

University of Strathclyde.

An Apostate Instauration:

Religion, Moral Vision and Humanism in Modern Science Fiction.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Anticlericalism and Satire in the Factitious Religions of SF

In Oscar Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) the capricious, amoral - 'poisonous' - Lord Henry Wotton characterizes fin-de-siecle England as the product of 'Beer, the Bible and the seven deadly virtues.' Charles Kingsley, a more earnest critic of religion, might be surprised at the extent to which his famous observation about contemporary religion has been popularized by - among others - modern science fiction authors. Kingsley wrote 'We have used the Bible as if it were a constable's handbook - an opium-dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they are being overloaded.' The nature and effects of religious influences upon us is of real interest to the progressive secular humanist who finds suppression and fatalism intolerable, lacking even the remotest possibility of the religious justification a devout writer like Lewis or Miller might discern in it. But for devout authors, as we have seen, a purely scientific or technological orientation of the humanistic ethic is seen as dangerously superficial and inadequate. Devout authors present the moral force of religion - based on revealed truths - as an essential counter to the amorality of pure scientific utilitarianism or the relativistic morals and expedient ethics of progressive scientific materialism.

This chapter presents evidence of a corresponding impatience or resentment amongst sceptics about the traditional standing of religion. Moorcock's Monica tells Karl Glogauer in Behold the Man that 'Science is basically opposed to religion... Who needs the ritual of religion when we have the far superior ritual of science to

replace it? Religion is a reasonable substitute for knowledge. But there is no longer any need for substitutes...Science offers a far sounder basis on which to formulate systems of thought and ethics.' Clearly one impulse to deride religion stems from an unwillingness to concede that the right to decree an authentic, enlightened definition of ethics should remain the prerogative of the religious. Religious faith is thought by the sceptic to be a particularly naive response to human existence within a universe about which more than ever is known, including some quite uncomfortable modern conclusions about the futility of trying to placate an utterly indifferent cosmos.

The sceptical and brazenly impious associations between religion on the one hand and deceitful oppression on the other which feature prominently in many factitious religions clearly are intended to expose or incriminate actual religions. Orthodox religion is depicted in many novels as a conservative institution promoting a reactionary moral consensus, exploiting, distorting or oppressing the innate spirituality of man. 'The Church has appropriated God for its own ends,' as Machiavelli bluntly complained centuries ago, and so there is clearly nothing new in the complaint itself. Yet the secular power enjoyed by Christian religions has declined and they no longer may assert an exclusive proprietary right to divine (or absolute) moral understanding, exemplified by ideas such as papal infallibility and Calvinistic election. Why then are they the target of so much modern sceptical satire? Religious aspiration and humanistic aspiration lay rival claim to the same role - fostering ethical development in individuals and society, and validating it.

Science fiction's secular humanists are engaged no less than religious thinkers by questions of personal growth, commitment and

responsibility and the danger of re-crudescence, or moral, intellectual or physical degeneration. Huxley, writing in 1937 on 'Religious Practices' (1) 'from a humanistic point of view,' concedes that if 'Attachment to traditional ceremonies and belief in the magical efficacy of ritual' would help most who have 'neither the desire nor the capacity for enlightenment to behave a little better than they otherwise would have done', then the rational idealist 'may accord them a certain qualified favour'. While Huxley (who attacks utilitarian ethics in Brave New World) recognizes the moral force of religious belief and practices, he sees their negative potential. Indeed, the attitude he expresses in the same essay about the broad effect of religions in general is still more clear-cut. Speaking of the rituals of organized religions as 'impediments' which stand in the path of enlightenment, he also attacks their pernicious ethical teachings:

...by no means all the doctrines and practices of the existing religions are calculated to ameliorate character or heighten consciousness. On the contrary, a great deal of what is done and taught in the name of even the most highly evolved religions is definitely pernicious, and a great deal more is ethically neutral - not particularly bad, but, on the other hand, not particularly good. Towards this kind of religion whose fruits are moral evil and a darkening of the mind the rational idealist can only show an uncompromising hostility. Such things as persecution and the suppression or distortion of the truth are intrinsically wrong, and he can have nothing to do with religious organizations which countenance such iniquities.

2.

Brave New World, discussed in detail in the last chapter as an example of humanist rather than religious unease about scientific materialism, could also justify a place in the present discussion for its sybaritic religion (a profane, synthetic travesty of Christianity) as this chapter examines the themes, contentions and conclusions

of a range of novels in which some of the acutest and most comprehensive hostility to all sorts of religions, real and imagined, is apparent. A factitious religion like Huxley's is one of most common vehicles for sceptical criticism.

Factitious religions are usually shallow analogues, designed really to do no more than serve their author's polemical purposes and lacking the force of religious conviction exhibited in the works discussed in the last chapter. But there are exceptions, notably Keith Robert's Pavane, and Moorcock's Behold the Man. Examples which are distinctly anti-clerical are used in the following discussion to introduce the rhetoric and general features of this sceptical satirical device. The discussion will move forward with a survey of works which attack theocracy; in them, religion is presented as inimical to human aspiration. Whatever their contentions, they present factitious religions and so are linked structurally and thematically with those discussed below. Their litanies, creeds and hierocracies are eclectic satirical devices, used in "radical" exposes to underpin a stylized, determinedly modernistic iconoclasm. Reversing the current of exploitation, these factitious religions may also be used to promote a new, positivistic or utilitarian view of religion as a potentially valuable means of achieving the evolutionary transformation of human nature, rather as Wells does in Men Like Gods.

Rationalistic Scepticism: Religion as Immature Mythopoesis.

Men Like Gods offers a revealing insight into the most cherished social vision of one of the century's most imaginative and prolific writers, H.G.Wells; Stapledon's Star Maker adopts its anticlerical

gnosticism, and Moorcock's Behold the Man (probably the most provocative of the three) has been acclaimed for uncompromising iconoclasm which not so long ago would certainly have brought it vociferous general condemnation. While recalling Butler's earlier satire of institutionalised religion in Erewhon, we may most usefully carry forward the examination of anticlericalism in science fiction by looking first to Wells's writings as an influential popular source of theme and discourse. Wells's qualified faith in science is well known:

From his earliest published essay....until his death in 1946, Wells was deeply concerned with the promise of science to help man understand and improve his environment. In his first essay, 'The Rediscovery of the Unique'(1891), he compares science to a match. Man has struck it with the hope and expectation that it will light up the dark room in which he stands, but he finds that it throws only a flickering and momentary glow on his hands and face, leaving the rest of the room in almost complete blackness. In more florid pieces like A Modern Utopia(1905) and The Shape of Things to Come(1933), science is not so much a flickering match as a beacon. However, the attitude towards science that appears in Wells's pronouncements on it, taken in bulk, is faith in it as a good tool, but faith moderated by skepticism about man's ability to obtain a knowledge of final reality with this tool or any other now available to him.

3.

In Men Like Gods(1923) H.G.Wells projects his most idealistic (yet, also his bleakest) vision of the human future. The 'god-like' Utopians are indeed masters of the physical sciences, and thus have complete control of their world. Yet they are later discovered to be using science to go beyond even their relatively exalted existence to somewhere Barnstaple, their human 'guest' from this world, cannot even conjecture. At the same time, Wells uses this novel as a vehicle for probably his most sustained attack on orthodox religious belief; and there is plenty to suggest that it was the stimulus for the later anti-scientific satire of Aldous Huxley and devout authors like C.S.Lewis, as well as George Orwell's parody in Coming Up for Air(4).

For all that, it is also an oddly neglected novel(5), perhaps because the flair, artistry and originality which distinguished the earlier 'Scientific Romances' is displaced in Men Like Gods by simple didacticism(6). Indeed, Wells's many didactic concerns may be examined here only insofar as they bear upon the present discussion of the cultural nature of religion and what Wells clearly thought of as the habitual conservatism of the religious perspective.

In many of his science fiction novels and stories, Wells presents a fundamentally pessimistic view of the nature of the universe and the inferences which may be drawn about the ultimate destiny of the race itself. In The Time Machine, the time traveller reports that the mindless, monstrous crabs, having outlasted even Mankind, are the only recognizable creatures in the terminal landscape he has discovered in the future. One feels that describing this sensationally apocalyptic vision as 'anti-utopian' is somehow inadequate, but Wells's fiction reaches this pitch of deep gloom about the future of man at least partly as a negative reaction to the utopias of Bellamy and Morris with their insistence that the technologies of the Industrial Revolution and their modern successors really are pernicious. Wells himself recognizes these problems - in The Time Machine and elsewhere - but he does not accept that humanity might dispense with the odious machines and return to wholesome, rustic societies. To Wells, technology offers a sacred hope, that through it - assuming mankind will not instead degenerate - mankind may transcend the limitations of human nature, attaining a Titanic, supernal ascendancy over the world and ultimately the entire Cosmos. Yet this is no merely Vernean fantasy of Man the Inventor heroically transformed by his mastery of awesome machines, but a millenarist

vision born of a more sophisticated yet qualified faith in scientific, secular man.

Butler foresaw this debate, lampooning in his idiosyncratic style the aspirations of the rustic utopians in the shape of the mechanical museums of Erewhon and the injunctions against possessing machinery which land Higgs in jail for owning a pocket watch. However, where Butler is quizzical(7) in presenting his view of technology, Wells is definite. For Wells, the future of mankind is caught up with technological progress, whatever the consequences - the genie, out of the bottle, may not be returned to it without the attendant disadvantage of a decline in social standards. In fact, the emergent necessity he perceives is the challenge of creating a positive modus vivendi with the ambivalent potential of the mechanical progeny of human ingenuity, an issue he addresses in Men Like Gods. Yet, since this novel is devoid of huge Vernean machines (and even of the awesome devices like the Martian fighting machines which feature in some of his early fiction), Wells's interest unmistakably lies in the sensibility of the 'Utopian' Titans he portrays in it; given the concerns of the present study, a most happy contingency.

The novel's initial premises are straightforward enough. In order to expose the inadequacies and vices of contemporary society, Wells invents another into which a range of current opinions are introduced for contrast. Where Butler, and before him Swift, found a single adventurer sufficient, Wells throws an assortment of 'modern' characters through a dimensional lacuna into what he calls simply 'Utopia'. Now an old hand at the game (the Time Traveller of The Time Machine having preceded the collection of Twenties men and women, among them mordant caricatures of Winston Churchill ('Catskill'),

Lord Balfour ('Cecil Burleigh') and the newspaper magnate Beaverbrook - 'Barralonga' - dispatched this time), Wells creates tensions within the 'modern' perspectives which he is setting against those found in Utopia. However, it is important to recognize the notional distinction between the earlier novel, with its gloom-ridden, even apocalyptic vision of the future of the human race, and the situation which Wells contrives in this novel. Drawing his 'scientific patter' from the most speculative theories of the brilliant physicist Einstein, Wells invents a world which is a possible future, rather than the 'actual' future which he has already depicted pessimistically. Such niceties are important, as George Hay explains:

Thus may we learn something of our country's political and social past, by looking through a magic window at an alternative future, created in the past. 'Alternative world' I mean, not future; this science-fictional device, now so well-used as to be almost banal, was used here, early and to excellent effect, to present a possible future, rather than a straight prediction.

8.

Still, the correspondences with The Time Machine are too many to ignore, and perhaps Wells intended readers familiar with his earlier work to notice the many allusions, especially the obvious one at the end of Men Like Gods. After his return, Barnstaple treasures an other-worldly flower as a symbolic memento of his amazing adventure, much as the Time Traveller produced a similarly exotic bloom as evidence of the veracity of his account of his expeditions into the future. It is tempting to think that Wells's later novel represents an attempt, however ill-conceived, to build upon in some way his earlier work. Indeed, Men Like Gods is viewed generally as being a sort of sequel to Wells's earlier work, A Modern Utopia (1905):

Perhaps the most notable way in which the Utopia of Men Like Gods differs from that of A Modern Utopia, which was only a little way ahead of us, is that all government has

withered away. Instead of judges and legislators and rulers, there are only experts doing their jobs scientifically and rationally. Instead of our confusions and conflict, there are only people living together in order and peace because they have been educated to do so.

.....
Indeed, Men Like Gods differs from A Modern Utopia in being much more of a dream vision, much less a detailed blue-print. In part it is a kind of hymn to a world incredibly more lovely, orderly, healthy, energetic...

9.

However, to see Men Like Gods purely in the light of its utopian predecessor may obscure three important new aspects of the idealized vision of the human future which Wells conveys in the later novel.

The first important innovation which Wells includes in Men Like Gods is his answer to the problem posed so tellingly in The Time Machine, namely, that over-dependence upon science and technology will stultify and stifle the very creativity with which human inventors establish new technologies and bring about the decline of the race. Mr.Catskill and Urthred (the Utopians' spokesman) discuss the problem of technological over-dependence, and Catskill is permitted to open the exchange polemically in terms very reminiscent of Weston, Lewis's later anti-hero:

For I take it, sir, that it is now a proven thing that life and all the energy and beauty of life are begotten by struggle and competition and conflict; we were moulded and wrought in hardship, and so, sir, were you. And yet you dream here that you have eliminated conflict forever. Your economic state, I gather, is some form of socialism; you have abolished competition in all the business of peace. Your political state is one universal unity; you have altogether cut out the bracing and ennobling threat and the purging and terrifying experience of war. Everything is ordered and provided for. Everything is secure, sir, except for one thing...

'I grieve to trouble your tranquillity, sir, but I must breathe the name of that one forgotten thing - degeneration! What is there here to prevent degeneration? Are you preventing degeneration?

Men Like Gods, p.79.

Urthred has Promethean answers which Wells advances in his own ultimate argument against the merciless, unrestrained positivism in which Darwin's theories about natural selection justify a particularly base, grasping and shallow materialism. The less scrupulous positivists were still advancing this reading of 'The Origin of Species' as a rationale to disguise a mercenary readiness to exploit the poor, the unfortunate and the oppressed:

'These Earthlings do not yet dare to see what our Mother Nature is. At the back of their minds is still the desire to abandon themselves to her. They do not see that except for eyes and wills, she is purposeless and blind. She is not awful, she is horrible. ...She made us by accident; all her children are bastards - undesired; she will cherish or expose them, pet or starve or torment them without rhyme or reason. ...There must be good in her because she made all that is good in us - but there is also endless evil. Do not your Earthlings see the dirt of her, the cruelty, the insane indignity of much of her work?

.....
'We have, after centuries of struggle, suppressed her nastier fancies, and washed her and combed her and taught her to respect and heed the last child of her wantonings - Man. With Man came Logos, the Word and the Will into our universe, to watch it and fear it, to learn it and cease to fear it, to know it and comprehend it and master it. So that we of Utopia are no longer the beaten and starved children of Nature, but her free and adolescent sons...

Men Like Gods, pp.82-83.

The single word 'adolescent' hints at the second main innovation Wells made. The Utopians at first seem like gods to the 'Earthlings,' but they quickly deny that they are. They are, however, clearly very different from their visitors, and they aspire to even greater achievements in shaping themselves physically and mentally to be capable of becoming a different species. Catskill is wrong in assuming that the Utopians are complacent and hence decadent. They have set their sights collectively upon a new challenge, something the ancestors of the Eloi and Morlocks failed to do, for they aspire literally to surpass themselves: "'We have taken over the Old Lady's

Estate. Every day we learn a little better how to master this planet. Every day our thoughts go out more surely to our inheritance, the stars. And the deeps beyond and beneath the stars.'"(p.83) The third innovative element Wells introduced was an anticlerical polemic. The humane variety of positivism advanced as the dominant ideology of his Utopia is confronted with a dogmatic, reactionary counterpart.

Significantly, Wells seems at the same time to have become somewhat more inclined towards a kind of mysticism. More precisely, he moved from a position of exclusively experimental rationalism with its emphasis upon the immediate and the tangible - the 'real,' if you will - to develop an outlook which, while being no less rationalistic, is markedly less single-minded about evolution and the limits of development. Furthermore, he expended considerable energy (and risked not a little of his considerable reputation as a free-thinking radical) upon three "mainstream" works in which he appears to take a less sceptical line towards conventional religion. God the Invisible King(1917), The Soul of a Bishop(1917) and The Undying Fire(1919) form a 'Manichaeian trilogy'(10) presenting his personal theological ideas and speculations.

These books, written during the First World War, delineate the unorthodox religious views of their author and suggest that Wells's contemporary position on these questions was not unlike Butler's, the "devout sceptic." The fact that Wells was less than happy with this philosophical position is borne out fully in Men Like Gods, a dialectical novel which may now seem straightforward enough but which provides striking evidence of its author's disillusionment with the progressive capability of orthodox religions. It marks a watershed in Wells's personal philosophy. The modified utopian themes of this, the

only major work he produced in 1923, suggest that he was striving to square the findings of his recent excursion into theological issues with his contempt for ecclesiastical conservatism and his perennial faith in science and reason. Here Wells snipes at reactionary religious ideas, rather than launching the all-out attack Moorcock does in Behold the Man.

Although Wells's materialism is as scientific as ever, it has acquired a new streak of idealism evident in his promotion of an updated and refined Comtist cult of Man. However Wellsian humanism is in fact theistic, not atheistic, for he simply endows man with what are conventionally regarded as divine attributes. For Wells, the greatest of these is Reason. In Men Like Gods he sets out to illustrate, in an optimized setting, his version of progressive scientific humanism.

Wells's assortment of characters find themselves involuntarily transported into a strange landscape which is bafflingly unlike anything they have ever seen before. The reader follows the mild, middle-class protagonist Mr. Barnstaple into the new world, and there discovers quickly that he is not alone, for the fatal experiment which has brought him through in his car without a scratch has also brought through two other, rather more expensive vehicles, their wealthy passengers, and - naturally - their respective chauffeurs. While their minds are still reeling from the disconcerting experience of crossing between two worlds while travelling along an otherwise unremarkable stretch of road towards Windsor, the loquacious Mr. Burleigh provides a characteristically indefinite sketch of the scientific and philosophical context of the incident:

'Einstein might make it clear to us. Or dear old Haldane might undertake to fog it up with that adipose Hegelianism

of his. But I am neither Haldane nor Einstein. Here we are in some world which is, for all practical purposes, including the purposes of our week-end engagements, Nowhere. Or if you prefer the Greek of it, we are in Utopia. And as I do not see that there is any manifest way out of it again, I suppose the thing we have to do as rational creatures is to make the best of it...'

Men Like Gods, p.30.

Wells's displays his gift for irony in setting out the central theme of the novel when Burleigh continues in negligently damning terms: "'And watch our opportunities.'" In a nutshell, this is the the moral weakness Wells intends to expose. His twentieth-century characters (except Barnstaple) call themselves 'rational' but regularly display a narrow opportunism. However, in Utopia - a 'world of subjugated nature', as Wells puts it - advanced rationalism has dispensed with both privileged individualism and mores based upon religious revelation. There man's overlordship of the world is technological, not Providential. The first of the travellers to register (in no uncertain terms) his disapproval of this world of Reason rather than Revelation is the cleric.

Father Amerton is one of the most uncompromising and unattractive of the clergymen in Wells's work. Wells's antipathy to these 'men of God' found an early expression in The War of the Worlds, written some twenty-five years before. The hapless, pathetic curate who construes the devastating Martian attack upon Weybridge as a divine punishment, and the Martians themselves as angels of death carrying out God's work, is contrasted most unfavourably with the rational narrator, an amateur scientist whose resourcefulness and determination helps him survive when the demented, raving curate betrays himself to the ruthless, dispassionate, exterminating Martians. Since the reader knows why the Martians have come to earth, and the narrator himself has begun to grasp that ecological problems

have prompted the Martians to launch their attack across space, the futility and illogicality of the curate's behaviour and attitude is manifest. By contrast the vicar in The Food of the Gods (1904) really is little more than a part of the landscape, as Wells himself explains:

Cheasing Eyebright had of course a vicar. There are vicars and vicars, and of all sorts I love an innovating vicar, a piebald progressive professional reactionary, the least. But the Vicar of Cheasing Eyebright was one of the least innovating of vicars, a most worthy, plump, ripe, and conservative-minded little man. ...He matched his village, and one may figure them best together...

The Food of the Gods, Bk.2, chap.2

Shortly after Mr. Barnstaple and the occupants of the first of the other vehicles come to their senses, the priest's vocational intuitions come to the fore. Father Amerton is struck by the physical beauty of the more or less naked Utopians, but is puzzled by the absence of what he terms any 'sign of maternity' among them - "'The most beautiful and desirable young women,'" he remarks to Barnstaple, "'most desirable; and not a sign of maternity!'" (p.39)

As the story progresses, it becomes quite clear that the world which the 'Earthlings' have taken for 'Utopia' is a rationalistic paradise whose inhabitants are in every way superior to their visitors, except where the emotions are concerned (though since they are telepathic, their outward calm and stoical acceptance of death may hide any more personal emotions which they may be reluctant for the 'Earthlings' to observe). Their philosophy seems to be materialist, and though they call themselves 'men', they do seem to Barnstaple and the others to be aloof and dispassionate to the point of coldness. They are commensalist socialists whose ancestors discovered 'the need and nature of the limitations of private property' (p.53); and incidentally, one is reminded at once of the behaviourist

'paradise' Skinner would depict twenty-five years later in Walden Two. As Burleigh observes to Urthred, their society is a marvel of harmony, yet the individual may exercise a considerable degree of autonomy. It all works because these are Apollonian rather than Dionysian 'gods' whose society is kinetic rather static - an important premise overlooked by virtually all of Wells's predecessors and not a few of his successors, including Skinner.

Amerton's observation is the pretext for an account of Utopian social development for their guests' benefit, for Utopia is here born through social upheaval (especially during the 'Age of Confusion', which is duly recognised by the Earthlings as being the closest historical parallel to their own epoch). Utopia has history, of course, and in a rather old-fashioned way Wells exploits it to extend the parallels with Earth which he has established: Utopian socialism after Morris (Looking Backward) and Bellamy (News from Nowhere) is propounded at length, and at the expense of incident and character development. However, before long Wells's anticlericalism coincides happily with his skill at catching the essence of human behaviour in relieving the dry exposition of Utopian history and values with Amerton's increasingly outraged interruptions.

The priest has already noticed an absence of the outward signs of a thriving religion - there are neither spires nor churches in Utopia. During Burleigh's discussion with Urthred Amerton suddenly understands how the Utopians are able to manage their society so effectively:

A gasp of horror came from Father Amerton. He had been dreading this realization for some time. It struck at his moral foundations. 'And you dare to regulate increase! You control it! Your women consent to bear children as they are needed - or refrain!'

'Of course,' said Urthred. 'Why not?'

'I feared as much,' said Father Amerton, and leaning forward he covered his face with his hands, mumbling, 'I felt this in the atmosphere! The human stud farm! Refusing to create souls! The wickedness of it! Oh, my God!'

Men Like Gods, p.56.

Leaving aside the prurience of Amerton's remarks, a Catholic theologian could not find much else to quibble with in his aghast denunciation, for (as a recent Vatican announcement has re-affirmed) the Catholic doctrine of the inseparability of the conjugal act from procreation is absolute: science may not intervene in any way, either through effective contraception or, in the contrary case, in vitro fertilization. Like the Lithians of Blish's A Case of Conscience, the rationalistic Utopians are, in Amerton's judgement, at best unconsciously beastly, at worst consciously satanic.

Here Wells exploits the fundamental point where science comes most acutely into conflict with religious conviction: permitting or prohibiting human fertility is a divine prerogative, and if it is hubristic to aspire to proscribed knowledge, it is profane to apply it. However, Wells is far from finished with Christianity, for Utopian history has a further shock in store for Amerton:

Propositions that had seemed, in former ages, to be inspired and exalted idealism began now to be recognised not simply as sober psychological truth but as practical and urgently necessary truth. In explaining this Urthred expressed himself in a manner that recalled to Mr. Barnstaple's mind certain very familiar phrases; he seemed to be saying that whosoever would save his life should lose it, and that whosoever would give his life should thereby gain the whole world.

Father Amerton's thoughts, it seemed, were also responding in the same manner. For he suddenly interrupted with: 'But what you are saying is a quotation!'

Urthred admitted that he had a quotation in mind, a passage from the teachings of a man of great poetic power who had lived long ago in the days of spoken words.

He would have proceeded, but Father Amerton was too excited to let him do so. 'But who was this teacher?' he asked. 'Where did he live? How was he born? How did he die?'

A picture was flashed upon Mr. Barnstaple's consciousness of a solitary-looking, pale-faced figure, beaten and bleeding, surrounded by armoured guards, in the midst of a thrusting,

jostling, sun-bit crowd which filled a narrow, high-walled street. Behind, some huge, ugly implement was borne along dipping and swaying with the swaying of the multitude....

Men Like Gods, pp.59-60

Wells continues in this homologic manner (the whole passage is presented as Appendix I), making deliberate correspondences between the Utopians' ancient religion and the Gospels' account of the life and death of Christ, until Amerton is told by Urthred that while the prophet and teacher is respected for the virtue of his ideas, no-one now has faith in him as a religious saviour or redeemer; nor have they had for ages past. The priest is quite overwhelmed by this realization that the Utopians' martyr has come to be seen as less significant than the ideals and values he once preached and that these have become so revered in a seemingly agnostic world - "'I don't understand this...It is too terrible. I am at a loss. I do not understand.'"

For Amerton, Wells seems to imply, Christ's testament is valuable because it carries with it the promise of redemption and because it is revealed knowledge. Without Christ's divine authority, the message would be merely worthy; sanctioned by Christ, it has absolute moral force. What he cannot comprehend, as he repeatedly hints, is that although Utopia has had its parallel revelation, whatever may be admirable about its strange people - their beauty, scientific power, and supreme rationalism - has been attained even though the sacrifice upon the Wheel and the sacred message of its messianic victim has been ignored or accorded the significance of purely secular wisdom.

There are of course further implications from Amerton's point of view: if the revelation of this ancient prophet is true, then each human world may have its own saviour. Of more immediate significance,

however, is the matter of whether the Utopians are right merely to esteem, rather than worship their own redeemer. It is fair to say that Wells does not allow him any thoughts on this question, it being a foregone conclusion in view of his calling. The priest, staggered by what he has learned of the history of religion in Utopia, remains silent until he has summoned the resolve to condemn the utilitarian ways of the Utopians once again, to Mr.Burleigh's evident alarm:

'I wish you would not press this matter further just at present, Father Amerton. Until we have learned a little more. Institutions are, manifestly, very different here. Even the institution of marriage may be different.'

The preacher's face lowered. 'Mr.Burleigh,' he said, 'I must. If my suspicions are right, I want to strip this world forthwith of its hectic pretence to a sort of health and virtue.'

'Not much stripping required,' said Mr.Burleigh's chauffeur, in a very audible aside.

Men Like Gods, p.68

Amerton is unaware - or ignorant - of the ironic incongruity of the role he is ready to assume. Wells has indicated beforehand that the 'humans' are, in many respects, socially and ethically inferior to the Utopians. Still, since Amerton believes his moral authority is god-given, he ploughs on. Staggered by the Utopians' equanimity about birth control, Amerton feels compelled to denounce their 'universal scientific state' and its evil, materialistic practices - and things go from bad to worse, as even the suave parliamentarian Burleigh suddenly realizes.

It was clear to Mr.Barnstaple that Father Amerton was not in complete control of himself. He was frightened by what he was doing and yet impelled to do it. He was too excited to think clearly or control his voice properly, so that he shouted and boomed in the wildest way. He was 'letting himself go' and trusting to the habits of the pulpit of St. Barnabas to bring him through.

'I perceive now how you stand. Only too well do I perceive how you stand. From the outset I guessed how things were with you. I waited - I waited to be perfectly sure, before I bore my testimony. But it speaks for itself - the shamelessness of your costume, the licentious freedom of your manners! Young

men and women smiling, joining hands, near to caressing, when averted eyes, averted eyes, are the least tribute you could pay to modesty! And this vile talk - of lovers loving - without bonds or blessings, without rules or restraint. What does it mean? Whither does it lead? Do not imagine because I am a priest, a man pure and virginal in spite of great temptations, do not imagine that I do not understand! Have I no vision of the secret places of the heart? Do not the wounded sinners, the broken potsherds, creep to me with their pitiful confessions? And I will tell you plainly whither you go and how you stand. This so-called freedom of yours is nothing but licence. Your so-called Utopia, I see plainly, is nothing but a hell of unbridled indulgence. Unbridled indulgence!

Mr. Burleigh held up a restraining hand, but Father Amerton's eloquence soared over the obstruction.

He beat upon the back of the seat before him. 'I will bear my witness,' he shouted. 'I will bear my witness. I will make no bones about it. I refuse to mince matters, I tell you. You are all living - in promiscuity! That is the word for it. In animal promiscuity! In bestial promiscuity!'

Mr. Burleigh had sprung to his feet. He was holding up his two hands and motioning to the London Boanerges to sit down. 'No, no!' he cried. 'You must stop, Mr. Amerton. Really, you must stop. You are being insulting. You do not understand. Sit down, please. I insist.'

Men Like Gods, pp.69-70.

Ironically, it is the priest's 'testimony' which the more eloquently 'speaks for itself', for Wells effectively allows Amerton to condemn himself. Everything Amerton asserts confirms the reader in the opinion that the priest is an ingrate; his reactions to what Wells advances as a species of earthly paradise, based as they are upon the priest's merely vicarious appreciation of the very things he affects to condemn, make him seem to be inconsiderate, disrespectful, bigoted, prurient, and reactionary. His notions about the vileness of the Utopians' promiscuity are unconvincing - even embarrassing, for they serve only to underline his own inadequacy. However, they are not without genuine significance in the context in which Wells has presented them, as he uses this to expose the latent authoritarianism of the clergy. Quite simply, Amerton holds that marriage sanctifies sexuality - in other words, God sanctions certain kinds of sexual behaviour, and the clergy presume to know which.

This is yet another of those confrontations between reason and materialism on the one hand, and orthodox religious belief on the other which have become a distinctive feature of modern science fiction. As in a host of novels and shorter fiction, the cleric speaks for traditional morality and defends virtue against the rationalistic onslaught of materialistic progress. But there is no argument offered to counter Amerton's denunciation, for Utopia also speaks eloquently on its own behalf to the reader. It seems to be the very embodiment of humanistic aspiration for a secular earthly paradise completely adapted to the wants of reasonable beings. Wells's Utopians therefore do not need to give an account of themselves, or to advertise their virtues too strenuously. Theirs is, after all, a society which has surpassed its human parallel; Amerton and his fellows are the primitives come to London, as it were. Whatever they may desperately wish to believe, they are less sophisticated than their hosts.

Nonetheless the essential irony is that 'the London Boanerges' has sought to take upon himself the role of senior arbiter of the mores of both worlds, and advances his as the better. Indeed, he speaks with his own form of licence in expressing this arrogant hostility towards his hosts and vilifying their ways, which they have not sought to have him adopt. Hence even the broad-minded Utopians take exception to his tirade, and in the most dramatic instant of this entire passage of discussion of the differences and correspondences of both human worlds, Amerton is told: "Sit down and hold your peace...Or you will be taken away." Burleigh intercedes for him, and the priest remains, though he is unrepentant. His egotism and proscriptiveness are not lost on the Utopians, whom Wells allows

to voice his own attitude, apparent, in any case, from the beginning of Amerton's dogmatic sermon. "'Manifestly this man's mind is unclean,'" states the Utopian spokesman Urthred. "'His sexual imagination is evidently inflamed and diseased. He is angry and anxious to insult and wound. And his noises are terrific. To-morrow he must be examined and dealt with'" - a promise sombre enough to quell the priest's passionate flood of invective against the moral values of the Utopians, and perhaps lose Wells the reader's sympathy. Utopian force is a convenient force majeure which relieves Wells of the tedious, even difficult obligation of advancing the Utopian line of reasoning.

After Catskill has made his contribution to the visitors' criticism of Utopian life and culture by suggesting that they have sacrificed natural human vigour and creativity in attaining their scientific paradise, Urthred answers him and Amerton indirectly, rather as if he is conversing with his peers about a lower species which they have all, momentarily and regrettably, taken for their equals:

'Why does he say degenerate? He has been told better already. The indolent and inferior do not procreate here. And why should he threaten us with fancies and irruptions from other, fiercer, more barbaric worlds? It is we who can open the doors into such other universes or close them as we choose. We can go to them - when we know enough we shall - but they cannot come to us. There is no way but knowledge out of the cages of life... What is the matter with the mind of this man?

'These earthlings are only in the beginnings of science. They are still for all practical ends in that phase of fear and taboos that came also in the development of Utopia before confidence and understanding... The minds of these Earthlings are full of fears and prohibitions, and though it has dawned on them that they may possibly control their universe, the thought is too terrible for them to face. They avert their minds from it.

Men Like Gods, p.81

Urthred's is a key statement of Wells's own attitude towards what he always depicted as the two most persistent cognitive constraints upon genuine progress: reluctance to face the truth about life and the unthinking acceptance of 'taboos' and 'prohibitions' such as those advanced by moral spokesmen like Amerton. This vision of human nature struggling to throw off its inadequacies and shortcomings in trying to attain the knowledge necessary to escape from 'the cages of life' may sound inspiring, and again confirms the argument being developed here about the relationship between knowledge and power, but Wells is astute enough to concede that some of what the Utopians countenance is of doubtful ethical propriety. The first assertion Urthred makes above - "'The indolent and inferior do not procreate here'" - begs all sorts of questions, and has an authoritarian ring which almost eclipses even Amerton's wildest proscription. Thomas Molnar's polemical study of utopian writing, Utopia, The Perennial Heresy, depends upon this repressive aspect of Utopian social projection:

...the utopian...visualizes the globe as having become one powerful dynamo from the integration of all its natural and human potentials and launched upon the conquest of other globes, planets, solar systems - and God himself. ...power over things and men - the will to be God - is the ultimate objective of both. Observed H.G.Wells in A Modern Utopia:

The Utopia of a modern dreamer must needs differ in one fundamental aspect from the Nowheres and Utopias men planned before Darwin quickened the thought of the world. Those were all perfect and static States, a balance of happiness won forever against the forces of unrest that inhere in things. But the Modern Utopia must not be static but kinetic, must take shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages.

To understand, with the utopian, that human freedom jeopardizes these prospects, these states of happiness and this long ascent of stages injects incalculability into the march of things and accounts for the differences between one man and another, is also to understand why it is of relatively little importance for the utopian to deprive mankind of these instruments of freedom. The transition period toward utopia

is, then, the process of removing and abolishing certain of these instruments of freedom. Granted, in every age these instruments change and the utopian, child of his age, concentrates on those which in his eyes are the most obstructive of common happiness, yet, even though some of these instruments are permanent, they are still denounced with passion or by cold logic throughout the pages of utopian literature.

11.

If, however, Wells is prepared to hint that there is an unattractive, inhumane side to the Utopian temperament, he does not condone Amerton's position. When the priest seeks to enlist Barnstaple's support the next day, he is given a less sympathetic reception than he expects. Amerton begins on what he considers to be the safe ground of irrefutable moral logic: "'The Laws of Morality hold good for every conceivable world.'"(p.90) Barnstaple, we later learn(p.98), is not the friend to religion which Amerton has assumed. He is not willing to accept the priest's assertion that moral values are absolute - the counterparts of scientific constants. He seeks to expose the fallacy of Amerton's position by advancing a scientific case which suggests that moral values are relative rather than absolute, asking "'But in a world in which people propagated by fission and there was no sex?'" But the priest is adamant: "'Morality would be simpler but it would be the same morality.'"

With what seems to be uncharacteristic bitterness, Barnstaple, a genial middle-class everyman, privately wishes that Amerton ('a bore') could be discarded as readily as litter or a cigarette butt. When the cleric, full of his mission to "'recall them to the One Thing that Matters'" describes Utopia as "'this Hell of sensuous materialism'", Barnstaple turns on him at last:

'I want you to understand that I am entirely out of sympathy with all this stuff of yours. You seem to embody all that is wrong and ugly and impossible in Catholic teaching. I agree with these Utopians that there is something wrong with your mind about sex, in all probability a nasty twist given to it

in early life, and that what you keep saying and hinting about sexual life here is horrible and outrageous. And I am equally hostile to you and exasperated and repelled by you when you speak of religion proper. You make religion disgusting just as you make sex disgusting. You are a dirty priest.

Men Like Gods, p.92

However, when Barnstaple extends his criticism of the priest to include the creed he represents, Wells reveals a perhaps unexpected degree of circumspection, allowing Barnstaple to present a line of reasoning which is anti-clerical certainly, but not irreligious:

'What you call Christianity is a black and ugly superstition, a mere excuse for malignity and persecution. It is an outrage upon Christ. If you are a Christian, then most passionately I declare myself not a Christian. But there are other meanings for Christianity than those you put upon it, and in another sense this Utopia here is Christian beyond all dreaming. Utterly beyond your understanding. We have come into this glorious world, which, compared to our world, is like a bowl of crystal compared to an old tin can, and you have the insufferable impudence to say that we have been sent here as missionaries to teach them - God knows what!'

Idem.

The tenor of Barnstaple's reproach is righteous to the point of seeming conventionally devout, and there also is an implicit acknowledgement that religious faith may not be entirely valueless. Albeit in the most general terms, Wells here introduces the seemingly radical idea of a religion of Man. His portrayal of a humanistic creed, notwithstanding Barnstaple's ingenuous, ready approbation and more or less immediate conversion, is not as inventive as it may appear. In fact Wells is giving pride of place in Utopian philosophy to logical positivism with a spiritual orientation, for Urthred's Logos, "'the Word and the Will'" - the unique product of the human mind - is its central principle.

Barnstaple, then, is acting as a spokesman advancing the virtues of positivist religion very much like that of the French rationalist Auguste Comte who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, had

even established a Church of Humanity with a Positive Catechism - Comte himself being High Priest of this 'sociological' cult he had founded. Principally through the medium of Wellsian fiction, Comte's vision of an anthropocentric religion founded upon Western values has remained influential, emerging in one guise or another even in recent fiction, though Victor Frankenstein should certainly be counted as an early prophet and martyr. Nevertheless, however ostensibly spiritual, Wells depicts a religion which is no less utilitarian than anything else about Utopia and its people: like Butler's Erewhonians, his Utopians are moral pragmatists.

Having repudiated Amerton and his values so emphatically and revealed, coincidentally, how much he admires the Utopians, Barnstaple now emerges as the nearest the novel offers to a central character of a Faustian disposition. He has gradually become estranged from the other visitors, but since the Utopians suddenly find themselves with an epidemic on their hands because, like the Martians in The War of the Worlds, they have no resistance to the sort of pathogens with which twentieth-century man is infected, he is quarantined with the others in a ruined castle atop a remote crag while the Utopians are trying to contain the spread of the illnesses which the 'Earthlings' have carried into their world. One of the party, Lady Stella, confides to Barnstaple that she has misgivings about how they will now be treated, introducing the main theme of the second part of the novel ('Book Two, Quarantine Crag'). Whereas in the first of the novel's three sections the 'humanity' of the visitors is weighed, and indeed is found wanting, it is the 'humanity' of the Utopians themselves which will be apparent in how they respond to the 'inferior' visitors whose presence has proved to

be problematical.

No sooner are the members of the Earth party installed in the ruined fortification in the second 'Book' than they start to react to the happenstance humiliations with which they have had to cope virtually since their arrival in Utopia. Disturbed by the apprehension of an inferiority they are loathe to acknowledge, they organize themselves into a pathetic armed band, constituted along military lines and with the vaguest of objectives. Burleigh and Catskill take charge of the others and Barnstaple, being not much in tune with their ways, finds himself dragooned into a menial role. He reflects ruefully on the effect his various compatriots have had since their arrival, the weakness of his own vacillation, and the motives behind their present course of action:

But how miserably had he and his companions failed to rise to the great occasions of Utopia! No one had raised an effectual hand to restrain the puerile imaginations of Mr.Catskill and the mere brutal aggressiveness of his companions. How invincibly had Father Amerton headed for the role of the ranting, hating, persecuting priest. How pitifully weak and dishonest Mr.Burleigh - and himself scarcely better! disapproving always and always in ineffective opposition. ...Women, he thought, had not been well represented in this chance expedition, just one waster and one ineffective. Was that a fair sample of Earth's womankind?

All the use these earthlings had had for Utopia was to turn it back as speedily as possible to the aggressions, subjugations, cruelties and disorders of the Age of Confusion to which they belonged. Serpentine and Cedar, the man of scientific power and the man of healing, they had sought to make hostages to disorder, and failing that they had killed or sought to kill them.

They had tried to bring back Utopia to the state of Earth, and indeed but for the folly, malice and weakness of men Earth was now Utopia. Old Earth was Utopia now, a garden and a glory, the Earthly Paradise, except that it was trampled to dust and ruin by its Catskills, Hunkers, Barralongas, Riddleys, Duponts, and their kind. Against their hasty trampling folly nothing was pitted, it seemed in the whole wide world at present but the whinings of the Peeves, the acquiescent disapproval of the Burleighs and such immeasurable ineffectiveness as his own protest. And a few writers and teachers who produced results at present untraceable.

Men Like Gods, p.166.

Barnstaple has already decided, however, that though this entire enterprize is an ill-conceived, mad gesture of defiance, Catskill and the others are capable of injuring the unsuspecting Utopians. Ashamed at the barbarity of his fellows, he resolves to interfere at a crucial moment. While he thus exhibits more of a conscience than any of the others (Amerton included), Barnstaple is not made of the stuff of heroes, and his plan is only partly successful. The hack-turned-adventurer cannot escape immediately from the towering crag and consequently has to endure the anger of his thwarted compatriots, who not surprisingly regard him as a traitor. He does have sufficient courage to attempt a risky escape, which nearly costs him his life; but he survives the vengeance of the others and, now separated from them, is left in Utopia when the Earthlings' former hosts cast them out again into the dimensions whence they came (along with the entire top of the crag the Earth party had garrisoned so ineffectively.)

The Utopians have decided, without any consideration of the consequence of their act upon the primitive people they are rejecting so casually, that the 'Earthlings' are now too much of a nuisance to be borne; in doing so, they demonstrate a marked lack of compassion or mercy, for they do not care what happens to these creatures. Their merciless act shows them to be, by human standards, amoral. However, Wells for a time maintains the integrity of his vision - to face up to the awful truth, as he might have seen it - for their action does not recommend them to the reader. Here Wells is being true to his purpose, for he intends to depict in an appropriately unsentimental way the kind of supremely rational mind he anticipates, perhaps even hopes, will evolve from, and succeed, 'confused' contemporary Man. Wells's Utopians are, in fact, the Martians of The War of the Worlds

in human guise; the fore-runners of Stapledon's Odd John Wainwright and his fellows(12), John Wyndham's 'chrysalids', Arthur C. Clarke's Overlords of Childhood's End and the Star Child of 2001:A Space Odyssey, and indeed the legion of science fiction Übermenschen unconstrained by merely human ethics. Of course, this amorality raises unique problems of narrative and moral vision, aspects of which are addressed in the final chapter of this work. Wells's solution to the technical part of these new problems, which really merits no more than passing attention, is advanced in the third book of his novel, wherein it is also revealed that the apparently omnipotent Utopians have retrieved the Earthlings they cast out into the void, restored them to life, and returned them to their native surroundings, though Barnstaple is allowed to remain among them for some time.

Perhaps more notably than any other of his utopian, or, as he preferred to say, 'sociological' novels, Men Like Gods is open to the charge of advancing a naive, idealistic attitude to the ethics of Progress and the moral problems innate to this sort of fictive projection of a better society. Book Three of the novel, in which Barnstaple wanders about in Utopia, the sole representative of our kind privileged to observe the Utopians engaging in quotidian life, is indeed a sort of panegyric of the world Wells clearly thought might be ours if the humans of 'Old Earth' could lose their aggressiveness, spite, wilfulness, bigotry, and sexual inadequacy and embrace "reasonable" mores and behaviour. Yet a more than superficial reading brings one to a fuller appreciation of the central, daunting inference about human nature Wells would draw even more explicitly in his last works. Anthony West has made a convincing case for

recognising a resurgence of the "cosmic pessimism" of the celebrated 'Scientific Romances' in these later works, with which he also linked

Men Like Gods:

For some years after his death I reacted angrily to the criticisms of the quality of his thought which made so much of the pessimism of his last writings and utterances. These were, and still are, being represented as an abandonment of a superficial optimism in the face of those realities of which his coming death was a part. The suggestion is made that they were some kind of final admission that he had been wrong about the nature of things for the greater part of his life.I cannot now agree that his final phase of scolding and complaining at human folly represented any essential change in his views at all. What happened as his powers declined from 1940 onwards was that he reverted to his original profoundly-felt beliefs about the realities of the human situation. He was by nature a pessimist, and he was doing violence to his intuitions and his rational perceptions alike when he asserted in his middle period that mankind could make a better world for itself by an effort of will.

13.

West subsequently confirms the significance of Men Like Gods within the canon of Wells's science fiction, and attests that it is more than a facile day-dream:

...the idea of a change in human nature is the sine qua non of his utopias, and in the end Wells conceded that such a change was not within the realm of possibility. His much-parodied Men Like Gods is the point of concession, and it is odd that those who have criticized the book as representing the unpracticality and unreality of his idealism in its extreme form have not noticed the fact. The ideal beings which inhabit its Utopia exist in a free zone which is not within the realm of human reality.

14.

The difference can be drawn succinctly in comparing this later novel with its generic predecessor, A Modern Utopia, for where that depicts the sociopolitical transformation of a world 'somewhere beyond Sirius' (but which is indubitably this one) Men Like Gods depicts a society working for its own evolutionary apotheosis, a species striving for their ultimate spiritual fulfilment. However valid his observations about Wells's native pessimism, West's reading leads him

to overlook the special hybrid quality of the novel under discussion here.

In this novel Wells visualizes the possibility of human self-transcendence through a collective, conscious effort of the will presented as the communion of a natural religion of man. In so doing, he goes beyond the sterile impasse of the two mutually-antagonistic social forces which is repeatedly presented in this genre. The Wellsian resolution is both visionary and synthetic: the Utopians revere their own positive attributes and the potential they possess; they practise a humanistic pseudo-religion which exalts reason rather than uncritical faith and fervour. Barnstaple feels dwarfed by them: 'He went a little in awe of these people and felt himself a queer creature when he met their eyes. For like the gods of Greece and Rome theirs was a cleaned and perfected humanity, and it seemed to him they were gods' (pp.187-188). Wells's Utopian Apollos, so admired by Barnstaple, are in many ways the rationalistic counterparts of the sorns and eldila of Lewis's later Ransom trilogy. The crucial difference is that the quasi-divinity of the Utopians is essentially humane rather than supernal, self-sought rather than Providential.

Yet however eager Barnstaple is to accept them as gods, they are reluctant to be seen as such. They see their enterprise as a continuing effort to promote their own evolutionary development to an end they can perceive. Alas, nowhere is one afforded the sort of insight into Utopian perceptions which has become one of the principle foci of interest in more recent science fiction of aspiration. Indeed, Wells neglects the teleological implications of the 'Utopian' sensibility, an aspect of the theme of human evolution which would interest later writers of this specialized kind of fiction.

By this means, Wells avoids having to deal in any detail with the moral issues raised in the course of their programme; Barnstaple quite simply avers his general ignorance of their Icarian activities which, given their atheism, cannot be called hubristic as there is no divine order for them to challenge. However, Wells does exploit the ironic potential of the situation he has created to emphasize his own tragic view of human reality. This emerges in the novel in two ways, in Barnstaple's recognition that real Utopian existence will always be beyond his reach, and in his poignant decision to return to his own world. While he could have remained amongst the Apollos of Utopia whom he so much admires, he returns to 'Old Earth' with a stronger determination to oppose all the base things which stifle even the faintest stirrings of rationalistic progressive materialism, the key to true human development.

Yet there is no convenient, transforming formula for mundane Man. Wells does not allow Barnstaple his proxy, to return to tell how the era of Homo superior could be brought forward, and preach the abjuration of religion, greed, hypocrisy, aggression and the adoption of Reason as a vital guiding principle. The central, obdurate point is paradoxical: human nature is usually incapable and at best only just capable of coping with the demands of this reasoning life, and therefore cannot consciously will it to come into being. Barnstaple begins to understand this, if only dimly, when he sees how the Utopians' telepathy, a faculty cultivated eugenically for generations, facilitates their act of collective will. This, he knows, is presently beyond the attainment of our race; and there, implicitly, is the latent germ of Wells's pessimism, a realization that to bring to fruition the ideal human state, that divinity to which mankind

aspires and which orthodox attitudes and religion preclude, demands more-than-human qualities:

'The minds of these Earthlings are full of fears and prohibitions, and though it has dawned upon them that they may possibly control their universe, the thought is to terrible yet for them to face. They avert their minds from it. They still want to go on thinking, as their fathers did before them, that the universe is being managed for them better than they can control it for themselves. Because if that is so, they are free to obey their own violent little individual motives. Leave things to God, they cry, or leave them to Competition.'

'Evolution was our blessed word,' said Mr. Barnstaple, deeply interested.

'It is all the same thing - God, or Evolution, or what you will - so long as you mean a Power beyond your own which excuses you from your duty. Utopia says, "Do not leave things at all. Take hold." But these Earthlings lack the habit of looking at reality - undraped.

Men Like Gods, p.81

According to Urthred, there is a compelling reality which exposes the relative shallowness of all the other doctrines to which people have been drawn in seeking truth, or at least reassurance. Naturally, since Urthred is Wells as he might like to be, and Barnstaple is Wells as he disingenuously pretends to be in order to maintain the dialectic exposition, this exchange takes him to the heart of the crisis of faith in the future of mankind.

In the final analysis, Wells must have perceived that he would not be able to maintain even his own commitment to this most personal vision throughout the novel. Indeed, his confidence seems to falter, perhaps because his utopian vision has reached a point where it is in danger of becoming more fantastic than speculative. Two features of the novel contribute most to this failure to remain compelling: the Utopians' telepathic consensus; and the very vagueness of their goals. In effect, Wells relies upon the selflessness and resolute nature of their aspiration to excite and sustain the reader's interest. Yet however inspiring or noble their dedication to humane

progress, it all ultimately seems like wishfulness. 'Men Like Gods is in reality an altogether pessimistic book,' argued West (15), and the depths of that pessimism are indeed profound. Wells's abiding intuition about the indifference of the universe to man, his dreams, and his potential reasserted itself forcefully in his last days, eclipsing the humanistic Weltanschauung he had come close to formulating in 1923, and for which, ironically, he would lampooned by Huxley, Noyes, Orwell, Leavis et al, who would reject his quasi-gnostic scientism.

Olaf Stapledon was probably his most sympathetic fellow author. In Star Maker (1937) he depicts a journey to the central organising consciousness of the universe and confronts the same problem Wells could not resolve, namely, credibly treating the inscrutable will of the eponymous higher life form. Stapledon's Star Maker is a metaphysical tour-de-force. The mood moves from scepticism through apocalyptic awe to angry apostasy. If Odd John was an ironic "tribute" to Nietzsche's ideas of the rejection of conventional mores by the Übermensch, then Star Maker illustrates the more speculative areas of Kant's philosophy. In its final tragic realization of the finitude of human experience and the denial of the key teleological hope of the science fiction of aspiration, Stapledon's novel also develops Wells's pessimistic premise. Stapledon's traveller understands ultimately that like many other species, mankind is not ready - may never be - to join the universal consciousness.

It would be easy to claim too much for Olaf Stapledon's celebrated novel which abounds with contentions about religion and humanity, but at least it should be recognised that in it apocalypse and aspiration complement one another particularly well.

There is a remarkable profuseness of ideas, many of which parallel, indeed anticipate, arguments featured in the works by Orwell and Vonnegut already discussed, as well as those by Arthur C. Clarke yet to be discussed in Chapter Six. Stapledon's narrator earnestly hopes to gain answers to ancient ('grave') teleological questions as his journey, enlarged thus into a quest for cosmic enlightenment, progresses:

Was man indeed, as he sometimes desired to be, the growing point of the cosmical spirit, in its temporal aspect at least? Or was he one of many million growing points? Or was mankind of no more importance in the universal view than rats in a cathedral? And again, was man's true function power, or wisdom, or love, or worship, or all of these? Or was the idea of function, of purpose, meaningless in relation to the cosmos? These grave questions I would answer. Also I must learn to see a little more clearly and confront a little more rightly (so I put it to myself) that which, when we glimpse it all, compels our worship.

Star Maker, Chapter 2.

Collectively, these issues and questions have imbued much of the science fiction of the twentieth century with something approaching a consistent philosophical preoccupation; they come up again and again in different situations. What should not overlooked is the fact that to ask such momentous questions about Mankind's role in the grand scheme of things - are we a phenomenon of real significance to anyone other than ourselves, or of much importance 'in the universal view' - is to indicate a dissatisfaction with such answers as are offered in scripture - Talmud, Holy Writ, the Stone Tablets of the Commandments, the Koran, even the Word of God personally communicated by His Son - revealed knowledge in its many manifestations. Yet balancing his scepticism, there is also a willingness, even a desire to revere 'that which, when we glimpse it at all, compels our worship' evident in this narrator's reflections; which perhaps is why this seems such

a compelling view of the human dilemma, echoing the ages-old plea of the troubled spirit - "I believe, O Lord, help Thou my unbelief." The central question is, in what should we believe? Undoubtedly Stapledon wrestled with this very question for decades, and his books are deeply personal explorations of his own faith which, never orthodox in its allegiance to any creed, was variously placed in the Christianity of childhood, scientific materialism, Marxism, and finally a species of ecstatic, Gnostic Christianity(16).

When the narrator begins his fantastic journey, he has initially little real conception of what is happening to him, though he is aware that his imagination has played some vital part in precipitating his transcendental vision. Nor can he think of an explanation of how it is happening, still less where it will lead. Yet to his astonishment he finds himself embarked, apparently, on a journey first beyond Earth and then deep into space. His apprehension for his family and, more immediately, his own safety are at first very great, but he resolves 'not to be unduly alarmed by this mysterious change', and is determined that his perceptions of this unique experience will not be impaired needlessly: 'With scientific interest I would observe all that happened to me.' Leaving behind the Earth, this cosmic Gulliver is affected by a novel, magnificent perception of his native planet:

The spectacle before me was strangely moving. Personal anxiety was blotted out by wonder and admiration; for the sheer beauty of our planet surprised me. It was a huge pearl, set in spangled ebony. It was nacrous, it was an opal. No, it was far more lovely than any jewel. Its patterned colouring was more subtle, more ethereal. It displayed the delicacy and brilliance, the intricacy and harmony of a live thing. Strange that in my remoteness I seemed to feel, as never before, the vital presence of Earth as a creature alive but tranced and obscurely yearning to wake.

Star Maker, Chapter 1.

Enthralled by this apocalyptic vision of his home world (anticipating Lewis, if only by a year) as 'a creature alive but tranced and obscurely yearning to wake', his outlook has undergone the first in a series of upheavals it will have to accommodate as his cosmic journey progresses, and when he next sees Earth his feelings for his former life will be very different. Like Prendick and the Time Traveller, what he alone of all terrestrial men will witness leaves him withdrawn from his fellows, less ready to appreciate what before seemed fulfilling, important and wholesome, for in the light of his discoveries about the nature of consciousness and about the Cosmos itself, the familiar blessings of home and community will be less certain touchstones.

Peering, the mind could see nothing sure, nothing in all human experience to be grasped as certain, except uncertainty itself; nothing but obscurity gendered by a thick haze of theories. Man's science was a mere mist of numbers, his philosophy but a fog of words. His very perception of this rocky grain and all its wonders was but a shifting and lying apparition. Even oneself, that seeming-central fact, was a mere phantom, so deceptive, that the most honest of men must question his own honesty, so insubstantial that he must even doubt his very existence. And our loyalties! so self-deceiving, so mis-informed and mis-conceived. So savagely pursued and hate-deformed! Our very loves, and these in full and generous intimacy, must be condemned as unseeing, self-regarding, and self-gratulatory.

Star Maker, Epilogue: Back to Earth.

The narrator finds new, twentieth-century contentions to illustrate themes as apocalyptic as anything in Ecclesiastes. However this existentialist despair is redeemed by the thought of his marriage, 'The one rock in all the welter of experience.' He realizes that both the essential, close-grained reality of his life and love, and the inexorable equilibria of the stars and their Maker which he calls the 'hypercosmical apparition,' have a complementary integrity in which inheres the true being of 'man' - whatever the species. Accordingly,

he resolves to once again engage the dilemmas and trying if ephemeral problems of his life rather than shun them as Prendick does.

After only this first step on his great peregrination, his nascent cosmic detachment is already working the subtle, cumulative restructuring of his sensibility which will afflict him on his return. As he leaves, his thoughts turn briefly to human nature, prompted by the invisibility of 'the huge industrial regions, blackening the air with smoke' and 'teeming masses' which he knows lie far below him: 'No visiting angel, or visitor from another planet, could have guessed that this bland orb teemed with vermin, with world-mastering, self-torturing, incipiently angelic beasts.' 'Vermin,' a strange choice of word with which to denote one's own kind, suggests that his narrative is retrospective, though it is presented as a chronicle of his voyage of the spirit.

The first planetfall the narrator makes is in a distant galaxy, on a world he calls 'the Other Earth.' He spends many (apparent) years among the Other Men, a species not unlike ours in many ways, but with some few highly distinctive differences:

Perhaps the most striking example of the extravagance of the Other Men was the part played by religion in their more advanced societies. Religion was a much greater power than on my own planet; and the religious teachings of the prophets of old were able to kindle even my alien and sluggish heart with fervour. Yet religion, as it occurred around me in contemporary society, was far from edifying.

Star Maker, chapter 3.3

The narrator has little time for the religious beliefs of the Other Men, whose sanctimonious predisposition he contrasts unfavourably with that of Mankind, who seem to him to be comparatively better integrated, better balanced, and possessed of a greater degree of native common sense. After an anthropological description of the emergence of primitive tribal cults in which his own scepticism is

revealed, he describes some of the seemingly absurd grounds and issues which have created the unedifying religious factionalism of contemporary religion. The central difficulty subsists in the flavour of God (the Other Men have a highly developed gustatory sensibility, but despite this 'there seldom had been any widespread agreement as to the taste of God.') Of course, Stapledon, like Swift before him, is in good earnest. Despite his choice of something as absurd as gustatory appreciation and the connotations it has for these exquisitely discerning aliens, his only thinly-disguised satirical targets are the religious tenets, practices and ecclesiastical history of Mankind:

Religious wars had been waged to decide whether he was in the main sweet or salt, or whether his preponderant flavour was one of the many gustatory characters which my own race cannot conceive. Some teachers insisted that only the feet could taste him, others only the hands or mouth, others that he could be experienced only in the subtle complex of gustatory flavours known as the immaculate union, which was a sensual, and mainly sexual, ecstasy induced by contemplation of intercourse with the deity.

Star Maker, ibid.

When Stapledon further warms to his theme, his pretence of reporting the quaint religious notions of the people of the Other Earth is virtually dropped and his anticlericalism emerges fully:

Some ten or fifteen centuries earlier, when religion, so far as I could tell, was most vital, there were no churches or priesthoods; but every man's life was dominated by religious ideas to an extent which to me was almost incredible. Later, churches and priesthoods had returned, to play an important part in preserving what was now evidently a declining religious consciousness. Still later, a few centuries before the Industrial Revolution, institutional religion had gained such a hold on the most civilized peoples that three-quarters of their total income was spent on the upkeep of religious institutions. The working classes, indeed, who slaved for the owners in return for a mere pittance, gave much of their miserable earnings to the priests, and lived in more abject squalor than need have been.

Star Maker, ibid.

This mannered polemic recalls the reportage of Butler's Higgs when he

functions as Butler's mouthpiece in Erewhon. In contemporary times, though, Stapledon's narrator finds himself and his other-worldly companion Bvalltu, (with whom he communicates telepathically) caught up in a raging economic war which threatens to cast all the people of the Other Earth, regardless of nationality or religion, into a cyclic, ineluctable catastrophic fall from advanced civilization into atavism. His description reminds one of parallel ideas presented in later novels like Player Piano and Childhood's End, and also involves a similar ideology of social decadence and vitiation to that masterfully illustrated by The Time Machine(17):

Again and again the race would emerge from savagery, and pass through barbarian culture into a phase of world-wide brilliance and sensibility. Whole populations would conceive simultaneously an ever-increasing capacity for generosity, self-knowledge, self-discipline, for dispassionate and penetrating thought and uncontaminated religious feeling.

