SEVEN : CONCLUSION

Mythology, like the severed head of Orpheus, goes on
singing even in death and from afar.

Carl Kerenyi.

This study has attempted to isolate and analyse in depth one very particular and potent aspect of sf and fantasy literature. It has sought to find - in selected works - images that are imbued with that 'sense of wonder' which constitutes, perhaps, the most mysterious and fascinating aspect of this kind of writing, and which both writers and readers seek so assiduously. For sf and fantasy have - as I hope I have shown - more than almost any other fictional genres, the ability to awaken the urge to contemplate what is most enig-matic about existence and about the cosmos which surrounds humankind.

I have suggested that - to a large extent - this sense of wonder lies precisely in the ability of the writer to call up, to evoke from the mysterious realms of the unconscious mind, certain images or symbols that have archetypal and iconic meanings, and that, conse-quently, arouse a perception of the revelatory and the numinous. These images add extra dimension and resonance to the writing, for they elaborate upon and intensify those aspects of sf and fantasy which inspire profound responses.

In order to dissect these images and to lay bare their significances, I have used the meth-ods of archetypal criticism, a critical approach which flourished during the 1950s and 1960s and which then gradually fell into disfavour. Archetypal criticism - or myth criti-cism, as it is sometimes called - involves something akin to Baudelaire's *correspondences*; that is to say, the isolation of certain key images or symbols, and their explication in terms of the resonances they call up in the reader's mind. However, the images which are

central to the concerns of the archetypal critic are not merely personal, but those which appear to be embedded in culture and the human imagination, regardless of time and place. They seem universal in the sense that they persist through the ages, with roots that are sunk deep in the human mind and which reach back into what Jung called the 'collective unconscious'. Such images have, therefore, the power to move readers in ways of which they are not always consciously aware, since they unify not only the text but also general human experience.

However, as Darko Suvin (1979) has pointed out, the myth critic's task is not simply a mechanical identification of the underlying archetypes or the mythic patterns in writing of this nature. It involves also an assessment of the degree of skill and effectiveness with which such images are used, and an explication of why these symbols are capable of arousing powerful emotional and intellectual responses in the mind of the reader.

> ...the critic...of SF - must, I believe, abandon the belief that he has done much more than his formal homework when he has identified Yefremov's Andromeda as containing the myth of Perseus or Delany's Einstein Intersection...as containing the myth of Orpheus. He is still left face to face with the basic question of his trade, namely, is the myth or mytheme transmuted (1) into valid fiction; (2) into valid science fiction?
>
> (Suvin, 1979:35 - 36)

Anatomising these images, their genealogical lines, their polyvalent meanings and the sense of wonder that they confer upon the various texts under consideration, has necessitated using a wide range of sources as referents, so that this thesis is informed by what has been called 'discourse theory' or 'intertextuality':

> For those critics...who work within the school of deconstruction, the process of intertextual study in which sacred literature is related, along with works of history, philosophy, and psychology, to creative letters is a necessary aspect of the contemporary approach to the literary tradition.
>
> (Spivey, 1988:6)

In referring to such varied sources I have demonstrated as clearly as possible the complexity of these archetypal images, with their ancient provenances and their contemporary relevances. Necessary to this process, however, is a stringent discipline, an eschewal of personal free-association of the sort that became so contagious during the 1950s and 1960s[1] and which led, by the 1970s, to the perceived irrelevance of archetypal criticism as an analytical technique. Such undiscriminating pursuit of all possible echoes and resonances in the text is irresponsible and leads, finally, to obscurantism. Inherent in the task of interpretation is a form of delicacy or tact, as Frye puts it: 'The sense of tact, of the desirability of not pushing a point of interpretation "too far", is derived from the fact that the proportioning of emphasis in criticism should normally bear a rough analogy to the proportioning of emphasis in the poem' (Frye, 1990:86). Applying the principle of tact to archetypal criticism would mean, therefore, that the critic should proceed with discretion, bringing meaning into focus, and not spinning tenuous skeins of free-association that can lead to anything - or even to nothing.

It was almost certainly this sort of abuse which led to such a strong reaction against archetypal criticism decades ago. William Righter, author of <u>Myth and Literature</u>, levels the following harsh - but deserved - criticism at careless and overindulgent use of the term 'mythic' in contemporary criticism:

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[1] An activity that Richard F. Hardin (1989:42) has referred to as 'an archetypalist binge'.

