

The Best of *CyberCozen*, March 1992 - May 1993

Selected by Eli Eshed

(which is why there are no articles here by Eli Eshed)

March 1993

BOOK REVIEW: *The Barbie Murders*, by John Varley, 1980.

Reviewed by Aharon Sheer.

I once said to a young would-be author that if he makes his hero female, there should be some significance in the story to the heroine's female nature. Otherwise a male author -- who is likely to understand men better than women -- should stick to male heroes. John Varley is an author for whom the sex of his heroes is ALWAYS relevant to his stories.

In the title story of this collection, a community of people who have renounced sex has been set up. All members have been surgically operated on to look like 20th century American Barbie Dolls: identical "female" bodies with no body hair, breasts with no nipples, and external genitals completely lacking. In the barbie colony all wear the same clothes and hair style. Lieutenant Anna-Louise Bach, called in to investigate a series of murders in the colony, cannot tell one from another, nor can the thirteen eyewitnesses, not even with a videotape showing the murder taking place, the barbie killer's face clearly visible. (Talk about "vanishing into the crowd"!) Lieutenant Bach's female feelings are emphasized when she touches herself, thinking about how she would feel losing the female parts of her own body. The story, by the way, is completely unlike Asimov's robot story in which it is necessary to identify a robot that thinks differently from other robots. Human emotion is predominant in Varley's story.

In another story ("Bagatelle"), Municipal Police Chief Anna-Louise Bach (promoted?) calls in an expert in bomb disarming to deal with a human atomic bomb soon to go off. The expert, in the course of his work, propositions her. Afterwards he apologizes, saying that dealing with the dangers of bombs always sexually excites him.

The sex of Varley's characters is a major element in several stories (e.g., "Picnic on Near Side"). They take place in a world in which everyone lives part of his childhood as a female, and part as a male, regardless of sex at birth. The surgical conversion is complete, easily and safely done. The author seems to think that sexual behavioral differences are purely role-playing. When female, his characters consciously behave like females, and when male, they consciously behave like males. He ignores the hormonal differences between males and females, a mistake that I doubt he would make had he himself actually been surgically altered to be a fully functioning female.

Varley's stories are funny, and interesting to read, but his characters are often not fully believable. Some behave unlike any person I've ever met, but still it is amusing to imagine that in some future world people might actually be that way (after such a childhood?).

Recommended.

June 1992

Book Review: *The Psychology of Everyday Things*, by Donald A. Norman, Basic Books, 1988.

Reviewed by Aharon Sheer.

Donald Norman's book is wonderful. Everyone encounters devices today that are badly designed. How many people use the "CM", "RM", "M+", "M-" functions on their simple pocket calculator? These buttons don't do what you expect them to do, so it's easier to keep intermediate results using pencil and paper. It's said that if you have a VCR in your house, the time display is always blinking unless you have a teenage son who has figured out how to set it.

A common principle of attractive design today requires symmetric rows of identical switches. Yet wouldn't the device's use be easier to remember if each switch had a different shape, color, and manner of pushing, pulling or twisting, each form reminding you of its function? Such a device would be ugly! And probably more expensive to manufacture. But then what good is a VCR whose operation is so complicated that 90% of the owners use only the simplest functions?

People buy these badly designed monsters because of the impressive array of functions offered, but then they cannot remember from one week to the next how to use them without referencing the manual. The exceptions obviously are the professionals, who, because they use the device for hours each day, do not have time to forget how to operate it. The device's designers themselves fall in that class, making them incapable of understanding the problems of the casual user.

A colleague who scanned this book suggested that the author talks too much about doors. Clearly doors are a good way to get across simple principles of good design. This book is both aesthetic and entertaining. If you are involved in work that requires designing, it is essential.

The following passage shows the author's lucid, delightful style:

"A friend told me of the time he got trapped in the doorway of a post office in a European city. The entrance was an imposing row of perhaps six glass swinging doors, followed immediately by a second, identical row. That's a standard design: it helps reduce the airflow and thus maintain the indoor temperature of the building.