Consequently within a few centuries the whole world would blossom with free and happy societies. Average human beings would attain an unprecedented clarity of mind, and by massed action do away with all grave social injustices and private cruelties...

Presently a general loosening of fibre would set in. The golden age would be followed by a silver age. Living on the achievements of the past, the leaders of thought would lose themselves in a jungle of subtlety, or fall exhausted into mere slovenliness. At the same time, moral sensibility would decline. Men would become on the whole less sincere, less self-searching...Social machinery, which had worked well so long as citizens attained a certain level of humanity, would be dislocated by injustice and corruption. Tyrants and tyrannical oligarchies would set about destroying liberty. Hate-mad submerged classes would give them good excuse. Little by little, though the material benefits of civilization would smoulder on for centuries, the flame of the spirit would die down into a mere flicker in a few isolated individuals. Then would come barbarism, followed by a trough of almost subhuman savagery.

Ibid.

This idealised vision of 'humanity' - Other Men - in the Golden Age, the supreme flowering of human nature, is important. For here Stapledon reveals those faculties and innate qualities he most esteems: moral integrity, spiritual magnanimity, intellective brilliance,

social responsibility and mutual consideration - and, least secular of any of these - 'uncontaminated religious feeling.' The only real humane aspiration is both evolutionary and spiritual, a racial rather than self-centred desire for transformation. Periodically the nemesis of the human sensibility (which, being itself mutable, can find within itself no absolute, positive criteria) makes its mark, and the moral, material and spiritual perspectives of men become clouded with unwholesome, egocentric concerns. Consequently, the dominant orientation of human nature swings from humaneness towards primitivism.

Yet again the cause of this racial dissipation is over-dependence upon machines, the most ubiquitous products of human creativity. Too much complacent comfort encourages a general decline in humaneness, which on an individual basis is marked by a decline in moral sensibility and the waning of the 'flame of the spirit'. Stapledon does not trouble to include at this point the effects upon religious faith and practices of this cyclical social collapse, but having selected it for a fuller exposition, later deals with it at greater length.

A tiny minority concerned about the deteriorating ethics of the times seek to promote ancient principles for the common good. While the narrator applauds their idealism, they are scorned or condemned roundly by everyone else, except those caught up in 'radio-bliss,' an appalling pseudo-nirvana the broadcasters provide to those wishing to have 'recumbent,' wholly vicariously lives. The eleventh hour pleading of this group is swamped by the unrestrained self-indulgence and burgeoning violence afflicting the nations of this Other Earth:

...there was in each country a small and bewildered party which asserted that the true goal of human activity was the creation of a world-wide community of awakened and intelligent creative persons, related by mutual insight and

respect, and by the common task of fulfilling the potentiality of the human spirit on earth. Much of this doctrine was a re-statement of the teachings of religious seers of a time long past, but it had also been deeply influenced by contemporary science. This party, however, was misunderstood by the scientists, cursed by the clerics, ridiculed by the militarists, and ignored by the advocates of radio-bliss.

Ibid.

As the narrator will realize during later stages of his travels, the derided attitudes of this minority are the nearest apprehension to cosmic principles and propriety the Other Men - except Bvalltu - ever will achieve. The significance is plain, for the Other Men are satiric figures of mankind. Stapledon temporizes the implicit question of what makes the minority groups so distinctly more 'awakened' than their orthodox fellows but the clear inference is that their eclectic sapientia in which fundamental revelation, spirituality, scientific awareness and mutuality achieve a harmonious balance is enlightened and progressive. The climactic irony is that the Star Maker affords them neither providential succour nor even recognition; species achieve cosmic communion unassisted, or perish in derangement.

Accompanied by Bvalltu, one of the Other Men who has proved to be literally a kindred spirit, the narrator resumes his voyage, which has now turned into a joint quest to discover the nature of the awareness which created the Cosmos itself, and all its creatures - the Star Maker. One recalls a similar quest by Christian and Faithful in Pilgrim's Progress; while piety is their impulse, enquiry and adoration sustain Stapledon's travellers.

The novel moves into an entirely different phase, with Stapledon allowing free rein to his imagination, yet always trying 'to domesticate the impossible' so that the observations and inferences

he draws in the philosophical vignettes of consciousness and environment, however mystical, metaphysical or visionary they might be, seem credible. Although the scientific context of the novel becomes more and more speculative, Stapledon customarily works outward from what is known in coherently presenting the recondite or fantastic aspects of his vision. His novel is replete with interesting astronomical, biological and anthropological ideas, for instance.

During his quest for the Star Maker, the narrator encounters 'worlds innumerable' and their inhabitants, many sapient, some vegetative, and others who are 'mad', i.e., lost in pernicious or obsessive collective pursuits which distract them from, or obscure the cosmic enlightenment which would otherwise be within their reach, and which vitiate any cosmic qualities they already possess. In this discursive lengthy section of the novel, the rationalistic attack on ecclesiastical and institutionalised religion remains a central aim, but having tackled it so comprehensively in the third chapter in the setting of the Other Earth, Stapledon now makes only the occasional explicit reference to religion:

By means of chemical treatment in infancy the two kinds of organism were more interdependent, and in partnership more hardy. By a special psychological ritual, a sort of mutual hypnosis, all newly joined partners were henceforth brought into indissoluble mental reciprocity. This interspecific communion...became in time the basis of all culture and religion. The symbiotic deity, which figured in all the primitive mythologies, was reinstated as a symbol of the dual personality of the universe, a dualism, it was said, of creativity and wisdom, unified as the divine spirit of love.

Star Maker, Chapter 7.

In the settings of yet other worlds and species, religion is variously associated with obsessional delusions - 'the hunger for true community and true mental lucidity itself became obsessional and perverse, so that the behaviour of these exalted perverts might

deteriorate into something very like tribalism and religious fanaticism...Sometimes their zeal became so violent that they were actually driven to wage ruthless religious wars on all who resisted them' (pp.148-149); selfless stoicism(18); or with haughty imperialism:

They would be quite incapable of conceiving that the native civilization, though less developed than our own, might be more suited to the natives. Nor could they realize that their own culture, formerly the expression of a gloriously awakened world, might have sunk, in spite of their mechanical powers and crazy religious fervour, below the simpler culture of the natives in all the essentials of mental life.

Star Maker, Chapter 13.

These references (which reveal that Stapledon was well acquainted with many diverse expressions of religious feeling) confirm that he views yearning for spiritual communion and religious mythopoesis as fundamental aspects of human nature. Stapledon's view of 'human' nature is not anthropocentric, encompassing many forms of sentience and physical being. While he extols the advance of cosmical development he includes many examples of recrudescence suggesting that the growth of active consciousness throughout the universe is subject to many possible setbacks such as genocidal tragedies and cataclysms. In all its complex manifestations and differing stages of evolution and cosmical development, this 'human nature' striving for 'lucidity' is the Star Maker's vital active principle.

In describing the culmination of the narrator's quest - the 'Supreme Moment' - Stapledon offers his ultimate view of orthodox religion:

And as I fell abject before the Star Maker, my mind was flooded with a spate of images. The fictitious deities of all races in all worlds once more crowded themselves upon me, symbols of majesty and tenderness, of ruthless power, of blind creativity, and of all-seeing wisdom. And though these images were but the fantasies of created minds, it seemed to me that one and all did embody some true feature of the Star Maker's impact upon the creatures.

Star Maker, Chapter 13.

In this moment of theophany, the narrator experiences an omniscience which is the product of the same revelation striking home at once into the minds of the unified cosmos of which he is an aspect(19).

The narrator, now a part of (and at the same time, somehow, all of) a collective cosmical spirit incorporating a host of such 'human' attributes and intellectual faculties, is consequently able to comprehend the enigmatic ultimate being, the Star Maker, and the three phases of the Star Maker's creativity. In the first, the paradoxes of 'Immature Creating' (i.e. flawed creation) are described in Frankensteinian terms and perhaps Odd John Wainwright can be glimpsed in the supernal experimenter dispassionately creating and discarding worlds. In one series of attempts the 'twi-minded' Star Maker invests his created worlds with his own Manichaeian sensibility and observes how these quasi-Christian phenomena evolve; the result horrifies the 'dreaming' narrator:

Again and again he dissociated these two moods of himself, objectified them as independent spirits, and permitted them to strive within a cosmos for mastery. One such cosmos, which consisted of three linked universes, was somewhat reminiscent of Christian orthodoxy. The first of these linked universes was inhabited by generations of creatures gifted with varying degrees of sensibility, intelligence, and moral integrity. Here the two spirits played for the souls of the creatures. The 'good' spirit exhorted, helped, rewarded, punished; the 'evil' spirit deceived, tempted, and morally destroyed. At death the creatures passed into one or other of the two secondary universes, which constituted a timeless heaven and a timeless hell. There they experienced an eternal moment either of ecstatic comprehension and worship or of the extreme torment of remorse.

When my dream presented me with this crude, this barbaric figment, I was first moved with horror and incredulity. How could the Star Maker, even in his immaturity, condemn his creatures to agony for the weakness that he himself had allotted to them? How could such a vindictive deity command worship?

Star Maker, p.243

Deciding that 'this dread mystery lay far beyond my comprehension' the narrator 'salutes' the Star Maker's cruelty because it proves that the Creator is true to his own nature, just as Odd John's biographer can accept superhuman ruthlessness in the Homo superior he serves. Stapledon sardonically resumes his satire of organized religion in proceeding to relate 'the strange evolution of this cosmos':

Since its denizens had mostly a very low degree of intelligence and moral integrity, the hell was soon overcrowded, while the heaven remained almost empty. But the Star Maker in his 'good' aspect loved and pitied his creatures. The 'good' spirit therefore entered into the mundane sphere to redeem the sinners by his own suffering. And so at last the heaven was peopled, though the hell was not depopulated.

Star Maker, p.244

Lest the identification of this with its real counterpart be too direct, Stapledon then affirms that the present is the product of the second phase of creating - 'The cosmos which he now created was that which contains the readers and the writer of this book.'(p.246) Following this phase of 'Mature Creating' the Star Maker conceives and creates 'his ultimate and most subtle cosmos'. The metempsychotic voyage of the narrator is nearly over, but there remains a final moment of compassion and indignation, a spontaneous gesture of defiance, and a blinding lucidity before the narrator is reclaimed by the mundane world whence he has journeyed to this ultimate communion of creator and creation. The final chapter, 'The Maker and His Works', is a triumph of apocalyptic visualization, for by confronting his 'ineffable' creation Stapledon eludes the paradox which Wells in Men Like Gods found intractable. What is even more exciting is that Stapledon restores his narrator's dignity and freedom with a defiant gesture which prompts a Promethean fall from grace. The narrator dares to prefer his own kind to the presence and 'crystal ecstasy' of

the ultimate being:

But to me this mystical and remote perfection was nothing. In pity of the ultimate tortured beings, in human shame and rage, I scorned my birthright of ecstasy in that inhuman perfection, and yearned back to my lowly cosmos, to my own human and floundering world, there to stand shoulder to shoulder with my own half animal kind against the powers of darkness; yes, and against the indifferent, the ruthless, the invincible tyrant whose mere thoughts are sentient and tortured worlds.

Then, in the very act of this defiant gesture, as I slammed and bolted the door of the little dark cell of my separate self, my walls were all shattered and crushed inwards by the pressure of irresistible light, and my naked vision was once more seared by lucidity beyond endurance.

Star Maker, p.235

Lastly we may interpret the religious satire of Star Maker. If Stapledon appears to qualify it in some slight measure, the dismissiveness of 'fictitious deities' and 'fantasies of created minds' is emphatic. What, however, is that 'impact upon the creatures' of the Star Maker the narrator perceives, and what causes his retrospective bitterness towards orthodox religion whenever it is mentioned in the account of his quest?

Ironically Stapledon asserts that cosmic rapture associated with the 'hypercosmical' consciousness is pernicious. Spirituality, the key to infinite communion, is both a human strength, a power for good, and a weakness, an invitation to pointless, self-absorbed contemplation.(p.256) The religious impulse itself creates one of Wells's 'cages of life' for the answers to the narrator's 'grave' questions are negative or absurd rather than exalting or even just comforting. The Star Maker is not concerned with the fate of its creations nor with their redemption from error; and this seeming betrayal fires the narrator's anger and bitterness. As in Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? there is no salvation for those who must

endure and perish. His enlightenment makes the narrator a determined, apostate humanist.

This conceptualization of religion as self-absorbing is given a literal treatment in Michael Moorcock's Behold the Man(1969). Moorcock contrives an almost definitively thorough association of religion with profanity - even to the point where it is made difficult for the sympathetic reader to distinguish between the sacred and the profane; with no constructive focus, the satiric impulse generates invective. Consequently there is nothing uplifting or inspiring about religion in this story of alienation, delusion and perception. In fact, Moorcock's novel offers a searing view of Christianity which completely lacks Butler's wry, even compassionate view of the human capacity for self-deceit. Glogauer encounters no compassion or forgiveness in a ruthless, unsympathetic world where a variety of more or less self-seeking powers contend for supremacy. By wholly ascribing (somewhat after Jung) the origins of the creed to the mythopoeic tendency of human nature, Christianity itself is depicted as a factitious ('syncretistic' - p.88) creed in this jaundiced, provocative, award-winning story(20):

'Christianity is dead.' Monica sipped her tea. 'Religion is dying. God was killed in 1945.'

'There may yet be a resurrection.'

'Let's hope not. Religion was the creation of fear. Knowledge destroys fear. Without fear, religion can't survive.'

Behold the Man, p.60.

Monica also attacks Jung's proposition about the innate spirituality of the individual not simply because Karl finds it so seductive, but because it posits a spiritual humanism not unlike Stapledon's which her own scientific materialism excludes. She goes on to argue sceptically that Christianity's claims to an unique hegemony are

merely fraudulent: "'Christianity is just a new name for a conglomeration of old myths and philosophies.'" She scathingly counsels Karl to take up theology - "'You should have been a theologian with your bias - not tried to be a psychologist. The same thing goes for your friend Jung.'"(p.63) The Swiss psychiatrist represents a post-modern intellectual dissatisfaction with rationalism - and, one may suppose, behaviourism (after Skinner, author of Walden Two) - as the primary organising principle of humanism. We may take this further for Moorcock explicates his reasons for drawing so openly on Jung; the humanistic discourse of the novel is post-modern in its insistence on claiming ontological rather than epistemological understanding for its troubled protagonist:

We Protestants must sooner or later face this question: Are we to understand the 'imitation of Christ' in the sense that we should copy his life and, if I may use the expression, ape his stigmata: or in the deeper sense that we are to live our own proper lives as truly as he lived his in all its implications? It is no easy matter to live a life that is modelled on Christ's, but it is unspeakably harder to live one's own life as truly as Christ lived his. Anyone who did this would... be misjudged, derided, tortured and crucified...A neurosis is a dissociation of personality.

(JUNG, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*)

Behold the Man, pp.72-73

While there is an unmistakeably existentialist ring to his dilemmas and confusion (the eighth chapter both begins and concludes with a sequence of empirical existential questions - 'Where am I? Who am I? What am I? Where am I?' p.64 & p.68 21, Karl Glogauer is at the mercy of his own irresistible mysticism and his 'archetypal role'. Indeed, Moorcock's reconciliation of the personality of this pathetic 'messiah' with the scriptural story he inventively exploits and adapts is a particularly interesting feature of his story, for Glogauer 'projects' himself as a messiah and, as Sartre asserted, 'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.' Intriguingly,

that here entails a 'certain kind of psychic circuit' in complete accord with Jung's idea of the 'collective unconscious' with its spiritual and mystical archetypes which are suppressed in too-rational Man.

If the Gospels provide Moorcock's novel with a storyline and background detail, clearly he owes much to modern psychology and philosophy for his protagonist. Glogauer is a self-centred, neurotic individual morbidly obsessed with his amateur interest in psychology, mysticism and religion, his own suicidal impulses, and his sexuality. A self-destructive impulse is sustained by the pressure of these powerful and often conflicting drives, but his agnostic religiosity predominates and hence is the most paradoxical and distressing.

Mainly due to a loveless, dislocated upbringing (a factor introduced in the novel presumably to deepen the credibility of his neurosis) Glogauer harbours a potentially destructive craving for an all-consuming love he is certain will bring him a sublime fulfilment. Leaving aside the thematic concerns it shares with the other works discussed in this chapter, there is little in the genre to which Moorcock's novel can be related immediately. In generic terms, Behold the Man is that rare thing, a singular novel; it presents the contentions of rationalistic scepticism with unique force and directness while questioning their validity no less than that of the religion which drives Glogauer to an illusionary apotheosis. For all Moorcock's apparent care to establish the persona of this novel's central character in depth, however, his sympathy is not much extended to Glogauer, for the scope of Moorcock's tragic vision is historic rather than individual. Behold the Man is on one level about one (or two) figures, Karl Glogauer/Christ:

In terms of the science fiction theme of a time-paradox, Glogauer merely fulfills what will become history when he plays out the role of Jesus. It is psychiatrically complete, too, because he is by the time-paradox the source of his own Christian neurosis, but he also becomes its solution when he dies on the cross and satisfies his own masochism.

22.

However, on another level it is about Man rather than a man, and the nature and consequence of religious delusion. Given its psychological nature and philosophical emphasis, the most productive comparisons and contrasts may be afforded by modern novels like, perhaps most particularly Sartre's Nausea (1938).

Moorcock's novel shares some marked features of style, structure and premise with the first novel of the French existentialist. Sartre's diarist, Antoine Roquentin, is depleted by daily living to the point where he experiences 'ennui' - a profound feeling of futility. Roquentin craves 'adventure' to give meaning to his life, to take him out of the alienation characteristic of existentialist protagonists, expressed here as a joyless introspective distraction upon the nature and significance of one's existence. So great is his own inward distraction that while he can perceive the needs and difficulties of others, they leave him at best unmoved, at worst disgusted - 'nauseated.'

The central problem confronting Roquentin even seems absurd to the dilettante historian himself: 'I have some money like a gentleman of leisure, no boss, no wife, no children; I exist, that's all. And that particular trouble is so vague, so metaphysical, that I am ashamed of it.' (Nausea, p.153 23) He acknowledges that his interest in de Rollebon, the eighteenth-century adventurer about whom he is writing a scholarly book, has become the single motivating force in his life, as essential and exclusive as Glogauer's passionate inter-

est in the life and death of Jesus Christ. As he resolves in his diary, 'Must not make public the fact that Monsieur de Rollebon now represents the only justification for my existence.'(p.105) When Roquentin finishes his book, he is seized by a sense of panic and dread. Paralyzed by a compelling perception, he is unable to add the final full stop:

Monsieur de Rollebon was my partner: he needed me in order to be and I needed him in order not to feel my being. I furnished the raw material, that material of which I had far too much, which I didn't know what to do with: existence, my existence. His task was to perform. He stood in front of me and had taken possession of my life in order to perform his life for me. I no longer noticed that I existed, I no longer existed in myself, but in him... I was only a means of making him live, he was my raison d'etre, he had freed me from myself. What am I going to do now?

Nausea, pp.142-143.

Moorcock's Glogauer is similarly possessed by an all-consuming, self-annihilating obsession with historical figures. Before his obsession with Christ fully takes hold, Karl has had others:

He had suffered migraines since adolescence. He would become dizzy, vomiting, completely immersed in pain.

Often during the attacks he would begin to assume an identity - a character in a book he was reading, some politician currently in the news, someone in history if he had recently read a biography

The one thing that marked them all would be their anxieties. Heyst in Victory had been obsessed with the three men coming to the island, worrying how to stop them, how to kill them if possible (as Heyst, he had become a somewhat less subtle character than Conrad's). After reading a history of the Russian Revolution, he became convinced that his name was Zinoviev, Minister in charge of Transport and Telegraphs, with the responsibility of sorting out the chaos in 1918, knowing, too, that he had to be careful, otherwise he would be purged in a few years' time.

Behold the Man, p.65

Glogauer's compulsive search for another identity, and the ease with which his imagination is able to bury his own persona under another, is emphasized in Moorcock's novel version for the third paragraph

quoted above is additional material. Moorcock's protagonist truly is 'Modern Man in Search of a Soul', which in Glogauer's case, seems to involve securing a meaning for his existence more profound than the bare fact of that existence itself. Alienated, deeply sceptical, and compulsive, Glogauer seems a symbol of the futility of modern living, and the personification of the distortions which contemporary pressures work upon the human consciousness: but the fact that Glogauer's sense of personal identity is so exaggeratedly ephemeral should not be overlooked - he is a special case.

Setting aside for a moment the classic time-traveller paradox which further compounds the ironies of Moorcock's story, Glogauer's dilemma is similar to Roquentin's: should he allow Christ to exist by giving up his own personality, or should he leave Christ to be 'merely the creation of a process of mythogenesis'? Sartre's novel carries before it this polemical prefatory note quoted from L.F.Celine: "He is a fellow without any collective significance, barely an individual". Ironically, Glogauer's obsession with finding his own identity will bring him a staggering burden of 'collective significance.' As Sartre wrote elsewhere, existentialists argue that the responsibility of 'engaged' existence - which gives rise to the anguish attendant on being and acting - is momentous: 'I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself I fashion man.'(24)

It emerges as the story unfolds that Glogauer is a time-traveller who has moved back through time and space to Judea in A.D.28, where he is to witness the Christian Passion. Like the Time Traveller of Wells's novel, Glogauer is fated to receive a disturbing

revelation, though it is to be construed for us in contemporary terms which are at a vast remove from the generally restrained, mannered tones of the Wellsian traveller. Indeed, one could speculate that Noyes would have seen Glogauer as the very embodiment of the modern tendencies he excoriated in The Last Man.

Moorcock uses time-travel to give a final tragic twist to the sensibility of his disturbed protagonist, for Glogauer now has to confront a world which appears vastly different from that he left when he stepped into the time machine. Moorcock's novel develops in three stages and throughout the first stage Glogauer's expectations are shaped by his scriptural knowledge, but he is to discover that even that is not reliable. Consequently he finds himself facing a textbook existentialist dilemma, without any pertinent moral and cultural bearings to help him orientate himself in his new situation. He therefore adopts a self-serving ethic, an egocentric morality which existentialists like Sartre and the modern school of phenomenology alike would criticize, as would Christians.

Heavily psychological, Moorcock's narrative is intended not just to convey how Glogauer's personality reflects his social background, but also to depict how he is drawn into adopting the literal role of Christ even though in his personal past he has found orthodox religion to be empty of significance:

Our Father which art in Heaven...

He had been brought up, like most of his schoolfellows, paying a certain lip-service to the Christian religion. Prayers in the mornings at school. He had taken to saying two prayers at night. One was the Lord's Prayer and the other went God bless Mummy, God bless Daddy, God bless my sisters and brothers and all the dear people that surround me. Amen. That had been taught to him by a woman who looked after him for a while when his mother was at work. He had added to this a list of 'thank-yous' ('Thank you for a lovely day, thank you for getting the history questions

right...') and 'Sorrys' ('Sorry I was rude to Molly Turner, sorry I didn't own up to Mr.Matson...'). He had been seventeen years old before he had been able to get to sleep without saying his ritual prayers and even then it had been his impatience to masturbate that had finally broken the habit.

Our Father which art in Heaven...

Behold the Man, p.12

This seems all the more nugatory when we are told soon after that, like Tommy in the rock opera, Karl 'didn't have a daddy, didn't have any brothers and sisters. The old woman had explained that his daddy was somewhere and that everyone was a brother and a sister. He had accepted it.'(p.12).

Every chapter contains similar passages of Glogauer's reminiscences, together with distinctive authorial observations by Moorcock construing for us Glogauer's present situation in Judea, and conveying his responses to the situation which is unfolding around him. Moorcock thus defines Glogauer's character quite explicitly, and the authorial intentions and perspective also can thereby be apperceived throughout what it is a deliberately disjointed narrative. The New Testament provides additional coherence, for some chapters are prefaced by excerpts from the Gospels upon which the events of the chapter are based. These strike up resonances with Glogauer's past, for he is haunted by rather sordid experiences from his twentieth-century life which have always possessed religious connotations for him despite his scepticism. The Freudian juxtaposition of the sexual with the religious is calculated:

At the end of evening choir practice, Mr.Younger asked Karl to stay behind and Karl was torn between disgust and desire.

Finally, he did stay behind and let Mr.Younger stroke his genitals under a poster which showed a plain wooden cross with the slogan GOD IS LOVE underneath.

Karl began to laugh hysterically and ran away from the church and never went back again.

He was fifteen.

Silver crosses equal women.

Wooden crosses equal men.

He often thought of himself as a wooden cross. He would have mild hallucinations between sleeping and waking where he was a heavy wooden cross pursuing a delicate silver cross through fields of darkness.

Behold the Man, pp.38 & 39

Glogauer has been injured by the impact with which his time-travel ends. He is cared for by John the Baptist's Essene community who regard him as a magus. This community is religiously and politically estranged from the rest of Judean society, and Glogauer shares their ascetic lifestyle while he recovers. He has come to Judea to witness the Crucifixion, and as time passes he grows more puzzled because no-one seems to have heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover, John is convinced that Glogauer is a political messiah, come to lead the people against the Roman overlords. As an initial move to inspire his followers, John would have Glogauer baptize him. However, at the appointed time Glogauer experiences a sudden, severe migraine, and John consequently baptizes him instead. Fearing he has failed John, Glogauer runs off into the wilderness wherein he is subject to such extremes of hunger and fatigue that he becomes almost completely disoriented, but he is driven - he must find his way to Nazareth.

The second phase of the novel begins with Glogauer having fled the Essenes, and continues through his wanderings as a madman to Nazareth, where he finds Jesus, who turns out to be an illegitimate congenital imbecile. Glogauer regards this unfortunate creature with a bitter callousness reflected in the choice of pronoun:

The figure was misshapen.

It had a pronounced hunched back and a cast in its left eye. The face was vacant and foolish. There was a little spittle on the lips.

'Jesus?'

It giggled as its name was repeated. It took a crooked, lurching step forward.

Behold the Man, p.98

Moorcock's provocative, calculated disrespect towards Jesus extends to the rest of the 'Holy Family': Joseph is a cuckold and 'a man who never laughs'; and Mary is a fat, sarcastic, promiscuous creature who seduces Glogauer while her husband is at Nain, bringing the second part of the novel to a close. Of course Glogauer's disillusionment is now absolute. The situation he has found underscores this, for he has travelled back through time hoping to experience at first hand, and hence, experimentally verify, the provenance of the Gospels. He has found in mystical Judea only mundane situations and people. Moorcock takes pains to emphasize the ordinariness of everything and everyone in Judea, and his harshly naturalistic style - "warts and all", as it were - is clearly intended to strip away the traditional reverence accorded to the Judean Christians by devaluing or discrediting the scriptural 'record'(25).

The third part of the novel begins with Glogauer established in the Nazareth synagogue as something of a holy man or prophet, but inwardly he is in a state of profound neurotic disorientation. Questioned by the rabbis as to where he is from, he replies in Aramaic: "Ha-Olam Hab-Bah; Ha Olam Haz-Zeh: The world to come and the world that is." Thanks to the time machine, Glogauer can be said literally to be both from the world that is and the world to come, but the statement neatly describes Moorcock's naturalistic depiction of Judea and its society. The world Glogauer has come into has dark similarities with the one he has left. Only its institutions are different, for the people are often as perverse as any in Glogauer's twentieth-century memories.

In this final section of the novel, Glogauer adopts the role of the Biblical Jesus and, as his memories of the world from which he has come fade gradually, his identification with the scriptural Messiah becomes complete. For all that, since Moorcock is careful not to undermine the characterisation by endowing him with irrational or extraordinary powers, Glogauer remains a perverse but notionally 'ordinary' man; and even his 'miracle' cures are given a rational explanation: 'Many he could do nothing for, but others, obviously with easily remediable psychosomatic conditions, he could help. They believed in his power more strongly than they believed in their sickness. So he cured them.'(p.115)

For the first time in his life, Glogauer achieves the fulfilment he has craved. As he knows the Gospels and their story, he can predict what will 'come to pass' - that is, he can predict how the reactions of those around him and in authority will promote the scriptural sequence of events. If the prospect of the death which will consequently overwhelm him fills him with fear rather than exaltation at his 'divine' role and the adulation which he enjoys, he is certain that it is his destiny and cannot be escaped. Significantly, he readily accepts the role of martyr:

There was something more, something that he recognized instinctively rather than intellectually. He now had the opportunity to find at the same time both redemption and confirmation for his life up to the moment he had fled from John the Baptist in the desert.

But it was not his own life he would be leading now. He was bringing a myth to life, a generation before that myth would be born. He was completing a certain kind of psychic circuit. He told himself that he was not changing history; he was merely giving history more substance.

Since he had never been able to bear to think that Jesus had been nothing more than a myth, it became a duty to himself to make Jesus a physical reality rather than the creation of a process of mythogenesis.

Karl Glogauer had discovered the reality he had been seeking.
Behold the Man, p.118

Note the emphasis Moorcock places on 'myth' in referring to scripture, and upon Christ as 'the creation of a process of mythogenesis.' Thus Glogauer - whether, in his passionate desire to bring Christ to life, he acknowledges it or not - is himself the myth-maker.

The turning-point for Glogauer comes, of course, in the Garden of Gethsemane. He realises that he must make a final commitment to his adopted destiny when Judas Iscariot brings the Temple Guards and Roman troops to arrest him. He has time for reflection, however, and his mind returns to another decisive moment from his modern past. Significantly, a familiar twentieth-century concern is presented as a dichotomy. He recalls a conversation with Monica in which his consuming interest in mysticism and religion is as apparent as her contempt for religious conviction. Although he was once an agnostic, Glogauer took to religion as the only meaningful alternative to Monica's faith in science:

'Science is basically opposed to religion,' Monica had once said. 'No matter how many Jesuits get together and rationalize their views on science, the fact remains that religion cannot accept the fundamental attitudes of science and it is implicit in science to attack the fundamental principles of religion....Who needs the ritual of religion when we have the far superior ritual of science to replace it? Religion is a reasonable substitute for knowledge. But there is no longer any need for substitutes, Karl. Science offers a sounder basis on which to formulate systems of thought and ethics. We don't need the carrot of heaven and the big stick of hell any more when science can show the consequences of actions and men can judge easily for themselves whether those actions are right or wrong.'

'I can't accept it.'

'That's because you are sick. I'm sick, too, but at least I can see the promise of health.'

'I can see only the threat of death...'

Behold the Man, pp.136-137

Thus, his rejection of scientific materialism sets motion the train of events which brings Glogauer to a self-willed betrayal in the Garden. True to his own peculiar brand of integrity, Glogauer betrays

himself to the arresting soldiers and the die is cast. The subsequent narrative more or less follows scripture, with quotations from the Gospels interposed throughout the last chapter amid Glogauer's tortured thoughts. His last moments are a painful delirium and memories come and go in his agonised consciousness. At the very last, he perceives what his author has already given us to understand. His death, the completion of 'a certain kind of psychic circuit,' is charged with dramatic irony, for while it has brought him fulfilment, all he has been doing is acting out a role; and his last words testify to his enlightenment: "'It's a lie - it's a lie - it's a lie...'"

Although the crucifixion is the dramatic climax of the novel, Moorcock continues after Glogauer's death in order to make its manifest pointlessness quite plain. There is no triumphant Resurrection, no unmistakeable vindication of the sacrifice, no shining message for the faithful. Moorcock draws his story to a close with a calculated dismissiveness:

Later, after his body was stolen by the servants of some doctors who believed it might have special properties, there were rumours that he might not have died. But the corpse was already rotting in the doctors' dissecting rooms and would soon be destroyed.

Behold the Man, p.143

Religious conviction is clearly given short shrift in Moorcock's novel, which is entirely given over to an uncompromising attack upon such faith. Glogauer, even in his messianic state, is a pathetic, deluded figure: 'It was strange. He was not a religious man in the usual sense. He was an agnostic. It was not conviction that had led him to defend religion against Monica's cynical contempt for it; it was rather a lack of conviction in the ideal in which she had set her

own faith, the ideal of science as a solver of all problems.' (pp.135-136) More importantly, perhaps, his perverse drive for fulfillment which has emerged as a sort of 'martyr complex' ordains, in an authentically existentialist way, the future of thousands of millions. Ironically, his sacrifice accomplishes nothing except his own death and the implied deception of unguessable millions of Christian believers, and Glogauer/Christ's delusions are, in these terms, the well-spring of their oppression. Moreover, Monica's contempt for Christianity now seems justified rather than simply wilful. Christ's mortal cry, "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' ...My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?"(p.142) acquires a new significance in the special context created by Moorcock, that of the anguish of the modern sensibility which despairs of finding any evidence of divine purpose - or even of divine existence - in an age of scepticism.

However, if Monica and Glogauer are right in assuming that a modern dichotomy exists and that the perspectives each asserts are mutually exclusive, then it is clear that, by virtue of his calculated blasphemy, Moorcock by no means advocates religious faith here. Glogauer achieves self-transcendence, but seems to become aware at the end that it is illusory rather than enduring, and his death is consequently all the more pathetic and disturbing because he realises that his faith has betrayed him. Glogauer is therefore ultimately a victim of a special kind of religious determinism.

The profound scepticism which prompted Moorcock to create, shred and finally destroy Karl Glogauer - for whom even aspiration for spiritual fulfilment is simply another futile delusion - might seem to be the expression of a nihilistic vision of Man. If so, we could

be tempted to assume Moorcock is advancing Monica's attitude, even if only by default: rationalism permits the universe to be comprehended, so that pragmatic decisions - encompassing both the quotidian and the vital - can be made. However, if Moorcock could dramatise this dichotomy between reason and faith so astutely, it can surely be assumed he knew its limitations, and further, that his own attitude is more complex. One wonders if it is reflected in the pragmatic Roman officer's dry observations about the respect the spontaneously spiritual Jews readily accord mystics and aspirants:

'One of their prophets, perhaps,' said the officer, walking towards his horse. The country was full of them. Every other man you met claimed to be spreading the message of their god. They didn't make trouble and religion actually seemed to keep their minds off rebellion.

We should be grateful, thought the officer.

Behold the Man, pp.90-91.

This ties in with Monica's argument against religious faith, which she sees as futile and self-deceptive because it is a naive response to the spontaneous mysticism of the human mind.

Moorcock urges in his title that we 'behold the man', apparently in the spirit of secular humanism which Coleridge decried as "the belief that Christ was only a human person"; but this novel goes much further, for the same scientific materialism is used to introduce and undermine the Scriptures with moral confusion, cynicism, nihilism and alienation manifested as perversion, violence and neurosis. Nor is there anywhere an endorsement of positive human values. Moorcock's surrogate Jesus Christ achieves nothing except his own self-willed destruction: there is no real redemption, for Glogauer or for anyone else. This novel is not merely polemical in the attitude to Christianity it purveys, but it indeed bespeaks an acute hostility towards the creed in its bias towards materialistic, scientific rationalism over

religious belief. Monica speaks throughout the novel for reason and scepticism, and the impression left by the novel's explicit repudiation not just of religious faith but even of Karl's attempt to 'live his own proper life,' is that Christian faith is credulous and redundant.

Monica returned to her attack on Christianity in a letter written to 'get her idea across' to Karl, putting her case against the religion in historic terms:

You make the mistake of considering Christianity as something that developed over the course of a few years, from the death of Jesus to the time the Gospels were written. But Christianity wasn't new. Only the name was new. Christianity was merely a stage in the meeting, cross-fertilization, metamorphosis of Western logic and Eastern mysticism. Look how the religion itself changed over the centuries, reinterpreting itself to meet changing times. Christianity is just a new name for a conglomeration of old myths and philosophies. All the Gospels do is retell the sun myth and garble some of the ideas from the Greeks and Romans.

Even in the second century, Jewish scholars were showing it up for the mish-mash it was!

They pointed out the strong similarities between the various sun myths and the Christ myth. The miracles didn't happen, they were invented later, borrowed from here and there. Remember those old Victorian dons who used to argue that Plato was really a Christian because he anticipated Christian thought?

Christian thought!

Christianity was a vehicle for ideas in circulation centuries before Christ. Was Marcus Aurelius a Christian? He was heading in the direct tradition of Western philosophy. That's why Christianity caught on in Europe and not in the East!

Behold the Man, pp.62-63.

However Monica's attitude towards science is perplexing because it is never made explicit except when she is expressing the mutual antagonism of religion and science as a dichotomy.

In his 1976 Introduction to Moorcock's Book of Martyrs, Moorcock speaks of his writing as an attempt to encourage mutual tolerance between 'those who are of an orthodox disposition and those who are

not, for society...can make good use of both temperaments. The world probably has need of saints and sinners - but I look forward to the day when it will no longer need martyrs of any persuasion.' This is all very humane sounding, but it is difficult to discern in Behold the Man where the compromise, the middle ground between antagonistic dispositions, lies. While it is asserted that knowledge and rationalism actually promote hostile criticism of religion, Moorcock nowhere allows Monica to affirm the positive value of science and declare its virtues, real or imagined. As several of the fictive theocracies discussed in the remainder of this chapter will show, Moorcock's reserve about science is shared by others.

Orthodox Opiates: Theocracy, Aspiration and Sceptical Humanism

The prominent scepticism of religion evident in modern science fiction is the contemporary manifestation of a historic principle. In the second half of the nineteenth century criticism of orthodox religion became more pronounced and common. Nonetheless, the casual disparagement of religious teachings which has become almost a conventional feature of some forms of modern popular culture such as science fiction was rare, for religion and respectability were linked for most people.

Samuel Butler flayed the materialistic hypocrisy of contemporary Anglicanism, which Matthew Arnold half-earnestly lampooned as 'an institution devoted above all to the landed gentry, but also to the propertied and satisfied classes generally; favouring immobility, preaching submission, and reserving transformation in general for the other side of the grave.' Another devout critic, Charles Kingsley, writes of the Bible as 'an opium-dose' for 'beasts of burden.' Karl

Marx, Kingsley's contemporary, came to much the same conclusion. These rejections of current religious values and orthodox ethics are the signs and portents of science fiction's modern rationalistic and materialistic religious scepticism. Marx provided the most sustained and influential ideological impetus of the time towards the complete secularization of ethics.

'Religion...is the opium of the people' is the most famous of Marx's materialistic assertions about religious morality. One could call Marx a 'supra-atheist,' for he not only deplores contemporary religion but argues that socialism is a more direct, positive assertion of the existence of man than atheism, which first requires denial of the existence of God to affirm the actual character of human existence. However in recognizing that religion has a personal element and is something to which people commit their deepest trust, he goes further than depicting it merely as an external imposition:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

26.

As one of religion's most influential critics understood, it is manifestly both a social phenomenon and a deeply personal one. In 'Dover Beach'(1867), Arnold evokes the decline of religious faith and the bleak growth of scepticism:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

If religion can be a sort of social narcotic, it is one which is not always reviled by those upon whom it is imposed. Organized religions

attract adherents because they offer an authoritative, reassuring perspective on a seemingly unpredictable, inhospitable world, one which:

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Whatever the spiritual rewards and enrichment they gain from their beliefs, the devout, who do believe in the absolute rectitude and propriety of their faith, are also subject to other pressures to remain so.

The life-long loyalty of the faithful is encouraged with promised redress for injustices and mundane suffering in some form of after-life or supernatural existence, or with threats of dire punishments for transgressions. Indeed, some sceptics contend as Marx did that this largely explains its success and popularity, though others depict religion as a wholly oppressive social force, being no more than an instrument for reconciling or inuring people to their servitude and buttressing the power of the cynical masters who exploit them.

In characterising religion as 'the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions' Marx clearly does see in human nature an essentially spontaneous propensity for aspiration, a fact which his less sympathetic critics often ignore. Crucially, religion is for Marx both the manifestation and the product of frustrated humane aspiration.

On the other hand, as the works discussed in Chapter 4 indicate, religious aspiration (for instance, to see the kingdom of God - C.S. Lewis's Logres, for example - re-established on earth) is no less

potent, and cherished, than any secular aspiration. To the devout, their own religious aspiration is more human than any 'humanistic' aspiration. It follows that general attacks upon one's religion can be construed quite readily as attacks upon one's personal ethics and view of the world, particularly if the pre-eminently religious impulse to divine veneration is coldly dismissed by materialists as an ignoble readiness to propitiate, or an addiction to superstitious ritual, or, worst of all, a means of securing pelf. However, more sophisticated criticisms have been raised against the continuing importance of religion in moral issues.

The central distinction, expressed in the science fiction of aspiration with a singular clarity and forcefulness, is that while the aspirations of the devout are directed beyond man to God and are subject to divine approbation, man is the focus of the secular humanism that reason and science underpin. Enlightenment, a more sophisticated, contemporary version of Baconian knowledge which lacks the latter's materialistic connotations, is a key feature of the science fiction of aspiration, be it sceptical or idiosyncratically religious in its orientation.

Generally speaking, conventional religious conviction is attacked by the materialist both for its social role and its limitation of human aspiration by affirming that man is a lesser creature. Roger Zelazny's Lord of Light, one of the most impressive of these 'science fictions of aspiration', illustrates the arguments most evocatively in relating how 'great-souled Sam' struggles against hedonistic, immortal, technocratic 'gods' to enlighten and emancipate his oppressed fellows and restore to them their technological birthright.

By contrast, the religious humanist recognizes Man as God's creation; science is one of the means people may use to more fully appreciate divine creativity, but it can also subordinate or completely subvert mankind's intrinsic faith in God. At the same time the religious humanist considers man to have innate weaknesses or limitations imposed by an essentially benevolent Providence. However, since science fiction questions everything, James Gunn has argued, and 'religion answers all the questions that science fiction wishes to raise,' science fiction and religion are uniquely and diametrically opposed. Gunn asserts that 'Science fiction cannot be written from an attitude of religious belief' for 'science fiction written within a religious framework..turns into parable.'(27) As an opening argument to his brief survey of science fiction which in some way deals with religion, Gunn's statement has the usual limitations of the polemical generalisation; indeed, as is apparent from the works discussed in Chapter 4 (and is certainly the case with Keith Robert's excellent book Pavane discussed below), exceptions exist. However, in describing 'science fiction's religion' as being 'skepticism about faith,' Gunn astutely sums up a dominant generic attitude with epigrammatic force. The well-known misapprehensions of the devout about the "benefits" of man-made, technological change confirm that the well-spring of this scepticism is scientific materialism and 'Progress'. This should not obscure the fact that some sceptics, Kurt Vonnegut for example, are no less wary.

Yet if the idea of materialistic 'Progress' is very often anathema to the religious humanist, it is also unacceptable to the secular or atheistic humanist for ancient, allegedly sham wisdom to prevail over modern necessity, especially when an effort is being

made to realize something of that power which, as an idea projected upon their god, so inspired the ancients. Where devout writers express their frustration by attacking the materialistic excesses of scientific positivism, sceptics generally prefer to castigate religion, characterizing the devout as hypocritical, complacent, fatalistic or short-sighted. Often, they will also emphasize the materialism and corruption, or zealous inhumanity, of the ministers of institutionalized religion. Just as often, these criticisms are pointedly made in the depiction of a theocracy, organized religion in its most extreme form; in its own right, a form of statolatry reviled by the genuine libertarian and humanist no less than the devout writer scorns materialistic utopias and profane oligarchies.

Some Representative Fictive Theocracies.

If Men Like Gods suggests that H.G.Wells found his humanistic vision to be untenable, he never took to conventional spiritualism and orthodox religion. The novels discussed below offer further evidence that his was an early but by no means unique attempt to balance the conflicting virtues and limitations of faith and rationalistic scepticism.

'Johnnie, the nice thing about citing God as an authority is that you can prove anything you set out to prove. It's just a matter of selecting the proper postulates, then insisting that your postulates are "inspired". Then no one can possibly prove that you are wrong.'

'If This Goes On...'; Robert Heinlein
(Revolt in 2100, p.93)

As Heinlein's protagonist seems to suggest in a distinctly cynical aside, the strength of religious teachings is derived from their purported divine provenance. Yet the systematic nature of religious dogma seems to offer the rationalist an irresistible challenge. To

judge by the popularity of science fiction with religious themes, religious ethics have given sceptical science fiction writers all sorts of opportunities for exposing doctrinal inconsistencies and illustrating devout folly. Most follow Wells rather than Butler, for their criticisms go much further than his satirical demands for reform, and many of them clearly would prefer to see the complete demise of the monolithic, institutionalized religions they depict.

This body of literature presents intriguing, quite individual perspectives on the nature of humanism, aspiration, moral vision and religious faith. The dissatisfaction of Vonnegut and Zelazny with contemporary orthodoxies is revealed by their adroit utilisation of factitious religions like those discussed earlier. Anticlericalism, iconoclasm and moral relativism (sometimes depicted as profanation or depravity) are used to expose orthodox religion at its worst - theocracy. Accordingly, even if someone like Keith Roberts seems to approach Wells's position of ultimate despair, a less whole-hearted faith in rationalism (and the determinism which trapped Wells) frees him from the necessity, everywhere apparent in Wells's later fiction, to adopt the inferences of his visionary fiction. Therefore these post-modernist writers can criticize dogma rationalistically while being under no particular obligation to advance pure Reason as a counter-creed. Yet though there is a recognisable pattern in their fabrications, they retain their independence as non-conformists: few contemporary authors would be flattered to be discussed as 'Wellsian,' not least because of the disrepute into which a spurious cult has brought the Comtist brand of positivistic scientific humanism which Wells extolled in Men Like Gods(28). Nonetheless, science is clearly prominent as a possible alternative to dogma in all of the texts

discussed below - and it is equally clear that some of these authors are as wary of the scientific State as they are of the theocratic State.

Perhaps the most obvious place to begin seeking an overview of the many different ways in which authors have used the device of the factitious religion in attacking theocracy is with those novels in which the humanistic spirit is at its most embattled. The authors of Gather, Darkness and Pavane have both chosen a quasi-Medieval setting to allow their depiction of a centralised, absolute religion the widest possible scope and so they present what could be termed the purest depiction of theocracy. In both novels, the church is monolithic, all-pervasive and repressive - the counterpart of the unattractive societies ruled by Big Brother and his like. These two books will be the central focus of a wider-ranging excursion into the themes and contentions of a variety of other works which deal with theocracy.

Like many of the most famous science fiction novels, Leiber's initially appeared as a serialization (in the May-July 1943 editions of Astounding Science Fiction). Its subsequent re-publication clearly reflects its success as popular fiction which has caught the mood of the moment and perhaps of the times. An ingenious tale of technological witchery and centralized oppression, it is in some respects quite like Robert Heinlein's earlier tale, 'If This Goes On,' also first published in an American pulp magazine in 1939. Heinlein's jingoistic, muscular prose undoubtedly reflects the contemporary patriotic fervour and moral self-righteousness of America - belatedly,

perhaps - at war, and it can be dealt with here in passing.

Heinlein's story deals with the successful attempt to overthrow a future theocracy in which Angels on the side of the Prophet strive to extirpate the 'heretical' conspirators of the Cabal. Militarism, a favourite topic of Heinlein's, is imposed on the ecclesiastical hierarchy from the start: "'I was young then and not too bright - a legate fresh out of West Point, and a guardsman in the Angels of the Lord, the Personal Guard of the Prophet Incarnate.'" Indeed everything is given an ecclesiastical flavour: "'This on-the-spot cast by the No-Sparrow-Shall-Fall News Service is coming to you under the sponsorship of the finest Associated Merchants of the Kingdom, dealers in the finest of household aids towards grace. Be the first in your parish to possess a statuette of the Prophet that miraculously glows in the dark! Send one dollar...'" (Revolt in 2100, p.63) Not for the last time, we may note in passing, will this sort of science fiction seem to have anticipated an ugly side of modern religion.

Still, what may be termed the two species of authoritarianism of this story are distinguished by little more than unmistakeable hypocrisy and cynicism on one side, and a generous measure of emphatically right-wing Christian values on the other. Here John Lyle is being evaluated to establish his role in the Cabal:

It seemed to me that, in this business, someone was continually making me face up to facts, instead of letting me dodge unpleasant facts the way most people manage to do throughout their lives. Could I stomach such an assignment? Could I refuse it - since Master Peter had implied at least that assassins were volunteers - refuse it and try to ignore in my heart it that it was going on and I was condoning it?

Master Peter was right; the man who buys the meat is brother to the butcher. It was squeamishness, not morals... like the man who favours capital punishment but is himself too 'good' to fit the noose or swing the axe. Like the person who regards war as inevitable and in some circumstances moral, but who avoids military service because he doesn't like the thought of killing.

Emotional infants, ethical morons - the left hand must know what the right hand doeth, and the heart is responsible for both. I answered almost at once, 'Master Peter, I am ready to serve...that way or whatever the brethren decide I can do best.'

'If This Goes On...' (Revolt in 2100, p.53)

It seems verging on the impertinent to suggest in the face of Heinlein's absurdly self-confident morality that it is actually no less relativistic than any other 'pragmatic' creed. John's willingness to surrender his own moral vision for the brethren's (as long as they prove themselves worthy of it, naturally) is more intuitive than profound, especially since they cannot be any more certain of the propriety of their actions, ultimately, than can the Prophet's inquisitors. Their doctrines and organisation are in the end morally right because God, the Great Architect, has allowed them to triumph. The vindication of their struggle is of 'the end justifies the means' line, rather than being the inevitable consequence of their clear ethical virtue.

In brief, Heinlein presents a sanitised form of revolution as a righteous struggle to re-establish the democratic principles abjured by the corrupt hierophants. Thus it is no more than a mildly original twist to an otherwise conventional treatment of Western values, delivered in the author's distinctively energetic and robust style (29), and full of mayhem and esprit de corps. (Significantly, Heinlein returns to this storyline frequently; two further examples, The Day after Tomorrow, discussed below, and Stranger in a Strange Land are included in this study).

However, though Leiber's Gather Darkness may be derivative, it is clearly the more sustained and sophisticated of these two versions of the righteous struggle against theocracy. Moreover, while Leiber places arcane science and technological 'necromancy' in the hands of

the insurgents instead of Heinlein's military hardware, he is also more explicit in justifying their actions in humanistic rather than theistic terms. What is principally wrong with Heinlein's Supreme Prophet, of course, is that he has broken faith with the Great Architect, whereas the merry band of patriotic fundamentalists who wish to expose the corrupt religious despot are acting from selfless motives and a desire to re-establish the veneration of a real God of a more palatable - indeed, ecumenical - kind. Leiber takes the same road as Heinlein, but goes further in advocating enlightenment, everyone's birthright, against religious embargo, the yoke common to all but a few elect 'techno-theocrats.'

Brother Jarles, like his predecessor John Lyle, has had enough of the corrupt theocracy to which he belongs. Indeed Jarles also betrays himself in a clearly treasonable act. He chooses a very public forum for his denunciation:

"Commoners of Megatheopolis!"

That checked the beginnings of a panicky flight. Eyes turned to stare at him stupidly. They had not yet begun to comprehend what had happened. But when a priest spoke, one listened.

"You have been taught that ignorance is good. I tell you it is evil!

"You have been taught that to think is evil. I tell you it is good!

"You have been told that it is your destiny to toil night and day, until your backs are breaking and your hands blister under the callouses. I tell you it is the destiny of all men to look for easier ways!

"You have let the priests rule your lives. I tell you that you must rule yourselves!

"You believe that the priests have supernatural powers. I tell you that they have no powers you could not wield yourselves!

"You believe that the priests are chosen to serve the Great God and transmit his commands. But - if there is a god anywhere - each one of you, in his ignorant heart, knows more than the mightiest archpriest.

"You have been told that the Great God rules the universe - earth and sky. I tell you the Great God is a fake!"

Gather, Darkness! p.11

The difference between Lyle's and his motivation is made clear at once, for where Lyle's rage that a girl who has caught his eye is being offered to pleasure the epicene Prophet is a peculiarly presumptive and self-serving pretext, Jarles's indignation is provoked more by disgust with the gratuitous forcefulness of a brother priest than by simple gallantry towards a young woman caught in a similar predicament. Above all, though, Jarles's denunciation is hubristic and libertarian rather than merely macho. From the start, Leiber's novel deals with concepts which are presented as inherently rather than symbolically moral, whereas Heinlein sanctifies a relativistic code (murder is sometimes moral, 'skinny-dipping' is not lewd nor is brutality wrong in the service of God and Liberty, and so on) either by wrapping morals in the Flag, mystifying them in Lodge rituals or culling them from the Book. As there is no place for real hubris in his theistic tale, Heinlein never goes beyond insisting that the ultimate justification for moral values is religious; but Leiber immediately insists that "'ignorance is evil...to think is good...rule yourselves!'"

Throughout Leiber's novel aspiration sustains and vindicates rebelliousness, and oppression is its polar opposite. Rescued from the obvious consequences of his rashness, Jarles joins the underground. Unlike Heinlein's Cabal, they do not have a creed for they prosper by harnessing the powers of nature rather than by deferring to a supernatural master. However, Leiber needs a thematic framework to give coherence to the ethical structure inherent in the book and avoid the charge of advocating moral anarchy as a social principle. In choosing to advance a very scientific form of necromancy he is able to combine aspiration, absolutism, esoteric technological

potency and the resurgent energy of a second renaissance. The New Witchcraft, aided by 'familiar' (telepathic, genetically-engineered homonculi) and possessing the technological secrets of the Golden Age which consumed itself and gave way to the Hierarchy, is pitched against the forces of the symbolic Great God (the idol set up by the prelates). Technology is also exploited by the theocrats to maintain their hegemony over a cowed people. The people hold the key: victory for the underground movement which struggles for their emancipation depends upon inspiring the masses by exposing the priests as charlatans. That in turn will depend upon which side can better use its knowledge of behaviour, devices and forces to vanquish the other. Surprise and military strategy are a formidable combination, particularly when the scientific source of the terror produced is disguised for maximum effect as the legendary, primeval foe of mankind:

...most of the archpriests could only stare helplessly at the ever-mounting chaos around reviewing stand. Long habit had taught them to maintain inscrutable expressions, but now their facial masks concealed nothing but empty stupefaction. It was not physical fear that froze them. They felt that the whole materialistic world on which they based their security was going to pieces before their eyes. Physical science, which had been their obedient servant, had suddenly become a toy in the hands of a dark power that could make or break scientific laws at pleasure. Something had scratched out the first principle of their thinking: "There is only the cosmos and the electronic entities that constitute it, without soul or purpose - " and scribbled over it, in broad black strokes, "The whim of Sathanas."

Gather Darkness, pp.148-9

Once the germ of this breakdown of faith in their own control of the world through science is planted in the minds of the priests, it flourishes and their regime is swept aside by the New Witchcraft in a symbolic victory for humanity.

Heinlein published in 1949 a second version of his righteous-religious-conspiracy-against-oppression plot in which the pronounced

jingoism of 'Revolt in 2100' has been converted expeditiously into simple xenophobia. Alas, the enemy of humanity is no incomprehensible extraterrestrial bug-eyed slimy thing with a penchant for sadistic homicide, but the emperor's 'monkeys', the 'slant-eyed' 'flat-faced' Pan-Asians who have conquered the United States. Perhaps one may discern in his depiction of the underground opposition a minor debt to Leiber, for Heinlein begins with the last viable cadre of the U.S. Army - a mere handful of men - and, endowing them with a scientific genius to do the backroom wizardry, depicts how they win through by impressing their own citizenry and baffling and terrifying the enemy with the technological miracles of a factitious religion. This is how it is explained to an early recruit to the scheme:

The man hesitated, and Ardmore added, 'Damn it- we're white men! Can't you see that?'

The man answered, 'I see it, but I don't like it.' Nevertheless he slowly approached.

Ardmore said, 'This is a piece of razzle-dazzle for the benefit of our yellow brethren. Now that you're in it, you're in it! Are you game?'

The other members of the personnel of the citadel had gathered around by this time. The mountain guide glanced around at their faces. 'It doesn't look as if I had much choice.'

'Maybe not, but we would rather have a volunteer than a prisoner.'

The mountaineer shifted tobacco from left cheek to right, glanced around the immaculate pavement for a place to spit, decided not to, and answered, 'What's the game?'

'It's a frame up on our Asiatic bosses. We plan to give them the run-around - with the help of God and the great Lord Mota.'

The Day After Tomorrow, p.57

Heinlein would no doubt have resented the suggestion that the leader of his six G.I. musketeers had read Leiber's novel for inspiration but it is all there in the trappings of the fledgling sect of 'Mota' - "Atom" in plain English. I pause to condemn the militaristic cant and blase, right-wing 'ethics' advanced in this novel, which leaves one wondering whether the self-righteous gimcrack heroes really are much better, in human terms, than the despots they ultimately

overthrow with the help of their all-American ingenuity and know-how. Heinlein certainly was excited by the promise and power of science, but, whatever his intentions, all he manages to suggest was how dehumanizing these can be. By contrast, John Boyd gleefully achieves the opposite in The Rakehells of Heaven(1969), by suggesting how pernicious religious fervour can be.

Boyd's is not a profound book, or even one in which he tried from the outset to give a form to an idea he considered worth the single-minded shaping behind any great work. In fact in his preface to the 1978 Penguin edition he recalls that he had set out to write a Promethean story, but 'strange things happened on the way to the denouement.'⁽³⁰⁾ The work as it stands is entertaining, irreverent, ribald and jocose - particularly where the pseudo-religious motivation of the two men from earth is concerned - yet it is interesting in its few serious moments, where the reader may glimpse behind the buffoonery an argument about the religious credulity of human nature and the social and psychological distortions which may arise from the unscrupulous exploitation of this human propensity to worship and placate.

Two space scouts, Adams and O'Hara, discover the 'university' planet Harlech and its studious, rational inhabitants. Their next objective is to ascertain whether or not the humanoid Harlechians are truly human, for only if they fail to meet the strict criteria set by the Terran administrators can their planet be colonised and exploited by Earth. Since the two Earthmen are uncertain, they decide to stay to investigate. The Harlechians' comeliness, native intelligence and sexual prowess are initially hard to cope with but the two spacemen adjust, O'Hara more readily than Adams. Rivalry grows between them,

as the exuberance of Catholic Celt O'Hara is initially much more attractive to the Harlechians than the sober reserve of Adams, a Southern Methodist. Soon both men are trying to outdo one another in their respective efforts to build up a following among the students of this campus planet. While O'Hara is intent on popularising himself aided by his near-indefatigable libido and a gift for the theatrical, Adams, fired with missionary zeal, strives to bring the Harlechians to his God.

The young folk of Harlech are highly impressionable, and take to Red O'Hara's populist, showbiz Catholicism with alacrity. Moral controversies arise for the first time in aeons on Harlech, and there is even a murder as the students are deliberately imbued with alien, Terran values by their new mentors. A police force is established, and the revealing garb customary on Harlech is replaced with 'decent' clothing. The credulous, gullible Harlechians are corrupted by the two rivals; each builds up factions in an effort to ensure that his religion, opinions and values eclipse those of his colleague. However, in a satirical denouement reminiscent both of Farmer's 'Prometheus' and Harrison's 'An Alien Agony', O'Hara ends up being crucified (or so Adams concludes, though the novel finishes with doubt being cast upon this assumption) in the most religious media event the literal-minded Harlechians are ever likely to witness. Ironically, O'Hara's roguish influence is sanctified by his martyrdom, and his is the creed which endures:

...I heard the sibilance of prayer arising from the chapel, and when I opened the door the area was filled with worshipers. My Good Friday sermon had been taken over by a lay preacher, Bardo the Lawyer, who was finishing a prayer for the dead. Standing behind the kneeling worshipers, I hear him finish: "And we ask this blessing in the name of Red. There is no Lord but the Lord of Moses and Red was his prophet."

"Wait, Bardo," I cried. "Red was not a prophet. Jesus Christ was the Prophet."

"By law, Bardo answered, "we cannot accept hearsay evidence, and we all know that Red died on the cross and he spoke only of Moses. So we are of the Hebrew faith..."

My brain spinning. I entered my office. There was more to be done on Harlech now than kill a Judas. Slick lawyers were using the rules of evidence on my Scriptures, and jurisprudence was converting my Christianity to Judaism. I had to get the Word straight before I left Harlech, and my time was short. It was one Holy mess!

In my heart I knew what had to be done, but how? I was willing to grant O'Hara sainthood, but I could not grant him co-equality with the Holy Trinity, particularly now that these pagans had pared the Trio to a Duo.

The Rakehalls of Heaven, pp.175-6

Adams's last effort to save the Harlechians from themselves and O'Hara brings him back to Earth after enduring a return voyage at enormous velocity, but his efforts to turn the clock back by creating an Einsteinian time paradox fail. Ultimately, the only clear message which emerges from a welter of off-beat humour, knavery and intrigue is that men make very poor divines, as Wells would surely have agreed.