> 'Mythic' has…become a value term, with very little beyond a minimum of descriptive content, drawing upon other senses of myth in only the loosest possible way, with its claim to some cognitive content equally loosely staked in 'significance'. A strong degree of approval, a recognition of importance, an attribution of high seriousness - all are implied but hardly explained. And this seems a failure of critical imagination in placing too easy a reliance on 'mythic', where the importance of the term almost seems to come from the uncanny reverence in which it is held, from the myth of 'myth'.

<div align="right">(Righter, 1975:55)</div>

Any critical tool is as useful as the competence of its user renders it. I have, therefore, throughout this study tried to remain aware that it would be entirely inappropriate to confuse the presence of mythic components with excellence. As Righter (1975:18) also points out: '…the "collective unconscious" is pure hypothesis of the sort which is inaccessible to empirical investigation.' Thus, there is a certain latitude for what he calls 'seeing-as'. That is to say, a symbol is open to several interpretations, and no way exists to actually test the hypothesis or the interpretation in any way that can be finally definitive. He cautions that, in the end, the only judgement one can make is whether or not the interpretation or analysis is 'coherent'. But here (despite himself) he seems to be in agreement with Jung, who also warns:

> Not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. Even the best attempts at translation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language.

<div align="right">(Jung, 1991f:134)</div>

For, the paradoxical nature of the archetype is such that, while it can be explained metaphorically or allegorically, it also resists final explication. Yet simultaneously, and rather

miraculously, exegesis does not destroy its power. Like a poem, its meaning is most clear in the form in which it exists. Nothing can quite replace it.

> Contents of an archetypal character...do not refer to anything that is or has been conscious, but to something essentially unconscious. In the last analysis, therefore, it is impossible to say what they refer to. Every interpretation necessarily remains an 'as-if'. The ultimate core of meaning may be circumscribed but not described.
>
> (Jung, 1991f:130)

Perhaps because of the paradoxical manner in which the archetypal symbol both resists and demands explication, myth and mythic symbolism themselves were also subjected to a great deal of adverse criticism during the 1960s. As a result of the passionate manner in which many of Jung's theories were expanded upon and proselytised by commentators such as Campbell, Eliade and Kerenyi, mythic interpretation became something of a religious cult, lending itself to an almost pseudo-spiritual response which outraged certain intellectuals who saw in it an unfortunate nebulosity and a mere sentimental hankering after a bygone past. It was referred to, somewhat sneeringly, as 'mythomania' (Rahv, 1966:109).

Philip Rahv's contention is that myth offers an illusory stability, since it 'confounds' past, present and future in an undifferentiated unity. He feels that it is, in fact, a withdrawal from the historical process that brings only stagnation (1966:118). Other theorists, rebelling against the romantic and somewhat mystical qualities inherent in much of Jung's teachings (and which were promulgated so ardently by disciples such as Campbell), have agreed with this viewpoint. In the 1970s, these theorists were disturbed and outraged by the notion that myth could be regarded as the bearer of some sort of racial memory or

essential meaning, and that mythic writing might, therefore, express realities which could be accessed only through myth itself. Wallace W. Douglas, in his essay on 'The Meanings of "Myth" in Modern Criticism', rejects Jung completely, finding it wholly unacceptable, in fact, that any work of literature might be 'a repository of truth, of racial memories, or of unconsciously held values' (1966:121).

There have been other objections to the archetypal method. Many critics have regarded this approach as a sign of regression. Rahv's objection to myth, for instance, is grounded in the fact that he regards myth as static and immutable, while history is, on the contrary, ever-changing and therefore 'progressive' (1966:109 - 118). The emotional affirmation of myth is, he feels, one that rejects progression, change and adaptation. The 'craze for myth represents…the fear of history' (111).

In contrast, the tendency of Campbell, Eliade and other archetypalists is to see myth as integrative, as a way of returning humanity to its lost roots.

> Mythology leads us back not only to the most ancient but also to the deep-
> est springs of the human mind. The wish for a correct interpretation of
> mythology is therefore not just an academic or intellectual exercise. It
> stems from the concern to keep our lines of communication with the centre
> clear and untarnished.
>
> (Munz, 1973:xii - xii)

For, as Jung and others have so often pointed out, myth is not static, but constantly evolving and self-renewing. Because of its polysemous nature, its relevance can override the historical. The very longevity of myth, the vigour of certain symbols throughout

recorded history, is potent testimony that it is necessary and of inestimable value. If the myth cannot adapt, it is false and it dies.

