change in Ballard's work should be seen within this context, as an awakening from what Shklovsky thinks of as algebraic thinking (as do Tolkien and Lewis, though their terminology is different). As Delville points out, "Ballard's fiction is as concerned with the possibility of self-fulfilment and spiritual regeneration, as well as with the healing powers of imagination, as it is preoccupied with violence, regression and the entropic dissolution of society and the individual."[154] As the word "dissolution" indicates, transformation can mean psychic or even physical suicide.

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Ballard's first novel was <u>The Wind From Nowhere</u> (1962). This rushed piece is generally considered to be substandard. Gregory Stephenson calls it "altogether his most conventional and most uncharacteristic effort,"[155] and Delville tells us Ballard "disowned" the work.[156] Later in the year however, Ballard published <u>The Drowned World</u>, a story in which regressions – historical/geological, uterine, and psychoanalytic – take place. Solar activity has produced alterations in the Earth's Van Allen belts and upper atmosphere, resulting in a massive increase of radiation and temperature. Most of humankind has migrated to the poles, with some eccentrics, looters, and scientists still living in or visiting the flooded cities. The consequences of environmental change are unexpected: the new conditions roughly correspond to those of the Triassic, and plants and animals – assisted by increased genetic mutation from the solar

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[153] Delville 4.
[154] Delville 5.
[155] Gregory Stephenson, <u>Out of the Night and into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J. G. Ballard</u> (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1991) 42.
[156] Delville 7.

radiation[157] – begin to adapt by devolving back to earlier forms. For human

beings, this means the reawakening of collective, biological race memory.

Primordial instincts/memories, physically present in the brain, are reactivated by

the senses sending imagery of a Triassic landscape into the nervous system. This

has a complex (and somewhat confusing) effect on the human psyche, as the

return to an earlier and pre-conscious mode of thought evokes memories of the

womb as a primal sea and also interacts with the unconscious. The three

regressions – historical/geological, uterine, and psychoanalytic – are presented as

paralleling each other, or even as one and the same process. The dynamic of the

novel is the unfolding drama of the protagonist, Kerans, coming to understand,

accept, and finally implicate himself in the physical and psychological changes, a

pattern which, as Stephenson has said, can be seen in much of Ballard's other

fiction.[158]

In yet another convergence with Aldiss, Ballard uses his formative

perceptions of Asia, mixed with later images of England, for The Drowned

World. In this case, the deluged streets of summertime Shanghai, inundated by

the Yangtze, are mingled with post-war London.[159] As well as having

biographical significance and reference to the childhood pastoral, the flooded

London of the novel – "like a discarded crown overgrown with wild orchids"[160] –

is an example of the dethronement seen in Wells's scientific romances. Here

there is a specific focus on the usurpation of the conscious by the unconscious

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[157] This motif of radiation as catalyst for physical change is a common feature of pulp sf, and may be an unusual misuse of science by Ballard. Genetic mutations caused by radioactivity are far more likely to result in birth defects and cancers than they are useful adaptations.
[158] Stephenson 50.
[159] J. G. Ballard, "Time, Memory and Inner Space," A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 199.
[160] J. G. Ballard, The Drowned World, Sf Masterworks. 17 (London: Millennium-Orion, 1999) 21.

mind. As we will see, Ballard's ideas on surrealism are central to this. The physical world has become indistinguishable from the dream vistas of the unconscious:

> Just as the distinction between the latent and manifest contents of the dream had ceased to be valid, so had any distinction between the real and the super-real in the external world. Phantoms slid imperceptibly from nightmare to reality and back again, the terrestrial and psychic landscapes now indistinguishable, as they had been at Hiroshima and Auschwitz, Golgotha and Gomorrah.[161]

The city has become submerged under water, silt, encroaching vegetation, and mould. Mould, in particular is an interesting image; it is associated with decomposition, but is also new life in itself. As Pringle notes, "[t]he submerged city may present a desolate prospect – and Ballard is not a writer to pass this way without lingering on the potent imagery of all man's works in dissolution – but there is an enormous fecundity and vitality in the life-forms which are imagined as having taken over the lagoons of London."[162] There is a sense of the fortunate catastrophe, of artifice being replaced with the vital and primal, the ego with the unconscious. This is the site of surrealism.

To underline this point, Ballard makes frequent reference to painters and paintings throughout the text, and links these with images of the inundated world, effectively shifting archetypes onto the "canvas" of the novel's landscape. Upon looking at the ruined twin clocks on a large building (St Paul's Cathedral?),

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[161] Ballard, The Drowned World 73-74.
[162] Pringle 19.

Kerans recalls how another character, Riggs, would wind up cathedral clocks in the other cities they had visited: "For nights afterwards, in his dreams Kerans had seen Riggs dressed as William Tell, striding about in a huge Dalinian landscape, planting immense dripping sundials like daggers in the fused sand."[163] Yet another character, Beatrice Dahl (who herself may represent the dangers of the unconscious, as we will see), has paintings by Delvaux and Max Ernst on her walls. The images in these are externalised onto the world and internalised into the mind:

> Kerns threw her a mock salute and strolled over to look at the painting by Ernst at the far end of the lounge, while Bodkin gazed down at the jungle through the window. More and more the two scenes were coming to resemble each other, and in turn the third nightscape each of them carried within his mind. They never discussed their dreams, the common zone of twilight where they moved at night like the phantoms in the Delvaux painting.[164]

The dancing skeletons of the Delvaux painting appear to finally emerge physically as the bones piled around Kerans, and the grotesque, capering, and white-suited form of the albino Strangman, another figure who relates to the double-edged potential of the unconscious. The process also operates in reverse, when Kerans sees Beatrice and Strangman inside the painting "The Marriage of Esther and King Xerxes." The compass Kerans uses to navigate in this surreal world may relate to Dali's melting clocks, pointing, as it does, insistently

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[163] Ballard, The Drowned World 63.
[164] Ballard, The Drowned World 81.

downwards to the South. In physical terms this is toward the Triassic equator and away from the sub-tropical Northern Artic where human civilisation still holds sway, but the two directions are also figurative, reflecting the mixed themes of regression in the novel. Stephenson acknowledges this: North "represents the world as it is perceived by the rationalist, materialist intellect"; South "represents the unconscious mind, the internal world of timeless transcendent reality."[165] Indeed, Kerans knows that the first character to escape, Hardman, will be in the Southern areas of the city, because "there isn't any other direction."[166]

On a symbolic level, it is unclear exactly what constitutes the "down" that leads to the unconscious. South, as we have seen, is one expression of this, but so is diving beneath the waters (this latter metaphor has dark implications when Strangman drains the London lagoon). Kerans's descent into the Planetarium is probably the most striking expression of this theme, and reveals the mixed ideas of regression overtly. The dive is to the historical past (pre-figured by Strangman's earlier remark, "[y]ou look a little melancholy. A touch of time-sickness, perhaps? The chronoclasmic bends?"[167]), the womb, and the unconscious. Ballard's essay "Which Way to Inner Space" reveals that he has again drawn on a surrealist for this scene; in this instance, from Dali and a piece of self-publicity: "As a final text, I'm reminded of the diving suit in which Salvador Dali delivered a lecture some years ago in London. The workman sent along to supervise the suit asked how deep Dali proposed to descend, and with a flourish the maestro exclaimed: 'To the Unconscious!'"[168] The workman's

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[165] Stephenson 46.
[166] Ballard, The Drowned World 57.
[167] Ballard, The Drowned World 92.
[168] J. G. Ballard, "Which Way to Inner Space?" A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1997) 198.

response – "I'm afraid we don't go down that deep"[169] – is represented in the

novel by Strangman: "But don't try to reach the Unconscious, Kerans; remember

it isn't equipped to go down that far!"[170] Earlier in the novel, Bodkin says of the

submerged Planetarium, "[i]t looks like an enormous shell, fucus growing all over

it, straight out of The Water Babies. Curiously, looking at it brought my

childhood much nearer."[171] It is later referred to as "a giant shell-palace from a

fairy tale."[172] Clearly, Ballard is making use of the psychoanalytic aspect he

found in such stories. The symbolism in this scene becomes rather blatant (a fact

not lost on Ballard, as we will see). The water is "warm amniotic jelly,"[173] the

silt-encrusted auditorium is "like a huge velvet-upholstered womb in a surrealist

nightmare," thudding dimly,[174] and we hear that the "deep cradle of silt carried

him gently like an immense placenta."[175] As well as the unconscious and the

womb, the Planetarium also represents the primordial sea, the cracks in the dome

producing a "distant zodiac" of Triassic constellations that makes Kerans like

"some pelagic Cortez emerging from the oceanic deeps to glimpse the immense

Pacifics of the open sky."[176] The image of the planetarium combines perspectives

of regression with a pseudo-religious sense of the mythic. It is interesting that the

first diver into the building believes he has entered a church, that we hear of the

Planetarium's "hull" (the Latin word navis – ship – is the origin of the term

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[169] Ballard, "Which Way to Inner Space?" 198.
[170] Ballard, The Drowned World 103-04.
[171] Ballard, The Drowned World 76.
[172] Ballard, The Drowned World 98.
[173] Ballard, The Drowned World 99.
[174] Ballard, The Drowned World 108.
[175] Ballard, The Drowned World 110. The use of both "cradle" and "placenta" is a somewhat mixed metaphor, but possibly a deliberate one. As Pringle suggests, Ballard can allow similes and metaphors to mix and even contradict each other to create a "portmanteau" image in which, for example, the dual qualities of the beauty and ugliness in a situation can be expressed. Pringle, 15. In this case, the less-problematic combination of security and nourishment is present.
[176] Ballard, The Drowned World 109.

"nave", the largest space in a church), and that it is described as "an immense submarine temple."[177] The final meeting place of Kerans and Hardman, presumably symbolic of the unconscious, is a ruined church.[178] As Freud notes, there is a link between the popular-fantastic and universal or at least cultural myth.

However, despite the novel's use of such phrases as "amniotic paradise"[179], its position on such regressions is ambiguous. For example, Ballard does not sidestep the rather obvious point that desire for a return to the womb is ultimately desire for psychic death. The chapter describing the descent into the Planetarium is titled, "The Pool of Thanatos", and very nearly means death for Kerans. He deliberately loops the oxygen cable around a door handle, ostensibly so that he is not pulled out of the Planetarium, but probably in an unconscious suicide attempt. Within the symbolic womb, "the barriers between his own private bloodstream and that of the giant amnion seemed no longer to exist [. . .] his consciousness faded."[180] The waters contain both promise and threat. Thus, the "amniotic jelly" is also "the foetid embrace of some gigantic protozoan monster."[181] Ballard has said that for the characters in the novel "the dark womb of the ocean mother, is as much the graveyard of their individuality as it is the source of their lives" and that the reptiles that inhabit the water represent this danger.[182] It is quite possible that Ballard chose the image of the reptile for this purpose because the reptilian brain, the R-complex, which lies beneath the limbic system and neocortex in the human brain, represents our evolutionary past, and is

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[177] Ballard, The Drowned World 106.
[178] This is also reminiscent of Aldiss's dream.
[179] Ballard, The Drowned World 70.
[180] Ballard, The Drowned World 110. As Ballard notes, "[f]ive minutes later, sure enough, Dali nearly suffocated inside the helmet." Ballard, "Which Way to Inner Space?" 198.
[181] Ballard, The Drowned World 104.
[182] Ballard, "Time, Memory and Inner Space" 199.

also roughly analogous to the id. The human brain develops during gestation in a re-enactment of the evolutionary process: first the R-complex, then the surrounding the mammalian limbic system, and then, surrounding this, the higher functions of the neocortex.[183] A return to the womb and reversal of this progression would therefore in a sense mean becoming a reptile. For those with unthinking sentimental admiration for Kerans's quest, the novel carries warnings: "Without the reptiles, the lagoons and the creeks of office blocks half-submerged in the immense heat would have had a strange dream-like beauty, but the iguanas and basilisks brought the fantasy down to earth. As their seats in the one-time boardrooms indicated, the reptiles had taken over the city."[184] We hear that "[t]heir harsh shrieking voices filled Kerans with a dull fear that persisted even after the cutter's arrival and their return journey to the base."[185] When Kerans mentions this to Bodkin, he says, "Be warned, Robert; you may hear them again."[186] It is from this point on that Kerans begins to experience "deep dreams" of the Triassic past in which he sees dinosaurs in the midst of the promised paradise. Even the landscape of these dreams can reflect danger, with the shore of a Triassic lagoon "like the dull metallic skin of a reptile."[187] After immersing himself in the "amniotic jelly" he becomes aware of an albino snake, and an albino crocodile, their colouring emphasising their link with Strangman. This presence of the reptile beneath the surface of civilisation is indicted by the photographs of a cultured family upon the crocodile-skin desk in Kerans's Ritz suit.

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[183] Júlio Rocha do Amaral and Jorge Martins de Oliveira, "Limbic System: The Center of Emotions." Online posting, epub.org.br, 2 February 2002.
[184] Ballard, The Drowned World 18.
[185] Ballard, The Drowned World 69.
[186] Ballard, The Drowned World 70.
[187] Ballard, The Drowned World 83.