Keith Robert's Pavane(1968) opens with an 'historical' Prologue in which the reader is offered an explanation of how a novel set in the twentieth century is without so many of the technological wonders which, in Verne's Frankville, Wells's future history, Huxley's Somatic London, Vonnegut's Ilium and countless other less well-known corners of science fiction's multifarious space-time-reality five-dimensional territory, have become synonymous with the modern world as it is and the world to which it will give birth. In Robert's marvellous novel the assassination of Elizabeth the First in July 1588 and the Spanish invasion of a realm divided along religious sectarian lines not only halts the English Renaissance and precludes the Age of Reason, but gives Rome the opportunity to re-establish their Medieval hegemony throughout the Old World and the New, and consolidate their spiritual and temporal interests:

To the victor, the spoils. With the authority of the Catholic Church assured, the rising nation of Great Britain deployed her forces in the service of the Popes, smashing the Protestants of the Netherlands, destroying the power of the German city-states in the long-drawn Lutheran Wars. The New-worlders of the North American continent remained under the rule of Spain; Cook planted in Australasia the cobalt flag of the throne of Peter.

In England herself, across a land half ancient and half modern, split as in primitive times by barriers of language, class and race, the castles of mediaevalism still glowered; mile on mile of unfelled woodland harboured creatures of another age. To some the years that passed were years of fulfilment, of the final flowering of God's Design; to others they were a new Dark Age, haunted by things dead and others best forgotten; bears and catamounts, dire-wolves and Fairies.

Over all, the long arm of the Popes reached out to punish and reward; the Church Militant remained supreme. But by the middle of the twentieth century widespread mutterings were making themselves heard. Rebellion was once more in the air.

Pavane, Prologue, pp.9-10.

Those 'mutterings' symbolize the resurgent, irrepressible and characteristic spirit of Man; and as Roberts's story unfolds, his version is revealed. Note, however, that Pavane appears at first to present the converse of the situation portrayed by Miller in A Canticle for Leibowitz - especially in Fiat Lux - where the Church (i.e. the monks of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz) struggles to advance, and failing that, just to sustain a spiritual perspective in a materialistic, secular world.

Pavane consists of a number of introductory chapters which are really cameos of the main characters, whose lives later become interwoven, and each chapter also establishes a strand of the novel's main theme, likewise spun into a final coherence in the last chapter, and in a final epistolary 'Coda.' Thus in the first chapter, 'The Lady Margaret,' Roberts deftly intertwines narrative, characterisation and background allusion in describing the independent-minded, resourceful haulier Jesse Strange making the year's last trip through the West Country at the wheel of his best steam-driven traction engine:

...but what else could you expect, Jesse asked himself sourly, when half the tax levied in the country went to buy gold plate for its churches? Maybe though this was just the start of a new trade recession like the one engineered a couple of centuries back by Gisevius. The memory of that still rankled in the West at least. The economy of England was stable now, for the first time in years; stability meant wealth, gold reserves. And gold, stacked anywhere but in the half-legendary coffers of the Vatican, meant danger...

Jesse had all the hauliers' ingrained contempt for internal combustion, though he'd followed the arguments for it and against it keenly enough. Maybe one day petrol propulsion might amount to something and there was that other system, what did they call it, diesel... But the hand of the Church would have to be lifted first. The Bull of 1910, Petroleum Veto, had limited the capacity of IC engines to 150cc's, and since then the hauliers had had no real competition.

Pavane, p.14 & p.15.

The hauliers are the middle-class businessmen of this age of steam locomotion and Petroleum Veto, hard-working, relatively prosperous and independent-minded; but the Church's firmness is an effective brake upon their ambition and the growth of their own power. They are tolerated mainly because they are useful - indeed, indispensable - but they are acutely aware of their limited freedom:

He valved water through the preheater, stoked, valved again. One day they'd swap these solid-burners for oil-fuelled machines. The units had been available for years now; but oil firing was still a theory in limbo, awaiting the Papal verdict. Might be a decision next year, or the year after; or maybe not at all. The ways of Mother Church were devious, not to be questioned by the herd.

Old Eli would have fitted oil burners and damned the priests black to their faces, but his drivers and steersmen would have balked at the excommunication which would certainly have followed. Strange and Sons had bowed the knee there, not for the first time and not for the last.

Pavane, pp.25-26.

The only other independent force in this England of 1968 wherein cement is available only through the Church and at enormous expense - it being too useful for the rapid construction of strongholds - is the Guild of Signallers, the subject of the second chapter:

Guildsmen paid no tithes to local demesnes, obeyed none but their own hierarchy; and though in theory they were answerable under Common Law, in practice they were immune. They

governed according to their own high code; and it was a brave man, or a fool, who squared with the richest Guild in England. There had been deadly accuracy in what the Serjeant said; when kings waited on their messages as eagerly as commoners they had little need to fear. The Popes might cavil, jealous of their independence, but Rome herself leaned too heavily on the continent-wide network of the semaphore towers to do more than adjure and complain. In so far as such a thing was possible in a hemisphere dominated by the Church Militant, the Guildsmen were free.

Pavane, p.55.

The Guildsmen and artisans are not the only pragmatists in this parallel world, of course. In the third chapter, wherein Roberts relates Brother John's story, we encounter the least compassionate, the most devious, and the most powerful of the three - the Court of Spiritual Welfare. If the assassination of the Faery Queen has sent this world spinning down a divergent path from that which brought ours into being, then a special kind of ecclesiastical viciousness would flourish as the need became apparent to the Holy See that its secular power could only be maintained at the expense of a ('relatively') little blood. So reasons Roberts, and consequently he clouds the skies above his alternate world with the awful shadow of the most damnable of all the Catholic Church's most misanthropic institutions - the Inquisition. Roberts reviles its sadistic practices by throwing the gentle, gifted, obstinate Brother John into the very midst of its madness. Unlike Leiber, Roberts is not content merely to hint at the extreme behaviour of the zealot, as he does here:

The room in which he found himself was long and wide, devoid of windows except where to one side a line of grilles set close under the roof admitted livid fans of light. At the far end of the chamber an oil lamp burned; beneath it clustered a group of figures. John saw dark-dressed, burly men with the insignium of the Court, the hand wielding the hammer and the lightning flash, blazoned on their chests; a chaplain was mumbling over trays of spiky instruments whose purpose he did not recognize. There were spiked rollers, oddly shaped irons, tourniquets of metal beads; other devices, ranged in rows, he

identified with a cold shock. The little frames with their small crank handles, toothed jaws; these were gresillons. Thumb-screws. Such things then really existed. Nearer at hand a species of rough table, fitted at each end with lever-operated wooden rollers, declared its use more plainly. The roof of the place was studded with pulleys, some with their ropes already reeved and dangling; a brazier burned redly, and near it were piled what looked to be huge lead weights.

Pavane, p.87.

Imagine Wells's Doctor Moreau pacing this grim chamber, and the provenance of one's revulsion in rejecting his superficially humane effort to surgically transform animals into "people" is evident. Yet here one confronts perhaps the deepest, most hideously perverted species of Reason; ironically, though, religious zeal is in the dock, not scientific expediency. For all that, the rationale propounded to John on his arrival at the Court has all the vile logic and composure of a Nazi doctor's testimony:

The priest at Brother John's elbow continued in a low voice the explanation which he'd felt impelled to embark on while crossing the town from their lodgings. 'We may take it then,' he said, 'that as the crimes of witchcraft and heresy, the raising of devils, receiving of incubi and succubi and like abominations, the trafficking with the Lord of the Flies himself, are crimes of the spirit rather than the body, crimen excepta, they cannot be judged, and evidence may neither be given nor accepted under normal legal jurisdiction. The admission of spectral evidence and its acceptance as partial proof of guilt subject to confession during Questioning is therefore of vital importance to the functioning of our Court. Under this head to belongs our explanation of the use of torture and its justification; the death of the guilty one disrupts Satan's attack on the Plan of God, as revealed to Mother Church through His Vicar on Earth, our own Pope John; while dying penitent the heretic is saved from the greater relapse into the sin of subversion, to find eventually his place in the Divine Kingdom.'

Brother John, his face screwed up as if in anticipation of pain, ventured a query. 'But are not your prisoners given the opportunity to confess? Were they to confess without the Questioning--'

'There can be no confession,' interrupted the other, 'without compulsion. As there can be no answering the challenges of spectral evidence, the use of which by definition invalidates the innocence of the accused.' He allowed his eyes to travel to one of the pulleys and its dangling rope. 'Confession,' he said, 'must be sincere. It must come from the heart. False confession, made to avoid the pain of

Questioning, is useless to Church and God alike. Our aim is salvation; the salvation of the souls of these poor wretches is our charge, if necessary by the breaking of bodies. Set against this, all else is straw in the wind.'

Ibid.

Even if Roberts at first merely suggests rather than illustrates the worst of this codex of cold-blooded procedure, he will not eschew the truth - but there is nothing in what follows which seems gratuitously Gothic. The reader is shown the savagery through the medium of Brother John's demented memories. John has been forced not merely to witness the cruelties of the Inquisition, but to record them graphically - for his calling is to art, not to religion. Ironically he has found himself being used as a result of having enjoyed the security of his Order to practise his vocation:

Through the deep channels of his brain noises still echoed. A susurrantion, rising and falling like a shrill and hellish sea; the shrieks of the damned, and the dying, and the dead. And the sizzling of braziers, thud of whips splitting flesh, creaking of leather and wood, squeak and groan of sinews as machines tested to destruction the handiwork of God. John had seen it all; the white-hot pincers round the breasts, branding irons pushed smoking into mouths, calf-length boots topped up with boiling lead, the heated chairs, the spiked seats on which they bounced their victims then stacked the lead slabs on their thighs... The Territio, the Questions Preparatoire, Ordinaire, Extraordinaire; sqassation and the strappado, the rack and the choking pear; the Questioners stripped and sweating while the great mad judge upstairs extracted from the foamings of epileptics the stuff of conviction after conviction.. Pencil and brush recorded faithfully, flying at the paper with returning skill while Brother Sebastian stood and frowned, pulling at his lip and shaking his head. It seemed John's hands worked of their own, tearing the pages aside, grabbing for inks and washes while the drawings grew in depth and vividness. The brilliant side-lighting; filming of sweat on bodies that distended and heaved in ecstasies of pain; arms disjoined by the weights and pulleys, stomachs exploded by the rack, bright tree shapes of new blood running to the floor. It seemed the limner tried to force the stench, the squalor, even at last the noise down onto paper; Brother Sebastian, impressed in spite of himself, had finally dragged John away by force, but he couldn't stop him working. He drew a wizard in the outer bailey, pulled apart by four Suffolk Punches; the doomed men and women sitting on their tar kegs waiting for the torch; the stark things that were left when the flames had died away. 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to

live,' Sebastian had said at his parting. 'Remember that, Brother. Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live..' John's lips moved, repeating the words in silence.

Night overtook him a bare half dozen miles from Dubris. He dismounted in the dark, awkwardly, tethered the horse while he fetched water from a stream. In the stream he dropped the satchel of brushes and paints. He stood a long time staring, though in the blackness he couldn't see it float away.

Pavane, pp.89-90.

The Church is profaned here, deliberately and thoroughly; yet while one recoils at the scope of Roberts's depiction, the basic principle of the factitious or fictive religion - that however outlandish, it is in some way a counterpart of an actual religion - is forcefully apparent. Here we must recognize the grim truth of the Catholic Church at the height of its temporal influence; and the essential inhumanity of those agents of ecclesiastical hegemony who could routinely preside over the destruction of their fellows and claim to be acting from the highest moral principles has diminished not at all in the retelling.

However, Robert's harrowing account has a wider significance, for it serves to illustrate that there has always been a distinctive kind of religious moral expediency which parallels the scientific utilitarianism against which the devout writers (discussed in Chapter Four) declaim in tones of the highest moral outrage. Furthermore, history furnishes ample proof, were it wanted, to indicate that inhumane practices have often gone hand-in-hand with the rituals and rules of orthodox religions, a throwback to the long-forgotten practices of ancient cults whose creeds preach sympathetic magic, or vicarious expiation of guilt. The very antiquity of such abominable notions and their persistence even in allegedly civilized times - as Huxley never failed to argue, be it in the form of the Savage's masochistic religious fervour, or in the infanticide at the altar in

Ape and Essence - is undoubtedly one of the most telling indications that human perfectibility can be no less chimerical than the quest for the philosopher's stone, and that the human sensibility, devoid of moral restraint, might be just as likely to deteriorate as to develop. This, too, is part of Roberts's theme: "'I said I knew I was damned because I'd damned myself,'" rages the Lady Eleanor later in the novel, "'I didn't have to wait for any god to do it for me.'" She continues:

'That was the worst of all of course; I only said it to hurt him but I realized afterwards I meant it anyhow, I just wasn't a Christian any more. I said if necessary I'd raise up a few old gods, Thunor and Wo-Tan perhaps or Balder instead of Christ; for he told me himself many years ago....that Balder was only an older form of Jesus and that there have been many bleeding gods.'

Pavane, p.168.

For all her pagan leanings, Eleanor later will have an exemplary moral role. Yet she is not the central figure of this story of aspiration, that distinction being Brother John's.

Cast adrift on a sea of moral confusion by what he sees in the inquistors' dungeon, John is in a state of inner turmoil. Accusing himself of having enjoyed the technical demands of the sordid recording he has been summoned for, he leaves his Order and becomes a raving wanderer in the wilderness, himself now an emblem of the distortion which the maintenance of ecclesiastical conformity and obedience may work upon the human psyche. John's guilt is another burden imposed by his Order.

Barred from prestigious work and the full flowering of his gift by a jealous superior - John being another of those individuals whose usefulness has been recognized by Mother Church (commercial work such as the design of 'sauce bottle labels' being his particular strength) - the artist in John emerged fully in the chamber of horrors. Without

vanity to save him, John's revulsion at his own participation, however indirect, is transformed into the certainty of his own complicity. His insanity, which gives all this so much force, is, like Glogauer's, the outcome of a shattering perception. Where Glogauer encounters a simple child rather than the sublime human incarnation of the divine he has expected, John has been confronted by the Christian Church at its most cynical. Now that he has seen it, he can no longer accept its Rule, and, again like Glogauer, becomes the focus for dissent, a bedraggled prophet whose charismatic madness draws to him the humble folk oppressed by the potentates of the Church.

Before long the following of John the 'renegade' becomes a sizeable threat, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Londinium ('a gourmet in all things temporal,' p.92) decides to dispatch troops to quell the rebellion. John's is not the only voice raised against the Inquisition - the prelate notes with barely suppressed fury the 'heresy' of the Bishop of Dubris ('the rage of a pious and honest man was very plain' in this petition against the 'desecrator of decency and his so-called Spiritual Court'); but John's heresy is the greater since he has rejected the Church and seems to be encouraging multitudes to do the same. Of course the reader knows that John is really only preaching by example, if at all, for like Glogauer, the followers of the prophet read signs into his actions, and credit him with powers and sermons which reflect their own deepest desires rather than his real qualities. To the Cardinal, though, this is all quite beneath his notice. His concern is to restore the status quo as quickly as possible, for administering the Church is a matter of balance, and the evidence is plain to see that, 'The old cry of the Church, to

submit and to adore, was no longer enough; the people were being tempted once more to set up their own spiritual hierarchy, and John or some such figure was tailor-made to head it.'(p.94) The Cardinal, an intellectual potentate, is clearly also a relativist:

The renegade then had attended the last sittings of the Court of Spiritual Welfare; that, thought His Eminence as he re-read facts already learned by heart, was clearly the beginning of the whole ridiculous affair. He shook his head. How explain? ...His Eminence shrugged tiredly. In the history of the world, there had been no power like the power of the second Rome. To hold half the planet in the cup of your hands; to juggle, to balance one against the next forces nearly beyond the mind of man to grasp...The rage of nations was like the anger of the sea, not to be contained with straws. Anglicanism had torn the country once, the history of it was all there in the great books that lined the study walls. Then, England had glowed from her Cornish to to her Pennine spine with the light of the auto-da-fe. Against that set a little pain, a little blood, soon gone and nearly soon forgotten; that, and the mighty wisdom of the Church.

Once too often, mused the Cardinal; the goad, the threat of Hellfire, applied instead of the lure of the Kingdom of Love... Father Hieronymous, mad as he undoubtedly was, had been useful in the past; but this time his gory circus had triggered an uproar that could easily involve all England.... ...His Eminence by nature of his position was economist and politician as much as churchman; in his more cynical moods he seemed to see the whole vast fabric of the Church stretched like a glittering blanket, a counterpane of cloth of gold, across the body of a giant. At times like this the giant moved and grumbled, turned in a restless sleep. Soon, he would wake.

Pavane, pp.94-95.

Since the Cardinal is evidently as much a pragmatist as a visionary, the full force of the Church Militant is brought to bear on the rebellion, with the result that the pressure is relieved, the revolt melts away and order is restored. Yet John leaves his followers with his own vision, one which goes beyond the Cardinal's. No longer under the influence of the Church's conservative dogma, John is able to discern the future in the present, a future which is noble and which offers the promise of human spiritual fulfilment and technological emancipation - Utopia by another name - as an alternative to the

Church's 'lure of the Kingdom of Love':

'People of Dorset...fisherman and farmers and you, marblers and roughmasons, who grub the old stone up out of the hills...and you, Fairies, the People of the Heath, you were-things riding the wind, hear my words and remember. Mark them all your lives, mark them for all time; so in the years to come, no earth shall ever be without the tale...' The syllables rang shrieking and thin, pulverized by the wind; and even the injured girl stopped moaning and lay propped against the knees of her friends, straining to hear. John told them of themselves; of their faith and their work, their lonely carving of existence out of stone and rock and bareness; of the great Church that held the land by the throat, choking their breath in the grip of her brocade fist. In his brain visions still burned and hummed; he told them of the might Change that would come, sweeping away blackness and misery and pain, leading them at last to the Golden Age. He saw clearly, rising about him on the hills, the buildings of that new time, the factories and hospitals, power stations and laboratories. He saw the machines flying above the land, skimming like bubbles the surface of the sea. He saw wonders; lightning chained, the wild waves of the very air made to talk and sing. All this would come to pass, all this and more. The age of tolerance, of reason, of humanity, of the dignity of the human soul.

Pavane, pp.106-107.

John's testament is not quite the Sermon on the Mount but its tone is unmistakeably promissory: 'All this would come to pass...' Invoking as it does the prospect of C.P.Snow's scientific benison, the 'Golden Age' John extols to an audience whose experience is of unending toil and scant reward beyond subsistence, is Wellsian. Yet, as John's chapter closes with the peaceable dispersal of his following, one realizes that this rebellion of the humble folk of the West Country can be no more than a precursor, as the structure of Medieval society and the Church's hegemony are too robust to be challenged effectively from below.

In the next chapter, 'Lords and Ladies', we are afforded a glimpse of the mores of the contemporary aristocracy. Margaret Strange is a bystander at her Uncle Jesse's deathbed. Reflecting bitterly, she rails inwardly at the Church and at the aristocratic

lover who has wooed her only to seduce her and cast her aside. She despises the Church, reviling Christianity as a foreign imposition:

The journey and the castle had been in her mind; the tears were real. They ran down hot, wetting her cheek. Is this the best you can do? she asked Father Edwardes silently. To plague this old man with your mumming while I sit here free who've brought the evil and the wrong into this house? Of course, her mind answered itself scornfully. Because he like the Church he serves is blind and empty and vainglorious. This God they prattle on about, where's His justice, where's His compassion? Does it please Him to see dying people hounded in his name, does He snigger at his bumbling priests, is He satisfied when men drop dead chopping out stone for His temples, this twisted little God dying tepid-faced on a cross... She thought, I'll go out and look for other gods, and maybe they'll be better and anyway they can't be worse. Perhaps they're still there in the wind, on the heaths and the old grey hills. I'll pray for Thunnor's lightning and Wo-Tan's justice, and Balder's love; for he at least gave his blood laughing, not mangled and in pain like the Christos, the usurper...

Pavane, p.132.

The old gods, the elemental spirits revered in the pre-Christian era, answer. Their ethereal spokesman chides her gently and, perhaps surprisingly, counsels tolerance, even acceptance of the Church of Christ as a positive response to the inscrutability of a pseudo-Wellsian cosmos:

She tried to speak again, and he stopped her with a raised hand. 'Listen,' he said, 'and try to remember. Do not despise your Church; for she has a wisdom beyond your understanding. Do not despise her mummeries; they have a purpose that will be fulfilled. She struggles as we struggle to understand what will not be understood, to comprehend that which is beyond comprehension. The Will that cannot be ordered, or charted, or measured.' He pointed round him, at the circling stones. 'The Will that is like these; encompassing, endlessly voyaging, endlessly returning, enfolding the heavens. The flower grows, the flesh corrupts, the sun circles the sky; Balder dies and the Christos, the warriors fight outside their hall Valhalla and fall and bleed and are reborn. All are within the Will, all are ordained. We are within it; our mouths close and open, our bodies move, our voices speak and we are not their masters. The Will is endless; we are its tools. Do not despise your Church...'

Pavane, p.134.

Wells might have abjured - indeed ridiculed - such an indiscriminate reduction of the aspiring human spirit to being no more than the gibbering of an involuntary implement of Divine Will, but this perspective of the Universe and the significance within it of human life is Wellsian in its seeming indifference to the fate of the individual. Yet it is also optimistic in its assertion that the Cosmos is not random or arbitrary but is directed and shaped to a purpose beyond the scope of human understanding. While continuing in the historic vein, the novel's resolution proceeds from the further development of this essentially theistic theme.

Three perspectives have now been developed by Roberts, and they are brought together to bear upon the fortunes of Eleanor, the daughter of Margaret Strange and her aristocratic husband Robert, last of the Lords of Purbeck. The youthful Lady Eleanor, chatelaine of Corfe, has her great-uncle Jesse's acumen and determination, her mother's fey perception and impatience with Church pomp and secular power, and a strong streak of the compassion for the oppressed which once drove John to renounce his Order. Of more immediate moment, she also has the power and influence of a feudal seigneur but resents the obligations to the monarchy and to the Church her role involves.

In the Lady Eleanor, Roberts personifies all the qualities and energies of the Bishop of Londinium's metaphorical sleeping giant. Eleanor is certainly a heroine, but not of the conventional sort. She is the focus of the popular pressures for Reform and Reason, and is also the catalyst who initiates the train of events that forces the Church to loosen the bonds with which it had constrained the movements of the giant. The rebellion she leads from Corfe Castle entails a double jeopardy. The Church of Rome's agents and proxies in

Britain seek to use it to embarrass the King, who is visiting the Americas and who is thus unable to manage the crisis though he is sympathetic to a degree with her cause. The Church will also seize upon this pretext to destroy her and her nonconformist demesne.

Aided by her seneschal, Sir John Faulkner, she withstands the worst the Church and its creatures can throw at her, until the King returns to lift the siege of Corfe. She is imprisoned in comfort but bereft of her former power until an escape is arranged and she is able to return to her beloved West Country, where she lives for many years in humble circumstances attended only by her former seneschal. Alas, the memory of Rome is as unforgiving as its reach is long and persevering. For Eleanor this means death at the hands of a Catholic assassin, as her retainer John Faulkner has known from the first it would. For all his Fairy lineage, even he is prompted to seek to revenge her. As she dies, perhaps in atonement for the single treachery she ever committed in long ago ordering the massacre of the Pope's cruel lieutenant in England and his brutal, bloody retinue, Eleanor urges restraint:

He stayed kneeling, breath hissing between his teeth; and when he raised his head his face was totally changed. 'Who did this, Lady?' he asked her huskily. 'When next they cross the heath, then we must know...'

She saw the blazing start at the backs of the strange eyes and reached for his wrist, slowly and with pain. 'No, John,' she said. 'The Old Way is dead. Vengeance is...mine, saith the Lord...' She pushed her head against the back of the chair, parting her lips; blood showed between her teeth...

Pavane, pp.181-182.

In terms of the novel's moral allegory, this proves that she has triumphed over her nature and proved her humanity. How masterfully Roberts combines the paradoxical premises of his story! Aspiration is innately human, but only in controlling our nature are we really humane.

In an epistolary denouement ('Coda') Roberts explicates his moral vision. The hand is John Faulkner's; the recipient, his and Eleanor's son, heir to the modern world of hovercraft and nuclear power which they together strove to foster:

'Here, in this place, began that strange Revolt of the Castles; and here, too, as you have read, it ended. Here began the freedom of the world; if freedom is a proper word to use. The feudal world of Gisevius the Great was shattered; and with it the Church that had conceived it and perpetuated it and brought it to its flowering.

'When the grip of that Church seemed strongest, it was at its most slack. Within ten years of the breaking of these walls the New-world colonies had torn themselves free from Rome.... So Angle-Land became again Great Britain without bloodshed, and without sacrifice. Internal combustion, electricity, many other things, were waiting to be used; all had been held from us by Rome. So men spat on her memory, calling her debased and evil; for many years yet this will be true.

Pavane, p.187.

Here Roberts aims to sum up the Church's role as positively as possible, not vilify it. However, his argument of relative benefit approaches an illustration of the end justifying the means:

'The ways of the Church were mysterious, her policies never plain. The Popes knew, as we know, that given electricity men would be drawn to the atom. That given fission, they would be come to fusion. Because once, beyond our Time, beyond all the memories of men, there was a great civilization. There was a Coming, a Death and Resurrection; a Conquest, a Reformation, an Armada. And a Burning, an Armageddon. There too in that old world we were known; as the Old Ones, the Fairies, the People of the Hills. But our knowledge was not lost.

'The Church knew there was no halting Progress; but slowing it, slowing it even by half a century, giving man time to reach a little higher toward true Reason; that was the gift she gave the world. And it was priceless. Did she oppress? Did she hang and burn? A little, yes. But there was no Belsen, no Buchenwald. No Passchendaele.

'Ask yourself, John, from where came the scientists? And the doctors, thinkers, philosophers? How could men have climbed from feudalism to democracy in a generation, if Rome had not flooded the world with her proscribed wealth of knowledge? When she saw her empire crumbling, when she knew dominion had ended, she gave back what all thought she had stolen; the knowledge she was keeping in trust. Against the time when men could once more use it well. That was her great secret. It was hers, and it was ours; now it is yours. Use it well.

Pavane, p.188.

Unhappily, Roberts ends by compromising the intellectual rigour and integrity of vision which makes his such a notable novel, and as a result his fiction deteriorates almost into an expression of wishful thinking, just as Wells's rigour falters in Men Like Gods. His closing assertions quoted above as a rationale are ethically problematic, if not fallacious. The nub of the problem resides in John Faulkner's uncharacteristically maudlin justification and apology. It would be hard to persuade a victim of the Inquisition - or its fictional counterpart here - that they are only being hanged or burned 'A little'; or that their death is necessary to buy their persecutors time to become more humane. At bottom, the error he makes here reflects a profound faith in the infallibility of the Church, because it assumes that the Inquisitors and those who have sanctioned torture could anticipate - indeed could know - how their inhumanity to nonconformists, deviants and innovators like Leonardo would prevent the atrocities of later epochs, and of other men. Notwithstanding the many other virtues of this evocative and moving novel, one is disappointed that such a perceptive, learned mind could lapse into this apparent condonement of authoritarianism, repression and violence in the name of high idealism.

Kurt Vonnegut's work offers a mordant answer to the contentions and aspirations of the religious humanism of Pavane. Two of his novels are of particular interest in the present discussion, Cat's Cradle and the anarchic The Sirens of Titan. Although The Sirens of Titan is the earlier work, Cat's Cradle (1963) presents a more straightforward exploration of the social role of religion than its predecessor, which is full of deliberate parody and which also has an extra-terrestrial dimension lacking in Cat's Cradle because by then

its author had arrived at a humanistic resolution of the crisis of confidence in religious faith which his novels confront. Thus the later novel presents a clearer picture of Vonnegut's disillusionment with organized religion.

The world is in its cataclysmic death-throes as ice-nine tightens its grip on every molecule of water. This ultimate disaster follows the pattern established ed by Noyes in The Last Man: experimental science has brought man deadly knowledge and a fatal opportunity; ignorant military men and irresponsible politicians seek to maintain their geopolitical role, in this case by finding a gimmick - 'one of the aspects of progress' - which will allow the U.S.Marines to storm ashore and across country without once getting bogged down in mud (mud, not the scientist's protein, is the symbolic Bokononist raw material of corporeal life). The world perishes as a result. This, of course, is the opposite of scientific materialism as seen from the Wellsian Golden Age which comes into prospect at the end of Pavane.

In the last days of life on earth the narrator has found a safe, albeit temporary haven, in which he spends the time reading the cynical wisdom and non-doctrines of Bokonon. Cat's Cradle is John's (31) record of the world's end, and as he reveals on its first page, he eventually decides that Bokonon's creed accords with human life and experience better than Christianity:

When I was a much younger man, I began to collect material for a book to be called The Day the World Ended.

The book was to be factual.

The book was to be an account of what important Americans had done on the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan.

It was to be a Christian book. I was a Christian then.

I am a Bokononist now.

I would have been a Bokononist then, if there had been anyone to teach me the bitter-sweet lies of Bokonon. But

Bokononism was unknown beyond the gravel beaches and coral knives that ring this little island in the Caribbean Sea, the Republic of San Lorenzo.

We Bokononists believe that humanity is organized into teams, teams that do God's Will without ever discovering what they are doing. Such a team is called a karass by Bokonon, and the instrument, the kan-kan, that brought me into my own particular karass was the book I never finished, the book to be called The Day the World Ended.

Cat's Cradle, p.7

In another context these ridiculous details could be dismissed as spurious or juvenile; however, this is not a merely facetious parody. Their absurdity is not intended as a cheap jibe at religious belief, but it is implicitly an attack on the sententiousness of dogma. Vonnegut, perhaps the most elusive of all the writers discussed in this chapter, is fond of depicting his targets absurdly but he rarely deploys absurdity casually. In Vonnegut's fiction absurd coincidence often paradoxically represents the most profoundly significant cause and effect, probably because he 'does not choose sides among those he attacks because his technique is the Swiftian one of presenting equally false theses and antitheses'(32). This view of Vonnegut's approach is to some extent helpful but neglects the explicitly moral concerns which underlie the ambiguities of the narrative. Bokonon's writings and philosophy are alluded to passim, but one of the more telling excerpts is read by John towards the end of his chronicle as he sits in the shelter of the converted dungeon while ice-nine wreaks havoc everywhere else:

I turned to The Books of Bokonon, still sufficiently unfamiliar with them to believe that they contained spiritual comfort somewhere. I passed quickly over the warning on the title page of The First Book:

Don't be a fool! Close this book at once!
It is nothing but foma!

Foma, of course, are lies.
And then I read this:

In the beginning, God created the earth, and he looked upon it in His cosmic loneliness.

And God said, 'Let Us make living creatures out of mud, so the mud can see what We have done.' And God created every living creature that now moveth, and one was man. Mud as man alone could speak. God leaned close as mud as man sat up, looked around, and spoke. Man blinked. 'What is the purpose of all this?' he asked politely.

'Everything must have a purpose?' asked God.

'Certainly,' said man.

'Then I leave it to you to think of one for all of this,' said God. And He went away.

Cat's Cradle, pp.165-6

Vonnegut, like his character Bokonon, discerns the absurdity of trying to understand or paraphrase the will and actions of a divine being. Revealed knowledge, the scriptures, theophany are all chimerical, as fictive and fantastical as his own book, which opens with the prefatory headnote: 'Nothing in this book is true' and a quotation from The Books of Bokonon: 'Live by the foma that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy.' In other words, God - if God exists - is inscrutable; religions are factitious delusions, and one may as well live, by one's own lights failing any other agreeable principles and conventions. For surely human destiny is not one of God's main concerns - 'She (an affluent Episcopalian lady) was a fool, and so am I, and so is anyone who thinks he sees what God is doing, [writes Bokonon]' (p.9):

Along the way we are introduced to a religion so ridiculous that it resists being taken seriously, but which nevertheless helps the people create meaning for their otherwise pitiful lives. And at the same time Vonnegut's narrator converts to this religion and writes the book which survives: Cat's Cradle. Of course it's all made up. Just as the Bokonist religion keeps its members aware of the artificial drama they are playing, so too does Cat's Cradle draw attention to its own artifice of form. For each to work, Vonnegut believes, there should be no danger of either worshipper or reader mistaking such activity for bedrock-solid truth.

33.

However, it would misleading to suggest that Cat's Cradle is without any 'bedrock-solid truth,' for Vonnegut's mockery cannot be written

off as so much nihilism. His purpose is real enough, however much he reveals it through the inconstant medium of his foma, and it absolves him from any suspicion of moral disengagement or abdication:

'What is sacred to Bokononists?' I asked after a while.

'Not even God, as far as I can tell.'

'Nothing?'

'Just one thing.'

I made some guesses. 'The ocean? The sun?'

'Man,' said Frank. 'That's all. Just man.'

Cat's Cradle, p.133.

Yet for all its humane wit, Vonnegut's mordant view of religion is really as much an adverse response to it as an explicitly positive assertion of humanism. Bokonon, the sole enactor of Vonnegut's factitious religion, consistently repudiates or parodies the themes and symbols of conventional religions. Thus, Bokononism (the 'mountebank' creed) really is what its sardonic prophet claims it to be, namely a religion which exists only in its relationship to others, with an accretive, syncretistic catechism whose significance is derived chiefly from its denunciation of human foibles, which is sometimes palliative but more often cruelly capricious. Bokonon's advice to the doomed people of San Lorenzo is the ultimate manifestation of these ideas:

To whom it may concern: These people around you are almost all of the survivors on San Lorenzo of the winds that followed the freezing of the sea. These people made a captive of the spurious holy man named Bokonon. They brought him here, placed him at their centre, and commanded him to tell them exactly what God Almighty was up to and what they should do now. The mountebank told them that God was surely trying to kill them, possibly because He was through with them, and that they should have the good manners to die. This, as you can see, they did.

Cat's Cradle, p.170.

The frozen San Lorenzans are, like the Martian army in The Sirens of Titan, a monumental symbol both of the culpable passivity which permits humans to wink at unpalatable truths about ourselves,

and of passive complicity through inaction in the great and trivial inhumanities we countenance. Turned thus to ice, the corpses of the islanders outwardly reflect the cold, selfish inner consciousness which for Vonnegut is characteristic of modern, venial man. Ice-nine has not only allowed the complete annihilation of human consciousness, but works a figurative, revealing transformation of our inner natures. Ultimately, though, Vonnegut has been making his point every time Bokonon is mentioned, for his is a pivotal - and highly ambiguous - role in the unfolding ethical tragedy. Even he is not blameless. It is Vonnegut's view that we are all agents and victims, and Bokonon the reluctant, world-weary holy man is no exception. His perspective implicitly becomes that of Vonnegut's narrator, John, at the end of the novel; and, like Samuel Butler's Higgs, John himself is no moral vir bonus either, as has been noted by Thomas L. Wymer:

The narrator's errors in love show that he is in his own way as guilty of the dehumanization of others as those he ironically attacks. He can see this in others...But he cannot see it in himself. By blaming "You Know Who," which on one level implies God, he absolves himself of responsibility, flushing himself down a spiritual oubliette. And he does it, in a brilliant metaphoric stroke, by turning himself into a block of ice, reducing himself to an object, a veritable monument to human stupidity, unknowingly showing how all agents of dehumanization ultimately become their own victims. And the ambiguity of "You Know Who" is a final satiric masterstroke: "You Know Who" is both the narrator himself and each one of us. Vonnegut is no modern comic Prometheus, flippantly thumbing his nose at the great S.O.B. in the sky. Like all good satirists his eyes are on the Earth where all posturing is comic and where the folly of man is sufficient cause for the world's evil. 34.

Whatever else Vonnegut thought of formal religion(35), he certainly recognized that it is a powerful popular influence, be it indeed no more than a palliative which helps insulate mankind from the bleak truth about human existence, for there is no special, teleological destiny to be attained. If there is any 'message' in

Cat's Cradle - apart from a general injunction against the 'coarsening of the soul'; and the argument against being a passive agent of inhumanity - it is minimalist. Vonnegut insists that our real purpose is to do what we can for each other, rather than striving to please a putative god whose assumed desires and motives are as absurd and futile as our attempts to meet or fulfill them, and which in fact say much more about our self-conceit than about anything else. While this amounts to a moral argument about responsibility which retains its validity in the absence of the divine sanction religious ethics possess, the field of human endeavour it endorses is limited to that with which Mankind can cope. Yet what is known and in that sense safe is the historic product of trial and error - in other words, vision and risk-taking. However ingenuously, Vonnegut's schema in Cat's Cradle provides no answer other than a fatalistic shrug to the question of humane creativity, the essential conundrum of the science fiction of aspiration.

Evidently religion has had a profound role in shaping the patterns of human thought and behaviour, particularly that distinctively progressive aspiration long ago identified as 'hubris'. Roger Zelazny's Lord of Light (1967) offers an ingenious and quite exotic example (36) with which to close this survey of representative factitious religions. As the challenge of the human hero, Sam, to his 'divine' foes indicates, the basic structure of Zelazny's novel is that already elucidated for 'the science fiction of aspiration':

'The full power of Kalkin?' asked Sam. 'That has never been released, oh Death. Not in all the ages of the world. Let them come against me now and the heavens will weep upon their bodies and the Vedra will run the color of blood! ...Do you hear me? Do you hear me, gods? Come against me! I challenge you, here upon this field! Meet me with your strength, in this place!'

Lord of Light, p.210.

'Great-Souled Sam' is a remarkable figure: warrior; prophet identified as 'the Buddha'; egalitarian hero, as Kalkin, one of the original space travellers who landed centuries before upon this planet; and the eponymous Lord of Light who has refused to become a 'God'; he is essentially a Promethean figure, as his Titanic defiance quoted above shows. Yet symbolically Sam and his side fail in that first terrible conflict, for he once allows anger to overwhelm reason.

In the far future, a colony planet of long-forgotten Terra is governed by an elite who guard their many prerogatives jealously. The Deicrats (or Masters) are a self-centred group of men and women made virtually immortal by their jealous command of technology, who spend their days in diverse pleasures and studiously ignore as far as is possible the subjugated masses over whom they have arrogantly set themselves.

It emerges in the second chapter that the Masters are the crewmen of the original colonist space ship who have harnessed technology to prolong their lives (they simply transfer into a new, specially grown body before old age makes the chance of actual physical death too great) and to control the populace, who are the descendants of the colonists, the "'cargo'" the technical crew brought safely to this planet centuries before. Unwilling to give up their status and prestige, the crew instituted a religious social code and caste system which proved to be highly effective at limiting aspirations and encouraging fatalistic acceptance of the status quo. Not all of the First are decadent "'deities'", however; Lord Yama is sympathetic to the Accelerationist cause, and Mahasamatman ("'Sam'") is the hubristic hero who could break their hold over the people.

Sam (also called Siddhartha) arises to confront these oppressors

having been awakened after many lifetimes asleep in suspended animation because, as Yama mockingly confesses, "'a world has need of your humility, your piety, your great teaching and your Machiavellian scheming.'" Sam defends himself - "'I was one of the First, you know. One of the very first to come here to build, to settle. All the others are dead now, or are gods - dei ex machiniThe chance was mine also, but I let it go by. Many times. I never wanted to be a god, Yama. Not really. It was only later when I saw what they were doing, that I began to gather what power I could to me. It was too late, though. They were too strong..."(Ibid.)

Initially Zelazny's novel follows the classic pattern of hubristic defiance, as Sam escapes death at the hands of the Lord of Illusion, Mara, thanks to the prowess of Lord Yama. For all its allusions to Hindu divine myth, however, the fiction is, from the start, emphatically rationalistic. Here the maverick Lord Yama is discussing with Tak the archivist the special command Sam, newly resurrected, has over the perverse, powerful elemental denizens from whom possession of the planet was wrested aeons before:

'Then the one called Raltariki is really a demon?' asked Tak.

'Yes - and no,' said Yama. 'If by "demon" you mean a malefic, supernatural creature, possessed of great powers, life span, and the ability to temporarily assume virtually any shape - then the answer is no. This is the generally accepted definition, but it is untrue in one respect.'

'Oh? And what may that be?'

'It is not a supernatural creature.'

'But it is all those other things?'

'Yes.'

'Then I fail to see what difference it makes whether it be supernatural or not - so long as it is malefic, possesses great powers and has the ability to change its shape at will.'

Lord of Light, p.24

Yama's answer confirms beyond any doubt that this is an humanistic novel:

'Ah, but it makes a great deal of difference, you see. It is the difference between the unknown and the unknowable, between science and fantasy - it is a matter of essence. The four points of the compass be logic, knowledge, wisdom and the unknown. Some do bow in that final direction. Others advance upon it. To bow down before the one is to lose sight of the three. I may submit to the unknown, but never to the unknowable. The man who bows in that final direction is either a saint or a fool. I have no use for either.

Ibid.

Lord of Light has an epic flavour which is not merely the result of Zelazny's astute borrowings from Hindu myth. The typical images and ideas of the fiction of aspiration also have an unique power and generate their own excitement. These the author imbues quite masterfully with the lyricism of the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, which give this saga its form, if not its theme. Like Moorcock in Behold the Man and Frank Herbert in Dune before him, Zelazny prefaces each of the lengthy chapters of his work with quotations from sacred writings (37). Zelazny's impressive talents as an inventive writer are most apparent when he unites ancient and modern myths so that they complement each other (38). The bloody struggle of the faction led by Sam (the 'Accelerationists') against the Deicrats has a familiar ring:

'If we win, Siddhartha, toppling the Celestial City, freeing man for industrial progress, still there will be opposition. Nirriti, who has waited all these centuries for the passing of the gods, will have to be fought and beaten himself...

Lord of Light, p.205

Nirriti turns out to be one of the most ghoulish figures of the novel. Like Sam and the Gods, he is one of the First, but his primary attribute is indeed a strange one, for Nirriti is in fact another Mardok, a Frankenstein who creates zombie warriors to advance his own cause, the overthrow of the Deicrats and the religion they have established. Yet he and Sam are poles apart. Nirriti, the First expedition's chaplain, is driven by his calling, and would see the

"'true'" faith - Christianity - instituted at any cost. Ironically, it is only as a result of the fanatic's struggle against the deicrats that the Accelerationists finally manage, after a fifty years' conflict, to overthrow the despots, resulting in the emancipation of the people and the unshackling of knowledge and technology to play a part in instituting a more humane social order. It is a humanistic victory nonetheless, for Nirriti and his soulless legions are annihilated in breaking the power of the 'Gods' he despises, ultimately leaving the victory with the libertarians. The conflict consists of vast battles, full of carnage and resulting in inconclusive, usually pyrrhic victories. However, before Roberts's closing argument in Pavane (that the Church's oppression prevented slaughter by keeping science from the people) attracts any spurious merit by default, it should be recalled that Zelazny's terrible epic battles are paper ones of only allegorical significance, whereas Roberts's 'Court of Spiritual Welfare' has a real counterpart, which itself failed to suppress knowledge 'until men would be ready for it', though its persistent efforts cost many lives.

While there is much more in this award-winning novel which invites discussion, in the present context the focus necessarily must be upon how adroitly the author wove ancient Upanishad and modern symbolism together to produce a compelling allegory of aspiration and dogmatic religious oppression. Hypocrisy and oppression may not be the most striking aspect of Hinduism, which after all has not quite had the centralised role of the Medieval Christian Church and some of its Protestant offspring, but in most other respects - above all in that of religious elitism, there called 'election' and here 'caste' - it is just as open to cynical exploitation as these others. Hinduism

offers its own counterparts to those of Western beliefs which have so dominated the works already discussed in this study, there being, for instance, enlightenment for knowledge, nirvana for transcendental attainment, karmic burdens to be expiated, and so on. Fittingly, it is Buddhism, rather than any Western Christian creed, which here provides the "liberation theology" used to counter the autocratic Brahmanism adopted by the First. Ultimately, though, even Buddhism is little more than a religious means to a humane end, as Sam indicates in rejecting emphatically the recognition "'Buddha'" which the faithful would have conferred on him, though he is also known passim as "'Siddhartha.'" Thus, in Lord of Light, no religion - Hindu, Buddhist or Christian - contributes to the theme conventionally, as its actual counterpart might, a clear confirmation that they are used as sources of myth and images in telling a story wherein aspiration is more highly valued than dogma or orthodox religious conviction. One feels that there is also at least a hint of Wellsian religious utilitarianism present - "fashion the religion for yourselves which will help you get on", as it were - for Sam's kind of Buddhism has little of the gentle tranquillity of real Buddhism; rather, it is an instrument of social reform, a 'smokescreen for his actions,' as Joseph V. Francavilla has put it(39).

With their technical control of the wholly commercialized process of spirit (atman) transfer from old body to new, the Deicrats may now extend their hegemony completely. As Jan explains to Sam, not even one's thoughts (Winston Smith's last resort in another, older book) are wholly secure:

The old religion is not only the religion - it is the revealed, enforced and frighteningly demonstrable religion. But don't think that last part too loudly. About a dozen years ago the Council authorized the use of psych-probes on

those who were up for renewal. This was right after the Accelerationist-Deicrat split, when the Holy Coalition squeezed out the tech boys and kept right on squeezing. The simplest solution was to outlive the problem. The Temple crowd then made a deal with the body-sellers, customers were brain-probed and Accelerationists refused renewal, or... well..simple as that. There aren't too many Accelerationists now. But that was only the beginning. The god party was quick to realize that therein lay the way of power. Having your brains scanned has become a standard procedure, just prior to transfer. The body merchants are become the Masters of Karma, and a part of the Temple structure. They read over your past life, weigh the Karma, and determine your life yet to come. It's a perfect way of maintaining the caste system and ensuring Deicratic control. By the way, most of our old acquaintances are in it up to their halos.'

'God!' said Sam.

'Plural,' Jan corrected. 'They've always been considered gods, with their Aspects and Attributes, but they've made it awfully official now. And anyone who happens to be among the first had bloody well better be sure whether he wants quick deification or the pyre when he walks into the Hall of Karma these days.'

Lord of Light, pp.52-53

This factitious theocracy, however outwardly exotic, follows the familiar pattern: the divine attributes of the Hindu pantheon the crew have assumed are furnished by technology in a war between humanity and their 'gods', who are more Dionysian than, for instance, Wells's Apollonian Utopians. Moreover, though the religious morality of this Eastern faith is manifestly different from that of Christianity, its social role has been presented in significantly similar terms, and not just because the First brought occidental values with them in their ship, 'The Star of India'. The religious ethic and scriptures of this world are effectively another, colourful version of Kingsley's 'constable's handbook.'

This observation begs the question, however, of whether this occurs because all the main religions of the world are homologous, or because Zelazny is taking up, consciously or not, an established line of generic scepticism about the social role of religions, and about man's special propensity to worship. Both are, one suspects, to an

extent the correct interpretations of his outlook - assuming, of course, that he is not simply writing foma to earn a living, but is more deeply engaged in his own epic:

Though the whole book shows the Hindu Gods manipulating people, events, and demons, Sam is "a man of destiny," as Yama calls him, who, after a long struggle, seems to have graduated from being a pawn in someone else's game to a king in a game of his own devising.

Again, Sam does not believe in his sermons, his Buddhism, or his own godhood. He repeatedly rejects the idea that he is Buddha, and yet is worshipped by men as such.

40.

Indeed, one special feature of Lord of Light is the distinction Zelazny makes between ambition and aspiration. Before leaving this colourful novel, though, it is certainly worth weighing up how he presents the respective characteristics of man-as-god, and man-as-hubrist. Here Yama is trying to, in Milton's words, 'justify the ways of God to men':

'You are wrong, Sam. Godhood is more than a name. It is a condition of being. One does not achieve it merely by being immortal, for even the lowliest laborer in the fields may achieve continuity of existence. Is it then the conditioning of an Aspect? No. Any competent hypnotist can play games with the self-image. Is it the raising up of an attribute? Of course not. I can design machines more powerful and accurate than any faculty a man may cultivate. Being a god is the quality of being able to be yourself to such an extent that your passions correspond with the forces of the universe, so that those who look upon you know this without hearing your name spoken. Some ancient poet said that the world is full of echoes and correspondences. Another wrote a long poem of an inferno, wherein each man suffered a torture which coincided in nature with those forces which had ruled his life. Being a god is being able to recognize within one's self these things that are important, and then strike the single note that brings them into alignment with everything else that exists. Then, beyond morals or logic or esthetics, one is wind or fire, the sea, the mountains, rain, the sun or the stars, the flight of an arrow, the end of a day, the clasp of love. One rules through one's ruling passion. Those who look upon gods then say, without even knowing their names, "He is Fire. She is Dance. He is Destruction. She is Love." So, to reply to your statement, they do not call themselves gods. Everyone else does, though, everyone who beholds them.'

Lord of Light, p.145

However inspired and impassioned Yama's theme, Sam is not prepared to accept this answer to what Wells saw as the paradox of human godhood, replying scornfully: "'So they play that on their fascist banjos, eh?'" The amoral 'Gods' of the pantheon determine the morals and circumscribe the aspirations of their caste inferiors. Thus the elitism of Wellsian logical positivism, implicitly rejected by Bokanon, is just as speedily dismissed for its shallowness and arrogance by Sam.

In the novel's action, the gods maintain power by concentrating on some part of themselves and clinging to it forever, world without end, but in doing so they become so wrapped up in themselves as they were that they cannot cope with the present. Trying to preserve a static, peaceful society, they organize increasingly cataclysmic battles. Their accomplishment, finally, is folly. Sam does not take himself so seriously - except when he is overcome by hubris during the battle for Keenset - but he practices more wisdom. He is not sure exactly who he is or what he can do; however, he is free to improvise brilliantly on new opportunities and new abilities he finds in himself. The novel's overall action demonstrates the deadly sterility of refusing to change, and the ultimate viability of accepting natural growth. Sam's way finally works.

41.

Why, then, does Sam value his humanity more than Yama's counterfeit godhood? Not merely because he knows how contrived that status is; for he also actively prefers the frustrations as well as the triumphs of authentic human experience:

'It is because I am a man who occasionally aspires to things beyond the belly and the phallus. I am not the saint the Buddhists think me to be, and I am not the hero out of legend. I am a man who knows much fear, and who occasionally feels guilt. Mainly, though, I am a man who has set out to do a thing, and you are now blocking my way. Thus you inherit my curse - whether I win or whether I lose now, Taraka, your destiny has already been altered. This is the curse of the Buddha - you will never be the same as once you were.'

Lord of Light, p.125

And again:

'...all men have within them both that which is dark and that which is light. A man is a thing of many divisions, not a pure, clear flame such as you once were. His intellect often wars with his emotions, his will with his desires...his ideals are at odds with his environment, and if he follows

them, he knows keenly the loss of that which was old, but if he does not follow them, he feels the pain of having forsaken a new and noble dream. Whatever he does represents both a gain and a loss, an arrival and departure. Always he mourns that which is gone and fears some part of that which is new. Reason opposes tradition. Emotions oppose the restrictions his fellow men lay upon him. Always, from the friction of these things, there arises the thing you called the curse of man and mocked - guilt!

Lord of Light, p.127

Sam, as the reincarnation of Siddhartha the Enlightened One, speaks with authority. In many respects a sceptical sort of Ransom, Lewis's allegorical Christian leader, Sam's personal fate is of teleological significance because he strives to change Man, to promote a general emancipation and the fuller development of humanity. Technophilic self-transcendence is not genuine metempsychosis, but only allows one some of the prerogatives of divinity, wielding power - however responsibly - not being synonymous with godhood. Zelazny clearly proves how well he appreciates the essential flaw in the anti-humanistic obsession with power of Victor Frankenstein, Mardok, and their unscrupulous successors, these selfish, decadent 'gods' he invented for Lord of Light. Mahasamatman's humanistic sensibility attracts Zelazny's fullest commitment:

Zelazny's flawed protagonists nevertheless exemplify what is noble, admirable and divine in man. Zelazny's gods and godlike heroes vastly extend the range of experiences and the potential of humanity; Zelazny is defining 'human' in terms of the 'divine,' showing the qualities of gods that can be imparted to man.

42.

Consequently, Zelazny preserves the possibility of genuine human self-transcendence (which for many humanists carries the force of an ethical commitment) for in his terms "aspiration", as Sam's rejection of 'Godhood' shows, is not the same as "ambition". The role of an enlightened one is the subject common to the fiction which falls to be discussed next.

The Prophet of Futility and the Royal Faustus.

Vonnegut offers the reader of Cat's Cradle a Bokonist warning that: 'Anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either.' Vonnegut's is not by any means an unique view: other authors have used an ironic denouement to expose the credulity of those committed to any such deceitful beliefs, inviting the reader to share the authorial contempt or derision. Of course, Vonnegut's ironic caveat begs an important question: in what way can a religion be 'useful'? Vonnegut's consistent response - in any way or none at all - takes us little further forward. Zelazny offers a humanistic exploitation of religion; in Dune, Herbert follows Heinlein's lead, easily surpasses the very limited achievement of Revolt in 2100, and sweeps forward into the avant garde domain of metempsychotic fiction which is explored in the next chapter. Dune can be seen as a transitional work which passes from the conventional and well-worn into more speculative themes. On the other hand, The Sirens of Titan can be seen as a sophisticated parody of the sort of science fiction of which Dune is widely held to be the unsurpassed exemplar(43).

The Sirens of Titan(1959), like Cat's Cradle, is imbued with Vonnegut's perceptive scepticism. Although the earlier novel is the sligher of the two(44), it is also more polemical about organized religion and the value attached to revealed truth by the devout. In this, his second novel, Vonnegut reveals the beginnings of his disaffection with science fiction despite the success of Player Piano. More importantly, in The Sirens of Titan Vonnegut seems to hold out the admittedly tenuous hope (quite overlooked in most critical discussions of this book) that human nature can be reformed, which

contrasts sharply with the bleak nihilism he would later present in Cat's Cradle.

By setting The Sirens of Titan against the other two novels its most interesting features can be seen. It differs from the others in being slightly less of an exercise in satiric denunciation of vain hope. In Player Piano Vonnegut offers no hint of hope for the reformation of the human sensibility - rebellion fails because the mechanisation of human life has been allowed to advance to the point of no return, and the rebels, not knowing what to do with their meagre opportunity, surrender. Similarly, Cat's Cradle ends with a frozen world and the demise of a human race long since dead in a moral sense after vesting all their hope and faith in an inscrutable and hence quite notional divine being who is not Providential. Vonnegut's God, who is the opposite of Verne's, does not intervene to save Mankind from the consequences of ambition, natural carelessness and irresponsibility. Not unexpectedly, much the same themes run through The Sirens of Titan, but there is also the deceptive prospect of a different order of things:

"To that end, devoutly to be wished," said Rumfoord, "I bring you word of a new religion that can be received enthusiastically in every corner of every Earthling heart.

"National borders," said Rumfoord, "will disappear.

"The lust for war," said Rumfoord, "will die.

"The name of the new religion," said Rumfoord, "is The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent.

"The flag of that church will be blue and gold," said Rumfoord. "These words will be written on that flag in gold letters on a blue field: Take Care of the People, and God Almighty Will Take Care of Himself.

"The two chief teachings of this religion are these," said Rumfoord: "Puny man can do nothing at all to help or please God Almighty, and Luck is not the hand of God.

The Sirens of Titan, p.128

Rumfoord goes on to promote this new creed in the unmistakeable language of modern advertising copy - "Why should you believe in

this religion, rather than any other? You should believe in it because I, as head of this religion, can work miracles, and the head of no other religion can. What miracles can I work? I can work the miracle of predicting, with absolute accuracy, the things that the future will bring.'" Alas for Rumfoord and his victims, he is wrong.

Like Doctor Faustus, Niles Winston Rumfoord has enjoyed everything mundane life can offer, and has grown weary of his privileges. Seeking a new challenge, he embarks on a foolhardy space voyage with his dog Kazak. Vonnegut does not stress the apostate nature of Rumfoord's venture, explaining it instead in terms of 'pure courage,' 'style' and 'gallantry.' This is a central point, for Rumfoord's daring is Promethean rather than Faustian. In the universe which Vonnegut portrays in The Sirens of Titan, God is not so much absent as indifferent or out of the picture, and people are induced to adopt Rumfoord as a surrogate. Malachi Constant's cherished notion that 'someone up there likes me' (which Rumfoord condescendingly calls 'charming') is thoroughly and brutally exploded in the novel. The familiar pattern of divine vengeance inflicted upon an hubristic would-be usurper - Rumfoord being the novel's best candidate for this dubious distinction - is not employed by Vonnegut in an immediately recognizable way. The pattern is made more complex by Vonnegut's insistence that God is indifferent to human actions. Rumfoord is a sort of sceptical Prometheus whose ambiguous gift to mankind is spiritual rather than technological. Moreover, his audacious expropriation of divine prerogatives indicate that, consciously structured or not, the pattern of Rumfoord's story is Promethean however anti-heroic his protagonist is made to seem.

Kazak and Rumfoord become trapped in a spatio-temporal anomaly

(a 'chrono-synclastic infundibulum' or '"time-funnel"'), and must resign themselves to traversing the continuum of space-time, returning only briefly and rarely to their native locus. During this involuntary journeying back and forth through infinity Rumfoord visits Titan and there encounters Salo, a Tralfamadorian messenger who supplies him with a quantity of 'Universal Will to Become.' Thus equipped, Rumfoord may do anything he pleases. Unlike Faustus, Rumfoord seems determined to use this 'UWTB' benevolently. Also, all Salo wants of Rumfoord is friendship while he waits to resume his interrupted journey; but while there may not be a Mephistophelean contract in the background, Rumfoord is himself destined to be the victim of a truly cosmic irony.

Rumfoord believes that through having been 'chrono-synclastically infundibulated' he has actually become quasi-divine, and unique knowledge and power is his to wield. His cynical manipulation of "lesser" mortals marks him as an anti-hero. He establishes 'The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent,' exploiting his understanding of the fore-ordained future to earn himself the kudos of godhood, which his religion-ridden sublunary fellows readily accord him in recognition of his manifest ability to foretell the future. For all that Vonnegut insists that Rumfoord is only a showman, 'passionately fond of great spectacles' and that 'he never gave in to the temptation to declare himself God or something a whole lot like God' (p.169), he relishes the role and seems as much an omnipotent character as Orwell's O'Brien.

Vonnegut figuratively belittles religious belief by including vivid if whimsical sketches of Rumfoord's cult. He also caricatures a more conventional American creed (the Love Crusade led by the Rev.

Bobby Denton); and since Rumfoord himself (a man of only 'very moderate greatness' as Vonnegut calls him at one point) is allowed to play God, Vonnegut satirizes credulous spirituality. Ironically, Rumfoord is not in fact a deity, sardonic or otherwise, for even he is as helpless to change the course of events as anyone else. However, he is sure that he knows what is happening, and why, and therefore is the beneficiary of an uniquely complete perspective of everything that happens:

"I can read your mind, you know," said Rumfoord.

"Can you?" said Constant humbly.

"Easiest thing in the world," said Rumfoord. His eyes twinkled. "You're not a bad sort, you know," he said, "particularly when you forget who you are." He touched Constant lightly on the arm. It was a politician's gesture - a vulgar public gesture by a man who in private, among his own kind, would take wincing pains never to touch anyone.

"If it's really so important to you, at this stage of our relationship, to feel superior to me in some way," he said to Constant pleasantly, "think of this: You can reproduce and I cannot.

The Sirens of Titan, p.17

Nor is Rumfoord an agonized or sacrificial Redeemer, for his own suffering is, if anything, merely that of corporeal separation from a world he has symbolically rejected with a journey into space. Rather, he is a prophet of the futility of human theosophy who facilitates the unfolding of the course of events and exploits the guilt and suffering of others - Vonnegut describes him as being 'genially willing to shed the blood of others'- in order to effect an agnostic but spiritual reformation of Man, so that '"Earthlings might at last become one people - joyful, fraternal, and proud.'"(p.127) Of such importance is this justification of Rumfoord's motives that Vonnegut virtually spells it out in explaining why he has assembled and then had destroyed his pathetic army of Martian invaders (Earth's casualties 461 killed, 223 wounded and 216 missing; Martian casualties

149,315 killed, 446 wounded, 11 captured, and 46,634 missing).

It was Rumfoord's intention that Mars should lose the war - that Mars should lose it foolishly and horribly. As a seer of the future, Rumfoord knew for certain that this would be the case - and he was content.