> The longevity of myth and its spell-binding quality across millennia is an assurance that it adequately symbolises genuine feeling-states. In this respect false myths are like treason: they never prosper.
>
> (Munz, 1973:62)

The kinds of sf and fantasy dealt with here rely to a large extent on mythic patterns and symbols and would seem to provide cogent proof of both the enduring qualities and the power of these archetypal images. The writers dealt with in this study have demonstrated that the so-called static and immutable patterns of mythic and archetypal images are surprisingly plastic, capable of endless transformation, vibrancy and relevance. Particularly in the case of sf, there is no apparent 'fear of history', for here the mythic components are set against backgrounds that are futuristic and which embrace progress openheartedly, although not always uncritically. Within these alien and futuristic settings, it is those very universal and stable qualities that convey a sense of progression and continuance. Rather like fairy tales which transport children into unfamiliar *milieux* (forests or castles or rustic villages) and surround them with strange characters (witches, kings, queens, dwarves, and talking animals) in order to distance or displace the existential message or lesson of the story and make its painful realities easier to absorb for the young mind, sf and fantasy can also transport the reader into settings which are disturbingly alien but which become powerful metaphors for the here and now. Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim (1991), in his extremely influential analysis of the meanings carried by fairy

tales, has described these stories in terms that might well be used of much sf and fantasy:

'…these stories are *unreal*, they are not *untrue*' (1991:73).[2]

Since it seems to be generally accepted by psychologists and researchers such as Piaget and Bettelheim that even very young children are capable of symbolic thought processes, these fairy tales have inestimable value in their ability to point subtle lessons by the processes of psychological displacement, replacement, externalisation and symbolisation. Frye (1976:36 - 39) has noted the use of displacement techniques not only in romance literature, but also in mimetic or realistic fiction. He describes the process as 'the adjusting of formulaic structures to a roughly credible content' (Frye, 1976:36). Sf and fantasy may also convey messages about complex existential problems by much the same means. Indeed, the sf and fantasy works analysed in these chapters carry this metaphoric sense of significance, for they may be said to express essential truths through their use of archetypal *motifs* and symbols. Thus, John Crowley's <u>Beasts</u> speaks to the reader of the dangers and responsibilities inherent in man's custodianship of the world - and which are becoming ever more pressing with current scientific advances such as, for instance, the possibility of cloning animals and human beings. He leads the reader gently, however, so that the inferences culminate in a sense of revelation as the reader voyages through Crowley's unfamiliar world and meets the strange and complex characters who populate it. And J. G. Ballard's books constantly testify to the problems of psychic adaptation facing humanity in a society so dominated by technology that not only is the physical environment being irrevocably altered, but the perception of reality is constantly engulfed

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[2] Stanislaw Lem (1976:2), no psychologist but an sf writer and theorist, agrees: "You would be quite mistaken if you believed…that the classical fairy tale has only its autonomous inner meanings and no relationship with the real world. If the real world did not exist, fairy tales would have no meaning.'

and manipulated by the controlling power of the mass media. Similarly, the fantasies of Ursula Le Guin take the reader, on one level, on a long and arduous journey through the islands and oceans of Earthsea. But on a subliminal level, what the reader is experiencing is the sensation of participating in an intense psychodrama: the growth of the human spirit; its search for wisdom and self-knowledge; the way in which it comes to terms with loss and age - all these are the true subjects of Le Guin's tale-telling.

I would like to suggest, then, that some sf and fantasy may even be regarded as fairy tales for adult minds. However, in comparing the typology of fairy tales with the sf and fantasy discussed in this study, some remarkable transformations became apparent. Bettelheim points out that the typology of fairy tales ensures that they state an existential problem briefly and succinctly, omitting all inessentials such as complexities of character, plot or setting. Evil and good, for instance, are polarised. Characters are never ambiguous, but good or evil, ugly or beautiful, rich or poor, old or young, lazy or industrious. In this sense, fairy tales may be regarded as primitive, lurid and unsubtle. Frye argues along much the same lines for what he calls romantic fantasy and the fabulous. He finds these forms highly stylised and claims that their 'verticality' leads to clear dichotomies or 'moral polarizing'.

