ONE: INTRODUCTION

There is no total view of the world as an intelligible whole, and it is our fictions that we shore against our ruins.

William Righter

The study which follows was suggested by a lifetime fascination with science fiction and, to a lesser extent, with fantasy writing. From this grew a desire to understand the particular and enduring pleasures of these two genres. Since readers with conservative academic backgrounds are not usually captivated by this sort of writing, my own enthusiasm became something of a puzzle. What constituted the vivid flavours of certain books, so that they did not pall with familiarity and time? Why was it possible to go back to some stories over and over, and be continually moved by them?

It seemed to me that one of the most potent sources of this attraction was the manner in which certain writers dealt with themes that were all too familiar in mainstream or canonical literature. In much of the science fiction and fantasy that I encountered, these ancient themes sprang forth with new vitality and fresh relevance. It began to seem that the sort of writing that was of enduring interest was largely centred on certain key images, concepts and symbols. Furthermore, it became apparent that these images were those that had been accessible to mankind since the beginnings of history. Because of this, the writing - which displayed, in many cases, literary skills equal to those acclaimed by the academic fraternity - attained a unique attraction, inspiring what has been called, within the science fiction fraternity, a 'sense of wonder'. This study will focus, therefore, on isolating these images and symbols, on analysing and explicating their specific potency, and on demonstrating that they bring a unique flavour to certain fictional works. In the

process, I hope to demonstrate also that the two genres, science fiction (which will from now on be referred to simply as sf) and fantasy, do not always deserve the denigration often meted out by sophisticated or academic readers, that they are constantly evolving and maturing literary forms and, furthermore, that they are capable, in certain cases, of taking their place alongside canonical or mainstream literature.

Perhaps what deflects a certain amount of approval away from the fantasy and sf genres is the fact that the critic who approaches these forms of literature with a view to serious assessment must needs confront a set of problems which does not arise in the consideration of most other literature. An initial difficulty is that of anatomising with any degree of precision what constitutes the particular nature of fantasy and sf, and this leads - a further complication - to the vexed question of how to define each genre. These dilemmas are compounded, moreover, by the fact that many theorists bring to the field an entire range of idiosyncratic and sometimes abstruse terminology. In addition, since sf and fantasy have been regarded for so long as commercial, sensational and popular, there has always been a marked resistance, from the academic fraternity, towards serious consideration of these genres.[1] Despite the fact that sf has been ubiquitous since the second half of the Victorian era, and notwithstanding the fact that some of its early practitioners were writers such as Mary Shelley, H. G. Wells and Jules Verne, none of the difficulties here mentioned has yet been wholly dissipated. Finally, yet another barrier has been created by the fact that there exists, within the sf and fantasy fields themselves, a noticeable hostility to critical attempts to relate these genres to the larger mainstream. This chapter will attempt to place these issues in perspective. It will then move on to a discussion of the scope of

[1] As Northrop Frye points out, academicians frequently regard such entertaining writing as 'delightful, and therefore detestable' ((1976:25).

this study, to an explanation of the critical method used, and to a justification of the particular form of analysis which has been chosen.

Unlike mainstream writing such as the realistic novel, the sf and fantasy genres display an interesting anomaly. This is the manner in which both readers and writers of sf and fantasy have long been closely linked in a remarkable relationship that is - at least to those readers and critics who remain beyond the parameters of these two genres - a phenomenon which arouses much puzzlement, admiration and commentary. Almost no other fictional genres elicit the same amount of enthusiasm or disapprobation. Sf and fantasy readers form a sub-culture that is vociferously involved in its chosen reading habits, producing 'fanzines', forming clubs and attending conferences that create an environment in which readers and writers interact closely in a unique symbiosis.[2]

Despite the long and ardent history of sf fandom, there was, until the 1970s, very little rigorous critical attention given to the field of sf. What did exist was supplied by the writers themselves - generally in forewords and introductions to the books of other sf writers - and by their fans. Such 'criticism' could not be said to be truly concerned with judgements about the texts, but only to quantify the reader's emotional response to them.[3] For this was a small and cosy world, infinitely comforting and somewhat incestuous. To be subjected to the glare of the outside world was not a sensation with which writers or

[2] Even here in South Africa there is an active fan club called SFSA which meets regularly, publishes its own fanzine (called Probe) which contains articles, reviews and fiction, runs an annual short story competition and holds yearly conferences and conventions.

[3] As an example of the sort of 'chummy' enthusisam with which one sf writer will introduce another, here is an extract from the introduction to a collection of Connie Willis stories, Impossible Things (1994), written by Gardner Dozois. '…Connie has a mind like a steel trap - except that in Connie's case it would be some rarer and more subtle device, something with mirrors and lasers perhaps, that would somehow give the mice such a good laugh that they'd never even notice that their throats were being cut. Connie's work is like that, too. Deceptive and deadly, and ruthlessly effective' (xi).

readers of science fiction were familiar.

The sources of this unparalleled relationship between the writers and their fans are complex and related to the special nature of the two genres. This study, by isolating and investigating one particular aspect of sf and fantasy writing, will attempt to go some way towards explaining the peculiar and potent fascinations of these art forms.

Once ignored by the academic fraternity, critical interest in and assessment of these fields have now burgeoned, sometimes to be met with a high degree of hostility within the genres themselves. Many writers (and indeed readers) of sf and fantasy seem to feel that their love for the genre gives them the unique right to tread the hallowed ground of what has sometimes been packaged in the portmanteau term 'speculative fiction'. They suggest that the academic who has the temerity to enter this sacred precinct is damned. Even Kingsley Amis - who was one of the first academics to approach sf from a scholarly point of view - professes to understand the basis for this hostility.[4] He quotes sf writer E. C. Tubb as saying, in 1961, that 'the result of bringing high-brow values into what was an essentially popular form or field would be to ruin it' (Amis, 1981:8). Apart from professing to understand just what Tubb meant, Amis also claims to sympathise to a certain extent with the anonymous (but much-quoted) fan who maintained that the truly sensible thing to do would be to 'kick SF out of the classroom and back to the gutter where it belongs' (Amis, 1981:21).

Some highly-intelligent and successful writers, such as Joanna Russ and Arthur C. Clarke,

[4] Kingsley Amis gave a series of lectures on sf at Princeton University as early as 1959.

were - as late as the 1970s - still complaining bitterly that their writing was treated in a discriminatory manner. They were quick to point out that they were published and marketed in ways that set them apart from 'mainstream' literature. They were indignant that, in bookstores and in libraries, their books were, and indeed still are, generally relegated to special shelves and special sections - rather as though these works present some sinister danger to the general population.

A small minority of writers of sf have managed, however, to escape such categorisation. Kurt Vonnegut, author of Player Piano (1952), Cat's Cradle (1963), and Slaughterhouse Five (1969) has, for example, always strenuously rejected any attempts to label his writing sf. This resistance seems to have paid dividends, since he is usually referred to as a social satirist or a post modernist (McHale, 1987:16), rather than as an sf writer. The works of J. G. Ballard - on the strength of his wartime novel Empire of the Sun (1985),[5] - now regularly turn up on shelves that do not normally carry genre sf. Similarly, the works of Ursula K. Le Guin, since her mammoth work Always Coming Home (1988) was approvingly reviewed by several highly regarded journals not exclusively devoted to sf[6] and fantasy literature, are now not always confined to the sf ghetto.

But these writers are exceptions, and their success in crossing the barriers of rigidly defined marketing limits is due, in equal part, to luck and to their own abilities to transcend genre material. Other equally serious and gifted writers (for instance, Gene Wolfe

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[5] Empire of the Sun was recommended for the Booker Prize in 1984, the year of its appearance.

[6] Time (14 October, 1985:79), for instance, reviewed Always Coming Home and called the book - despite certain reservations - 'inspired' and 'enchanting'.

and John Crowley) have not been as fortunate. Sometimes writers themselves seem confused about how they would wish to be received by the general reading public. Writers such as Joanna Russ appear to reject the sf label. Yet, paradoxically, Russ also lays clamorous claim to being 'different' or 'special'. Russ, a highly-regarded writer of sf and an academic herself[7] is on record as saying that contemporary criticism is inadaquate to the task of assessing sf. She maintains controversially:

> Not only do academic critics find themselves imprisoned by habitual (and unreflecting) condescension in dealing with this particular genre; quite often their critical tools, however finely honed, are simply not applicable to the body of work that - despite its superficial resemblance to realistic or naturalistic twentieth-century fiction - is fundamentally a drastically different form of literary art.
>
> (Russ, 1976:9)

Samuel R. Delany (1989:10), semiotician and acclaimed sf writer,[8] claims, somewhat extravagantly, that science fiction, by its very nature, cannot be literature, and that he himself does not wish, nor has he ever wished, for it to be literature. For Delany, sf has its own 'philosophical worth and an esthetic beauty', a beauty which is valorised by reading in a special kind of way.

In this, he would seem to agree with Joanna Russ that the critic of sf must needs be equipped in some particular way that is mysteriously unavailable to critics of canonical

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[7] Joanna Russ is a 1972 Nebula Award winner (for 'When it Changed'[1983]), a 1983 Hugo Award winner (for the novella Souls [1985]), and a university professor of English who has produced a certain amount of interesting sf criticism.