Surreal scenery is thus fraught with danger to the ego. The image that

Pringle uses most often to describe the London of the novel is Eden. It is "a

scientific Eden from a twentieth-century perspective [. . .] a psychological garden

of Eden,"[188] and "the Eden of preconsciousness."[189] The Drowned World,

however, calls it "an insane Eden."[190] Stephenson believes that the inundation of

the earth by water is a symbol of the individuality's inundation by the

unconscious,[191] but, while this may be partially true, we have seen that the

unconscious is also represented by what lurks beneath the surface of that water.

Thus, when Strangman drains the London lagoon he does not remove the

unconscious but unveils its horror: "Looming just below the dark pellucid surface

were the dim rectangular outlines of the submerged buildings, their open windows

like the empty eyes of enormous drowned skulls. Only a few feet from the

surface, they drew closer, emerging from the depths like an immense intact

Atlantis."[192] To Kerans, it seems that the city has been "resurrected from its own

sewers."[193] With the "Pool of Thanatos" gone, the terror of the absorbing

Planetarium is revealed as "a fragmenting cloak of rotting organic forms, like the

vestments of the grave. The once translucent threshold of the womb had

vanished, its place taken by the gateway to a sewer."[194]

Kerans's role in the psychodrama of the novel is therefore unclear. Are

we to see his odyssey as a positive adaptation to the new world of the surreal that

is approaching (and, in later works by Ballard, is already here), or a negative

symptom of it? While noting that he does not return to civilisation, Delville

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[188] Pringle 20.
[189] Pringle 21.
[190] Ballard, The Drowned World 53.
[191] Stephenson 47.
[192] Ballard, The Drowned World 120.
[193] Ballard, The Drowned World 126.
[194] Ballard, The Drowned World 127.

compares Keran's journey with that of Marlow in <u>Heart of Darkness</u>.[195] This is

not unreasonable. Arguably, Riggs and Strangman both represent different

aspects of Kurtz, and the return to the womb could describe Marlow's passage up

the birth canal of the Congo to the primal and feminine imagery at the heart of

darkness. Of course, Kerans is not as initially grounded in civilisation as Marlow:

he has never known the world that has gone and is effectively a child of the flood.

He does not so much discover "the horror" as transcend it and become a new

being. Kerans has the not-quite messianic quality of Complain, a feature that

seems to be symbolised by Strangman's abuse of him. At the novel's conclusion

he is referred to as "a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the

reborn sun,"[196] which recalls St Paul's image of Christ as a second Adam,

representing the shift from Fall to Redemption.[197] Delville notes that, once he has

lost his individuality, Kerans becomes "an archetypal figure standing for

mankind's longing for a prelapsarian state."[198] When Strangman and his men

torture Kerans, he is suspended above a kind of Golgotha, a "white harvest of

bones"[199] at his feet, a tin crown placed on his head. As he hangs there in the

fierce sun, a final transformation seems to takes place as he is able to survive the

heat, perhaps basking, reptile-like, in it. Thus he is, in a sense, the new human

that Christ embodies. This interpretation is, however, highly figurative: there is

no indication of humankind reaching a higher state following the <u>felix culpa</u>.

Rather, Kerans returns to what Pringle calls "unthinking organic existence,"[200]

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[195] Delville 8.
[196] Ballard, <u>The Drowned World</u> 175.
[197] "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." <u>1 Corinthians</u> 15.45.
[198] Delville 10.
[199] Ballard, <u>The Drowned World</u> 136.
[200] Pringle 20.

and "the Eden of preconsciousness,"[201] which is presumably why he attains the reptile nature of basking in the sun. He is the ego and its ultimate disintegration, an example of the popular-fantastic playing with identity, as the reader can, at a distance, experience Kerans's journey and regression.

By contrast, Pringle labels Riggs as a "figure that could be viewed as analogous to the Super-Ego." Certainly, he is seemingly impervious to the regressions around him and is a force of order and civilisation, "obeying reason and logic."[202] As such, he is rather like the "enlightened" Kurtz, forcibly "helping" the natives of the cities toward civilisation. We see in him almost a caricature of an English officer, and there are also hints from the other characters that he is a colonialist. Beatrice says to him, "[w]hats the matter Colonel? Looking for your punka-wallah?"[203], a phrase adopted later by Strangman: "Ask the Colonel to lend you his punka-wallah."[204] As with Kerans, the role of Riggs is ambiguous. He can be seen as a positive force, combating the horrors of the unconscious. Though, as the super-ego becomes less meaningful for his psyche, Kerans finds himself "unable to accept wholly the idea of Riggs' reality."[205]

Beatrice Dahl is closer to the unconscious. As the only woman in the story, she may be there to personify the paradise/death of the womb imagery. The womb attracts and destroys, and thus Beatrice is a kind of Siren of the unconscious. As Roger Luckhurst points out, "it is she who owns the surrealist paintings that may act as key to unlock significances. Kerans' early

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[201] Pringle 21.
[202] Ballard, The Drowned World 75.
[203] Ballard, The Drowned World 27.
[204] Ballard, The Drowned World 160.
[205] Ballard, The Drowned World 157-58.

indecisiveness only becomes solidified in her presence."[206] She is "the feminine

as catastrophe and apocalypse."[207] Pringle states that Ballard's female characters

are aspects of the Anima, the ideal feminine of the male unconscious, and

therefore threaten the male self.[208] Putting aside for the moment whether this

represents genuine anxieties or is a highly questionable presentation of femininity,

the text does portay Beatrice as menacing. When we first see her she is basking

beside a swimming pool (a "tank of steaming, insect-strewn fluid"[209]), "her long

oiled body gleaming in the shadows like a sleeping python."[210] Kerans sees her

as Pandora, "with her killing mouth and witches box of desires and

frustrations."[211] and as the death mask of Nefertiti "in the depths of the

necropolis."[212] Seen in this light, she is like the savage woman linked to Kurtz, or

the title character of Haggard's She. However, Kerans's transformation is in

some ways a triumph, and Beatrice helps him to accomplish it. As Luckhurst

notes, "Beatrice" is Dante's guide in Paradise,[213] providing revelation (though

Luckhurst's implication, that Kerans is within paradise, is not necessarily correct:

Dante actually meets Beatrice in Purgatory). This, of course, would apply to the

notion of Kerans's journey as one of redemption. Beatrice's surname "Dahl"

refers to Dali, a more secular figure of revelation.

Stephenson is of the opinion that Strangman represents the ego.[214] This

certainly makes sense for Stephenson's interpretation of the text, bearing in mind

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[206] Roger Luckhurst, "The Angle between Two Walls": The Fiction of J. G. Ballard, Liverpool
Science Fiction Texts and Studies (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1997) 57.
[207] Luckhurst 58.
[208] Pringle 49.
[209] Ballard, The Drowned World 26.
[210] Ballard, The Drowned World 25.
[211] Ballard, The Drowned World 31.
[212] Ballard, The Drowned World 151.
[213] Luckhurst 57. Though, as Luckhurst reminds us, she is also presented as Pandora:
"Woman as guide may become woman as embodiment of death drive." Luckhurst 57.
[214] Stephenson 48.

that he considers the inundating water to be the unconscious submerging the conscious – Strangman drains the lagoon. In addition to this, Strangman constantly mocks the other characters' sense that they are returning to the Triassic/womb/unconscious. This can provide light relief, as when "[t]he whole passage of Kerans' dive into the planetarium is undermined by Strangman's ironic commentary on its corny and thunderingly obvious 'return to the womb' symbolism,"[215] and one wonders if it is not actually present to provide a necessary sceptical reaction to the events. Significantly, Strangman's hydroplane awakens Kerans from deep dreaming. As an albino, the primal sun does not stain him. Delville, however, thinks of Strangman as "the Kurtz figure of the novel", embodying "the darker implications of the pre-national realm of the phantasmagoric jungle."[216] Indeed, if Riggs is the pompous Kurtz of European reason, Strangman is Kurtz "gone native", as his instigation of (stereotypical) savage ritual suggests. Something that should be carefully noted is his relationship with reptiles. He uses trained alligators as guards, saying "I'd have those 'gators dancing on their tails If I wanted to."[217] The fact that he is an albino can also be interpreted as a feature he has in common with many of the reptiles in the novel, and, as has been noted, makes him an externalisation of the imagery in the Delvaux painting. He is seen "[r]acing around the lagoons like the delinquent spirit of the drowned city, apotheosis of all its aimless violence and cruelty."[218] While he certainly does drain the lagoon, what is revealed can be viewed as the horrors of the unconscious, those dangers represented by the reptiles who can normally only break the water's surface. Kerans is obsessed with the rhythm of

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[215] Luckhurst 55.
[216] Delville 8.
[217] Ballard, The Drowned World 114.
[218] Ballard, The Drowned World 115.

his dreams, and this rhythm is manifested in the ritualised acts of violence carried out by Strangman and his men, indicating two faces of the unconscious. Interestingly, Strangman, who symbolises the worst impulses of the id, is defeated by Riggs, that character identified as the super-ego.

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What is the central theme of The Drowned World? Is it one of a humanity in decline, or of one adapting to a new environment? The confused mixture of regressive imagery[219] seems to point both ways.

As we have seen, the womb promises paradise at the expense of dissolution and the end of consciousness, a state that in any meaningful sense could only be thought of as death. As Pringle notes, "[t]o go back to the womb is to become a fetus again; to search for the forgotten paradises of the Sun is to become dissolved once more in the great biological soup in which we all originated."[220] Consequently, Kerans's quest is, when viewed in this way, merely a quest for suicide. When Kerans meets Hardman, his precursor who has gone into the South before him, he finds an emaciated figure "no more than a resurrected corpse,"[221] incoherent and almost blind with corneal cancers from the exposure to radiation. It seems likely that death will soon arrive for them both. The unconscious that they have sacrificed so much to reach is a monstrous place. The womb is revealed to be a sewer, the drained lagoon seething with Triassic alligators.

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[219] The rather tenuous connection between the Triassic, womb, and unconscious is made by Bodkin, who argues that primordial memories are located in the central nervous system and that the foetus's development is a "uterine odyssey" that "recapitulates the entire evolutionary past." Ballard, The Drowned World 44. Furthermore, because these memories are likely to be of danger, they have a similarity to repressed trauma: "Just as psychoanalysis reconstructs the original traumatic situation in order to release the repressed material, so we are now being plunged back to the archaeopsychic past, uncovering the ancient taboos and drives that that have been dormant for epochs." Ballard, The Drowned World 43-44.
[220] Pringle 21.
[221] Ballard, The Drowned World 171.

However, it is possible to think of this process of regression and loss of self in a more positive light. Pringle sees the tension between the freedom of dissolution and the fear of "death" as a major theme in Ballard's work:

> To be a fully conscious and self-aware individual is to be imprisoned in one's body and mind [. . .] There is an opposite impulse in human beings – a desire to lose one's consciousness, to plunge into delirious states, to commune with the universe, to experience what Freud called the 'oceanic.' This can be interpreted as a desire for death or for something larger than death. A rapturous forgetfulness of self does not necessarily mean oblivion. The human being is torn both ways: individuality is precious, yet frail and totally at the mercy of time; dissolution of the self is dangerous (and ultimately inevitable), and yet it can be ecstasy. It is this grand existential conundrum – the conflict between the conscious and the unconscious, between the being and the environment, between life (in a limited sense) and death (in the widest sense) – which Ballard's fiction dramatizes.[222]

Other commentators on Ballard have made similar assessments. Brigg asserts that what is involved is a movement away from the conquest of nature to a discovery and adaptation of the psyche, concluding that Kerans does not commit suicide but carries out "an act of acceptance of the path to psychic wholeness."[223] Stephenson sees the event in more mystical terms, saying that destruction of the

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[222] Pringle 58.

[223] Peter Brigg, J. G. Ballard, Starmont Reader's Guide 26 (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont, 1985) 46.

ego and even the body are a "means to the fullest self-realization and to fulfilment in union with infinite being."[224] He calls this a "numinous" and spiritual experience,[225] a description that recalls Bedford's <u>nirvāna</u> in <u>The First Men in the Moon</u>. "Union with infinite being" would certainly end alienation. On a more prosaic level, <u>The Drowned World</u> is simply the story of people attempting to recapture the childhood pastoral, which is literal in the case of Bodkin, who was actually born in London and is seen "punting aimlessly around the narrow creeks in search of the submerged world of his childhood."[226]

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

The novel is, then, about discovering new selves and achieving escape from an alienated state of full self-awareness. When concentrating on <u>The Drowned World's</u> more theoretical elements, it is easy to forget that its bizarre (and unlikely) world of radioactive mutations is straight from pulp science fiction. In addition to this, there are prolonged moments of action with little or no subtext: the scuttling of the testing station; Kerans's escape from Strangman and his attempted rescue of Beatrice; the re-flooding of the lagoon and the flight to the South. Could the reading self be in a sense forgotten in wonder, in the process of reading such material? We have talked about the experience reader being "immersed" in reading pleasure. That would seem a highly appropriate phrase to describe this novel.

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[224] Stephenson 47.
[225] Stephenson 48.
[226] Ballard, <u>The Drowned World</u> 84.

Chapter Four: The Fantastic in Postmodernity

It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and in deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own.
The desert of the real itself.

Jean Baudrillard[1]

Welcome to the desert of the real.

Laurence Fishburne in The Matrix[2]

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[1] Jean Baudrillard, Simulations, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman, Foreign Agent Series (New York, NY: Semiotext[e], 1983) 2.
[2] Laurence Fishburne, perf., The Matrix (Warner Bros., 1999).