"My friend pushed on the side of one of the leftmost pair of outer doors. It swung inward, and he entered the building. Then, before he could get to the next row of doors, he was distracted and turned around for an instant. He didn't realize it at the time, but he had moved slightly to the right. So when he came to the next door and pushed it, nothing happened. "Hmm," he thought, "must be locked." So he pushed the side of the adjacent door. Nothing. Puzzled, my friend decided to go outside again. He turned around and pushed against the side of a door. Nothing. He pushed the adjacent door. Nothing. The door he had just entered no longer worked. He turned around once more and tried the inside door again. Nothing. Concern, then mild panic. He was trapped! Just then, a group of people on the other side of the entrance way (to my friend's right) passed easily through both sets of doors. My friend hurried over to follow their path.

"How could such a thing happen? A swinging door has two sides. One contains the supporting pillar and the hinge, the other is unsupported. To open the door, you push on the unsupported edge. If you push on the hinge side, nothing happens. In this case, the designer aimed for beauty, not utility. No distracting lines, no visible pillars, no visible hinges. So how can the ordinary user know which side to

push on? While distracted, my friend had moved toward the (invisible) supporting pillar, so he was pushing the doors on the hinged side. No wonder nothing happened. Pretty doors. Elegant. Probably won a design prize."

At one point while reading the above passage I felt like I was in the middle of an SF story by Philip K. Dick. Reality gone wild! Which is why I thought that a review of the book belongs in *CyberCozen*.

September 1992

Commentary: Unseen by Miriam Ben-Lulu

To see or not to see -- that is the question. The sense of sight is so important to us that in both Hebrew and English "I see" is equivalent to "I understand". (No quiz throws students into a greater panic than an "unseen"!) Because of this importance, science fiction writers have provided their spacecraft with visual clues concerning the environment outside. I have yet to come across a spacecraft that gave its information concerning the outside environment through tactile or auditory clues. I doubt if anyone has tried smells -- a rose smell for an Earth-type planet, violets for a blue star, rotten eggs for a black hole, perhaps?

Instruments and Instrumentally Aided Vision: Some stories use instruments only, or instruments and some form of viewing with artificial senses:

1) *Saberhagen: My Best*, "The Long Way Home" (Fred Saberhagen, 1961), p. 75: "It was a needle thirty miles long, as near as his radar could measure"

2) *Downbelow Station* (C.J. Cherryh, 1981), p.261: "'Rider's turned,' scan op said in her ear. She saw it on-screen. The rider had gotten their acknowledgement minutes ago, had put about; that scan image was meeting them now. Longscan comp had put the rest of the arc together"

P. 291: "Militia freighters scattered, stationary nightmare. One of them blew like a tiny sun, flared on vid ..."

3) *The Crystal Singer* (Anne McCaffrey, 1974), p.281 [in the "dimension tank"]: "The cruiser was a very tiny blip, coasting past the orbit of the outermost planet, down towards the primary. Blinking lights indicated major mining stations in the asteroid belts; two tiny solid light [sic] of the two moon bases."

4) *The Man-Kzin Wars* (ed. Larry Niven) "Iron" (Poul Anderson, 1988), p. 62: "Going off watch, Carita Fenger stopped by the saloon. A large viewscreen there kept the image of the sun at the cross-haired center."

P. 58: "While Rover was in hyperspace, all five of her gang stood mass detector watch"

5) *Agent of Vega* (James H. Schmitz, 1960) "The Illusionists", p. 73: "In the vision tank, the fleeing disk grew and grew. During the first few minutes, it had appeared there only as a comet-tailed spark, a dozen radiant streamers of different colors fanning out behind it -- not an image of the disk itself but the tank's visual representation of any remote moving object on which the ship's detectors were held. The shifting lengths and brightness of the streamers announced at a glance to those trained to read them the object's distance, direction, comparative and absolute speeds and other matters of interest to a curious observer. But as the Viper began to reduce the headstart the Bjanta had been permitted to get ... a shadowy outline of the disk's true shape began to grow about the spark. A bare quarter million miles away finally, the disk itself appeared to be moving at a visual range of 200 yards ahead of the ship, while the spark still flickered its varied information from the center of the image."