[8] Delany won a 1966 Nebula Award for his novel Babel - 17 (1987), as well as a 1967 Nebula Award for his short story 'Aye, and Gomorrah' (1980). His novelette 'Time Considered as a Helix of Precious Stones' (1981) was awarded both the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1969. In addition, he has produced an impressively rigorous body of literary theory. No less a literary theorist than Umberto Eco has said of Delany that he is 'a fascinating writer in general who has invented a new style' (Matrix, Issue No. 120:8).

literature. Russ (1976:9), however, goes even further, maintaining that in order to criticise sf the critic has to understand modern science. Since the scientific component in most works of sf is slight - not least in her own works - this last statement is particularly inapt. In addition, of the countless readers who are passionate about sf, it is only a very small percentage who are actually initiates in the mysteries of science. It seems that an enthusiasm and reverence for the romance and the possibilities of science are of far greater value than scientific knowledge as such. To Russ's (1976:11) comment that 'unless a critic can bring to The Time Machine not only a knowledge of the science that stands behind it, but the passionate belief that such knowledge is real...the critic had better stay away from science fiction', one can respond only with astonishment. Since the 'science' behind The Time Machine is not only negligible but also spurious, her statement is quite meaningless.[9]

As theorist Damien Broderick remarks, 'science' in sf plays, for the most part, the role of an 'enabling device' and, as such, is certainly not to be taken too seriously. As he points out (1995:27), 'it is undeniable that the majority of sf's enabling devices...are mock-scientific at best'. The 'science' - such as faster-than-light travel, teleportation aids, time travel, extra-sensory perception, telekinesis (to name but a few of the tropes of sf) - is simply the means to set plot in motion and, often, to provide a background against which intellectual or ethical enquiry becomes valid. John Griffiths (1980:8) calls such settings 'hypothetical paradigms', while Cory and Alexei Panshin (1976:9) - those prolific, intelli-

[9] H. G. Wells's Time Machine is never clearly described, neither is the principle upon which it operates. The reader is told that it has parts of nickel, ivory, of rock crystal and quartz, that it has a saddle, a starting lever, a stopping lever and a clock (The Time Machine, 1957:17). But what the novella is truly remarkable for is the writer's horrifying and millennial vision of humanity's eventual decay and extinction, as well as for the nightmarish conception of the Earth's long slide into entropy beneath the feeble light of its dying sun. This vision has since become one of the more familiar tropes of sf and will, in fact, be dealt with at greater length in chapter five of this study.

gent and prophetic commentators on sf and fantasy literature[10] - state more bluntly that 'science fiction has never done better than pretend to be about science.'

Joanna Russ is not alone amongst sf writers in her condemnation of the literary critic. J. G. Ballard has referred uncharitably to certain academics who show interest in the field as the 'Lumpen Intelligentsia' (in Griffiths, 1980:2). Kingsley Amis, apparently in a state of some confusion on the subject of the value of criticism, maintains on the one hand (Spectrum, 1964), that sf 'is not ordinary fiction and cannot be judged as if it were...', and warns on the other hand - in the foreword to his early appraisal of sf, New Maps of Hell (1969:10) - against 'too much...reluctance to invoke ordinary critical standards'.

John Griffiths, in his lively study of sf, Three Tomorrows: American, British and Soviet Science Fiction (1980), displays a somewhat more balanced view. Although he does not rashly discount the value of measured criticism, he draws attention to the sudden profusion of academic interest as undesirable in that it often brings the 'arcane' and 'totally incomprehensible jargon' of the universities to a field hitherto unsullied by the gaze of the literary critic. He quotes a passage of criticism from Foundation II that is stunning in its opacity.

> Even so, being formed in the cracked mould of the capitalist ethos, M. Le Clezio has found a style for the mystery he seeks to corrode away. He is well experienced in the existential canon, with perhaps Camus and Barbusse as heroes, Genet and Robbe-Grillet as influences, and the Gallic penchant for masochistic rationalism being a compulsively used tool. Yet,

[10] The Panshins, writing in 1976, predicted - with remarkable prescience - a creative explosion in the sf field in the 1980s. The flowering of feminist and cyberpunk sf would seem to prove them right. Furthermore, they predicted that after 1980, fantasy and sf would become more closely entertwined, and that the audience for each would have grown enormously. In all of these predictions they have been proven correct.

> given the existentialist's screaming inconclusiveness, the denial of absolutes, the metaphysical/menstrual quality of such thought worlds, the values which drop out and crystallize at the end of the book are known to us all: Freedom, Love, Privacy, Peace and Dogs, in whatever order.
>
> (in Griffiths, 1980:9)

Leaving aside, for the moment, the fact that much literary criticism in general could be regarded as arcane jargon, written in such highly specialised language that even academics often find it impenetrable, it would be doing sf a grave disservice to suggest that it is unassimilable except by those who have some special gift, or to imply that it is 'owned' by the writers and fans who lay claim to it. Certain critics seem to feel that it is a private domain, unavailable to those who do not have the correct password. Recently, Damien Broderick (1995) has suggested that readers of sf need to serve a sort of apprenticeship, so that they become educated in, and familiar with, the tropes of the genre, rather as though they were initiates into some esoteric priesthood. But this would seem to be true of almost any art form. Poetry, opera, abstract art, drama in blank verse, dance, all these demand of their audiences a certain learned responsiveness and sophistication, a certain familiarity with the 'grammar' of the genre. In this, then, sf is not unique. The suspicion thus lingers that many writers of sf are not happy to be subjected to the harsh glare of external assessment.

In mitigation of this hesitancy to accept academic standards, however, it does appear that there might well be a certain legitimate cause for unease within the fields of sf and fantasy writing. In my opinion, there is at least some reason to distrust the sudden surge of interest by the academic world, since a certain amount of it would seem to come from the mercenary and arid region of self-interest. With academic research proliferating, academic

opportunists are constantly searching for fertile fields in which they might reap the benefits of research. Most traditional literary areas have been endlessly ploughed and sifted, and researchers must seek areas that have been less thoroughly worked. When a critic who is not familiar with the entire context or development of the genre, nor familiar with its particular forms and charms, selects a random sampling of texts and then comments upon them without true empathy, the result can only be a dismaying and empty exercise. Thomas J. Roberts, in his study of popular genres, An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction, has called attention to the critical difficulties which may arise from this situation:

> Academic scholars who assign themselves the task of discovering the appeal of some genre or subgenre they do not read themselves - the historical romance, sword and sorcery, the caper novel - and who solemnly read and annotate some six or twenty of the novels are handicapped by the ignorance of the occasional reader, though they cannot afford to allow their readers or themselves to recognise this. The misunderstandings they foster do more mischief, for their descriptions are supported with massive citations and are smugly embedded in method.
>
> (Roberts, 1990:81)

Nevertheless, the situation is not entirely a negative one. Latterly, critical attitudes have undergone a change, becoming more open and less rigid. There are now more egalitarian attitudes towards what has hitherto been regarded as entertainment or popular literature. As academic interest has, in the past two decades, shifted to those fields of popular literature which have been less thoroughly explored, studies such as W. Wright's Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western (1975), John G. Cawelti's Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories and Popular Culture (1976) and Umberto Eco's The Bond Affair (1977) have signalled a newer, more serious response to genres that appeal unashamedly to commercial markets. Sf and fantasy literature have not eluded this

expanding academic gaze.

For some writers and readers of sf, who still vigorously resist this movement towards the mainstream, it is a source of dismay that the not always dispassionate eye of the literary critic is turning in their direction. Others, happily, are more comfortable with such changes and are ready to throw themselves whole-heartedly into the hurly-burly of the literary mainstream, resigned to braving the possible chilliness of the academic response.[11] It is not only Kurt Vonnegut who is refreshingly open to academic considerations. Le Guin, for example, argued vigorously in 1975 - in a speech entitled 'The Stone Ax and the Muskoxen' - that sf must be judged, and judged as rigorously as any other branch of literature (Le Guin, 1989h:208).

Despite the fears of so many writers and readers of sf, however, there are considerable benefits to be derived from this new-found interest in less traditional genres. Of undoubted importance is the fact that academics who formerly were less than eager to admit that they themselves were readers of sf or fantasy literature - Damien Broderick (1995:14) has neatly summarised this self-consciousness as 'the embarrassment of the complicit' - are no longer reluctant to announce publicly their enthusiasm for the field. They now feel free to add the weight of their experience to the field of criticism. Such scholarly scrutiny brings to sf and fantasy the combined benefits of a profound interest in these genres, as well as an ability to analyse and assess in an informed and balanced manner.

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[11] One cannot help but speculate whether the unease about the value of academic criticism which is displayed so vociferously by, for instance, Russ, is not, in part, a defensive and protective reaction. She - unlike Ursula Le Guin - has not achieved a more generalised literary acceptance. And it would be interesting to evaluate J. G. Ballard's current response to critical appraisal in the light of the recent general interest and approbation that he is receiving. It is conceivable that, in the wake of such changing responses to his work, his own attitude to the academic fraternity may have altered.