Postmodernism is notoriously difficult to define. In addition to theoretical

difficulties, the term is confusingly polymorphous. Certainly, it relates to a

perceived crisis in Enlightenment thought, and a new doubt over the validity of all

grand narratives, but it is unclear whether postmodernism is a description of this

state or a response to it, a critique or a celebration. Furthermore, it can be

difficult to reconcile the varied philosophical positions mentioned above with

those cultural products described as "postmodern".

* * *

Jean-Francois Lyotard sees postmodernism as, among other things, "a war

on totality."[3] For him, postmodernity is a multiplicity of incommensurable

language games, by which he means a collection of various "truths" that are

actually games in which the participants agree on certain "rules" of discourse.[4]

Employing an analogy reminiscent of the game of chess Saussure uses to describe

parole and langue, Lyotard argues that each language game has specific rules, and

that individual utterances can be considered "moves" in the game, obeying those

rules.[5] The difference with Saussurean linguistics is that, rather than referring to

the system and use of a language, Lyotard (like Wittgenstein) apparently posits

language as a network of localised cultural subsystems (language games).

If this theory is correct, then all knowledge is relative. There is no Truth,

not even the scientific truth that is implicated in almost every aspect of our lives.

Lyotard tells us that scientific knowledge is merely a kind of discourse,[6] one

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[3] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?," trans. Regis Durand, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984) 82.

[4] Acknowledgement of this is the political element of postmodernism: "It is those in power who imply that these individual language games are in fact commensurable." Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984) xxiv.

[5] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge 10.

[6] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge 3.

based solely on the language game of denotation.[7] Thus scientists, far from

discovering facts, are simply participants in a self-referential consensus:

> With modern science, two new features appear in the problematic
of   legitimation. To begin with, it leaves behind the metaphysical
search   for a first proof or transcendental authority as a response to the
> question: 'How do you prove the proof?' or, more generally, 'Who
> decides the conditions of truth?' It is recognized that the
conditions of   truth, in other words, the rules of the game of science, are
immanent in   that game, that they can only be established within the
bonds of a   debate that is already scientific in nature, and that
there is no other   proof that the rules are good than the
consensus extended to them by   the experts.[8]

This position seems absurd. How can the many achievements of science, without

some of which it is quite possible Lyotard would not even be alive to make the

above assertion, be the results of relative truth in a language game? However, it

is hard if not impossible to disprove a negative, and Lyotard's thesis is in many

ways a negative one.[9] There is even some justification for his argument, provided

that it is removed from the "real" world we habitually accept and applied to

philosophical areas that are not the province of the scientific method. While it is

highly desirable to be a materialist when engaged in practical research,

contemplation of the fundamental nature of reality is something different, and

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[7] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge 25.
[8] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge 29.
[9] He is saying what science is not (i.e. objective). Once a position of radical scepticism has been assumed, everything can be denied.

doubt of sensory information must be accepted in the debate.[10] Can science defend itself at this level? In their otherwise excellent book Intellectual Impostures, physicists Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont make a case against solipsism and radical scepticism, but fail to set out a convincing argument. They acknowledge that they cannot actually refute solipsism, qualifying this by saying "the mere fact that an idea is irrefutable does not imply that there is any reason to believe it is true."[11] Unfortunately, this caveat applies to their position also. Their argument is that sensations produced by the imagination alone are in flux, and can be controlled by the will, whereas perceptions of the "real" world have "persistence" and cannot be altered by thought. What they (accurately) describe is two categories of experience, one unstable and malleable, the other fixed and unyielding. They go on to say, "[t]he best way to account for the coherence of our experience is to suppose that the outside world corresponds, at least approximately, to the image of the world provided by our senses."[12] They do not, however, explain why this is the "best way to account" for fixed and unyielding experience. The unquestioning assumption implied here rather adds weight to Lyotard's contention. Sokal's and Bricmont's other argument – the correspondence between theory and experiment – is only significant if their first point is accepted. Bearing this in mind, doubting science's ability to provide Truth seems to be, ironically, rational.

Thus, areas of knowledge such as science have, it is argued, been reduced from their status as grand narratives and become little narratives, mere stories

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[10] Having said that, the new physics is not strictly materialistic (and yet it offers philosophical insights into human reality). It has, however, been arrived at via scientific method. This creates an interesting problem for Lyotard's scientific "validation" of his ideas.

[11] Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science (London: Profile, 1998) 52.

[12] Sokal and Bricmont 54.

about the world, referring only to themselves. Consequently, as distinctions between knowledge and experience collapse, the real is aestheticised: "a gradual displacement of discovery, depth, truth, correspondence and coherence with construction, surface, fictionality, self-reflexive narrative and ironic fragmentation: realism giving way to idealism and then to an all-pervasive textualism."[13] This can be seen in scientific developments that apparently challenge determinism. For example, Lyotard asserts that the undecideable status (until perceived by an observer) of particles in quantum physics means that the division between rational and aesthetic knowledge has gone. Referring to Mandelbrot's work on the unpredictable irregularity of natural shapes, Lyotard goes on to argue that aestheticisation of scientific knowledge is not restricted to microphysics, but in fact extends to unpredictable systems on every level.[14]

In extreme postmodernism there is no autonomy: human beings follow the rules of language games, are in a sense produced by language games. This can be seen as a welcome development, because it emphasises that a work of art is also a product of language games, thus denying cultural hegemony by revealing "the complicity of all art with the cultural assumptions of its time."[15] This results in cultural democratisation and artistic pluralism: mass culture can challenge high culture on equal terms. Just as "narratives" of history, science, and ethics (for

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[13] Patricia Waugh, "Postmodernism," Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives, eds. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris, vol. 9 (of The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 292.

[14] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge 53-60. Lyotard refers to Mandelbrot's "catastrophe theory". Perhaps this should have been translated as "chaos theory"? However, there is a contradiction in the argument, as Waugh points out: "the very examples used to proclaim that the legitimacy of the scientific method is now exhausted, are simultaneously mobilised to provide the scientific legitimacy of Lyotard's own position." Patricia Waugh, "Postmodernism and Feminism," Modern Literary Theory: A Reader, eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, 4th ed. (London: Arnold-Hodder, 2001) 352.

[15] Waugh, "Postmodernism" 295.

example) cannot offer truth, there can be no claim that one work of art is somehow intrinsically superior to another.

The shift from meaning/truth to aesthetics describes a kind of romantic reality, and the sublime does indeed play a part in postmodernism. Lyotard's own account of the sublime is arrived at through a brief discussion of Kant. While emphasising the difference between knowledge and the sublime for Kant (the former involves direct correspondence between "cases" and concepts; the latter involves experience of an object producing pure – and unknowable - reason), Lyotard dismisses the Kantian sublime because it implies a link between the inner and the outer, an object somehow having an inherent quality. As Patricia Waugh notes, Lyotard sees such a link as dangerous, leading to totalitarian political ideologies. He favours challenging any alleged correlation of this sort through the use of irony. To him, contemporary art attempts to "present the fact that the unpresentable exists."[16]

This postmodern sublime is a mixture of pleasure and pain: "the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility is not equal to the concept."[17] Unlike the Romantic critique of reason, with its grand narrative of "imaginative knowing and the truth of the human heart" postmodernism does not provide any transcendent position.[18] It may be that the postmodern sublime emerges from radical uncertainty in relation to all things, including materialism.

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[16] Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" 78.
[17] Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" 81.
[18] Patricia Waugh, "Postmodernism: Introduction," <u>Modern Literary Theory: A Reader</u>, eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, 4th ed. (London: Arnold-Hodder, 2001) 326.

Where Lyotard's interest is the supposed end of grand narratives, Jean Baudrillard's main concern with postmodernity is the aestheticisation of reality. He discusses "simulation" of the real, and its consequences. The language he uses implies that there is literally no material world, merely simulacra,[19] but it is more likely he is specifically discussing human perception of reality. It is important to note, however, that simulation of the real is indistinguishable from the real itself. For example, while feigning an illness is a matter of pretence, simulating an illness actually involves experiencing the symptoms. The latter instance, therefore, "leaves the reality principle intact."[20] Baudrillard argues that this experience of symptoms is not a "real" mental illness. He suggests that simulation may take place in the unconscious, and that symptoms the unconscious produces are themselves simulacra.[21] Simulation has overtaken reality because the real has been saturated with the imaginary, and is therefore no longer distinguishable from it. For example, where once television was a spectacular medium, it is currently so present in our lives that it can not now be identified and isolated. In this sense we are all on/in television.[22]

Baudrillard outlines three historical orders of appearance – counterfeit, production, and simulation – dominant in the classical, industrial, and current periods respectively.[23] He describes Renaissance man as a "worldly demiurge", transforming nature into theatrical signs which took form in architecture etc. In the industrial period people took on the characteristics of machines, and, through

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[19] Simulacrum: "2) a) Something having merely the form or appearance of a certain thing, without possessing its substance or proper qualities." The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed.
[20] Baudrillard, Simulations 5.
[21] Baudrillard, Simulations 7.
[22] Baudrillard, Simulations 54-55.
[23] Baudrillard, Simulations 83.

mass production, the objects of the real became copies without an origin.[24]

Appearances in today's culture consist of signs that do not reflect, mask, distort,

or even challenge reality: "At this level the question of signs, of their rational

destination, the illusion they create or that which they conceal or their parallel

meanings – all of that is erased."[25] Baudrillard claims that a "revolution" of

thought has "annihilated" reference, leaving only structural play.[26] Now signs

only interact or play with each other, and the sign is, as it were, liberated from

signification. This is because, for Baudrillard, there is no ultimate transcendent

reference point, such as God, to guarantee that signs signify the real. It is not

signs themselves that are significant, but their organisation in the "code" of

"structural law".[27] This situation, the end of reference and structural play of the

sign, the saturation of the real by the imaginary, has given rise to hyperreality.

Hyperreality has some correspondence to Lyotard's idea of the

postmodern condition. As is the case in Lyotard's model of postmodernity,

hyperreality is based around relativism and lack of metaphysical certainty.

However, Baudrillard focuses his argument on teasing out the alarming

consequences of aestheticisation:

> With it goes all of metaphysics. No more mirror of being and
>
> appearances, of the real and its concept; no more imaginary
>
> coextensivity: rather, genetic miniaturization is the dimension of
>
> simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized units, from
>
> matrices, memory banks and command models – and with these it

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[24] Baudrillard, Simulations 96.

[25] Baudrillard, Simulations 104.

[26] Jean Baudrillard, "Symbolic Exchange and Death," Literary Theory: An Anthology, eds.
Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Revised ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998) 487.

[27] Baudrillard, "Symbolic Exchange and Death" 489.

can   be reproduced an infinite number of times. It no longer has to be

rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or

negative   instance. It is nothing more than operational. In fact, since

it is no   longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at

all.[28]

He appears to be saying that it is the absence of a separate aesthetic sphere, as

well as the actual aestheticisation of the real, that produces hyperreality. The

crucial dialectic of reality and imagination has collapsed. To some extent this is a

performative phenomenon – people responding to a crisis in the same way they

have seen fictional characters behave, for example. As Baudrillard has said of

cinema, "[w]here is the cinema? It is all around you outside, all over the city, that

marvellous continuous performance of films and scenarios."[29] In this hyperreal

world, the real has been replaced by signs of itself,[30] and "[i]llusion is no longer

possible because the real is no longer possible."[31] So, not only has the real ceased

to exist (at least in Western human perception), but its replacement – hyperreality

– cannot be transcended through, for example, fantastical literature: "And so art is

everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality. And so art is dead, not

only because its critical transcendence is gone, but because reality itself, entirely

impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparable from its own structure, has been

confused with its own image."[32] This position has something in common with

Marcuse's idea that art has lost its ability to transcend because it has become a

degraded capitalist product and thus material.

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[28] Baudrillard, <u>Simulations</u> 3.
[29] Jean Baudrillard, <u>America</u> (London: Verso, 1989) 56.
[30] Baudrillard, <u>Simulations</u> 4.
[31] Baudrillard, <u>Simulations</u> 38.
[32] Baudrillard, <u>Simulations</u> 151-52.

The "political" dimension of hyperreality, in which the end of reference has led to liberation of signs and an end to determinism, is an ambiguous one for Baudrillard, because there is tyranny inherent in the sign system itself. While, due to the end of the real (and thus material production), we are not living in a capitalist society, that does not mean that we do not simulate capitalism. Baudrillard suggests we occupy a "hyper-capitalist" system, one that is not based on commodity value, but which nevertheless involves social control, because structural value is "pure" and "illegible" social domination.[33] Baudrillard asserts that this "network of codes" can be disassembled by using difference against itself. "Coded differences" will be undermined by "an uncodeable absolute difference" that the sign system cannot recognise or absorb.[34]

* * *

Postmodernism seems to offer a logical development of this dissertation's argument. Not only have many writers of the fantastic (including two we have already examined) come to embrace postmodern ideas in the form and content of their novels, but, on a theoretical level, the important role of the sublime and the rejection of the materialistic/rationalistic are significant. As Jameson proposes, postmodernist architecture discards the political stance and "affect (depth, anxiety, terror, the emotions of the monumental)" of modernism and replaces them with "what Coleridge would have called fancy."[35] In addition, the postmodern attack on privileged positions of knowledge effectively removes the cultural hierarchy in which fantastical and escapist works of literature have usually occupied a low place. However, postmodernism also removes that

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[33] Baudrillard, "Symbolic Exchange and Death" 492.
[34] Baudrillard, "Symbolic Exchange and Death" 505.
[35] Fredric Jameson, Forward, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, By Jean-Francois Lyotard (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984) xviii.

distinction between the real and fictive which is required if experience reading

and transcendence are to take place. It raises many questions and contains

internal contradictions. Much of this can be understood by acknowledging that

postmodernism is an "-ism", and imposes its own totalising view on reality.