6) *Galactic Derelict* (Andre Norton, 1959) p. 64-5: "'We can see -- a little.' The technician stepped to one of the side panels his hand going to a button there.... A plate arose from the board, glowed. Then, over the head of the technician ... they caught sight of swirling ash-filled vapor [there was a volcano outside], as if they were looking through a window into the valley."

Other methods used: electron telescope (Stasheff), remotely controlled telescope (Saberhagen), general-view tank (Schmitz) and optical compensators that project an exact simulacram (Anderson).

Direct Vision: Direct vision has been used alone or with instruments:

1) *The Crystal Singer* (McCaffrey) p. 37: "Captain Anurs alerted Killishandra when the ship had emerged from hyper-space and Ballybran was fully visible.

"'Good view,' he told her, pointing to the two inner moons, positioned at ten and five, but Killishandra had eyes only for the mysterious planet."

2) *Crystal Witness* (Kathy Tyers, 1989) p. 28 [on a shuttle]: "Three passengers already sat in this economy section with neither windows nor a viewscreen. Disappointed to be denied one glimpse of her new homeworld from space" [While this is in the negative it seems to indicate that windows and/or viewscreens were available in 1st class sections.]

3) *Sundiver* (David Brin, 1980) p. 28: "This was Jacob's first trip aboard a ship powered by the billion-year-old science of the Galactics. He watched from the first-class lounge as the Earth fell away.... The view was breathtaking...."

P. 53 [when viewing the sun]: "The Captain ordered the ship's stasis screens polarized and the regular viewing ports sealed."

P. 58: "A soft, pearly light suffused through the ports, illuminating the faces of those who watched Mercury glide beneath the descending ship. Almost everyone who did not have a duty to perform was in the lounge, held to the row of viewing windows by the planet's terrible beauty."

4) *The Stars, Like Dust* (Isaac Asimov, 1950) p. 22: "The view-room was a bubble on the ship's 'skin', a bubble of curved two-feet-thick, steel-hard transparent plastic."

It is interesting that some authors change descriptions in various stories they have written, while others may in a single story describe different types of spacecraft with different methods being used. Ambiguity: Looking at the above quotations you may disagree with the way I have grouped them. This is because it is often difficult to decide where un-aided vision leaves off and instrument begins when both are available on the same craft. The same holds true when an instrument is simply read or when it is a form of vision. The description by Schmitz in "The Illusionists" (above) shows one instrument with both forms.

Faster Than Light Travel: In faster-than-light travel it is logical that things would look different:

1) *The Warlock Unlocked* (Christopher Stasheff, 1982) p. 89: "He gazed at the viewscreen, letting his subconscious read ecclesiastical symbols into the random swirls of color that hyperspace induced in the cameras."

P. 90-1: "... and saw the velvet darkness and bright little stars again; but this time they stayed still. 'We're back in normal space?'"

2) "Iron" (Anderson) "... stood mass detector watch.... It wasn't torture, of course, once you had schooled yourself never to look into the Less Than Void which filled the single port necessarily left unshuttered."

3) *The Witches of Karres* (James H. Schmitz, 1949) p. 21: "The screens all blurred and darkened simultaneously, and, for a short while, a darkness went flowing and coiling lazily past the Venture. Light jumped out of it at him once in a cold, ugly glare, and receded again in a twisting unnatural fashion." [This was when the spaceship was using the "Sheewash Drive" provided by three young witches, and a ship using a conventional drive fired on them.]

Problems Concerning Vision: Several authors have considered the possible problems that might arise in space concerning vision:

1) [detection of a craft] *Galactic Patrol* (E.E. "Doc" Smith, 1937) p. 149: "His speedster was immune to all detection save electromagnetic or visual, and therefore, even at that close range -- the travel of half a minute for even a slow space ship in open space -- he was safe. For electromagnetics are useless at that distance; and visual apparatus, even with subether converters, is reliable only up to a few mere thousands of miles, unless the observer knows exactly what to look for and where to look for it."