For criticism, at its best, is instructive, not destructive. When it is offered with integrity, in the spirit of disinterested inquiry, and with the informed ability to 'place' writing against the larger tradition of literary and cultural development, criticism brings a new understanding to sf and fantasy literature. By steadfastly facing the ordeal of general critical assessment and by learning to regard such attention as enriching - something that other literary genres have learned to do - sf will undoubtedly come to new maturity. Writers of sf are slowly learning to 'face the music', as it were, in order to achieve legitimacy and esteem and in order to become fully-fledged and official members of the larger literary stream. Sf, like all other kinds of literature, must simply learn to take its chances. It must be prepared to accept the good and discard the bad.

Happily, this process of maturation seems now to be well under way. As previously pointed out, not only are sf and fantasy engaging the serious and rigorous attention of academics who are, themselves, writers of sf and fantasy, but these genres have begun to intrigue serious critics of canonical literature. The fact that theorists such as Christine Brooke-Rose, Rosemary Jackson, Karl Kroeber and Northrop Frye - to mention a few only - have been moved to discuss the special problems of sf and fantasy is, in itself, meaningful, for the motives of such critics are entirely unimpeachable. In addition, sf and fantasy devices have begun to infiltrate mainstream fiction. Thus, novelists who would hesitate to call themselves writers of sf (Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, William Golding and John Fowles, for example)[12] have begun to adopt science fictional modes and techniques. Far from being impoverished by such attention, sf and fantasy are already

[12] Books by these esteemed contemporary writers that are strongly science fictional or which contain science fictional tropes are, for example, Doris Lessing's Canopus in Argos: Archives (1979 - 1983) series, Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (judged Best Sf Novel of the Year in 1986), William Golding's Lord of the Flies (1954) and The Inheritors (1955), and John Fowles's A Maggot (1986).

finding themselves considerably enriched in terms of more accomplished writing styles and more complex characterisation - aspects which this study will demonstrate.

Frye, in The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (1976), has suggested a logical reason for the interpenetration of sf and fantasy with canonical writing. He has formulated the theory that an artistic development, before it reaches a peak of expressiveness and subtlety, is heralded by the initial appearance of what he calls a 'primitive' phase. Thus, '...the primitive is a quality in literature which emerges recurrently as an aspect of the popular, and as indicating also that certain conventions have been exhausted' (Frye, 1976:29). Frye describes this movement towards the primitive (or popular) as 'the wandering of desire' (1976:30). Rather than dismissing such writing as valueless, he feels that it creates a groundsoil, like some rank and richly odorous compost, which will later give birth to, and nourish, more exquisite growths - that is to say, the 'great literature' which will spring from it.

> Great literature is what the eye can see: it is the genuine infinite as opposed to the phony infinite, the endless adventures and endless sexual stimulation of the wandering of desire. But I have a notion that if the wandering of desire did not exist, great literature would not exist either.
>
> (Frye, 1976:30)

Frye finds that this necessary initial or 'primitive' phase appears as a popular genre, at a time when more highly-developed art forms have reached a peak and begun to slide toward obsolescence. The popular genre then begins to indicate movement in a fresh direction, eventually becoming the source of a new fecundity for writers in the mainstream.

James Gunn, sf writer, teacher and critic, had - two years earlier - already predicted much the same thing in relation to the field of sf writing:

> An increasing number of [sf] writers will be difficult or impossible to categorize. The goal will be the goal of the mainstream: each writer with his individual vision, his individual voice. Meanwhile, mainstream vigor, where it exists, seems to derive from its contacts with popular culture...
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> (Gunn, 1974:211)

The following chapters will, amongst other concerns, attempt to develop the above concept in order to demonstrate more precisely the extent of the current evolution of the sf and fantasy genres. I would hesitate to say that a sense of responsibility is entering the field. The best sf has always been written in reaction to social and cultural phenomena.[13] In general, sf has usually had serious intent, despite its superficially playful appearance. However, it does seem recently that a *different* sense of responsibility is apparent. In a genre where the close relationship between reader and writer is so prevalent, market-orientated demands have often played a large part in the way in which practitioners shape their texts, responding directly to the demands of their readers, often to detrimental effect.[14] But, during the past two or three decades, the 'fabulous' and exotic qualities of sf and fantasy have, in the hands of certain writers, taken on a richness of intent and an expressiveness of style that enhance the discerning reader's delight. Inventive and fantas-

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[13] To pick a few examples purely at random: Suzy McKee Charnas's Walk to the End of the World (1974) takes the hostility of the male sex towards women to a horrifying conclusion, while Arthur C. Clarke's 1970s novel Rendezvous With Rama (1991) and Stanislaw Lem's Solaris (1973) both attempt to hypothesise genuinely alien intelligences, and then try to grapple with the problem of how humankind might communicate with them. Judith Moffat's Pennterra (1987) dramatises the concept that mankind must take responsibility for maintaining the ecosystems which sustain all types of life. One of sf's newest manifestations, 'cyberpunk' sf, deals with the impact that computer technology will have on the human race in the near future.

[14] Evidence of this intellectual and artistic barrenness is all too visible on the shelves of bookstores, groaning under the weight of indifferently written and formula-laden sf and fantasy. Anne McCaffery and David Eddings - both extremely popular authors - are just two writers who produce this sort of jejune sf and fantasy.

tic qualities are heightened by a more highly-evolved use of language itself, a point that will be explored at greater length.

At this point it would be apposite to attempt some loose description of the two genres which will be under consideration in this study. Fantasy of the type which will be explored here proves somewhat easier to define than does sf - a point which should make itself clear during the discussion which follows. Confining sf to any single, all-encompassing description is no easy task, since the genre notoriously resists attempts at typification and categorisation. It is a much-quoted truism that readers can recognise immediately what is and what is not sf, even though they may be unable to describe its nature. Griffiths (1980:12) asserts that any attempt to define the genre is doomed to failure - despite the ease with which it can be recognised. John Clute and Peter Nicholls, editors of The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1993:314) comment that 'There is really no good reason to expect that a workable definition of sf will ever be established. None has been, so far.'

Yet these difficulties, though admitted, have not deterred almost every writer or theorist of sf from attempting his or her own description of the genre, each in turn adding to the confusion. The attempts range from the primitive[15] to the arcane,[16] with definitions tending to become lengthier and more imprecise as they become more subtle. Brian Aldiss, noted sf writer, critic, anthologist and historiographer, in his Hugo Award-winning Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction, adds his definition to the roster, end-

[15] For instance, Donald Wollheim, in 1935, clumsily defined sf as '...that branch of fantasy which, while not true of present-day knowledge, is rendered plausible by the...recognition of...it being possible at some future date or at some uncertain period in the past' (in Nicholls, 1979:160).

[16] In 1972 Darko Suvin described sf as a 'literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment' (Suvin, 1979:7-8).

ing with a description that is somewhat grandiose and which consciously begs the question, since it is a definition that could - by extension - apply to many different kinds of literature:

> Science fiction is the search for a definition of mankind 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 mode.
>
> (Aldiss, 1986:26)

He goes on to say: 'It is often impossible to separate science fiction from science fantasy, or either from fantasy, since both modes are part of fantasy in a general sense' (1986:27).

Despite these many contradictions, and the difficulty of reaching a definitive conclusion about what is and what is not sf or fantasy, the distinction between the two genres seems to be generally accepted. Fantasy is that which is palpably unreal and which the reader cannot rationally accept. The worlds which fantasy writers create usually contain a high complement of wizards, witches or dragons, and the presence of the occult and the supernatural pervades most works of fantasy. Sf, on the other hand, creates fantastic worlds which - given the acceptance of some basic hypothetical concept from which all else logically flows - can be accommodated with a minimum of intellectual discomfort by the rational reader. Sf, while it may be regarded as a type of fantastic discourse, is, therefore, more rooted in reality than is fantasy *per se*. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1993:408), commenting on the overlap between the two genres, points out that '...all sf is fantasy, but not all fantasy is sf.'

If the above very generalised comments seem to evade the problem of definition, perhaps it is Samuel R. Delany who can bring this thorny question to the most balanced conclusion. Why, he asks, should sf be the only literary genre that critics struggle to contain in some limiting and reductive definition? As he points out, 'If SF were definable, then it would be the only genre that was!' (1994:192).

In an effort to escape from the contradictions implicit in defining genres and sub-genres that are notorious for their protean ability to mutate endlessly, Brian Attebery ingeniously proposes adopting 'fuzzy set theory' to the concepts of science fiction, science fantasy and their many offspring.

> Genres may be approached as 'fuzzy sets', meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center.... fuzzy set theory proposes that a category such as 'bird' consists of central, prototypical examples like 'robin', surrounded at greater or lesser distance by more problematic instances such as 'ostrich', 'chicken', 'penguin' and even 'bat'.
>
> (Attebery, 1992:12)

The analogy is obvious and is certainly helpful in delineating the difficulties and ramifications of the genres. The purest forms of fantasy (Attebery proposes that J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings fits this category) can be seen as the central point of the fuzzy set system - much as the sun is the centre of the solar system. Works which bear relation to the fantastic in lesser or greater degrees may be regarded as orbiting this centrifugal point at nearer or further distances, dependent on the degree of the fantastic which forms their substance - just as the closest or more distant planets remain part of the solar system no

matter how closely or how distantly they may roam.[17]

While the fuzzy set concept is apt, it nevertheless leaves us with the need to unravel the specific qualities that constitute sf or fantasy. Patrick Parrinder, in Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching (1980:19), suggests yet another way out of this difficulty. He points to the fact that younger sf writers themselves no longer seem to feel the need to define what they write, but are content to leave such matters to the 'academic theorists'. The perspective of much criticism has shifted moreover, revealing not so much the desire to define sf as the impulse to recognise it 'as a particular *type* of discourse...' (my italics). Brian Stapleford has also suggested that 'the label "Science Fiction" does not simply tell a would-be reader something about what a book contains. It also tells him something about *how it should be read'* (in Griffiths, 1980:5).