Frederic Jameson suggests that Lyotard's reduction of "truth" to localised

little narratives is accomplished via a new grand narrative: "something like a

global or totalizing 'crisis' in the narrative function in general."[36] As Waugh puts

it, "If postmodernism has taught us that we cannot separate the object of

knowledge from the various language games through which it is constructed, then

why should we accept any historical 'grand narrative' of postmodernism itself?"[37]

She goes on: "Theorists of postmodernism are endlessly caught in the

performative contradictions of obsessively naming the unnameable even as they

decry the activity of naming as incipiently totalitarian." Jameson is of the opinion

that grand narratives have not disappeared but shifted "underground" where they

influence judgments unconsciously. This is his famous concept of the Political

Unconscious. While stating that Lyotard sees postmodern art as dissatisfaction

with a degraded modernism, that will in turn be replaced by a new, valid,

modernism (leading to dissatisfaction again and so on, in a cycle), Jameson

believes that the postmodern rejection of formal invention is "a new social

conservatism."[38] It is certainly true that postmodern pluralism directly opposes

high modernist elitism.

However, leaving these internal contradictions to one side for the moment,

we can see that postmodernism's notion of the sublime and concept of pluralism

are more obviously problematic. As has been noted, postmodernism denies the

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[36] Jameson xi.
[37] Waugh, "Postmodernism" 290.
[38] Jameson xvi-xvii.

existence of a transcendent autonomous subject. Its idea of the sublime can therefore not be related to the self in the way Dickens's conception of "amusement" can. Furthermore, as Baudrillard points out, the aestheticisation of the real means that there is no imaginative sphere to escape to. Consequently, there can be no genuine liberty in the pleasure literature may offer, only a kind of manic pretence. Postmodern society is (ironically) a totality of linguistic social constructivism, and the "freedom" presented is ultimately an empty one. With no transcendent self, postmodernity becomes "a monolithic cultural determinism from which the only escape must be into a textualist world void of freedom as jouissance, consumer hedonism or criticism as freeplay."[39] In addition, postmodern cultural pluralism is actually relativism, with all works of literature (for example) becoming equal in their meaninglessness. This cultural relativism ultimately emerges from the epistemological relativism that is at the base of postmodernism.

* * *

Examining postmodernism from a feminist standpoint, Waugh defends some aspects of the Enlightenment project. So, while stating that feminism has criticised the Enlightenment due to its "white male middleclass" conception of a universal subject, she emphasises that the intention of feminism has generally been to modify Enlightenment ideas, extending them to women.[40] By rejecting human agency in favour of language games, and denying any one discourse a position of validity over another, postmodern theory eliminates feminism along with the other grand narratives.

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[39] Waugh, "Postmodernism" 299.
[40] Waugh, "Postmodernism and Feminism" 346-47.

Distinguishing between cultural products and objective knowledge, because the latter deals with and impacts on material realities, Waugh suggests that rational thought should guide actual political principles, whereas the sublime should exist in fiction and provide "imaginary vision".[41] Waugh's proposal – that the real should be governed by rational thought while the fictive should deal with the sublime – is vital if popular-fantastical literary pleasure, and its associated quality of escape into the imaginative/fantastical sphere of the mind, is to remain possible for readers. Also, a divide between the aesthetic and the world, with rational thought as the final arbiter of material action, means that the dangerous mythology seen in Fascist states is prevented. The distinction relates to the notion of two orders of reality: the material and the fictive.[42] As suggested earlier, a materialistic mindset is necessary when dealing with material issues, from science to politics. However, the kinds of pleasures and freedoms that can be derived from this are necessarily limited. This dissertation argues that desire will always be frustrated in a purely materialistic scenario, while acknowledging the (obvious) necessity for material action and rational thought. Materialistic and fictive (i.e. sublime, fantastical) realities could be said to describe the practices of critical reading and experience reading. Referring to binaries such as autonomy and aestheticisation, science and art, Waugh calls for such distinctions to remain, and for both sides to be used without allowing one to "subsume into the other".[43]

In his book on the Two Cultures debate – <u>Newton's Sleep: The Two Cultures and the Two Kingdoms</u> – Raymond Tallis examines the binary of science and art, and his conclusions provide a theoretical framework for the

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[41] Waugh, "Postmodernism and Feminism" 358.
[42] These might be related to Wells's categories of "grosser sense" and "metaphysical sense". See Appendix
[43] Waugh, "Postmodernism and Feminism" 305.

distinction Waugh discusses. Tallis is a professor of geriatric medicine, so it is somewhat surprising that he argues consciousness cannot have come about via natural selection.[44] This is because, in Darwinism, new varieties and adaptations are the end product of a vast number of incremental changes, random genetic mutations selected for survival by virtue of the slight advantage they give an organism. Tallis has two main objections to this as an explanation for the existence of consciousness. The first is that the development of consciousness cannot be regarded as akin to the development of a physical attribute. Absolutely attacking Dawkins's suggestion that photoelectric cells in an organism can be considered a stage towards conscious "vision" (Tallis rightly concludes that unconscious response to stimuli is fundamentally different to aware perception), Tallis makes the difficult but significant point that, while there are different levels of consciousness, one cannot be slightly conscious – one either is or isn't. Consequently, there can not have been incremental stages leading up to consciousness (because, unlike the evolution of a physical attribute, there can never be a stage that is something other than or prior to consciousness).[45] His second argument is to challenge the most important criteria consciousness would have to possess to be a product of natural selection: utility and advantage in the struggle for survival. Positing that unconscious processing of information could be of equal if not greater value, Tallis gives examples such as flies performing intricate and rapid manoeuvres to avoid pursuit and bees creating hives and communicating complex data to each other, all unconsciously. Even if insects

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[44] As Tallis himself puts it, "As one who has been brought up within and still largely continues to think within scientific orthodoxy, I am aware that this is no minor heresy." Raymond Tallis, Newton's Sleep: The Two Cultures and the Two Kingdoms (London: St Martin's-Macmillan, 1995) 112.

[45] As Tallis explains, there may be different stages of pregnancy, but one cannot be slightly pregnant. Tallis 115-16.

have some form of consciousness, they clearly do not require the level of it that humans do in order to have complex societies and survival strategies. With what may be a touch of mischievousness, Tallis notes that the most intricate object known – the human brain – is created on a regular basis without the need for any conscious action or supervision.[46] His point appears to be that automata capable of unconsciously processing information, to the same degree that people do consciously, would achieve what human society has done. But Tallis goes further than this, suggesting that consciousness is a <u>disadvantage</u> in survival terms, and that unconscious mechanism would be preferred. For example, he contrasts the well-ordered society of ants with the self-destructive wars of a fully self-conscious creature that "plans and has protracted and abstract and carefully nourished grudges." Returning to the issue of brain development in the womb, Tallis asserts that this can <u>only</u> come about through an unconscious process – attempting to consciously manufacture a human brain would be impossible.[47] We are so used to associating language, co-operation, etc. with consciousness it is tempting to consider that attribute as necessary to the group survival of a species. However, the complex societies and communication systems of some insects call such an assertion into question.

Tallis's conclusion, therefore, is that human consciousness has no practical function: it is useless (or even worse than useless). At least, it is useless in a material, utilitarian sense. Discussing the problem of being, Tallis talks of "an incurable wound in the tense", the inability (for the modern Western mind, at

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[46] Tallis 118.

[47] Tallis 118-19. Other arguments include: consciousness can not have been an accident of the developing nervous system because "there is no way of explaining why an increasing number of connections between increasing numbers of neurones should accidentally give rise to something totally different from those neurones."; human consciousness, with its complicated and abstract pre-occupations, such as metalinguistics, "absurdly exceeds its evolutionary brief." Tallis 120-21.

least – a feature of postmodernity?) to exist in the present. He has already argued at length that art has done very little to civilise us, and has been of no real material benefit. He therefore combines this "useless" art with "useless" consciousness, the former being an expression of the latter, to provide a familiar model of art as transcendence and escape from alienation (in this case, the escape of a consciousness alienated from itself): "Art is about achieving arrival and arresting, however momentarily, becoming to being [. . .] Art helps us to be more solidly there."[48] Art does this through its "form". That is to say, it can organise the ideas of abstract knowledge (in a way that non-artistic forms do not) so that those ideas can actually be experienced by us in a direct manner akin to sensory perception.[49] Art is thus materially useless, experience for its own sake (which is exactly what Tallis considers consciousness to be) on the one hand, but on the other is a vital product of a consciousness attempting to sustain and heal itself.

This has direct relevance for postmodernism, or, at least, postmodernity. As Tallis says, "art will be essential to enable us to come to terms with a world transformed by science and technology."[50] Linking this to Waugh's distinction between the material and the fictive, the role of literature here becomes almost traditional: it exists to provide a sublime transcendence for the ailing postmodern consciousness, even while material considerations are dealt with rationally. It may not be correct to say that this is a sublime arising from radical uncertainty, but this essay argues that the level of abstraction Tallis refers to, relating to ideas dislocated from experience, implies thought that is beyond the systematised structure of grand narratives.

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[48] Tallis 150-51.
[49] Tallis 152-57.
[50] Tallis 210.

Although two of the novels examined in the following chapter are written by authors often still considered science fiction writers, they properly belong to high contemporary culture. Postmodernism's promised plurality does exist, at least for those works of art designated as postmodern. Brian Aldiss's Frankenstein Unbound, Angela Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, and J. G. Ballard's Crash are all novels that explore the crisis of aestheticisation, with the fantastic and fictive invading the material order of reality. They can be thought of as responses to a society in which reality reaches us only after being mediated by conventions of myth and narrative. This is consistently portrayed as detrimental – the novels demonstrate the ambiguity of postmodernism – but it is not uncritically celebrated either. In the following section, these three postmodern novels of the early 1970s will be studied with an emphasis on what they say about the postmodern condition, and what strategies they offer to end it or liberate oneself from it.

Frankenstein Unbound

In his history of science fiction, Trillion Year Spree,[51] Brian Aldiss nominates Mary Shelley's Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus as the first true sf work. It is not hard to find earlier candidates – such as astronomer Johannes Kepler's seventeenth-century account of a lunar journey, Somnium (The Dream) – but Aldiss believes it is in Shelley's novel that the themes of science fiction are for the first time used in a consistent and deliberate way. These are:

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[51] This is an updated version of Aldiss's classic work Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction, and is co-authored with David Wingrove.

the foregrounding of science as the source of the fantastic; the devaluing of non-

scientific knowledge; a critique of science itself. Much has been made of the

relevance Shelley's tale has to its historical context, and Aldiss notes that the year

of its publication (1818) saw many major technological developments.[52] The

spirit of the age was one of an emerging rationalism that undermined earlier

methods of understanding the world. Aldiss observes that it is only when Victor

gives up his researches in alchemy and takes up science that he succeeds in

creating life.[53] What becomes clear from Aldiss's comments is that science has

an iconoclastic role very similar to postmodernism – it attacks grand narratives:

"The novel dramatizes the difference between the old age and the new, between

an age when things went by rote to one where everything was suddenly called into

question."[54] This is scientific, not radical, scepticism, and the Enlightenment

view would be that rationalism offers ultimate truth after previous grand

narratives have been abandoned. However, in Frankenstein science seems more a

basis for ill-informed power than truth. As Aldiss suggests, the core of the novel

is an "experiment that goes wrong".[55] Thus, Shelley uses science as both the

agent and the subject of critique, as a means by which past certainties can be

destroyed while no real new ones appear in their place. In this regard, her novel

has some similarity with Lyotard's ideas, though to think of it as postmodern

would perhaps be stretching the point.

It may be with this in mind that Aldiss wrote his eminently postmodern

work Frankenstein Unbound (1973). The title, strangely overlooked in critical

commentaries, is obviously a reference to Aeschylus's fifth century B.C. verse

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[52] Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction
(London: Stratus, 2000) 17.
[53] Aldiss and Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction 22.
[54] Aldiss and Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction 21.
[55] Aldiss and Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction 21.

drama <u>Prometheus Bound</u> and Percy Shelley's "Lyrical Drama" <u>Prometheus</u>

<u>Unbound</u> (though this allegorical tale of triumphant Enlightenment ideals can

only be linked to Aldiss's novel ironically). While Shelley derives the subtitle for

<u>Frankenstein</u> from Ovid's interpretation of the Prometheus myth (in which the

titan moulds humankind in divine form from clay), she is simultaneously alluding

to Aeschylus's account of Prometheus defying Zeus by giving humankind the

godlike powers of fire and knowledge (and being bound to a cliff as punishment).

Certainly, it is this aspect of the Prometheus myth with which Aldiss engages: the

modern Prometheus, Frankenstein, bestowing science and rationalism on the

world. Frankenstein and his creation, paralleled with each other just as they are in

Shelley's original novel, become metaphors of science unbound in the late

twentieth century world and consciousness. Science is deconstructed as a grand

narrative, becoming more a chaotic creative force. As a work of metafiction,

<u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> is also about the origins of the genre Aldiss has written in

and about for most of his life. Thus, the novel is a story of beginnings.