> The characterisation of romance is really a feature of its mental land-
> scape. Its heroes and villains exist primarily to symbolize a contrast be-
> tween two worlds, one above the level of the ordinary experience, the
> other below it. There is, first, a world associated with happiness, security,
> and peace; the emphasis is often thrown on childhood or on an 'innocent'
> or pre-genital period of youth.... I shall call this world the idyllic world.
> The other is the world of exciting adventures, but adventures which in-
> volve separation, loneliness, humiliation, pain, and the threat of more

> pain. I shall call this the demonic or night world. Because of the power-
> ful polarizing tendency in romance, we are usually carried directly from
> one to the other.
>
> (Frye, 1976:53)

However, as I have demonstrated, some sf and modern fantasy has evolved in surprising directions. While still retaining the archetypal components and patterns, these genres have undergone significant transformation. Settings, for instance, are now carefully drawn, often in painstakingly extrapolated detail. The all-devouring lushness of Brian Aldiss's Hothouse world, semi-sentient and constantly in motion, is vividly delineated, as are the silent and subtly menacing inundations by sea or sand of J. G. Ballard's strangely mutating surroundings. Similarly, the richness of Robert Holdstock's Ryhope Wood, with its endlessly shifting sunlight and shadow, has a reality that goes beyond the merely impres-sionistic. And Alfred Bester's twenty-fourth century world of Tiger, Tiger! provides a glitteringly menacing and completely logical backdrop to the actions of the novel. In all of these, the sense of place is strong, the reader absorbed into and convinced by these envi-ronments, which are both familiar and alien. Thus, the archetypal settings and images found in fairy tales can be transmuted into even more complex and potent symbols by the complex settings of the sf and fantasy which is considered here.

In addition, as I have demonstrated, characters have now evolved into more rounded personalities. Whereas, in fairy tale and myth, characters are simplistically typified as the brave prince, the beautiful princess, the wicked stepmother or the loyal sister, in much sf and fantasy character has evolved into more than just a recognisable 'type'. Le Guin, writing in the 1970s, in her essay 'Science Fiction and Mrs Brown' made a plea for writers of sf and fantasy to realise the importance of the human presence within their writings, the

need for writers to create characters who impress with a sense of the density of their being, the need to welcome common humanity - in the shape of Virginia Woolf's Mrs Brown - aboard their spaceships.

> If Mrs Brown is dead, you can take your galaxies and roll them up into a ball and throw them into the trashcan, for all I care. What good are all the objects in the universe if there is no subject?.... For we are not objects. That is essential. We are subjects.... If we stop looking, the world goes blind. If we cease to speak and listen, the world goes deaf and dumb. If we stop thinking, there is no thought. If we destroy ourselves, we destroy consciousness.
>
> (Le Guin, 1989g:99 - 100)

Le Guin, herself, has managed to capture admirably the essence of what she was suggesting other writers should do. No reader of her Earthsea tetralogy would be likely to forget the name of Ged, Archmage of Roke, or fail to have a strong sense of his physical presence, his dark skin, his scarred cheek, his stocky frame, his unshakeable dignity and his inherent reserve. Fortunately, she is not the only writer who has succeeded in suggesting the rounded qualities of her protagonists. Alfred Bester's Gully Foyle, the vengeful and amoral beast of Tiger, Tiger! is similarly unforgettable, as is Ben Reich, Bester's demolished man. It is the strong sense of humanity which such writers bring to their work, their intense awareness of the complexity of human nature, its terrible propensity for evil and stupidity, and its paradoxical yearning for transcendence, which helps them to create beings who appear to inhabit a world that is larger, more terrifying, more beautiful - and more real - than the surface of the printed page. Thus, John Crowley's heroic leo, Painter, his devious but endearing Reynard, his surgically-altered and suffering Sweets, craving a master to whom he can surrender his entire being - all these are unforgettable and touch-

ing creations because each in some way suggests the complexity and pathos of the human experience. Their varied existences are suggested with such solidity and weight that the reader cannot but become involved in their strange worlds and destinies.