Here, then, is a clue as to how one might approach a subject that positively bristles with difficulties. Ignoring for the moment the question of precisely what it is that constitutes the nature of science fiction, a more productive approach may be to ask what it is that a reader of this particular kind of fantasy expects. What needs does the genre feed that remain unsatisfied by other and more traditional forms of fiction?

As pointed out earlier, an interest in the nature and purposes of fantasy has become central to much contemporary literary criticism. Rosemary Jackson's authoritative Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion (1988) has, for instance, become extremely influential, and sever-

[17] Speaking purely from a writer's point of view, Roger Zelazny comments, in his essay 'Fantasy and Science Fiction: A Writer's View', that he regards genre distinctions as 'different areas of a continuum - the same ingredients but different proportions' (1987:56).

al other respected academics have produced important works on the subject. Each critic, unfortunately, brings his or her own terminology to the field, so that - for example - what Frye designates the 'fabulous', Jackson calls the 'marvellous', while Karl Kroeber (1988) labels the same literary manifestations 'Romantic fantasy'.

Central to Jackson's approach to fantasy is her reading of it in Marxist and psychoanalytic terms, since she agrees with Freud that fantasy seeks to expel desire, to express, to discover what is hidden by culture and personality. She reads it, in other words, as part of the desire to exorcise the irrational. As such, she argues with Freud, fantasy is the product of neurosis.

However, Kroeber, in his stimulating study, Romantic Fantasy and Science Fiction (1988), finds that Jackson has missed the true subversiveness of fantasy, because she has overlooked the fact that fantasy '... provides important revelations about the strongest tendencies of modern society to exclude and exorcise whatever is neither natural nor amenable to rational explanation' (Kroeber, 1988:87).

Kroeber is critical of Jackson's strongly Marxist and Freudian bias. He maintains that Freud's theory of the 'uncanny' is yet another manifestation of the deterministic and mechanistic stance of our strongly rational and technological society, which explains away and dismisses anything that appears to be strange or 'impossible'. He feels, in fact, that fantasy expresses a desire, not to expel or exclude the irrational, but to embrace the mysterious. For Kroeber, fantasy is not a neurotic but a healthy response to the totalitarian yoke of rationality and technology that has restrained imaginative life during much of the twentieth century. It is his view that Romantic fantasy seeks '...to restore balance to a

world distorted by its total conquest by humankind...'(1988:7). He feels that this realization is necessary in order to understand fully this particular literary mode. Furthermore, it is his opinion that, until we can accept a psychological approach other than the Freudian, we will be unable to fully appreciate the fantastic discourse. As will become apparent later, this study will seek to approach fantasy from a point of view which is decidedly un-Freudian.

While the distinction between Jackson's approach and that of Kroeber (or Attebery [1992:21-23], who also takes Jackson to task on the narrowness of her point of view) might seem to be mere hair-splitting, it is seminal, for the first approach sees the emissions of the fantastic as the product of neurosis, while the second sees it as a healthy response to the imperfections of society or culture. Thus, Jackson's approach can be seen, in the final analysis, as reductive, for in her view fantasy is limited to what she regards as 'subversive', while types of fantasy that do not conform to this 'subversive' category she simply discards or judges deficient. In her view, those kinds of fantasy which do not fall into the subversive category are seen to '...reinforce a blind faith in "eternal" moral values, really those of an outworn liberal humanism' (Jackson, 1988:155).

Kroeber, in contrast, regards fantasy as something that arises spontaneously and defensively as a reaction to 'enlightenment' or rational thought. Indeed, he argues, sf and fantasy come from the same source - that is to say, in reaction to the 'obliterating of otherness' (1988:7) by our modern age. Paradoxically, although it grows out of an antagonism to rationality, fantasy is also destroyed by the great emphasis placed by our predominantly mechanistic society on the need to explicate or rationalise. Since Kroeber points to the oxymoronic nature of fantasy (as indeed do most theoreticians) - which he

calls 'an impossible possibility' - this paradox seems fitting.

Here, perhaps, is part of the answer to the question of what it is that fantasy provides, and why there is so extraordinary a contemporary flowering of fantasy on bookshelves. Even though the greater part is emptily formulaic, as well as indifferently written, its sheer abundance indicates that it feeds an enormous hunger. Rather than being simply an indication of the failure of religion or of the mystical, it seems likely that this appetite for fantasy is also, in part, a reaction to the failure of the *rational.*

Damon Knight (1956), sf writer and one of the earliest and most intelligent critics of the genre, coined the much-quoted phrase 'a sense of wonder' in his effort to describe something of the emotional and intellectual reactions that the best science fiction is able to evoke. Although Darko Suvin (1979) dismissed the phrase more than two decades later as a 'superannuated slogan', the words nevertheless express with some degree of precision what it is for which the reader of sf and fantasy hungers. For, while all successful art evokes the sense of being in the presence of the wondrous, sf and fantasy suggest a particular kind of vision, a more distinctive sense of wonder than that provided by the artfully constructed realities of genres such as, for example, the realistic novel or the thriller. Readers of sf and fantasy seek wonder in somewhat novel ways, for they wish to be aroused by a sense of what is epic in the history and nature of mankind. This particular kind of reader is intrigued by speculation about the future capabilities and possibilities of humanity's existence in space and time, intrigued even by speculation as to the very meaning of what constitutes 'humanity'. Indeed, rather than being engaged in a process of exorcism (as Jackson would have it), the reader of sf and fantasy is involved in a wondrous act of acknowledgement.

The questions that sf readers ask are often grandiose in scope, and the responses aroused by their reading are expected to provide a unique and powerful sense of revelation. Thus, sf at its best presents, in a dramatised form, those eternal metaphysical or existential questions that have consistently tormented the consciousness of humanity. Furthermore, as science and society progress or metamorphise, such writers also raise new questions and speculate about the future of differing aspects of human life. For example, Alfred Bester's The Demolished Man (1953) is, on one level, an exciting detective story. But on another level it asks questions about how a certain sort of society might be likely to function. The action is set against the background of an 'esper' society, a world in which certain individuals have the talent to read minds. Bester attempts to define ways in which citizens would need to be protected from this intrusive power. He ponders what the legal and ethical ramifications might be. He debates how this power might be controlled and policed, how it would affect both the possessor of the gift and the 'normal' man. He asks, in other words, questions about how humanity's social, political and cultural relationships would be changed by the alteration of one aspect of what we accept as normality.[18] Similarly, Ursula Le Guin's Left Hand of Darkness (1981), which first appeared in 1969, is, on the narrative level, about politics on an alien world of the far future. It also contains an account of a prison escape and a long and arduous journey that pits the protagonists against a hostile physical world. But, against the details of this adventure, what the book investigates are the implications of a world in which sexual orientation does not constitute the basis for a concept of personal identity - as it does in our own world.

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[18] Certain critics even go so far as to insist upon the necessity of the 'didactic' element in sf, as Russ maintains in her essay 'Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction' (Science Fiction Studies, Vol. 2, 1975:112-119). Even Stanislaw Lem, the Polish sf novelist and intimidatingly intellectual theorist, contends that sf is essentially a form of argument and that knowledge is its prime concern (Science Fiction Studies, Vol. 1, 1974:26).

While fantasy is not as speculative in nature as sf, it, too, provides the reader with those sensations of awe and mystery that are allied to Knight's sense of wonder. In part, this sense of wonder is aroused by another process that is unique to sf and fantasy. This is the ability of the writing to force upon the reader what Suvin (1979:4) designated the experience of 'cognitive estrangement'. Again, this is a process that is not entirely unknown to other kinds of writing, for all art has the ability to make us experience the world afresh and in new ways. However, realistic or mimetic literature provides the sense of wonder through a process of recognition, through a perceived sensation that one is being shown a true reflection of what really *is*. The mimetic novelist creates a sense of wonder by drawing together the disparate or fragmented aspects of experience and imposing some kind of order on them that forces a sense of coherence and recognition.

Suvin's 'cognitive estrangement' is a concept that is obviously closely akin to what the Russian formalists called *ostranenie*[19] and what Bertold Brecht called *Verfremdungseffek*.[20] For Suvin (1979:7), however, estrangement has 'grown into the *formal framework* of the genre' [italics in text], and is the source of the special *frisson* which the reader gets from the sf and fantasy genres. Here it is estrangement rather than recognition which becomes the very base upon which such writing rests. There is a kind of shock that comes from the alien and the unfamiliar, a certain sensation of novelty or newness that is called into being for the reader. Suvin (1979:64) calls this novelty of background the 'novum', and for him the existence of the novum is axiomatic in the science fictional genre.[21] He

[19] The term *ostranenie*, translated as 'defamiliarisation', was the invention of Viktor Shklovsky, who identified it as a common literary device (in Seldon, 1989:10).
[20] Translated as 'alienation effect' (in Seldon, 1989:12).
[21] Suvin suggests that the 'novum' is produced by neither fantasy nor science-fantasy, but only by sf. However, this seems to me an unnecessary quibble, since much fantasy produces a background world or frame of reference that is as essentially estranging as any to be found in sf.

maintains that 'a novum of cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality.'