He wished to change the World for the better by means of the great and unforgettable suicide of Mars.

As he says in his Pocket History of Mars: "Any man who would change the World in a significant way must have showmanship, a genial willingness to shed other people's blood, and a plausible new religion to introduce during the brief period of repentance and horror that usually follows bloodshed.

"Every failure of Earth leadership has been traceable to a lack on the part of the leader," says Rumfoord, "of at least one of these three things."

"Enough of these fizzles of leadership, in which millions die for nothing or less!" says Rumfoord. "Let us have, for a change, a magnificently-led few who die for a great deal."

The Sirens of Titan, p.124

Rumfoord's consistent response to grief is to shrug it off. In his god-game, he is the supreme player. None of his millions of pawns have much, if any, choice. Of course, he does have an overall game-plan, which is revealed towards the end of the novel in a sort of early denouement in which he holds up a mirror for Man to see himself as he really is. The occasion Rumfoord chooses for this self-righteous revelation is the return of Unk, the Space Wanderer (alias Malachi Constant), which fulfills his main prediction. The Job of the story, Malachi Constant is reduced from being a fortunate man whose unfailing luck has brought him enormous wealth and a reprehensible lifestyle to symbol for the worst excesses of hedonism, greed and moral corruption. Rumfoord himself attends to ensure that the moralitas of his living parable - 'When Rumfoord staged a passion play, he used nothing but real people in real hells.' (p.168) - is not lost on those present, and delivers an authoritative sermon in which he denounces Constant vehemently before deporting him to Titan to live out his remaining years:

"We are disgusted by Malachi Constant," said Winston Niles Rumfoord up in his treetop, "because he used the fantastic fruits of his fantastic good luck to finance an unending demonstration that man is a pig. He wallowed in sycophants. He wallowed in worthless women. He wallowed in lascivious entertainments and alcohol and drugs. He wallowed in every known form of voluptuous turpitude.

"At the height of his good luck, Malachi Constant was worth more than the states of Utah and North Dakota combined. Yet, I daresay, his moral worth was not that of the most corrupt little fieldmouse in either state.

"We are angered by Malachi Constant," said Rumfoord up in his treetop, "because he did nothing unselfish or imaginative with his billions. He was as benevolent as Marie Antoinette, as creative as a professor of cosmetology in an embalming college.

"We hate Malachi Constant," said Rumfoord up in his treetop, "because he accepted the fantastic fruits of his fantastic good luck without a qualm, as though luck were the hand of God. To us of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent, there is nothing more cruel, more dangerous, more blasphemous than a man can do than to believe that - that luck, good or bad, is the hand of God!

"Luck, good or bad," said Rumfoord up in his treetop, "is not the hand of God.

"Luck," said Rumfoord up in his treetop, "is the way the wind swirls and the dust settles eons after God has passed by.

The Sirens of Titan, p.177

Through his protracted suffering, Malachi Constant has been taught by Rumfoord, the sardonic master of ceremonies, that accidents, not Providence, have shaped his life. The corollary is that people bear an inescapable burden of responsibility for their actions which they may not avoid by attributing everything to the hand of God. Yet characters like Constant and Bee alias Beatrice have experiences which are not foreordained by Rumfoord, such as when Unk finds Chrono almost as soon as he decides to abscond from Mars with him and his mother. Rumfoord does not ordain every event, and though he tries to stage-manage things to promote the moral regeneration of mankind, he cannot control everything. Luck, accident or Providence plays its part, whatever he says; when Bee and Chrono are the only survivors of their crashed assault ship, who or what sequence of accidents has preserved them?

The regenerative moral standards and vision are Rumfoord's, and are essentially conservative: he condemns hedonistic corruption and by implication promotes idealistic ("imaginative") unselfishness. Being wealthy (as Rumfoord himself was while earthbound) is not necessarily offensive, if the power the money represents is not squandered and somehow contributes to the common good. Of course, this moral perspective is distinctively bourgeois, reflecting as it does the "common-sensical" ethics of liberal capitalist Middle America. Vonnegut exposes Rumfoord's ideals by weaving around them a contrasting narrative imbued with post-modernist uncertainties about the existence of God, the worth of religion, the notion that one may act in accordance with conscience and of one's own free will, the sanctity of the individual, the corporate threat of the technological society, and even, as will be noted later, the very nature and purpose of human existence. Rumfoord's sublime self-assurance is itself ill-founded. Yet however sceptical and iconoclastic Vonnegut's opinions may seem, they belie a profound commitment to commonplace moral standards rather than the positivist, relativistic moral perspective of Wells, Skinner et al.

A ritual scapegoat, Constant is deported to Titan in an inverted parody of the Ascension of Christ so that the whole world may be freed from sin:

"In a few minutes, Mr.Constant," said Rumfoord up in his treetop, "you are going to walk down the catwalks and ramps to that long golden ladder, and you are going to climb that ladder, and you are going to get into that space ship, and you are going to fly away to Titan, a warm and fecund moon of Saturn. You will live there in safety and comfort, but in exile from your native Earth.

"You are going to do this voluntarily, Mr.Constant, so that the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent can have a drama of dignified self-sacrifice to remember and ponder through all time.

"We will imagine, to our spiritual satisfaction," said Rumfoord up his treetop, "that you are taking all mistaken ideas about the meaning of luck, all misused wealth and power, and all disgusting pastimes with you."

The Sirens of Titan, pp.179-180.

Rumfoord is completing his scheme of spiritual renaissance by publicly absolving the whole human race of the burden of wrongdoing and allowing every believer a fresh start. Of course, this act is no more genuine than the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent which was merely an instrument of social and personal reformation; but within the terms of Vonnegut's plot and perverse premises - 'All persons, places, and events in this book are real' (prefatory Dedication, p.6) - it is consistent, satisfying, and in complete accord with his line that all religions and theosophy are factitious, invented in response to the spiritual propensity of consciousness.

Things do not go wholly Rumfoord's way, however. The first hint that something is seriously going wrong with his plans is when Beatrice, the society wife he rejected, condemns him and his Church roundly before leaving with Malachi and their son Chrono for Titan.

"I believe everything you say about me is true, since you so seldom lie. But when my son and I walk together to that ladder and climb it, we will not be doing it for you, or for your silly crowd. We will be doing it for ourselves - and we will be proving to ourselves and anybody who wants to watch that we aren't afraid of anything. Our hearts won't be breaking when we leave this planet. It disgusts us as much as we, under your guidance, disgust it.

"I do not recall the old days," said Beatrice, "when I was mistress of this estate, when I could not stand to do anything or to have anything done to me. But I loved myself the instant you told me I'd been that way. The human race is a scummy thing, and so is Earth, and so are you."

The Sirens of Titan, pp.184-185.

Her defiance is a moral challenge. Once an emblem of affluent decadence, of spiritual emptiness, her misanthropic declaration that everything about the world is "'scummy'" reflects the extent of her suffering on Mars and elsewhere which Rumfoord orchestrated. Her fate

at his hands shows that his motives are ambiguous; one inference is that revenge plays a part in his vendetta against her. He inflicts joyless sexual experience on her in revenge for her hauteur and, more damningly, his own inadequacy. Rumfoord has even personally arranged for Malachi Constant to cuckold him as a vengeful rebuke for Beatrice and the child of that maliciously-motivated union provides the key to Rumfoord's own moral lesson. Ironically, the most serious flaw in his scheme is about to overwhelm his entire arrogant strategy. When Rumfoord returns to Titan, Salo, the stranded interstellar traveller, unwittingly drops a bombshell.

Tralfamadorians usually communicate with one another by telepathy, but on a voyage such as Salo's they must adopt another method. They send "'certain impulses from the Universal Will to Become'" echoing through "'the vaulted architecture of the Universe with about three times the speed of light.'" The apparatus required is literally monumental, and constitutes an authorial joke on human creativity and endeavour:

The meaning of Stonehenge in Tralfamadorian, when viewed from above is: "Replacement part being rushed with all possible speed."

Stonehenge wasn't the only message old Salo had received.

There had been four others, all of them written on Earth.

The Great Wall of China means in Tralfamadorian, when viewed from above: "Be patient. We haven't forgotten about you."

The Golden House of the Roman Emperor Nero meant: "We are doing the best we can."

The meaning of the Moscow Kremlin when it was first walled was: "You will be on your way before you know it."

The meaning of the Palace of the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, is: "Pack up your things and be ready to leave at short notice."

The Sirens of Titan, p.190

All of Rumfoord's high-handed, Machiavellian manipulation is, in these terms, merely the last stage in the process of rushing Salo the spare he needs. His Promethean efforts, then, and the impulses which

inspired them - in common with the whole social history of Mankind - have been in response to esoteric directions designed to produce and deliver the component for Salo's vehicle. If like a Frankenstein he has sought to reform mankind in his own (moral) likeness, this presumption has been rewarded with ironic success for even he has been merely a pawn, a link in a chain of consequences rather than accidents. As it turns out, the final link in that chain is Chrono.

Chrono's good luck piece is the spare part for the spaceship which will allow Salo to continue his journey to deliver the Tralfamadorian message "Greetings". Rumfoord realizes bitterly that he himself has been used, and through him, everyone else. So much for his "humane" idealism, his conviction that some mere hundreds of thousands of his earthbound fellows could be sacrificed to show Mankind the error of their selfish ways. The whole story has demonstrated the futility of trying to understand one's fate:

...the discovery that conventional human identity is a form of cultural imprisonment may be as harrowing for the alien mind as it is for those most directly concerned. ...Kurt Vonnegut in The Sirens of Titan(1959) shows both humans and aliens realising that their supposed identity is a form of conditioning, a literal 'alienation' that has been programmed into them for reasons unknown. Winston Niles Rumfoord disappears after announcing that the goal of human history has been the production of a tiny spare part for a Tralfamadorian spaceship. When Salo, the Tralfamadorian, discovers that the message his grounded spaceship is trying to deliver consists of the one word 'Greetings', he commits suicide. ...In Vonnegut...the viewpoint of the 'alien' is hard to distinguish from that of an alienated humanity.

45.

Vonnegut goes on to suggest that two important developments have occurred. Salo, the mechanical alien, is so moved by Rumfoord's imminent dissolution that he becomes "humanised" and breaks his undertaking not to read the message he carries: "'The machine is no longer a machine... This machine's contacts are corroded, his

bearings fouled, his circuits shorted, and his gears stripped. His mind buzzes and pops like the mind of an Earthling - fizzles and overheats with thoughts of love, honour, dignity, rights, accomplishment, integrity, independence"" The other twist emerges from Rumfoord's mawkish last testament:

"All I can say is that I have tried to do my best to do good for my native Earth while serving the irresistible wishes of Tralfamadore. Perhaps, now that the part has been delivered to the Tralfamadorian messenger, Tralfamadore will leave the Solar System alone. Perhaps Earthlings will now be free to develop and follow their own inclinations, as they have not been free to do for thousands of years. The wonder is that they have been able to make as much sense as they have."

The Sirens of Titan, p.208.

Rumfoord's attachment to pretending always to have been acting from the highest moral imperatives is exposed as hypocrisy if his role as an autocratic, unsympathetic manipulator is seen in the light of his own response to Salo's revelation. He thinks himself a Promethean provider of self-knowledge to his mundane fellows through the medium of his wholly artificial creed, but Rumfoord's spiritual utopia is as flawed as its architect was fallible. He can forgive himself his self-serving vanity since he considers himself to be the greatest sceptic in the human universe, and believes his 'gift' is worth the suffering it demands and causes. In still striving to sound supernal, he reveals that his vanity is undiminished; he also feels aggrieved, betrayed - unlike Malachi and Beatrice, he has learned nothing. They prove that human nature is capable of change and growth; Rumfoord suggests its immaturity and potential excesses. Seeing our predicament as a tendency to hubristic defiance and self-aggrandizement, Vonnegut's hope for mankind subsists in our recognition of modest moral principles whose merit is self-evident and axiomatic, like Malachi Constant's perception that ""a purpose of human life, no

matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved.'"(p.220) God may seem remote - even absent - but the universe has a transcendent redemptive principle, as Chrono (who does not have 'a sense of futility and disorder') seems to perceive as he stands among Salo's wreckage: 'Sooner or later, Chrono believed, the magical forces of the Universe would put everything back together again.'(p.211) Salo is reconstructed by Constant and in return eases his lonely death by returning him to Earth where he dies believing that he is going to join Beatrice in Paradise, freed from the crippling guilt of having killed his only friend Stony. Salo resumes his interrupted journey having thus performed a modest but important compassionate act which suggests, in a final symbolic refutation of Rumfoord's creed of petulant futility, the workings of Providence and a muted soteriological hope.

Rumfoord declared that, '"Any man who would change the World in a significant way must have showmanship, a genial willingness to shed other people's blood, and a plausible new religion to introduce.'" All three elements of his formula can be found in Frank Herbert's Dune.

A factitious religion, again based upon the personality cult which develops around a charismatic figure is the central unifying principle of Dune. Paul Atreides keeps his major military resource, the ironically-named 'Fremen', under tight control by the inspirational use of his extraordinary personal abilities (he is, amongst other things, a "seer"), his superb technology, and his exploitation of their dependence upon a sacramental drug.

Even a superficial reading of this novel will reveal its humanistic themes and religious symbolisms. There can be little doubt about the centrality of religious themes in a work which includes an

appendix detailing the workings and structure of the factitious creed of the Fremmen. There is also a glossary which distinguishes between 'figh' and 'giudichar' as distinct types of religious lore; explains that the 'gom jabbar' is a 'death-alternative test of human awareness'; defines the 'Panoplia Prophetica' as 'the infectious superstitions used by the Bene Gesserit to exploit primitive regions'; and describes the eclectic scriptures of the future, 'The Orange Catholic Bible', thus:

...the 'Accumulated Book,' [is] the religious text produced by the Commission of Ecumenical Translators. It contains elements of most ancient religions, including the Maometh Saari, Mahayana Christianity, Zensunni Catholicism and Buddislamic traditions. Its supreme commandment is considered to be: 'Thou shalt not disfigure the soul.'

Dune, p.499.

Conceptually at least, the factitious religions of Dune parallell Monica's critique of Christianity as a 'syncretistic' creed in Moorcock's later Behold the Man: "'Christianity is just a new name for a conglomeration of old myths and philosophies. All the Gospels do is retell the sun myth and garble some of the ideas from the Greeks and Romans.'" Again like Moorcock's later hero, Atrides/Maud'dib is assailed by a sense of personal loss in assuming a messianic role, and his predicament and uncertainty are a major theme Herbert explores in the paradox this throws up. In fulfilling his destiny to become Maud'dib, Paul Atrides will lose himself, for there is a high price to pay in giving the myth its own reality.

Monica argued that Christianity is, due to its eclectic provenance, a cultural phenomenon with little significance outside that context. Clearly some of the religions of Dune reflect such a sceptical view, as they are depicted as vehicles for propaganda intended to support the cynical manipulation of credulous people much

as the ministers of the Butler's musical banks swindle the worthy in Erewhon. Yet in Dune Herbert offers something more, no less than the story of how a charismatic leader becomes a messiah whose powers, unlike Glogauer's, are genuinely miraculous. Paul attains thereby the veneration and power which tempted - and quite eluded - Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein. Paul Atreides, alias Usul, alias Maud'Dib and the Kwisatz Haderach of the Bene Gesserit, is a royal Faustus whose highest ambitions are ultimately realized, but whose corrupting appetite for power grows apace with his emergence as a Fremen leader and their transfigured saviour. The question of his freedom of choice is complicated by the genetic configuration the Bene Gesserit have bred into him. Ambition is a predetermined feature of his character which sustains his noble struggle against the Harkonnens but also slowly corrupts his benevolent intentions into a drive for ever greater dominion.

Although Dune's main narrative describes how the personality cult surrounding a charismatic leader is transformed into a mystical religion, there is much else to this impressive novel besides an exploration of the nature of religion and its social role.

Against the sweeping backdrop of a future intergalactic human society riven by commercial rivalry, adapted men, a savage dynastic conflict and technological ruthlessness, the novel tells the story of how the only son of a noble house involved in a court vendetta emerges as the leader of the redoubtable Fremen of Arrakis. Herbert provides a host of apocryphal 'background' sources which relate the 'history' of the breeding programme of Bene Gesserit, chronicle the Fremen diaspora and refer to the defeat of the Imperium as if the story is historical rather than a projection of a fictive future, and

he includes factual encyclopaedia entries, appendices, and even an extensive glossary which support his narrative. Yet for all the intricacy of the main and subsidiary plots and themes of Dune, and the pains taken by Herbert to give seeming substance to his densely-crafted creation, Dune is a more straightforward novel than The Sirens of Titan. It is enthralling and epic in scale, but unlike Vonnegut's fiction Dune only has one area of sustained ambiguity - Paul's paranormal talents and the moral vision they generate - whereas ambiguity is the dominant principle of Vonnegut's stories.

The story opens as the Atriedes retainers and the family themselves are preparing to leave their native fief Caladan to take over control of Arrakis (otherwise known as Dune) from their powerful enemies, the Harkonnens, at the command of the Emperor. Paul, only son of Duke Leto Atriedes, has survived the Bene Gesserit test administered by the Reverend Mother and so has been established at the outset as a genuine human, possibly the Kwisatch Haderach the breeding programme of the B.G. has sought to create eugenically. After this test, young Paul feels a strange new 'sense of terrible purpose' awaken within him. Also, some of the Reverend Mother's revelations provoke him, for they offend his 'instinct for rightness,' but before long he himself will have been forced to take morally suspect measures in fighting to establish a proper foothold on Arrakis, 'the biggest mantrap in history,' as the Baron Vladimir Harkonnen gloatingly calls the planet the Atreides must master.

The Harkonnens have prepared their killing ground well before reluctantly giving up their control of the lucrative trade in melange, the geriatric spice unique to Arrakis. Leto is an early casualty, the Caladanians are overthrown, and Paul and his B.G.

mother Jessica escape into the deserts controlled by the mysterious Fremen. Paul and Jessica have been reduced to the status of refugees, but Herbert depicts in the second book of Dune how they are trained by the Fremen to live and fight in the desert. Paul possesses a prescient faculty which allows him to see the future and plan accordingly (much as Rumfoord does in The Sirens of Titan), but he cannot muster Rumfoord's easy assuredness because his visions are cryptic, dark and violent, filled with the shadow of jihad - fanatic, holy war:

'Now, what name of manhood do you choose for us to call you openly?' Stilgar asked.

Paul glanced at his mother, back to Stilgar. Bits and pieces of this moment registered on his prescient memory, but he felt the differences as though they were physical, a pressure forcing him through the narrow door of the present.

'How do you call among you the little mouse, the mouse that jumps?' Paul asked, remembering the pop-hop of motion at Tuono Basin. He illustrated with one hand.

A chuckle sounded through the troop.

'We call that one maud'dib,' Stilgar said.

Jessica gasped. It was the name Paul had told her, saying that the Fremen would accept them and call him thus. She felt a sudden fear of her son and for him.

Paul swallowed. He felt that he played a part already played over countless times in his mind...yet... there were differences. He could see himself perched on a dizzying summit, having experienced much and possessed of a profound store of knowledge, but all around him was abyss.

And again he remembered the vision of fanatic legions following the green and black banner of the Atreides, pillaging and burning in the name of their prophet Maud'Dib.

That must not happen, he told himself.

Dune, p.292

These visions haunt and terrify Paul, but his terror is not purely personal. Again and again he resolves that they must never come to pass, but he does not know how he can prevent his awful prescient dreams becoming a hideous reality.

Two things, apart from their independence and their dignity, are of paramount importance to Fremen: water and the geriatric spice melange, which is produced by the giant sand-worms of Dune. These are

brought together in a sacred ritual, which gives Jessica an opportunity to win acceptance from the Fremen for herself, her unborn daughter, and Paul. By drowning an immature sandworm in the most precious substance on Arrakis, water, the native tribespeople are able to acquire a special form of melange. This liquor is the basis of a prized drug which engenders a sense of mutuality throughout the whole tribe, but in the raw form the drug is quite toxic. It can only be converted by a Reverend Mother's conscious metabolic restructuring. Jessica, herself a Bene Gesserit adept, is more or less compelled to attempt the conversion of the spice liquor because the tribe's Reverend Mother is on the point of dying. What happens takes Jessica utterly aback:

This is a drug they feed me, Jessica told herself.

But it was unlike any other drug of her experience, and Bene Gesserit training included the taste of many drugs.

Chani's features were so clear, as though outlined in light.

A drug.

Whirling silence settled around Jessica. Every fibre of her body accepted the fact that something profound had happened to it. She felt that she was a conscious mote, smaller than any subatomic particle, yet capable of motion, and of sensing her surroundings. Like an abrupt revelation - the curtains whipped away - she realized she had become aware of a psychokinesthetic extension of herself. She was the mote, yet not the mote.

The cavern remained around her - the people. She sensed them: Paul, Chani, Stilgar, the Reverend Mother Ramallo.

Reverend Mother!

At the school there had been rumours that some did not survive the Reverend Mother ordeal, that the drug took them.

Jessica focused her attention on the Reverend Mother Ramallo, aware now that all this was happening in a frozen instant of time - suspended time for her alone.

Why is time suspended? she asked herself. She stared at the frozen expressions around her, seeing a dust mote above Chani's head, stopped there.

Waiting.

The answer to this instant came like an explosion in her consciousness: her personal time was suspended to save her life.

She focused on the psychokinesthetic extension of herself, looking within, and was confronted immediately with a cellular core, a pit of blackness from which she recoiled.

That is the place where we cannot look, she thought. There is the place the Reverend Mothers are so reluctant to mention - the place where only a Kwisatz Haderach may look.

This realization returned a small measure of confidence, and again she ventured to focus on the psychokinesthetic extension, becoming a mote-self that searched within her for danger.

She found it within the drug she had swallowed.

The stuff was dancing particles within her, its motions so rapid that even frozen time could not stop them. Dancing particles. She began recognizing familiar structures, atomic linkages: a carbon atom here, helical wavering....a glucose molecule. An entire chain of molecules confronted her, and she recognized a protein ...a methyl-protein configuration.

Ah-h-h!

It was a soundless mental sigh within her as she saw the nature of the poison.

With her psychokinesthetic probing, she moved into it, shifted an oxygen mote, allowed another carbon mote to link, reattached a linkage of oxygen...hydrogen.

The change spread....faster and faster as the catalysed reaction opened its surface of contact.

The suspension of time relaxed its hold upon her, and she sensed motion. The tube spout from the sack was touched to her mouth - gently, collecting a drop of moisture.

Chani's taking the catalyst from my body to change the poison in that sack...

Dune, pp.336-337.

The mystical inwardness of this experience is balanced by the scientific description of this crucial chemical process. It is the hallmark of Herbert's style, one in which the mystical or spiritual and the technological or scientific are made to complement each other, and this adroit balancing is sustained throughout Dune, though the passage above is an outstanding example.

Jessica is now the Reverend Mother of the tribe - or, will be as soon as she discovers the new dimension to her being which has been imposed upon her without warning, for she is now the beneficiary and host to the consciousness of each Reverend Mother who has preceded her, 'Reverend Mothers within other Reverend Mothers until there seemed no end to them.' As is now apparent, transcendence and paranormal faculties such as prescience are the novel's main symbols of progressive humanism. These present most problems for Paul, whose

determination to avoid either enslaving the Fremmen or unleashing the Jihad is gradually eroded under the pressure of the events related in Book Three of Dune, 'The Prophet'. As it turns out, Paul does prove to be the Kwisatz Haderach, the unique male who can survive raw spice liquor and look into that place in the human mind where the Bene Gesserit cannot see. Having experienced a profound metempsychosis more disruptive even than Jessica's, he becomes a charismatic leader whose inner conflicts between power and responsibility and power and ambition may be discussed in the context of other explorations of the messianic predicament by contemporary science fiction authors reviewed in the final chapter.

REFERENCES and FOOTNOTES

1. Aldous HUXLEY, 'Religious Practices'; Chapter XIII of Ends and Means, Chatto and Windus, London, 1937.
Huxley also offers a penetrating comparative analysis of the psychology of religious ritual and observance to which further reference will be made.
2. Huxley, op.cit., p.225.
3. Robert P.WEEKS, 'Disentanglement as a Theme in H.G.Wells's Fiction,' from H.G.Wells: a Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Bernard BERGONZI; Prentice-Hall, Inc., New Jersey, 1976; p.29.
4. Howard FINK, 'The Shadow of Men Like Gods: Orwell's Coming Up for Air as Parody'; reprinted in H.G.Wells and Modern Science Fiction, edited by Darko SUVIN and Robert M.PHILMUS; Associated University Press, 1977.
5. This is one of Wells's least popular novels - even, it seems, among some of his most well-read critics. For instance, it does not rate a mention in Patrick PARRINDER'S general volume, Science Fiction, its Teaching and Criticism (Methuen & Co., London, 1980), but more disappointingly perhaps, while A Modern Utopia earns a brief discussion in John HUNTINGTON's otherwise comprehensive article on 'The Science Fiction of H.G.Wells' in Science Fiction, a Critical Guide (ed. Parrinder for Longman Group Ltd., London, 1979), Men Like Gods is quite overlooked. However, like Aldiss (see 6, below), whatever its shortcomings as entertainment (and he contrasts it unfavourably with Edgar Rice Burroughs's Pellucidar - though that depends upon what one looks for in judging the entertainment value of science fiction), I consider Men Like Gods to be a substantial, significant work, not least because of what it suggests about Wells's ideas about the future development of Homo sapiens, and the emergence of Homo superior.
6. Brian ALDISS observes:

In short, Wells' is a serious tale, enlivened by a little humour, whose main aim is to discuss entertainingly the ways in which mankind might improve himself and his lot. Whereas Burroughs' story is pure fantasy adventure which we do not for one minute take seriously.

The publishing history of the two novels is also interestingly in contrast. Wells' novel was published in hard-cover in 1923 and only achieved paperback publication forty-seven years later. Burroughs' novel was serialised in All-Story Cavalier Weekly in 1915, to appear in hard-cover in 1923, since when it has made many paperback appearances.

Burroughs, in this novel [Pellucidar], writes about as well as he can write, which is not well but very serviceably, while his fertile imagination pours out lavishly the details of his preposterous world. Wells appears constipated beside him.

Wells' novel is laborious, and, whatever it was in 1923, it takes an effort to read now, whereas Burroughs still slips down easily. With Burroughs you have (moderate) fun; Wells here gives off what Kingsley Amis categorises as 'a soporific whiff of left-wing crankiness.'

So why does one obstinately respect Wells the more? It must be because, whatever else his failings, he is trying to grapple with what he sees as the real world, whereas Burroughs - however expertly, and he can be a mesmerist - is dishing out daydreams.

Billion Year Spree, pp.178-179.
(abridged)

To which one might add, so is Wells, but of a most earnest, most demanding kind - a dream, indeed, which inspires Olaf Stapledon, Arthur C. Clarke, and countless others; and earns the condemnation of C.S. Lewis and other writers of his moral line such as Aldous Huxley:

Many years after writing Brave New World, Huxley told an interviewer for the Paris Review that his famous book had "started out as a parody of H.G. Wells's Men Like Gods, but gradually it got out of hand and turned into something quite different from what I'd originally intended."

Mark R. HILLEGAS, op.cit. (below), p.111.

7. However, Butler's attitude towards machines and industrialism approaches Wells's more sophisticated response more closely than is often generally thought:

The superficial resemblance between [Bulwer-Lytton's] The Coming Race (1871) and Erewhon (1872) made some readers surmise that Bulwer-Lytton had written both books, because Butler...also seemed to warn the Victorians about the terrible dangers of industrialism... He had no quarrel with machinery; Butler was not nervous about the future of industrialism. A comparison with William Morris's News from Nowhere (1890), which envisages the destruction of machinery, reveals the difference between Samuel Butler and a real enemy of the machine.

J.C. GARRETT, op.cit., p.30.

8. From George HAY's introduction to the Sphere Books 1976 edition, to which all subsequent page references are made.
9. Mark R. HILLEGAS, The Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-utopians; Oxford University Press, New York, 1967; pp.79-80.
10. This description is from the excellent annotated bibliography of Wells's articles and lengthier works which is included in H.G. Wells and Modern Science Fiction, edited by Darko SUVIN and Robert M. PHILMUS; Associated University Presses, London, 1977.
11. Thomas MOLNAR, Utopia, the Perennial Heresy; Tom Stacey Ltd., London, 1971.

Potentially a most interesting study of the philosophical contexts of utopian thinking, Utopia, the Perennial Heresy eventually turns into a tract. Molnar's arguments are consistently and thoroughly orthodox, revealing him to be a most knowledgeable and adroit apologist of the Christian Right. His method subordinates every idea or social tenet he examines to his principle argument that ultimately all utopian thinking is derived from religious traditions or beliefs, and being unorthodox, is thus necessarily heretical per se. Consequently, the ideas of Marx and of Father Teilhard de Chardin founder for similar reasons. In effect, his position is ultra-conservative in that it will admit of no event apart from the Second Coming and Last Judgement which could be of any ontological significance whatever. If one may thereby infer a response to the fiction discussed in the present work, even devout speculative texts such as That Hideous Strength and A Canticle for Leibowitz are quite heretical, the former chiliastic, and the latter millenarist; though Mrs. Penny's devout tract, by the same token, would not be.

12. Early in Men Like Gods Barnstaple describes how the dead scientists' remains are disposed of in a simple ceremony which is carried out in a very unsentimental, quite matter-of-fact manner. A rather similar event occurs in Stapledon's Odd John, when one of the colony of Homo superior euthanizes his lover who had been grievously maimed by a shark. The narrative viewpoint, which expresses conventional horror at the starkness of what happens, is that of John Wainwright's usually self-effacing, human biographer:

During the following three weeks he nursed her constantly, refusing to allow anyone to relieve him. What with her almost severed leg and her mental disorder, she was in a desperate plight. Sometimes her true self seemed to re-appear, but more often she was either unconscious or maniacal. Shahin was hard put to it to restrain her from doing serious hurt to herself or to him. When at last she seemed to be recovering, Shahin was ecstatically delighted. Presently, however, she grew much worse. One morning, when I took his breakfast over to their cottage, he greeted me with a gaunt but placid face, and said, 'Her soul is torn too deeply now. She will never mend. This morning she knows me, and has reached out her hand for me. But she is not herself, she is frightened. And very soon she will not know me ever again. I will sit with my dear this morning as usual, but when she is asleep I must kill her.' Horrified, I rushed to fetch John. But when I had told him, he merely sighed and said, 'Shahin knows best.'

That afternoon, in the presence of the whole colony, Shahin carried the dead Hsi Mei to a great rock beside the harbour. Gently he laid her down, gazed at her for a moment with longing, then stepped back among his companions. Thereupon John, using the psycho-physical technique, caused a sufficient number of the atoms of her flesh to disintegrate, so that there was a violent outpouring of their pent-up energies, and her whole body was speedily consumed in a dazzling conflagration. When this was done,

Shahin passed his hand over his brow, and then went down with Kemi and Sigrid to the canoes. The rest of the day they spent repairing the nets. Shahin talked easily, even gaily, about May; and laughed, even, over the desperate battle of her spirit with the powers of darkness. And sometimes while he worked, he sang. I said to myself, 'Surely this is an island of monsters.'

Odd John, p.164

Ultimately it is this human reaction to supernormal attributes and utilitarian ethics which leads John and his group to take their own lives and destroy everything they had created on their island rather than allow any of it to fall into the hands of the rival Pacific Powers, whose representatives and emissaries are by turn titillated and outraged by the 'amorality' of the free-loving, commensalist, naked, multi-racial, telepathic 'children' they encounter there.

13. Anthony WEST, 'H.G.Wells'; reprinted in H.G.Wells, A Collection of Critical Essays edited by Bernard BERGONZI for Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1976; p.10.
14. Idem., p.20.
15. Idem., p.21.
16. For a concise but informative discussion of Stapledon's life and work, see Leslie G.Fiedler's Introduction to the 1978 New English Library paperback edition of Odd John.
17. Although this conventional Spenglerian idea sustains the novel's early pessimism, Aldiss has noted that the radically meta-physical but sceptical vision central to Star Maker reflects the changing scientific perspectives of the period.

Last and First Men is just slightly an atheist's tract, based largely on nineteenth-century thought... In Star Maker, the atheism has become a faith in itself, so that it inevitably approaches higher religion, which is bodied forth on a genuinely new twentieth-century perception of cosmology. It therefore marks a great step forward in Stapledon's art, the thought unfolding with little sense of strain through chapter after chapter. It is magnificent. It is almost unbearable.

Trillion Year Spree, p. 198.

The power of Stapledon's imagination, and those cogent scientific speculations which so delighted Aldiss, have rarely been equalled, still less surpassed.

18. With difficulty we came to understand the source of this strange equanimity. Spectators and victims alike were so absorbed in cosmological research, so conscious of the richness and potentiality of the cosmos, and above all so possessed by spiritual contemplation, that the destruction was seen, even by the victims themselves,

from the point of view which men would call divine. Their gay exaltation and their seeming frivolity were rooted in the fact that to them the personal life, and even the life and death of individual worlds, appeared chiefly as vital themes contributing to the life of the cosmos. From the cosmical point of view the disaster was after all a very small though poignant matter. Moreover, if by the sacrifice of another group of worlds, even of splendidly awakened worlds, greater insight could be attained into the insanity of the Mad Empires, the sacrifice was well worth while.

Star Maker, p.170.

19. Though Brian Aldiss does not deal with the religious, rather than theosophical, themes of Star Maker in any great depth, and indeed does not recognise this ultimate melding of essences as theophany, he does elucidate what it is about this disembodied cosmic communion which Christians would reject:

The scale increases. The "I" is now part of the cosmic mind, listening to muttered thoughts of nebulae as it goes in quest of the Star Maker itself. This Supreme Creator is eventually found, star-like and remote. It repulses the raptures of the cosmic mind. The created may love the creator but not vice versa, since that would merely be self-love of a kind. This emphasis that God is Not Love was bound to upset Christians such as C.S.Lewis.

Trillion Year Spree, p.197.

20. The version of Behold the Man which is featured here is not the novella for which Moorcock won the 1967 Nebula prize awarded by the Science Fiction Writers of America, but his later, augmented version which was published as a novel in 1969. In his Introduction to the 1976 edition of his shorter fiction, Moorcock's Book of Martyrs, he wrote: 'Some of the "martyrs" of these stories are primarily people who seek to impose a private vision on the world and who suffer accordingly. Some of them...end up creating an orthodoxy quite as extreme as anything they have attempted to overthrow. Both Karl Glogauer and Max File attempt to create a new reality. Both succeed...' (Ibid., p.8) In the novel version of Behold the Man, certain additions have been made which make Moorcock's line of argument even more explicit, as can be readily seen in the following extract from the novel in which the additions and emendations have been underlined:

Perhaps the greatest change in him was that for the first time in his life Karl Glogauer had forgotten about Karl Glogauer. For the first time in his life he was doing what he had always considered himself too weak to do and at the same time fulfilling his largest ambition, to achieve what he had hoped to achieve before he gave up psychiatry.

(orig. he was doing what he had always sought to do as a psychiatrist.)

There was something more, something that he recognized instinctively rather than intellectually. He now

had the opportunity to find at the same time both redemption and confirmation for his life up to the moment he had fled from John the Baptist in the desert.

But it was not his own life he would be leading now. He was bringing a myth to life, a generation before that myth would be born. He was completing a certain kind of psychic circuit. He told himself he was not changing history; he was merely giving history more substance.

Since he had never been able to bear to think that Jesus had been nothing more than a myth, it became a duty to himself to make Jesus a physical reality rather than the creation of a process of mythogenesis. Why did it matter? he wondered; but he would be quick to dismiss the question, for such questions confused him, seemed to offer a trap, an escape and the possibility, once again, of self-betrayal.

(orig. he could not bear to think that)

(orig. It was in his power to make Jesus a physical reality)

So he spoke in the synagogues and he spoke of a gentler God than most of them had heard of, and where he could remember them, he told them parables.

And gradually the need to justify intellectually what he was doing faded and his sense of identity grew increasingly more tenuous and was replaced by a different sense of identity, in which he would give greater and greater substance to the role he had chosen. It was an archetypal role in all senses, a role to appeal to a disciple of Jung. It was a role that went beyond mere imitation. It was a role that he must now play out to the very last detail.

(orig. the very last grand detail)

Karl Glogauer had discovered the role he had been seeking. That was not to say that he did not still have doubts.

Behold the Man, pp.117-118.

Moorcock's alterations to the original version of this important narrative passage, which explains Glogauer's motivation for committing himself to 'the completion of a certain kind of psychic circuit,' generally emphasize his awareness of the personal significance of what he was considering; the inner conflict he perceived between his intellect and his instincts; and his quest for an external justification for his own existence: 'He now had the opportunity to find at the same time both redemption and confirmation for his life...' Moorcock also emphasizes the special nature, in Jungian terms, of the unique role Glogauer is to adopt: 'It was an archetypal role in all senses..')

21. Jean-Paul SARTRE, novelist and philosopher, advances a perspective of existentialism as a later form of positive humanism in his 1945 discussion of Existentialism and Humanism (translated by P.MAIRET for Methuen & Co.; London, 1948). He describes two kinds of existentialism, that of Christian existentialists such as Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, and that of the existential atheists,

among whom he numbers himself. The crucial difference between the two schools resides, according to Sartre, in their response to a fundamental teleological paradox concerning being and becoming. Whereas the Christian school hold that essence precedes existence - 'Thus each individual man is the realisation of a certain conception which dwells in the divine understanding' - the atheistic existentialists contend that 'there is one being whose existence comes before its essence' - man.

This argument, scarcely less paradoxical in Behold the Man, is central to Moorcock's story of Glogauer's imitatio dei:

'Christianity is dead.' Monica sipped her tea. 'Religion is dying. God was killed in 1945.'

'There may yet be a resurrection,' he said.

'Let's hope not. Religion was the creation of fear. Knowledge destroys fear. Without fear, religion can't survive.'

'You think there's no fear about these days?'

'Not the same kind, Karl.'

'Haven't you ever considered the idea of Christ?' he asked her, changing his tack. 'What that means to Christians?'

'The idea of the tractor means as much to a Marxist,' she replied.

'But what came first? The idea or the actuality of Christ?'

She shrugged. 'The actuality, if it matters. Jesus was a Jewish troublemaker organizing a revolt against the Romans. He was crucified for his pains. That's all we know and all we need to know.'

'A great religion couldn't have begun so simply.'

'When people need one, they'll make a great religion out of the most unlikely beginnings.'

'That's my point, Monica.' He gesticulated intensely and she drew away slightly. 'The idea preceded the actuality of Christ.'

'Oh, Karl, don't go on. The actuality of Jesus preceded the idea of Christ.'

Behold the Man, pp.60-61.

Due to the time-travel paradox which permits him to gain the perversely pious fulfilment he craves by becoming 'Jesus,' Glogauer is able to promote his idea of Christ and thus ensure Christ's actuality.

Sartre's discussion of the atheistic orientation of existentialism which he helped to shape suggests that Moorcock's novel may in fact owe as much to Sartre as to Jung (identified as Glogauer's guru by Monica):

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative (wrote Sartre), declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists,

encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing - as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.

Existentialism and Humanism, pp.27-28.

22. S.C.FREDERICKS, 'Revivals of Ancient Mythologies in Recent Science Fiction and Fantasy'; from Many Futures, Many Worlds, edited Thomas D.CLARESON, Kent State University Press, 1977; p.57.
23. This and subsequent page references are to the Penguin Modern Classics edition, translated by Robert Baldick, published in 1965.
24. SARTRE, Existentialism and Humanism, p.30.
25. The following incident is a fair example of what is being presented as Moorcock's picture of the sociopolitical and cultural context Glogauer encounters in the Holy Land:

'Herod's soldiers!' one of the sect cried.

Women were screaming and men were running into the night. Soon most of them had disappeared and only two women and the madman [Glogauer] were left.

The leader of the soldiers had a dark, handsome face and a thick, oily beard. He pulled the madman up to his knees by his hair and spat in his face.

'Are you one of these rebels we've been hearing so much about?'

The madman muttered, but shook his head.

The soldier cuffed him. He was so weak that he fell instantly to the ground.

The soldier shrugged. 'He's no threat. There are no arms here. We've been misled.'

He looked calculatingly at the women for a moment and then turned to his men, his eyebrows raised. 'If any of you are hard up enough - you can have them.'

The madman lay on the ground and listened to the cries of the women as they were raped. He felt he should get up and go to their assistance, but he was too weak to move, too afraid of the soldiers. He did not want to be killed. It would mean that he would never achieve his goal.

Herod's soldiers rode away eventually and the members of the sect began to creep back.

'How are the women?' asked the madman.

'They are dead,' someone told him.

[over...

Someone else began to chant from the scriptures, verses about vengeance and righteousness and the punishments of the Lord.

Overwhelmed, the madman crawled away into the darkness.
Behold the Man, pp.91-92.

This whole episode first appears in the augmented version of the original short story which was published as a novel.

26. Selected from Marx's Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right by Ernst FISCHER for his anthology, Marx in His Own Words; The Penguin Press, Harmondsworth, 1973. Fischer's opening chapter ('The Dream of the Whole Man') is most illuminating, and another extract Fischer quotes may be of interest here:

Atheism, as a denial of this unreality [the unreality of man and nature], is no longer meaningful, for atheism is a negation of God and seeks to assert by this negation the existence of man. Socialism no longer requires such a roundabout method; it begins from the theoretical and practical sense perception of man and nature as essential beings. It is positive human self-consciousness, no longer a self-consciousness attained through the negation of religion; just as the real life of man is positive and no longer attained through the negation of private property, through communism...Communism is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism is not itself the goal of human development - the form of human society.

from Economic and Political Manuscripts,
(in Bottomore, T.B., Karl Marx, Early Writings).

Fischer observes: "We can see that religion, atheism and communism were, for Marx, stages or features of human development rather than its goal. The goal was positive humanism, the real life of man," and continues: "The existence of the proletariat was the most striking contradiction of such a life; but 'the ruptured reality of industry' did not manifest itself in the proletariat alone" - something borne out by science fiction works as philosophically diverse as Men Like Gods, That Hideous Strength, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Player Piano and The Embedding.

27. GUNN, James, 'That Old-Time Religion;' The Road to Science Fiction Vol.III, New American Library (Mentor), New York, 1979; p.323.
28. L.Ron HUBBARD's cult of 'Scientology' has long been viewed sceptics as a most distasteful example of exploitation masquerading as a bona fide religion. It is a positivistic enterprise with commercial ends, justifying its bilking of the credulous with a creed invented by Hubbard himself, which stresses the importance of progressing through a series of gateways which ultimately give access to a sort of astral plane. The novice who wishes to attain this cosmic enlightenment must purchase a succession of books by Hubbard and undergo 'Dianetic'

confessional sessions monitored by more advanced devotees using a skin-conductivity measuring device said to be an accurate lie-detector. Needless to say, the materials and psychometric sessions involved at each stage become increasingly expensive as the candidate progresses through the whole, lengthy series.

Brian Aldiss has charted the rise and rise of Dianetics/Scientology:

Hubbard was a prolific producer of pulp fiction throughout the thirties and forties, until he published Dianetics: the Modern Science of Mental Health. Dianetics was launched in the May 1950 issue of Astounding with the wholehearted approval of John W. Campbell. Within a year Campbell had cooled in his enthusiasm and backed off. Dianetics became Scientology, a religion, with Hubbard its cult guru. Hubbard's energies were channelled into propagandist work.
Trillion Year Spree, p.393

If Hubbard's ponderous tome Battleground Earth is anything to go by, then the participants in his cult must be less than critical readers of his hastily-written, repetitive, banal prose.

Interestingly, Aldous HUXLEY mentions a contemporary cult in 'Religious Practices' (Ends and Means, 1937) which possesses some parallels with Hubbard's personal cult:

Those who have followed the cult of the negro man-god, Father Divine, must have been struck by the fact that many, probably most, of Father's worshipper's have undergone a striking 'change of heart' and are in many respects better men and women than they were before their conversion to Divinism. But this improvement of character has very definite limitations. Divinists are committed by their theology to a belief in the perfection of Father. The commands of a perfect being should be obeyed. And, in fact, they are obeyed, even when - and this would seem to be the case in certain of the new church's financial transactions - they are not in accord with the highest principles of morality.

Ends and Means, pp.236-7.

29. Robert Heinlein was considered to be the main figure of John W. Campbell's 'Golden Age' because he was so good at writing the kind of narrowly scientific fiction Campbell was eager to print. Full of action and movement, notorious for its stereotypical characters and emotional thinness, Heinlein's prose is crisp and distinctive, but Campbell prized his fiction for its technological plausibility.
30. Quoted from John Boyd's Preface(1978) to the Penguin Books edition of his novel, The Rakehells of Heaven (published U.S.A. 1969).
31. Vonnegut originally wished to identify himself explicitly as the narrator, but adopted 'John' at the insistence of the publisher. (Klinkowitz, op.cit., p.55)

32. Thomas L.WYMER, 'The Swiftian Satire of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr'; reprinted in Voices for the Future, Vol.I, ed. by Thomas D.CLARESON for Bowling Green University Popular Press, Ohio, 1976; p.241.
33. Jerome KLINKOWITZ, Contemporary Writers: Kurt Vonnegut; Methuen, London, 1982; p.53.
34. Wymer, op.cit., p.257.
35. Vonnegut, a professed unbeliever (Klinkowitz, op.cit., p.88) regarded Christ as a historical person with everyday human failings, whose genuine teachings have been corrupted by devout misconstructions and self-serving, cynical exploitation. Jerome Klinkowitz has described how this attitude to Christian faith is reflected in Vonnegut's 1979 novel, Jailbird: 'Christianity can be cruel, especially when left to the devices of those mortals who would use it to absolutize their own relative beliefs; Jailbird reinterprets the Gospels with an eye towards making some allowance for Jesus' meaner days.' (p.82)
Despite having the ghost of Kilgore Trout's son for the narrator of his latest book, Galapagos (1985), and including recurrent references to 'the blue tunnel of the afterlife' every time a character dies, Vonnegut has little to say about religion directly. On the other hand, he finds a good deal to castigate in human nature; all our failings, collectively and as individuals, he ascribes to our 'big brains' and our obsession with useless knowledge and 'turning more and more things over to machines':

To the credit of humanity as it used to be: More and more people were saying that their brains were irresponsible, unreliable, hideously dangerous, wholly unrealistic - were simply no damn good. Galapagos, p.29

The dominant ideas of the novel are agnostic. Human nature is the result of freak, uncontrolled development of the primeval ape-brain which will run its course and end by effecting its own destruction. The few survivors will be the ancestors of a new humanity, unrecognizable to their forebears as human, and possessing relatively small brains, flippers, and other amphibian features. The comedy of ideas is mordant; we have grown too big for ourselves, are unnatural, overblown parodies of what we should be. We cannot cope with our own feelings and drives, and - irony of ironies - a small furry aquatic animal is more truly human than we have proved ourselves to be.

Having witnessed a million years of human "evolution," Trout declares towards the end of the novel that - 'Thanks to certain modifications in the design of human beings, I can see no reason why the earthling part of the clockwork can't go on working for ever the way it is ticking now.' He continues:

If some sort of supernatural beings, or flying saucer people, those darlings of my father, brought humanity into harmony with itself and the rest of Nature, I did not catch them doing it. I am prepared to swear under oath that the Law of

Natural Selection did the repair job without outside assistance of any kind.

Galapagos, p.266

36. One should also say 'typical', according to Joseph V. FRANCAVILLA:

Despite the apparent differences between heroes in Roger Zelazny's science fiction, such as Mahasamatman in Lord of Light, Conrad Nomikos in This Immortal, and Francis Sandow in Isle of the Dead, they all conform to a particular model. With amazing virtuosity, Zelazny has used this model and has produced story after intriguing story, with fresh variations in locale, religious framework, and mythological background.

Zelazny's model is constructed in part from myths of the scarified God-King or Fisher-King, as described in Sir James Frazer and Jessie Weston. In these myths, the death and rebirth of the ailing, divine monarch effects renewal and the restoration of fertility to the land and its people. Zelazny's god-hero begins with a symbolic deficiency or flaw and himself undergoes a parallel renewal and growth in his process of self-discovery and self-realization as he becomes a more perfect representation of a divine spirit and a skeptical prophet, messiah, and savior.

'Promethean Bound: Heroes and Gods

in Roger Zelazny's Science Fiction';

The Transcendent Adventure, ed. REILLY; p.207.

However, Francavilla later attests that in trying to overthrow the Deicrat pantheon and restore altruistically the almost arcane progressive ideals of Accelerationism, 'Sam is even more like the Titan Prometheus than is usual in Zelazny...' (p.219) Joseph's Francavilla's article also provides a most penetrating and informative study of three forms of the Prometheus myth, showing how Percy Shelley developed Aeschylus' classical allegory for Prometheus Unbound, and how in his turn Zelazny was able to turn some of Shelley's material, and indeed his predecessor's, to his own purpose:

Zelazny does not follow Shelley in making the Promethean hero an ideal of perfection. Here Zelazny stays with Aeschylus' conception of the bold hero flawed by hubris. Unlike Aeschylus' Prometheus, Zelazny's hero changes greatly during the course of his adventures and becomes less prideful and arrogant usually through a combination of his love for a woman and his altruistic protection of the race of mortals.

Ibid., p.210

37. Whereas like Moorcock Zelazny quotes actual scripture, Herbert's quotations are clever futuristic apocrypha.
38. Zelazny clearly is greatly attracted to the themes of the science fiction of aspiration, having surpassed both in scope and in

sophistication his earlier short story, 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' (discussed in Chapter 1), with Lord of Light, for which he won in 1968 the Hugo award presented annually by members of the World Science Fiction Convention. However, a more recent version which bears the same hallmarks as the others is even more recondite, and has not received the same critical acclaim as have the others:

...in the novels since Lord of Light, Zelazny has been working with different combinations of action and fragmentary suggestion, ritual vs. emotional weight. ...Creatures of Light and Darkness (1969) takes Egyptian mythology much further than Lord of Light did Hindu; both the background and foreground are more obscure than in the earlier novel, and though Creatures is a satisfying construct, it remains cryptically unmoving otherwise.

Joe SANDERS, 'Zelazny: Unfinished Business' (p.194), reprinted in Voices for the Future, Vol.2, edited by Thomas CLARESON for Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, Ohio, 1979; pp.180-196.

39. FRANCAVILLA, op.cit., p.218.
40. Idem., p.220.
41. SANDERS, op.cit., p.192.
42. FRANCAVILLA, op.cit., p.220.
43. Dune has received a great deal of critical attention and much well-deserved praise; one of the best-known recent works in the genre, it won both the Nebula and the Hugo awards in 1966.

In 1966 Herbert published a novel which was a considerable departure from the style and content of his previous work. The book was Dune - it had a considerable impact within the s-f community and an incredible impact outside of it. People who had never had a good word for s-f read it and were impressed.

Dune is a massive novel which details the lives of the inhabitants of the planet Dune and the political machinations of an interstellar empire. The plot is based loosely on the life of Mohammed (which may account for the huge popularity of Dune in the mid-East). The story of Paul Atrides is compelling, but the real hero of the novel is the planet itself. Herbert has carefully and exhaustively described Dune's ecology, culture, religion, and technology; Dune has been called the genre's most effectively evoked world.

A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction,
by Searles, Last, Meacham, and Franklin; p.83.

Brian ALDISS has recently provided an account of Dune's magazine serialization which reflects his own high opinion of the Dune and its sequel Dune Messiah, which he goes on to call 'dense and complex books which repay careful attention and impress even on a fourth or fifth reading'.

Dune World...began serialization in the December 1963 large format Analog and ran for three issues, graced with some highly evocative illustrations by John Schoenherr. Many of the ideas were standard Analog/Astounding fare, but Herbert had sewn the familiar threads altogether into a tight, mesmerizing fabric, interwoven with a potent element of mysticism. Political intrigue in a harsh future galaxy was commonplace. so too were strange religions. But somehow Herbert merged the two strands with several new elements - primarily an interest in the eco-system of the planet Arrakis, the desert planet Dune - and produced something that is far greater than the whole.

Although Campbellian science fiction is still present, so, too, is an attention to sensuous detail which is the anti-thesis of Campbell. The bleak dry world of Arrakis is as intensely realized as any in science fiction. The shortage of water, for instance, is presented not just diagrammatically, but as a living fact which permeates all facets of existence.

Trillion Year Spree, p.315

Contrast these views of Dune with Jerome KLINKOWITZ'S discussion of The Sirens of Titan as a deliberate parody of conventional magazine science fiction:

Vonnegut certainly took the opportunity to make a change in his methods. The Sirens of Titan is a considerable departure from the orderly use of science-fiction techniques in Player Piano. It allowed the incorporation of new materials and devices. No longer do we find class notes from the University of Chicago's graduate program in anthropology. Instead, Vonnegut provides space opera, enjoying the unsophisticated carnival of lurid and often self-indulgent pop devices which has made science fiction a true sub-genre (and literary favorite of an identifiable sub-culture); fiction like this is filled with trappings such as ray-guns and invading armies of robots from Mars. Although there is a bit of H.G.Wells here, space opera discards the more thoughtfully based resources of Orwell and Huxley in favor of flashier entertainments. For his own debut, Vonnegut outdoes the genre's silliness, filling his novel with such ridiculous characters as the Space Wanderer, his son who flies off with the Gigantic Bluebirds of Titan, and even faithful Kazak, the Hound of Space. He degrades its pseudo-intellectual pretensions by explaining his own most imposing technological device, the chronosynclastic infundibulum, with an entry from A Child's Cyclo-pedia of Wonders and Things to Do....

Op.cit., p.41.

Klinkowitz's preferences are not wholly shared by me, but it is informative to compare Dune with The Sirens of Titan because the former is among the finest achievements in style and imagination which the genre may boast, whereas the latter offers an ironic, self-indulgent salute to the generic conventions it exploits.

44. Jerome KLINKOWITZ describes the genesis of The Sirens of Titan

as follows:

It was not until 1959 that Vonnegut published his second novel, The Sirens of Titan, and then only because the magazine market was diminishing and an editor offered him better money than he could earn for eight weeks' labor writing short stories. The plot of the book was devised in fully impromptu fashion over cocktails at a party, and the book itself came easily in a period of less than two months. It was indeed a novel for the market, and there was no respectable hard-cover edition at all; The Sirens of Titan was written as a paperback original for Dell's science fiction series, a rather sleazy operation...

Op.cit., p.40.

45. Patrick PARRINDER, 'Characterization in Science Fiction: Two Approaches; 2. The Alien Encounter, or Ms.Brown and Mrs.Le Guin;' Science Fiction, A Critical Guide ed. by P.Parrinder for Longman Group, London, 1979; p.154.
(See also G.K.WOLFE, 'Vonnegut and the Metaphor of Science Fiction: The Sirens of Titan;' reprinted in Journal of Popular Culture, Vol.5 (1972) 964-969. A thoughtful discussion in which Rumfoord's benevolence - termed 'altruism' - may have been overstated (though Wolfe accepts that such altruism may seem 'a bit cynical' since Rumfoord contrives the virtual suicide of the Martian army).

CHAPTER SIX

Apostate Visions: From Man to Messiah, and Beyond...

The science fiction discussed in previous chapters affords abundant evidence of the sustained interest genre writers have taken in the complex ethical and aesthetic relationships between religion, humanism, social change and science. Indeed one may justifiably claim that there are in fact profound conceptual associations between our moral thinking and values, the prevalent ideology of our society, and the nature and scope of our individual and collective aspirations, however reluctant one might be to accept the bald assertion that religious faith is only a special form of human response to the enigmas of life, exemplified, perhaps, by Engels's definition: 'the fantastic mirror image of human things in the human mind'; though, as has been shown, the idea has had its advocates in science fiction.

Consequently, religious and humanistic science fiction present many common features; and as the transcendental themes of some recent novels indicate, revelation of one kind or another has remained an essential feature of the contemporary Romanticism which distinguishes the science fiction of aspiration. However, the quest for knowledge in this fiction is emphatically different from the kind of generally epistemological Baconian or materialistic 'hard' science fiction (exemplified by Asimov's The Gods Themselves) in one major respect: teleological science fiction is concerned more with knowledge of self than of things or systems. The science fiction of final purposes, as we might also characterise it, subsumes iconoclasm in offering visions of transfigured Man, yet remains a profoundly sceptical literature surpassing, at its most inspirational or portentous, the

sort of more or less externalized, cognitive apocalypse discussed by David Ketterer. In a perceptive general study of such themes in American fiction, New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction and American Literature (1974)(1), Mr.Ketterer defines three categories of science fiction: utopian/dystopian extrapolation; the extrapolation of social change following on the 'modification of an existent condition' by scientific or pseudo-scientific innovation (e.g., a marvellous invention of some kind); and,

Thirdly, the most philosophically oriented science fiction, extrapolating what we know in the context of our vaster ignorance, comes up with a startling donnee, or rationale, that puts humanity in a radically new perspective. 2.

There are of course many examples of science fiction which is 'apocalyptic' in Ketterer's third sense: Dune Messiah, for instance, wherein Paul Atreides makes a prescient discovery of the collusion between CHOAM, the Imperium, and aliens which depends on the continuing suppression of humane development to support a cosmic balance of power. In The Sirens of Titan as well, Rumfoord's distressing realization is that all mankind's historical struggle has been directed by aliens to provide the replacement part for Salo's stranded spaceship. Yet Ketterer's use of 'puts' rather than 'offers' in the quotation above is significant. He continues:

...I am going to confine myself to my third science-fiction category, in which a startling rationale is involved, because I find the third type the most significant as an expression of the philosophical sense of the apocalyptic imagination and because this category has not previously been isolated by critics of the genre. 3.

According to Ketterer, 'the apocalyptic imagination..finds its purest outlet in science fiction.' He defines it 'in terms of its philosophical preoccupation with that moment of transformation or trans-

figuration when an old world of mind discovers a believable new world of mind, which either nullifies and destroys the old system entirely or, less likely makes it part of a larger design.' Clearly, the sort of science fiction which Ketterer includes in his category of philosophical work as a sub-set of apocalyptic literature also bears upon the present study of the science fiction of aspiration, as his interest in Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan indicates. Yet though many of the stories discussed here and in previous chapters are 'philosophical' in his sense in that they 'upset man's conception of his own situation and prompt him to relate his experience to a broader framework,' they also may be considered to be a part of the tradition of humanistic science fiction of aspiration, with its apostate qualities and hubristic archetypes. The literatures described here and in Ketterer's study are, being part of the same general field, essentially complementary strands of science fiction's post-gothic apocalyptic canon. Nonetheless, these contingent varieties are distinct in important ways, even if some authors have built both aspiration and apocalypse into the same work. This can be demonstrated succinctly with Arthur C. Clarke's 2001: A Space Odyssey (which Clarke wryly described as 'the world's first billion-dollar religious movie.')

Ketterer writes, 'But for the appearance of the mysterious slab, the human race would have died out in infancy. The result of entertaining these revolutionary notions is the sensation, however momentary, of a philosophical apocalypse.' An equally significant crux occurs at the end of the novel, when the surviving astronaut of the 'Discovery', Bowman, is transfigured by his contact with the alien creators of the slab and evolves into the 'Star-Child', able to

cross through the void and abort a terminal nuclear war on Earth:

There before him, a glittering toy no Star-Child could resist, floated the planet Earth with all its peoples.

He had returned in time. Down there on that crowded globe, the alarms would be flashing across the radar screens, the great tracking telescopes would be searching the skies - and history as men knew it would be drawing to a close.

A thousand miles below, he became aware that a slumbering cargo of death had awoken, and was stirring sluggishly in its orbit. The feeble energies it contained were no possible menace to him; but he preferred a cleaner sky. He put forth his will, and the circling megatons flowered in a silent detonation that brought a brief, false dawn to half the sleeping globe.

Then he waited, marshalling his thoughts and brooding over his still untested powers. For though he was master of the world, he was not quite sure what to do next.

But he would think of something.

2001:A Space Odyssey, Chapter 47.