<u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> opens, like Shelley's novel, with a letter. It is 20th

August 2020, and scientist Joseph Bodenland writes to his wife Mina about their

grandchildren.[56] There is something oddly formal about the language, even the

snatch of dialogue from the children as they pray: "'God bless you, Jesus, on this

bright day!' she said. 'Make this a good feast in thy name!'"[57] The letter

describes an idyllic scene of childhood innocence, quite possibly intended to be

prelapsarian, but there are ominous overtones. Bodenland speaks of ruptured

spacetime and war. Following the letter is an excerpt from <u>The Times</u> in which

we learn that use of nuclear weapons above the stratosphere has destabilised the

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[56] Mina is, of course, a name which "evokes the gothic". Michael R. Collings, <u>Brian Aldiss,</u>
Starmont Reader's Guide 28 (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont, 1986) 41.
[57] Brian Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> (Thirsk: House of Stratus, 2001) 6.

"infrastructure" of spacetime. The result of this is a growing number of "timeslips": two areas of land from different points chronologically and geographically suddenly swap places (which, of course, undermines the grand narrative of historical certainty). It is not long before Bodenland is caught in one of these events and finds himself in what appears to be early nineteenth-century Geneva. From this point on, the narrative is a transcription of "The Tape-Journal of Joseph Bodenland". The early formality, if anything, grows more manifest until it dawns on the reader that Aldiss is playing a postmodern game, mimicking Shelley's prose style. But this is just the start of the games the novel plays. Bodenland meets Victor Frankenstein, sees the creature, and becomes involved in the trial of Justine Moritz. The "timeslips" seem to be ruptures in the very fabric of reality itself, and the aesthetic fictionalised realm seeps into the historical. It might be said that the real is saturated with the fictional and is now a site of simulation. Unable to save Justine (another timeslip moves events two days beyond her hanging) Bodenland stays with Byron, Percy Shelly, Mary Godwin (soon to be Mary Shelley), and Dr Polidori. He tells Mary of her future literary success and they have a sexual liaison. She explains what she knows about Frankenstein, the novel she is working on, and Bodenland resolves to use this foreknowledge to kill the creature. Already, he has taken on Victor's avenging role. After killing Victor out of disgust and perhaps a sense that the world would be better without him, Bodenland sets out to pursue the creature and its mate across the "time-broken landscape".[58] This quickly becomes the icy waste in which Shelley's novel begins and ends, only here there are the ruins of cities, perhaps from the distant future. Finally, Bodenland arrives at a vast inhabited

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[58] Aldiss, Frankenstein Unbound 171.

building standing alone in an ice field. He speculates that this place is the last

refuge of humanity, but, upon noticing the creature and its mate about to enter,

wonders if it really is a human construction: perhaps the future belongs to

Frankenstein's progeny. He succeeds in killing both creatures, and the novel ends

without revealing who or what the inhabitants of the building are.

The major theme of <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> is its acknowledgement that

science is not a detached search for truth. Rather, it is a chaotic creative force, not

merely in the hands of a particular individual but in and of itself: the nuclear war-

torn future with which the novel opens is the direct result of Enlightenment

rationalism. There are some egalitarian ideals – Bodenland tells Mary that

technology has allowed the provision of welfare rights and enhanced living

conditions for all (at least in the West) – but the overall message is that science is

an unleashed violent entity. Thus, as with Victor Frankenstein himself, good

intentions lead to terrible consequences: "How many ills of the modern world

were not due precisely to Frankenstein's folly! And that included the most

overwhelming problem of all, a world too full of people. That had led to war, and

to untold misery before that, for several generations."[59] Aldiss links the grand

narrative of science with the teleological ideal of progress, attacking both.

Furthermore, science as a belief system is directly questioned. Victor

Frankenstein, the creator and symbol of the scientific age, is actually a kind of

panicked existentialist, attempting to create a myth of meaning: "no purpose in

life on this globe [. . .] So you can't kill me – you mustn't kill me, for a purpose

must be found, invented if necessary, a human purpose, <u>human</u>, putting <u>us</u> in

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[59] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 55.

control, fighting the <u>itness</u> of the great wheeling world."[60] Perhaps the "purpose" Frankenstein bequeaths to the world is the invented language game of science.

The future self symbolised by Frankenstein and the creature is the condition, described by Tallis, in which consciousness is alienated from itself. Bodenland tells Mary of "the sterility of the machine culture and the terrible isolation often felt by people even in overcrowded cities."[61] Marcuse's one dimensional man is here overtly associated with the machine – people are born of a rationalistic and aggressively materialistic ideology and are thus effectively soulless creatures. So, Frankenstein's creation is "like a machine, lathe-turned."[62] This image becomes a symbol of technological society and the people who inhabit it. Organised religion has simply been replaced with "[o]rganized science".[63] This is what Lyotard would call a totalitarian grand narrative, a language game claiming to provide Truth while excluding all other modes of discourse:

> Anything which could not be proven in a laboratory by scientific
> method – anything, that is to say, which was bigger than science –
> was ruled out of court [. . .] The Frankenstein mentality had
> triumphed in my day [. . .] I saw the technological society into
> which I had been born as a Frankenstein body from which the
> spirit was missing.[64]

At least part of the horror in Shelley's novel is the idea that life can be created without God and that we, like the monster, may be soulless and lacking a divine

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[60] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 165-66.
[61] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 108.
[62] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 145.
[63] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 143.
[64] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 143.

spark. This takes on a new dimension in <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u>, when even a

vague secularised notion of the soul (the "human spirit", for example) is removed.

Aldiss closes by pessimistically suggesting that, like the proverbial genie that can

not be put back into its bottle, science as chaotic force and death of spirit (but

never objective search for truth) is here to stay. The creature's final comments to

Bodenland are chilling: "When you hate and fear me, you believe it is because of

our differences. Oh, no, Bodenland! – It is because of our similarities that you

bring such detestation to bear upon me! [. . .] Moreover, though you seek to bury

me, yet will you continuously resurrect me! Once I am unbound, I am

unbounded!"[65] The Bodenland this is addressed to is, it can be argued, an

everyman figure of the rationalistic society. It is interesting that Mary calls him

"my first reader",[66] though she knows he is from two centuries in the future. The

creature is Bodenland, and Bodenland is spiritual primogenitor of the future race.

Collings believes "Bodenland" doubly (and ironically) suggests stability, because

"boden" is the German word for "floor", "ground" or "soil".[67] It is worth noting

that it was from soil or clay that Prometheus moulded humankind, and that the

Hebrew word for red earth is "Adam".

If Bodenland as a symbol is part of the novel's critique of science, as a

fictional character he emphasises the aestheticisation of reality and the book's

foregrounding of itself as fiction. In <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> it seems that

metafiction is not an ironic technique to combat aestheticisation but actually a

manifestation of it. For example, Collings suggests that Bodenland is "the child-

product of the same imaginations which created the monsters."[68] As we have

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[65] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 187-88.
[66] Aldiss, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u> 94.
[67] Collings 43.
[68] Collings 43.

seen, he represents the progeny of a "Frankenstein mentality" (nineteenth-century rationalism), in particular because he is a scientist himself. However, as a science fiction character he is also a child or descendent of the imagination that created Victor Frankenstein and his creature. These two points can be merged into an idea of science as aestheticised: Bodenland's "reality" springs from fiction and myth – as a scientist he is "born" from the rationalistic nineteenth-century imagination. He is a simulation. Thus, it is with a chill of the sublime rather than an ironic smirk that he records this in his journal: "Somewhere, there might be a 2020 in which I existed merely as a character in a novel about Frankenstein and Mary."[69] It is as if Bodenland is a postmodern figure, possessing no free will, driven by narrative. After all, in assuming Victor's role in tracking the creature through the icy wastes, he seems to be fulfilling a prescribed pattern, obeying the rules of the particular narrative he is in.

A section of the novel that is of particular interest is Bodenland's relationship with Mary. Tom Henigan complains that he finds the sexual side of this unrealistic,[70] but it is clearly allegorical and not part of any realist (or naturalised fantastical) discourse. In their time together, Mary imagines that they are the last man and woman on Earth and that they "see the whole world turn back into Eden,"[71] which would of course also make them the first man and woman. Bodenland finishes his description of the scene by saying, "[h]olding each other's hands, we spoke the name that had united us: Frankenstein."[72] Mary is "the woman who first warned the children of the Enlightenment that the monster had

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[69] Aldiss, Frankenstein Unbound 168.
[70] Tom Henighan, Brian Aldiss, Twayne English Author's Series No. 555 (New York, NY: Twayne, 1999) 21.
[71] Aldiss, Frankenstein Unbound 87.
[72] Aldiss, Frankenstein Unbound 88.

been unbound,"[73] the originator of science fiction, and the creator of Frankenstein

and his creature (symbols of science). She is therefore the parent of Bodenland

the scientist and Bodenland the science fiction character. The incestuous nature

of their liaison is entirely in keeping with sexual undertones in Shelley's novel,

undertones Aldiss himself mentions in his writing on Frankenstein.[74] In this

relationship between Mary and Bodenland, it is possible to see the latter's dual

significance and the aestheticisation of science this implies.

As stated earlier, Frankenstein Unbound is a story about beginnings, the

beginnings of rationalism and science, the modern mind, and science fiction. It is

simple to see how these connect in an aestheticised reality: science fiction

emerges simultaneously with the world and the people it refers to. Indeed, it _is_

that world. As Aldiss says of Shelley's famous nightmare in which the creature is

brought to half life by a huge machine: "It was science fiction itself that stirred."[75]

And if science fiction has its source in this tale, then so do its writers and readers,

and they occupy a place in the fictional landscape. Nicholas Ruddick calls

Bodenland Aldiss's "surrogate",[76] implying that he is a kind of alter ego, allowing

Aldiss to visit his literary origins. Similarly, the reader is present as the "intended

audience for fictional transcripts."[77] However, it is premature to consider

Frankenstein Unbound as a bleak description of the world science fiction has

emerged alongside. As may be recalled, Aldiss's definition of science fiction is:

"the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand

in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is

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[73] Nicholas Ruddick, "The Brood of Mary: Brian Aldiss, Frankenstein, and Science Fiction,"
Bury My Heart at W. H. Smiths: A Writing Life (By Brian Aldiss. Kent: Hodder, 1990) 216.
[74] Aldiss and Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction 26.
[75] Aldiss, Frankenstein Unbound 25.
[76] Aldiss, Frankenstein Unbound 216.
[77] Collings 45.

characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould."[78] Ruddick believes

this implies a "literary mode that ought to try to bridge the divided self of Western

civilisation."[79] In revealing aestheticisation, Frankenstein Unbound may allow

the reader liberation. The wider implications for the novel disturb, but this in

itself creates an exciting frisson, and may provide a fictional sphere separate from

aestheticisation: the reader's attention is arrested in a moment of wonder.

Perhaps, no matter what existential horrors the characters in a novel confront, we

as readers experience a sublime transcendence, allowing us to escape, however

briefly, the postmodern condition. While the alienated self of the technological

society is focused upon, that does not mean that the experience of reading this

intriguing novel is in itself alienating. As Tallis points out, ""art will be essential

to enable us to come to terms with a world transformed by science and

technology."[80]

Angela Carter and The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman

Born in 1940, Angela Carter's earliest experiences were during World

War Two. She spent much of this time living with her grandmother (a powerful

woman and a "domineering old harridan"[81]) in a South Yorkshire miner's cottage.

Her childhood appears to have been unusual. For example, she says, "I can

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[78] Brian Aldiss, "The Origin of Species," Science Fiction: The Acacdemic Awakening, eds. Willis E. McNelly, Jane Hipolito and A. James Stupple (CEA Chap Book. Shreveport, LA: CEA, 1974) 35.
[79] Ruddick 216.
[80] Tallis 210.
[81] Angela Carter, "The Mother Lode," Shaking a Leg, ed. Jenny Uglow, The Collected Angela Carter (London: Chatto, 1997) 9.

remember no rules, no punishments and I was expected to answer back."[82] What might have caused a sense of alienation in other children – she was aware that she did not arrive from a planned pregnancy, but "somewhat inconveniently"[83] – does not seem to have affected her. In fact, Carter apparently revelled in the separation of her family from the wider society. In part due to her Scots father's inability to understand the English class system, the family "did not quite fit in, thank goodness; alienated is the only way to be, after all."[84]

Probably most children feel that their immediate family (or surrogate family) is, in a sense, the world. In Carter's account of her early years this belief is extremely apparent, indicating that she has a particularly vivid memory. One striking moment is when she describes the sense of time in the family home: "Once you were inside the door, a curious kind of dream-time operated; life passed at a languorous pace, everything was gently untidy, and none of the clocks ever told the right time, although they ticked away busily."[85]

Carter's magical realism is not, in the cultural hierarchy of critical appraisal, what this dissertation calls the popular-fantastic. Many would consider her work to pursue political and intellectual agendas rather than generate reading experience. Her own interpretations of fairytales, anthologised in the 1979 collection The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories, focus on drawing out allegorical elements, allowing her to explore themes of psychoanalysis and feminism. Unlike Aldiss and Ballard, Carter did not begin her career as a writer of popular fiction. However, there is a rich and visionary texture in her language she uses, undermining the notion that her writing is purely analytical. As Marina

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[82] Carter, "The Mother Lode" 11.
[83] Carter, "The Mother Lode" 3.
[84] Carter, "The Mother Lode" 12.
[85] Carter, "The Mother Lode" 11.

