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Review: The Mundanization of the Non-Normal
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realistically address the true nature and history of science fiction" (204). Westfahl's infuriated and infuriating stance makes this essay the trigger for further valuable discussion. Margaret Wise Petrochenkov offers a sensible Freudian interpretation which recognizes current feminist thinking in her "Castration Anxiety and the Other in Zamyatin's *We*."

The remaining six essays in the volume have a variety of problems, many of which could have been avoided with more careful editing. Some never go beyond the merely descriptive, with lengthy plot summaries or reviews of standard critical or psychological theories. Some are just poorly written: unclear, wordy, even ungrammatical. Because of these problems and because the volume has neither an index nor any information on the contributors, the book looks hastily thrown together, despite the lapse of eight years between the conference on which it was based and its publication.

A conference volume such as this tends to sink into obscurity unless the quality of the essays and the care taken in organizing and editing the work transforms it into a collection with a clear and intellectually valid purpose. This volume had the potential to escape obscurity. Its focus, a variety of perspectives on the nature of the other in fantastic literature, is tremendously vital, as evidenced, for instance, by the number of recent science fiction novels using first contact with alien species to examine postcolonial issues. A careful organizing structure for the essays would have given this book more coherence—perhaps grouping them in subsections, for example. A clearer, more sharply specific introduction would have established that coherence. A more active editorial hand with individual essays would have helped more of the contributors move beyond the pedestrian and would have saved them all from the embarrassment of glaring errors. As it is, I must hope that all the really fine essays in this volume will see publication elsewhere, as H. Bruce Franklin's did, and that the remaining writers receive the editorial guidance to make their essays more effective and illuminating.—**Joan Gordon, Nassau Community College**

The Mundanization of the Non-Normal. Nancy H. Traill. *Possible Worlds of the Fantastic: The Rise of the Paranormal in Literature*. U Toronto P (416-978-2239), 1996. ix + 197 pp. $45.00.

Possible Worlds of the Fantastic is a modest but useful modal study of the genre of the fantastic, based on Traill's dissertation. Traill restricts her analysis to two complementary foci: a typology of the sub-modes of the fantastic and the historical contexts in which they emerged, with special emphasis on the type Traill names the "paranormal." Her typology derives from a version of possible worlds theory, in which different genres of fantasy reflect different attitudes toward a fundamental opposition between the world of the physically possible and worlds that are physically impossible. *Possible Worlds of the Fantastic* is clearly formulated as a critique of Todorov's *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970; trans. 1973), a work that has long exercised a fascination in English-language genre-studies of the fantastic far exceeding its usefulness. Traill discards Todorov's narrowly conceived model—that the fantastic is created by the hesitation of the protagonist and the implied reader

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about whether phenomena in the story are of natural or supernatural origin—for the sake of "a theory of the fantastic as a *universal aesthetic category*." Her conception comports with the generally held intuitions, at least in the Western tradition, of what constitutes fantastic writing as an inclusive class. For Traill the fantastic is a *modality* rather than a specific genre, and it has a history of transformations in different historical periods.

At the other end, Traill's approach also contrasts strongly with studies such as Lucy Armitt's *Theorizing the Fantastic* (St. Martin's, 1996) and Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (Methuen, 1981), which are primarily concerned with generative psychoanalytic and ideological "motivations" for fantastic writing. Traill aims for what she considers a purely descriptive approach. Her concern is with the different ways in which authors conceive of the opposition between the "natural" world and impossible worlds, and the only motivations she considers are the accepted notions of this relationship in the historical cultures in which the writers operated.