Moreover, as I have demonstrated in earlier chapters, the sf and fantasy dealt with in this study have taken yet another step forward on the path towards maturity. Moral dilemmas and choices are now considerably more complex and subtle than in traditional forms of fabulous or romantic writing. But even more striking is the fact that solutions to problems are not clear-cut. Where traditionally the protagonist would be returned to a state of original happiness after the vicissitudes and torments of adventure, in much sf and fantasy the return is ambiguous and profoundly disquieting, demanding significant mental and emotional adjustment, signalling the equivocal and fragile nature of human happiness, and pointing to the compromises which lie at the heart of all experience. Hugh and Irene can leave the idyllic twilight world of Threshold because they grow to recognise that life can be lived most fully only by recognising the metaphoric dragons that beset all men and women. They learn that the truest triumph comes from admitting pain, defeat and disappointment into life, and that happiness can only be found within the shadow of darker emotions. Crowley's Rush that Speaks may relive his joys countless times, but to do so he must, as a corollary, experience his own sorrow endlessly. It becomes clear, then, that the works of sf and fantasy analysed here have evolved into more mature forms, transcending their origins in pulp or popular literary traditions. These stories are capable of engaging the reader not only intellectually, but also emotionally. Thus, while these genres have retained all the characteristics of what Frye (1990:49) calls the 'mode of romance', they have managed to travel beyond the old boundaries to enter a new and more adult world.

Furthermore, all of the books discussed here are organised around the cohering power of the archetypal and symbolic image. Each book is clearly idiosyncratic, having its own unique concerns, and expressing these with great individuality. Yet, the power and resonance of the symbols are in no way diluted. Indeed, their strength and meaning shine forth even more brightly within these alien settings. It becomes obvious, then, that mythic images are, in fact, capable of endless and subtle transformation and that they can attain relevance in whatever period they are encountered. This would seem to deny Rosemary Jackson's (1988) contention that sf and fantasy are, in general, irrelevant because they fail to engage in matters of profound 'dis-ease'. Carl Kerenyi draws a useful analogy between myth and music, describing the reshaping and transformation of basic material thus: 'Various developments of the same ground-theme are always possible side by side or in succession, just like the variations on a musical theme' (Kerenyi, 1985a:3).

Accepting the power and relevance of the archetypal image is, therefore, not necessarily a sterile backward process. I agree with Susanne K. Langer, who has said of myth; 'Its ultimate end is not wishful distortion of the world, but serious envisagement of funda-mental truths: moral orientation, not escape' (Langer, 1969:177). For although Rahv feels that historical events occur once only, and that they are therefore specific to time, place and context,[3] I believe that there are eternal drives and impulses that govern human behaviour and response at all times and in all places, and that these go hand in hand with history. Since historic events are propelled by the actions of men, it is almost certain that these two aspects - the specificity of history and the universality of human imperatives -

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[3] There have always been commentators who have reacted against the view of history as a random and disorderly aggregation of events. In our century, Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West (1926) and Arnold Toynbee's Study of History (1935) have posited theories that attempt to prove the cyclical or rhythmical nature of historical events.

are not mutually exclusive. Eric Gould, author of <u>Mythical Intentions in Modern Litera-</u><u>ture</u> (1981:177) maintains:

> Myth is an expanding contextual structure rather than a recurring motif, a
> logic of reconstruction against compromise. Because the crises occasion-
> ing myth by definition do not disappear but produce further myth, all that
> can be believed is the power of the human intelligence to persevere in its
> logical struggles in the face of nonmeaning.
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> <div align="right">(Gould, 1981:177)</div>

The value of myth, maintains Gould (1981:178), lies 'not in discovering the origin of fire, but in asserting the power of the human intelligence as it pursues such large questions.' My contention is that - while there are certainly many paths that lead towards the moment of epiphany - sf and fantasy literature are more inclined, by the nature of the material with which they treat, to pose such 'large questions' of an existential nature and to seek an-swers. Since sf and fantasy often force the reader to confront and contemplate mysteries, they are more likely than other forms of writing to possess a form of what Richard Chase, in his essay 'Notes on the Study of Myth', calls 'mana'.