2) [getting un-lost] *Witches of Karres* (Schmitz) p. 56: "Stars filled the screens in all directions, crowded pinpoints of hard brilliance and hazy clusters. Here and there swam dark pools of cosmic dust. On the right was a familiar spectacle but one which offered no clues -- the gleaming cascade of ice-fire of the Milky Way. One would have had approximately the same view from many widely scattered points of the galaxy."

3) [care of viewscreens] *The Stars, Like Dust* (Asimov) p. 22: "The retractile iridium-steel lid which protected it [the view room; for description, see above] against the scouring of the atmosphere and its dust particles had been sucked back."

Aliens and Vision: Nor are humans the only ones with problems and solutions concerning vision:

1) "Iron" (Anderson) p. 79: "From what data we have on them, I believe they [the Kzinti] were searching for some time before they acquired us, probably with amplified optics."

P. 131: "They [Kzinti] did hate sensory deprivation, still more than humans do. There was no screen, but a port showed the spacefield."

2) *Earthmen and Strangers* (ed. Robert Silverberg) "Dear Devil" (Eric Frank Russell, 1950) p.11 [a Martian craft]: "There were no observation ports. All viewing was done through a transparent band running right around the fat belly of the sphere."

"The Best Policy" (Randall Garrett, 1957) p. 47 [on a Fenigwisnok craft]: "Gazing at the magniscreen, he rubbed his palms together in satisfaction.... He twisted the screen's magnification control up, and the scene beneath the ship ballooned outward...."

Conclusion: In short, we can't visualize a future in which we can't see where we're headed, but even SF's visionary writers cannot see eye to eye on the method to be used -- if you see what I mean.

Editor's Question: Miriam's comments suggest the following question: Has anyone ever written a story about space travelling dogs? Computer generated artificial smells might be their major source of information, just as "false" color is used by humans to picture the unseeable.

Miriam's Comment on Editor's Question: I have a battier idea -- aliens based on chiroptera who use echo location!

October 1992

Book Review / Dotan Dimet

* *The Difference Engine*, by William Gibson & Bruce Sterling

The Difference Engine, sighted recently at Steimatzky, is a book I was quite eager to read. The Authors are, respectively, the premier stylist, and the chief spokesman, of the 'Cyberpunk' movement which was heavily publicized in the mid eighties as the 'next thing' in Science Fiction.

Since then, most of the elements associated with cyberpunk (mind/computer interface, electronic hallucinatory realities, street-tough cyborgs, etc) have been absorbed and diffused throughout science fiction, emerging in a variety of contexts from militaristic space opera to cross-genre fantasy. The question was, was there something in Cyberpunk beyond the imagery everyone was borrowing from Gibson?

Gibson's works, the novels *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, and the short stories collected in *Burning Chrome*, constitute the definitive Cyberpunk texts. Fast, colorful and dazzling with both style and stylishness, they contain a core of existential despair familiar from both postmodernism and earlier SF (J.G. Ballard in particular). Gibson draws a portrait of human society transformed, distorted out of shape by the rampant evolution of technology out of control, which, while dehumanized, is still fascinating to watch. (If my description scared anyone off, let me assure you that Gibson's stuff is terrifically readable, and would appeal to lovers of thrillers if they could read Science Fiction).

Sterling lacks Gibson's sheer grace but is motivated by much more sharply defined ideological principles. While Gibson has been described as impressionistic, so that he is able to write something that feels right even when he doesn't know what he's talking about (this is a man who wrote a brilliant novel about futuristic computer crime on a mechanical typewriter), Sterling has been described as a super-realist. His Cyberpunk is carefully extrapolated from his perceptions of science, technology and the human condition. Gibson eclipses him simply by the fact that while Sterling shows you exactly how humanity can be mutated by technology, Gibson makes you feel it.

Both of them are clever and talented, both of them epitomize Cyberpunk. So, if there is something to Cyberpunk beyond all the imagery which makes it so fascinating to the mind's eye, and which has been recycled since the mid-eighties to near-death, they would be the ones to prove it. Which is what, in my opinion, they have done here.