Warner notes, "[s]he had the true writer's gift of remaking the world for her readers."[86]

* * *

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1973) has an engaging plot and sensuous descriptions. It tells the story of a final conflict between human desire and human reason, of, in Freudian terms, the pleasure principle confronting the reality principle. Dr Hoffman, an occultist, polymath, and celebrated professor of physics, attacks reality itself through aestheticisation, releasing the phantasies and desires of the unconscious into the material world. Laws of materialism, rationalism, and empiricism – causality and the conservation of energy, for example – are broken, and the bizarre manifestations that result imply a gleefully iconoclastic intelligence at work (though, initially, it is hard to say whether this is Hoffman or Carter herself). Hoffman's target is the capital city of the unnamed country in which the novel is set.[87] The capital, which is cut off from the rest of the world by its war with Hoffman, functions rather like a city-state. It is ruled by the Minister of Determination (the Ministry of Determination attempts to ascertain the reality of phenomena, including certain human beings). The Minister despatches Desiderio, the novel's central character and narrator, to assassinate Hoffman. The many adventures that Desiderio has on this quest allow Carter to discuss a number of themes.

Desiderio is part "Indian" (i.e. the indigenous people of the country who have been reduced to poverty since colonisation by Europeans), a fact that causes him some emotional pain. On the one hand he is obviously embarrassed at possessing such genetic traits as black hair; on the other he has a longing for the

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[86] Marina. Warner, Introduction, The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales, ed. Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1992) xii.
[87] The country appears to be in South America.

culture of the Indians. In this context he says, "[y]et I was a very disaffected

young man for I was not unaware of my disinheritance."[88] Later in the novel he

lives with a family of Indians belonging to the River People and gains a sense of

identity he has not known previously. He speaks of "the strongest sense of

homecoming" and "that slight feeling of warm claustrophobia I had learnt to

identify with the notion, home."[89] He is ready to marry into this family and

abandon his quest, when it becomes apparent they are about to betray him.

Following this he joins various other communities – a travelling fair, the

entourage of a decadent aristocrat, a crew of pirates, a society of centaurs –

always seeking (and in some cases believing he has found) acceptance and

selfhood.

Similarly, the citizenry of the capital city is alienated by reason and

technology, just as in Marcuse's account of the one dimensional man.

Symbolising the city is the Minister of Determination: "He had become the

invisible walls of the city; in himself he represented the grand totality of the city's

resistence."[90] The Minister is able to mount a defence against unreality because

he has no sense of the imaginative. We hear he "had never in all his life felt the

slightest quiver of empirical uncertainty. He was the hardest thing that ever

existed and never the flicker of a mirage distorted for so much as a fleeting

second the austere and intransigent objectivity of his face even though, as I saw it,

his work consisted essentially in setting a limit to thought." The Minister sees

Hoffman's activities as "a cancer of the mind, so that the cells of the imagination

run wild." In order to test the reality of a suspect individual he will resort to

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[88] Angela Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (London: Penguin, 1982) 16.

[89] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 76-77.

[90] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 28.

torture, rewriting the Cartesian cogito as "I am in pain therefore I exist."[91] By attacking the city with unfettered desires, Hoffman attacks the mindset of the Minister. It is the unreason of the unconscious invading the rational ego.

Hoffman uses the "eroto-energy" produced in his desire generators, actually fifty pairs of lovers perpetually having sex via means such as intravenous supply of hormones, together with much pulp sf technology and the laws of "Phenomenal Dynamics", to create his effects. Phenomenal Dynamics is a kind of idealism translated into the formal language of theoretical physics. It assumes that the "universe has no fixed substratum of fixed substances and its only reality lies in its phenomena."[92] That the novel makes such an assertion is interesting. In the first place it attacks materialism in much the same way Wells did by questioning whether the senses could provide an accurate picture of fundamental reality. In the second, it is obviously an absolutist idealism, denying, for example, Kant's things-in-themselves. This would of course have an impact on Lyotard's objection to Kantian epistemology (that there is a link between an object and reason, between the outer and the inner), though, because his concerns emerge from the danger of totalitarian political ideologies, it is likely that Phenomenal Dynamics would be even less palatable to him. Hoffman's theory leads to simulation and total aestheticisation, with the "real" (or hyperreal) world composed of the same stuff as the aesthetic.

Furthermore, while such literary encounters of the real and the fantastical as we see in the Minister/Hoffman confrontation (leading to artistic alienation) can usually be thought of as constructive, that is not the position in Carter's novel. One strand of postmodernism is uneasiness with the aestheticisation resulting

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[91] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 22.
[92] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 96.

from the end of grand narratives, and that is the case here. There is a frightening

chaos in the visions Hoffman creates:

> But only a few of the transmutations were lyrical. Frequently,
>
> imaginary massacres filled the gutters with blood and, besides, the
>
> cumulative psychological effect of all these distortions, combined
>
> with   the dislocation of everyday life and the hardship and privations we
>
> began to suffer, created a deep-seated anxiety and sense of
>
> profound   melancholy. It seemed each one of us was trapped in some
>
> downward-   drooping convoluted spiral of unreality from which we
>
> could never   escape. Many committed suicide.[93]

Hoffman, however, is not the colourful figure that Carter's 1973 audience

may have expected. When Desiderio encounters him at the end of the novel his

disappointment (and the reader's) is akin to that of Marlow's upon finally meeting

Kurtz. Like Marlow, Desiderio searches for an inspirational figure. Hoffman,

however, is almost funereal: "His voice never rose above a drab monotone, never

expressed enthusiasm, never invited astonishment."[94] He is as deadly as

intellectual movements that claim to be absurdist or irrational: "I was troubled in

mind and very uneasy for the magician's castle was not the home of unreason at

all but a school for some kind of to me incomprehensible logic."[95] It may be that

Hoffman's youthful passion has become jaded, but the fantastic should be a route

to rebirth, to, as Shklovsky put it, make the stone stony. Why should someone

who wanted, and was able, to manifest the naked desires of the unconscious be so

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[93] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 20.
[94] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 206.
[95] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 204.

world-weary? The novel implies that aestheticisation is not liberation but death, and that it is associated with power. Desiderio says, "I could not understand why a man like him should want to liberate man so much. I could not see how he could have gotten that notion of liberation inside his skull. I was sure he wanted only power."[96] It is no surprise when Desiderio notes that Hoffman is "a totalitarian".[97] Kai Mikkonen believes the mythic aura that has built up around Hoffman during the course of the novel is dispelled in this way to mark the self-delusion of the artist as alchemist, as creator of an imagined world,[98] but the sumptuous imagery Carter uses rather implies that she herself is attempting to generate reading wonder and transform words into experience. Such passages as,

> Cloud palaces erected themselves then silently toppled to reveal
> for a   moment the familiar warehouse beneath them until they were
> replaced   by some fresh audacity. A group of chanting pillars
> exploded in the   middle of a mantra and lo! They were once again
> street lamps until,   with night, they changed to silent flowers. Giant
> heads in the helmets of conquistadors sailed up like sad, painted kites
> over the giggling   chimney pots,[99]

can in fact can be seen, in Derridean terms, as referring to the "other" of language. It is a mistake therefore to associate Carter's myth-making with Hoffman's. Hoffman is a cold totalitarian simply because: "Carter's novel is essentially a

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[96] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 209.
[97] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 207.
[98] Kai Mikkonen, "The Hoffman(N) Effect and the Sleeping Prince: Fairy Tales in Angela Carter's the Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann," Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale, eds. Danielle M. Roemer and Christina Bacchilega (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2002) 170.
[99] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 18.

critique of an unreflexive romanticism that points out the dangers of celebrating fantasy."[100] What Hoffman offers is not the kind of escape, gratification, and affirmation alluded to by such figures as Marcuse, Freud, Tolkien, Lewis, and Shklovsky, quite the reverse. His fantastic is of the same type as that employed by Fascism.

Another question that the novel addresses is whether it is actually advisable to release the desires of the unconscious. Certainly, the sexuality that is freed is destructive. As Mikkonen points out, "the effort to liberate libidinal forces is thoroughly fused with power and the abuse of power (as in rape, paedophilia, necrophilia, incest)."[101] Desiderio is for the most part unconcerned about his carnal acts – sex with a somnambulistic woman and a nine-year-old girl, for example – he is, however, an unreliable narrator, and we may assume Carter is less morally ambiguous. It is that Desiderio's first introduction to the Doctor's methods is through the voyeurism of a peepshow, one containing violent sexual images. Hoffman's daughter Albertina, the focus of Desiderio's desires, is also a negative figure, ultimately intending to use Desiderio to create eroto-energy. Mikkonen suggests this is an ironic presentation of "the male narrator and the female muse, the notion of the idealized woman both as construction of the male 'heroic quest' perspective and as the force behind the narrative's unfolding."[102] While this may be true, it is more than simple irony. Mikkonen is correct to see Albertina as an idealised woman. As such, Albertina is anima; she is, like Beatrice Dahl in The Drowned World, a siren of the unconscious.

Desiderio is faced with choosing the Minister's dry rationalism or Hoffman's chaotic and sinister desires-made-flesh: "I found the paraphernalia of

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[100] Peter Christensen referred to in Mikkonen 171.
[101] Mikkonen 179.
[102] Mikkonen 181.

the Doctor's science disgusted me when I saw it face to face. And his cold eyes

perturbed me. I knew he could never be my master. I might not want the

Minister's world but I did not want the Doctor's world either. All at once I was

pitched on the horns of a dilemma."[103] The novel presents us with two

undesirable alternatives, which can be thought of as the restrictions of

Enlightenment rationalism and the dangerous aestheticisation of postmodernity.

Although he does kill Hoffman, Desiderio is uncertain whether he made the right

choice. The answer may simply be that the choice should not be made, and, as

Waugh argues, both material and fictive orders of reality should co-exist and

perform their separate functions, with aesthetic imagination as the source of ideas,

and reason as the means by which to decide on material actions.

Crash

The Drowned World explores a regression of the human psyche brought

about by unconscious archetypes becoming manifest in a changed environment.

In Crash the regression is brought about by images of postmodernity. The novel

is "what is", rather than "what if";[104] it "deals uncompromisingly with the

psychopathology of the everyday environment in a contemporary large city."[105]

That psychopathology is arguably part of the postmodern condition: the

externalisation of archetypes is the aestheticisation of the material. The novel

suggests this may be positive, at least for the characters, because it actually

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[103] Carter, The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 207.

[104] Peter Brigg, J. G. Ballard, Starmont Reader's Guide 26 (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont, 1985) 75.

[105] David Pringle, Earth Is the Alien Planet: J. G. Ballard's Four Dimensional Nightmare, The Milford Series: Popular Writers of Today (San Bernardo, CA: Borgo, 1979) 12.

<u>challenges</u> a different aspect of the postmodern condition: the sense of meaninglessness.

<u>Crash</u> describes the psychosexual awakening of James Ballard,[106] a London advertising executive whose life is transformed after a road accident. The novel argues that modern technology, in particular the car, is an extension of unconscious sexuality. This fact is only revealed or decoded by the experience of a crash. The psychological effects of this include liberation of all perversities within the human psyche, and through this a kind of transcendence as characters are introduced to a new imaginative sphere. Ballard, together with a number of other car crash aficionados, explores the limits of his sexuality and consciousness via fantasies, acts of violence, and experimentation.

As Pringle points out, <u>Crash</u> is a work in which "images and examples proliferate around what is basically a very thin plot."[107] Descriptions are intense and dreamlike, attempting to convey the expanded perception gained from the "eroticism" of car crashes. Like the London of <u>Bleak House</u>, what is presented is more bizarre hallucination than objective account. Pringle notes that the novel is not realist, but deals with "hyper-reality".[108] This is one fantastical aspect of the novel. Another is its subject matter: while it is probable that, as a universal, human sexuality is perverse, it is by no means clear that this perversity is boundless, or that it is represented by the obsessions of the characters in <u>Crash</u>. On this level too the novel is not realist. Most significantly, Ballard's experiences set him free from an alienated existence. Thus the story is a fantastical one of escape.

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[106] Henceforth, the writer Ballard will be referred to as "J. G. Ballard", in order to avoid confusion.
[107] Pringle 13.
[108] Pringle 12.

Prior to his accident, Ballard lives a detached life, saying, "[t]he crash was

the only real experience I had been through for years."[109] In particular, his sexual

relations with his wife Catherine, and their numerous affairs, have a dulled and

jaded quality. One thing that does give the couple a limited amount of

satisfaction is mutual masturbation while watching violence on television, though

this is "experienced at so many removes."[110] Michael Delville believes that the

novel thus demonstrates how the multiple and "trivialised" images of violence in

the mass media have "given rise to a new semi-unconscious logic of violence [an]

affectless condition."[111] However, there is another explanation. This violence-

centred sexuality can be seen as a response to the postmodern condition, rather

than a direct part of it. As Marcuse notes in One Dimensional Man, the

technological society creates false needs within individuals, even at the level of

instincts,[112] which would presumably include the sex drive. What Marcuse is

talking about here is the materialisation and rationalisation of perception, not

nihilistic doubt, but the latter can be seen as emerging from the former, the attack

on the Enlightenment actually resulting from its own rationalistic scepticism.