> Myth must always discover and accept preternatural forces.... I...use the
> the word "preternatural", by which I mean to indicate no more or less than
> is conveyed by the Melanesian word *mana*; whatever has impersonal
> magic force or potency and is therefore extraordinarily beautiful, terrible,
> dangerous, awful, uncanny or marvellous has *mana* and is, in
> our sense of the word, preternatural. Myth shows us reality set afire with
> our own emotions.
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> <div align="right">(Chase, 1966:70)</div>

Sf and fantasy writing, rather more frequently than other forms of fictional writing, are - as I believe I have shown - capable of arousing sensations of awe and wonder, in part

through the use of mythic images and symbols within complex settings and carefully delineated characters. Douglas (1966), in calling archetypal criticism 'mythogogic theorizing' is merely theorizing himself. For, if there is no proof that racial memory exists, neither is there any proof that it does not exist. In the end, what counts is the manner in which sense or non-sense is made of the evidence.

Furthermore, since the great Judaeo-Christian symbols which sustained much of western life seem to have largely failed our century, leaving it one in which a thousand obscure cults proliferate to feed the needs of the abandoned, the world that we currently inhabit has become largely demythologised. Most recently, the surprising convulsions of grief engendered by the death of a glamorous member of the British royal family would seem to be a testimony to the spiritual vacuum that many people inhabit. The modern fairy tale of Princess Diana created an iconic figure with which many identified and which evoked a form of worship. It would seem that, in this largely technological and secularised age, we still have a strong need for myths and fairy tales which guide and confer meaning on the vagaries of existence.

It seems that now, as we approach the millennium, disasters multiply: bloody internecine conflict is endemic throughout Africa, uncontrollable fires and the dumping of toxic waste threaten the well-being of our planet on a global scale, psychological disorders of all types appear to multiply, and each day seems to bring to light the death of yet another species of plant or animal life. There is a strong and all-pervasive sense that the human race is, in some fundamental way, diseased and that (in W. B. Yeats's much-quoted but still appropriate lines from 'The Second Coming'):

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
>
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
>
> (Yeats, 1973:211. ll. 3 - 4)

Since my contention is that sf and fantasy have the capacity to become a source of those messages that once were to be found in the symbolic language of myth and religion, the archetypal mode seems to me to be extraordinarily well-suited to analysis of these genres. From the strange dreams of the writers of sf and fantasy, the reader may extrapolate questions, meanings - even possible answers. Sf and fantasy writings that evoke the sensation of the numinous and the contemplation of the eternal thus convey what Campbell (1988:xvi) calls 'the *experience* of being alive.' If myths are stories with messages, then sf and fantasy take upon themselves the role of myth, guiding the reader - through a transformation and a reinterpretation of the age-old symbols - both to new meanings and to a recapturing of the old significances.

> Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning,
> for significance.... We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to un-
> derstand the mysterious, to find out who we are.
>
> (Campbell, 1988:5)

Campbell formulated his thinking several decades ago, but more recently Dudley Young has argued the importance of myth in much the same way. In <u>Origins of the Sacred: The Ecstasies of Love and War</u> (1993), he theorises (for the most part persuasively) that what has fragmented much of human society's ethical and emotional stability is the loss of those ancient and guiding mythic codes and symbolic images which once sustained culture. He maintains that their disappearance has created a vacuum, sundering the species from its instinctual and hereditary wisdom. Furthermore, he feels that it is often given to artists to

perform a kind of shamanistic ritual, for their works help the reader or viewer to 'interface' with this hidden world of coherence:

> ...because Mother Nature in her wisdom (or unwisdom) unlocked the instinctual primate codes by which when we were apes we used to navigate the seas of desire. A good myth or poem stands for these codes, addresses our appetitive anarchies, and offers safe conduct to some life-enhancing energy by giving it a name; and a bad one does the opposite.... But in the absence of an *authoritative* myth or poem, the lights simply go out and the soul is closed down:
>
> (Young, 1993:xxiii)

Paradoxically, in a genre most frequently concerned with technological progress and its effects on the human race, the sf reader often recognises and is moved by the presence of precisely those universal and archetypal images for which Young mourns. It is partly for these reasons that I believe that an archetypal approach to sf is now apposite. I also believe that the dust thrown up by the original archetypal storm has subsided. In addition, as Marxism has become increaingly devalued, the scepticism - indeed the scorn - which grew from much Marxist-orientated criticism, with its emphasis on class structure and its contempt for, and deep suspicion of, what it perceived as the spiritual or non-rational, has lost much of its original impetus. I feel, therefore, that a more balanced, less emotional, response is now possible and that the advantages of archetypal criticism can become newly apparent. An approach of this nature thus seems to me to be timely and could well be greeted with a new receptiveness.