This supremely moral act is messianic, and bespeaks not just the transformation of Bowman's vision, but indeed of his entire being. In later excluding 'epiphany' from the scope of his study in order to impose a definitive discipline upon his preferred term(4), David Ketterer reveals that an area of science fiction may not be treated in his study. By elucidating how science fiction authors have approached theosophical and transcendental themes and ideas like theophany, epiphany, and apotheosis in an evolutionary and humanistic context, this work aims to go some way towards providing a more detailed knowledge of the nature and significance of the science fiction of aspiration, though it is not within its scope to satisfy Mr. Ketterer's belated(5) specification - 'the pervasive presence of the Faustian theme and the Prometheus myth in SF suggests that some attention be given to their existence in the very much broader tradition of world literature.'(6) Fully defining their role and broad context within the genre must be a significant first step towards the realization of any such grand objective, for, as J. Norman King has argued:

...science fiction, at least in principle, is a peculiarly apt form of literature to speak both of and to our contemporary existence. It is, therefore, of considerable utility to theology in providing insight into the self-understanding of modern man.

7.

Needless to say, that same 'utility' King speaks of has, in the specific context of the science fiction of aspiration and its teleological concerns, still greater force.

For all its concern with hallucinatory, surrealistic experience and the transfiguration of the human sensibility, transcendental science fiction commonly continues the generic traditions of secular polemic, but with distinctly less insistence upon reason as the touchstone of humane behaviour, and this has important implications for both its conventional and emergent styles of literary expression.

Nonetheless, one may explore its unorthodox and humanistic contentions very successfully by elucidating how authors have employed what have emerged as the distinctive elements of the science fiction of aspiration. (Indeed without such a perspective, the motives, sensibility and behaviour of a character like Dr. Andrik Norn of Watson and Bishop's Under Heaven's Bridge might otherwise seem bewildering or senseless.) Essentially, where a Romantic fantasist would create a lyrical paen or irrational hallucination, a writer of this kind of science fiction constructs dramas of godhood and novel symbolic lexicons of aspiration. However supernal or religious these esoteric cosmic schemas may sound, they generally also advance the sceptical iconoclasm of much modern and post-modern science fiction:

If you were many, would you see better? That's what you wondered before.

That's the Godmind's project: to set fire to minds on a hundred worlds, to make a many-fold Ka-lens - and in that moment to try to master time, and being.

The void bubbles. The void breathes.

You once felt that you were on the brink of a transformation. Then the Worm yanked you home. You chickened out.

The void dreams the universe. But the void is unconscious. The universe has consciousness, but it can't control the breath of Being. A strong force, the inertia of normality, rules the universe. So the universe always chooses the same state as before. It sustains itself; limits itself.

In Ka-space, the weak force rules. The force of choice. Yet no-one chooses.

It's said in old myths that wizards could change men into toads, stones into bread. Those wizards must have tapped the weak force. Never for long, always on a tiny scale - because they lived in a universe ruled by the strong force.

The universe is dreamed by the void. It is made out of... grains of choice. Grains of virtual existence.

(Yes, now you're beginning to see.)

These basic grains are...electons. They elect their state of being.

Now look closer. Electons are really tiny dots, consisting of a circle of Ka-space rolled up compactly. Forever they unroll back into the void. Forever other bits of void roll up to replace them exactly. Roll up, roll up! Thanks to the pressure of public opinion in the neighbourhood, the new electons choose to be just the same as the old ones.

All these electons roll-up compactly in the same direction. Thus time flows in one direction, in the universe. In Ka-space the electons aren't rolled up. So there in the never-ever all time is one, and timeless.

A mind, a Ka, must be a mesh of electons which are only partly rolled-up. Thus minds delve into time-past, into memory. Minds resist the flow of time.

That must be why old folk say that time speeds up as you grow older. The more you know and remember, the more your Ka resists. A fish washed along by a stream hardly seems - from the fish's point of view - to be moving at all. A fish swimming against the stream sees the water rush by on all sides...

Each death, each disappearance into Ka-space, removes a fraction of resistance. The forces balance again quickly. New Kas come into existence.

What sort of shock would the death of almost all the minds in the galaxy deal to reality?

Enough to cause a lurch, a melting, a possible re-ordering of things?

Enough to bring about a mastery of time - and mastery of Being - locally, for a few crucial moments?

The Godmind must think so.

from 'All the Tapestries of Time,' Part Three of
Ian Watson's The Book of Being(1985), pp.130-131.

How do we evaluate this kind of science fiction? It may be tempting for some to dismiss it as ingenious nonsense or even mere gibberish - 'Ka-space', 'electons', the implacable, malevolent 'Godmind' and all;

but it clearly addressess profound concerns and for that reason alone it deserves serious attention. However decidedly abstruse and superficially paradoxical (even jocund and 'fake' in the manner of a Poe hoax), the world-view of Watson's protagonist actually has coherence: it is a complex blend of gnostic metaphysics and sceptical yet highly original theosophy. In as much as contemporary authors like Watson have adopted this distinctly philosophical species of science fiction for evoking what he has himself called 'glimpses of the ineffable' (and what Mary Shelley might well have termed 'the Sublime'), this literature may legitimately be viewed as the present culmination of a genre-based but nonetheless sophisticated form of humanism.

Many of the novels which will be discussed in this context deal in some way or other with the messianic role which entices the hubrist. Craving the sublime power and the freedom which will be his when he has overcome the frustrating limitations of the human condition, the hubrist seeks a liberating revelation. In this fiction the transforming insight is more often cast in the form of a scientific perception than a theophany, but with distinctly less reverence for scientific materialism itself. What one encounters, then, is a less stringent species of epistemology, a new sort of natural philosophy which emphasizes experience and perception rather than "objective" scientific pragmatism. Proposing that 'Science fiction began to expand beyond its Enlightenment beginnings in the late 1940s and early 1950s' (considerably later than most critics would now affirm) Thomas L. Wymer concluded a discussion of 'Perception and Value in Science Fiction'(8) with the observation that, 'certainly science fiction will remain in many ways a literature of ideas...But instead of human beings existing to add drama to the exploration of science,

technology, or the future, these latter elements have come to exist in a more sizable body of literature to heighten and expose a central concern with what it means to be a human being.' While it has been a contention of the present study that science fiction's Gothic legacy has sustained in writers like Wells and Poe an awareness of the limitations of scientific materialism as a controlling factor of the sensibility, we should recognise with Wymer that much science fiction has gone over from 'rather narrow empiricism' and technophilic themes 'in the direction of a radically enlarged and expanded empiricism which recognized the creative element in perception and explored the possibilities of new modes of consciousness and of knowing.' The transcendental science fiction of aspiration, whose precursors have been discussed in earlier chapters, now challenges the more familiar sorts of science fiction for pre-eminence as the characteristic generic expression of progressive humanism.

A prominent interest in faith, sensibility and moral uncertainty distinguishes today's science fiction of aspiration. Its transcendental themes contrast markedly with the sort of technophilic fiction in which machine power is centre stage. "Space" stills confronts the alienated hubrist, but it is much less cluttered with awesome (some would say tedious) machinery than it used to be. Many writers experiment with subjective or inward 'ultralogic', and focus more upon the development of innate human faculties than upon the development of technology and the realisation of its potential power for good. This in turn raises the teleological question at the heart of most of this fiction about the purpose of existence, which eclipses the more familiar ontological theme of the nature of existence and the humane sensibility.

In Herbert's Dune, for instance, more attention has been paid to controlled character development than to expressing hostility to religion. The dual nature of Paul Atreides's human/divine personality is presented effectively and does hold the reader's interest throughout the involved story of his transfiguration. Yet while the problematic nature of the personality of the central character is undoubtedly the main focus of the novel, the portrayal of religion as being some kind of calculated deception is included almost, in fact, as a background assumption. As this suggests, the satire of orthodox religion is less controversial or provocative and has become virtually an everyday theme.

Moreover, even the very nature of "space" has changed, for readers are now as likely to find themselves in inner space as they are among the galaxies. Hallucination, psychosis, derangement and perdition are the surreal products of the human mind which must be overcome before the true potential of our species can be attained. In this context even reason can seem to be no less a delusion than any other form of intellection, as Gene Wolfe's Dr. Marsch belatedly realizes in the third novella of The Fifth Head of Cerberus (1972):

Later. There is a new prisoner, I think about five cells down from mine. Seeing him brought in, has, I think, saved me from losing my mind; for that I do not thank him - sanity, after all, is only reason applied to human affairs, and when this reason, applied over years, has resulted in disaster, destruction, despair, misery, starvation, and rot, the mind is correct to abandon it. This decision to abandon reason, I see now, is not the last but the first reasonable act; and this insanity we are taught to fear consists in nothing but responding naturally and instinctively rather than with the culturally acquired, mannered thing called reason; an insane man talks nonsense because like a bird or a cat he is too sensible to talk sense.

Op.cit., pp.178-179.

In other novels a deranged central character has recklessly sought to know more about the hermetic nature of the cosmos than he can cope

with mentally. The hubrist must adapt his perceptions to a new order of reality or he will be forever lost to himself in a psychotic flight from the knowledge of things as they really are. If he does survive, the rewards could be omniscience, omnipotence and eternal life. Nowadays the protagonist may be not just a second Faustus or Prometheus but a Zeus, Apollo or even Christ.

This has complemented a gradual change in the nature of outer space from a rigid but reassuringly mundane Euclidian four-dimensional frame to the seemingly anarchic, transmutable parameters of Einstein's Relativity - and beyond even that, as the scientists sent on a reconnaissance mission in James White's All Judgement Fled(1969) learn en route:

There was a short silence broken by two bursts of static and an apologetic cough, then a new voice said, "Well now, the subject of this lecture may itself need an explanation and it is this. From our observations of the approach, physical mass and general appearance of the alien ship, we are convinced that some method of faster-than-light propulsion is being used. Since Einsteinian math holds FTL travel to be impossible in this spacetime continuum we must fall back on those vaguer theories which suggest that the physical laws governing this continuum may be in some fashion side-stepped by traveling along or in some highly speculative hyperdimension. But as things stand you would very probably not know a hyperdimensional propulsion device if it stood up and bit you, and neither in all probability would I..."

Op.cit., pp.12-13.

What then of religion? The moral tenets and world-views of various religions are often presented in this context as rigid codes which proscribe the attainment of our full potential because God is jealous of His prerogatives, and will not have His creatures usurping Him, manifestly a teleological theme. In another less polemical perspective, religion is portrayed as the embodiment of a paternalistic intention to safeguard our limited but growing ability to cope with the world (let alone control it) as it really is, unmediated by the

compassionate, saving Grace of the Creator. In these terms, religion is reduced to being a sort of antique code which claims to afford us a measure of protection from the consequences of our curiosity by counselling us against the aspiration to, in Frankenstein's words, 'become greater than our natures will allow.' The theologian J. Norman King confirms the teleological basis of such themes: 'the technological and behavioral powers born of the new sciences convey the sense of control over the creational process. The idea emerges of man's purposes; of his actively shaping himself, his society, and his history. Instead of enquiring into God's creation of nature and man in the past, attention turns to man's self-creation in the future.' For King, this does not mean that God the creator is a discredited idea, but he does recognize that it makes 'the presence of the creator a less immediate and more indirect question' and it also 'excludes certain concepts of God, especially in the spatio-temporal terms long associated with them.' (9)

By contrast, Marx held that religion precluded humane development, and his view of materialistic humanism - which demanded the revolutionary solution of sweeping away religion and other bourgeois alienating influences - in many respects anticipates the abiding mistrust of many a contemporary science fiction writer of capitalism's ability to create and re-create the means of continuing realistic alienation. Conformity and consumerism vitiate the humane impulse for self-emancipation and self-transcendence, the very essence of Romantic aspiration. Yet another response to religion is to characterize it as the product of an atavistic fear of the unknown which more sophisticated humans can confidently ignore, as redundant as an appendix. Ultimately, never the most popular strain of the science

fiction of aspiration, orthodox religious topoi seem to have become less attractive to writers over the past two decades, and lack proponents like Miller, Blish, Lewis et al.

More common are apostate or sceptical forms of religious feeling and belief. In the context of transcendental science fiction like Childhood's End, religious moral strictures are often presented as being like figurative bars on the windows and doors of our universe. These allow us tantalising glimpses of the transcendental nature of things but they also denies us access to the world as we might make it if we could overcome the superstitious, religious fear we have been "programmed" with or have acquired as a prejudicial pattern of behaviour during the forgotten early days of our long evolution. Brian Stableford has argued that this sort of fiction of ideas sustains a distinctive, speculative sensibility:

Voltaire, it is said, once argued that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him. In the reified imaginative universe of science fiction this has proved to be true. A substitute for the functions of the deity, jargonized as an array of "scientific" possibilities or (more crudely) as an alien intelligence, has been brought into the field of play. As time goes by we see more and more substitutes of this nature crossing the boundary of between acknowledged fiction and ostensible fact: Shaverism, Scientology, Velikovskianism and so on. Such beliefs are very largely subject to the same evolutionary forces which shape the demand for science fiction, although science fiction primarily serves the need to think rather than the simpler and less challenging need to believe. The sf reader, it seems, has the strength of mind required to confront ideas as ideas, without the comforting assurance that they are facts. 10.

Whatever its provenance may be, an apostate world-view which advances an alternative ontology and teleology of Man has attained a genuine popularity in post-Victorian fiction, though its core themes - revitalised by the vigorous humanism of the Renaissance and the Age of Reason - are classical, and, malgre Neitzsche or Marx, evolutionary rather than revolutionary. J.Norman King has offered a worthwhile

hypothesis which addresses these very issues:

With the actual development of the natural and social sciences, the earlier interpretation of creation becomes modified, as it were, by its own implications. Through these disciplines, there is unveiled an overwhelming vista of vast ages and distances, of an enormous universe slowly evolving over many billions of years. There dawns, too, a gradual realization of the intricate complexity and wide-ranging possibilities of matter. Although dwarfed against this background, the time of man's appearance on Earth becomes recognized as far greater than previously thought. The evolutionary character not only of man's biological structure, but also of his very human consciousness itself becomes clear. As a consequence, the image of a static, fixed, permanently enduring species is inevitably supplanted by a more dynamic and fluid understanding of all species, including man. The notion of an immediate creation of well-defined beings, projected into the past, no longer appears tenable. Indeed, with the emergence of this more open-ended and indeterminate picture of nature and man, reinforced and rendered vividly real by rapid changes in industrial society itself, the focus of the question of creation alters. The question becomes not "What has been created?" but "What will be created?" It becomes not "What has man been from the beginning?" but "What will man become?" or "What will become of man?"

11.

For the Faustian or Promethean hubrist so popular with modern science fiction writers, secular aspiration is often articulated in mystical terms, even as a profane sort of religious aspiration. Paradoxically, as Mary Shelley illustrates in Frankenstein, the visionary apperceives the attraction of divine powers and prerogatives through the medium of religious vision, but seeks to acquire them by materialistic (i.e., scientific) means. Consequently, secular aspiration is here linked profoundly to religious aspiration, with which, paradoxically, it is locked in a struggle for ascendancy.

Since religious aspiration is literally sacrosanct, the secular humanist may only challenge its hegemony by criticizing its ethics and their implications, or by advancing a novel world-view which fulfills the same role of dignifying human existence and endeavour. Thus apostate or hubristic idealism generates its own versions of

millennial, utopian or transcendental hopes; given the emergent nature of the rhetoric unique to its general vision of man, they tend to be couched in religious symbols or metaphors if pagan classical archetypes do not lend themselves to the author's purposes or themes. Nonetheless these opinions are apostate rather than heretical since, lacking a secular rhetoric which would not seem contradictory or absurd, their proponents are obliged to modify religious discourse to express their visions and ideas even though they abjure the religious world-view. Heresy distorts religious doctrine in constructing its radical argument; apostasy is irreligious even when it adopts the rhetoric of religion. Another religious principle places divine prerogatives by their very nature beyond the attainment of terrestrial man. If utopian thinking is heretical, god-envy must surely be even more damning. On the other hand, since as an institution religion antedates science or materialism, the dogma of religions can readily be interpreted and satirically presented by sceptical writers as conservative proscriptions against hubristic aspiration.

As we have seen, writers have developed the emblematic Faustian and Promethean figures (which respectively symbolize the anti-heroic, and heroic motives of aspiration) to illustrate or dramatize this fundamental conflict. Yet these are not watertight conventions, because writers do exploit these basic formats in very individual ways, according - as has already been shown by reference to some highly influential works, and some of a lesser stature - to their own attitude towards faith and reason. However, as the fiction discussed in this chapter indicates, a third emblematic figure, implicit in Frankenstein, the seminal work of this genre, has subsumed the others: 'Initially my story was based on the myth of Prometheus,'

writes John Boyd, author of The Rakehells of Heaven (1969), 'but my hero was to bring to men not fire but the truth of their origins...' (12). What emerges, not just in Boyd's novel (wherein it is facetiously debased), but in many other contemporary works, and a few earlier classics, is an interest in the most audacious idea of all - hubristic man as mystic messiah.

This line of argument may be further evaluated when commerce and consumerism, twin forms of mercenary as opposed to scientific materialism which turn up in many science fictions of aspiration, are also considered. In so far as it is a form of materialism broadly endorsed by Western religions, commercialism is the pretext for a good deal of the invective aimed generally at religions as social institutions, a generic emphasis which seems to have first emerged as a consistent argument in the 'utopian' novels of Samuel Butler. Here Higgs, the visitor to Erewhon whose elopement with Arowhena Nosnibor in a balloon some twenty years before had given rise to the Sunchild myth, has returned to find that the nimble-minded Erewhonians have taken to heart his every utterance. Everything he said, it seems, has been construed according to their experience and values, and their version carries Butler's satiric message:

"And now tell me, what did the Sunchild tell us about God and Mammon?"

The head boy answered: "He said we must serve both, for no man can serve God well and truly who does not serve Mammon a little also; and no man can serve Mammon effectually unless he serve God largely at the same time."

"What were his words?"

"He said: 'Cursed be they that say "Thou shalt not serve God and Mammon," for it is the whole duty of man to know how to adjust the conflicting claims of these two deities.'"

Here my father interposed. "I knew the Sunchild, and I more than once heard him speak of God and Mammon. He never varied the form of the words he used, which were to the effect that a man must serve either God or Mammon, but that he could not serve both."

Erewhon Revisited (1901),
Chapter XIII.

Consumerism, too, is often maligned as an even more pernicious, peculiarly modern species of commercialism. Authors such as George Orwell and Kurt Vonnegut have argued that it is a covert way of diminishing the independence and options of the individual. Indeed, both themes effectively coalesce in novels like Dick's The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch and Robert Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land. These and their like examined here reveal another side of a broad (if by no means always explicit) consensus derived from partisan perspectives in which humanism, viewed either in purely religious terms, or solely in terms of scientific materialism, is seen as an attractive but too narrow ethical code.

The chapter offers a discussion of the emergence of the transfigured hubrist, apotheosis being arguably the most teleological and exciting theme of contemporary science fiction.

The Consecrated Man: Theophany and Apotheosis in Science Fiction

Having reviewed so many works in which scepticism of orthodox religion is prominent, it may seem surprising to be now about to conclude with a discussion of how the messianic transfiguration of man is treated in some science fictions of aspiration. This topic has featured recently in quite sophisticated and philosophical texts. The genre has to a certain extent absorbed the simple satire of religious attitudes and values as a general convention: each of the five texts discussed below (with the exception of Butler's Erewhon Revisited includes at least two factitious creeds, and among them we encounter Neo-Christianity, the Fosterite Church, the Servants of Wrath, the Fremmen jihad, and the Church of All Worlds; and perhaps the appearance of secularized messiahs can be seen as a consequence of

this assimilation.

To recapitulate briefly the findings of chapter five, the basic premise common to all of these sceptical portrayals seems to be that religions are merely the social manifestation of an innate human propensity towards mysticism. In other words, religion is presented as a more or less spontaneous cultural product which is acutely open to hypocritical exploitation. Usually, a powerful group or individual uses a fake religion, often cartelized or consumer-oriented, to maintain their grip over a subject society. With commercialised religion, the consumers are disciples or believers rather than helots, though for some authors such as Philip K. Dick, such a distinction is nominal.

In many such novels these factitious creeds are presented as the means whereby a cabalistic elite is able to reinforce and exploit the sense of inadequacy and insecurity of those they have disadvantaged, and so religion has become identified in some quarters as the social institution which is most antagonistic towards the motives and values of the humanist or hubrist. Vonnegut offers the reader of Cat's Cradle a Bokonist warning that: 'Anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either,' and this is not by any means an unique view; in other novels the author uses an ironic denouement to expose the credulity of those committed to any such deceitful beliefs, inviting the reader to share his contempt or derision. However, such profound scepticism about religion as it is does not preclude speculation about religion as it could be, or about the divine teleology of Man, however blasphemous or hubristic an idea that may seem. '"Thou art God,"' Smith's acolytes tell each other, while in another context Barney Mayerson at

last begins to comprehend his implacable foe: "'Palmer Eldritch had gone to Prox a man and returned as a god.'"

As its pervasiveness suggests, the messianic idea, whether Faustian, Promethean, Appollonian or Dionysian, clearly is an important theme of modern science fiction. One of the most impressive and sustained treatments given to the theme recently is to be found in Frank Herbert's Dune(1965), already discussed in some detail. However, some credit for shaping the idea into its modern form could be claimed by Samuel Butler, however reluctant he might be to accept what he would certainly see as a dubious accolade.

Butler's sequel to Erewhon appeared almost exactly three decades later, in 1901, but in Erewhon Revisited we are given an account of Higgs's return trip twenty years after. It is a more unified and conventional novel than Erewhon, but, as Butler himself announces in his Preface, the satire has a much narrower focus, being concerned principally with questions of religious faith and the institutional influences which may advance it. If Mary Shelley can be said to have been the author of 'the seminal work of the new genre' of science fiction, and Wells lauded as 'the father of science fiction,' then surely Butler can be allowed the less grandiose distinction of having struck upon the device of the factitious religion so frequently used in the science fiction of aspiration:

I have concluded, I believe rightly, that the events described in Chapter XVIII of Erewhon would give rise to such a cataclysmic change in the old Erewhonian opinions which would result in the development of a new religion. Now the development of all new religions follows much the same general course. In all cases the times are more or less out of joint - older faiths are losing their hold upon the masses. At such times, let a personality appear, strong in itself, and made to seem still stronger by association with some supposed transcendent miracle, and it will be easy to raise a *Lo here!* that will attract many followers. If there be a single great and, apparently well-authenticated, miracle, others will

accrete round it; then, in all religions that have so originated, there will follow temples, priests, rites, sincere believers, and unscrupulous exploiters of public credulity. To chronicle events that followed Higgs's balloon ascent without showing that they were much as they have been under like conditions in other places would be to hold the mirror up to something very wide of nature.

To the Erewhonians who witnessed Higgs's ascension in the balloon, the event did seem to be just such a 'transcendent miracle', particularly since the heavy rain which began at the same time ended a prolonged drought. Whether intentionally or, more probably, coincidentally emulating Butler, modern science fiction authors have repeatedly fulfilled his prescription for the formulation of factitious religions, some earnestly, and some with deliberate irony. The 'transcendent miracle' varies with its context, but the residual implication is, in terms of Butler's mock-ironic formula, that 'older faiths are losing their hold upon the masses' and that our times are 'more or less out of joint.' These declining 'older faiths' are not simply religious, however. The arcane new principles of Einsteinian Relativity and the appalling effects of misapplied or fatal science which have shaken our confidence in 'real-time' and technology respectively, together with the socio-economic aftermath of Positivism, have all contributed greatly to the characteristic bewilderment and insecurity which afflict the post-modern literary sensibility. As the fore-runner of modern science fiction's troubled human 'gods,' the moral assurance with which Higgs responds to his alleged apotheosis does afford an apposite index against which the less settled moral vision of his generic successors can be discerned and evaluated more clearly.

On his return to Erewhon, Higgs, disguised to avoid capture in case the Erewhonian monarch still has not pardoned his transgression,

is able to observe carefully the unexpected results of his escape, for his arrival in Erewhon nearly coincides with an important ceremony of the new creed of Sunchildism, and the people are full of expectant religious fervour. He does not immediately realize that, incongruously, he is the deus absconditus the faithful venerate, but, listening to his son he is soon made all too aware of how his actions and sayings have acquired the force of divine revelation, for there are many instances of the way in which 'the Erewhonians had caught names and practices from my father, without understanding what they either were or meant':

...as a boy my father had had his Bible well drilled into him, and never forgot it. Hence Biblical passages and expressions had been often in his mouth, as the effect of mere unconscious cerebration. The Erewhonians had caught many of these, sometimes corrupting them so that they were hardly recognizable. Things that he remembered having said were continually meeting him during the few days of his second visit, and it shocked him deeply to meet some gross travesty of his own words, or of words more sacred than his own, and yet to be unable to correct it.

Erewhon Revisited, Chap.IV

To his credit, Higgs, horrified by the fanciful nonsense and deliberate distortions which his aerial departure has occasioned, is determined to set the record straight and debunk all the spurious notions spawned by the Sunchild Evidence Society, the Bridgeford Professors, and the credulous, self-important Mr.Balmy:

"A spiritual enlightenment from within...is more to be relied on than any merely physical affluence from external objects. Now, when I shut my eyes, I see the balloon ascend a little way, but almost immediately the heavens open, the horses descend, the balloon is transformed, and the glorious pageant careers onward till it vanishes into the heaven of heavens. Hundreds with whom I have conversed assure me that their experience has been the same as mine."

Erewhon Revisited, Chap.XIV

All this confirms Butler's standing as a modernist writer ahead of his time and suggests how well he could employ the standard arguments

which would become the stock-in-trade of a whole genre of sceptical scrutiny of orthodox religion. Yet, it must also be understood that he considered himself a religious if unorthodox thinker, rather than an atheist:

Butler considered himself primarily as a philosopher. His hope of continuing to live after his death in the minds of men, rested upon the value of his ideas. Towards the end of The Note Books, he entered under the heading "My Work" what he considered the most valuable "finds" in each of his books: ... (3) The clearing up the history of the events in connection with the death, or rather crucifixion, of Jesus Christ; and a reasonable explanation, first of the belief on the part of the founders of Christianity that their master had risen from the dead, and, secondly, of what might follow from belief in a single supposed miracle. (The Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, The Fair Haven, and Erewhon Revisited.)

13.

Seeking the maximum public audience and impact for his attempt to expose the knavery of the Musical Bankers who seized upon this 'miracle' to re-invigorate their declining popular influence and power, Higgs resolves to identify himself and denounce their fraudulent chicanery at the forthcoming dedication of the new temple at Sunch'ston ("Sunchildston"). Awaiting his moment, he hears how the nascent faith is to be centralized and institutionalized along the lines of the more or less defunct Musical Banks:

"Small wonder, then, that the Sunchild, having come amongst us for our advantage, not his own, would not permit his beneficent designs to be endangered by the discrepancies, mythical developments, idiosyncracies, and a hundred other defects inevitably attendant on amateur and irresponsible recording. Small wonder, then, that he should have chosen the officials of the Musical Banks, from the presidents and vice-presidents downwards, to be the authoritative exponents of his teaching, the depositaries of his traditions, and his representatives here on earth till he shall again see fit to visit us. For he will come. Nay it is even possible that he may be here amongst us at this very moment, disguised so that none may know him, and intent only on watching our devotion towards him. If this be so, let me implore him, in the name of the son his father, to reveal himself."

Erewhon Revisited, Chap. XVI

Despite the Bridgeford professor's goading, Higgs, undeterred by the realization that a trap has been set for him, patiently waits for the best opportunity. Yet there are others who also know of his intention and are determined to prevent him falling into the hands of his enemies, whose interests lie in deceiving the people. When the moment comes, Higgs jumps to his feet and dramatically denounces Prof. Hanky and his sermon - "'You lying hound...I am the Sunchild, and you know it.'" Unfortunately, since he is still heavily disguised, hardly any of the ordinary folk he has hoped to persuade to believe him, but at least his friends are able to ensure his escape, and as he leaves Erewhon by the high pass through which he has arrived, he pauses to discuss with his son the future of Sunchildism:

"If they stick to the cock-and-bull stories they are telling now, and rub them in, as Hanky did on Sunday, it may go, and go soon. It has taken root too quickly and easily; and its top is too heavy for its roots; still, there are so many chances in its favour that it may last a long time."

"(Hanky)...will brazen it out, relic and all; and he will welcome more relics and cock-and-bull stories; his single eye will be upon his own aggrandizement and that of his order....

"...As in our English body politic there are two parties opposed to each other, neither of which can thrive if the other is unduly weakened, so in our spiritual and intellectual world two parties more or less antagonistic are equally necessary. Those who are at the head of science provide us with the one party; those whom we call our churchmen are the other. Both are corrupt, but we can spare neither, for each checks as far as it can the corruption of the other."

"Then you would have us uphold Sunchildism, knowing it to be untrue?"

"Do what you will, you will not get perfect truth. And if you follow the lead which I believe Dr. Downie will give you, that is to say, get rid of cock-and-bull stories, idealize my unworthy self, and, as I said last night, make me a peg on which to hang your own best thoughts, Sunchildism will be as near truth as anything you are likely to get..."

Erewhon Revisited, Chap. XXV

One commentator has observed that to Samuel Butler it seemed that, 'God cared little for the individual but a great deal for the race' (14), and Higgs's final observations about Sunchildism do seem like

the tenets of the Bokononism of Cat's Cradle (even if as Vonnegut previously suggested in his The Sirens of Titan complete divine indifference is as likely anything else). The gist of this argument is that the potential for social good is much more important than the bearer or agent of the revelation. In Higgs's case, the benign potential of the symbol may even be more precious than the comparatively uninspiring truth, though such an inference for the devout Butler can only have been another diverting flirtation with a fundamentally heretical belief. Pete Sands, the Christian protagonist of Dick and Zelazny's Deus Irae, has a very clear opinion of the propriety of godhood by acclamation or usurpation:

'I believe you,' Pete said. Then, 'I don't know quite how to put this, though, so I will simply be direct: Do either of the two religions involved in this mean anything to you personally?'

A huge stick snapped between Schuld's hands.

'No,' he said.

'I didn't think so, but I wanted to clear that up first. As you know, one of them means something to me.'

'Obviously.'

'What I am getting at is the fact that we Christians would not be overjoyed at seeing Lufteufel actually represented in that mural.'

'A false religion, a false god, as you would have it. What difference does it make what they stick in their church?'

'Power,' Pete said. 'You can appreciate that. From a strictly temporal standpoint, having the real thing - as they see it - would give them something more. Call it mana. If we suddenly had a piece of the True Cross, it would whip up our zeal a bit, put a little more fire into our activities. You must be familiar with the phenomenon. Call it inspiration.'

Schuld laughed.

'Whatever Tibor paints, they will believe it is the real thing. The results will be the same.'

He wants me to say that I believe in the God of Wrath and am afraid of him, Pete thought. I won't do it.

'Such being the case, we would as soon it were not Lufteufel,' Pete said.

'Why?'

'Because we would look on that as blasphemy, as a mockery of God as we see Him. They would deify not just any man, but the man responsible for all our present woes...'

Deus Irae, pp.177-178.

The pattern and themes first treated by Butler in Erewhon and its

sequel do seem to have become perennial - Deus Irae was co-written in 1976 by Roger Zelazny, author of Lord of Light, and Philip K. Dick. Even if they were dissatisfied with the outcome of their collaboration, this is a well-crafted science fiction story of a grim deus absconditus, one Carleton Lufteufel, whose acolytes - 'philothanes' or lovers of death - venerate him as the merciless instigator of the Third World War:

'I have travelled widely...and I have seen much of the world, both before and after. I lived through the days of the destruction. I saw the cities die, the countryside wilt. I saw the pallor come upon the land. There was still some beauty in the old days, you know. The cities were hectic, dirty places, but at certain moments - usually times of arrival and departure - looking down upon them at night, all lit up, say, from a plane in a cloudless sky - you could almost, for that moment, call up a vision out of St. Augustine. Urbi et Orbi, perhaps, for that clear instant. And once you got away from the towns, on a good day, there was a lot of green and brown, sprinkled with all the other colours, clear running water, sweet air - But the day came. The wrath descended. Sin, guilt, and retribution? The manic psychoses of those entities we referred to as states, institutions, systems - the powers, the thrones, the dominations - the things which perpetually merge with men and emerge from them? Our darkness, externalised and visible? However you look upon these matters, the critical point was reached. The wrath descended. The good, the evil, the beautiful, the dark, the cities, the country - the entire world - all were mirrored for an instant in an upraised blade. The Hand that held the blade was Carleton Lufteufel's. In the moment that it plunged toward our heart, it was no longer the hand of man, but that of the Deus Irae, the God of Wrath Himself. That which remains exists by virtue of His sufferance.

Deus Irae, pp.175-176

By a savage act, Lufteufel emulates and thereby attains an apotheosis of Shiva - not merely a grim canonization as a mass-murderer or genocide, but a veritable deification as the ultimate psychopath. While the Servants of Wrath worship him, others, considering that he "'doesn't deserve a neatly dug hole in the ground, let alone worship,'" would confront him with the consequences of his actions and exact from him the ultimate price for his deeds.

The novel relates the experiences of three travellers whose journeys become linked by a common interest in locating Lufteufel. Their motives are very different. Schuld, the hunter, has distinctly murderous reasons for seeking him. Tibor McMaster the muralist is ostensibly trying to fulfill a commission awarded to him by the Servants of Wrath to paint the true likeness of their Deus Irae, but Pete Sands has been directed by his superior to frustrate McMaster's commission. The three meet up after Tibor is marooned when one of the wheels of his cow-drawn cart comes off. The artist is an 'inc' or phocomelic artist whose congenital handicaps are, like the talking meta-bird ('a teihard de chardin'¹⁵), the deranged autofac(tory) and the brisk, loquacious dung beetles (who worship 'Veedoubleyou', a 'god' in their own image) legacies of Lufteufel's technological armageddon. His journey, and by association those of his rescuers, has become a quest through the shattered post-apocalyptic landscape with deliberately religious connotations - a 'Pilg.'

Tibor has already been the victim of the sardonic God of Wrath's abuse. While this theophany or glimpse of god (the centrepiece of Chapter 12) proves that Lufteufel has paranormal abilities and more-than-human powers, Tibor, a former Servant of Wrath on the point of converting to "'the defeated, vestigial religion'" of Christianity, is made acutely aware of the less-than-exalting viciousness of the deified psychopath (¹⁶) - an especially vile charisma. Desperately seeking release from the awful prospect of a lingering death marooned in the wastelands, Tibor beseeches both the Christian God and the God of Wrath to intervene. Just as he has given up in disgust at the lack of response - 'To hell with it, he decided. They never come when you want them' - Lufteufel's visage appears monstrously in the sky above:

The disc above him grew into a more formed - but still plastic - state. He could make out features on its surface; eyes, a mouth, ears, tangled hair. The mouth was screaming at him, but he could not make out the words. 'What?' he said, still gazing upwards. He saw now that the face was angry, at him. What had he done to displease it? He did not even know who or what it was.

'You mock at me!' the shifting, vibrating, weepy face roared. 'I am a candle to you, a dim light leading into light. See what I can do to save you if I wish. How easy it is.' The mouth of the face bubbled with words. 'Pray!' the face demanded. 'On your hands and knees!'

'But,' Tibor said, 'I have no hands or knees.'

'It is mine to do,' the great lit-up face said. Tibor all at once found himself lifted upwards, then set down hard, on the grass by the cart. Legs. He was kneeling. He saw the long mobile forms, two of them, supporting him. He saw, too, his arms and hands, on which the top portion of his frame rested. And his feet.

'You,' Tibor gasped, 'are Carleton Lufteufel.' Only the God of Wrath could do what had just been achieved.

'Pray!' the face instructed.

Tibor said, mumbling his words, 'I have never mocked the greatest entity in the universe. I beg not for forgiveness, but for understanding. If you knew me better -'

'I know you, Tibor,' the face declared.

'Not really. Not completely. I am a complex person, and theology itself is complex, these days. I have done no worse than anyone else; in fact much better than most. Do you understand that I am on a Pilg, searching for your physical identity, so that I can paint -'

'I know,' the God of Wrath interrupted. 'I know what you know and a great many more things besides. I sent the bird. I caused you to travel close enough to the worm so that he would come out and try to gnaw on you. Do you understand that? It was I who made your right front wheel bearings go out. You have been in my power all this time. Throughout your Pilg.'

Deus Irae, pp.132-133.

Tibor, overcoming his amazement at suddenly finding himself hale in limb, opportunistically snaps Lufteufel to test the reality of this experience, and to preserve a record of his face for the mural he is to complete. However, the God of Wrath is angered by McMaster's impudence and, after destroying the photograph, once again consigns McMaster to his cart after depriving him of the limbs which, for a few seconds, have made him whole - "'restitution for an entire life led in this useless condition.'" Yet for all his miraculous powers

and awesome, capricious sadism, this "God" seems insecure and vulnerable. Human weaknesses such as vanity, hostility, suspicion and fear of death characterize his exchange with McMaster, betraying the limitations of his assumed divinity:

'Do you see?' the God of Wrath demanded. 'Do you understand what I can do?'

Tibor grated, 'Yes.'

'Will you terminate your Pilg?'

'I - ' He hesitated. 'No,' he said after a pause. 'Not yet. The bird said - '

'I was that bird. I know what I said.' The God's anger softened, momentarily anyhow.' The bird led you close to me; close enough for me to greet you myself, as I wanted to. As I had to. I have two bodies. One you are seeing now; it is eternal, incorruptible, like the body Christ appeared in after the resurrection. When Timothy met him and pushed his hand into Christ's womb.'

'Side,' Tibor said. 'Into his side. And it was Thomas.'

The God of Wrath darkened, cloudily; his features began to become transparent. 'You have seen this guise,' the God of Wrath declared. 'This body. But there is also another body, a physical body which grows old and decays...a corruptible body, as Paul put it. You must not find that.'

'Do you think I'll destroy it?' Tibor said.

'Yes.' The face disappeared, barely speaking its last word.

Deus Irae, p.134

Significantly, at the height of the crisis Tibor begs not forgiveness, but understanding - the distinctive response of post-Renaissance, indeed post-lapsarian Man for whom there are few if any absolute moral touchstones - "'I have done no worse than anyone else,'" he pleads. Whatever is asserted in Heaven, in the confusing sublunary world the only possible moral criteria are comparative - relativistic rather than absolute. This, and its attendant moral uncertainty, are aptly demonstrated by Tibor's reflection on his own inability to strike back at his tormentor ('the bastard,' as he thinks of him):

The God of Wrath had personality; he was not a force. Sometimes he laboured for the good of man, and back in the war days, he had virtually annihilated mankind. He had to be propitiated.

That was the key. Sometimes the God of Wrath descended to do good; at other times, evil. I could kill him if he was acting out of malice...

Grandiose, he ruminated. The pride, hubris. The 'all puffed up' syndrome. It's not for me, he decided. I have always lain low. Somebody else, a Lee Harvey Oswald type, can go in for the big kills. The ones that really mattered.

Deus Irae, p.135.

For all his innate disinclination towards hubris, Tibor is not immune to the visionary despair which has afflicted humanity since time immemorial, mythologised in Christian terms as the Adamic temptation - 'I could be so much more!'(p.136) Whatever else Deus Irae may also be, it is clearly science fiction of aspiration.

The late Philip K.Dick had a long-evident interest in using science fiction to explore religious issues and questions of belief. In Our Friends from Frolix-8(1970), for instance, one learns on page 50 that what is taken for the vast rotting corpse of God has been found floating off a little-visited asteroid. While increasingly apparent in the sequence of recent novels The Divine Invasion, Valis, Radio Free Albemuth and his last novel, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer (1986), this interest in the nature and purpose of human existence - the ontology and teleology of being and aspiration - has long distinguished his fiction. In an extraordinarily direct and candid late discussion of his ideas and career(17), he emphasized his own commitment to apostate rather than orthodox values:

Death makes me mad. Human and animal suffering makes me mad; whenever one of my cats dies I curse God and I mean it; I feel fury at him. I'd like to get him here where I could interrogate him, tell him I think the world is screwed up, that man didn't sin and fall but was pushed - which is bad enough - but was then sold the lie that he is basically sinful, which I know he is not.

His stories often have a distinctly sceptical ambience. In one of his more recent novels, VALIS, he offers the secular theory of theophany discussed later in this chapter; and in his penultimate novel, Radio

Free Albemuth (a sort of sequel to VALIS in which the author appears as "Horselover Fat" - 'Philip') he plays with the idea of author-as-god, intercedes for a friend's life and comically renounces the authorship of his own books! Dick was an agnostic rather than an atheist; his work is always colourful and often autobiographical. Both the frequent scenarios of drug-addiction and the pervasive sense of vulnerability are the products of personal experience heightened by the paranoia his friends recall. His mental distress may have been made more acute by the Federal surveillance he attracted in the 1950s and 1960s, the years of Red witch-hunting, and of anti-Vietnam agitation. In all his fiction, 'the times are more or less out of joint,' as Butler put it. Brian Aldiss pays tribute to the sophistication of Dick's ideas:

Philip K. Dick, for all his pulp origins and pulp trimmings, is an intellectual - one of the Pirandello school. In his novels, things are never quite what they seem. Between life and death lie the many shadow lands of Dick, places of hallucination, perceptual sumps, cloacae of half life, paranoid states, tomb worlds and orthodox hells. All his novels are one novel, a fatidical A la recherche du temps perfide.

This multidextrous work is elegant, surprising, and witty, spilling out disconcerting artifacts, scarecrow people, exiles, street-wise teenage girls, Faberge animals, robots with ill consciences and bizarre but friendly aliens. Dick published nineteen novels during the sixties, many for paperback, and as a result some are hastily written.

18.

Aldiss counts four of these novels among 'the finest novels of the decade', including The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch(1964) in which 'Dick hits the true apocalyptic note'; and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?(1968) with its bleak soteriological revelation - "There is no salvation." If much of Dick's work is unmistakeably commercial and entertainingly gimcrack, it is also renowned for its wry humour, thoughtful themes, and an interest in commonplace human concerns as well as the grandiose, abstract or cosmic considerations

which are familiar landmarks in the realm of science fiction.

Dick does not always hesitate to postulate the possible existence of an evil deity, but his correlation of form, or organisation (with its connotations of system and harmony), with good, and formlessness or chaos with evil, is consistent. It's the fight against entropy, and Dick sees the enemy everywhere, even in the steady accumulation of 'kipple', or useless objects, like junk mail or empty match folders, in an apartment. In A Maze of Death the antagonist is the Form Destroyer; in Ubik the breakdown of the rational order of the world occurs in a state of "half-life" after death, where a malevolent entity preys on the life force... Life is a function of organisation; the vital, creative force is negentropic, in opposition to the entropic tendencies of the universe at large.

19.

Dick's The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch (1964) affords a contrast which reveals the essential naivety of Butler's mischievous inference that untruths promoted for religious purposes are acceptable means of regulating morality. Dick is fond of probing the weak spots of social consensus in his often devastatingly effective narratives. For instance, in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (filmed as Bladerunner), he depicts a future world threatened by its own synthetic prodigies. The Frankenstein motif is most effectively merged with an anti-utopian story of frustrated aspiration in a world dominated by synthetic or vicarious experience, and an apocalyptic epiphany in which Mercer reveals to Rick Deckard that salvation is not universal.

In The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch Dick offers a fuller depiction than in Deus Irae of the apotheosis of an anti-Christ, the religious aspects of the story being announced by the title and maintained throughout with many religious analogies and allusions. An ingenious novel ('my really insane novel,' he later called it 20) which ambitiously projects surrealistic inner landscapes in seeking to evoke the elusive, abstract quality of a genuinely transcendental

experience, it also deals with ecological disaster, imaginary technologies and interplanetary space travel. Even when his theological concerns prompt the introduction of speculative ideas about mankind's spiritual confusion his fiction retains its clarity and force:

'Is it a curse?' Anne asked. 'I mean, we have the account of an original curse of God; is it like that all over again?'

'You ought to be the one who knows; you remember what you saw. All three stigmata - the dead, artificial hand, the Jensen eyes, and the radically deranged jaw.' Symbols of its inhabitation, he thought. In our midst. But not asked for. Not intentionally summoned. And - we have no mediating sacraments through which to protect ourselves; we can't compel it, by our careful, time-honoured, clever, painstaking rituals, to confine itself to specific elements such as bread and water or bread and wine. It is out in the open, ranging in every direction. It looks into our eyes; and it looks out of our eyes.

'It's a price,' Anne decided. 'That we must pay. For our desire to undergo that drug experience with that Chew-Z. Like the apple originally.' Her tone was shockingly bitter.

'Yes,' he agreed, 'but I think I already paid it.' Or came within a hair of paying it, he decided. That thing which we know only in its Terran body, wanted to substitute me at the instant of its destruction; instead of God dying for man, as we once had, we faced - for a moment - a superior - the superior power asking us to perish for it.

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, pp.194-195

Permanently exiled from Earth, the hapless colonists on arid, infertile Mars live in subterranean dwellings and temporarily escape from the awful reality which surrounds them by taking a hallucinogenic drug, Can-D. Under its influence, they achieve a state of virtual identity with the miniature figures of Perky Pat and Walt ("Barbie" dolls, more or less) which, installed in a suitable layout of models of luxurious terrestrial goods, are imagined pursuing all manner of dazzling and fulfilling, even erotic, adventures. However, there is a special dimension to this vicarious play which the colonists pursue with ludicrous and indeed pathetic dedication. The sense of exaltation they experience when in the trance-like state

induced by the drug is heightened by group participation, and so this idealized conjuration of their former terrestrial lifestyles has become for them a sort of sacramental communion in which at least some are prepared to place complete faith:

'I believe,' Fran said slowly...

'that whether it's a play of imagination, of drug-induced hallucination, or an actual translation from Mars to Earth-as-it-was by an agency we know nothing of -It should be a purifying experience. We lose our fleshly bodies, our corporeality, as they say. And put on imperishable bodies instead, for a time anyhow. Or forever, if you believe it's outside of time and space, that it's eternal. Don't you agree, Sam?' She sighed. 'I know you don't.'

'Spirituality,' he said with disgust as he fished up the packet of Can-d from its cavity beneath the compartment. 'A denial of reality, and what do you get instead? Nothing.'

'I admit,' Fran said as she came closer to watch him open the packet, 'that I can't prove you get anything better back, due to [sexual] abstention. But I do know this. What you and other sensualists among us don't realize is that when we chew Can-d and leave our bodies we die. And by dying we lose the weight of -' she hesitated.

'Say it,' Sam said as he opened the packet; with a knife he cut a strip from the mass of brown, tough, plant-like fibers.

Fran said, 'Sin.'

Sam Regan howled with laughter. 'Okay - at least you're orthodox.' Because most colonists would agree with Fran.

Palmer Eldritch, p.41
(slightly abridged; [] understood)

The colonists' communal transcendental fantasy is in fact more repressive than liberating, for their dependence upon Can-D means that they form an almost literally "captive" market for the cartel which sells both the models and the illicit drug itself. Even if these items are a source of sacred elation for the colonists, they are merely lucrative commodities to the businessmen who work for Leo Bulero. The contraband hallucinogen Can-D and the 'minned' models are exchanged for whatever largesse the colonists can offer, and every opportunity to maintain, indeed extend their commercial exploitation is taken. If the aspiration of a large group of people is rigidly controlled by the U.N. world government who, in trying to cope with a

Malthusian global catastrophe exacerbated by an accelerating, disastrous 'greenhouse effect' have ordered them there, the drug company which cynically exploits their religious sentiments compounds their predicament. Neither the heaven of a privileged life on their native planet which they crave, nor the hell of an unmitigated existence on dreary Mars, but a limbo of vicarious, illusory living is the colonists' lot. This anti-utopian scenario suggests those in Huxley, Orwell, and Vonnegut; but when Palmer Eldritch returns from the Prox system, he brings with him the secret of a similar but more potent drug developed by the aliens. As he calmly tells his arch-rival Leo Bulero, a radical worsening of mankind's difficulty is probably just around the corner:

'In four years on Prox I learned a lot. Six years in transit, four in residence. The Proxers are going to invade Earth.'

'You're putting me on,' Leo said.

Eldritch said, 'I can understand your reaction. The U.N... reacted in the same way. But it's true - not in the conventional sense, of course, but in a deeper, coarser manner that I don't quite get, even though I was among them for so long. It may be involved with Earth's heating up, for all I know. Or there may be worse to come.'

'Let's talk about that lichen you brought back.'

'I obtained that illegally; the Proxers didn't know I took any of it. They use it themselves, in religious orgies. As our Indians made use of mescal and peyotl...

Palmer Eldritch, p.70

During the course of the commercial warfare which develops between Bulero's cartel and Eldritch's newly-formed marketing group the former monopolists learn that the new drug 'Chew-Z' is extremely dangerous because it is so effective that only a few doses can bring to its users the conviction that the hypnoid world they enter under its influence is more "real" than the actual world which their bodies remain in; and soon, unable to distinguish between the two, they become trapped in the fantastic, illusory plane. As Eldritch boasts,

his advantage over Bulero is colossal:

'God,' Eldritch said, 'promises eternal life. I can do better; I can deliver it.'

'Deliver it how?' Trembling and weak with relief [after the restoration of normal space-time], Leo dropped to the grassy soil, seated himself, and gasped for breath.

'Through the lichen which we're marketing under the name Chew-Z,' Eldritch said. 'It bears very little resemblance to your own product, Leo. Can-D is obsolete, because what does it do? Provides a few moments of escape, nothing but fantasy. Who wants it? Who needs that when they can get the genuine thing from me?'

Palmer Eldritch, p.80

Once firmly caught up in the surreal universe of the Chew-Z trip, the drug-taker discovers Eldritch's true nature. Far from being the messianic liberator whose stigmata attest his selfless sacrifice, he is revealed to be a traitorous anti-Christ whose tempting drug bestows not the promised exaltation, but damnation and despair. His ambiguous stigmata (steel prostheses which been substituted for his injured eyes, teeth and arm) are the external symbols of his inward deformity, cruel parodies of authentic stigmata and their promise of redemption which allude to Eldritch's own Faustian aspiration and lapse, reminiscent in many ways of Rumfoord's in The Sirens of Titan. The transfiguration Eldritch's Chew-Z brings does seem genuinely transcendental, as a desperately confused Barney Mayerson reflects at a decisive moment of changing loyalties:

If it was good enough for Palmer Eldritch it was good enough for him. Because Eldritch had lived many lives; there had been a vast, reliable wisdom contained within the substance of the man or creature, whatever it was. The fusion of him with Eldritch during translation had left a mark on him, a brand for perpetuity; it was a form of absolute awareness. He wondered, then, if Eldritch had gotten anything back from him in exchange. Did I have something worth his knowing? he asked himself. Insights? Moods or memories or values?

Good question. The answer, he decided, was no. Our opponent, something admittedly ugly and foreign that entered one of our race like an ailment during the long voyage between Terra and Prox....and yet it knew much more than I did about the meaning of our finite lives, here; it saw in perspective. From its centuries of vacant drifting as it waited for some kind of

life form to drift by which it could grab and become....maybe that's the source of its knowledge: not experience but unending solitary brooding. And in comparison I knew - had done - nothing.

Palmer Eldritch, pp.188-189

What Barney is weighing up is the authenticity and value of what seems to be a sort of theophany which he can enjoy while in the surreal drug universe. There is also that 'form of absolute awareness' akin or analogous to divine omniscience which the hubrist has always craved: Faustus, having mastered the sublunary, coveted the cosmic knowledge denied Man by his creator, and his modern literary offspring - evil and humane - have inherited his characteristic thirst for knowledge. The suspension of normal space-time and the intensely-perceived 'reality' which seems more compelling and vivid than that of the diurnal, Euclidean universe left behind by the drug-taker is, as Angus Taylor has noted, almost a hallmark of Philip K.Dick's work:

Beyond the well-charted territory of human experience, then, are realms fraught with danger. If the alien presence is often the manifestation of a higher order, then the higher order, that reality which lies beyond satisfactory human comprehension, is not necessarily hospitable to the human presence. This concept, which plays a prominent role in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, is made even more explicit and dramatically concise in "Faith of Our Fathers", where God is portrayed as evil, or at least utterly inhuman, and is identified with the forces of destruction. Here Dick is treating the mysterious as grounds for speculation, rather than making any statement of belief. In an afterword to this short story he says, "I, myself, have no real beliefs about God; only my experience that He is present...subjectively, of course; but the inner realm is real, too. And in a science fiction story one projects what has been a personal inner experience into a milieu; it becomes socially shared, hence discussable."

21.

In these indeterminate zones, moral values seem neither absolute nor immutable, but shifting and transitory, even ephemeral. However Anne, the Neo-Christian apologist, is not taken in by Eldritch's offers of

'eternal life' through Chew-Z:

Anne said, 'What met Eldritch and entered him, what we're confronting, is a being superior to ourselves and as you say we can't judge it or make sense out of what it does or what it wants; it's mysterious and beyond us. But I know you're wrong, Barney. Something which stands with empty, open hands is not God. It's a creature fashioned by something higher than itself, as we were; God wasn't fashioned and He isn't puzzled.'

'I felt,' Barney said, 'about him a presence of the deity. It was there.'

'..Don't tell us, Barney, that whatever entered Palmer Eldritch is God, because you don't know that much about Him; no one can. But that living entity from inter-system space may, like us, be shaped in His image. A way he selected of showing us Himself to us. If the map is not the territory, the pot is not the potter. So don't talk ontology, Barney, don't say is.'

Palmer Eldritch, pp.192-193
(abridged)

Barney's final meeting with Eldritch is a denouement; not God, nor even a Mephistophelean tormentor, the entity possessing Eldritch is in fact a sort of alien Frankenstein (or, pace Aldiss, Miltonic Satan²²) capable of creating hallucinatory worlds which it uses to ensnare 'trippers' who then must grant it the veneration and propitiation it craves. "'I'm going to be all the colonists as they arrive and begin to live there [Mars]. I'll guide their civilization. I'll be their civilization.'"(p.181) It is itself an outcast; we may infer that it is itself in thrall to a superior being, a psychotic Prometheus exiled by another Zeus, perhaps, or some other sort of demonic creator, a fellow to Lucifer but one able to create a world of votaries to rival that of the Christian God who decreed that most humbling, even nugatory teleology of Man. The purpose of human life is to love God, God above and to the exclusion of all else, if possible, and be obedient to His Will - anathema to the hubrist, but the cornerstone of Christian devotion. Eldritch's dominion would deprive people of the right even to physical autonomy:

'I'd like to know,' Barney said, 'what you were trying to do when you introduced Chew-Z to our people.'

'Perpetuate myself,' the creature opposite him said quietly. He glanced up, then. 'A form of reproduction?'

'Yes, the only way I can.'

With overwhelming aversion Barney said, 'My God. We would all have become your children.'

'Don't fret about it now, Mr. Mayerson,' it said, and laughed in a jovial, humanlike way. 'Just tend your little garden up top, get your water system going. Frankly I long for death; I'll be glad when Leo Bulero does what he's already contemplating....'

Palmer Eldritch, pp.198-199

In more traditional narratives, moral virtue - whether acknowledged or not - is generally recognizable. The protagonist in Christian fiction can be sure that the truth will be vindicated by Providence. Higgs selflessly recognizes a potentially fatal duty to expose the cynical Erewhonian theosophers' cult of the Sunchild. Indeed, some critics may be misled by the very tentativeness of the moral vision of Dick's work into deciding that it is devoid of any sustained moral drama:

Science fiction usually treats the synthetic experience as dehumanizing. Yet sometimes writers avoid a moral position...

Synthetic experiences are the bricks and mortar of Philip K. Dick's The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch. Earth colonists on extraterrestrial planets (sic) find relief from their painfully boring lives by hallucinating themselves into the playworld of children's dolls. Dick's plot revolves around the conflict between the merchants of the prevailing hallucinogen and Palmer Eldritch, the inventor of a superior one. Eldritch's drug provides the user with virtual immortality, enabling him to leave his body, assume any shape, person, and circumstance for as long he wishes - and then return to his own body without time having passed. ...Dick confines himself to exotica here and does not address himself to the morality of living the unreal...(the book presumes) that man is naturally addicted to escaping himself.

23.

Harold Berger's summation neglects Anne's role completely, and quite misses the point of Dick's oblique approach to moral issues.

Barney, by contrast with the likes of Ransom, for instance, wishes to extricate himself from the welter of surreal cross-currents

which have destabilized his life and threaten his very survival; it is only at the last moment that he apperceives and acknowledges an intrinsic impetus strong enough to overcome his apathy and fatalism and thence re-direct his energies and will to confront the weird pilgrim.

A sort of minimalist moral certainty may triumph in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, but only after the 'hero' has established what is moral by experiencing a fathomless moral void. Even so, Dick is too astute an author to settle for a pat resolution; the moral vision which Barney has attained is partial and far from reassuring:

Maybe Anne can do something for me, he thought suddenly. Maybe there are methods to restore one to the original condition - dimly remembered, such as it was - before the late and acute contamination set in. He tried to remember but he knew so little about Neo-Christianity. Anyhow it was worth a try; it suggested there might be hope, and he was going to need that in the years ahead.

After all, the creature residing in deep space which had taken the form of Palmer Eldritch bore some relationship to God; if it was not God, as he himself had decided, then at least it was a portion of God's Creation. So some of the responsibility lay on Him. And, it seemed to Barney, He was probably mature enough to recognize this.

Getting Him to admit, though. That might be something else again.

However, it was still worth talking to Anne Hawthorne; she might know of techniques for accomplishing even that.

But he somehow doubted it. Because he held a terrifying insight, simple, easy to think and utter, which perhaps applied to himself and those around him, this situation.

There was such a thing as salvation. But -
Not for everyone.

Palmer Eldritch, pp.199-200

It would be well within the realm of the novel's premises to infer that Barney's conclusion is itself unreliable, and that God is not a jealous, aloof being beyond human ken, though treacherous demi-urges are allowed to test the human integrity and the human will. In fact, part of the success of Dick's novel lies in its very incon-

clusiveness - like the world itself, the novel can be read from a variety of angles, none, not even the hints of an alternative, agnostic teleology, being directly ruled out by the author. The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch is a cosmic comedy - or a cosmic tragedy - with a variety of possible resolutions available to the reader, even if the note of soteriological despair sounded above advances the latter perspective most poignantly. A complex, allegorical work by an author who freely translates or transforms Christian moral tenets in constructing his fictive moral dilemmas and dramas, the novel advances disturbing inferences which remind one forcefully that modern religious belief is as much a matter of faith - often troubled faith, like Anne's - as it is certitude about revelation, salvation and Providence, for despite the imputed immanence of God, the Creator seems recondite and aloof. By contrast, Heinlein's brisk comedy of redemption, Stranger in a Strange Land(1961) seems obvious in its message and morals and simplistic in its theosophy. By comparison with his two rather facile offerings The Day After Tomorrow(1949) and Revolt in 2100(1953) discussed previously, Stranger in a Strange Land is a more sustained essay in religious science fiction. This compendious novel tells of the reception given by American society (as projected into the near future) to the beliefs and activities of Michael Valentine Smith, a 'promethean' messiah born on Mars:

Another recurring myth is the myth of the rebellious angel. In Greek mythology it was Prometheus, who brought fire to man and for this boon was doomed to eternal torment by Zeus. The story of Jesus changed the bringer of the boon to mankind to the emissary, not the adversary of God and his torments were caused by other human beings, jealous of his divinity.

24.

The distinction between Prometheus and Christ is emphasized in the science fiction of aspiration. Not God's emissary, obedient to

his will, but his adversary, rebellious, confident and hubristic, the promethean messiahs of science fiction defy the creator who ordained that they inherit the earth when they aspire to the stars and chafe at the religious injunctions against knowing which the devout accept. Butler's Higgs is not a promethean, and is a messiah in name only - a most convenient and direct authorial strategy. Butler's irony depends on the reader's understanding that Higgs's apotheosis, the result of credulous acclamation, cannot possibly be seen as real. Robert Heinlein's Valentine Michael Smith ostensibly represents an attempt to depict a hybrid, a messiah who seems Christian but is also described as promethean:

Robert Heinlein in Stranger in a Strange Land has put this myth into science-fiction terms. His Christ figure is a human being, Valentine Michael Smith, born and brought up on Mars, who is brought back to Earth where he founds a new religion. Among the religious rites is the baptismal symbol in which people become water brothers and learn to "grok" each other. Smith, like Jesus, has extraordinary powers. He is able to go into a trance, disincorporate himself and other people, and to read with electronic speed.

Smith is referred to as a new Prometheus, who wants to bring a better world to man. Although his superior powers are sufficient to keep him from harm, he permits his crucifixion (by stoning) secure in the knowledge that his disciples will carry on his work.

25.