Either way, the result – alienation from the self – is the same. Therefore sexuality

would become bland along with all other experience. Arousal through violence

may, in the context of the novel, actually be seen as positive, providing contact

with the real. As J. G. Ballard explains in his Introduction, Crash is a reaction to

a society of intermingling symbols, multiplying identities, and aestheticised

reality. It is "an extreme metaphor for an extreme situation, a kit of desperate

measures only for use in an extreme crisis [. . .] Is this harnessing of our innate

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[109] J. G. Ballard, Crash (London: Vintage, 1995) 39.
[110] Ballard, Crash 37.
[111] Michael Delville, J. G. Ballard, Writers and Their Work (Plymouth: Northcote, 1998) 37.
[112] Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1991) 6.

perversity conceivably of benefit to us?"[113] Perhaps the strange sexual acts and

fantasies in the novel are actually "an affirmation of the survival and persistence

of certain forces in the psyche," a psyche frantically seeking an escape from a

futile and material existence.[114]

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Some of the many sexual acts and fantasies in Crash are so distasteful it is

hard not to see an impish schoolboy imagination at work, mischievously

cataloguing gratuitous outrages. Use of injuries as sexual orifices, descriptions of

every possible kind of bodily secretion, celebration of genital mutilation, even

reference to incest and paedophilia involving the disfigured, are all included. This

is made worse by the calm and clinical language that is often used, so that even

the licence of libidinal frenzy is not present. The apparent implication that the

novel discusses universal human sexuality is questionable. However, it is

possible that J. G. Ballard is attempting to emulate the Marquis de Sade in

exposing the perversity of the human mind, in this case updating the exposition to

include the significance of technology. In an essay on de Sade, J. G. Ballard

describes how the Marquis, interned in an asylum, staged plays with the mentally

ill as actors: "Fashionable audiences flocked from Paris, a foretaste of the uneasy

admirers his writings would attract in the twentieth century."[115] These crowds are

echoed in Crash by the throngs of spectators that gather at each "accident".

For the character Ballard, the lived violence of the car crash enables him

to release perversities of the inner psyche only suggested by his use of television

images. The violence leaves the screen, as it were, and experience becomes

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[113] Ballard, Crash 6. As Tallis says, art is essential for us to come to terms with technology.
[114] Gregory Stephenson, Out of the Night and into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J. G. Ballard (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1991) 74.
[115] J. G. Ballard, "The Divine Marquis," A User's Guide to the Millenium: Essays and Reviews (London: Flamingo-Harper, 1997) 125.

immediate and whole. Even for Catherine, enjoying the crash vicariously through her husband's injuries, there is some effect. Ballard notices that the wounds on his chest show the outlines of the horn and wheel, driven inward by the collapsing engine compartment, that they "define" the collision itself: "Catherine watched me trying to catch my breath. I took her left hand and placed it to my sternum. In her sophisticated eyes I was already becoming a kind of emotional cassette, taking my place with all those scenes of pain and violence that illuminated the margins of our lives."[116]

While Ballard does not directly experience another crash in the narrative, he gains pleasure through association. He begins an affair with Helen Remington, the woman with whose car he collided and whose husband was killed in the crash. Their encounters, all taking place within a car, involve fetishisation of the vehicle: "I looked at the cabin around me. This small space was crowded with angular control surfaces and rounded sections of human bodies interacting in unfamiliar junctions."[117] After Helen, Ballard moves on to Gabrielle, a young woman badly injured after skidding into the back of a bus. He finds the deep scars on her body, "the templates of new genital organs, the moulds of sexual possibilities yet to be created in a hundred experimental car crashes."[118] Finally, Ballard has a homosexual liaison with Vaughan, a guru for the car crash aficionados and a kind of male version of Beatrice Dahl: "I lowered my head to his chest, pressing my cheek against the bloody profiles of a collapsing steering wheel, the collision points of an instrument panel."[119] Stephenson proposes that each partner marks the overcoming of an inhibition for Ballard, giving him "a higher degree of

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[116] Ballard, Crash 37.
[117] Ballard, Crash 80.
[118] Ballard, Crash 177.
[119] Ballard, Crash 201.

libidinal liberation."[120] While it is true that there is an increasing level of perversion in the sadomasochism, what each of these acts has in common is the association of technology with the body.

In Crash, cars are replete with archetypal symbols of sexuality, overlooked by the uninitiated. Having seen the photographs Vaughan took at Gabrielle's accident site, Ballard speculates on how her sexuality has been altered:

> I could imagine her sitting in the car of some middle-aged welfare officer, unaware of the conjunction formed by their own genitalia and the stylized instrument panel, a euclid of eroticism and fantasy that would be revealed for the first time within the car crash [. . .] The crushed body of the sports car had turned her into a creature of free and perverse sexuality, releasing within its twisting bulkheads and leaking engine coolant all the deviant possibilities of her sex.[121]

The angles of a car's design, the damage following a collision, and the scars on the body of a crash victim are in several places referred to as "codes". For example, Ballard describes himself and Gabrielle caressing each other's scars as them "deciphering together these codes of sexuality made possible by our two car-crashes."[122] The unconscious sexual archetypes manifest in the car are encrypted, and can only be revealed through the rite-of-passage of a road accident. Once that has been achieved, the infinite perversity that is accessed becomes a means of transcendence.

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[120] Stephenson 70.
[121] Ballard, Crash 99.
[122] Ballard, Crash 179.

* * *

As we have seen so often in the fantastical works thus far examined, <u>Crash</u> deals with alienated characters. While its perspective seems bleak and its interpretation of human sexuality is grotesque, even dangerous, it actually has more in common with the optimism of Dickens than one would suspect. There have been several conceptions of personal alienation in this dissertation: the One Dimensional Man (Marcuse), algebraic perception (Shklovsky), dissatisfaction with the present (Freud), habitude (Hume), the postmodern condition (Lyotard), an incurable wound in the tense (Tallis). All of these thinkers believe that art, often fantastical literature, can resolve this internal numbness. In <u>Crash</u> road accidents are, in this sense, art: the car crash and the immediately experienced eroticism it invokes shatters the jaded mindset; it is artistic alienation, it makes the stone stony, it is liberation.

Delville argues that in <u>Crash</u> the car mediates not only between mind and body, but also between the spiritual and the base,[123] and, indeed, the spiritual and the base form a dialectic in the novel. There are what Pringle calls "portmanteau" images of the sordid and the sublime.[124] The transcendent nature of the latter is dependent on the perversity of the former, and vice versa. Semen, for example, is used conspicuously as something that is abject and yet almost numinous. In one of the final images of the book, Ballard roams through a scrap yard, touching parts of the cars: "I marked my semen on the oily instrument panels and binnacles, touching these wound areas at their most deformed points."[125] Then he and Catherine see it reflected in the light, taking on a celestial quality: "the first

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[123] Delville 39.
[124] Pringle 15.
[125] Ballard, <u>Crash</u> 224.

constellation in the new zodiac of our minds."[126] By this stage Ballard has

become what Stephenson calls an "erotic-mystic".[127] He has passed through

successive expansions of his consciousness until he has transcended materiality,

or at least the limits it imposes on his perception.[128] The final stage in this

journey is arguably the LSD experience he has with Vaughan before and during

their erotic encounter.

During this scene there is a link with the themes of The Drowned World:

Ballard meets Vaughan at an airport "in the mezzanine lounge of the Oceanic

Terminal." (The phrase "Oceanic Terminal" may contain a literal meaning, as we

will see.) Significantly, it is Ballard's second use of LSD. The first, some two

years previously, had been a terrifying and insular experience, but the new

mindset Ballard has gained after his crash means that the drug now enhances his

widened awareness. Thus, what occurs is not purely intoxication. The concrete

walls of the road become "luminous cliffs", the air is "golden", and trucks and

coaches are "suspended from the sky".[129] Oncoming cars are "carrying huge

cargoes of cool light, floats loaded with electric flowers being transported to a

festival."[130] These vehicles bear with them the secret codes of transcendent

possibilities, but here those ciphers finally become apparent: "Their radiator

grilles formed mysterious emblems, racing alphabets that unravelled at high speed

across the road surface."[131] They contain "thousands of messages".[132] As

Stephenson explains, transcendence is symbolised throughout the novel by images

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[126] Ballard, Crash 224.

[127] Stephenson 70.

[128] This is only viable within the context of the fictionalised realm of the novel, and with the willing suspension of disbelief. In the material realm, which, as Waugh points out, should not be aestheticised and should ultimately be based on rational thought, it would be healthier to regard the character Ballard as a dangerous psychotic.

[129] Ballard, Crash 196.

[130] Ballard, Crash 197.

[131] Ballard, Crash 197.

[132] Ballard, Crash 198.

of light and ascension,[133] and now the metaphors become overtly divine. Ballard

sees other vehicles as "paradisial creatures [. . .] an alighting archangel."[134] Like

the cars themselves the roads are unconsciously manufactured archetypes, ready

to receive these technological messengers of the inner psyche:

> An armada of angelic creatures, each surrounded by an immense
>
> corona of light, was landing on the motorway on either side of us,
>
> sweeping down in opposite directions. They soared past, a few
>
> feet above the ground, landing everywhere on these endless
>
> runways that covered the landscape. I realized that all these roads
>
> and expressways had been built unknowingly by us for their
>
> reception.[135]

Luckhurst argues that the motorway is a "non-place" where one's usual

determinants evaporate.[136] The otherworldly experience of motorway driving,

one that so often induces panic attacks in otherwise confident drivers, may be the

defamiliarity needed for the strange transcendence offered in Crash. Certainly,

the accidents all involve motorways or other high speed roads, and so this

environment may well be an integral part of the theme.

However, as in The Drowned World, it appears that final transcendence is

achieved through death. Crash is not strictly linear, and opens with what is really

the end of the story: Vaughan's fatal crash in which he drives off a flyover,

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[133] Stephenson 71.
[134] Ballard, Crash 198.
[135] Ballard, Crash 199.
[136] Roger Luckhurst, "the Angle between Two Walls": The Fiction of J. G. Ballard, Liverpool
Science Fiction Texts and Studies (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1997) 130.

"trying to launch himself into the sky",[137] into the roof of a coach on the carriageway below. Although Vaughan was attempting to strike the car of Elizabeth Taylor in the hopes that they would die in a mutual orgasm, their wounds identical, the actual manner of his death is apparently enough for his final transformation. Sometime before the crash, Ballard reaches the conclusion that "Vaughan could never really die in a car-crash, but would in some way be reborn through those twisted radiator grilles and cascading windscreen glass."[138] The spectators at the accident site (like de Sade's audiences) are "drawn there by the logic and beauty of Vaughan's death."[139] Indeed, it is implied he has achieved true transcendence from the material and is in some sense alive, and even a kind of fertility god. We hear that "Vaughan's glass aeroplane flew somewhere above the heads of the bored spectators moving back to their cars."[140] His semen is carried "to the instrument panels and radiator grilles of a thousand crashing cars, the leg stances of a million passengers."[141]

Seagrave, the male stunt driver who imitates famous actresses for onscreen accidents, eventually becomes so obsessed with the psychosexual implications of his job that he dies in a (probably deliberate) road accident, dressed as Elizabeth Taylor. Seagrave's face is "covered with shattered safety glass, as if his body were already crystallizing, at last escaping out of this uneasy set of dimensions into a more beautiful universe."[142] This is clearly a reference to one of J. G. Ballard's early sf novels The Crystal World, in which a plague of crystallisation is ultimately seen as the means to achieve perfection. Both

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[137] Ballard, Crash 222.
[138] Ballard, Crash 210.
[139] Ballard, Crash 222.
[140] Ballard, Crash 18.
[141] Ballard, Crash 224.
[142] Ballard, Crash 185.

Vaughan's and Seagrave's deaths suggest that again J. G. Ballard is presenting us with the fortunate catastrophe of external archetypal symbols allowing regression into the womb/unconscious. Ballard recounts how, during his and Vaughan's transformational encounter and mutual LSD experience, "I turned towards Vaughan, floating with him on the warm amnion of illuminated air, encouraged by the stylized morphology of the automobile's interior, by the hundreds of illuminated gondolas soaring along the motorway above our heads."[143] Thus it may be that the phrase "Oceanic Terminal" is actually a pun describing the final fatal state of ecstatic dissolution achieved by Seagrave, Vaughan, and perhaps Ballard himself. He disturbingly begins his final narrative section "[o]n our last evening, Catherine and I visited the police pound." and concludes with "[a]lready I knew I was designing the elements of my own car-crash."[144]

* * *

Crash, then, is another fortunate catastrophe, though it is not removed to the future. As J. G. Ballard notes in his Introduction, "Crash, of course, is not concerned with an imaginary disaster, however imminent, but with a pandemic cataclysm that kills hundreds of thousands of people each year and injures millions."[145] However, can embracing this death and mutilation ever be a suitable response? In attempting to escape the numbing effects of postmodern society, are the characters in Crash actually its slaves? Perhaps these questions may be resolved through Waugh's distinction between fictive and material realities: in the experience of reading, the fictive arena of the novel may provide what its material reality would not.

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[143] Ballard, Crash 201.
[144] Ballard, Crash 224.
[145] Ballard, Crash 6.

Crash is not a manifesto for the evolution of human consciousness.