Traill identifies five modes: the *disjunctive, fantasy*, the *ambiguous*, the *supernatural naturalized*, and the *paranormal*. The modes succeed each other roughly in correspondence with the prevalent beliefs of successive historical periods, although emerging modes do not wipe out their precursors. In each successive mode, the gap between the physical and the impossible narrows and becomes indistinct. The *disjunctive* is characterized by the uncontested separation of the physical and the non-physical worlds; nothing in the tales can "disauthenticate" the supernatural beings that appear in them. *Fantasy* is a subtype of the disjunctive; in it the natural world is either entirely absent or appears merely to frame the fantasy world. Fantasy's main world is supernatural. This class includes marvellous tales, fantastic romances like *Vathek* (1786), and such sophisticated versions as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

The *ambiguous* mode corresponds roughly to Todorov's *fantastique*. It does not determine with certainty whether the supernatural world exists or not, leaving it to be constructed by the readers as a potentiality, an "as if" or "may be." The narrator or protagonist-narrator—who for Traill is the medium for authentication or disauthentication in all fantastic fiction—offers no clear solution to the question, and inspires Todorovian hesitation. Traill cites *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), in which the narrator's or protagonist's uncertainty prevents the reader from resolving the tension. She also defends Gogol's "The Nose" (1835) against Todorov's rejection of it as a work of "fantastique"; Gogol shows that ambiguity need not be localized in a mediating character/perceiver, but can be raised to a higher level of textual abstraction by the reader's uncertainty about how to respond to the narrative.

The *supernatural naturalized* corresponds to Todorov's "supernatural explained," but for Traill, unlike Todorov, this is a valid form of the fantastic. In it, the supernatural is constructed in the disjunctive mode, but then it is disauthenticated via naturalizing explanations. For Traill the sense of the fantastic in Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, and Potocki's *Saragossa Manuscript* (1805-15)—and most obviously in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)—is not dissolved by the rationalized endings; often in such works the credibility of the explanation is itself in doubt. (This is a point that Traill might have

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expanded on: evidently the fantastic for her is not merely a mode of representing the relationship between worlds, but an *effect*. Only in this way can the rationalized Gothic remain fully in the domain of the fantastic; the feeling of world-strangeness that is ultimately explained away must be so strong that it survives the explanation. This playful—and eerie—overriding of the natural becomes an explicit feature of the paranormal.)

Traill is most interested in the *paranormal* mode, in which

> a structural change occurs: the natural domain is enlarged and encompasses a special region accessible to those with extraordinary perceptual capacities. Supernatural phenomena are reinterpreted and brought within the paradigm of the natural. They are latent in nature or innate in humans and other animals. The laws of the physically possible natural domain are not violated, but they are reassessed and their range is extended to include the scientifically unproved. (17-18)

As her subtitle indicates, the paranormal is the central mode in Traill's theory. Indeed, it appears that her whole theory of fantastic modes derives from her attempt to describe what makes the paranormal fantastic. In Chapter 2, she provides a succinct and engaging history of the rise of spiritualism in nineteenth-century Europe and the US, emphasizing the career of mesmerism as a model of the rationalization process. This chapter is extremely useful for students of sf, for it describes the widespread distribution of supposedly supernatural beliefs throughout English and French scientific culture. For many of the leading scientific minds such as Sir Oliver Lodge, Alfred Russel Wallace, William Crooke, Charles Richet, and even the arch-materialist T.H. Huxley, the effect of scientific progress and evolutionary ideas was to make acceptable the idea that knowledge is never completed, and the domain of known things cannot be arbitrarily closed off from the supposedly irrational or superstitious.

These ideas were the basis for the boom period of proto-sf writing in Traill's paranormal mode. The paranormal was the appropriate form of the fantastic for the second half of the century, not only permitting realist writers to continue the literary tradition of pitting known and unknown worlds against each other, but also expressing the deep social anxiety about empiricism's conquest of religious-spiritual culture. Traill devotes the second half of her book to a study of how three authors—Dickens, Turgenev, and Maupassant—use the different fantastic modes, which culminated, in Maupassant, with the adoption of the paranormal. In these chapters, Traill uses these writers' extraliterary opinions about supernatural phenomena, as found in their letters, journals, and journalism, to contextualize their fantastic stories.

Most interesting for students of sf is Traill's analysis of Maupassant's story "The Horla" (1886). Taking it through its early versions, Traill observes the ways Maupassant uses narrative devices to create the effect of scientific horror, in ways that seem to establish the model used later by Wells. But Traill is not interested in sf; her object is the way the fantastic tale is formulated in the midst of nineteenth-century realism. Sf is a form of writing beyond her horizon.