The device of the factitious religion is used in Stranger in a Strange Land much as it was in the earlier The Sirens of Titan: to create two contrasting parodies of religious sects, one of which is the personality cult which develops around a charismatic messiah and ultimately challenges the dominance of the established, traditional religion. While Vonnegut's is the more original work, Heinlein's made a tremendous impression, chiefly because he eschewed the more complex philosophical issues Vonnegut broached and instead came up with a sensationalistic rather than apocalyptic parable of apotheosis,

presented in his own inimitable style - headlong, incident-ridden narrative sprinkled with cross-grained digressions about values and sense.

No less a luminary than James Blish, author of the acclaimed A Case of Conscience and, as William Atheling, a critic renowned for the balanced appreciation and incisive comment of his reviews, concluded six pages of perceptive discussion of this work with an ambiguous profession of 'satisfaction' that he is not its author, observing that, 'for all its unknowable and/or visible omissions, (it) is as provocative, difficult and outré a science fiction novel as Heinlein has ever given us.' (26) Atheling finds the novel flawed by Heinlein/Harshaw's ubiquitous and intrusive aesthetic discourse, but concentrates on its problematic lack of a coherent metaphysical rationale. Early in his precis Atheling gives up the unequal struggle to summarise Heinlein's novel, which, he has previously noted, 'seems crowded, and for good reason: it is about everything.' Instead, he sets about discussing its central subject-matter:

At this point, I am going to abandon the plot, which has already developed as many knots as a gill-net, and which in any event can be depended upon to take care of itself. It goes, as good Heinlein plots always do, and this is a good one. Now, however, I think I have reached a position from which to characterize the novel: it is religious.

No communicant to a currently established religion is likely to think it anything but blasphemous, but is dominant subject is religion, and its intellectual offerings and innovations are primarily religious too. The sex, the politics, the sciences, the action, all are essentially contributory; the religious material is central. The religion is a synthetic one, of which Smith is the Messiah (or perhaps only the prophet), and the main task of the novel is to show it as sane, desirable and exalting - in contrast to both the systems of large established orders such as Islam and traditional Christianity (toward all of which Heinlein is sympathetic and apparently well informed) and those of highly commercial enterprises like the Californian nut-cults (some features of which, with Smith's Martian assistance, he also manages to view with at least moderate tolerance).

Heinlein-Smith's eclectic religion is a fascinating pot-pourri...it contains something for everybody, or bravely gives that appearance, though by the same token it contains something repulsive for everybody too.

27.

Like Higgs, Smith is a proclaimed messiah, but unlike Butler, Heinlein requires the reader to accept him as such as an opening premise, his apotheosis being behind him when he is introduced to us, though Heinlein illustrates his charisma tirelessly. Michael Valentine Smith, promethean 'messiah' who would reform mankind, begins as a displaced person, becomes a sort of Sancho Panza and then a satiric Gulliver, and ends as the self-immolating scapegoat for mankind's veniality. His uncanny powers - catalepsy, telekinesis, walking on water, volitional euthanasia - are really those of a magical Übermensch (a cat called Neitzche also enters the story briefly) rather than a hubrist. Smith is more like Faust the cheeky assailant of Popes than a Renaissance Icarus. Nonetheless, it is a tribute to Heinlein's considerable ability to stretch one's idea of the possible and plausibly credible that critics defer to Heinlein's opening scenario of extraterrestrials and rockets and have viewed the novel as science fiction as opposed to gnostic fantasy. His author has endowed Smith with powers which outrage the epistemology of the world which is foregrounded - modern America - without offering much perceptible justification where authors like Vonnegut, Clarke, Dick, Herbert, Bishop and Watson among many others have done. Blish continues:

The final question I would like to raise - not the final one raised by the novel, not by a thousand - is that of the metaphysics of Heinlein-Smith's system....

...it can hardly be deemed unfair to ask of a science fiction writer, who starts from assumptions about the nature of the real world which are as sophisticated as modern knowledge allows (this is not true of most of us, but it is true of Heinlein, at least by pure and consistent intention). In Stranger in a Strange Land he enforces the current acceptances of modern (scientific) metaphysics by beginning every

major section with an author-omniscient review of how these events look in the eye¹⁹⁶¹ of eternity; furthermore, he is scornful throughout of anybody (read, boobs) who does not accept this specific body of metaphysics.

So it is fair to ask him about the metaphysics of his proposed system; and it is, to say the best of it, a shambles. Smith appears on the scene able to work miracles, as is fitting for a prophet; in fact, he can work every major miracle, and most of the minor ones, which are currently orthodox in Campbellian science fiction. [Here gives a very long list of Smith's unusual faculties and abilities.] My point is not that this catalogue is ridiculous - though it surely is - but that Heinlein the science fiction does not anywhere offer so much as a word of rational explanation for any one of these powers. They are all given, and that's that.

The more general features of the system fare equally badly.

28.

One realizes that Stranger in a Strange Land is not a profound book; we have Heinlein at his sunniest and most wry. According to Brian Aldiss, the original title was The Heretic and Valentine Michael Smith certainly does advance what were taken for amoral or subversive ideas about personal conduct and social values, embracing homicide, free love, and ritual cannibalism. It soon became a 'cult' book (having first been an 'underground' success as a harbinger of both the emergent counter-culture, and the decade's 'New Wave' of audacious and inventive science fiction. Heinlein depicts the materialistic American religious institutions of the near future, explaining the mechanism of exploitation in great detail⁽²⁹⁾, as well as offering caustic judgements about the Nation, such as:

The Reverend Foster, self-ordained - or ordained by God, depending on authority cited - had an instinct for the pulse of his times stronger than that of a skilled carnie sizing up a mark. The culture known as "America" had a split personality throughout its history. Its laws were puritanical; its covert behavior tended to be Rabelaisian; its major religions were Appollonian; its revivals were almost Dionysian. In the twentieth century (Terran Christian Era) nowhere on earth was sex so vigorously suppressed - and nowhere was there such a deep interest in it.

Stranger in a Strange Land, p.267.

In the background of Smith's iconoclastic career through mundane institutions and values is a larger scheme, a spiritual hierarchy in which human nature is placed below the Old Ones of Mars and Smith himself, who in turn are somewhat junior in cosmic power to another spiritual realm which 'disincorporated' spirits enter after death. In the human realm, Smith may be an heretical iconoclast, but he has nothing negative to say about his Martian mentors. No hubrist he, for he doesn't defy these or any other gods; in the event he turns out to be their proxy - not their prophet, for unusually Heinlein eschews speculation about the future of the world until the last page, when he closes with a trite sentiment about the future of the vigorous human race: '...by the time they would slowly get around to it, it would be highly improbable approaching impossible that the Old Ones would be able to destroy this weirdly complex race.'(p.400) In fact, so benevolent is Heinlein's cosmogony that even the bigoted, asinine Bishop Digby is afforded a place in a Heaven that deliberately resembles a religious corporation. Down on the third planet, the novel's two contrasting factitious sects are the exploitative, materialistic Fosterite Church of Bishop Digby, and the professedly unconventional group who venerate Heinlein's 'man from Mars.'

The orphaned, sole survivor of the ill-fated first expedition to Mars, Smith is adopted and brought up among their own offspring by the enigmatic Martian 'Old Ones' who also school him in their contemplative, rationalistic philosophy-cum-religion while helping him to develop a variety of extraordinary abilities. Throughout the novel, the Old Ones of Mars offer a mature contrast to mankind's cosmic parochialism and relative primitivism. If humanity is excited about the contact between the two worlds, the Martians have more

important events to reflect on, such as how to deal with a work of art made unique by the unexpected demise of the artist:

Mars, geared unlike Earth, paid little attention to the Envoy and the Champion. The events were too recent to be significant - if Martians had used newspapers, one edition a Terran century would have been ample. Contact with other races was nothing new to Martians; it had happened before, would happen again. When another race was thoroughly grokked, then (in a Terran millenium or so) would be time for action, if needed.

.....

On Mars the current event was of a different sort.

By what standards should this opus be judged? It bridged from corporate to discorporate; its final form has been set throughout by an Old One - yet the artist, with the detachment of all artists everywhen, had not noticed the change in his status and had continued to work as if corporate. Was it a new sort of art? Could more such pieces be produced by surprise discorporation of artists while they were working? The Old Ones had been discussing the exciting possibilities in ruminative rapport for centuries and all corporate Martians were eagerly awaiting their verdict.

The question was of greater interest because it was religious art (in the Terran sense) and strongly emotional: it described contact between the Martian Race and the people of the fifth planet, an event that had happened long ago but which was alive and important to Martians in the sense in which one death by crucifixion remained alive and important to humans after two Terran millenia. The Martian Race had encountered the people of the fifth planet, grokked them completely, and had taken action; asteroid ruins were all that remained, save that the Martians continued to cherish and praise the people they had destroyed. This new work of art was one of many attempts to grok the whole beautiful experience in all its complexity in one opus. But before it could be judged it was necessary to grok how to judge it.

It was a pretty problem.

Stranger in a Strange Land, pp.85 & 86.

The abridged passage quoted above typifies the book as a whole, the tone of which slips readily between the comic and the sombre, the pragmatic and the magical, as Heinlein's essay at a transcendental parable strains to be ingenious, entertaining, liberal and yet 'decent' almost simultaneously. The result is that, far from emulating the Stapledon of Star Maker and the Wells of Men like Gods while retaining his own distinctive manner and values, the novelist

rarely engages the reader deeply and sympathetically. Consequently one is left with the impression of a book which, while being genuinely entertaining, is also rather capricious and sprawling and which comes as close to self-parody as parable, with Smith's serenity in the face of daunting dangers ultimately reducing everything to 'a pretty problem' rather than a significant or distressing dilemma. Heinlein's messiah from Mars is, alas, without credentials; Butler's Higgs served as a similar sort of vehicle for authorial moral comment, but where Higgs can worry Smith simply smiles beatifically while occasionally committing magical murders or performing miraculous stunts. If Higgs lacks the charisma this sort of thing provides for Smith, he seems to have some sort of conscience. Whatever its popular success as satire, Stranger in a Strange Land is not an adventurous or radical work in terms of its tradition.

Having been brought to Earth quite against his will by the long-delayed second expedition, Smith is befriended by the garrulous, wealthy, and paternalistic Jubal Harshaw who rescues him from close arrest in a government research centre. Harshaw and his cronies defend Mike's freedom and his extensive financial inheritance (Smith is the sole legitimate human heir to all the mineral riches of Mars) from governmental depredations. Keen to discover at first hand the social reality of the world to which his parents belonged, Smith's encounter with its shady side almost overwhelms him. Yet he does not lapse, and though it is some time before he recovers his equanimity, he goes on to use his exceptional combination of birthrights to establish an utopian community of friends and followers, the beginnings of his Church of All Worlds.

Without Smith's moral endorsement, the counter-cultural life-

style of his group would seem nearly as libertine as that devised by Huxley for his satiric Brave New World, but Smith is a transcendental figure able to sanctify the self-indulgent practices of the community with charismatic utterings and rites. (The parallel can be extended: for though their gospels are inverses of one another, Smith is John's evangelical brother, the outlander advancing truths which the reader views with more sympathy than the dominant ethic of the novel's larger society.) 'Thou art God' is adopted as an everyday greeting by Smith's faithful. Money is stored in bins, and time is devoted to mutual 'grokking;' also, though the group is notionally egalitarian, Harshaw is always referred to as 'Father' even though he is a late convert, and Smith is supposedly the spiritual guru of the group revered by everyone else. This distinction slips, however, and eventually Harshaw, the no-nonsense provider of most of the group's axioms, comes to dominate the narrative, though Smith shares the limelight again towards the end of the novel.

Smith's first utopian group quickly becomes the nucleus of a fast-growing sect committed to combatting what he has declared to be the excessive materialism of human society. The Fosterite Church, set up by Heinlein to be the satirical butt of the novel, exemplifies the garish shallowness and greed Smith abhors.

Black humour and tomfoolery join hands in Mike's visit to the Church of the New Revelation (Fosterite), which bears some resemblance to a commercially resplendent Mormonism. Teenage messengers are "cherubs" with wings who fly by means of "jump harnesses" under their robes. Slot machines give blessings and occasional jackpots - Mike manipulates one to pay off three times in a row for Jubal before Jill stops him - which usually find their way back into the cash registers of the Church. Foster himself has been stuffed and mounted for reverent contemplation, though Mike sees it only as "spoiled food." People are occasionally chosen, like lottery winners, to "go to Heaven" with a "Bon Voyage" party and funeral services held the same night, and their estates go to the Church. And services include snake dances and cheer-

leaders, glossolalia and bar service, stereovision coverage (the big screen shows football games afterward during the season), with hymns sponsored by approved products, door prizes, subsonic vibrations and other electronic gadgetry in a building designed to shake to the foundations for effect when the congregation claps and stamps its approval.

In presenting this scene, Heinlein goes all out, with foreword and afterword by Jubal, explaining, respectively, that churches can get away with anything, and that this one - he fears - might become totalitarian, because it delivers what it promises: happiness here and now. For all that the satirical lash cuts deeply, Jubal is at pains to explain away the outrageousness, reducing the reader's resistance to the unconventional elements that will later appear in Mike's Church.

30.

The clerical hypocrisy described above by David N. Samuelson (who takes the better part of thirty pages faithfully unravelling what he terms the 'farrago' of the novel's wayward structure) is the direct descendant of Butler's Musical Banks of Erewhon; but if Smith is to be seen, as Heinlein himself directed, as a 'new Prometheus', it can only be in terms of the alternative creed - the 'system' lambasted by Blish - which he promotes as a novel, esoteric, humane latter-day Enlightenment or Revelation. The real problem with Heinlein's messiah, of course, is that his revelation is profane, existential and, to a fair degree, quite self-obsessive; Smith's millennial emancipation is from materialism and absurd mores, from guilt rather than its cause, sin. However much Ronald Lee Cansler urges us to see a fundamentalist concern behind Heinlein's invective, Heinlein still cannot be absolved of wrecking most of the Ten Commandments:

One should not assume, however, that Heinlein is mocking all of Christianity. Heinlein obviously admires Christ and has at least some feeling for the message of Christianity: 'Representations of the Crucifixion are usually atrocious - and the ones in churches are worst - blood like catsup and that ex-carpenter portrayed as if He were a pansy... which He certainly was not. He was a hearty man, muscular and healthy. But a poor portrayal is as effective as a good one for most people. They don't see the defects; they see a symbol which inspires their deepest emotions; it recalls to them the Agony and Sacrifice of God'(p.308). What Heinlein is doing is showing a contempt for what he believes to be Christianity's

falling away from the true gospel of Christ. He is also troubled at Man's probable reaction to another chance at a true faith. The name "Michael" means "One who is like God," and Mike becomes a Christ-image in trying to show Man a better way, a religion of truth, self-understanding, and love - salvation. Mike founds a church that is not based on the notion that God is 'something that yearns to take up every indolent moron to His breast and comfort him'(p.400) Instead, Mike sets up a church on a rather pantheistic basis, with the basic creed 'Thou art God,' 'an unafraid unabashed assumption of personal responsibility'(p.400). 31.

This sort of spiritual Workfare is the other side of Heinlein's religious schema, deflecting the charge that Mike's religion promotes indolence and sexual self-indulgence. If Heinlein can claim any sort of Christian impulse for the satire of his novel, we must look for it in the canon of the Church of All Worlds.

Unlike the Fosterite Church, Smith's group has an egalitarian rather than hierarchical structure, a dismissive rather than acquisitive attitude towards money, and a canon of libertarian beliefs which is supposed to be an enlightened combination of the rationalistic sagacity of the Martian 'Old Ones' with human compassion and joy. Moreover, Smith and his disciples enjoy a lifestyle which, in its sexual liberality and indulgence bears a striking resemblance to the institutional, hedonistic religion of Huxley's Brave New World - minus the soma, of course.

Heinlein's sects rarely carry such onerous moral ramifications and questions as this one supports. Clearly contrary to Christian ethics, Smith teaches that morality is really replete with human prejudice rather than reason or sapience. By contrast, the tenets of Smith's sect are grounded in the bedrock of direct messianic revelation. Initiates practice 'grokking essences' reminiscent of 'Boko-maru' of Cat's Cradle, both of which are means of achieving a form of self-transcendence. The key to self-mastery and communion

with others, as well as to mental control over objects and their physical contexts, is understanding the Martian language. Adepts like the inner circle of Harshaw even achieve that most elusive of Wells's Utopian dreams - telepathy - and a variety of other transcendental faculties. Indeed, the inner circle of Smith's immediate friends are allowed a foretaste of heaven; their communal existence is a mundane version of the life-to-come, which is enjoyed among a community of kindred spirits, the ultimate and true destiny of the individual.

The growing popularity of Smith's revelations threatens the dominion of the Fosterite Church. Consequently, the rivalry between the two implicit in Heinlein's thematically polemical opposition of Smith's humanist cult to the corrupt and exploitative Fosterite establishment becomes the major means of carrying forward the narrative. A confrontation ensues between the Fosterites, who, like the rich Pharisees of the Gospels, react to a growing sense of their own insecurity, and Smith's idealistic acolytes. Since the aggression is all one way, Smith's tolerant disciples emerge as the moral victors much as the early Christians exposed the brutality of their persecutors by turning the other cheek.

Smith's claim to promethean stature begins and ends with his ability to liberate his acolytes from their mundane moral sensibility and pass on to them the powers which the Martian Old Ones have conferred on him, their 'alien nestling'. The idea that culture - indeed, language itself - conditions sensibility and faculties is an important one to which further reference will be made in the next section, but in Heinlein's novel it is quite overwhelmed by a torrent of gags, astute moral discourse, gimcrack vignettes, patter and corny philosophy, nearly all of it emanating from Jubal/ Heinlein.

Heinlein, seemingly unable to reconcile the sins and shortcomings of Smith's given character with his symbolic role of divine messiah, simply pares away the humane aspects of Smith's personality until the reader can see only his inhuman purity and the other-worldliness of his Martian values and vision. The reader is meant to take this gradual attenuation of Smith for a gradual apotheosis: ever more aloof and 'cosmically' detached, Smith turns from the pleasures and pursuits of this world in order to prepare for his immolation. Thus, the venial rather than decadent materialism of Smith's acolytes is ratified as being a benign sensual compensation for the vagaries and frustrations of mundane existence, rather as the skinny-dipping and sexual opportunity which goes with participation in the Underground army of Revolt in 2100 is a healthy rather than profane aspect of communal living in distinct contrast to the sybaritic Soldarity Service of Huxley's Brave New World.

More importantly, Smith's apotheosis is really neglected, for Heinlein does not confront the problem of making Smith's transfiguration and assumption seem plausible but expects his reader to simply accept that Smith, selflessly sacrificing himself, is indeed a sort of saviour. He becomes a martyr to save his friends from an angry mob whom he would once simply have 'discorporated' into oblivion, and it may be that we are to read a measure of Agape for his attackers into this restraint. If so, it is quite undercut by what then happens, as Mike's acolytes enact a gross, literal parody of Christ's Last Supper by making a broth from his mortal remains which they consume to more fully 'grok his essence.' While Heinlein has established the practice of cannibalism as one of the more sacred rites of the 'Old Ones,' the overwhelming bathos of this final,

absurd analogue of a religious doctrine - the idea of communion - taken with Heinlein's closing depiction of Smith's spending his afterlife in the company of both Digby and Foster, at last unambiguously exposes Heinlein's sceptical and ironic response to his comedy of faith. His dilemma is identical to that faced by Stapledon, whose Odd John Wainwright, lusus naturae and dispassionate murderer, creates an island utopia where he and his fellow supermen and superwomen might live according to their own ultra-ethic. While Heinlein's sardonic handling of Smith's messianic role is as studiously sacrilegious as Moorcock's contemptuous portrayal of Glogauer in Behold the Man, he fails to bring us to see Mike's self-sacrifice as profoundly tragic:

Nowhere, perhaps, is Heinlein's inconsistency more irritating than in his refusal to establish a position from which the whole farrago can be viewed... Jubal is clearly unequipped for the kind of commitment Mike wants from him. Mike's adventures on Earth are hardly in keeping with the comic heaven he shares with Digby and Foster. And that heaven and reality as seen by the Martians seem mutually contradictory. The deepening tone as the story goes on suggests taking Mike and his Church seriously, but the makings of his religion are preposterous - and are so labelled within the book - and his own immortality removes any tragic sting from his death.

It is as if Heinlein had been seized by a story with its own inexorable logic, then sought to undercut its effectiveness by devices that might absolve him of responsibility for the story's message. Panshin maintains Heinlein never could end a story right, because he was unwilling to accept anything more meaningful in life than search and survival. The commitment in this story was to nothing less than martyrdom, the myth of the dying god whose demise liberates his followers; but being forced into the position of offering that lesson to his readers seems to have been unacceptable to Heinlein's better judgement.

32.

Stapledon manages to bring one not just to understand Odd John's motives, however much we reject their appalling logic, but indeed to side with Homo superior in their fatal confrontation with the world's battleships; Heinlein sends up his tragic culmination with a finale which is purest escapism, however construed, because it has no

rationale: 'The Old Ones...were not omniscient and in their way were as provincial as the humans.' This finale actually reverses even the single substantiated contention of the general metaphysical system Blish criticized in his review. By contrast, Stapledon's story is coherent and, however unlikely some of his invention may appear, is also genuinely disturbing and thought-provoking; Heinlein's story is wayward, hectic and florid, replete with solipsistic digression and ebullient facetiousness, parapsychological and pseudomystical improbabilities. The former is the product of a genius and the latter, of an impresario. This is perhaps most acutely apparent in Heinlein's reluctance to leave us with the impression that the Old Ones are the ultimate beings: the narrative and moral vision may indeed be 'speculative', as Heinlein thought of the novel as a whole, but its theosophy is essentially traditional.

The macrocosm Heinlein outlines very sketchily supports this, being in fact a reassuringly Ptolemaic one; for behind the Old Ones, transfigured humans (Digby, Foster and ultimately Mike, too) are at work, and beyond them, unseen but implicit, a Providential God runs Head Office. It is quite unlike the sort of thing one meets in Dick, or indeed, in much recent science fiction. If one sees Digby and Foster as archangels, the Old Ones as alien angels and Smith, their saintly prophet of the sublime and the ineffable, as an evangelist of humane ethics furthering the providential Divine Will of an inscrutable God, the Christian Universe is as clearly present as it was in Lewis's trilogy, with its sorns, eldils and hnau.

The key to Stranger in a Strange Land is to see it as an (allegedly) adult entertainment, as is indicated by the author's distinct lack of earnestness about his eponymous messiah (whose sole

charisma, the weirdness of his alien powers and sensibility, are virtually overshadowed by 'Father' Jubal Harshaw, Heinlein's surrogate and the dialectical doubting Thomas to Heinlein's Martian 'promethean' Christ). While no one should decry a novel on the grounds that it is diverting and enjoyable, it is surely not too much to demand of it, with Blish, that it offer us something else besides a solipsistic narrative, bowdlerised eroticism and an anodyne rehash of probably the most widely-commemorated event of Western culture. As science fiction - or even as 'speculative' fiction, as Heinlein preferred this and later work(33) to be called - it may be fairly compared with the response of writers like Wells, Lewis, Harrison and Moorcock to Christ's sacrifice, and found wanting credibility and feeling.

To conclude this section, we may further assess Valentine Michael Smith's messianic role by contrasting it with that of the protagonist of another great 'underground' novel of the early nineteen-sixties, Herbert's Dune, already discussed in the closing section of the previous chapter. Paul Atreides's life-story is told in three books which are cleverly linked together by theme and epic pattern to form a novel charged with religious ideas and symbolism.

Now religion is a subject on which science fiction has regularly come off the rails, mistaking it either for superstition (maybe superstition with some valid factual phenomenon hidden behind it, but superstition for all that), or for miracle-working. And invented religions in sf have almost universally served to spotlight their author's ignorance of extant religions. Yet...religious mysticism permeates the pages of the Dune novels. Herbert has contained within his novel the cynical view ("religion is the opium of the masses" - typified by the Emperor or the Bene Gesserit's manipulations) and the miraculous view (in Paul's fulfillment of the prophecies of the Fremen); but he also has managed to show that he understands the essence that lies much closer to the heart of the religious impulse - that which gives the individual's life significance.

34.

Nonetheless Robert C. Parkinson's germane observations about the religious nature of Dune overlook the aspect of the novel which is of prime interest in discussing the humanistic world-view of modern science fiction, that is, the source of Paul's prescient vision and the form of his messianic role. Is it helpful to see Atriedes as a Christ, Faust or Prometheus - or is he, like his successor Great-Souled Sam the Lord of Light, another apostate humanist champion? If other writers are often more reluctant to offer a clear, definite perspective of their protagonist, in this case we may look to the text confidently for an answer as Herbert's themes are illustrated by means of the experiences of his central character.

As we have seen, Herbert's success with Dune is the product of his mastery of detailed narrative: the imaginary world of Arrakis itself, its peoples and their sociopolitical context, are intricately and compellingly evoked in a visionary narrative which, by virtue of a coherent configuration of complex ontological, transcendental and teleological ideas, happily overcomes the cliches of ray-gun and rocket for which much science fiction is justly notorious. Not that Dune lacks either; but Herbert imbues the hackneyed properties of the 'space opera' with an exotic quality. Yet, however impressive and unique, the ecology and adaptive technology of Arrakis are but the mise-en-scene of a human drama which is genuinely compelling.

From the outset, Herbert highlights his protagonist's human-ness in dramatic fashion. On Caladan, the Atreides household is preparing to leave their ancestral home world to supervise the Imperial spice commerce based on the barren planet Arrakis. In the midst of things, an ominous guest arrives, the Reverend Mother Helen Gaius Mohiam of the Bene Gesserit sisterhood. Her mission is to administer a

potentially lethal test of character to Paul.

'...If you withdraw your hand from the box you die. This is the only rule. Keep your hand in the box and live. Withdraw it and die.'

Paul took a deep breath to still his trembling. 'If I call out there'll be servants on you in seconds and you'll die.'

'Servants will not pass your mother who stands guard outside that door. Depend on it. Your mother survived this test. Now it's your turn. Be honoured. We seldom administer this to men-children.'

Curiosity reduced Paul's fear to a manageable level. He heard truth in the old woman's voice, no denying it. If his mother stood guard out there... if this were truly a test... And whatever it was, he felt himself caught in it, trapped by that hand at his neck: the gom jabbar. He recalled the response from the Litany against Fear as his mother had taught him out of the Bene Gesserit rite.

'I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.'

He felt calmness return, said: 'Get on with it, old woman.'

'Old woman!' she snapped. 'You've courage, and that can't be denied. Well, we shall see, sirra.' She bent closer, lowered her voice almost to a whisper. 'You will feel pain in this hand within the box. Pain. But! Withdraw the hand and I'll touch your neck with the gom jabbar - the death so swift it's like the fall of the headsman's axe. Withdraw your hand and the gom jabbar takes you. Understand?'

'What's in the box?'

'Pain.'

He felt increased tingling in his hand, pressed his lips tightly together. How could this be a test? he wondered. The tingling became an itch.

The old woman said: 'You've heard of animals chewing off a leg to escape a trap? There's an animal kind of trick. A human would remain in the trap, endure the pain, feigning death that he might kill the trapper and remove a threat to his kind.'

The itch became the faintest burning. 'Why are you doing this?'

'To determine if you're human. Be silent.'

Paul clenched his left hand into a fist as the burning sensation increased in the other hand. It mounted slowly: heat upon heat...upon heat. He felt the fingernails of his free hand biting the palm. He tried to flex the fingers of the burning hand, but couldn't move them.

'It burns,' he whispered.

'Silence!'

Dune, pp.14-15.

Paul's human spirit is confirmed by the painful duress of the test and this saves him from a death to which his instincts would have

betrayed him. (Indeed there are many hints that the outcome is portentous enough to have compelled even Jessica's reluctant complicity).

The idea of human nature being the most noble form of sensibility, but being constantly vitiated by beastly impulses and drives (exemplified by Wells's Moreau) is an element of the complex thematic patterning of Dune and its several sequels. The Harkonnens are hideous individuals in their own right, sadistic and vindictive; but their administrator, the Governor of Arrakeen, is their equal in cruelty and is regaled with the soubriquet 'Beast'. If the novelist has set a typical conflict between good and evil in the future, this conflict is also presented as the struggle for the humane attributes of man to overcome the atavistic vices of animal cruelty and ruthlessness. The Harkonnens are demonic and bestial, and the idealistic Paul Atreides is humane and redemptive: his eventual triumph over them is a science-fictional Harrowing of Hell (ironically reversed in the sequel, Dune Messiah, with the religious corruption of the Fremen).

Herbert's structuring of the three books of Dune is quite clear. In each, Atreides confronts another challenge which, like the first, demands resilience, courage and imagination. Yet, as one gathers from the first book, Paul Atreides has a powerful prescient talent which offers him unique perceptions of his situation which he may use to preserve himself and further the aims which become increasingly important to him, especially his prime aim of overthrowing the Harkonnen regime which has usurped and killed his father.

In the second book, 'Maud'dib', Paul and Jessica have taken refuge in the Fremen desert enclaves wherein he becomes Usul, water-brother of Stilgar the leader of Seitch Tabr. They are not killed out

of hand for their water as is customary with strangers, but instead are treated with reserved suspicion until Jessica assumes the role of tribal Reverend Mother after catalysing the poisonous raw geriatric spice. At that point, Jessica discovers an aspect of herself which she finds terrifying initially, though like Paul's gift her collective memory will prove to be vital for their survival.

By undergoing her own sort of deadly ordeal, Jessica transcends the limits of her individual sensibility and gains access to the stored memories of all her predecessors. The insights she gains are apocalyptic in both its senses, that is, as historical revelation (in Ketterer's terms); and as her own doom, for her recapitulative experience of the drug catalysis is very nearly fatal. Imagistically, this event embodies all the salient features of metaphysical science fiction, which conventionally depicts human nature as possessing one or more 'superhuman' innate faculties in a latent state or in the process of evolving from within the human consciousness.

As the story of their life among the Fremen unfolds, it becomes apparent that however remarkable is Jessica's new awareness, Paul's faculty is even more impressive for, when he too risks his life to catalyse the poisonous raw spice into the drug sacred to the Fremen, the visions he has are both apocalyptic, like hers, and prescient:

He sampled the time winds, sensing the turmoil, the storm nexus that now focussed on this moment place. Even the faint gaps were closed now... Here was the race consciousness that he had known once as his own terrible purpose. Here was reason enough for a Kwisatz Haderach or a Lisan al-Gaib or even the halting schemes of the Bene Gesserit. The race of humans had felt its own dormancy, sensed itself grown stale and knew now only the need to experience turmoil in which the genes would mingle and the strong new mixtures survive. All humans were alive as an unconscious single organism in this moment, experiencing a kind of sexual heat that could override any barrier... This is the climax, Paul thought.

From here, the future will open, the clouds part onto a kind of glory. And if I die here, they'll say I sacrificed myself that my spirit might lead them. And if I live, they'll say nothing can oppose Muad'Dib.

Dune, Book III, 'The Prophet'; p.457

An unexpected consequence of gaining acceptance among the Fremen is the deepening and strengthening of this melange-stimulated oracular talent; and eventually Paul can foretell the likeliest outcome of the possible futures pertaining at any nexus of the space-time continuum. As he quickly realizes, however, this quasi-divine awareness raises immediate questions whose emergent answers entail an awesome responsibility for his actions and their singular deterministic impact on the course of the future:

Prophecy and prescience - How can they be put to the test in the face of the unanswered questions? Consider: How much is actual prediction of the 'wave form' (as Muad'Dib referred to his vision-image) and how much is the prophet shaping the future to fit the prophecy? What of the harmonics inherent in the act of prophecy? Does the prophet see the future or does he see a line of weakness, a fault of cleavage that he may shatter with words or decisions as a diamond-cutter shatters his gem with a blow of a knife?

- 'Private Reflections on Muad'Dib' by the Princess Irulan
Dune, Book II (p.264).

This ability has always troubled him with its insistent, cryptic visions, never more ominous perhaps than that which followed his victory over Jamis in a deadly Fremen duel:

Paul...realized that he had plunged once more into the abyss...blind time. There was no past occupying the future in his mind...except...except...he could still sense the green and black Atreides banner waving...somewhere ahead...still see the jihad's bloody swords and fanatic legions.

It will not be, he told himself. I cannot let it be.
Dune, Book II, (p.294).

However, the converted raw spice liquor the Fremen take in their seitch orgies enhances his prescience to the point where the visions become meaningful. Even as an outcast among the Fremen bereft of seigneurial power, with this faculty - explicitly genetic and thus

inherent (that is, essentially scientific as opposed to miraculous) - Paul seems to be able to steer events so as to effectively drive the present to create the future. He may also use his ability to anticipate events so as to obviate the sort of failings of intuition or understanding which characterize the human condition, extending the awareness and multifarious experience of human nature acquired in his formative relationships:

Paul...challenges each superior being that he meets, extracts the superiority, and adds it to his own. The superiorities are synergistic. The first being to be absorbed is his father; the last is his mother. Unlike his son, Leto, Paul is unwilling to incorporate nonhuman superiors. As he grows more complex, Paul does not forget that all beings differ only in degree, but he gradually discovers that a Supreme, beyond all being, exists. "God" is a pattern of organization.

35.

To the Fremen, Paul seems to have divine powers; and they readily identify him as the eponymous prophet of their sacred lore, the 'Lisan al-Gaib', the long-promised 'Voice from the Outer World'.

Simply by living among them, Paul gives the legend a living presence, and gains power to bend the Fremen to his will. He begins to mold them into a guerilla force with which to win back his dukedom. But already they are more than that, and so is he. He is no longer Paul Atreides, but Paul Maud'Dib, Mahdi of the Fremen and will-o-wisp of the desert, while his followers have become Fedaykin, "death commandoes." The marriage of a charismatic leader and a people who long to be led has begun to bear its inevitable fruit.

Paul does in fact have remarkable powers, but far more important in the end is how the Fremen respond to them. There is a strong, unconscious projection that makes him even more special than he is. Part of this projection depends on the legends planted by the Bene Gesserit and the way they crystallize around Paul, but even more depends on the faculty of his followers for wishful thinking, the unconscious will to believe there is someone out there with the answers they lack. Unable to find adequate strength of purpose in themselves, they look for a truth, a cause, and a leader to supply it. It is the same mutually supportive relationship of leaders and followers which was explored in the feudal setup of House Atreides.

36.

The apotheosis of Paul (the 'Royal Faustus' introduced in the previous chapter) is enacted little by little on two levels, the public and the private, and is signally of more concern to his author than the parallel transfiguration of Smith in Stranger in a Strange Land, whose author conveniently finds in him a ready-made superhuman. Smith has few aspirations. He has superhuman powers, and his self-confidence derives from the cosmic certainty of the martian ethics in which he was raised. Atreides has many personal and political goals, but his aspirations are dogged by contingent moral dichotomies and the violence of his zealous followers.

Yet even if the Fremen may consider him a messiah, Herbert takes pains to ensure that we do not too readily ascribe mystical charisma to Paul. We witness his uncertainties and inner turmoil; we are shown how important is his relationship with his Fremen concubine Chani, who is one of the few who are permitted to know an intimate side of him as he really is rather than as the image circumstances have forced upon him. Thus confronted with Usul's human doubt and needs, we are less likely to view him as a prescient Übermensch (still less a mystical emissary) for we also know that the Fremen religion is a factitious creed established centuries before by the Bene Gesserit to prepare for Paul and present him with an opportunity to command rather than emancipate the Fremen (who, being native, are in many respects his superiors in the vital business of surviving the hostile desert climate of Arrakis). Their cult of the Kwisatch Haderach which takes Paul/Usul/Muad'Dib for its personified icon is viewed with contempt by the Harkonnen lords, who consider it a primitive sort of folly, too ludicrous to warrant suppression:

'Have you heard the latest word from Arrakis?' the Baron asked.

'No, Uncle.'

'They've a new prophet or religious leader of some kind among the Fremen,' the Baron said. 'They call him Muad'Dib. Very funny, really. It means "the Mouse." I've told Rabban to let them have their religion. It'll keep them occupied.'

Dune, Bk.III, p.350.

Like Higgs, Paul is acclaimed as a messiah though readers know he is none, and this creates in Dune expectations and issues of religious ethics much as it does in Erewhon Revisited, generating a narrative tension focussing on the protagonist's motives which hardly rises to anything like the same degree in Stranger in a Strange Land, even if there the likes of Foster and Digby are exposed and sent up for laughs. However, the question which Herbert highlights in Dune by depicting a reluctant 'messiah' being constrained by events to promote a factitious religion bears directly on Paul's humanistic traits of altruism and redemptiveness (without which he would surely be merely another self-interested warlord). Tragically the messianic role which he resents both because it enslaves others and because he knows it subsists in a false belief that he is divine insidiously erodes his freedom of action.

Paul's perpetual struggle is to preserve his personal integrity from the dual erosion of the violent faith of the vengeful Fremen and the Bene Gesserit manipulation of his predestined role as the charismatic warrior-prophet of Arrakis who, they hope, will advance the cause of the Sisterhood against the Landsraad, the Guild and the Imperium. His search is essentially for wisdom rather than scientific knowledge, benign sapience rather than expeditious science (though, given the careful realization of Dune's ecological themes, scientific endeavour is also granted a significant place in Maud'Dib's endeavour to liberate the Fremen).

Paul must use the Fremen to achieve his aims of overthrowing the corrupt Imperial hegemony, both on Arrakis itself and at large; but his concern is to liberate them rather than enslave them. To his growing disquiet, he discovers that as their incarnate idol he inspires in them a fanatical zeal which knows no moderation and which may only be channelled constructively by exploiting their fanaticism. Theirs is an absolute faith which cannot accomodate any contradiction of its prevalent ethos and ideology.

Although Paul's intuitive impulse is redemptive, as the third book proceeds it is plain that the 'Panoplia Prophetica' of the Bene Gesserit is to some extent actually determining history through Paul's charismatic leadership, for his image more and more constrains his autonomous will. Yet it transpires that he is not their Kwizatch Haderach (the 'shortening of the way' they have tried to genetically engineer through their 'breeding program' and through whom they would be able to exercise temporal power) for he is an usurper born a generation earlier than their authentic intended proxy should be. His prescient gift and situation offer him the chance to commandeer their preparations for the real one. As Timothy O'Reilly has noted, this is an exceptionally well-wrought and sophisticated theme:

....there is one other concept Herbert built on his story that is unique. This is what we might call his genetic theory of history.

Once again, Herbert uses the Bene Gesserit and the inner powers Paul has gained from them as his vehicle. The source of the almost supernatural abilities of the Bene Gesserit is a substance they call the Truthsayer drug, which allows their Reverend Mothers to draw on profound inner knowledge and the accumulated knowledge of the past. But it is only women who can master the inner changes brought on by the drug. It has always been death for a man. The Bene Gesserit have embarked on a centuries-long program of selective breeding to produce a man who can take the drug and live. They call their goal the Kwisatz Haderach, "the shortening of the way." They hope

to open vast new areas to their control - the depths of the active male as well as the receptive female. The crippling flaw in the Bene Gesserit skills is that they must be wielded indirectly. They hope that a man fully trained in their esoteric arts would still be able to wield temporal power in a way that they cannot. It is hoped that Paul may be this figure, but he has been born a generation too soon in the plan and is consequently not completely under their control. He has his own destiny to follow.

37.

Paul Atriedes struggles to avoid giving way to the temptation to become a god - or at least a demigod, for he is a shaper rather than creator - which ironically would also mean being a political puppet, the 'Lisan Al-Gaib', whose strings are pulled by the Sisterhood. Yet Herbert also endows him with an inborn transcendental impulse which sustains Paul's humanistic aspiration - 'There exists no separation between gods and men; one blends softly casual into the other'; as one of the Proverbs of Muad'Dib cited in Dune Messiah attests eloquently.

In Dune itself, Paul's Fremen concubine Chani acts as an index of his success in preserving his identity. His public actions reveal that he has preserved his conscience in circumstances where his evil adversaries the Harkonnens have developed appetite in its place, and so he is a sympathetic, troubled hero - a paradoxical figure - the aristocratic warrior who will lead but will not become a messiah, the apostate redeemer sceptical of his own motives. His agonies are Christian, but transposed into a setting which only science fiction can provide; for Paul, the dilemma is not to drive the divine to overcome the misgivings of the flesh in the tradition of Gethsemane, but quite the contrary - he must strive to preserve his humanity in the face of a personal transformation which is catastrophic and potentially alienating. Herbert views this experience of transfiguration (which has a prominent place in many of his books) as potentially psychotic. Also, the proposition that if mundane power can

corrupt, the charismatic power to inspire and exploit religious devotion may corrupt on a potentially cosmic scale, is central in Dune.

Paul wishes to lead a political-military campaign and free humankind from the exploitation of the Imperium and its associates, but he must at last recognize that his Fremen see this as a crusade against their vile persecutors - a galactic Jihad, a religious war of ruthless bloodletting. His messianic aims smack of prometheanism without being technophilic. He himself is a titan of sorts, one of the mighty aristocrats whose expulsion from the circles of privilege is the consequence of feudal vendetta rather than a personal transgression, but who otherwise fits the role. His motives are noble, his objectives - the enfranchisement of the Fremen, the fulfillment of their dream of converting Arrakis's deserts into water-rich, fertile land, and the restoration of moral values to the realms of man which have been ruled for generations by greed and cynicism - are idealistic and libertarian. Yet therein lies the ineluctable problem which will frustrate the most benevolent of these aims and reduce his idealism to a rueful disappointment in the inability of his fellows to share his moral vision.

The most expedient means is to seize upon and exploit his reputation as a religious figure, but this involves a deliberate deceit which proves to be very pernicious. The Royal Faustus effects a damning trade-off between his deep-rooted desire for personal autonomy and the historical necessity the Fremen's collective aspiration for vengeance creates. Knowing the consequences, Atrides concedes in his struggle to evade the role prepared for his descendent and usurped by himself to further his feud with the Harkonnens; after their victory

on their home world of Arrakis (made by God 'to test the faithful') Fremen legions are unleashed on the other worlds of men to sate their mystical blood-lust in his name. If the successful campaign to overthrow the Harkonnens and destroy the force of Imperial writ on Arrakis is a symbolically redemptive, Paul Atreides's emancipation of the Fremen tribes tragically turns into a ferocious apocalypse which even he cannot restrain without becoming just as cynical as his vanquished foes. His intended ploy, to use the anti-agathic 'spice' unique to Arrakis's austere ecosystem as an effective counter to the forces commanded by the Imperium, turns out to provide only the most precarious of advantages against them. The Guild, Landsraad, Sisterhood and ousted Imperial dynasty almost immediately form a common cause against Atreides's new hegemony, and he is consequently forced to secure his own position by bolstering his image as the god-king of Arrakis in order to maintain the loyalty of his fanatical legions who ironically have emerged as the only means he has of fulfilling his dream of a stable, harmonious humane universe capable of allowing men a chance to develop their - putative - innate potential. One of Paul's most redeeming features is that he believes that mankind in general can one day acquire his special faculty - a millennial, teleological vision indeed.

In the first sequel, Dune Messiah, Atreides's general strategy is to force an advantageous settlement upon the Imperial, alien, religious and mercantile power-blocs which hitherto have controlled the human universe and reform human life and sensibility. To this end, he seeks to use the once-subversive Fremen religion, but he fails because he seeks to institute a stable, benevolent despotism - and this goes not only quite against the grain of human nature, but out-

rages the universal principle of change and growth through evolution he himself wishes altruistically to advance. Finally embittered by his failure to maintain the stability bought at the price of terrible slaughter, revolted by the first signs of decadence and spiritual deterioration he sees even in his most faithful Fremen acolytes, and sickened by the habitual cynicism of the now-powerful clerical establishment he himself helped to create, he goes knowingly to his death in an ambush.

In the final analysis, Atreides has himself been misled - or, giving way to a growing agape stimulated by the loyalty of his Fremen, allowed himself to be. Everything he has initiated seemed to have betrayed its promise as well as the altruistic hope which later motivates his benign manipulations; the final irony is that he discovers himself to have been born of the very hated stock he sought to eradicate - the Harkonnens. In the conventional symbolic terms of the science fiction of aspiration, Faust's gamble, Frankensteinian in its scope, has again proved doomed perhaps even from its very inspiration, dogged by the same nemesis which vitiates the utopian vision of the Wells of Men Like Gods; and yet again it has been betrayed by man's innate follies - passion and fratricidal aggrandisement:

Here lies a toppled god -
His fall was not a small one.
We did but build his pedestal,
A narrow and a tall one.

Dune Messiah, p.96.

This 'Tleilaxu Epigram' is a fitting rejoinder to Goethe's sardonic 'Prometheus', itself perhaps an inspiration for Mary Shelley's post-Gothic classic tale of hubris and nemesis, of aspiration and apocalypse. Indeed in a moment of introspection amid all the welter of plotting and subterfuge of Dune Messiah Paul considers his own vision

in just these very terms:

'Pardon, Sire,' the aide said. 'The Semboule Treaty - your signature?'

'I can read it!' Paul snapped. He scrawled 'Atreides Imper.' in the proper place, returned the board, thrusting it directly into the aide's outstretched hand, aware of the fear this inspired.

The man fled.

Paul turned away. Ugly, barren land! He imagined it sun-soaked and monstrous with heat, a place of sandslides and the drowned darkness of dust pools, blowdevils unreeling tiny dunes across the rocks, their narrow bellies full of ochre crystals. But it was a rich land, too; big, exploding out of narrow places with vistas of storm-trodden emptiness, rampart cliffs and tumbledown ridges.

All it required was water....and love.

Life changed those irascible wastes into shapes of grace and movement, he thought. That was the message of the desert. Contrast stunned him with realisation. He wanted to turn to the aides massed in the seitch entrance, shout at them: If you need something to worship, then worship life - all life, every last crawling bit of it! We're all in this beauty together!

They wouldn't understand. In the desert, they were endlessly desert. Growing things perform no green ballet for them.

He clenched his fists at his sides, trying to halt the vision. He wanted to flee from his own mind. It was a beast come to devour him! Awareness lay in him, sodden, heavy with all the living it had sponged up, saturated with too many experiences.

Desperately, Paul squeezed his thoughts outward.

Stars!

Awareness turned over at the thought of all those stars above him - an infinite volume. A man must be half mad to imagine he could rule even a teardrop of that volume. He couldn't begin to imagine the number of subjects his Imperium claimed.

Subjects? Worshippers and enemies, more likely. Did any among them see beyond rigid beliefs? Where was one man who'd escaped the narrow destiny of his prejudices? Not even an Emperor escaped. He'd lived a take-everything life, tried to create a universe in his own image. But the exultant universe was breaking him at last with its silent waves.

I spit on Dune! he thought. I give it my moisture!

This myth he'd made out of intricate movements and imagination, out of moonlight and love, out of prayers older than Adam, and gray cliffs and crimson shadows, laments and rivers of martyrs - what had it come to at last? When the waves receded the shores of time would spread out there clean, empty, shining with infinite grains of memory and little else. Was this the golden destiny of man?

Dune Messiah, pp.202-203.

However, for all that it is ultimately ground in the dust of the Fremen planet, Atreides's hubris retains its nobility. Far from

seeming despotic in his demise - the final verdict on many a science fictional godling - the hero of Dune and Dune Messiah dies of despair at the fanaticism he has propagated, for it has effectively given the Fremen a set of religious hobbles in place of the Imperial yoke and Harkonnen chains from which he has striven to liberate them.

'I've had a bellyful of the god and priest business! You think I don't see my own mythos? ...I've insinuated my rites into the most elementary human acts. The people eat in the name of Muad'Dib! They make love in my name, are born in my name - cross the street in my name. A roof beam cannot be raised in the lowest hovel of far Gangishree without invoking the blessing of Muad'Dib!'

- Book of Diatribes
from The Hayt Chronicle;
Dune Messiah, p.124.

Herbert's tripartite novel is one of the high points of aesthetic and visionary achievement to be found in the genre, ranking alongside novels like A Canticle for Leibowitz and not too many others as the classics of a burgeoning field. It is also fair to say that Dune eclipses not just its immediate sequel, but indeed the rest of the series, as an integrated, evocative and lyrical tour-de-force. It has also, one feels sure, influenced many contemporary authors within the genre itself and indeed beyond such fairly notional limits. But when one thinks of generic influences, one may identify novels as seemingly diverse as Aldiss's Barefoot in the Head, Zelazny's Lord of Light, Watson's The Martian Inca and Bishop's Stolen Faces, all of which seem to ring with echoes of Herbert's epic work just as it itself reveals a host of allusions and conventional tropes - drug-induced transcendence, the perils of perception and enlightenment, the oppression of dogma - which have contributed to its power. None equal Herbert's achievement in Dune, which is unique(38).

'A Sudden Surge': Synergy and The Teleological Transfiguration of Man

Twenty years ago I.F. Clarke observed that another change was taking place in the prophetic war fiction which was the subject of his classic study. Faced with the redundancy of describing the virtually instantaneous total global war of the nuclear era, writers seemed to be turning from detailed predictions of the circumstances and situation of the next war. He seemed to think that new images and narrative forms would be developed to explore the nature of the crucial relationship between science, progress, and human nature:

Hope for the sake of hope keeps on breaking in with a vision of renewal. For instance, in The Chrysalids, an ideal community of beneficent telepaths has emerged from the ruins; and in one of the most recent stories in this field, Midge by Paul McTyre, there is every hope that the remnants of mankind may learn brotherhood and wisdom from swarms of intelligent, telepathic, and highly moral insects. The tale of imaginary warfare has become a parable for the times.

Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984, p.199.

Perhaps transcendental science fiction is what has emerged most distinctively from the new direction he sensed writers were taking then. Brian Aldiss's Barefoot in the Head (1969) well illustrates the transition between the anticipation of warfare and the transcendental science fiction of aspiration.

As a preliminary to advancing Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan as an exemplar of the apocalyptic vein of modern science fiction, David Ketterer condemns Barefoot in the Head as a 'pastiche of super-subjective, late Joyce... The problem...appears to be that Aldiss began with a particular style that he wished to imitate and then contrived a plot to allow for the extended use of that style. The result eventually makes for excruciating reading.' While there may well be more than a hint of truth in his inference about Aldiss's methods since the novel was, as Aldiss acknowledged, constructed from

the series he wrote for Moorcock's New Worlds after Harry Harrison had published 'the original chunk' in Impulse, the novel was greeted as a significant work by such respected voices as The Listener and The Daily Telegraph. Ketterer's use of the phrase 'excruciating reading' has an unconscious ironic force, for while Aldiss's style is 'multi-layered, free-associational and stream-of-consciousness' and 'pun-encrusted', his prime object was not so much to 'come up with a plot' to support it but to sustain a style which might effectively evoke the traumatic disorientation of the inflamed post-catastrophe mentality of his characters. Charteris and his acolytes are at the mercy of their own impulses and their own fevered response to the arbitrariness of events: the familiar has been distorted or obliterated by a weapon which has transformed their world into a phenomenological zone where survival and fulfilment are all-consuming existential pressures. By no means the facile or shallow pastiche Ketterer describes, Aldiss's novel is actually an sustained experiment in portraying contemporary obsessions and despair.

Colin Charteris, the uncommitted 'saviour' of the automobile sect, is the very antithesis of Maud'Dib though he too is capable of a drug-induced oracular vision. His precognition is every bit as intense, terrifying and erratic as was Paul Atreides's first perceptual breakthrough and is construed in much the same terms, that is, as a progressive metaphysical faculty unfettered by a traumatic disruption of the controlling logos:

Precognition is a function of two forces he told himself and already wished that he might record it in case the thought drifted from him on the aerosolar light. Precognition. Two forces: mind of course and also time: the barriers go down and somewhere a white-thighed woman waits for me -

These are not my images. Bombardment of others' images. Autobreasted succubae again from Disflocations.

Yet my image the white-thighed, although I have not seen them already familiar like milk inside venetian crystal all the better to suck you by. But my precognitions slipping.

It's not only that mind can leap aside from its tracks but that the tracks must be of certain property: so there are stages I have crossed to reach this point the first being the divination of time as a web without merely forward progress but all directions equally so that the essential I at any moment is like a spider sleeping at the centre of its web always capable of any turn and the white thorn thighs turning. Only that essential Gurdjieffian I aloof. And secondly the trip-taking soaked air of London tipping me off my traditional cranium so that I allow myself a multi-dimensional way.

Barefoot in the Head, pp.56-57

'Zbogom, he asks himself rhetorically, 'what am I now if not more than man, mariner of my seven seizures. More than pre-psychedelic man. Me homo viator.' Even if this personal enlightenment resonates with Orphic allusion it is explicated in the language of aspiration:

In his treadmillrace he was on her thought scent moving along the web taking a first footfall consciously away from antique logic gaining gaining and losing also the attachment to things that keeps alive a thousand useless I's in a man's life seeing the primary fact the sexual assertion that she took wing whoever she was near to these two men.

Then he knew that he was the last trump of his former self to ascend from the dealings at Dover by the London lane and the other caught cards of his pack truly at discard trapped in old whists and wists.

He had a new purpose that was no more a mystery only now in this moment of revelation was the purpose yet unrevealed.

Idem.

In a footnote to Trillion Year Spree, Aldiss sums up his novel thus: '...the entire culture is freaked out after the Acid Head War, and the central character, Charteris, is elevated to the role of Messiah. But such power as he has comes from abnegation and, when he finds himself on the brink of believing in his ability to work miracles, he deliberately throws away the Christ role.' (39) Ketterer seems not to comprehend the point of Aldiss's anti-heroic novel because it fails to match the generally positive criteria for apocalyptic fiction he employs in New Worlds for Old. In fact, Barefoot in

the Head should be better understood as a sardonic allegory of aspiration, an essentially tragic rather than heroic vision of existence and desire.

Setting aside the more conventional messianic features of the novel, two questions are clearly worth pursuing. The first, concerning Charteris's aspirations, is readily disposed of: Charteris travels into the hallucinogenic zone of bombed-out England seeking sex and adventure and little else. However he there acquires self-knowledge through the medium of drug-enhanced precognition, and an obscure but vital purpose. Having supplanted Brasher as the prophet of the Proceed Charteris becomes more reclusive as he works on 'Man the Driver,' his 'gospel' comprising 'Some Gurdjieff, more Ouspenski, time-obsessed passages from some here and there, no zen or that - no Englishmen, but it's going to spread from England out, we'll all take it, unite Europe at last. A gospel. Falling like PCA. America's ready, too. The readiest place, always.'(p.85) Essentially, the profane cult of homo viator preaches liberation from old moral strictures:

You will see. No more conflicts once everyone recognises that he always was a hunter, all time. The modern hunter has become a driver. His main efforts do not go towards improving his lot, but complicating ways of travel. It's all in the big pattern of space-time-mind. In his head is a multi-value motorway. Now, after the Kuwait coup, he is free to drive down any lane he wants, any way. No external frictions or restrictions any more. Thus spake Charteris.

Barefoot in the Head, p.84

Like Higgs, Charteris becomes a messiah by acclamation. Perhaps a latter-day cousin of Conrad's Marlow from Heart of Darkness, he has travelled through the psychotic nations of Europe into the worst affected region, but the immanent darkness in the souls of his acid-head acolytes is eclipsed by the psychedelic mystical light of their

deranged mass faith, for they believe that through their destructive rituals they may evolve under his spiritual guidance. The Escalation, an acid-rock group, provide him with his first large audience and help spread his message with their twisted lyrics extolling the 'catagasmic' interactions of the deranged automotive crusaders.

The second question is undoubtedly the more interesting: why does Charteris finally reject this messianic role? After surviving a cathartic auto-da-fe which culminates in the destruction of Brussels, and the several attentions of the 'mascodistic' trinity of Brasher, Boreas and Laundrei, Charteris reaches his messianic nadir in a Gethsemane meditation. The impulse of the Chartercade is spent, leaving him facing an ineluctable dichotomy:

all the words I have said or spoken were minced of my
blood my semen my moan-barrow of weeping tissue in dis-
inegration

what is I in truth is in their locality not here

trees ruin me too particular

and the specified woman

anonymous

all anonymous that felty well in the languid dark against
thighs of unknown speech and every faculty distended to some
farther shore like aface with nothing personal in it just the
big chemical loot-in of eternal burn-down

in the nerved networks and elastic roadways of me is the
traffic passing for thought but this eternal recurrence of
trees signals me that no decision is possible that decision
is impossible for everything will come back again back to the
same centre

alternatives must be more multi-valued than that I either
go with Kommandant on his hosanno domination or speed with
Angel south but if one crossed martyranny if the other
another series of eitherors with death always the first
choice

somewhere find a new word new animal
transgress
in their heads they have only old words
insisting that history repeats itself

the stale hydrogenes of a previous combustion rolling in
an old river and elder landscape footprinted to the last tree
gnarled landscape of I stamped flat by the limbus brain

its their behaviour and its geared experience is lessening
and cuts me down to sighs morality nostalgia sentiment
closure falsight all I have to drive through their old faded
photograph of life

how that crumbling nightdream thunderclouds round my
orizons

Barefoot in the Head, pp.204-205

His pained reverie is interrupted by a devotee who urges him, "'Speak
at the world's megaphone Master. These small strifes are your larger
battlefield or the states your pulpit. Pay the big taxi fare to a
Rome address! Talk out the lungs cancer. Rocket right up the lordly
astralbahn. Flush the world's motions into your own bowl and I'll
back you.'" Angeline, Charteris's pregnant Criseyde, vehemently
opposes the idea of Charteris sacrificing himself - "'That's all non-
sense. We're trying to turn into human beings first Cass and we don't
need your snow-job for aid.'" Charteris himself angrily rebuts the
suggestion that he should sacrifice himself to reinvigorate
Christianity:

'Listen to the multi-valued answer. All resolved. I had it
in my dream turning down the old clothes.' Then mute in his
wonderment so she asked him darling?

'Whatever you all think you think you all think in the old
stale repeating masadistrick Judeo-Christian rhythm because
its in your bloodshed. Your heritage taken or rejected dormi-
nant. Be rich as Christ indeed. But Creosus Christ is to me
pauperized an old figment and just another capitalist lackey
whose had our heads isn't it? It's the historic recess over
and over a western eternal recurrence of hope and word and
blood and sword and Creosus victimizes your thinkstreams.'
Continued in this blaspheme of Christ Plutocrat schekelgrabb-
ing bled-white christendamn till Cass fluttered.

'I don't believe in him either Master you know that.'

'No difference. History jellied and you can't drip out.
You're hooked in his circuit and the current circulates.'

Barefoot in the Head, p.207

"...say for ever farewell to that crazy nailedup propheteer'" he
directs them, and decides to resign his role, rejecting his own
passion for a pastoral family life with Angeline, leaving the

'automotive lemmings' and Herr Laundrei's marching military masturbators to their own febrile pursuits. Ultimately Charteris is unable to discover any authentic 'universal patterns', can discern no philosophia perennia in the 'wornout mode' of the 'old Westciv groove'; but only a bleak entropic reality resonating with archaic banalities and futile self-sacrifice. His final message ('holy law okay but spiced with heresy') is decidedly Bokononist:

All possibilities and alternatives exist but ultimately
Ultimately you want it both ways
Barefoot in the Head, p.220

Of course science fiction is, perhaps supremely, the mode of literary expression in which technological man confronts his own nature. If, in the absence of the God whose demise was pronounced by Marlowe, Neitzche et al, men may not readily implore or blame a supreme being, then surely the Infernal Host is by the same token banished expediently, and men must squarely face the moral issues of their own making. Marlowe's Barrabas, The Jew of Malta asserted 'I count religion but a childish toy, / And hold there is no sin but ignorance'; and perhaps humanistic science fiction takes the argument a step further - usually without losing sight of moral imperatives - by revealing the extent of human ignorance not just of the universe, but crucially, of ourselves, of the human spirit however defined. Tom Woodman concluded in a brilliant survey(40) of the whole field of religious science fiction that, 'The idea of transcendence creates a common ground between aesthetic criteria for evaluating science fiction and a degree of theological interest that goes beyond the purely diagnostic.'

What finally links religious aspirations and the best science fiction is a common interest in transcending our present reality. Both have a cosmic dimension. Both have a common focus on the future of man, an interest especially

built into Judaism and Christianity. Cosmic awe, the perspective that comes from contemplating the stars, makes us realize our littleness... Science fiction relates to great cosmic forces. It is the opposite as a genre to what D.H. Lawrence once called 'wearisome sickening little personal novels.' Our earthly viewpoint is bound to be narrow and half-blind, and the epistemological sophistication of modern science fiction confirms this...