Although the character Ballard may speak of the "coming autogeddon"[146] with

some ambiguity, even welcome, J. G. Ballard the author makes his own position

clear in the Introduction: "Needless to say, the ultimate role of Crash is

cautionary, a warning against that brutal, erotic, and overlit realm that beckons

more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological

landscape."[147] He seems to take seriously the idea of technology releasing violent

perversities from within the psyche, but does not share his characters' enthusiasm

for the transcendence that might bring in the material (or "real") world. Within

the fictive arena of the novel this transcendence is conveyed to the reader through

the startling descriptions of Ballard's perceptions and the complex, even

unnameable, emotions they inspire.

It is impossible (fortunately) for most if any readers to empathise with the

extreme sexualities in Crash, but the soaring images of illumination and magic

that run through the novel do potentially provide Wonder, a new imaginative

sphere, and that literary escape we have discussed in this dissertation. Like

Dickens and his portrayals of London, J. G. Ballard endows the roads and

motorways "with the magic and radiance of fairyland."[148]

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[146] Ballard, Crash 50.

[147] Ballard, Crash 6. Several commentators, Brigg for example, cast doubt on this, almost as if they are unable to believe such a powerful vision as Crash could be reduced to a cautionary tale. It seems unlikely, however, that Ballard would make this statement if it were untrue, particularly since the Introduction was originally written for the liberal intellectuals of the French literary scene.

[148] Harry Stone, Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Novel-Making (London: Macmillan, 1980) 53.

Conclusion

It follows that wide hospitality is good. Nor need it be the enemy of good judgement. The fact that some people use their claim to being hospitable as an excuse for refusing to make distinctions is another matter; catholicity is not promiscuity. Almost every writer with imaginative ability (that is, with some capacity, no matter how intermittent or partial, to explore aspects of experience through language), almost every such writer will have some insights if we read him disinterestedly, with a 'willing suspension of disbelief'.

Richard Hoggart[1]

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[1] Richard Hoggart, "Why I Value Literature," About Literature, Vol. 2. of Speaking to Each Other, London: Chatto, 1970. 14-15.

One possible way of overcoming the problems presented by the critical/experience divide is the development of dual reading habits, a dialectic of critical and experience reading (i.e. simultaneous experience and reflection on experience).[2] Probably this has always existed – human beings are both inquisitive/reflective and lovers of stories and narrative, but it appears one of the two reading methods is often repressed and becomes almost unconscious in a reader, depending on his or her prejudices and basic philosophical assumptions. Consequently, many readers will gain only part of what literature can offer. If we are to use literature to negotiate the real, rather than confirm our own preconceptions, we should employ the "intellectual openness and charity"[3] recommended by Hoggart, in order to avoid what Lewis identifies as "epics being blamed for not being novels, farces for not being high comedies, novels by James for lacking the swift action of Smollett."[4] Only by reconciling ourselves with our reading other can we achieve the full benefits of fiction.

Fantastical fiction often provides a site of interaction between materialism and transcendentalism, and between the various literary practices and positions that emerge from them. The struggle between these opposites – realism/fantasy, high/popular, ideas/escape, polemicist/amusing – is not only fruitful, but may be essential for our continued well-being. Complete immersion in fantasy is dangerous on both a personal and a social level, yet, as we have seen, several thinkers and writers propose that some contact with fantasy and narrative (for its own sake) is beneficial, even vital for mental health. Maintaining and balancing

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[2] The idea that reflection (on Truth and knowledge) is opposed to the "false" experience offered by art dates back at least to Plato's The Republic.

[3] Richard Hoggart, "Why I Value Literature," About Literature, vol. 2 of Speaking to Each Other. (London: Chatto, 1970) 15.

[4] C. S. Lewis, "On Science Fiction," Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Bles, 1966) 60.

the rational and the imaginative is perhaps more important now than ever before: postmodernity places complex pressures on individuals, such as the need to combat aestheticisation of the real while at the same time escaping it. Perhaps the wide acceptance, on all social and intellectual levels, of cultural phenomena like J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels indicates such a mass need for fantasy in people's lives.[5]

Examination of Dickens has shown that the division of philosophical assumptions informing opposed reading practices is dubious. The Christmas Books, with their overlap of vision, revision, illusion, and disillusion, give some indication of the falsity of a dichotomous position, but it is the dual narrative of Bleak House that perhaps most graphically illustrates the possibility of a dialectic. Not only does the third person narrative contain the disillusioned perspective of modernism, it also uses similar language to some modernists: hard boiled, repetitive, fragmentary. Esther's narrative, by contrast, is more akin to the popular novels Dickens had written prior to Bleak House, even utilising the first-person form and Bildungsroman plot of his previous success, David Copperfield. Therefore it can be suggested that the two narratives of Bleak House form a dialectic of high and low culture, and, as can be extrapolated from Higbie, a

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[5] "Wide acceptance" does not mean absolute acceptance, of course, and there are some signs of a backlash against the naïve pleasures of such books. In most cases these objections emerge from personal preference, but some negative reaction to Rowling's work also reveals that anxieties over fantastical fiction are still present. Some, rightwing Christian groups have seen the Potter novels as encouraging interest in the "occult". Jacqui Komschlies, "The Perils of Harry Potter: Literary device or not, witchcraft is real – and dangerous," 23 October, 2000, Online posting, christianitytoday.com, 2 March 2002. There have even been attempts to ban the books. Ted Olsen, "Parents Push for Wizard-free Reading," 10 January, 2000, Online posting, christianitytoday.com, 2 March 2002. At the other end of the political spectrum, Pierro Bruno, professor of social theory at Dijon University, says, "I would urge parents who want their children to develop non-sexist, non-elitist, progressive views to keep all four Harry Potter novels out of their way. Harry Potter may look like an intellectual with his glasses and his unruly hair, but once deconstructed he is only too clearly the hero of a political allegory for the triumph of the socially ascendant petite bourgeoisie." Pierre Bruno qtd. in John Lichfield, "French Marxist attacks 'bourgeois' Harry Potter," 28 January, 2001, Online posting, news.independent.co.uk, 15 June 2003.

dialectic of realism and idealism. Esther's scarred face arguably serves as an image of this. She is an attempt at the synthesis of reason and imagination that Higbie claims was sought by nineteenth-century writers: she allows belief in the ideal. From this, other dialectics surface[6] and the values of the "critical" and "experience" reader can set up a dialogue, threatening the literary caste system of high and low culture. For example, intellectual socialism may form a relationship with ethical socialism, the former providing the latter with critical awareness, the latter giving the former the hope and, importantly, the moral motivation for social change.

A similar dialectical relationship can be found in Wells's major scientific romances. The Wellsian scientific romance is by definition dialectical, and that the dialectic was lost when Wells's tales gave up their aesthetic quality in favour of didacticism (when they ceased, in fact, to be romances). As Orwell says, "acceptence of any political discipline seems to be incompatible with literary integrity."[7] The major romances maintain a balance, however, and C. P. Snow could be referring to them when he says in his lecture The Two Cultures, "[t]he clashing point of two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures - of two galaxies, so far as that goes - ought to produce creative chances."[8] It is interesting that, in his emotive response to the lecture, F. R. Leavis describes Snow as "the spiritual son of H. G. Wells,"[9] and refers to his "crass Wellsianism"[10] and "Neo-Wellsian assurance."[11]

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[6] These also include public/private and, if one considers the narratives to be gender-related, masculine/feminine

[7] George Orwell, "Writers and Leviathan," In Front of Your Nose: 1945-1950, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Fergus, vol. 4 of The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. (London: Secker, 1968) 412.

[8] C. P. Snow, The Two Cultures, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 16.

[9] F. R. Leavis, Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow (London: Chatto, 1962) 21.

[10] Leavis 23.

[11] Leavis 27.

It is useful to study the development of science fiction in the twentieth century in terms of its form, content, and cultural status. From the cerebral heights of Wells's scientific romances to the pleasures of lowbrow pulp, from the social commentary of Wyndham to the psychoanalytic fables of Aldiss and Ballard, it has been a genre that is hard to quantify. Though there has been an increased intellectualisation of sf, and a movement away from the pulp magazines, it never seems to have lost its connections with the popular-fantastic, with that Dickensian sense of amusement. Even the apparently "serious" agenda of The Drowned World ultimately refers to the fairy-tale. The defamilarisation inherent in empty streets, spaceship-worlds, and flooded cities is enough to impart artistic alienation or arresting Wonder to the reader. As with Wells's work, unthinking complacency is undermined by uncontrolled nature, and the images associated with this didactic message thrill the reader: walking and murderous plants, 'ponic jungles, and massive environmental change threatening identity itself. The attack on complacent thinking is also an attack on conventional or algebraic thinking, satisfying Shklovsky's requirement of art, and Tolkien and Lewis's ideas on fantasy. The word "algebraic" is significant, as it arguably recalls the conventional model of the sign, and thus this is what is defamiliarised, or, indeed, deconstructed by this fiction – reading pleasure and the direct experience of a stone's stoniness is reference outside language. The Day of the Triffids, Non-Stop, and The Drowned World all challenge identity. In some cases this challenge is social, in others psychoanalytic, but it always has the liberating effect of creating a space with new potential selves for the reader. Together with the expression of unconscious desire through phantasy, this is the function that

"populist" cultural studies theorists ascribe to the popular-fantastic, in some cases referring to a postmodern pluralism.

Postmodernism itself is both an expression of and response to the end of certainty and to the increasing confusion between real and fictive. Arguably, the rhythms, structures, and symbols of (especially popular) fiction and art have become an automatic, ritualised form of behaviour and perception – the real is aestheticised. On an analytical level, <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u>, <u>The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman</u>, and <u>Crash</u> all explore and reveal this postmodern condition, but in doing so they provide the reader with an exciting <u>frisson</u> of discovery, and even wonder. They contain rich language and imagery. In the case of <u>Crash</u>, transcendence is offered in the emergence of unconscious desires.

It would seem that neat distinctions of high and popular, left and right, material and ideal can collapse upon closer inspection. This should have implications for the way we read. In this dissertation novels have been studied using the criteria of both critical and experience reading.[12] It has been shown that texts discuss social and philosophical ideas even while creating certain effects in the reader experiencing them: transgression, phantasy, projection, and escape from alienation. It is significant that the texts studied have ranged across the cultural hierarchy, including classic literature, pulp, mainstream, and the postmodern novel (and mixtures of these categories). The narrative forms have included the dual narrative of <u>Bleak House</u>, the "found" narratives of <u>The Time Machine</u> and <u>The Island of Doctor Moreau</u>, intertextuality in <u>Frankenstein Unbound</u>, and postmodern self-reference in <u>Crash</u>. Dickens's fantastical narratives reveal connections and interdependencies between divergent classes in

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[12] Obviously, commentary on the latter is restricted to writing about experience from a relatively objective standpoint.

society, a theme also taken up by Wells in his presentation of the Eloi and

Morlocks. Wells's, Ballard's, and Aldiss's scientifically-grounded novels use the

fantastic to reveal material truths. Carter (like Wells in <u>The First Men in the</u>

<u>Moon</u>) shows us alternate worlds and ontologies that cannot meet. In all cases, a

narrow approach, one that considered a text's popular appeal or transcendentalist

aspects in purely ideological terms, or ignored subtextual themes, would have

limited the scope of the readings. Thus the argument can be made for a

combination of both reading methods.

Appendix: Marxism, Materialism, and Reason

Materialism is defined as "a set of related theories which hold that all entities and processes are composed of – or are reducible to – matter, material forces or physical processes. All events and facts are explainable, actually or in principle, in terms of body, material objects or dynamic material changes or movements."[1] However, the role of materialism in Marxism can be problematic, because "reason" is incorporated. It should be noted, for example, that Marx's materialism rejects absolute empiricism. Marx's apparent attempt to demystify Hegelian principles of teleology, by basing a material theory of history on them, means that objective idealism has had at least some influence on Marxism. Although Marx utilises "empirical" techniques of analysis (examining history and economics, for example), he sees this as an insufficient tool for understanding reality, using rationalism in addition to empiricism. Marx thus seems to attempt a reconciliation of materialism and idealism, but he is ultimately a materialist.

In the Introduction to the 1892 English edition of <u>Socialism: Utopian and Scientific</u>, Frederick Engels tackles the fundamental basis of Marxian thought. Engels notes that an "agnostic" will argue it is impossible to know how valid our sense impressions are (i.e. whether or not they convey the fundamental nature of reality), and will emphasise that "objects" are sensory phenomena that may not exist materially: "Now, this line of reasoning seems undoubtedly hard to beat by mere argumentation. But before argumentation there was action. <u>Im Anfang war die Tat</u>. And human action had solved the difficulty long before human ingenuity invented it [. . .] From the moment we turn to our own use of these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the

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[1] <u>Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy</u> (London: Routledge, 2000) 535.

correctness or otherwise of our sense perceptions."[2] This is really a more restrained (and less amusing) version of Samuel Johnson's famous attack on Bishop Berkeley's idealist philosophy: to kick a stone and say, "I refute it thus."[3] Engels does not say, "I refute it thus," but he does say, "[t]he proof of the pudding is in the eating."[4] What he and Johnson apparently fail to accept is that doubt of sensory evidence is practically Cartesian doubt. At this level of discourse, offering common-sense arguments is meaningless, particularly since they rely on yet more sensory information and are therefore tautological.

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[2] Frederick Engels, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, Scientific Socialism Series, 7th ed. (Moscow: Progress, 1970) 15.

[3] Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. R. W. Chapman. Corrected by J. D. Fleeman. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) 333.

[4] Engels 15.

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