This is a pity, because there is much that could be said about the similarities

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of the contexts in which the paranormal and sf develop. Todorov, too, makes only slight mention of sf; for him it is a species of the "instrumental marvelous," where "the supernatural is explained in a rational manner, but according to laws which contemporary science does not acknowledge" (56). Characteristically, the sf tale presents the reader with supernatural data ("robots, extraterrestrial beings, the whole interplanetary context") which is steadily naturalized, so that the irreducible opposition between natural and supernatural explanations is dissolved by the reader's acceptance that the marvellous data are part of an expanded reality (172). In its full-fledged Maupassantian form, Traill's paranormal has a similar dynamic, except that the protagonist's/narrator's difficulty of adapting to the expanded conception of the natural brings it closer to Todorovian hesitation than Todorov himself would allow. The hesitation is no longer an epistemological indecision, but one of *morale;* accepting the consequences of the expansion would imply that the values held most dear by human protagonists are undermined by the new nature, a perfect representation of cultural anxiety in face of the rise of scientific materialism. The paranormal's protagonist/narrator hesitates to believe what is true.

This model may be adequate for much sf. The sf reader does usually go through a process of "adaptation," learning the new words and referents that an sf text uses to dislocate the reader from the here and now, and this is how his or her in-text natural world is "expanded." Even though most sf begins *in medias res alias,* as far as the reader's knowledge is concerned, this may not constitute a decisive difference from the paranormal. It is widely held that sf is tied to the rhetoric of realism, if only to keep alive the essential separation between the natural and the supernatural in the form of the separation between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Adventure fiction worked in an analogous way; lost tribes were modeled on real anthropological "discoveries"; and supernatural events could be rationalized through the magical belief systems of these others, in a natural world where parallel world-systems could exist at the same time. But the formal congruence of the paranormal and sf says little about sf. For one thing, the "supernatural" is increasingly depicted in sf as the product of human technology. The supernatural emerges "immanently" from the natural world, or worlds just like it, rather than being discovered existing on a separate plane of the real. But this is not the end of it, since the "supernatural" in much sf is not only produced in the course of human activity, it is *mass-produced*, by technological means, or by supposedly natural means that are modeled on technological production. The term "supernatural" or physically impossible has little meaning in sf; indeed, the very idea of the "normal" has been made subject to hesitation, since an sf reader can be sure that normality merely indicates ignorance and, perhaps more important, impotence.

But even these questions seem somehow off the point. Sf comes in many forms. It may be that much of it inherits the paranormal mode, and much of it is completely different. At the very least, one would expect that the new conditions of technological world-transformation in the twentieth century would bring about new modes of the fantastic, analogous to the development of the

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paranormal during the scientific revolutions of the nineteenth. If any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic, does it not mean that all wonders are merely extremely complex immanent material processes? Is there a difference between a fantastic that conceives of a single opposition between the physical and the physically impossible, and one that entertains the statistical possibility of countless alternatives to physical normality? The mundanization of the non-normal—i.e., the easy entertainment of realities that differ significantly from our own—must certainly distinguish twentieth-century fantasy from that of the nineteenth.

The question is whether such an attempt to describe different species of the fantastic modally is truly useful in the study of sf and its historical context. Lem criticized Todorov for, among other things, ignoring the interpretations of the depicted world that are shared by the author and the reader. Thus, for example, a structural-formal approach must ignore the irony of certain tellings, since that is merely an interpretation of the given textual world. However, the complexities of these "colorations" surround the possible world-modalities at the very moment the reader tries to construct the fictional worlds in question. In many cases, one can say that the world supposedly presented as a home-base for the reader is so unstable that no decision can be made about which possible world it is. This is not only a problem—the most intriguing one, at that—in works like *Solaris* (1961; trans. 1970), *Roadside Picnic* (1972; trans. 1977), *A Case of Conscience* (1958), *The Embedding* (1973), *Ubik* (1969), *The Female Man* (1975), *Triton* (1976), and scores of other sf works, but in classical literature as well.