The Difference Engine is an alternate history story with a delightful premise: What If Charles Babbage, who invented the computer in Victorian times (building, or at least designing, a device called the analytical engine, a sort of programmable calculator based on high-tech clockwork), had actually succeeded in perfecting and mass producing his remarkable device? Sterling and Gibson envision a nineteenth century in which the British Empire rules supreme, its industrial revolution accelerated to an unbelievable pace by the widespread use of steam-powered clockwork computers, its armies equipped with computer-targeted cannons, its entertainment industry dominated by the Kineotrope, a form of mechanical computer-graphics with thousands of little chits of different colors forming a huge screen manipulated by computer. The politics of this bold new empire is dominated by the Rad party, headed by the prime minister, Lord Byron. Shelly is a discredited and imprisoned Luddite (anti-industrial revolution) rebel, Disraeli is a writer of cheap romances (using a 'word-processor' where punched tape plays the role we assign to

our hard-disks and diskettes), and Karl Marx has founded a commune in the island of Manhattan at the edge of the chaotic and not-very-united states of America.

Gibson and Sterling tell their story in four chunks, each one using a different viewpoint character. The chunks are connected indirectly, with the characters mostly unaware of each other's actions, and none but the reader perceiving the larger picture. This technique is similar to that used by Gibson in his last two novels, where the stories of his multiple viewpoint characters paralleled and intersected but barely came together except in his finales. Here, the reader is the only witness to the finale.

It is fun to try and guess which of the writers contributed which part of the novel: The first part, whose viewpoint character is a ruined woman, the daughter of an anti-technology leader reduced to prostitution, reads very much like Gibson, with its graceful description of the heroine's life in a London both historically accurate and yet very different from "our" Victorian London, and of her involvement in some intricate scheme of her lover, a dandy con-man, and his boss, General Sam Houston, the exiled president of Texas. Gibson's style is well evident here, with his ability to put us into the heroine's head, see what she sees, sense the smells and textures of her world, and still feel cozy and distant.

Part two must be Sterling's, I guess. The protagonist is a Planetologist who must cope with scientific rivalry, intrigue involving the Prime minister's daughter, the brilliant programmer Ada Byron ("the Queen of Engines"), a gang of anarchist revolutionaries, and an ecological disaster. Once Gibson has slid us smoothly into this alternate world, Sterling takes us on a ride around, showing us some of the more interesting sights. The closing sequence, which serves as an epilogue to this part, is quintessential Sterling, taking a distanced look at his hero, encapsulating his life and the spirit of scientific struggle which it epitomized.

Part three brings the story to a conclusion of sorts, as its secret agent protagonist tracks down the heroine of the first part. Information is exchanged, but the reader remains somewhat mystified. I find it hard to tag a writer on this piece, but I would guess Sterling.

Next we have a parade of documents, descriptions, cuttings, describing the alternate world by illuminating various panels. Ada Byron, having used the computer to extract some obscure mathematical proof (perhaps Godel's theorem), is the final human character to walk the stage. She looks in a mirror. Through a mirror, we see the final scene, set in the twentieth century, our mirror. We get a glimpse of what dominates the stage a hundred years after Ada exited it, the hub around which all the stories, the images, the fragments Gibson and Sterling have been presenting us are revolving, spiraling down into. It is not us, not our reflections we see in the mirror of the alternate history, it is our future. Our true reflection has been all along the technologically transformed England of the nineteenth century, which, without a trace of electronics, seems remarkably Cyberpunk.

December 1992

Commentary by Daniel Gorelik: Utopia: H.G. Wells Men Like Gods

The concept of utopia in European thought has its roots in two traditions: the Hebraic and the classical. From the sacred literature of the Jews, the concept of history as a movement towards human perfection is derived. In the books of the Hebrew prophets and in rabbinic literature, the Messianic period is envisioned as ushering in an era of total social harmony: Man is restored to the state in which he

existed before the Fall (from the Garden of Eden). The Messianic idea enters into European culture via Christianity. As defined by St. Augustine in his *City of G-D*, history represents a spiritual journey towards the establishment of the kingdom of G-D on earth. The world of Greek and Roman classical literature contributed the idea of the Golden Age. In Greek myth, the first age of man is conceived of as an era of perfect social equality, characterized by the absence of exploitation and social inequality. The myth of the Golden Age was interpreted by the Church as an allusion to the Garden of Eden and gradually incorporated into the Messianic vision.