41.

Yet however highly metaphysical the transcendental science fiction of aspiration may be, it generally also insists, conventionally, that awareness and experience (or catastrophe) are twinned vectors of humane progress. The pursuit of practicable knowledge does tend to remain an important motivating force, but is allied closely to teleological thresholds which appear unexpectedly (apocalyptically, in Ketterer's terms) in response to frustrated human aspiration. Brian Aldiss in 'Enigma 2: Three Diagrams for Stories - A Cultural Side-Effect' (1974) from his Last Orders (1977) toys disingenuously with the theme of his earlier work Barefoot in the Head, this time stressing the 'otherness' of an emergent species much as Stapledon did in Odd John and Wyndham in The Chrysalids:

Notes on Aliens. Make it clear somewhere that these aliens are not from another planet; that notion has whiskers on it. Make these aliens a sudden surge from the human race in one generation, just as there was a generation of great engineers towards the end of the eighteenth century. But these have been generated by a pharmaceutical error, like the Thalidomide children of the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties. In this case, the error was a new tranquillizer administered to mothers during early pregnancy. Since it alters only cultural attitudes, the strange side-effect was never detected on research animals. The cultural gene has shown itself to be inheritable.

42.

'Aliens are everywhere. Culture-obsessed' he concludes wryly, confirming in parody the real significance of the science fiction of aspiration, itself now a literary 'gene' which has 'shown itself to be inheritable.'

Gully Foyle's apotheosis in Alfred Bester's Tiger! Tiger! (1955), a futuristic picaresque which Brian Aldiss has called 'a definitive statement in Wide Screen Baroque' (Trillion Year Spree, p.235), is a classic example of teleological science fiction of aspiration. Gully Foyle is transformed by months of suffering aboard a derelict wreck in space from an ordinary "grease monkey" into a vengeful superman who ultimately saves mankind from atomic destruction prompted by demented commercial rivalry. Yet since Bester stresses the contiguous nature of the transformation (Aldiss's 'sudden surge') rather than the intrinsically 'alien' quality of the 'New Man' or Homo superior Foyle becomes, the humanistic implications of his story are universal rather than sectarian or individualistic. In fact Bester suggests that the potential discovered by his anti-hero is innate in human nature generally rather than restricted to genetically-predisposed Übermenschen. Whatever the humanistic vision of his novel, its conventional moral vision is harder to gauge, especially where orthodox religion is concerned. Foyle's world seems anarchic and generally amoral - violent crime flourishes, humanity has invented new forms of perverse self-indulgence, and social order (destabilized by the advent of 'jaunting' or volitional self-teleportation 43) is seemingly inconstant. It is revealed en passant that institutionalised religion has formally been abolished, and that Christianity has again gone underground. Foyle is brisk and dismissive, even contemptuous:

At one side (of the house), they saw the top of a cellar window brightly illuminated and heard the muffled chant of voices: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...'

'Cellar-Christians!' Foyle exclaimed. He and Robin peered through the window. Thirty worshippers of assorted faiths were celebrating the New Year with a combined and highly illegal service. The twenty-fourth century had not yet abolished God, but it had abolished organized religion.

'No wonder the house is man-trapped,' Foyle said. 'Filthy practices like that. Look, they've got a priest and a rabbi, and that thing behind them is a crucifix.'

'Did you ever stop to think what swearing is?' Robin asked quietly. 'You say "Jesus" and "Jesus Christ", you know what that is?'

'Just swearing, that's all. Like "Ouch" or "Pshaw".'

'No, it's religion. You don't know it, but there are two thousand years of history behind words like that.'

'This is no time for dirty talk,' Foyle said impatiently. 'Save it for later. Come on.'

Tiger! Tiger!, p.140

In fact Bester ignores his own cue and the topic of religious prescription and its justification is not developed further, indicating that it is present merely as a trope rather than as a central concern of the novelist, and suggesting the extent to which Butler's Erewhonian criticisms of institutional religion have been assimilated in the conventions of popular American science fiction of the fifties. However, it is perhaps significant that Foyle's penultimate transformational trauma - a literal baptism of fire - is set in a disused church, the Cathedral of St. Patrick in New York. The last stop for Foyle's travelling circus and entourage, Old St.Pat's is destroyed catastrophically just as Foyle returns to set in motion the final stage of his plan to shock the world out of its apathy and stagnation. He is virtually burned alive but consequently learns how to 'jaunt' through space and time and uses this supernal talent to emancipate his fellows:

Foyle shook himself and abruptly jaunted to the bronze head of Eros, fifty feet above the counter of Piccadilly Circus. He perched precariously and bawled: 'Listen a me, all you! Listen, man! Gonna sermonize, me. Dig this, you!'

He was answered with a roar.

'You pigs, you. You rot like pigs, is all. You got the most in you and you use the least. You hear me, you? Got a million in you and you spend pennies. Got a genius in you and think crazies. Got a heart in you and think empties. All of you. Every you...'

He was jeered. He continued with the hysterical passion of the possessed.

'Take a war to make you spend. Take a jam to make you think.

Take a challenge to make you great. Rest of the time you sit around lazy, you. Pigs, you! All right, God damn you! I challenge you, me. Die or live and be great. Blow yourselves to Christ gone or come to me and I make you great. Die, damn you, or come and find me, Gully Foyle, and I make you great. I give you the stars. I make you men!'

Tiger! Tiger!, pp. 245-246.

Haranguing his audience in the gutter tongue of the twenty-second century, Foyle's message - a 'sermon' - is a profane Sermon on the Mount. He has distributed throughout the world nine pounds of a deadly new explosive, PyrE, which is detonated telepathically by the Will and the Idea, to the horror of a few powerful men who have sought to procure it. The explosive is in the hands of a few ordinary people, but is no longer shielded. Thus Foyle has literally placed the future in their hands, urging them no longer to be humble but to aspire, to secure control of their own lives and indeed to seek to follow and emulate him. Yet the central theme of his message, whatever the Christian impetus of his excited oaths, is not Christian but humanistic. Fulfill yourselves, he challenges them, live up to your potential. His prophecy offers Everyman not the Earth promised to the humble resigned to their down-trodden lot by Christ but the stars, their real destiny. Or, by default, they can destroy themselves with the PyrE. Science is again the familiar catalyst of man's nascent potential, but here offers the common people ('children' as the powerful see them) a truly Promethean gift.

Lately the transcendental or visionary experience is often presented as being an unsought one, visited upon an individual who has little desire to acquire staggering power or some advantageous scientific insight, and fewer recent writers have drawn upon the theme of human aspiration in this more familiar Promethean vein. As I.F.Clarke affirmed in 1966 in Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984, the

now all-too-familiar perils of the expedient use of scientific discoveries, particularly in furthering the arms race, have brought home to people everywhere the unpalatable truth about the science which underpins the comforting dream of the consumer society with its seemingly incessant progress: 'Two world wars have taught the lesson that modern warfare is by far the most dangerous manifestation of the powers of science. The inhuman logic of science now confirms the analysis made by Wells in 1905; if men want the benefits of technology, they must adjust themselves to meet its dangers.' As Bester's Tiger! Tiger! suggested in 1955, we must somehow meet the responsibilities our continuing pursuit of the terrestrial paradise entails or become victims rather than masters of our own technological inventiveness. Bester and Vonnegut have been instrumental in transmitting the misgivings of Butler, Wells, Huxley and Orwell to their contemporary successors, Aldiss, Clarke, Dick et al.

A new interest in individual as opposed to general or racial human motivation is also apparent in contemporary science fiction, though of course something meaningful about human nature is usually to be inferred from the latter-day protagonist's baptism of fire. Commonly a decidedly unheroic moral vision - ambiguous and initially self-serving in Gully Foyle's case - is the starting-point for the digressions and evaluations of many of these stories, which are unique parables which proclaim the need for a new, sophisticated ethical sensibility to complement their apostate motives. Moreover, though the novels offered here as representative examples share many common features and ideas, they also show a great diversity in style and rhetoric, ranging from Bester's flamboyant picaresque through Asimov's determinedly logical exposition of technological advances

and Aldiss's drug-boosted surrealist symbolism to Dick's phenomenological solipsism.

Commonly, a delirious or bewildered protagonist has traumatically lost all his ethical referents through some personal tragedy or more general catastrophe like the Acid Head War of Aldiss's pessimistic Barefoot in the Head. The grail he pursues (and must retrieve to avoid insanity or moral perdition) is a comprehensive system of moral understanding to complement our knowledge of the physical universe. The key to this is cryptic - an enigmatic problem tests the intelligence, resourcefulness and adaptability of the human mind. Moreover, the challenge must be met by mastering the disturbingly unfamiliar holistic perspectives of the Cosmos, as in Asimov's The Gods Themselves (1972).

Isaac Asimov's novel is tripartite, and takes for its theme Schiller's saying 'Against stupidity the gods themselves contend in vain;' with each section taking its cue from part of this statement. Asimov's simple style suits his determinedly scientific approach to his subject. James Gunn sums up Asimov's achievement:

The spirit of reason that (John W.) Campbell preached and Asimov embodied in his fiction purged science fiction of an accumulated detritus of careless thinking and casual writing. The Campbell-Asimov attack on the irrational and the romantic eventually was attacked in its turn as unfeeling, an infatuation with technology, a naive image of man as a rational being. But while it lasted, it brought a clarity of thought and purity of style that served science fiction well for two decades.

44.

Indeed one might fairly call the first section of The Gods Themselves a story about the contemporary scientific establishment's personalities and their vanities, something about which one may assume Asimov, himself a scientist, is knowledgeable. Alas he displays a surer touch in technical exposition than in creating memorable

characters, for while he convincingly contextualizes his initial scientific premises, all his scientists apart from Ben Dennison seem like functional caricatures. Nonetheless his novel offers what may be thought of as an indirect but telling answer to anti-scientism such as Lewis's Out of the Silent Planet, Voyage to Venus and That Hideous Strength, personified in the former two by Weston, and represented in the third by the scientific establishment as a whole, depicted as the N.I.C.E. Like Wells, Stapledon, Bester, Miller, Clarke et al, Asimov demands maturity of man and then grants ennobled mankind cosmic power and freedom.

The novel begins in a low-key fashion as Asimov weaves physics theory into a plausible tale of professional rivalry among scientists. The donnée is ingenious but simple: a parallel universe is discovered when its intelligent species manages to produce energy by transmuting in our universe a quantity of tungsten into plutonium-186, an unknown, quite improbable element.

In a since famous article in the North American Sunday Tele-Times Weekly, (Hallam) wrote, 'We cannot say in how many different ways the laws of the para-Universe differ from our own, but we can guess with some assurance that the strong nuclear interaction, which is the strongest known force in our Universe is even stronger in the para-Universe; perhaps a hundred times stronger. This means that protons are more easily held together against their own electrostatic attraction and that a nucleus requires fewer neutrons to produce stability.

'Plutonium-186, stable in their Universe, contains far too many protons, or too few neutrons, to be stable in ours with its less effective nuclear interaction. The plutonium-186, once in our Universe, begins to radiate positrons, releasing energy as it does so, and with each positron emitted, a proton within a nucleus is converted to a neutron. Eventually, twenty protons per nucleus have been converted to neutrons and plutonium-186 has become tungsten-186, which is stable by the laws of our own Universe. In the process, twenty positrons per nucleus have been eliminated. These meet, combine with, and annihilate twenty electrons, releasing further energy, so that for every plutonium-186 nucleus sent to us, our Universe ends up with twenty fewer electrons.

'Meanwhile, the tungsten-186 that enters the para-Universe is unstable there for the opposite reason. By the laws of the para-Universe it has too many neutrons, or too few protons. The tungsten-186 nuclei begin to emit electrons, releasing energy steadily while doing so, and with each emitted electron a neutron changes to a proton until, in the end, it is plutonium-186 again. With each tungsten-186 nucleus sent into the para-Universe, twenty more electrons are added to it.

'The plutonium/tungsten can make its cycle endlessly back and forth between Universe and para-Universe, yielding energy first in one and then in another, with the net effect being a transfer of twenty electrons from our Universe to theirs per each nucleus cycled. Both sides can gain energy from what is, in effect, an Inter-Universe Electron Pump.'

The conversion of this notion into reality and the actual establishment of the Electron Pump as an effective energy source proceeded with amazing speed, and every stage of its success enhanced Hallam's prestige.

The Gods Themselves, p.23.

Thus to the evident delight of the world, the process makes available a virtually inexhaustible new supply of energy: 'No major technological advance had ever caught hold so rapidly and so entirely and why not? It meant free energy without limit and without problems. It was the Santa Claus and the Aladdin's lamp of the whole world.' (pp.17-18)

Both humans and their 'para' collaborators gain from working both sides of the 'electron pump'; but a disenchanted young scientist is outraged by the vainglory of the 'discoverer' of the process. Hallam resents Lamont's suspicions about his role in the most exciting scientific find of the century and uses his superior position to stifle his allegations. Yet Lamont clings to his critical inference that the parahumans are technologically more advanced - perhaps even more intelligent per se - than mankind, and thus may be simply exploiting a backward race. Crucially, he reasons with Hallam, they can manage communication and transmission between the parallel universes but man cannot, being thereby virtually a passive partner in the exchange.

Lamont became aware now of the storm of emotion he had raised, but he couldn't understand its cause. Uncertainly, he said, 'That they are more intelligent than we - that they did the real work. Is there nay doubt of that, sir?'

Hallam, red-faced, had heaved himself to his feet. 'there is every doubt,' he shouted. 'I will not have mysticism here. There is too much of that. See here, young man,' he advanced on the still seated and thoroughly astonished Lamont and shook a thick finger at him, 'if your history is going to take the attitude that we were puppets in the hands of the para-men, it will not be published from this institution; or at all, if I have my way. I will not have mankind and its intelligence downgraded and I won't have para-men cast in the role of gods.'

The Gods Themselves, p.26

Apart from the title itself, this is in fact the only other allusion to supernal beings in the entire work. The book as a whole is emphatically materialistic as only a novel written largely as an exposition of a theoretical physical hypothesis and its impact on human behaviour can be. One may well marvel at how scientific learning can be so ingeniously made to serve the narrative credibility of an updated version of the 'chimerical' alchemist's pursuit of the transmutation of lead into gold. An important difference, however, is Asimov's consistent and erudite development of the scientific core of his fiction. One may say with some justice that in The Gods Themselves the rhetoric of speculative science - 'para-physics' - very closely approaches that of mysticism, but not at the expense of its rigour or fundamental principles of clarity and logical inference. Consequently the work is essentially a science or speculative fiction rather than a science fantasy, a necessary distinction in the light of the author's adroitness in the invention of the aliens depicted in the second section, '....The Gods Themselves....'; and his resolution of the entropic crisis facing mankind in the final section, '....Contend in Vain?'

By the time one has read to the foot of the first page of

chapter 1a of Asimov's section II it is apparent that Odeen, Tritt and Dua are not the eponymous gods of the story, which is in fact materialistic rather than theosophical. The three alien creatures of the para-universe are the focus of this part of the story; and Asimov offers us sympathetic characters whose emotional crises and literally homely preoccupations emphasise a quite human warmth rather than otherness in all but one crucial respect. Dua is an Emotional, Odeen a Rational and Tritt a Parental, three individual beings who synergistically complement one another in the psychosexual melding which allows conception while also giving rise to a gestalt awareness. This special form of congress is of course the evolutionary result of progressive adaptation to the physics and ecology of the para-universe in the same way that human existence is thought to have developed in the real world; but because Asimov has developed his extra-terrestrials from human nature itself they do seem to be abstractions rather than full characters, however engaging. Yet even this formal objection is overcome as the author astutely makes a virtue out of a distinct liability by presenting three more or less distinct narratives in each three-part chapter.

The three beings are the focus of attention because they are, by the standards of their own society, quite unusual. Odeen is told by his mentors, the Hard Ones, that he is considered to be a Rational prodigy; Dua is scorned by her fellow Emotionals as a deviant, a 'Left-Em' who is unusually rational in her behaviour and attitudes; and Tritt the Parental is uncommonly outspoken and determined in his pursuit of the triad's proper generative fruitfulness. Their 'para-world' is in entropic decline, as is their species, which derives its life-energy directly from the light of a dwindling star. In a cal-

culated attempt to avoid extinction the 'Hard Ones' have initiated the inter-universe energy flow in the certain knowledge that it will save their universe but destroy the universe of man. Foremost among the innovators of this last-ditch enterprise is the rather enigmatic figure of Estwald. When Dua eventually infers what is afoot she becomes acutely disturbed:

Dua said, 'If the other laws slow down our Sun and cools it down; don't our laws speed up their suns and heat them up?'

'Exactly right, Dua. A Rational couldn't do better.'

'How hot do their suns get?'

'Oh, not much; just slightly hotter, very slightly.'

Dua said, 'But that's where I keep getting the something-bad feeling.'

'Oh, well, the trouble is that their suns are so huge. If our little suns get a little cooler, it doesn't matter. Even if they turned off altogether, it wouldn't matter as long as we have the Positron Pump. With great, huge stars, though, getting even a little hotter is troublesome. There is so much material in one of those stars that turning up the nuclear fusion even a little way will make it explode.'

'Explode! But then what happens to the people?'

'What people?'

'The people in the other Universe.'

For a moment, Odeen looked blank, then he said, 'I don't know.'

'Well, what would happen if our own Sun exploded?'

'It couldn't explode.'

(Tritt wondered what all the excitement was about. How could a sun explode? Dua seemed angrier and Tritt was confused.)

Dua said, 'But if it did? Would it get very hot?'

'I suppose so.'

'Wouldn't it kill us all?'

Odeen hesitated and then said in clear annoyance, 'What difference does it make, Dua? Our Sun isn't exploding, and don't ask silly questions.'

'You told me to ask questions, Odeen, and it does make a difference, because the Positron Pump works both ways. We need their end as much as ours.'

Odeen stared at her. 'I never told you that.'

'I feel it.'

Odeen said, 'You feel a great many things. Dua - '

But Dua was shouting now. She was quite beside herself. Tritt had never seen her like that. She said, 'Don't change the subject, Odeen. And don't withdraw and try to make me out a complete fool - just another Emotional. You said I was almost like a Rational and I'm enough like one to see that the Positron Pump won't work without the other-beings. If the people in the other Universe are destroyed, the Positron Pump will stop and our Sun will be colder than ever and we'll

all starve. Don't you think that's important?'

Odeen was shouting too, now. 'That shows what you know. We need their help because the energy supply is in low concentration and we have to switch matter. If the Sun in the other Universe explodes, there'll be an enormous flood of energy; a huge flood that will last for a million lifetimes. There will be so much energy, we could tap it directly without any matter-shift either way; so we don't need them, and it doesn't matter what happens - '

The Gods Themselves, p.124.

Of course this confirms the accuracy of Lamont's reasoning and shows Hallam, the 'Father of the Electron Pump,' to be have been quite blind to the possibility that his opportunistic pursuit of kudos could bring such dire consequences. Clearly the eponymous allusion to 'gods' is deceptive and ironic, for the 'para-men' are in an even more wretched situation than their overcrowded, energy-starved human collaborators (there is a suggestion in the first part of the novel that the pressure of overpopulation on Earth is increasing). The 'para-men' are indeed wholly dependent upon the success of the deception they have worked on mankind for any hope of continuing their race, but Dua has developed an uncomfortably acute sense of moral wrongness about her fellows' pursuits and the equanimity with which they can countenance the annihilation of Man:

Dua was filled with anger; so filled she could scarcely sense the Hard Ones. She seemed stifled under the components of the anger, each one filling her to the brim, separately. There was a sense of wrongness that Odeen should try to lie to her. A sense of wrongness that a whole world of people should die. A sense of wrongness that it was so easy for her to learn and that she had never been allowed to.

The Gods Themselves, p.124.

Consequently Dua becomes reclusive - the more so because she learns that in her previous feeding she has been duped by Tritt into consuming energy derived from the human universe - and takes to spying on the activities of the 'Hard Ones'. However, since the trio have managed to produce their third child they may now 'pass on', a

prospect which depresses Dua unnaturally. Before she gives in to this doom, she resolves to disrupt the energy exchange fatal to mankind by communicating the truth to the people of the other universe in the form of the enigmatic messages which confirm Lamont's fears in the first section of the novel. By this means she will cheat Estwald of an immoral scientific triumph:

It was Estwald whom she hated. He was the personification of all that was selfish and hard. He had devised the Positron Pump and would destroy a whole world of perhaps tens of thousands without conscience. He was so withdrawn that he never made his appearance and so powerful that even the other Hard Ones seemed afraid of him.

Well, then, she would fight him. She would stop him.

The Gods Themselves, p.132.

Her efforts to warn mankind of the danger are heavily ironic because one is aware from reading the first section of the reception given to her messages by the world's submissive scientists; yet this too is eclipsed rather abruptly by Asimov's conclusion (wherein Dua learns that passing on involves evolution more than extinction) to the para-universal section of the novel. During their final union, the three individuals coalesce permanently as the youngest and most brilliant of the 'Hard Ones', an event which is underscored by Asimov discontinuing his practice of structuring each chapter of this section as three more or less distinct narratives of events from each character's point of view:

'If what you are saying is true, Odeen,' she gasped. 'If we are to be a Hard One; then it seems to me you are saying we'll be an important one. Is that so?'

'The most important. The best who was ever formed. I mean that ... Tritt, over there. It's not good-by, Tritt. We'll be together, as we always wanted to be. Dua, too. You, too, Dua.'

Dua said, 'Then we can make Estwald understand that the Pump can't continue. We'll force -'

The melting was beginning. One by one, the Hard Ones were entering again at the crucial moment. Odeen saw them imperfectly, for he was beginning to melt into Dua.

It was not like the other times; no sharp ecstasy; just a smooth, cool, utterly peaceful movement. He could feel

himself become partly Dua, and all the world seemed pouring into his/her sharpening senses. The Positron Pumps were still going - he/she could tell - why were they still going?

He was Tritt, too, and a keen sharp sense of bitter loss filled his/her/his mind. Oh, my babies -

And he cried out, one last cry under the consciousness of Odeen, except that somehow it was the cry of Dua. 'No, we can't stop Estwald. We are Estwald. We - '

The cry that was Dua's and yet not Dua's stopped and there was no longer any Dua; nor would there ever be Dua again. Nor Odeen. Nor Tritt.

7abc

Estwald stepped forward and said sadly to the waiting Hard Ones, by way of vibrating air waves, 'I am permanently with you now, and there is much to do - '

The Gods Themselves, p.147

The final section of the novel begins briskly with a conducted tour of Earth's lunar colony, signalling a return to the human side of events. The dilemma has been spelled out; the question of its resolution is now addressed by the author. Strangely, in view of the effort made to realize his alien characters, Asimov simply drops Estwald and we learn no more of him or his 'unique' contribution to the preservation of his species. Another cast appears to occupy the foreground - Selene Lindstrom, 'Moon-girl' extraordinaire; Barron Neville, a possessive lunar astrophysicist; Konrad Gottstein, the Commissioner from Earth; and a time-worn emigre Terran scientist, Benjamin Denison. The intrigues of this story concern the efforts being made to establish an Electron Pump on the Moon.

Asimov's technophilic narrative continues with some modest padding describing life as it might be in the lunar town including an anodyne account of a lunar sport, a rather clumsy exposition of lunar sexual mores and manners stressing the prurience of mundane male interest in the normal nudity of Lunarites and the mammary development of lunar women(45), and, of course, the applied science of the

future - the equipment and systems which might support human life on the Moon. His larger purpose, however, is to construct a notable victory for human scientific endeavour and vision. There is little which one feels is original in the first several chapters: Heinlein's earlier The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, for instance, offers a vastly more vivid account of a rebellious lunar colony seeking to shake itself free from a 'stagnant' Earth, despite this thematic thrust by Asimov as Gottstein meets his predecessor:

'There is something going on here - I don't know exactly what - which may be dangerous.'

'How can it be dangerous? What can they do? Make war against the Earth?' Gottstein's face trembled on the brink of a smile-crease.

'No, no, it's more subtle than that.' Montez passed his hand over his face, rubbing his eyes petulantly. 'Let me be frank with you. Earth has lost its nerve.'

'What does that mean?'

'Well, what would you call it? Just about the time the Lunar colony was being established, Earth went through the Great Crisis. I don't have to tell you about that.'

'No, you don't,' said Gottstein, with distaste.

'The population is two billion now from its six billion peak.'

'Earth is much better for that, isn't it?'

'Oh, undoubtedly, though I wish there had been a better way of achieving the drop....But it's left behind a permanent distrust of technology; a vast inertia; a lack of desire to risk change because of the possible side-effects. Great and possibly dangerous efforts have been abandoned because the danger was feared more than greatness was desired.'

The Gods Themselves, p.161.

Montez continues in this vein, concluding that, 'On the Moon...there is no direction but forward,' in contrast to the Earth which is 'in retreat from technology.' He describes the lunar community to his successor as, 'the only close-knit group of ten thousand human brains that are, in principle and by emotion, science-oriented.' The emerging scenario is one reminiscent of Miller's A Canticle for Leibowitz but written by an advocate of scientific rather than religious humanism.

Barron Neville, a leading Lunar scientist who is trying to gain an independent Electron Pump for the Moon, effectively personifies the restless creativity of the Moon's scientific community. He is suspicious of Ben Denison's ostensible purpose for visiting the Moon and it is he who instructs Selene to find out more about the Earthman. Ironically, she comes to prefer Denison to her former lover, partly because Neville becomes jealous and resentful. For his part, Denison enjoys her company and together they make an important discovery which re-introduces Asimov's main theme of the entropic disaster threatening mankind. Despite Hallam's efforts to stifle him, Lamont's persistence has paid off in the long run, with a growing realization among the world's scientists that the Electron Pump's operation may be pernicious. However, there seems to be no practicable alternative without an unacceptably severe retrenchment of the world's use of energy. Fortunately Denison and Selene succeed in working out a means to eliminate the risk to mankind without leaving the para-Universe to its entropic fate. In the process, Selene reveals unwittingly that she is an Intuitionist, which further enrages Neville. Her inborn talent (the unexpected outcome of a long-abandoned and discredited eugenic programme) is for intuitively selecting the relevant details and visualising the solution to a complex problem, however cryptic or obscure it may seem:

'...I do have an idea, a simple idea - perhaps too simple to work - based on the quite obvious fact that the number two is ridiculous and can't exist.'

There was a silence that lasted a minute or so and then Selene, her voice as absorbed as his, said, 'Let me guess your meaning.'

'I don't know that I have any,' said Denison.

'Let me guess anyway. It could make sense to suppose that our own Universe is the only one that can exist or does exist, because it is the only one we live in and directly experience. Once, however, evidence arises that there is a second Universe as well, the one we call the para-Universe,

then it becomes absolutely ridiculous to suppose that there are two and only two Universes. If a second Universe can exist, then an infinite number can. Between one and the infinite in cases such as these, there are no sensible numbers. Not only two, but any finite number, is ridiculous and can't exist.

Denison said, 'That's exactly my reas -' And silence fell again.

Denison heaved himself into a sitting position and looked down on the suit-encased girl. 'I think we had better go back to town.'

She said, 'I was just guessing.'

He said, 'No, you weren't. Whatever it was, it wasn't just guessing.'

The Gods Themselves, p.208

The inferred multiplicity of universes leads to another important finding - that universes coexist in different stages of development. Denison's and Selene Lindstrom's solution to the Electron Pump problem is to find a way to tap the power of a primordial or 'cosmeg' universe - one in which all matter and energy is concentrated in a single body (a so-called 'cosmic egg') before its 'big bang' distributes its matter throughout the primordial void - and to transmit a portion of this energy to the para-Universe via the Electron Pump. Consequently mankind at once ceases to be the dupes of the 'para-men' and becomes their saviours; and human intelligence is vindicated fully - the 'para-men' are evidently not 'gods' after all, but human evolution is still proceeding: "'You can build ships, any number. You can move outward at near-light velocities without difficulty, once you transfer momentum to the cosmeg. You can explore the entire Universe in a lifetime.'" This could be the very fulfilment of Lewis's misapprehensions about Man's exploitation of the Cosmos. Yet granting him his idealized marriage of scientific method and the evolving human genius represented by Selene's perceptive intuition (celebrated with a capital I), surely Asimov's vindicating vision of scientific triumph is synergistic, not doctrinaire.

Rehearsed in the quasi-mystic fusion of the aliens he has depicted, Asimov reinforces in the resolution of his story his line about the progressive potency of collaboration, cooperation and unselfishness. He extols the potential of the reciprocating creativity of the scientific (here, rational male) and visionary (intuitive female) progressive impulse, but ultimately, of a longed-for humane reunification of two sceptical and estranged cultures.

The humanism of The Gods Themselves, a novel in which an unmistakably mystical premise - the multiplicity of universes and the transcendental nature of intelligence - is presented as a purely materialistic, even mechanistic phenomenon, is scientific humanism in perhaps its purest, most exalting form. It is nonetheless simplistic, as a comparison with Watson and Bishop's Under Heaven's Bridge shows, for Asimov's aliens conveniently disappear from the reckoning without posing a direct threat, and the rapprochement between two reasoning but competing species is expedient rather than profound - an implicit factor created as much by neglect of its complex possibilities as deliberate authorial fabulation. While it too envisions a scientific encounter with an intelligent alien race on a dying planet, Bishop and Watson's novel differs from Asimov's. While the setting of a planet circling a distant sun assumes that mankind will be able to travel freely about the universe, the novel's insights into human nature are couched in explicitly religious terms; which is why this novel's allegory of human perception and values is of considerable interest.

The Kybers, as the cybernetic-seeming beings are dubbed by their human scrutineers, are indeed a puzzling phenomenon. Machine-like, they move ponderously about their world, organic relicts of their

previous physiology flapping like dead hide from their metallic anatomy. Communication among these awesome beings is apparently telepathic, and they live, seemingly childless, in 'family' groups of seven adults. The professional scientists who man the starship Heavenbridge disagree about the puzzling, impassive, inscrutable beings even though one of them has shown sufficient interest in the human investigators to acquire from Dr. Keiko Takahashi the rudiments of spoken language. The crewman Farrell Sixkiller, for instance, finds them unnerving and ominous:

A hand fell across Keiko's shoulder.

She started, swung about, and found herself confronting a wide-eyed Farrell Sixkiller, his irises marbled with the colours of sunset.

'Dr Norn has one very basic and crippling hang-up,' the floater pilot informed her, not quite whispering.

Keiko instinctively retreated a step.

'I've been with him to the Kyber palaces, you know. He believes the aliens to be a genuine life form.'

'So does Betti, even if she is a cyberneticist. So do I, for that matter. I taught one to speak Translic, after all.'

'No, no, you don't understand, Dr Takahashi. Dr Norn also believes that they embody an answer - maybe the answer - to the riddle of the cosmos.'

Keiko laughed.

'I mean it. He thinks them the key to the very meaning of our existence.'

Certain that the man was touched with a peculiarly virulent form of 'decoupling madness,' Keiko stared at Sixkiller.

'It's true,' he declared.

'You're distorting the nature of his involvement, Farrell, mistaking the depth of his commitment for - for I don't know what.'

'He's obsessed with what I told you.'

'So are you, it seems.'

'I don't like seeing anyone search after ultimate meaning in places where there's no blood, no gyzym, no juice. The Kybers are machines - very advanced machines, perhaps, but still machines. Whatever sacrificed its birthright to engineer them has paid the price of extinction for its vanity. Dr Norn refuses to recognize that fact. He thinks the Kybers will be able to tell him who coded the acorn.'

Keiko felt that, mutedly, Sixkiller was raving; none of what he said made any straightforward sense. 'You're a pantheist,' she said, testing the description mentally. 'You're a Shintoist in eagle feathers.'

'Without the goddamn feathers. I see no spirit in these death-worshipping mechanical aliens - except an evil one. Machines have no souls, Dr Takahashi.'

'This from a floater pilot? From a man who has many times entrusted his life to the mercy of the Heavenbridge?'

'Controllable machines, Dr Takahashi.'

'Whereas the Kybers -'

'Are machines that seek to control the organic processes and the organic beings that you and I represent. Therefore, they're our enemies. If he thinks them good fodder for xenological study, Dr Norn is a traitor to life. Meanwhile, Dr Takahashi, the kybers are agents of entropy and death.'

Under Heaven's Bridge, pp.32-34

Sixkiller fears that the Kybers will place mankind in technological thrall (a fate ostensibly worse even than the helotry of Player Piano) and thereby vitiate innate human potential. Perhaps he has allowed their peril - their world is soon to be cast adrift from its customary orbit and projected at an immense velocity perhaps into deep space - to infect his perception of them as sentient intelligences. Certainly they are facing their possible annihilation with an inhuman equanimity. Andrik Norn, on the other hand, has no doubts as to their sentience and is given staggering intimations of their spirituality:

The xenologist pointed skyward. 'You realize that Onogoro is going to decouple from Dextro because of the heavy inner planet? That Laevo may or may not recapture your world? That Dextro will inevitably flare up and eject shells of annihilating gas at huge velocity? You genuinely understand the seriousness of the situation?'

'In all its gravity,' replied the family speaker.

'But you joke, you pun,' cried Andrik, a titbird strutting before Titans. 'The truth of the matter is that your world is doomed and your people with it.'

'In such circumstances,' crooned the Kyber, 'it would seem essential to appeal to a higher power.'

Andrik's expression was incredulous. 'How? By prayer?'

'Orare est laborare. Our prayer is our labour. Oratory in the laboratory of our souls.'

'You're going to pray that some higher power shunts Onogoro into a viable orbit around Laevo? And your prayer is going to bring about the very orbit your people desire?'

'We pray to ourselves, Lady Keiko,' said the alien, ignoring Andrik. 'Each of us is a god in turn. We all worship the septaprime, whom each will become turn by turn in the cycle of our apotheosis.'

'Apotheosis?'

'I speak now not of kybertrance, but of the ordinary social world we share with you at present.'

Confused, Keiko nodded at the aliens lying back to back on their slate-grey bier. 'Are they also gods - intermittently?'

'Even they, who maintain us in underlinkage and psalm in death-sleep a versicle of our people's common prayer.'

'You can't move worlds by psalms or magic,' Andrik protested.

Under Heaven's Bridge, pp.59-60

Andrik Norn's concern becomes obsessive, to the detriment of his relationship with Keiko. He comes to identify his own future - and by extension, that of mankind itself - as being caught up with the doom which the Kybers (or Onogorovans as they have been dubbed by Keiko in a spirit of primal symbolism) are countenancing with incredible calm. The Onogorovans are still treated with profound suspicion by Sixkiller and some others among the people of the Heavensbridge, and Keiko herself remains uncommitted and sceptical, but Norn the xenologist becomes their main advocate and apologist. He believes that their inertness shows them to be caught up in a sort of nirvana, an exotic version of the religious self-annihilating meditative trance. Personally invited to a rare Onogorovan ritual Andrik pursues his objective unwaveringly, for the Kyber who speaks for his inert people suggests the possibility of showing him that which cannot be explained adequately in the human language it has been taught. Keiko has responded sympathetically to his deepening mood of absorption and withdrawal, but when he impulsively reveals his thoughts to her he leaves her shocked:

'Kei,' he said, sitting down on the cart and dropping his hands between his knees.

'Yes?'

'Keiko, I'm sorry that I've been the way I have.'

She cocked her head. 'How have you been?'

'Fine,' he responded. 'How have you been?'

As fragile and uninspired as it so obviously was, this bit of nonsense marked Andrik's first attempt at humour since the

day that Craig Olivant had told them that Dextro was going to flare up. Keiko laughed, and Andrik let his lips approximate a smile. The fire had not gone out of him of late; he had simply put it under bushel and fanned its coals in secret. The smoke from the flames of his personality was bitter, flavoured with wormwood.

'I haven't been able to think about anything but the Kybers.'

'I know,' she said.

'Listen, Kei. What we're abandoning on Onogoro is more important than either you or me, more important than Sixkiller or the captain or anyone else connected with this expedition.'

A small hostility moved in her. 'Why?'

'Because the Kybers have struck through the mask of our illusory reality to what's truly real - '

'Now you sound very much like a Buddhist, Andrik.'

'That shouldn't disturb you, should it? What I'm trying to say is that if Captain Hsi doesn't permit the Kybers to school us in their techniques for achieving a similar breakthrough, he'll be depriving our entire species of its finest chance for the fulfilment of... well, of our spiritual potential.'

'Captain Hsi? By himself? And are you worried about the whole of humanity as much as you are about the soul of Andrik Norn?'

'Of course I'm worried about the individual soul of Andrik Norn!' He squinted at her appraisingly, then got up and strode to the window-lens. 'But just as we expeditionary personnel are representatives of everyone who stayed at home, I'm a stand-in for those same people in our dealings with the Kybers. I want what we all should want, Keiko. To deny me is to deny multitudes.'

She flushed in acute embarrassment - for him. Did he really have any idea what he had just said?

Under Heaven's Bridge, pp.84-85

Norn's excitement is metaphysical rather than scientific. He believes that the aliens hold the key to the discovery of ultimate cosmogenic and ontological truths, and more significantly, he believes that they offer, "'our entire species of its finest chance for the fulfilment of ...our spiritual potential.'" His intuition may be expressed in the rhetoric of religious faith, but it is fed by humanistic enquiry and teleological aspiration. Perhaps Keiko, a fellow scientist, may also sense something even more disturbing than his megalomaniacal obsessiveness. Evidently he has sacrificed his objectivity and scientific scepticism to the promise of the 'truly real.' Keiko's own

scepticism of the Kybers goes deeper than being a matter of habit or professional training, however, for they revive haunting memories of an intense childhood religious experience occasioned by a visit to the temple of Sanjusangendo, home in her native Japan to thousands of statues of Kannon, the Buddhist god of Mercy and Compassion. Struck by an outward resemblance, Keiko resents all the more deeply therefore the impassiveness and remoteness of the Kybers but tries to maintain an open mind as to what they portend. Accordingly she will not participate in or condone Norn's plan to join a Kyber family to observe their ritual awakening but she does not betray his furtive expedition. Later, his colleagues will have to set out to retrieve him before their ship leaves.

At the Captain's insistence, Keiko forms one of the party and on arriving at the labyrinthine dwelling of the Kybers finds that only she is to be permitted to enter to speak to Norn because her erstwhile lover considers her to be less 'insane' than the others. The authors reiterate the nature of Andrik Norn's quest by means of her thoughts when she sees him waiting to meet her again:

Suddenly the corridor opened upon the atrium at whose heart stood Andrik and the only other animate member of the alien family. Keiko hesitated, uncertain what to expect of the man who had broken with her, and with all his fellows on the Platform, without ever really renouncing his native allegiances. Indeed, he had come out here on the pretext of discovering from the Kybers a means whereby humanity could slip its biological and philosophical fetters and attain the sort of perfect awareness available to the Kybers in death-sleep. How that grandiose goal contrasted with the bleak and dismaying reality of these surroundings!

Under Heaven's Bridge, p.108

For all the deliberate exoticism of its oriental/alien religious discourse, the soteriological drama of this futuristic novel is formally Gothic. Norn has made an hubristic pact with supernal creatures; he has pursued his aspirations - 'that grandiose goal' - to an inhospit-

able extreme - 'the bleak and dismaying reality' - where truth may be found. The stage is set for an heroic teleological climax, for Norn desires a transcendental melding quite unlike anything to be encountered in the traditional 'mainstream' fiction of character. Will Norn's Faustian communion cost him existence itself? Does he face personal annihilation, or will he achieve a divine transformation? Is the syzygy which is about to take place, the melding, an assimilation or a fatal consumption? These imponderables generate a tension and a speculative excitement which belies or overwhelms the reader's own scepticism about apotheosized man. Yet the authors introduce disquieting hints of a fell resolution; Norn speaks 'deferentially' to the alien as one might defer to a superior rather than a fellow; and in an attempt to convey his wonder at their unhuman sensibility he babbles excitedly in a welter of contradictory allusions to Lewis Carroll's surrealism:

'Like Alice, they grow and shrink and grow again at will. But that's only out here, up here, where we can see them...But down the rabbit hole of consciousness, down there, deep inside, where it's hell for us to follow - and heaven, too - they're not very much like that little-girl-Alice tourist at all; they're more like Mad Hatters, March Hares, and Cheshire Cats - native to the place. To tell the truth, I don't really know what we ought to call them when they're down there. It's we who are the Alices when we try to follow, we who are susceptible to - '

Under Heaven's Bridge, p.109

The ontological confusion surrounding the aliens is multiplied by their cryptic expression, which seems to mock the interlocutor with riddles: "'Eat me,'" one tells Keiko as it offers her 'kyberflesh' to enhance her perception in a gesture explicitly analogous to sacramental communion. "'This isn't cannibalism or predation, it's holy communion!'" declares Norn excitedly. When she accedes her mind finds itself trying to cope with an apocalypse as her perception and sensi-

bility encounters and enters the gestalt frame of the Kybers:

This place that she, and they, inhabited was a place between Heaven and Hell, a limbo of uncertain possibilities. A noise like the lurching of bump'em cars punctuated the silence of which it was apparently woven: a humming silence connected to that ineffable Somewhere Else still just beyond her grasp.

Nevertheless, energies and auras, the currency of death-in-life, flowed between her and the others in their little diamond of external touching; and she saw in death-sleep a flicker of lightning against the tarnished mother-of-pearl of her inward sky: ****Do you feel pain, Lady Keiko?**** This was from her former student, Alice A, no longer its family's septa-prime. And yes, almost coinciding with its question, she had experienced an ache or hunger for which she could imagine no effective balm or nourishment.

****That's good,**** hummed Alice A, even though she had framed no response either silently or aloud, for a little of that mysterious pain nagged her yet. ****Pain is the First Mover, Lady Keiko, at whose touch we flee the stagnation of complacency and self-righteousness.****

Under Heaven's Bridge, p.113

Keiko and Andrik Norn have entered a realm - 'a gauzy limbo' - where human logic seems to be inadequate, while the surreal thoughts of the Kybers appear portentous. Keiko strains to grasp the significance of their rather tangential utterances despite a mounting sense of panic:

****We are evolving in response to anticipated pain,**** vouchsafed one or both of the Kybers. ****We are evolving at the behest of our own intelligence but in response to our intelligent perception of a control system greater than Kyber self-awareness. This control system is our God.****

****Is it Andrik's, too?****

****Tied end to end, the neuronc axons of the human brain - if the cerebral makeup of your lover is typical of the species - would stretch one and a quarter million kilometres. That is the length of the unitary human mind, Lady Keiko; and as great as that may seem to you, as 'rapidly' as the synapses along that involute network spark and fire, it may yet be insufficient to appraise itself of the God manifest within us as a programme for our own survival.****

Now Keiko was lost not only in the fog of death-sleep but in the briary thickets of Kyber metaphysics. Her eyes were open - her physical eyes - but all she could see, now that her initial pain and fear had subsided, was a kind of photographic negative of the aurora-riven night. No way back, no way forward, no way out.

Under Heaven's Bridge, pp.114-115

With Keiko's synaesthetic and surreal predicament established, the authors introduce further theosophical revelations in this strange epiphany. The alien creatures venerate a 'programme' designed by a Prime Mover which is deterministic and dispassionate. This exists as a continuum which the Kybers apperceive in their deep trance, when their 'lateral eye bulbs' give them a metaphysical perception which replaces the visual sight of their defunct normal eyes. Keiko begins to think along similar lines to Sixkiller's instinctive misgivings about the drone-like beings whose thanatic visions are epiphanic:

Where was Andrik? Keiko wondered again... Then, although she was sure that she had not projected her questions at either of the aliens, Alice B responded:

****We are taking him to God.****

****You see,**** fluted Alice A, in melodic glissando gloss, ****still further below ice-heat, at winter-aphelion, super-conductivity of our prime circuits induces yet another para-cerebral phase-shift, this time to a tempo nearly coincident with that of the Control System governing all that is, and was, and will be.****

God, though Keiko bemusedly. What did this concept of a Prime Motivator and Controller do to the Eastern belief that all beings were related to one another in harmonious hierarchies constituting a vast cosmic pattern? Given a motivator and controller above these manifold hierarchies, you could scarcely attribute either virtue or vice to the beings arrayed within each level - for in such a system behaviour arose from decrees; or from programmes, rather than the inner dictates of each being's special nature.

The negative of an aurora wriggled like breeding black snakes through the gauze of Keiko's kybertrance sky.

How do I escape? thought Keiko, for she rejected the aliens' proof of God as harmful to the health of the fragile human soul. How do I rescue Andrik from the malaise of Kyber 'spirituality'? Or are we the ones who suffer from the malaise...?

Under Heaven's Bridge, p.119

Distrusting the alien theosophy because she realizes that it rewards the abdication of self-hood and the annihilation of individuality with freedom from moral responsibility ('...you could scarcely attribute either virtue or vice to the beings arrayed within each level'), Keiko resolves to rescue Andrik from his ambiguous mystical

commitment. Meanwhile the Kybers and Andrik continue their transcendental siren song:

Sped to control tempo, or alarmingly thereabouts, our kyberthoughts permit permit epiphany, my sweet Lady Kei. The over-reality manifests itself! We peek into the demesne of control by first having peaked into that of death-in-life and life-in-death.

Ibid.

The thanatic metaphor of this account indicates that its primary concerns are indeed post-Gothic, being a hybrid of Gothic sublimity and post-modern paranoia in which Poe's 'arabesque reality' delimited with a poetic intensity is imbued with contemporary anxiety about the twin terrors of futile existence and extinction of the self. Yet, as has been seen with other fictions of aspiration such as Men Like Gods, Star Maker, Deus Irae and the metempsychotic Lord of Light, a thorough discussion of this novel does lead beyond Ketterer's 'apocalypse,' entering the arena of epiphany his study neglects.

The 'gauzy limbo' Keiko experiences transcendently is a zone wherein issues of morality and altruism are irresolvable or redundant. The perspectives pertaining in this zone invoke absolutes; with their 'supranormal eyes' the Kybers "'...see what outlives the flimsiness of time and fleshly bodies.'" in the very nadir of a Romantic rapture. This view of ultimate Nature as a control system to which the sapient resign self-determination as futile frightens Keiko, who values her autonomy (even if only as a delusion, at worst) and intuitively rejects the Kybers' cosmogony. Since Andrik's awareness has gone on to who knows where (leaving one wondering whether he was assimilated or consumed) Keiko is suddenly overcome by a wave of self-preservation when the Kybers offer her the same terrifying invitation to worship their supernal Big Brother, the God-Behind-the-Galaxies. At this most opportune moment, the authors

allow her a moment of reflection and understanding before the Kybers try unsuccessfully to abduct her spirit:

If God was a control system, God was infinitely more alien than the Kybers. You could never attain perfect union with that which lay above and beyond you, outside you, manipulative and dictatorial rather than serenely existent and quiescently complementary. Andrik, a Westerner, might approve the concept of such a god; but how could she - or even the cyberneticist Betti Songa, whose professional expertise encompassed the finer points of programming and control, but whose cultural background denied these same mechanistic tendencies in nature - ever surrender to so impersonal a cosmology?

Under Heaven's Bridge, p.120-121

Never in doubt, Keiko's instinctive preference for humane qualities comes to the fore in her struggle to resist the acquisitive zeal of the Kybers whose 'altruistic' efforts to unite her with the greater consciousness prove very nearly fatal. She has seen the flaw in their logic - '**We discontinuously obtain union, and much more frequently than it is given human mystics to do - because we are designed to approach that state.**' Desperately, she exposes their fallacy, '**Then how may you take Andrik to God? He's not an Onogorovan, and neither am I!**' Their answer is functional rather reassuring:

She had no human voice with which to scream.

We lead you into the presence by hymning in continent-wide chorale the paeon of our Way.

I don't want - !

Switches were thrown, circuits were opened, and a sound like the intermittent burr of an overloaded transformer wracked Keiko's body through the conducting channels of her bones. She was blind, mute, deaf, desensitized to nearly every sensation except pain and fear of pain; meanwhile the Kybers were attempting - insanely, altruistically - to augment the tempo of her perception to that of a control system whose suzerainty she would never accept or acknowledge. Thousands of Kyber families poured their 'voices' into the paeon lifting her to God, while bereft of Andrik and the world, she braked her burning consciousness and resisted their efforts. Her body writhed blindly between the Kybers crucifying her above the flagstones.

Let her go, crooned Alice A. **Let her go before her brittle body snaps; before, to daub us culpable, her blood spills out.**

Ibid.

Keiko retreats from the communion Andrik sought so eagerly because she sees the proffered relationship between human and seemingly supernal creature in a very different, highly sceptical light. '...the primordial tyrant,' she describes the Prime Mover of the system Andrik has penetrated, 'not a deity but a system, not a unifying consciousness but a programmer.' By implication, Andrik the visionary scientist has found a 'god' in his own materialist image, a transcendent, immanent presence, true, but one whose sensibility is literal and driven by machine logic rather than intuition and wisdom, the ultimate idiot savant. However Keiko's response indicates that the joint authors of Under Heaven's Bridge do not castigate science per se, but only the C.P.Snow positivistic variety vilified by Lewis as venial and pernicious. For as their sympathetic depiction of Keiko proves, Watson and Bishop are critical, not reactionary. Keiko is a linguist, not a physical scientist - though in terms of the novel's argument this distinction diminishes as the story unfolds. While her sensibility is distinctly rational it is also intuitive in ways not discernable in the characters of the other scientific surveyors of Onogoro. Keiko's sensibility is in fact an idealized hybrid, a post-Enlightenment, Second Renaissance paradigm of sapience and humane intellection. The intrinsic force of her own thought processes eclipses the heady but futile elation of the alien syzygy Andrik has welcomed and the entropic epiphany he has been granted:

Maybe Sixkiller had been right. Even if the Kybers were alive by all the standard biological criteria, they were self-confessedly in thrall to...a control system. That made them, yes, machines. Even their intelligence and free will - if you could use those loaded terms - were attributes of the system that had programmed them to know it. The next step in this inescapable chain of reasoning led you to conclude that human beings, despite not having been specifically programmed to know the primordial tyrant dictating the shape of their lives,

were likewise a variety of machine, albeit a less complex or successful variety because incapable of merging unaided with their Controller.

Or else you could assume that the God-Behind-the-Galaxies of the Kybers was not humanity's Controller after all.

This was Keiko Takahashi's instinctive assumption even as she fell back from the kneeling aliens and begged for the world to reassert itself around her...

Under Heaven's Bridge, p.122

As she regains consciousness the desolate truth of Andrik's probable fate sinks in: 'Andrik...stood at last on the threshold of the ultimate Control Room, peering in with astonished inward eyes and longing to take the fateful metaphysical step that would unite him with the Controller even if that step extinguished the life sheltering his own microscopic spark of the divine.' Restored to a familiar environment, Keiko realizes that Andrik, having fulfilled his desire to transcend the limits of his sensibility, is beyond any hope of rescue. Keiko angrily rejects the aliens' clumsy attempt at a teleological justification:

'You are no better or worse than we, Lady Kei,' said Alice A by way of explanation. 'We are the notes of the piano roll of our genetipsychic heritage, after all, and so are you of yours. That which slotted the rolls and plays out our melodies on the upright piano of consensus reality is one and the same composer/performer. Sometimes, however, we Kybers are permitted to slot the rolls and tickle the keys ourselves. You need not fear us simply because we are able to influence the performance more often than you. What we wish to do, Lady Keiko, is.... Show You the Way.'

'Kybertrance is madness,' said Keiko, looking behind her. 'Your death-sleep is insane. Your world view is a vile, melancholy thing. I leave you to your deaths.'

'Our Weltanschauung, our world view, will prevent those deaths, O little teacher, or at the very least permit us to trot foxily around them.'

No longer listening, Keiko shouted again at Andrik, knowing that she would not be able to rouse him. His name - the living word - echoed in the pit, rang against the icy rocks. Tears came to her eyes, salt in her blurred apprehension of the night, and at last she broke and ran.

Under Heaven's Bridge, pp.124-125

Keiko's rejection of the metaphysical para-reality the kybers worship is as damning as it is heartfelt. Later she denounces the decision to

carry back to Earth six of the Kybers, for she believes that they are infiltrators intending "'to colonize Earth for a new variety of kyberlife. That's what their survival option amounts to finally: they hope to displace us, replace us, take over - because they have evolved beyond us here on Onogoro, under heaven's bridge, and they see no hope of our ever putting a foot on that span if left to ourselves.'" However her colleagues receive her arguments with scepticism (one warns against prescribing "'standards of ethical behaviour for aliens'") and so the meta-machines are duly transported to Earth while their fellows left on Onogoro, and Andrik Norm, are flailed by the radiation of the dying star.

In the final analysis, Andrik's transcendent adventure has proved futile from any conceivable human point of view. In Promethean terms, for instance, his efforts are no less fruitless as they are in Faustian or messianic terms for his transcendence and pain secures no empowering revelation, though as knowledge in the abstract about the nature of the cosmos his experience has significance. Yet these terms may not adequately explain his goal, which is, as Keiko thinks of it, 'trying to give birth to himself;' and his destiny is most readily explained in terms of a religious spiritual communion, creating an unconventional materialistic version of apotheosis given his professedly scientific humanism. On the voyage home, Keiko interrogates one of the aliens and is told that the pursuit of knowledge is the Kybers' single existential concern:

'We wanted you to know that we will survive on Onogoro,' the alien told her aloud. 'Even on a world cut adrift from a fevered sun.'

'And Andrik?'

'Andrik thinks us - prays us - toward that survival, too, by obeying the cosmic process whose purpose is the continuous acquisition of knowledge at the goad of either pain or its promise.'

'To what end? For what reward?' Keiko cried, again aware of the dingy clutter of around her - for the alien seemed to be retreating from her, withdrawing inexorably into the bleak winter light of kybertrance.

'Awareness,' crooned the Kyber. 'Perception of the Presence. These are their own rewards.'

'But will Andrik survive? Will he live through what's happened and what's going to happen?'

'He?'

'His spirit,' Keiko emended. 'His essence.'

'In our offspring saviours, yes. Assuredly. Have no fear.'

Under Heaven's Bridge, p.150

In what seems to be a postscript rather than a closing chapter, Keiko is found again decades later as a retired lecturer who makes her way to Kyoto to view the apparently dead Kyber installed there among the statues of Kannon, to which it bears a striking resemblance. The light from the exploded star has finally reached Earth, and she seems to discern a faint lambent glow in the alien's impassive features; and as the crowd presses her past she inwardly yearns again to share the gestalt communion she experienced on Onogoro - 'She would come again. The promise was there.' Her hope may seem perverse, but the implication is that in the last years of what has been a bleak life she feels the absence of Andrik all the more acutely and yearns to join him in his alien immortality. An intricate and subtle short novel, Under Heaven's Bridge displays its co-authors' mature grasp of idiom, character and motivation.

Yet Under Heaven's Bridge also illustrates another aspect of the uniquely epistemological nature of the science fiction of aspiration. Christopher Marlowe affirmed that knowledge, whatever its provenance, meant power; Mary Shelley also portrayed it as a seductive force and destroyed her hubristic scientist as a warning about human vanity. In the modern era, Wells contended that it was indispensable, there being 'no escape from the cages of life without knowledge.' In response C.S.Lewis condemned the vanity of scientists, asserting that

knowledge, when not the fruit of divine Revelation, must be profane and dangerous. A doyen of magazine science fiction's 'Golden Age,' Asimov celebrates sophisticated science, suggesting in The Gods Themselves that the scientific method itself is more robust than its fallible practitioners and depicting the acquisition of knowledge as a vital, ennobling activity which brings forth discoveries of dependable utility. At the same time, he takes the widest possible definition of science, recognizing the value of cognitive intuition. In Under Heaven's Bridge, Ian Watson and Michael Bishop use a number of long-familiar generic ideas and dreams such as gestalt telepathic communication, inter-racial synergy, the tyranny of the deified machine or computer, and the mutual antipathy of religious and secular world-views. These elements are used to create a scenario in which the relentless acquisition of knowledge seems the ultimate in nihilism. Moreover, they even imply that the ability to exploit knowledge selectively, without becoming its slave, is a distinctly human survival trait. The Kybers are addicted to knowledge, which through generations has become their sole raison d'etre; yet even if multiplex human nature is less evolved - that is, specialised - it is more responsive and possesses a vastly richer Weltanschauung, the real measure of awareness. In both The Gods Themselves and Under Heaven's Bridge there is a direct assertion of the possibility of intuitive knowing, a human visionary faculty which is contrasted with the mechanistic - and thence partial - principles of science. Indeed in Under Heaven's Bridge even the radical principles of Einsteinian science are condescendingly adopted by the Kybers despite their imputed primitiveness(p.118). Hence in the phenomenological context of some recent science fiction qualities like intuition and

individualism are emphatically positive attributes. Since the Kybers' philosophy effectively indicts them, that 'promise' Keiko discerns in the motionless Kyber invites scrutiny.

Throughout the novel, Keiko's ambivalence towards the aliens is suggests the attraction of venerating an all-knowing, all-powerful supernal being; this is the psychological bedrock of religious devotion, and the precondition of, for instance, both the Christian and Islamic soteriologies. Yet the tenor of the science fiction of aspiration is commonly sceptical - 'apostate' - and so protagonists do not usually place much faith in religious metempsychosis or salvation. The materialistic alternative is a progressive faith in human self-directed teleology, the central sacrament of the Kybers' creed. Keiko may therefore claim some sort of ambiguous justification to partly legitimize her unspoken hope of a metempsychotic reunion with her rapt lover Andrik. Philip K.Dick's VALIS, with which this discussion of religion, moral vision and humanism in modern science fiction will conclude, further illustrates this tension between scientific materialism and spiritual hope.

'GOD IS NOWHERE / GOD IS NOW HERE':

Salvation and 'the prime aberration of the human mind'.

The title of this closing section is composed of two quotations, from VALIS by Philip K.Dick and Childhood's End by Arthur C.Clarke respectively, two key novels published some twenty-seven years apart that offer significantly differing perspectives of mysticism and apotheosis. Before discussing them, it may be useful to try to sum up the main themes and contentions of transcendental science fiction while reviewing some recent additions to the field.

The recent spate of cryptic science fiction novels exemplified by Under Heaven's Bridge reveals how thoroughly scientific humanism, scepticism, Romanticism, and existentialist ideas have become interwoven. Collectively, such books confirm the propriety of the generic term 'science fiction of aspiration' which well describes a significantly large group of texts recent or historic; explicitly religious or apostate. In fact, in his 1965 discussion 'Religion in Science Fiction: Space, God and Faith' (augmented slightly in 1976), Sam Moskowitz cites some thirty or so titles (omitting Dune and its sequels, remarkably) whereas some fifteen years later Tom Woodman was able to include two to three times as many in 'Science Fiction, Religion and Transcendence.' Doubtless diverse factors contributed to this increase in the production of religious science fiction, but two of the most obvious are probably also the most significant: the increase in its popularity among paperback readers; and its improved literary quality and a greater sophistication of ideas which is partly the result of emulation and elaboration, and partly the result of the debate generated by the 'New Wave' polemicists. Recent books by Ian Watson, Michael Bishop and Gregory Benford illustrate this trend.

For H.G.Wells, logic and reason constituted the lingua franca of more-than-human intelligence. The atheistic utopians of Men Like Gods are so dispassionate as to seem almost as remote and alien as the exterminating Martians of The War of the Worlds wherein Wells hypothesised a common ancestry for both alien and human species, an original anticipation of that increasingly popular holistic theme of later science fiction writers, the physical and intellectual kinship of all intelligent life. The recent work of Watson and of Benford is

characterised by just this idea, which Aldiss's Charteris calls an 'essential pattern'. Post-modernist uncertainty has so affected the notion, however, that now human logos tends to be depicted as a reactionary influence obscuring the 'embedded' reality. Explicitly in Watson's The Embedding(1975), a South American forest tribe threatened with extinction by economic development revives a strange mode of thought which is completely at odds with the mathematically-precise epistemology of Western science, but which reveals humanity's archaic kinship with an intelligent extra-terrestrial race. Modern science, the progeny of Enlightenment Utilitarianism and Positivism, has eclipsed the 'embedded' semiotic philosophy. Consequently the aliens are incomprehensible to all except the Xemahoa - and a group of orphans who have been raised in laboratory seclusion and deprived of socialization in an experiment designed to test the premises of psychology and semantics without the possibly distorting or occluding influence of scientific logic.