What, for example, does the modal analysis tell us about *The Golden Ass*? Apuleius's second-century novel is surely a work of the fantastic, since it tells the story of a man transformed by magic into a jackass, and later returned to human form, a better one than before, through the power of the goddess Isis. Gritty Roman physical normality works side by side with sympathetic magic and spiritual transformations of mystery cults, flickering in and out of allegory, autobiography, Milesian satire, devotional prose, and rhapsodic porn. This carnivalesque confusion of forms does not lead to hesitation, or even contestation, but to a kind of revelling in different ways of interpreting the world, without granting any way dominance. Sf similarly includes in it the potential of a carnivalesque chaos of worlds, most of which can be conceived as rationally explicable, even though they may be contradictory. And given the Lafferties and Cordwainer Smiths, the Dicks and Strugatskys of the sf world, sf is potentially the genre of the infinite proliferation of worlds, all of them licensed by ideas that are theoretically natural. In such a domain, Traill's possible worlds theory needs to be greatly refined.

Traill notes that her operative notion of the real is not the same as Auerbach's mimesis. Auerbach is concerned with the sense of the real that comes from mundane experience in the world in a given age. Traill wishes to expand the idea to cover also the theoretical (or philosophical) sense of the real of a given age, i.e., the abstract conceptions of the real nature of things, which may have little to do with everyday life. Yet one might argue that in certain

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periods, and in certain versions of the fantastic, the theoretical real is so uncertain that even in everyday life people do not set up a simple opposition between the physical and the impossible. One might say that the modal approach, like structural analysis in general, works best with works that are so simple that the idea of "world" is not called into question by the text. The sf novels I listed above might all be called meta-sf, since they assume that their readers are so familiar with basic sf conventions that they will appreciate how their works deviate from those conventions. But the well-known argument against structuralist approaches that cannot identify the difference between a convention and a complex artistic message may apply in Traill's case, too.

That being said, I don't doubt that Traill's approach might be fruitfully applied to sf, if the writer is willing to take the risk to see whether it survives the test.—**ICR**

Leftovers. Gary Westfahl, George Edgar Slusser, and Eric S. Rabkin, eds. *Foods of the Gods: Eating and the Eaten in Fantasy and Science Fiction.* U Georgia P (706-369-6163), 1996. vi + 253 pp. $45.00 cloth.

The essays in this book consider eating in various genres and contexts, from mystery novels to body-building magazines, Balzac to Octavia Butler, Steven Spielberg films to that warhorse of sf, Robert A. Heinlein. The goal is to explore the relation between reason and the material body, between the ritual of the communal meal and the horror of solitary eaters, between gnosticism and orthodoxy, between transcendence and the turd. However, this is one of those conference volumes that gives you the strong impression the conference was a lot more fun than are its gathered remains. The puns I'm sure flowed fast and furious (there was clearly plenty of food for thought...); what Pat Cadigan calls food porn must have been readily available; and one assumes that theory frequently devolved into yummy practice.

Claude Lévi-Strauss said, "Food is good to think with," but alas this is not always the case in this book; moreover, not enough exchange occurs among the pieces. Thus, a careful critique of the dangerous Social Darwinist philosophy at work in Heinlein's and Frank Herbert's fiction (Peter Fitting's "Eating Your Way to the Top: Social Darwinism in SF") shares space with a deeply untheorized deployment of exactly that philosophy to explain utopian fiction (Brett Cooke's "Utopia and the Art of the Visceral Response"). A laughable speculative fiction about homo erectus male sexual fantasies and shamanism—Wayne Allen's "Shamanic Manipulation of Conspecifics: An Analysis of the Prehistory and Ethnohistory of Hallucinogens and Psychological Legerdemain"—rubs elbows with an erudite, elegant, and historically precise discussion of cannibalism in Jonathan Swift and H.G. Wells in Paul Alkon's "Cannibalism in Science Fiction." The so-unabashed-it's-almost-cute sexism and homophobia of George Slusser's "The Solitary Eater in Science Fiction and Horror" mingles uneasily with the delightful comfort in gender-bending evidenced in Stephanie Hammer's "Watching the Forbidden Feast: Monstrous Appetites, Secret Meals, and Spectatorial Pleasures in [Jean] Cocteau, [Anne] Rice, and [Octavia] Butler."

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