Greek philosophy also makes its contribution to the concept of utopia, notably in Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates, dealing with the subject of justice, describes the ideal state as follows: It is of a hierarchial nature organized along strictly functional lines. The interests of the individual are strictly subordinated to the interests of society. The well-functioning of the state is insured by a ruling class whose authority is based on the superiority of its knowledge and moral character. Because their moral values have a strictly scientific basis, they are in a position to decide what is in the interests of the state. Class divisions are based neither on money nor ancestry but on natural ability alone. Each class is defined by its social function and each individual is placed into that class which best fits his abilities. There is no freedom in the choice of profession; the individual's choice is determined for him by the guardians of society. In this way, argues Socrates, social harmony is insured.

What differentiates the socialist schemes of the nineteenth century from previous utopian visions is the conviction of their creators that their ideals can be realized through the application of scientific method to political action. Karl Marx distinguished between his political ideas, which he labelled Scientific Socialism, and those of his contemporaries, whom he defined as utopians.

"Philosophers have described the world;" declared Marx, "it is our task to change it." With these words Marx summarized the sentiments of modern socialist thinkers. Marx provides us with the most coherent and lucid expression of modern utopian sentiment. Like the science fiction writer, Marx was preoccupied with predicting the future. One could argue that Karl Marx was a potential science fiction writer who had missed his true vocation.

Marx believed that socialism would inaugurate a new era in human history by liberating man from historical necessity and giving mankind conscious control over its destiny; the dreams of prophets and saints would be realized without G-d through man's efforts alone.

The question which many science fiction writers raise, beginning with H.G. Wells, is whether utopia is realizable, and if it is, is its realization desirable. Might it not be that that the translation of the dream into reality would become a living nightmare?

In his *Null-A* series, A.E. van Vogt presents us with the nightmarish possibility of a galaxy in which humanity has achieved revolutionary advances in its control over the material world, while its emotional life has remained at the infantile stage. What happens, van Vogt forces us to ask ourselves, when a civilization's technological advancement outstrips its emotional development?

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* poses another challenge to its readers. When we finish the novel, we are left wondering whether the utopian ideal of social harmony is compatible with human freedom, and whether the realization of such an ideal might not result in the negation of human values.

Isaac Asimov, in his late novels *Foundation's Edge* and *Foundation and Earth*, describes a planet (Gaia) whose inhabitants have achieved an organic consciousness, and in which all elements, on all levels, exist in perfect harmony with each other. The question which the hero of the novel sets out to answer is whether such a society should exist at all, and whether its continued existence in the galaxy doesn't pose a threat to the welfare of the human race.

Ursula Leguin forces us to see the idea of utopia from a radically different perspective. The assumption underlying her novels is that it is man's impulse to impose his will on nature that is the source of evil. The will to power, whether directed towards man or nature, leads to social exploitation and disharmony with nature; it is anti-life in its essence.

What gives the questions raised by science fiction writers special urgency in the twentieth century are the social upheavals caused by political movements which have attempted to carry out the various nineteenth century utopian schemes in practice. The practical results of their efforts should give us pause for thought.

Men like Gods is one of H.G. Wells' least successful science fiction novels. Its importance lies in this: The way the novel deals with the subject of utopia anticipates its treatment in later science fiction novels.

The hero of the novel, Mr. Barnstaple, is an assistant editor of a liberal newspaper and at the beginning of the novel we find him in a state of despondency as he contemplates the political scene. Instead of progress he sees a world "sinking towards chronic disorder and dissolution." (p. 5) Suffering from spiritual exhaustion, he decides to take sick leave, believing that a holiday will give him the emotional relief he needs. What begins as a holiday trip to the countryside becomes an exotic journey to another planet in another galaxy. Journeying through the English countryside his car suddenly swerves, and as he continues to drive, he finds himself in unfamiliar surroundings. He eventually discovers that he has been transported to another planet in a different galaxy as result of an experiment carried out by scientists of a civilization that possesses a technology superior to that of Earth.