Thus, the novum or *novelty* becomes the context in which the writing is placed. It is inextricably bound up with the 'idea' or 'concept' within which the writing is framed, and part of the special joy of sf is the recognition and acceptance of the idea. It is, in fact, the entire means by which the story is understood, rather than an occasional literary device. Sometimes the *frisson* involves, as well, the greeting by the reader of the familiar or the recognisable within the matrix of the unfamiliar. For sf and fantasy asks of its readers that they call into question the very fabric of everyday life: these genres force the reader to look with a different sort of vision, forcing also a questioning of a great many common assumptions. Attebery illustrates this very neatly in his discussion of J. R. R. Tolkien's concept of the 'recovery' of the everyday or the commonplace when he says that 'in order to recover our sense of something like a tree, it is only necessary to envision something like a dragon curled around its trunk' (Attebery, 1992:16).

Science fiction, obviously, shares with fantasy this miraculous process of recovery, although in the case of sf the dragon might well be replaced by a space ship or perhaps a picnicking alien.[22] Whatever the case, the estrangement is a potent source of the sense of revelation.

However, sf and fantasy are, in this, not quite as unique as Suvin would have it since, it could be argued, a certain sense of estrangement occurs in other kinds of writing - histori-

[22] As, indeed, happens in Roadside Picnic (1978), an intriguing and moving novel by Russian writers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky.

cal novels, for example, or indeed in any writing in which the plot moves against an exotic background that is removed from the reader's own time and place; removed, that is, from the contemporary and quotidian reality.[23] Delany has, in various critical writings, expanded upon Suvin's undeniably important body of theory by drawing attention to certain linguistic elements which define more closely, for him, the special characteristics of sf and fantasy.

For Delany, the concept of estrangement is simply not adaquate to explain the specific and unique qualities of the genre. As early as 1977, when he began to produce his first writings in the field of literary criticism, he propounded the theory that sf interposes, in recognisable or familiar syntagmatic chains of reference and relationship, signifiers from a 'wholly unexpected paradigm' (1977:255). Because these disruptions of the syntagmatic chain create both linguistic and cognitive novelties that are specific to sf, the result is that the reader's attention is focussed in a completely different way. Part of the novelty is contained in the many innovatory and neologistic uses to which words are put, as well as to what Delany calls 'fictive' words that writers create. Since such words often have no reference outside of the science fictional text, they cannot bring to the reader anything but new and unique associations and resonances, what Delany has called 'subjunctivity'. On the other hand, sf may harness familiar words to unfamiliar meanings, or even cannibalise words, corrupting them, subverting them and forcing them to serve in new ways. The reader must then, perforce, receive the text in ways that are alien to canonical liter-

[23] It might even be possible to claim that works such as James Joyce's Ulysses (1960) or D. M. Thomas's The White Hotel (1981), both of which utilise a wide range of linguistic and narrative devices, also rely for effect on the degree of estrangement which they create in the mind of the reader.

ature.[24]

Such linguistic and conceptual disruptions and distortions enhance for the reader the 'wondrous' qualities which make the genre so attractive. But there are other factors that come into play. The ability of sf and fantasy to provoke a profound sense of revelation suggests that these genres share some of the same factors that are at work in the structures and images of myth - a link that many critics have noted.[25] Kroeber's (1988:7) suggestion that an entirely different psychological approach might lead to a fuller critical response to fantasy becomes interesting in the light of such correspondences. This study proposes that an analytic approach within the parameters of the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious and the powerful symbolism contained within the archetypal image will be fruitful in revealing much of the power and significance of certain sf and fantasy writing. Such an analysis will, I feel, help to reveal the particular pleasures of these two genres and will also, in the process, illuminate in large measure the powerful sense of wonder evoked by the symbolic components of such archetypal or mythic images.

The interest in symbolic meaning has been a constant stimulus in literary and philosophic discourse since the 1700s and 1800s. The movement received a fresh impetus, however,

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[24] Early if simplistic examples of fictive words are Philip K. Dick's 'kipple' (A Scanner Darkly:1977), or Alfred Bester's 'jaunte' (Tiger, Tiger!:1991) and 'esper' (The Demolished Man:1953), all entirely synthetic and also entirely expressive. More recently, cyberpunk writers such as William Gibson and Bruce Sterling have engendered a flowering of brilliantly evocative words and concepts. Sometimes these are so apt that they spill over into the usage of other writers, eventually becoming what has been called a 'mega-text' - or, as Samual R. Delany would have it, a *textus* - that is uniquely science fictional. Sometimes, indeed, the neologisms are so appropriate that they infiltrate common usage, for example, terms such as 'cyberspace' and 'virtual reality'.

[25] Critics who have drawn analogies between the structures of myth and sf are almost too numerous to mention. Within the sf field, those that spring most immediately to mind are Ben Bova, Stanislaw Lem, Alexei and Cory Panshin, and Darko Suvin. Some general academic theorists who have commented on sf in relation to myth are Tzvetan Todorov, Northrop Frye, Christine Brooke-Rose, Robert Scholes and Brian McHale.

as the field of anthropology opened up to scholarly and analytic enquiry in the nineteenth century. By the second half of the 1800s there was a sudden surge of interest in myth, magic and ritual, and various interpretations of symbolic behaviour were propounded. Many of these pioneering works are now of historic interest only, considered valuable for the manner in which they expanded methodology and knowledge in the fields of anthropology, ethnology and philosophy, and for the important influences they exerted on those who came after them. One such was J. J. Bachofen, primarily an ardent student of antiquity, who can be regarded as an important precurser of C. G. Jung. He brought a somewhat romantic and spiritual outlook to his archeological and anthropological conclusions, and his work is now considered dated and unscholarly. However, his interest in symbolism is part of an important literary genealogical line, and has proven to be a stimulating influence to writers, poets and scholars of all types. Anthropologist Raymond Firth paraphrases Bachofen's concept of the importance of the symbol:

> He argued that human speech is too poor to convey all the thoughts aroused by such basic problems as the alternation of life and death and the sublimity of hope. Only the symbol and the related myth can meet this higher need. The symbol awakens intimations; speech can only explain. The symbol plucks all the strings of the human spirit at once; speech is compelled to take up a single thought at a time. Into the most secret depths of the soul the symbol strikes its roots.... The symbol aims inward; language aims outward. Only the symbol can combine the most disparate elements into a unitary expression....
>
> (Firth, 1973:105)

Bachofen's insistence on the 'disparate' qualities of the symbolic image is central to an understanding of the power and significance of the symbol. A symbol can be said to be an image that stands in the place of something else and which indicates that other thing. But,

as Jung (1960:45) quite correctly points out, the symbol cannot be interpreted semiotically, for it is not a sign merely. The symbol is far more complex, for within the apparent starkness and simplicity of its outlines is contained a multiplicity of meanings. The symbolic image is a condensation or synthesis of an entirely more elaborate and complex combination of meanings, both intellectual and emotional. As such it can have multiple - even inexhaustible - interpretations. It can be said, paradoxically, that it expresses in the simplicity of its form something which defies expression. Firth (1973:75) defines a symbol as '...a sign [that] has a complex series of associations, often of emotional kind, and difficult (some would say, impossible) to describe in terms other than partial representation.'

Jung, by inclination something of a mystic (a propensity for which he has often been castigated and which earned him Freud's antagonism), brought a certain emotional intensity to his own work, not least to his ideas on the symbolic aspects of creative thought. Even more than the work of Bachofen, his theories have taken root and fertilised much literary discourse. Although not an anthropologist by training, it is through his study of mythology, primitive culture and the recurring imagery of dreams, that Jung postulates his theory of a *collective unconscious*. He finds that certain images are universal in that they recur endlessly, and that such images are not always culturally specific, but appear in diverse cultures and societies at all levels of human development. Jung calls these thought patterns *archetypes*, and finds them to be part of a vast, impersonal reservoir available to all humanity. Furthermore, according to Jung, these archetypes are an essential component of the psychic health or wholeness of both individuals and of the larger groupings to which they belong. The archetype has cryptic significances that function on the level of allegory and metaphor, for it carries symbolic meaning and appears also to be intimately

connected to the processes of myth. Jung speaks of archetypes as being endowed with the *numinous*. That is to say, they are charged with special relevance and power, for they mean not only what their surface meaning suggests but other things as well. Many of these images are intricately bound up with those myths that are central to cultural identity and thus have significances that are profoundly meaningful and potent, even if they are unrecognised by the conscious mind.