It would seem, also, that many of the *motifs* of sf and fantasy have penetrated the consciousness of the masses to an unprecedented extent. Barely a decade ago, interest in sf or fantasy was limited to a small segment of the population. Now, people who formerly

would not have admitted to seeing a 'sci-fi' film, or reading a fantasy or sf story, find that the messages and symbols of these genres are familiar currency. And, as pointed out earlier, many of these tropes have entered mainstream literature, film and art.[4] Frye (1976) has said that popularity is often prophetic, pointing towards the next trend that the more serious will follow. Sf and fantasy were already pointing towards these new directions with great vigour in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and have now interpenetrated mainstream literature to a noticeable extent. I believe that it is only their traditional limited marketing appeal that prevents many of the books under discussion here from being recognised and accepted by academia in general, and by the serious reading public at large.

The initial impulse behind this study was a fascination with the prevalence of mythic elements in much sf and fantasy. This suggested that these elements must, in large part, be responsible for the unique attraction of these genres. This was my route towards the archetypal approach. I have explained why I feel that this method, used judiciously, seems under the circumstances to be ideally suited to an exploration of this sort. I maintain that the archetypal approach reveals how and why these genres are capable of evoking such a strong response. Despite the disparagement of antagonistic critics, I agree with Haskell M. Block (1966:135 - 136) who maintains: 'When operative as a controlling principle, as part of the organic unity of a work, mythical patterns are at the core of aesthetic experience and cannot be neglected by criticism.'

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[4] Within the field of sf, the term 'slipstream' has come to denote writing which uses sf devices, but which is not inherently sf. It would seem an appropriate term to denote forms of art which employ such tropes, for their momentum comes, as it were, from the energy generated by the sf genre, and a process of what The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1993:1117) calls 'piggybacking'.

It is no doubt as a result of the use of such archetypal patterning that another striking attribute of the sf and fantasy fields becomes noticeable, one which cannot pass without brief comment. Although I have, in this study, confined myself to writing which has, in my opinion, literary as well as imaginative and intellectual value, these two genres display a characteristic peculiarly their own. This is the ability of mediocre, even poor writing, sometimes to exert a powerful - indeed, an unforgettable - hold over the imagination of the reader. Such stories, once read, can never be forgotten. An example is Isaac Asimov's first published short story, 'Nightfall' (1997), which appeared originally in 1941 and is generally considered to be the most successful American sf story ever written.[5] The story evokes graphically the terrifying vastness and incomprehensibility of the cosmos (calling up a profound sense of what Rosemary Jackson [1988:9] designates 'existential unease') in prose that is, paradoxically, entirely unmemorable.

Similarly, Harry Harrison's 1962 short story 'The Streets of Askelon' (1981) uses potent and brutal imagery to display the potential narrowness of Christian dogma and how it may, unwittingly, pervert essential innocence. The writing, however, is firmly rooted in pulp origins: it is stereotyped and formulaic. Characters such as the strapping planetary trader, the well-meaning but inflexible priest, the childlike indigenes of Wesker's World - all these are sketched with the crude simplicity of cartoon images. Yet, in numerous stories such as these, the intellectual content and final *dénouement* are so powerfully conveyed that the images and ideas strike with great force. Since language itself is always somewhat inadaquate - all it can do, in the final count, is to find synonyms, metaphors and symbols for

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[5] Almost three decades after it first appeared, 'Nightfall' was voted the most popular sf story published before 1965 by the Science Fiction Writers of America guild, and it has continued to be so judged in many subsequent polls.

the inexpressible - words themselves are not always quite enough to bridge the 'ontological gap' (Gould, 1981:175). Yet, some sf and fantasy miraculously crosses this divide. Because they deal with large questions, and because the images and symbols seized upon by the writers of sf and fantasy are fundamentally archetypal and mythic in their universal significance, these genres often achieve a unique imaginative potency.[6]