Barnstaple is not the only "Earthling" to be transported to the planet. He finds himself in the company of Mr. Cecil Burleigh, a Conservative member of parliament, a clergyman, Rupert Catskill, the Secretary of the State of War, and an adventurer by the name of Mr. Catskill.

Wells, not being among the most subtle of novelists, calls the planet Utopia. In the course of the novel, the visitors from Earth discover that Utopia is inhabited by a humanity that has not only achieved a high order of technical civilization, but also total social equality. All forms of external coercion are absent. Private property is nonexistent, being viewed by the Utopians as an institution belonging to a barbaric age. The forces of nature have been conquered and subordinated to the needs of man.

Gradually the visitors from Earth learn of Utopia's past history. The novel's hero becomes aware of how much Utopia's past resembles the present on Earth. As described by the Utopians, the history of their planet is a movement from haphazard technological development, both senseless and mechanical, to the eventual triumph of cooperative forms of social organization over competitive ones. By this time in the novel, it becomes quite clear to the reader that Utopia represents Earth's future.

To a large extent, H.G. Wells borrowed heavily from Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888). The novel would have ended up as a dull imitation had it not been for the dramatic twist that Wells introduced. In Bellamy's story the hero awakes in a utopian future, and the novel simply describes the contrast

between the chaos and inhumanity under capitalism on one hand and the greater rationality and justice of socialism on the other. Wells describes the journey into the socialist future in a more interesting fashion.

The reaction of Bellamy's hero to the new world in which he finds himself is one of unqualified admiration. In Wells' novel, the reactions vary from confusion to outright hostility.

Barnstaple suffers from a conflict of feelings. While morally attracted to the Utopian way of life, he finds that the habits ingrained into him on Earth make it impossible for him to adjust to its standards. He feels himself an alien on Utopia and yet, after having had direct experience of its virtues, he cannot conceive of himself returning to Earth.

In contrast, Ridley, the chauffeur (Wells' representative of the British working class), has a completely unambiguous reaction: "The sooner I get out of this world back to old England, the better I shall like it." (p. 149)

Father Amerston denounces Utopia as a den of sin, and the Conservative M.P. remains neutral.

Mr. Rupert Catskill rejects the values of Utopia as a menace to the highest human values as he conceives of them; a touch of menace invades the tranquility of Utopia as Mr. Rupert Catskill organizes a rebellion, rallying the majority of the Earthly visitors behind him through a combination of demagoguery and emotional bullying. "Believe me," he declares, "this is the most complete demonstration of decadence it would be possible to imagine. Complete. And yet we shall disturb their slumbers, never fear." (p. 142)

The debate between Rupert Catskill and Urtherd, one of the sages of Utopia, which takes place shortly before the attempted revolt, in many ways foreshadows similar debates in future science fiction novels dealing with the subject of utopia. The debate begins with Catskill's oration on the superiority of Earthly virtues over those of Utopia:

"You have been getting away from conflicts and distresses. Have you not also been getting away from the living and quivering realities of life?... What can you know in this immense safety of the intensity of many of our efforts? What can you know of the reprieves and interludes and escapes?... Ask us to give up our Earthly disorder, our miseries and distresses, our high death rates and our hideous diseases, and at the first question every man and woman in the world would say, 'Yes! Willingly, Yes!'... [But] when we learnt that the price was to surrender that intensity of life, that tormented energy, that pickled and experienced toughness, that rat-like, wolf-like toughness our perpetual struggle engenders, we would hesitate. In the end, Sir, I hope and believe, indeed I pray and believe, we would say, 'No!' We should say 'No!'" (p. 99-101).

Catskill's speech is a model for all the anti-utopian positions that have become so familiar to us in science fiction novels. Of equal importance is the reply of Urtherd. His answer, as a defence of utopian values, foreshadows the pro-utopian position as it is defended ideologically in future science fiction novels. Below is a quotation from the main parts of his reply:

"These Earthlings do not yet dare to see what our Mother Nature is. At the back is still the desire to abandon themselves to her. They do not see that except for our eyes and wills, she is purposeless and blind. She is not awful, she is blind.