Jung feels that these archetypes are inherent in the biology of the human race, that they are encoded into our genetic heritage and that they are, therefore, - as Anthony Stevens has pointed out - 'biological entities' (1982:23). They are imprinted on the human consciousness, and that is why they are universally present in cultures that differ so radically from each other. They are a result of the process of natural selection, just as much as the fact that the human race possesses other biological characteristics in response to the imperatives of evolution. They are what mark us as essentially human.[26]

Freud, on the other hand, sees these images as the product of neuroses. For him, they are generated from within the neurotic and infantile personality and are the product of repressions and fears from which the healthy personality should strive to be freed. It was disagreement with Freud's view that these recurring images are symptomatic of sexual 'complexes' that led, in large part, to the final schism between Jung and Freud. For Jung,

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[26] In the wake of recent research into the immensely complicated genetic patterns that are encoded in human DNA - and which are still little understood - it is possible that eventual evidence may come to light to substantiate Jung's hypothesis. Furthermore, current theories about the moment in time when the human race diverged from other primates have placed the evolutionary step much later than was originally believed possible (between 5 and 7 million years ago, a mere eyeblink in evolutionary terms), thus suggesting that the human race is not so far away , chronologically speaking, from its remote ancestors as initially believed (Dr L. R. Berger, palaeo-anthropologist, University of the Witwatersrand: pers. comm.). Such theoretical developments suggest that the human brain might well retain mysterious patterns that link the race to its origins.

in direct opposition, regards such images as life-generating and life-sustaining. Contrary to Freud, he feels that they are valuable, that they are the source of secret reserves of psychic health. They are, for Jung, spontaneous and 'autochthonous'; that is to say, they are native to, and a pre-condition of, the human condition. Jung (1968:78) feels strongly that these primordial or archetypal patterns become visible in the products of 'creative fantasy'. Thus, mankind's symbol and mythology-making propensity is a reponse to the existence in the human consciousness of these archetypes, and 'provide[s] satisfaction for a fundamental human need - the need to *perceive meaning*, the need to *comprehend*' (Stevens, 1982:30) [Italics in text]. As Jung himself points out (in criticism of Freud's viewpoint), if all human behaviour can be explained exclusively in terms of neurotic sexuality, then '...you can explain a work of art or a religious experience in exactly the same terms as an hysterical symptom' (1960:57).

Jung's theory of a genetically encoded collective unconscious has not been uncritically received. More recently, philosopher Susanne K. Langer has pointed to what she calls the *transformational* mode of human perception. Like Jung, she finds a genetic component in the processes of human thought, though for somewhat different reasons. She feels that certain *organisational* modes of cognition are inherent in the human make-up. 'The symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind...' (Langer, 1969:41). Thus, to remain sane, to have a semblance of control, humankind must make sense of what it perceives. To this end, it organises, systematises and interprets the flow of information to which it is constantly subjected. Mythic concepts are then, in part, a result of this need to achieve a semblance of meaning and order. In short, to allay the terrors of existence we 'need a sense of cosmic order, and our myths are one of its major sources' (Lowry, 1982:11).

Anthropologists and psychologists have suggested other reasons for the existence of those concepts which permeate so much of human thought and which constitute 'shared' experience. A process of cultural diffusion may account, in part, for the spread of concepts and symbols from one civilization to another, or from one continent to another - a form of 'cultural drift', as it were. And psychologists have pointed out that wherever and whenever human life evolves, the same natural processes, the same emotions, affect all men and women regardless of the cultural context.

> Put simply, many of our most powerful symbols arise out of nearly universal human experiences.... We are all born small and helpless into a world of giants. Since most of us are born into a family, our earliest experience includes a mother-goddess and a father-god. We all know hunger, thirst, heat, cold, darkness, sleep. We observe that falling feels peculiar and that landing hurts.... We see that babies come from bellies, dogs have a large number of sharp teeth, the sun goes away and comes back.
>
> (Fromm, 1951:18 - 19)

Whatever causes the prevalence of such images - and it seems most probable that an entire constellation of factors may be responsible for their existence - it cannot be denied that they exist and that they have enormous power to move the human imagination. Jung has been a seminal figure in the isolation and explication of many of those images that are most potent and therefore most frequently encountered. In more literary terms, these symbolic images or archetypes have been described by Frye (1990:102) as 'associative clusters' or 'complex variables'. They have what he calls 'cumulative power', which derives from all the associations with which they are imbricated. Thus, such images, while they may appear in themselves to be simple, have polysemous meaning. They help to connect one thing to another, they create resonances and have a strongly allusive character. Frye is careful to disassociate himself from any taint of Jungianism, warning of the

'danger of determinism' (1990:109). He claims that the Jungian collective unconscious is 'an unnecessary hypothesis in literary criticism' (1990:112). He maintains, rather, that these ubiquitous images arise simply from the tendency of the human imagination to conventionalise fantasy into stock 'formulaic units' (1976:36-37). As such, what he might recognise as an archetype is simply any image or symbol which recurs often enough in art to be instantly recognisable (1990:365). He does accept, however, that such images are closely associated with the metaphorical and allegorical structures to be found in myth.

Myths themselves function strongly on this symbolic level. Indeed, it may be said that their very nature is metaphorical. Peter Munz (1973:55) goes so far as to state that 'myths are no more than extreme cases of metaphor' and that they arise out of the fact that language itself is often an inadaquate means of expression. As such, the use of symbols is not simply an unneccessary artistic conceit, but a necessity '...forced upon man by the inability to describe a feeling-state literally. And, moreover, ... the substitution is not in fact a substitution but an elaboration' (Munz, 1973:76).

Like many literary symbols and images, myths appear on the surface to mean one thing but may simultaneously be expressing something else altogether. Thus Theseus, wandering lost through the labyrinth of Crete, hearing the distant bellows and roars of the fearsome Minotaur, may speak to us symbolically of the labyrinthine coils of the human mind in which we too can become lost and where we too might need to seek and overcome some monstrous and painful truth. The parallels between the functions of myth, then, and the function of literary symbolisation such as allegory or metaphor are very clear, since each welds complex and manifold meanings into simple but powerful images.

Because the work of some writers of sf and fantasy uses motifs and images which function on cryptic and symbolic levels of meaning, their writing bears a distinct relationship to myth. Rather than using realistic or mimetic techniques, such writing comments on culture and society in diffused rather than pointed, inferred rather than direct ways, through the use of symbol and metaphor rather than by obvious didactic lessons. Thus, novels such as Le Guin's Threshold (1982) or John Crowley's Engine Summer (1980) imply, rather than demonstrate, a profound dissatisfaction with society, as does Crowley's Beasts (1987) or most of the novels and short stories of J. G. Ballard. The concept of the Jungian archetype, which has an intuitive logic, will be the context within which the potency and significance of such images are unravelled in this study.

But there is another facet of sf and fantasy literature that is closely related to the effects and functions of myth. Myth, says Mircea Eliade (1974:3), 'narrates a sacred history.' It 'supplies models for human behaviour and ... gives meaning to life. Myth offers paradigms for all significant human acts' (Eliade, 1974:6). Myth, therefore, has something of the religious or the revelatory about it. Because myth is 'sacred', because it comes from a time that is unmapped in terms of human history, because it deals with events and beings that are suprahuman or supranatural, the response evoked by this sacred narration is one of awe. And it is here that one may find another parallel between myth and science fiction, for Damon Knight's sense of wonder is an expression of something akin to this same awed response. The wonder here is evoked, however, by the fantastic realities of sf and fantasy literature and by the contemplation of what is epic in the range of humanity's possibilities and ingenuity. Sf and fantasy - like myth, which lies in the lost hinterland of the past - also take place in unknown and mysterious areas of time and place and introduce the reader to fabulous creations, both living and mechanical.

It is a banality to point out that Western man, who has so eagerly embraced the mechanistic, the rationalistic and the scientific, has not done so without paying a price. At this particular point in time, as the twentieth century draws to a close, the human race might well be balanced at a crucial moment in its history, a moment of great potential danger. Not only is the existence of humanity itself imperilled by its own monstrous playthings but - and this is surely not coincidental - the health of the entire planet is at risk from the wonderful and terrible inventiveness of the human species.

Dudley Young, in his erudite, passionate and persuasive enquiry into the origins of the psychic malaise of the Western world, expresses the belief that humanity has, in accepting unquestioningly the dreams of science, lost the knowledge of *how* to respond to those dreams. Mankind has, correspondingly, lost that essential and immediate connection with the roots of experience, with those primal forms of knowledge which may well grant true human status.

> The voice of authority in our culture is unquestionably the voice of science, and yet that voice is still unable (and often unwilling) to master those parts of speech...without which no utterance can be fully human, no author authoritative.
>
> (Young, 1991:xv)

Young argues powerfully - although speculatively - that these crucial 'parts of speech' are to be found in those potent myths of origin with which modernity has lost touch. Western culture's 'loss of innocence' can, he feels, be regained only by returning to those areas of experience which teach man to 'heal the divisions in his soul' (1991:xvii). Only by finding again within the self that capacity for joyous, even ecstatic connection with the world, only by tracing human emotion back to the very roots of experience, will humankind be able to

cast off its profound sense of alienation and disquiet.

Young points out that 'if the young are not given proper images to dream upon, they will dream the improper, and civilization will suffer' (1991:xi). This study will, in part, argue that sf and fantasy, like those myths which once enriched culture and to which mankind looked for meaning and protection, are able, in certain circumstances, to open up windows into a space where those lost dreams - the dreams which arouse awe, wonder and amazement and which are the founts of human experience - become once more accessible. Prudence might make one hesitate to go so far as Joseph Campbell, that ardently enthusiastic student of comparative mythology, who asserts with sweeping confidence:

> It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.
>
> (Campbell, 1975:13)

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the images and components of myth have power to move the receptive psyche, that they reappear through the ages in the works of artists of all types, and that they resonate deeply within the mind of the reader or viewer. The contention of this study is that sf and fantasy writing which contains the elements discussed above may, when intuition and craftsmanship are combined with delicacy and skill, attain a unique and revelatory potency which is somewhat akin to the power of mythic and archetypal significance. Without belabouring the point too heavily, I would like to suggest that sf may have the capacity to teach its readers something of the *how* of dreaming. In the discussion of the chosen texts, it is hoped, it will also become clear that sf and fantasy

are moving in new directions and that both are achieving considerable relevance and richness in the process.