It is for all of the above reasons that the archetypal approach offers a logical pathway into the interpretation of sf and fantasy literature, since this method provides a matrix of rationality within which one can approach the intuitions and messages of such writing. I have, however, as previously noted, avoided discussion of the category of writing which seems to me to be artistically mediocre. Thus, I have excluded writing in which the prose seems to me to be leaden or lacking in vivacity. Similarly, I have ignored writing in which characterisation fails to suggest the complexity of human nature and experience and which fails, moreover, to engage the reader in any form of intellectual discourse. In short, I have tried to avoid writing which I consider not only formulaic in terms of language, characteri-sation and ideas, but where such formulæ are unredeemed by any glimmerings of original-ity in their presentation. I have confined this study to works which have, in my opinion, genuine literary flavour, and have shown - by selecting certain passages for analysis - why certain writers may be regarded as artistically successful. Furthermore, I have been careful to investigate only those works which seem to me to be organised around a central point of gravity constituted by the archetypal image itself. To attempt to force this approach on

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[6] My personal selection of some sf that fits this particular category would include some stories already mentioned in this study, such as Philip K. Dick's 'The Golden Man (1981) and Cordwainer Smith's 'The Game of Rat and Dragon' (1981). The list would also include, amongst others, Jerome Bixby's 'It's a *Good* Life' (1981), James Blish's 'Surface Tension' (1973), Arthur C. Clarke's Childhood's End (1953) and 'The Nine Billion Names of God' (1981), Vonda McIntyre's Dreamsnake (1978) and the 1977 story by James Tiptree (Raccoona Sheldon), 'The Screwfly Solution' (1981).

writing which does not yield comfortably to archetypal analyis would be merely foolish.
All the works studied here would seem to evoke in some way that indefinable and numi-
nous quality which is carried by myth. And in all of them, the central images are those
which appear to be almost universally present in thought and culture, regardless of time or
place. Yet, in contrast to the manner in which they are utilised by more simplistic folk and
fairy tales, these powerful mythic and archetypal symbols are now successfully woven into
complex settings and integrated into subtle forms of discourse.

Although I have tried to reserve a measure of detachment, the reader's response is always,
to some extent, subjective. I do not apologise for my enthusiasm for the texts analysed
here, but hope that I have sufficiently clarified the reasons for my response. Critics seek
an equilibrium in which passion for the subject matter is balanced against detachment.
This I hope I have achieved. I have been careful to eschew facile associations and refer-
ences and have tried to track punctiliously the genealogy of each mythic image in order to
determine where its roots may lie and what its credentials may be. I have not applied this
form of analysis to inappropriate forms of sf and fantasy, doing violence to texts in the
process, but have used this method only where it seemed strictly apposite. I have been
highly selective in my choice of works, discarding much that seemed, at first reading, to be
suitable for archetypal analysis. I have been as specific as possible, and have tried to
demonstrate the resonances of the mythic and archetypal images clearly. I have shown
how these small *motifs* may become integrated into the larger whole, and how they work
within the text to amplify meaning and relevance. I am certainly not suggesting that my
approach is relevant to all literature or even to all sf and fantasy. However, my hope is
that I have demonstrated both that these genres have a very special appeal and also that

they can, in some instances, take their place alongside respected works of canonical literature.

I hope, also, that this study is not only a tribute to the protean aspect of the archetypal image, but that it testifies also to the vibrant and affirmative nature of sf and fantasy literature. Neither 'outmoded' nor 'nostalgic' (as Rosemary Jackson [1988] claims), these genres are not necessarily the pale reflections of an anodyne imagination, but can be vividly meaningful and fluid in their ability to transmute ancient patterns. Campbell (1975:19) maintains that it is 'the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols which carry the human spirit forwards…' and Lévi-Strauss has said of anthropology that it gave him the sensation of experiencing 'at one extreme the history of the world and at the other the history of myself…' (in Gould, 1981:91).

I believe that much sf and fantasy can do the same. As the bearers of humankind's dreams, these two genres can help to carry the human spirit forwards and can also, in the process, trace some tentative paths towards the meaning of both the broad sweep of history and the more intimate patterns of individual life. Furthermore, I maintain that they also offer, when at their best, aesthetic pleasures equal to those provided by much critically approved mainstream literature. Far from having exhausted themselves (as Kingsley Amis [1981:25] once averred), they have proven to be enduringly vibrant forms, constantly undergoing hybridisation, fertilising their own deep-growing and ever-spreading roots from a multitude of sources and putting forth, from time to time, blooms more exotic and intriguing than ever before. It would perhaps be apt to allow Ursula Le Guin the last word. 'When fantasy is the real thing,' maintains Le Guin (1989:81), 'nothing, after all, is realer'.