She is not awful, she is horrible. She takes no heed of our standards, nor to any standard of excellence. She made us by accident... Half the species in our planet also, half and more of all things alive, were ugly or obnoxious, inane, miserable,...

We have, after centuries of struggle, suppressed her nastier fancies, and washed her and combed her and taught her to respect the last child of her wantonness -- Man... " (p. 106-107).

The debate represents the clash between two opposing sets of values that have become commonplace in science fiction novels dealing with the utopian theme: the demands of reason as opposed to those of feelings, collectivism as opposed to rugged individualism, competition as opposed to cooperation.

January 1993

WAS ISAAC ASIMOV AN ANTI-SEMITE? The following passage from **Foundation** describes Prince Lefkin, son of the villainous Wienis: "Lefkin inherited his blue eyes from his mother, but there was that about the hook in his nose and the squint in his eyes that marked him as the son of Wienis." Note the crucial use of the word "but"! This was published in 1951, only six years after the stopping of the Nazi head-bashers.

Reader's Comment:

Was Asimov an anti-Semite? He was a devout atheist, never even bar mitzvah, but always regarded himself as Jewish ("I bear the cultural stigmata"). "Bridle and Saddle" (the story cited) appeared in *Astounding*, whose editor John W. Campbell Jr. had his Jewish writers use Scottish or English pennames and give characters like names (Asimov got around this by creating alien names; and he even named the pivotal character in his first novel, *Pebble in the Sky*, Joseph Schwartz); they made heroes blond(e) and baddies swarthy.

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Time Paradoxes by Aharon Sheer

In a recent rereading of Poul Anderson's *The Guardians of Time*, a couple of quotes from the book stimulated my thoughts on time paradoxes.

Quote Number 1:

"Of course, there are impossibilities. You could not be your own mother, for instance, because of sheer genetics. If you went back and married your former father, the children would be different, none of them you, because each would only have half your chromosomes."

This is from the story "Time Patrol"; he is quoting the Time Patrolmen's instructor. While on the face of it the statement is true, it seems to me that a woman could be her own grandmother. (I hope that our religious readers will not be too offended by the following discussion.) First she goes back and has sex with her grandfather, fathering a son who has half of her chromosomes. Then she skips forward in time and has sex with her son. Now here is where a little luck (or careful control) is required. Since half of her son's chromosomes come from her, he must provide a sperm which has precisely the 23 chromosomes which she provided him. That is, for each of the 23 pairs of his chromosomes, precisely that chromosome coming from her is chosen for the sperm. When she has sex with him, she provides an egg which has the other chromosome from each of the 23 pairs needed to make HER. Thus her granddaughter (who is also her daughter) will also be exactly her. Since she does indeed exist, if she is the result of this process, then it must have

succeeded. The technical details are difficult; by chance alone the process could succeed in only 1 out of 223 tries. However, advanced technology may provide methods of controlling the process (she does come from the future, right?).

Nowadays, despite Poul's quote, with surrogate mothers a man could even be his own father: just implant in your mother a fertilized egg prepared to have precisely your own genetic characteristics. When your mother gives birth to you, you are you, and that's it. If ביאה is not involved (no sex), but a surgical process, there isn't any halachic problem at all!

Quote Number 2:

"I got worried right away. I asked the boss about it. He obliged me by querying himself a week ahead -- today -- and got the answer that Keith had not returned."

This quote is from the story "Brave to Be a King". Now really! Suppose I want to know how some action I'm going to take today will work out. I just jump ahead a week to ask myself. If it didn't work out, I can go back and do something differently. Just keep doing that until everything works out. Nice. But suppose I jumped ahead and found my wife sitting shiva for me. "How did I die?" I ask her. "You were killed in a horrible traffic accident." "Oh," I say. "In that case, I won't go back." (That way I skip over the week of the accident and save my wife the trouble of sitting shiva.) Poul emphasizes that Time Patrolmen are prohibited by the rules from going back in time and warning themselves not to do something, but the above quote shows that jumping forward is permitted (even the boss does it). Cute!

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