Like myth, sf and fantasy often have a metaphoric range. In such cases, the textual reality hides another reality, '... the other world that is awaiting ... below the surface of the text' (Armitt,1991:41). What may seem to be mere escapism is often enriched by deeper and hidden significances. It is, therefore, appropriate to discuss the symbolic and allegorical functions of many of those archetypal images mentioned earlier, as well as to discuss *how* these images achieve their effectiveness. In part, this effectiveness derives from what Frye - adding weight to Young's argument - calls 'special knowledge, something of what in religion is called revelation' (1976:6).[27] It would appear then, that Kroeber's comment that fantasy seeks to embrace rather than reject the unknowable, might have a great deal of validity.[28]

So close, in fact, is the similarity between the functions and the effects of myth and certain kinds of sf and fantasy, that some writers have consciously tried to rewrite classical themes in futuristic settings. Samuel R. Delany and Roger Zelazny are notable for their attempts to manipulate Greek myth. Examples are works such as Delany's early novelette The Einstein Intersection (1992) and Zelazny's This Immortal (1975) and The Dream Master (1976), each of which dates back to the 1960s. Not all of these are unalloyed successes, and it is of interest to analyse - in the light of the Jungian archetype - the extent to which each writer does or does not achieve what he has set out to do.

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[27] Dudley Young does, indeed, acknowledge Northrop Frye as his 'first and most influential teacher' (1976:xxxvii).

[28] Kroeber's viewpoint is explained on pp. 19 - 20 of this study.

The power inherent in these mythic or archetypal symbols is at its most potent when the images appear to rise almost unconsciously from the subterranean areas of the writer's mind, from what Jung calls the 'dark side of the psyche'. They must be allowed to 'speak for themselves', as it were, in order to take on added potency and beauty. The reader should feel that such images have arisen almost accidentally, for they must give the impression that they spring - like Athena, who leapt from the forehead of Zeus - fully formed from the mind of the creator. This ability to create the illusion of spontaneity is one that tests the artistry, skill and integrity of the creative craftsman in any field. Poet Robert Graves has encapsulated the fragility of the creative 'dream', and the difficulty of recognising the moment of capture:

> Poet, never chase the dream.
> Laugh yourself and turn away.
> Mask your hunger, let it seem
> Small wonder is he come or stay;
> But when he nestles in your hand at last,
> Close up your fingers tight and hold him fast.
>
> (Graves, 'A Pinch of Salt', 1978:32)

Not all writers meet this test with success, for such images are fragile and need to be handled with a gossamer touch. When they are manipulated with too-conscious a deliberateness they lose their innate grace and their ability to inspire wonder. For it is axiomatic to say that no writer can actually *create* myth, which can rise only spontaneously and over a period of time. The individual writer can, however, initiate a response that makes the reader *feel something similar* to what he or she might experience in the presence of the genuinely mythic. Thus, for example, a writer such as Robert Holdstock - who is interested not only in the existence of these mythic images but also in the mental or psycho-

logical processes that might create them - is sometimes guilty of too heavy-handed an approach. His writing shows, however, steady development in the handling of his chosen theme as he moves from the rather clumsy early novels such as Where Time Winds Blow (1981) and Earthwind (1987) to the more refined terrors of his Mythago novels and his more recent Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region (1990) and The Hollowing (1994). Despite the fact that Delany's The Einstein Intersection (1992) has been acclaimed by some critics within the sf field for his rewriting of the Orpheus myth,[29] his treatment would appear to be finally unsuccessful - a fact which will be discussed in Chapter Six of this study.

Because of the close relationship between mythic symbolism and the imagery present in much sf and fantasy literature, this study will demonstrate that an approach through the concept of the Jungian archetype can illuminate the particular enchantments of each genre. The revelatory nature of sf and fantasy and the sense of wonder that each evokes, testifies to the logic of this method. Although 'archetypal criticism', as it became known, flourished in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it had fallen into disfavour by the 1970s. Like all critical tools, this form of analysis needs to be applied with discretion. The critic needs a sure instinct for the precise value of the archetypal component within any given work of art, and should not ascribe to the archetype greater inherent weight or value than is implicit in the writing. In other words, a sense of proportion is necessary. The critic who hunts relentlessly for images and symbols in inappropriate places is guilty of doing violence to, and distorting the fabric of, the text under scrutiny. Possibly because archetypal criticism was endorsed by the illustrious name of T. S. Eliot - who publicly announced his

[29] Nicholls calls the book a 'tour de force' (1993:316). It won the Nebula award in 1967.

indebtedness to Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough (1996) and to Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance (1980)[30] - certain critics went on a kind of archetypal witch hunt, irresponsibly dragging symbols and archetypes into view and ascribing to them disproportionately bloated importance and meaning. In the wake of this intellectual frenzy, archetypal criticism became a little disreputable, giving way eventually to newer theoretical disciplines such as structuralism and semiotics.

However, far from being an entirely outmoded and irrelevant approach, this study will attempt to demonstrate that archetypal criticism can be of value in the study of much sf and fantasy writing. In order, though, to avoid the pitfalls outlined above, the material selected for analysis has been carefully restricted. Within the field of sf it is possible to find a great many books that treat of similar themes. Nonetheless, not all of sf is amenable to archetypal criticism and, even in books where the archetypal component is present, it is not always of major importance to the structure and coherence of the writing. Disappointing also, in a great deal of fantasy literature, much of what the writer glibly perceives as archetypal is displayed in the form of perfunctory images and symbolism, with little understanding of the inherent power of the archetype or the ways in which narrative and significance may, through its presence, converge. Such writing can never be a source of wonder or revelation, can never impart to the reader any sense of the weight of relevance and experience which underpin the archetype. Writing of this type also has been discarded.[31] Furthermore, in all cases the selection has been based on writing that has been

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[30] Notes appended to the vastly influential 'The Waste Land' (1965:68-74). The poem first appeared in 1922.

[31] Thus, the immensely popular, but inherently superficial writing of novelists such as Anne McCaffrey, David Eddings, David Gemmell and even, on occasion, Michael Moorcock - all of whom use mythic symbolism at times - has been ignored.

judged to have genuine literary merit and which reveals not only accomplished writing skills, but also a profound concern with questions of a metaphysical or personal nature. As Richard F. Hardin points out: 'Work of otherwise limited imagination can assume great significance for the archetypal critic' (1989:43). Thus, the presence of archetypal and symbolic images alone has not been sufficient to ensure inclusion in this study.

Although Frye (1976) carefully separates myth and romance into two distinct modes, this study will demonstrate that these two areas may overlap uniquely in the fields of sf and fantasy and that the result is one that may, at its best, achieve new relevance and meaning. Frye categorises myth as that body of literature which has 'special authority' (1976:27), while romance or the fabulous has its roots in popular literary traditions such as folk and fairy tales. The images and symbols utilised by sf and fantasy - both forms of romance in Frye's estimation (1976:4) - are found in a good deal of art and literature generally. The contention of this study is that they are reinterpreted in unique ways by sf and fantasy so that they not only retain their ancient relevance but become renewed. Furthermore, the manner in which the mythic and the romantic merge in these two genres often achieves a unique and felicitous hybridisation.

Because sf and fantasy are rather like myth, they are both somewhat oxymoronic by nature, for both work through the relating of 'true lies' or 'impossible truths'. For example, in Le Guin's Threshold (1982) and Crowley's Little, Big (1981), the protagonists reach some form of self-realisation and maturity by a process that is distinctly impossible in the world as we know it (Suvin's 'empirical world' [1979:8]), demonstrating the paradoxical nature of the genre very clearly, for the reader reaches a truth by means of what appears to be palpably untrue.

Finally this study will attempt to illuminate the various ways in which sf and fantasy literature have begun to evolve and converge with mainstream literature. Kroeber argues (1988:9) that the directions in which sf and fantasy move are completely antithetical. They are, he feels, both responding to the hegemony of the technological. However, fantasy, in his view, turns inward, exploring what he calls the 'oxymoronic', the paradoxical aspects of human existence. Sf, on the other hand, turns outward, exploring the 'extrapolative' - what Suvin would call the 'cognitive'. As a result, Kroeber finds, the language each uses is different: fantasy is more experimental; more given to hyberbole, to exaggeration, to linguistic subtlety. Sf is cooler, more reportorial in style. Since it is extrapolative, it must give the appearance of reality, of verisimilitude (1988:29). This makes it essentially conservative in its usage of technique and language. He feels that sf 'is not well suited for articulating dialogic consciousness' (1988:22).

In agreement, although using very different terminology, Frye talks of the concepts of verticality and horizontality in literature (1976:49-50). Realism, the reportorial mode, is 'horizontal' - giving the appearance of logicality, of linearity, of rational cause and effect. By contrast, the fantastic mode adopts a more 'vertical' structure, in which logicality, characterisation and so forth are often tenuous. Indeed, says Frye, the 'romantic tendency is antirepresentational' (1976:36).

Seen in the light of the last two decades, however, neither of these viewpoints is, in my opinion, altogether justified. The so-called New Wave writers of the 1970s - Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Michael Moorcock, Roger Zelazny and Thomas Disch, for example - have forced a stylistic evolution of the genre. By turning inward, by probing the interior landscape of the mind, by journeying into what Ballard has called 'inner space', these

writers have abandoned much of the original 'horizontality' of sf in favour of more complex modes of expression. The writing of Ballard or Delany, for example, is highly sophisticated and subtle, and engages the reader on many levels. Although it does not always do so, fantasy overlaps quite frequently with sf. An analysis of works such as Tanith Lee's Sabella (1987), Roger Eldridge's The Fishers of Darksea (1984) or Ballard's The Drought (1978) will demonstrate *how* it overlaps, for each uses language adventurously - even fantastically. By contrast, Le Guin's very successful forays into pure fantasy (Threshold [1982], the Earthsea tetralogy [1979, 1990]) are told in extremely lucid and matter-of-fact terms, despite the fantastic content.

To be fair, neither Frye nor Kroeber are completely rigid in their categorisation. Each does comment briefly on the fact that the various modes can overlap and interpenetrate, though neither of them actually demonstrates how and when this happens. This overlapping is common rather than rare, however and the recent development of sf and fantasy is due, in part, to the fact that each seems to be becoming more flexible, to be appropriating techniques that have traditionally not been part of their structures. Aspects of realism are now more frequently woven into the fabric of the fantastic or the fabulous, creating an ambiguity that has previously been the traditional property of the realistic novel. The chapters which follow explore not only characterisation, motivation and use of language to reveal the truth of this statement, but will also demonstrate yet another convergence of the fantastic and the realistic.

Frye, in his 1976 anatomisation of the structures of the mythic and the fantastic (in his terminology, the 'fabulous'), employs a biblical analogy to explain one of the basic structures of romance literature. Referring to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden as a 'fall'

from grace, he points out that central to myth and to fantasy is the romantic concept of a fall from the 'idyllic' and paradisic world into the 'night world' of the 'demonic'. Inherent in romantic fantasy, however, is the fact that the descent into the demonic is not eternal: it is finally reversed by the expiatory or redeeming actions of the hero or heroine, who then subsequently returns to the idyllic world to live happily ever after - a correspondence with the biblical theme of resurrection. The Christian myth, says Frye, is 'the archetype of the completed romance' (1976:163).

But, in scrutinising the fantasy and sf that concern this study, a subtle evolution becomes visible in these two forms of fantastic literature, for many of these works reveal an inter-penetration of the romantic and the realistic modes. Here, it becomes apparent, is an interesting inversion. The fall does indeed occur. But it is a fall from the nightmare of the *real* (rather than the idyllic), into the nightmare of the demonic, followed by a return - not to the idyllic or utopian world of romance - but to the fragile and questionable comforts of the real world. Thus, despite the fantastic or fabulous matrix within which the action occurs, there is present, in many cases, a simultaneous and paradoxical sensation of realism.

In response, then, to Frye's statement that fantasy is vertical, with little plausibility or subtlety as far as development of character or motivation is concerned, this study will show how recent works of fantasy succeed in creating a richness and complexity of texture that is usually associated with realistic or mimetic fiction. In such works, the ascent out of the nightmare is often ambiguous, involving the protagonist in the uncomfortable and ironic act of embracing the painful. The uneasy process by which Eldridge's No-Mirth (The Fishers of Darksea [1984]) begins to acknowledge his destiny, the lurid

sexual and psychic nightmare in which Lee's Sabella (1980) flounders, the mundane world to which the protagonists of Le Guin's Threshold return, attest to a new subtlety in the flavour of sf and fantasy.

Since the analyses of the above-mentioned works will be through the concept of the Jungian archetype, these texts will be approached by isolating and discussing those images and motifs that represent powerful emotional and ethical concepts. I shall also comment on the way each writer uses language to communicate with the reader and - finally - I hope to succeed in conveying something of the unique fascination of these extraordinary genres

In the chapters which follow, the Chapter Two, 'The Symbolism of Personal Redemption', explores the manner in which writers confront the eschatalogical and random aspects of the human condition and the means by which their flawed characters wrest pattern and purpose from the chaos which surrounds them. The books analysed in this section are the creations of two very contrasting authors: one writer has created works of purest fantasy, while the other has produced gritty and hard-edged sf. Yet the concerns of these works prove to be much the same, for they all reveal the same passionate involvement in the capacity of the individual to evolve towards maturity and personal redemption. Le Guin's A Wizard of Earthsea, The Farthest Shore and Threshold, surprisingly, mirror many of the themes of Alfred Bester's Tiger, Tiger! and The Demolished Man. Central to all of these works is a concern with how the protagonists learn to face the dark side of their own flawed natures and travel the arduous road towards wholeness or Jungian 'individuation'.

Chapter Three, 'The Symbolism of Messianism', is concerned with redemption on a much larger scale; that is to say, not only with the movement of the protagonist forward into a new life, but also the way in which the prophetic hero may transfigure the future of society, or even of the entire world. The protagonists of these books become close relatives of Campbell's mythic hero, he who will 'liberate the land' (1975:221). In each of these books the central symbol is that of the apocalypse, and each protagonist must find a way to lead his race towards a redemptive acceptance of either the future or the past. Each writer does this, to a large extent, through the use of archetypal symbolisms which take on powerful metaphoric connotations. Thus, Gene Wolfe's tetralogy The Book of the New Sun (1980-1983) will be discussed in some detail, since all four books are rich in allusive imagery and symbolism: the sword, the rose, the labyrinth and the ouroboros are just some of the archetypes which are central to the journey of Wolfe's protagonist towards his messianic destiny. Other books analysed in this section are Eldridge's The Fishers of Darksea (1984), Crowley's Engine Summer, and Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest (1991).

Chapter Four, rather than being concerned with progression or evolution of the personality, deals with retrogression and devolution on both the personal and the racial level. This chapter, 'The Symbolism of Entropy and Decay', probes those images of entropic decay which obsess certain writers of sf. The discussion will centre on Brian Aldiss's Hothouse (1979), two novels by J. G. Ballard, The Drowned World (1976) and The Drought (1978), and one of Ballard's longer stories, 'The Voices of Time' (1981). In all these works there is an over-riding conception of cosmic devolution, within which is enmeshed mankind's own decay. Archetypal images central to this Darwinian concept are those drawn from the natural world. Thus, the rampant and gargantuan forest of Hothouse, the

inundated or drought-stricken worlds created by Ballard, as well as his great cosmic mandala in 'The Voices of Time' - all carry powerful symbolic and archetypal resonances which will be carefully explored.

Chapter Five, 'The Symbolism of the Beast', in contrast to the preceding chapters, turns outward, in a sense, for although the books discussed in this chapter are also concerned with questions of spiritual growth (both for the individual and the larger grouping to which that individual belongs), it probes such questions specifically through the use of theriomorphic imagery. This section demonstrates some of the symbolic meanings with which animal images are imbricated, and also shows how these may be used to give resonance to character, and shape to the perception of reality. Lee's Lycanthia (1990) and Sabella (1987), as well as Crowley's Beasts (1987) all make use of real animals that exert a powerful hold on the human mind, while Le Guin's Earthsea tetralogy and Clive Barker's Weaveworld (1988) use purely imaginative creatures that have long inhabited the racial imagination. All these creatures have rich mythical connotations: they act as psychopomps, leading the human protagonist into the realm of potentiality and potency. Each will be discussed in some detail to illuminate how animal imagery has been used to amplify the concerns of these writers.

Chapter Six, 'The Eternal Mind', unlike the other chapters, is concerned with the work of one writer in particular. Robert Holdstock has made a courageous and surprisingly successful attempt (given the difficulties inherent in the task of making the unconscious visible) to penetrate the hidden recesses of the human psyche in order to give shape to those very processes which might engender the archetypal image. Several of his books are discussed, showing how he has progressed in this single-minded attempt to probe the

origins of archetypal thought, and demonstrating how he has chosen to deal with these powerful imaginative emanations. His earlier works are passed over briefly, in order to concentrate on his more mature works. Thus the greater part of the chapter is given over to Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region (1990), The Bone Forest (1992), The Hollowing (1994) and Mythago Wood (1995).

Chapter Seven will offer, in conclusion, a synthesising view of the critical approach taken in the preceding chapters, demonstrating that, rather than being moribund and irrelevant, the archetypal method of criticism may enliven discussion of much fantasy and sf. It will also review the manner in which both genres have evolved towards greater maturity in the period from the 1950s to the 1990s, and will make the point that, rather than being shallow, clichéd and nostalgic, the use of mythic or archetypal symbolism can, when used with intuition and skill, add depth, resonance and extraordinary imaginative range. It will demonstrate how sf and fantasy - without compromising an admirable capacity to entertain - may lead the reader to a contemplation of those existential dilemmas which have plagued mankind since the birth of consciousness, and how each may offer some solutions for such eternal questions. At the same time, sf and fantasy may also confront matters of contemporary relevance, proving that, rather than being merely trivial and escapist, they may give their readers the courage to dream of facing the complexities of the human condition.