In The Martian Inca(1977) by the same author, Julio becomes the messianic leader of his oppressed fellows. He leads them in a quasi-religious political crusade against economic imperialism following his traumatic awakening by a Martian bacterium with which he has been infected at the site of a wrecked Russian space vehicle. Julio's ragged crusade reaches a gory culmination when he, like Moorcock's Glogauer, pays with his life for the godhood seemingly conferred upon him. The mystical ambience of Watson's work is continued into The Gardens of Delight(1980), wherein he presents an international space exploration crew with a baffling world which disturbingly resembles the fantastic landscapes of Bosch's painting. Each of the crew experiences metempsychosis, and so develops a deeper perception and

appreciation of the holistic universe. His recent trilogy, The Book of the River, The Book of the Stars and The Book of Being(1985) further exhibit his gift for blending and balancing mysticism and rationalism in transcendental science fiction.

A future global society is verging on collapse in the face of its own environmental pollution, injustices, moral uncertainty and the religious fervour of the fanatics who call themselves 'the Sons' in Benford's In the Ocean of Night(1977). Inadvertently compounding the chaos, an alien starship on a voyage of exploration approaches Earth and the fearful Terran authorities order it to be destroyed. A ship is despatched, but after awesome encounters with the reticent aliens, the humans return having discovered the true nature and extent of the Cosmos from a cryptic alien star chart. During the same year, Benford co-wrote If the Stars are Gods, in which a scientist ultimately succeeds in deciphering a cryptic alien transmission aimed at Earth, having undergone a whole series of mystic experiences in an attempt to discover the key to this crucial message.

In three books by Michael Bishop, A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire (1975), Beneath the Shattered Moons(1973,76) and Stolen Faces (1977), humane protagonists struggle to reform societies afflicted by atavistic rituals sanctified by their 'religious' doctrines and embellishments. In the pessimistic Stolen Faces the administrator of a quarantine camp pays with his life for his attempt to re-educate the 'muphormers' after discovering that their deformities are ritual rather than pathological, inflicted rather than leprous. Like Watson's Julio, Lucian Yeardance ends as their scapegoat when his attempt to re-align their terrible cult of the Flayed God fails. Yeardance's humanistic altruism cannot itself reverse the profound

social conditioning which promulgates their savage faith, and ironically his own death actually serves to strengthen the religion before its proscription and the dispersal of the colony. The central drama may be tragic but it is also exemplary and noble.

As these and a number of works already discussed have attested, teleological character development is triggered in many sceptical science fictions of aspiration by some extraordinary experience. Drugs or trauma disorient the individual and allow an innate divinity to emerge from its suppressed source into the consciousness: apotheosis occurs. Thus, an experience which disrupts the quotidian sensibility is the catalyst which triggers the emergence of hidden traits or hitherto untapped potential, and these distinguish the charismatic individual from his unseeing, mundane fellows. The God of religions might be dead, as Nietzsche asserted, but surely Swinburne's observation, 'But God, if a God there be, is the substance of men which is man' finds at least as many supporters among the authors of this humanistic science fiction with its multifarious varieties of transcendental transformation(46).

At the same time a particular form of iconoclasm is central to the science fiction of aspiration. The idea of human apotheosis enthralls Victor Frankenstein, yet ultimately he concedes that he had sought to 'become greater than human nature will allow.' At its most hubristic the science fiction of aspiration accepts few such constraints upon human nature. 'God' is seen as an ideal, not a being - an end-point rather than a condition of existence which will be attained after a sapient teleological evolution. Indeed, a comparison with the apocalyptic soteriology of traditional Christianity depicted in A Dream of the Day that Must Come reveals significant resonances

between the ostensibly radical teleology of scientific humanism and its Christian counterpart.

Mrs. Penny's narrator attains his epiphany after a distressing journey of atonement, culminating in his death and immediate assimilation into a rapt communion with Godhead. This transcendental soteriology is completely traditional in its allegory, and even its metempsychosis closely parallels Bunyan's conclusion to Pilgrim's Progress, differing only in details. Such Christian moral tales are essentially monitory but also hold out the prospect of the supreme happy ending promised to the devout. Stapledon's Star Maker attacks orthodox religion but describes a similar sort of metempsychosis and theophany (albeit in strictly evolutionary terms) which, as we have seen, the narrator rejects in favour of human concerns and fellowship.

The narrator is taken from the comfortable familiarity of an English market town on a vast journey throughout the Universe culminating in a poignant encounter with the divinely creative Star Maker. Afterwards the narrator believes he has seen God, and tragically knows that it has been an unrepeatable experience. It has so changed his outlook that he feels quite alienated from his fellow humans on being returned to earth. Now he sees everything human as being petty, and also knows that the human race is presently too immature to actually have that special attention of the divine organiser of the Cosmos devoutly assumed to be ours. Arthur C. Clarke, to date Stapledon's most cogent successor, utilises the tragic potential of the idea of divine remoteness or indifference in Childhood's End (1954), wherein religion is also depicted as a vestigial element of an immature society and limited sensibility. The

Overlords turn out to be mentors, and their advanced technology and deliberate remoteness from the people of Earth lend force to the scientific world-view which it is their responsibility to promote, but knowledge beyond human ken supports Supervisor Karellen's utter certainty: "'The Wainwrights fear, too, that we know the truth about the origins of their faiths. How long, they wonder, have we been observing humanity? Have we watched Mohammed begin the Hegira, or Moses giving the Jews their laws? Do we know all that is false in the stories they believe?'" To Karellen, all religions are factitious, their revelations the products of Man's essentially mythopoeic sensibility.

Other disturbing assertions are made in Karellen's reply to the Wainwright's fundamentalist complaints, for he goes on to challenge the credibility, and consequently the integrity, of the world's organized religions. Yet Karellen simply ignores Wainwright's main point about individual freedom, something which is rather eclipsed by Clarke's introduction of a time-honoured rationalistic criticism reflecting an anthropological perspective of Mankind's religious ideas: "'Believe me, it gives us no pleasure to destroy men's faiths, but all the world's religions cannot be right - and they know it.'" He concludes by implying that the repudiation of most human religions is a unpleasant but necessary duty. Virtually all religions are held by the Overlords, in their superior wisdom, to be no more than hindrances to the attainment by a species of its maturity. Then Clarke opportunely adds cryptic suspense to his series of sensational opening premises when the Supervisor tells Stormgren that a revelation which is likely to shatter the faith of many devout people (one is irresistibly reminded of the denouement of 'The Star') is to be

made public when the moment is right: "'Sooner or later man has to learn the truth: but that time is not yet.'"

Indeed, the Overlords remain hidden from sight for over fifty years before they judge that Mankind is ready to learn part of that truth, because their first lesson will require careful preparation.

Fifty years is ample time in which to change a world and its people almost beyond recognition. All that is required for the task are a sound knowledge of social engineering, a clear sight of the intended goal - and power. These things the Overlords possessed. Though their goal was hidden their knowledge was obvious - and so was their power.

Childhood's End, Chapter 6.

The Overlords achieve their twin aims. The world, socially, becomes a more congenial place as their scientific expertise resolves material difficulties which have been long-established sources of conflict: 'By the standards of all earlier ages, it was Utopia. Ignorance, disease, poverty and fear had virtually ceased to exist.' Perhaps more incredible, however, is the ease with which the Overlords effect their other central aim, the destruction of the world's religions; and it is striking how readily Clarke associates the decline of religious conviction with a general improvement in education - only a depleted form of Buddhism survives, presumably because of its emphasis on meditation, self-knowledge, and personal development:

Profounder things had also passed. It was a completely secular age. Of the faiths that had existed before the coming of the Overlords, only a form of purified Buddhism - perhaps the most austere of all religions - still survived. The creeds that had been based upon miracles and revelations had collapsed utterly. With the rise of education, they had already been slowly dissolving, but for a while the Overlords had taken no sides in the matter.

Ibid.

Probably reflecting his acknowledged debt to Stapledon's Star Maker, Clarke alludes to a tiny group who believe in a depersonalized god; they may perhaps be the counterparts of the sad 'awakened minds' of

the mad worlds. (There is another, more obvious similarity - Jan's quest - which dominates the second and final parts of Clarke's novel.)

When he does eventually intervene, Karellen again exploits the science of his race - 'The instrument he handed over on permanent loan to the World History Foundation was nothing more than a television receiver with an elaborate set of controls for determining coordinates in time and space (which) must have been linked to a far more complex machine, operating on principles that no-one could imagine, aboard Karellen's ship.' The impact of this super-gadget for viewing the past is to be enormous, entailing - in terms of the novel's premises - nothing less than the final exposure and abjuration of religion, depicted as one of the most distinctive symbols of the immaturity of the human race:

Here was a revelation which no-one could doubt or deny: here, seen by some unknown magic of Overlord science, were the true beginnings of all the world's great faiths. Most of them were noble and inspiring - but that was not enough. Within a few days, all mankind's multitudinous messiahs had lost their divinity. Beneath the fierce and passionless light of truth, faiths that had sustained millions for twice a thousand years vanished like morning dew. All the good and evil they had wrought were swept suddenly into the past, and could touch the minds of men no more.

Humanity had lost its ancient gods: now it was old enough to need no new ones.

Ibid.

Perhaps in one sense, "Childhood's End"; but, if the religions of mankind are in themselves so inconsequential, if they are essentially merely delusions, why do the apparently omniscient Overlords need to challenge them at all? Clarke has hinted in an earlier chapter that Karellen and his fellows are carrying out some kind of duty for which they have little enthusiasm; and, indeed, that their task is remedial - "We have had our failures," Karellen tells Stormgren at their

last encounter. In what is a well-executed denouement in Chapter 5, Clarke wrings the last drop of suspense from describing the world's intense, speculative interest as humanity awaits their first sight of an Overlord. Karellen has first insisted that two young children are sent aboard his ship; the manner of their return is breathtaking, but not, as Clarke emphasises, calamitous or convulsive:

It was a tribute to the Overlords' psychology, and to their careful years of preparation, that only a few people fainted. Yet there could have been fewer still, anywhere in the world, who did not feel the ancient terror brush for one awful moment against their minds before reason banished it forever.

There was no mistake. The leathery wings, the little horns, the barbed tail - all were there. The most terrible of all legends had come to life, out of the unknown past. Yet now it stood smiling, in ebon majesty, with the sunlight gleaming upon its tremendous body, and with a human child resting trustfully on either arm.

Loc.cit.

However sceptical or iconoclastic Clarke's opinions may seem here, we must be wary of jumping to premature conclusions. Questions remain: Who directs the Overlords? If mankind has a religious propensity, what supplants the discredited faiths?

Their mission to Earth involves overseeing the emergence of a new generation of mankind radically different from their progenitors. The first indications of the real nature of their Directive emerge gradually:

"_ originally contacted him because he has one of the world's finest libraries of books on parapsychology and allied subjects. He politely but firmly refused to lend any of them, so there was nothing to do but visit him. I've now read about half his library. It has been a considerable ordeal."

"That I can well believe," said Karellen dryly. "Have you discovered anything among all the rubbish?"

"Yes - eleven clear cases of partial breakthrough, and twenty-seven probables. The material is so selective, however, that one cannot use it for sampling purposes. And the evidence is hopelessly confused with mysticism - perhaps the prime aberration of the human mind."

Childhood's End, pp.88-89.

This teleological story of the emergence of a newly-evolved species of Man proceeds side-by-side with a generic tale of hubristic aspiration featuring a clever young man with curiosity and determination. Its familiar theme - 'knowledge is power'- is given a mystical context which seems to contradict the precepts of science. Moreover there is a considerable, calculated irony in the Overlords' inability to comprehend the value to their master, the Overmind, of the mystical and intuitive humans in their care. But the Overlords' faith in Reason and Science ironically reveals their own limitations. Jan reveals a measure of this special human quality in his discovery of the Overlords' home planet:

It was an impossible coincidence. NGS 549672 must be the home of the Overlords. Yet to accept the fact violated all Jan's cherished ideas of the scientific method. Very well - let them be violated. He must accept the fact that, somehow, Rupert's fantastic experiment [a seance] had tapped a hitherto unknown source of knowledge.

Rashaverak? That seemed the most probable explanation. The Overlord had not been in the circle, but that was a minor point. However, Jan was not concerned with the mechanism of parapsysics: he was only interested in using the results.

Very little was known about NGS 549672: there had been nothing to distinguish it from a million other stars. But the catalogue gave its magnitude, its co-ordinates, and its spectral type. Jan would have to do a little research, and make a few simple calculations: then he would know, at least approximately, how far the world of the Overlords was from Earth.

A slow smile spread over Jan's face as he turned away from the Thames, back towards the gleaming white facade of the Science Centre. Knowledge was power - and he was the only man on Earth who knew the origin of the Overlords. How he would use that knowledge he could not guess. It would lie safely in his mind, awaiting the moment of destiny.

Childhood's End, p.95

The remainder of the second section of Childhood's End, 'The Golden Age' (47), relates how Jan manages to connive his way aboard a returning Overlord ship and secure a passage to their homeworld. Clarke suspends our interest in what he finds there for the closing chapters of the book; and the middle section of the book concludes with the

Overlords' sombre revelation - "'The stars are not for Man'":

"The stars are not for Man." Yes, it would annoy them to have the celestial portals slammed in their faces. But they must learn to face the truth - or as much of the truth as could mercifully be given to them.

From the lonely heights of the stratosphere, Karellen looked down upon the world and the people that had been given into his reluctant keeping. He thought of all that lay ahead, and what this world would be only a dozen years from now.

They would never know how lucky they had been. For a lifetime Mankind had achieved as much happiness as any race can ever know. It had been the Golden Age. But gold was also the colour of sunset, of autumn: and only Karellen's ears could catch the first wailings of the winter storms.

And only Karellen knew with what inexorable swiftness the Golden Age was rushing to its close.

Childhood's End, pp.118-119

The third section of Childhood's End opens with the description of an island community founded by Salomon to preserve 'the soul of man' from becoming destroyed inadvertently by the altruism of the Overlords. 'New Athens' is a behaviorist utopia, a cross between Walden Two and the New Atlantis managed in Bacon's 'Instauratio Magna' by the founder's sixteenth-century namesake: 'It hoped to become what the old Athens might have been if it had possessed machines instead of slaves, science instead of superstition.'(p.135) Yet the island venture is, in the circumstances, doomed to futility and Clarke uses it only as a suitable cradle for the tenuous interaction of Homo sapiens and the remote Overmind, at whose bidding the Overlords have taken over the world. Now the author returns to the strategy of overthrowing expectations. Two children turn out to be telepathic prodigies, able to undertake transcendental voyages of exploration throughout space and time - they have managed what the Overlords call 'Total Breakthrough.' Still more significantly, they can somehow communicate their talent, but only to minds which do not yet have too much to unlearn, and so the older generation is wholly excluded. Their parents are not to be alone in bearing this burden of

inferiority, however:

"What started this thing?" asked George. "And where is it going to lead?"

"That is something we cannot answer. But there are many races in the universe, and some of them discovered these powers long before your species - or mine - appeared on the scene. They have been waiting for you to join them, and now the time has come."

"Then where do you come into the picture?"

"Probably, like most men, you have always regarded us as your masters. That is not true. We have never been more than guardians, doing a duty imposed upon us from - above. That duty is hard to define: perhaps you can best think of us as midwives attending a difficult birth. We are helping to bring something new and wonderful into the world."

Rasheverak hesitated: for a moment it almost seemed as if he was at a loss for words.

"Yes, we are the midwives. But we ourselves are barren."

In that instant, George knew he was in the presence of a tragedy transcending his own. It was incredible - and yet somehow just. Despite all their powers and their brilliance, the Overlords were trapped in some evolutionary cul-de-sac. Here was a great and noble race, in almost every way superior to mankind; yet it had no future, and it was aware of it. In the face of this, George's own problems seemed suddenly trivial.

Childhood's End, pp.153-154

A yet more cruel eventuality is about to occur, however. Virtually all children under ten are taken from their parents and placed in a protected preserve wherein they will be free to grow together into one true telepathic gestalt.

When Jan returns to Earth more than eighty years have elapsed, though thanks to the time-paradox named after Einstein he is only a few subjective years older. The world is a quiet place, for the last generation of Mankind have died out without increase, and Jan is the Last Man. The evolved children of the last generation are commencing to exercise their awesome paraphysical power and embark upon a cosmic journey to join the Overmind which has spurred their development. The world and everything upon it is consumed in the process, and Jan's last transmission from Earth to the Overlord researchers (who study the phenomenon in the vain hope that they may someday emulate this

'apotheosis' p.179) rings with pride for what mankind has become:

Jan...struggled for words, then closed his eyes in an effort to regain control. There was no room for fear or panic now: he had a duty to perform - a duty to Man, and a duty to Karellen.

Slowly at first, like a man awakening from a dream, he began to speak.

"The buildings round me - the ground - the mountains - everything's like glass - I can see through it. Earth's dissolving - my weight has almost gone. You were right - they've finished playing with their toys.

"It's only a few seconds away. There go the mountains, like wisps of smoke. Goodbye, Karellen, Rashaverak - I am sorry for you. Though I cannot understand it, I've seen what my race became. Everything we ever achieved has gone up there into the stars. Perhaps that's what the old religions were trying to say. But they got it all wrong: they thought mankind was so important, yet we're only one race in - do you know how many? Yet now we've become something you could never be.

Childhood's End, p.188

What makes Clarke's novel so impressive and significant is his projection of a mystical but apostate philosophia perennia which accommodates the scientific aspect of the human mind without displacing its transcendental propensity. This productive synthesis supports images of humane vindication and growth, emphasizing the contingency of intuition and reason in sapientia, but stressing at the same time the value of the modern scientific outlook, as his preference passim for the expression 'paraphysical' at the expense of the more traditional term 'metaphysical' indicates. Karellen's explanation of the Overlords' interest in the human race broadcast to the 'last generation' of mankind illustrates this adroit marriage of metaphysics and science:

"In the centuries before our coming, your scientists uncovered the secrets of the physical world and led you from the energy of steam to the energy of the atom. You had put superstition behind you: Science was the only real religion of mankind. It was the gift of the western minority to the remainder of mankind, and it had destroyed all other faiths. Those that still existed when we came were already dying. Science, it was felt, could explain everything: there were no forces which did not come within its scope, no events for

which it could ultimately account. The origin of the universe might be forever unknown, but all that had happened after obeyed the laws of physics.

"Yet your mystics, though they were lost in their own delusions, had seen part of the truth. There are powers of the mind, and powers beyond the mind, which your science could never have brought within its framework without shattering it entirely. All down the ages there have been countless reports of strange phenomena - poltergeists, telepathy, precognition - which you had named but never explained. At first science ignored them, even denied their existence, despite the testimony of five thousand years. But they exist and if it is to be complete any theory of the universe must account for them.

"During the first half of the twentieth century, a few of your scientists began to investigate these matters. They did not know it, but they were tampering with the lock of Pandora's box. The forces they might have unleashed transcended any perils that the atom could have brought. For the physicists could only have ruined the Earth: the para-physicists could have spread havoc to the stars.

Childhood's End, pp.157-158

Perhaps this explains why Childhood's End won such praise for its author from C.S.Lewis, who declared, 'There has been nothing like it for years...an author who understands there may be things that have a higher claim on humanity than its own "survival".' Certainly Clarke's sophisticated balancing of the philosophical and aesthetic elements of this powerful composition has created one of the most enduring and effective synthetic fabulations of its genre.

In general, Clarke's science fiction illustrates the sceptical humanist soteriology which in many ways matches devout belief; and as a recent work again shows, even a broadly traditional idea of 'God' may be assimilated. In 2010 Odyssey Two, Clarke's 1982 sequel to 2001, the story of the investigation of the strange monoliths of the first novel continues. As usual Clarke's evolutionary theme is conveyed amid a welter of futuristic, 'hard' science ideas and discourse which give the fiction a realistic, rigorous tone - this author's preferred way of counterpointing the staggering nature of his subject. Although Bowman, transfigured in 2001, has gone beyond

his human form ("All that Dave Bowman really was, is still part of me," he tells his bewildered ex-wife in a fleeting last visit via her television), it is made clear to us that his was an individual experience. The human race must go on along its own path of evolutionary development without any further interruptions. The Cosmos remains a cryptic place, especially since the enigmatic alien beings who intervened to spare the Europeans the potential harm which could accompany human curiosity have again withdrawn beyond human ken.

Clarke's teleological fiction expects humane development through the joint influences of evolution and technology. It is a paradigm of scientific humanism in which positivism is mediated by the sophisticated moral sensibility of transcendental man. Ultimately, the Renaissance mage has re-emerged as the epitome of apotheosized man. This perfect sensibility goes beyond a simple apperception of the limitations of science in its re-integration of science as a valued kind of knowledge about physical reality with mystical religious perception. The resultant awareness recognizes the holistic reality of the universe, having acquired the macroscosmic kind of natural philosophy without which it cannot be fully known.

Throughout this final chapter two strands of teleological science fiction have been discussed concurrently: that in which an external agency or effect synergises an evolutionary transcendence; and the organic, that is, immanent transformation of human nature which is the basis of the depiction of human apotheosis.

In VALIS, the two strands converge to provide a dramatic tale of self-preservation and humane struggle in a situation so bewildering, and yet so allegedly commonplace, that the distinction between sanity and derangement virtually disappears.

The title of Philip K. Dick's VALIS (1981) is an acronym for 'Vast Active Living Intelligence System'. This turns out to be an alien artefact whose telemetred messages come as a bolt from the blue to its startled and disoriented communicants. With his usual taste for irony, Dick keeps the identity of the source of their apparent theophany from his characters, and the book charts the anxiety-ridden decline of several of them through insanity, delusions (often with a religious flavour), and suicide.

The novelist purports to relate the experiences of a close friend, Horselover Fat, who struggles to explain his visions of a cosmic conspiracy to the rest of the world. The early chapters relate how Fat clings to the conviction of the reality of disturbing paranormal events in the face of personal calamity and institutional doubt. Fat's response to the scepticism with which his assertions are met is twofold: he confronts the disbelief personally in direct exchanges with the psychotherapists who try to 'cure' him of the delusional complex which prompts his suicide attempts; and he records his understanding of the cryptic hints he picks up in his waking fugues in his Exegesis or tractate, a clever collocation of Gnostic and Hermetic analysis and contentions. The first paragraphs of the eighth chapter illustrate Dick's typically intellectual, wry and mannered narrative:

I did not think I should tell Fat that I thought his encounter with God was in fact an encounter with himself from the far future. Himself so evolved, so changed, that he had become no longer a human being. Fat had remembered back to the stars, and had encountered a being ready to return to the stars, and several selves along the way, several points along the line. All of them the same person.

Entry *13 in the tractate: Pascal said, "All history is one immortal man who continually learns." This is the Immortal One whom we worship without knowing his name. "He lived a long time ago but he is still alive,"

and, "The Head Apollo is about to return." The name changes.

On some level Fat guessed the truth; he had encountered his past selves and his future selves - two future selves: an early-on one, the three-eyed people, and then Zebra, who is disincorporate.

Time somehow got abolished for him, and the recapitulation of selves along the linear time-axis caused the multitude of selves to laminate together into a common entity.

Out of the lamination of selves, Zebra, which is supra- or trans-temporal, came into existence: pure energy, pure living information. Immortal, benign, intelligent and helpful. The essence of the rational human being. In the center of an irrational universe governed by an irrational Mind stands rational man, Horselover Fat being just one example. The in-breaking deity that Fat encountered in 1974 was himself. However, Fat seemed happy to believe that he had met God. After some thought I decided not to tell him my views. After all, I might be wrong.

VALIS, pp.109-110.

Even the author is unsure of the truth; appropriately, however, for throughout the novel there are points of deliberate convergence when Dick, the real author of Fat's eclectic Exegesis, drops his pretended detachment and candidly becomes his bewildered fictional alter ego, 'Horselover Fat' - Philip Dick. Indeed, VALIS is also Dick's public profession of faith in an obscure but active Providence; but since Horselover Fat and his author coalesce and separate several times, biographical speculation on that score is rather unprofitable.

However idiosyncratic or even eccentric VALIS may seem, it shows thematic resonances with earlier works by Dick and indeed by other writers whose works have already featured in this discussion of the science fiction of aspiration. The Wellsian scientific Apollos of Men Like Gods represent a rationalistic ideal similar to Dick's. Lewis's angelic cosmogony striving to maintain cosmic harmony by defeating the evil intent of the deranged 'Bent One' Maledil is surely reflected in VALIS as it is in Childhood's End in the symbolic guise of the cosmic menace posed by occluded modern man exploring our disproport-

tionate and ill-managed power. Aldiss's acid-head rock group 'The Escalation' are transmuted into Mother Goose's pro-Christian rock band; the psychomimetic distortions of behaviour which afflict the characters of Barefoot in the Head have their counterparts in the bewildering 'hypnagogic states' which disturb Fat's friends. One could see the central theme of VALIS as a sophisticated version of Behold the Man, for in both an obsessed individual seeks a saviour and ironically finds himself at the end of his quest. Both the cosmic hoax and the time-paradox of The Sirens of Titan have counterparts in VALIS, too, but above all VALIS stands as another example of the theosophical narratives - such as The Divine Invasion published in the same year (a more conventional, gimmicky reworking of the Apocalypse of St. John) - for which Dick has been justly praised.

Taken to its logical culmination, this argument might seem to reduce VALIS to a clever but nonetheless rather derivative synthesis of conventional generic ideas; but that ignores Dick's real purpose and achievement: the formulation of a original holistic gnosis, a fictive unification of all the arcane and diversified sacred tenets and premises of the orthodox, hermetic and apocryphal sources which he welds into a single, coherent mystical Weltanschauung. If the peril of this learned eclecticism is that it very readily slips into mere pretentiousness, Dick's contrapunctual wry humour preserves his Exegesis from deteriorating into the literary equivalent of name-dropping:

Siddhartha, the Buddha, remembered all his past lives; that is why he was given the title of buddha which means "the Enlightened One." From him the knowledge of achieving this passed to Greece and shows up in the teachings of Pythagoras, who kept much of this occult, mystical gnosis secret; his pupil Empedocles, however, broke off from the Pythagorean Brotherhood and went public. Empedocles told his friends privately that he was Apollo. He, too, like the Buddha and

Pythagoras, could remember their past lives. What they did not talk about was their ability to "remember" future lives.

The three-eyed people who Fat saw represented himself at an enlightened stage of his evolving development through his various lifetimes.... I did not tell Fat this, but technically he had become a Buddha. It did not seem to me like a good idea to let him know. After all, if you are a Buddha you should be able to figure it out for yourself.

It strikes me as an interesting paradox that a Buddha - an enlightened one - would be unable to figure out, even after four-and-a-half years, that he had become enlightened. Fat had become totally bogged down in his enormous exegesis, trying futilely to determine what had happened to him. He resembled more a hit-and-run accident victim than a Buddha.

VALIS, pp.110-111

Whatever the excitement of the ideas themselves, Dick never forgets their human context or implications: Fat and his friends are variously exalted, depressed and terrified by their discoveries as their minds try to cope with the emergent reality underlying the concerns of twentieth-century life. As the Rhipidon Society, they are a group of contemporary Everymen, refreshingly venial (exclamatory tetragrammatta seemingly offend no-one) but embarked on the highest spiritual pursuit and ethical in outlook. Their axiom reflects a morality which, in its rejection of violence as a individual right, surpasses the mores of their culture: 'Fish can't carry guns.' Having had the fish symbol of the early Christians linked with the double helix of DNA germ-cell encoding by the enigmatic deity Fat calls Zebra, they adopt it as their own emblem.

Chapter Eight (from which the foregoing quotations have been taken) is a turning point for Fat, who has found a 'divine' purpose to fulfil, a soteriological quest for which he must prepare by committing himself to growth and development (in stark and absolute contrast to his friend Sherri, who has committed herself to death and 'succeeded' in reversing the remission of her cancer).

Fat's obsessive idea these days, as he worried more and more about Sherri, was that the Savior would soon be reborn -

or had been already. Somewhere in the world he walked or soon would walk the ground once more.

What did Fat intend to do when Sherri died? Maurice had shouted that at him in the form of a question. Would he die, too?

Not at all. Fat, pondering and writing and doing research and receiving dribs and drabs of messages from Zebra during hypnagogic states and in dreams, and attempting to salvage something from the wreck of his life, had decided to go in search of the Savior. He would find him wherever he was.

This was the mission, the divine purpose, which Zebra had placed on him in March 1974: the mild yoke, the burden light. Fat, a holy man now, would become a modern-day magus. All he lacked was a clue - some hint as to where to seek. Zebra would tell him, eventually; the clue would come from God. This was the whole purpose of Zebra's theophany: to send Fat on his way.

VALIS, pp.111-112

Given the complexities of his theme and ideas - not to mention the occasional red herring - Dick's reiterative style seems felicitous rather than condescending, apposite rather than erudite. Fat and his fellows (including the author) are intent on pursuing the truth intimated by the theophanic sendings of 'Zebra' - VALIS, actually - and their theosophical method is essentially interpolative; that is, constructing a viable hypothesis by inductive reasoning, and abandoning the hypothesis if new concepts cannot be accommodated as they emerge or are revealed. This dialectic is apostate, for they have agreed that Christian Revelation as it stands is misleading; and it is recapitulative, since the facts as they have them are redeployed in a new schema whenever an hypothesis folds. While the impatient or adventurous reader may play the game for himself by construing the Tractes Cryptica Scriptura Dick provides as an appendix, the story of Fat's struggle for enlightenment is both moving and amusing.

Having convinced his sceptical friends of the truth of his bizarre ideas, they form the secret Rhidipon Society after viewing Lampton's allusive and subliminal film 'Valis'. The next step is to make contact with the film-maker and his group which includes the

avant-garde composer Brent Mini. The author himself effects a meeting between Lampton and the Rhipidon Society, who travel north in a state of general excitement at the prospect of meeting fellow mystics better informed than themselves. The encounter is more momentous - and frightening - than they could possibly have imagined, for the self-styled 'Friends of God' claim to be Promethean Titans - Prometheus plasticator, sapient and ageless as Victor Frankenstein could never have been - the creators of the human world and everything it encompasses. This key episode, which further illustrates Dick's synthetic-apocalyptic style at its most impressive, learned and humane, could only be abridged at the expense of its effect:

Shortly, we were squeezed into the [VW] Rabbit, sailing down residential streets of relatively modern houses with wide lawns.

"We are the Rhipidon Society," Fat said.

Eric Lampton said, "We are the Friends of God."

Amazed, Kevin reacted violently; he stared at Eric Lampton. The rest of us wondered why.

"You know the name, then," Eric said.

"Gottesfreunde," Kevin said. "You go back to the fourteenth century!"

"That's right," Linda Lampton said. "The Friends of God formed originally in Basel. Finally we entered Germany and the Netherlands. You know of Master Eckehart, then."

Kevin said, "He was the first person to conceive of the Godhead in distinction to God. The greatest of the Christian mystics. He taught that a person can attain union with the Godhead - he held a concept that God exists within the human soul!" We had never heard Kevin so excited. "The soul can actually know God as he is! Nobody today teaches that! And, and - " Kevin stammered; we had never heard him stammer before. "Sankara in India, in the ninth century; he taught the same things that Eckehart taught. It's a trans-Christian mysticism in which man can reach beyond God, or merge with God, as or with a spark of some kind that isn't created. Brahman; that's why Zebra - "

"VALIS," Eric Lampton said.

"Whatever," Kevin said; turning to me, he said in agitation, "this would explain the revelations about the Buddha and about St. Sophia or Christ. This isn't limited to any one country or culture or religion. Sorry David."

David nodded amiably, but appeared shaken. He knew this wasn't orthodoxy.

Eric said, "Sankara and Eckehart, the same person; living in two places at two times."

Half to himself, Fat said, "He causes things to look different so it would appear time has passed."

"Time and space both," Linda said.

"What is VALIS?" I asked.

"Vast Active Living Intelligence System," Eric said.

"That's a description," I said.

"That's what we have," Eric said. "What else is there but that? Do you want a name, the way God had man name all the animals? VALIS is the name; call it that and be satisfied."

"Is VALIS man?" I said. "Or God? Or something else."

Both Eric and Linda smiled.

"Does it come from the stars?" I said.

"This place where we are," Eric said, "is one of the stars; our sun is a star."

"Riddles," I said.

Fat said, "Is VALIS the Savior?"

For a moment, both Eric and Linda remained silent and then Linda said, "We are the Friends of God." Beyond that she added nothing more.

Cautiously, David glanced at me, caught my eye, and made a questioning motion: Are these people on the level?

"They are a very old group," I answered, "which I thought had died out centuries ago."

Eric said, "We never died out and we are much older than you realize. Than you have been told. Than even we will tell you if asked."

"You date back before Eckehart, then," Kevin said acutely.

Linda said, "Yes."

"Centuries?" Kevin asked.

No answer.

"Thousands of years?" I said, finally.

"High hills are the haunt of the mountain-goat," Linda said, "and boulders a refuge for the rock-badger."

"What does that mean?" I said; Kevin joined in; we spoke in unison.

"I know what it means," David said.

"It can't be," Fat said; apparently he recognized what Linda had quoted, too.

"The stork makes her home in their tops," Eric said, after a time.

To me, Fat said, "These are Ikhnaton's race. That's Psalm 104, based on Ikhnaton's hymn; it entered our Bible - it's older than our Bible."

Linda Lampton said, "We are the ugly builders with claw-like hands. Who hide ourselves in shame. Along with Hephaistos we built great walls and the homes of the gods themselves."

"Yes," Kevin said. "Hepaistos was ugly, too. The builder God. You killed Asklepios."

"These are Kyklopes," Fat said faintly.

"The name means 'Round-eye,'" Kevin said.

"But we have three eyes," Eric said. "So an error in the historic record was made."

"Deliberately?" Kevin asked.

Linda said, "Yes."

"You are very old," Fat said.

"Yes, we are," Eric said, and Linda nodded. "Very old. But time is not real. Not to us, anyhow."

"My God," Fat said, as if stricken. "These are the original builders."

"We have never stopped," Eric said. "We still build. We built this world, this space-time matrix."

"You are our creators," Fat said.

The Lamptons nodded.

"You really are the Friends of God," Kevin said. "You are literally."

"Don't be afraid," Eric said. "You know how Shiva holds up one hand to show there is nothing to fear."

"But there is," Fat said. "Shiva is the destroyer; his third eye destroys."

"He is also the restorer," Linda said.

Leaning against me, David whispered, "Are they crazy?"

They are gods, I said to myself; they are Shiva who both destroys and protects. They judge.

Perhaps I should have felt fear. But I did not. They had already destroyed - brought down Ferris F. Fremount, as he had been depicted in the film Valis.

The period of Shiva the Restorer had begun. The restoration, I thought, of all we have lost. Of two dead girls.

As in the film Valis, Linda Lampton could turn time back, if necessary; and to restore everything to life.

I had begun to understand the film.

The Rhidipon Society, I realized, fish though it be, is out of its depth.

VALIS, pp.161-163.

Having thus invoked the prospect of a new era of hope and redemption, Dick suddenly embarks on a sombre digression. His characters are deserted by their author midway between Gino's Bar and the Lamptons' home, packed into the VW Rabbit. His style abruptly switches into exposition about how the allegedly dualistic morality of man and the death 'within every religion' can readily convert a religion from light and eros to thanatos, from the worship of Apollo's divine reason and Sophia's 'holy wisdom' to the morbid indulgence of Pan and Dionysos. His tone is utterly grave, without a trace of the flippancy which does here and there threaten to reduce his story to pastiche;

his subject, the awful force of religious conviction and its ability to foster an obedience every bit as oppressive and deadly as any Orwellian nightmare or event of the Inquisition. Evidently, Dick was himself overwhelmed during the composition of VALIS by an appalling topical proof of the commonplace notion that 'truth is stranger than fiction':

But the divine and the terrible are so close to each other. Nommo and Yurugu are partners; both are necessary. Osiris and Seth, too. In the Book of Job, Yahweh and Satan form a partnership. For us to live, however, these partners must be split. The behind-the-scenes partnership must end as soon as time and space and all the creatures come into being.

It is not God nor the gods which must prevail; it is wisdom, Holy Wisdom. I hoped that the fifth Savior would be that: splitting the bipolarities and emerging as a unitary thing. Not of three persons or two but one. Not Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer and Shiva the Destroyer, but what Zoroaster called the Wise Mind.

God can be good and terrible - not in succession - but at the same time. This is why we seek a mediator between us and him; we approach him through the mediating priest and attenuate and enclose him through the sacraments. It is for our own safety: to trap him with confines which render him safe. But now, as Fat had seen, God had escaped the confines and was transubstantiating the world; God had become free.

The gentle sounds of the choir singing "Amen, amen" are not to calm the congregation but to pacify the god.

When you know this you have penetrated to the innermost core of religion. And the worst part is that the god can thrust himself outward and into the congregation until he becomes them. You worship a god and then he pays you back by taking you over. This is called "enthousiasmos" in Greek, literally "to be possessed by the god." Of all the Greek gods the one most likely to do this was Dionysos. And, unfortunately, Dionysos was insane.

.....
.....

I write this literally with a heavy hand; I am so weary I am dropping as I sit here. What happened at Jonestown was the mass running of panic, inspired by the mad god - panic leading into death, the logical outcome of the mad god's thrust.

For them no way out existed. You must be taken over by the mad god to understand this, that once it happens there is no way out, because the mad god is everywhere.

It is not reasonable for nine hundred people to collude in their own deaths and the deaths of little children, but the mad god is not logical, not as we understand the term.

VALIS, pp.165-166.

The materialistic explanation is simpler by far than his theosophical ideas: he sees the Jonestown tragedy as the consequence of blind faith in a charismatic oppressor, religious 'totalitarianism' by another name. If Dick strains to analyze this fell event within the Gnostic rhetoric and scheme he has adopted, his despair at human folly is plain and heartfelt; clearly an agnostic rather than an atheist, he resentfully accuses: 'You worship a god and he pays you back by taking you over.' As the rest of the novel seems to suggest, the precarious equilibrium of agnostic faith suggested by the Hermetic slogan 'GOD IS NOW HERE / GOD IS NOWHERE' has tipped from millennial joy to agnostic despair.

Dick returns at once to the storyline he has been developing with the party's arrival at the Lamptons' house, but the dominant tone is increasingly sceptical, even hostile. The Lamptons reveal that they and Mini are actually alien beings from Albemuth who have exchanged their titanic faculties - including their third eye - to play a sophisticated reality game within the prevailing conditions on Earth which they claim to have created. The artifact VALIS is an automatic device designed to restore their native rationality despite the derangement the pathological atmosphere of Earth causes; yet before they admit their insanity, the author has realized, 'So that's why you're dying. Your god has killed you and yet you're happy. I thought, We have to get out of here. These people court death.' (p.171) Yet the Rhidipon Society stay, partly because their confidence in their strange hosts becomes stronger once again, and partly because they are offered a proof which could either confirm their doubts or reverse them: a meeting with the Head Appollo's fifth avatar, St. Sophia, the daughter of Linda Lampton and VALIS - the incarnate

'hypostasis of Christ:'

What I had expected was tranquility, the peace of God which passes all understanding. However, the child, upon seeing us, rose to her feet and came towards us with indignation blazing in her face; her eyes, huge, dilated with anger, fixed intently on me - she lifted her right hand and pointed at me.

"Your suicide attempt was a violent cruelty against yourself," she said in a clear voice. And yet she was, as Linda had said, no more than two years old: a baby, really, and yet with the eyes of an infinitely old person.

"It was Horselover Fat," I said.

Sophia said, "Phil, Kevin and David. Three of you. There are no more."

Turning to speak to Fat - I saw no one. I saw only Eric Lampton and his wife, the dying man in the wheelchair [Mini], Kevin and David. Fat was gone. Nothing remained of him.

Horselover Fat was gone forever. As if he had never existed.

"I don't understand," I said. "You destroyed him."

"Yes," the child said.

I said, "Why?"

"To make you whole."

"Then he's in me? Alive in me?"

"Yes," Sophia said. By degrees, the anger left her face.

The great eyes ceased to smolder.

"He was me all the time," I said.

"That is right," Sophia said.

VALIS, pp.176-177.

Debating the validity of all this bewildering revelation later, the Rhidipon Society (now numbering three) conclude that the Lamptons and Brent Mini are mad, but Sophia represents absolute reason - wisdom incarnate. Phil resists the latter finding until Kevin and David suggest to him that his cure is the ultimate proof of Sophia's benevolent power - "'You stopped believing you were two people. You stopped believing in Horselover Fat as a separate person. And no therapist and no therapy over the years, since Gloria's death, has ever been able to accomplish that.'"(p.182) They decide to stay a further day to speak once more with the oracular child. Their faith is rewarded with an uplifting humanist vision and they are charged with a holy mission, for the millenium is not yet at hand and must be defended during the last days of morbidity and oppression:

"I gave you your motto," she said. "For your society; I gave you its name. Now I give you your commission. You will go out into the world and you will tell the kerygma which I charge you with. Listen to me; I tell you in truth, in very truth, that the days of the wicked will end and the son of man will sit on the judgement seat. This will come as surely as the sun itself rises. The grim king will strive and lose, despite his cunning; he loses; he lost; he will always lose, and those with him will go into the pit of darkness and there they will linger forever.

"What you teach is the word of man. Man is holy, and the true god, the living god, is man himself. You will have no gods but yourselves; the days in which you believed in other gods end now, they end forever.

"The goal of your lives has been reached. I am here to tell you this. Do not fear; I will protect you. You are to follow one rule: you are to love one another as you love me and I love you, for this love proceeds from the true god, which is yourselves.

"A time of trial and delusion and wailing lies ahead because the grim king, the king of tears, will not surrender his power. But you will take his power from him; I grant you the authority in my name, exactly as I granted it to you once before, when that grim king ruled and destroyed and challenged the humble people of the world.

"The battle which you fought before has not ended, although the day of the healing sun has come. Evil does not die of its own self because it imagines that it speaks for god, but there is only one god and that god is man himself.

VALIS, pp.183-184.

Its apostate character aside, this passage is easily the equal of anything by Wells, Lewis, or Stapledon. Indeed its very unorthodoxy proclaims its uniqueness and genius. Dick's hermetic allegory should therefore be seen not as a pale imitation of their towering achievements, but as a worthy successor in the humane tradition of the science fiction of aspiration which includes so many other impressive allegories of salvation or humane fulfillment. VALIS, as it turns out, has a sort of suspended resolution which refocusses the reader's attention on the human predicament of its protagonists as they await the restoration of the world and their individual salvation. Sophia has been killed by Mini; yet VALIS's subliminal messages continue to come through television advertisements aimed at children. Fat has returned from the limbo to which he was sent by Sophia, but leaves

Phil to seek his Saviour across the world; alone again, 'I have a sense of the goodness of men these days....' Phil reflects; 'The divine intrudes where you least expect it.'

My search kept me at home; I sat before the TV set in my living room. I sat; I waited; I watched; I kept myself awake. As we had been told, originally, long ago, to do; I kept my commission.

VALIS, p.213

As Dick's work has always attested, the progressive impulse which has long been a pervasive theme of modern science fiction now demands of its champions a greater measure of self-awareness, fidelity, and maturity. These new protagonists embody the emergent humanism of contemporary science fiction, with its scepticism about religious moral values which have interdicted progressive yearnings since Eden, and the essentially conservative nature of Religion as a social institution. An additional function of transcendental science fiction is to present topical criticism: where the sixteenth and seventeenth-century satirists thought to expose the truth as they saw it in their bitter 'glas', these contemporary satirists assert that only in a puzzling eclipse can truths be glimpsed, rather in a straightforwardly reflective mirror of the intellect; often such 'truths' confront orthodox religion with its own imputed inadequacies.

In general, contemporary science fiction's cerebral parables assert that moral values are only apparently immutable, and being relative, must not be obeyed unthinkingly. Ethical principles should be defined in the purest interests of mankind, and not sought from some illusory supernatural source. Their moral force should not depend either on allegedly divine authority or proscription, but upon

their sophistication, general acceptability, and humaneness. In this the science fiction of aspiration pleasingly reflects the distinctive idealism and scepticism of the genre as a whole.

A final question may now be answered. If the science fiction of aspiration really is generically 'apostate,' why have writers tended to pay so much attention to concepts like 'faith' and 'salvation'? Bester's hubrist par excellence, the transformed Gully Foyle, grasps their significance in the very instant of his soteriological transfiguration:

He jaunted up the geodesic lines of space-time to an Elsewhere and an Elsewhen. He arrived in chaos. he hung in a precarious para-Now for a moment and then tumbled back into chaos.

'It can be done,' he thought. 'It must be done.'

He jaunted again, a burning spear flung from unknown into unknown, and again he tumbled back into a chaos of para-space and para-time. He was lost in Nowhere.

'I believe,' he thought. 'I have faith.'

He jaunted again, and failed again.

'Faith in what?' he asked himself, adrift in limbo.

'Faith in faith,' he answered himself. 'It isn't necessary to have something to believe in. It's only necessary to believe that somewhere there's something worthy of belief.'

He jaunted for the last time and the power of his willingness to believe transformed the para-Now of his random destination into a real...

NOW: Rigel in Orion, burning blue-white, five hundred and forty light years from earth, ten thousand times more luminous than the sun, a cauldron of energy circled by thirty-seven massive planets... Foyle hung, freezing and suffocating in space, face to face with the incredible destiny in which he believed, but which was still inconceivable. He hung in space for a blinding moment, as helpless, as amazed, and as inevitable as the first gilled creature to come out of the sea and hang gulping on a primeval beach in the dawn-history of life on earth.

He space-jaunted, turning para-Now into...

Tiger! Tiger!, pp.246-247

Be it invested in God, Science, Self or Man - or in all four - faith sustains the sensibility; without it, existence is empty of meaning and aspiration is nugatory, and, to quote Dick's terror-stricken protagonist Barney Mayerson, "'There is no salvation!'" - only

entropy. The unique attraction of the science fiction of aspiration is that it supports so much speculative discourse while celebrating a progressive moral vision of Man. .

REFERENCES and FOOTNOTES

1. David KETTERER, New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature; Indiana Univ. Press, London, 1974.
2. Ketterer, op.cit., p.17.
3. Idem., p.19.
4. Idem., p.38. Epiphany, theophany and apotheosis are significant features of works discussed in this study.
5. David KETTERER's 1976 'coda' to New Worlds for Old, 'Science Fiction and Allied Literature' appears in Science-Fiction Studies, Second Series.
6. Loc.cit., p.95.
7. J.Norman KING, 'Theology, Science Fiction and Man's Future Orientation' reprinted in Many Futures, Many Worlds, ed. Thomas D.CLARESON; p.238.
8. Thomas L.WYMER, 'Perception and Value in Science Fiction'; in Many Futures, Many Worlds ed. Clareson; p.12.
9. King, op.cit., p.241.
10. Brian STAPLEFORD, 'Science Fiction and the Image of the Future'; Foundation 14 (Sept.1978); p.34.
11. King, op.cit., p.240
12. From Boyd's own 1978 Preface to the 1969 Penguin edition of The Rakehells of Heaven, p.vii.
13. From Desmond MacCarthy's Introduction to the joint edition of Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited by J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd.; p.vii.
14. Idem., p.viii.
MacCarthy's discussion of Butler's unorthodox religious views is informative and lucid; further reference will be made to it.
15. Or, a 'forward oddity'; a positively-tending mutation capable of a limited awareness of the 'noosphere', Teilhard de Chardin's heretical conjecture of the ultimate planetary consciousness toward which all creatures capable of consciousness, in however slight a degree, are evolving. Cf. also the discussion of the recondite, transcendental, holistic 'Overmind' of Childhood's End, in 'GOD IS NOWHERE / GOD IS NOW HERE', p.566 et seq.
16. Dick's depiction of a psychopathic god here is not unique, by any means. Another striking example of such an entity was the subject of 'Faith of our Fathers'(1967), written for Harlan Ellison's celebrated (and notorious) 'New Wave' anthology, Dangerous

Visions. A Chinese commissar is being evaluated for advancement. At the same time, the underground movement try to win him over by supplying him with a drug, which he innocently takes. The dose provokes a most terrifying hallucination, in which he sees a vile cyborg on his viewer, rather than the depressingly familiar features of the Party Chairman. As the bad trip passes he assumes that he was given a hallucinogen, but as his girl contact later tells him, he was in fact given stelazine, an anti-hallucinogen. The city's drinking water is treated with a drug which he, and everyone else, has been taking unknowingly for years. The horrid creature he saw was not a hallucination, but the opposite. Still sceptical, Chien accepts another dose to take with him to a social gathering in the presence of the His Greatness the Absolute Benefactor. The meeting turns out to be an apocalyptic epiphany:

I know who you are, Tung Chien thought to himself. You, the supreme head of the world-wide Party structure. You, who destroy whatever living object you touch; I see that Arabic poem, the searching for the flowers of life to eat them - I see you astride the plain which to you is Earth, plain without hills, without valleys. You go anywhere, appear any time, devour anything; you engineer life and then guzzle it, and you enjoy that.

He thought, you are God.

Dangerous Visions Vol.2, p.62.

Chien then tries to take his own life, but is saved by 'God'. After a bitter exchange with this malevolent entity in the course of which it promises him that it will torment him to death and - shades of Nineteen Eighty-Four - 'deprive you of everything you possess or want'; and reveals a 'mystery' - 'The dead shall live, the living die. I kill what lives; I save what has died. And I will tell you this: there are things worse than I'; the encounter ends when Chien strikes out at it. Though he burns for further revenge, 'He thought, I will get you. I will see that you die too. That you suffer, just like us, exactly in every way we do. I'll nail you; I swear to god I'll nail you up somewhere. And it will hurt. As much as I hurt now.', Chien realizes that 'God' - it, the State, its protocols, its agents, devices and lackeys - cannot be defeated. Returning home, he finds a measure of temporary release in Tanya's compliant and healing sexuality, but his estrangement is only a little diminished as he perceives that his death is imminent.

In an afterword to this story, Dick speculated about the possible use of hallucinogenic drugs to allow the scientific study of 'the theological experience'. He continues, 'This appears to me to be a true new frontier...part hallucination but containing other, real components. God, as a topic in science fiction, when it appeared at all, used to be treated polemically, as in "Out of the Silent Planet". But I prefer to treat it as intellectually exciting. What if, through psychedelic drugs, the religious experiences becomes (sic) commonplace in the life of intellectuals? The old atheism, which seemed to many of us - including me - valid in terms of our experiences, or rather lack of

experiences, would have to step monetarily aside. Science fiction, always probing what is about to be thought, become, must eventually tackle without preconceptions a future neo-mystical society in which theology constitutes as major a force as in the medieval period. This is not necessarily a backward step, because now these beliefs can be tested - forced to put up or shut up. I, myself, have no real beliefs about God, only my experience that He is present...subjectively, of course; but the inner realm is real too.'

17. 'The Profession of Science Fiction XVII: The Lucky Dog Pet Store' by Philip K.Dick, Foundation 17 (Sept.1979) pp.41-49.
18. Brian ALDISS, Trillion Year Spree, p.329.
19. Angus M.TAYLOR, 'Can God Fly? Can He Hold Out His Arms and Fly? The Fiction of Philip K.Dick'; Foundation 4 (July 1973); pp.39-40.
20. DICK, Radio Free Albemuth(1985); p.67 (Grafton Books edition).
21. TAYLOR, op. cit., pp.42-43.
22. According to James Blish's argument in A Case of Conscience, the belief that Satan possesses creativity is heretical.
23. Harold L.BERGER, Science Fiction and the New Dark Age; The Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio, 1976; pp.41-42.
24. Sheila SCHWARTZ, 'Science Fiction as Humanistic Study'; English Record 22:II (1971) pp.49-55; p.54.
25. Idem., pp.54-55.
26. James BLISH (as William Atheling), 'Cathedrals in Space'; pp.49-70 of his collected reviews, The Issue at Hand; p.70.
27. Idem., pp.63-64.
28. Blish's 'catalogue' of Smith's 'Campbellian' superpowers:

He can control his metabolism to the point where any outside observer would judge him dead; he can read minds; he is a telekinetic; he can throw objects (or people) permanently away into the fourth dimension by a pure effort of will, so easily that he uses the stunt to undress; he practices astral projection as easily as he undressed, on one occasion leaving his body on the bottom of a swimming pool while he disposes of about thirty-five cops and almost as many heavily armored helicopters; he can heal his own wounds almost instantly; he can mentally analyze inanimate matter, well enough to know instantly that a corpse he has just encountered died by poisoning years ago; levitation, creptitation, intermittent claudication, you name it he's got it - and besides, he's awfully good in bed.

Loc.cit., pp.69-70

29. Stranger in a Strange Land, passim, but pp.267-268 especially. (New English Library 1978 edition).
30. David N.SAMUELSON, 'Stranger in the Sixties: Model or Mirror?' in Critical Encounters: Writers and Themes in Science Fiction, edited by Dick Riley, pp.144-175; Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York, 1978; p.162.

Samuelson's essay also describes the phenomenal success of Stranger in a Strange Land, and its adoption by cultists, among them the notorious Charles Manson, 'self-appointed Messiah of Southern California'.

It was not until the Sixties, however - when Heinlein himself was in his fifties - that he became a really popular writer for "adult" audiences, known to large numbers of people outside the science fiction subculture. Perhaps it would be more accurate to observe that a greater proportion of society became initiated, if only minimally, into the science fiction subculture. The growth in Heinlein's sales and reputation was gradual, centering on one book, which shared with Frank Herbert's Dune (1965) the dubious blessing of becoming an "under-ground classic." Stranger in a Strange Land (1961) sold over a million copies... Far from being a rival of Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, Heinlein came to compete with Harold Robbins and Jacqueline Susann, although his idiosyncracies made it unlikely he would ever surpass them.

Loc.cit., p.145.

31. Ronald Lee CANSLER, 'Stranger in a Strange Land: Science Fiction as Literature of Creative Imagination, Social Criticism, and Entertainment'; Journal of Popular Culture 5, pp.952.
32. Blish, op.cit.
33. Heinlein evidently wished to claim a new prestige for his work by using the term, which he felt distinguished his later fiction from its antecedent juvenilia and 'hard' science fiction which emphasized rigorous extrapolation of existing scientific knowledge and technological hardware.
34. Robert C. PARKINSON, 'Dune - An Unfinished Tetralogy'; from Extrapolation 13 (Dec. 1971); p.19.
35. David M. MILLER, 'Toward a Structural Metaphysic: Religion in the Novels of Frank Herbert'; The Transcendent Adventure ed. Reilly; pp.146-147.
36. Timothy O'REILLY, 'From Concept to Fable: The Evolution of Frank Herbert's Dune'; in Critical Encounters ed. Dick Riley; pp.49-50.
37. O'Reilly, op.cit., p.50.

38. Brian Aldiss nearly concurs (he rates Dune Messiah more highly than I): 'The first two novels [of the Dune sequence] ... are, it must be said, the best of the series. Complexity of theme in the later novels does not compensate for an absence of mythic depth.' Trillion Year Spree, p.396.
39. Trillion Year Spree, p.471.
40. Tom WOODMAN, 'Science Fiction, Religion and Transcendence'; in Science Fiction: A Critical Guide ed. Parrinder; pp.110-130.
41. Woodman, op.cit., p.128.
42. Aldiss, op.cit., Panther edition, pp.63-64.
43. The 'Golden Age' of American magazine science fiction of the 1950's saw a proliferation of stories with paranormal heroes. Indeed Bester's novels reflect this interest in speculative faculties such as telekinesis, synaesthesia, teleportation (Tiger!Tiger!), and telepathy (The Demolished Man, 1953); in later novels he depicts immortals in a gestalt interface with a supercomputer (Extro, 1975) and the telepathic 'polymorphic' incubus of Golem-100(1980).
44. James GUNN, The Road to Science Fiction Vol.3; p.40.
45. The sexual explicitness of 'New Wave' writers like Moorcock, Aldiss, et al. is arguably more humane than the sort of coy prurience their 'Golden Age' predecessors often would work into their stories, which, being generally chauvinistic or voyeuristic, is no less offensive.
46. Given the impossibility of sustaining a detailed discussion of such a large group of texts, the approach adopted meant selecting those which would represent all the main features of the group as a whole. Many of these novels have been recognised as being among the most sophisticated science fiction stories of their day.
47. Chapter 10 of Childhood's End presents one of the most credible, concise projections of the sociology of a future 'Golden Age' the genre includes. Alas this ultimate phase of human civilization is foredoomed and poignantly short-lived.

APPENDIX I

Wells's View of the Social Role of Religion

This passage, one of the most effective of the many expositions of Men Like Gods (1923), illustrates Wells's central thesis that orthodox religious moral values and their influence upon social development has been exaggerated and harmful. He suggests here that there are Christian ideas which are humane, but also that these have been considered sacrosanct and hence accorded absolute moral force, whereas in fact, since all ethics are relative qualities generated by their cultural context, they become pernicious rather than wholesome if their effect is maintained statically throughout a long period of social change on the basis that they are 'revealed' and immutable.

Wells always held that social change was an inevitable phenomenon, but that it could be a positive force if it was managed scientifically (that is, from a position of knowledge of ends, means and consequences) rather than on a laissez-faire basis. Religious feelings, which he saw as a powerful influence upon popular human attitudes, could be harnessed to bend the will of the people to constructive, egalitarian ends ('a doctrine of universal service'). This humanistic 'religion of Man' does not require divine sanction in the same way conventional religions depend upon the backing of a god for the force of their moral dicta; yet Wells perceived the benefit as well as the danger of endowing the prophet with a divine sensibility and hence, more-than-human significance. The Utopians' creed therefore has a theistic element, although it is strictly atheistic in the conventional sense, because Wells has substituted Man for God by asserting, anthropologically, that some human qualities actually are divine qualities. In Utopia, it there is a God

at all, God was made in the image of enlightened Man - 'A great many people thought that his man was a God. But he had been accustomed to call himself merely a son of God or a son of Man.' In Michael Moorcock's *Judea*, by contrast, while Glogauer does create a God out of his own personality, the drives which compell him to substantiate the Christian scripture - selfishness, insecurity and sado-masochism - ironically are perverted and quite ignoble.

What happened, Mr. Barnstaple gathered, was a deliberate change in Utopian thought. A growing number of people were coming to understand that amidst the powerful and easily released forces that science and organisation had brought within reach of man, the old conception of social life in the state, as a limited and legalised struggle of men and women to get the better of one another, was becoming too dangerous to endure, just as the increased dreadfulness of modern weapons was making the separate sovereignty of nations too dangerous to endure. There had to be new ideas and conventions of human association if history was not to end in disaster and collapse.

All societies were based on the limitation by laws and taboos and treaties of the ancestral man-ape; that ancient spirit of self-assertion had now to undergo new restrictions commensurate with the new powers and dangers of the race. The idea of competition to possess, as the ruling idea of intercourse, was, like some ill-controlled furnace, threatening to consume the machine it had formerly driven. The idea of creative service had to replace it. To that idea the human mind and will had to be turned if social life was to be saved. Propositions that had seemed, in former ages, to be inspired and exalted idealism began now to be recognised not simply as sober psychological truth but as practical and urgently necessary truth. In explaining this Urthred expressed himself in a manner that recalled to Mr. Barnstaple's mind certain very familiar phrases; he seemed to be saying that whosoever would save his life should lose it, and that whosoever would give his life should thereby gain the whole world.

Father Amerton's thoughts, it seemed, were also responding in the same manner. For he suddenly interrupted with: 'But what you are saying is a quotation!'

Urthred admitted that he had a quotation in mind, a passage from the teachings of a man of great poetic power who had lived long ago in the days of spoken words.

He would have proceeded, but Father Amerton was too excited to let him do so. 'But who was this teacher?' he asked. 'Where did he live? How was he born? How did he die?'

A picture was flashed upon Mr. Barnstaple's consciousness of a solitary-looking, pale-faced figure, beaten and bleeding, surrounded by armoured guards, in the midst of a thrusting,

jostling, sun-bit crowd which filled a narrow, high-walled street. Behind, some huge, ugly implement was borne along dipping and swaying with the swaying of the multitude....

'Did he die upon the Cross in this world also?' cried Father Amerton. 'Did he die upon the Cross?'

This prophet in Utopia they learned had died very painfully but not upon the Cross. He had been tortured in some way, but neither the Utopians nor these particular Earthlings had sufficient knowledge of the technicalities of torture to get any idea over about that, and then apparently he had been fastened upon a slowly turning wheel and exposed until he died. It was the abominable punishment of a cruel and conquering race, and it had been inflicted upon him because his doctrine of universal service had alarmed the rich and dominant who did not serve. Mr. Barnstaple had a momentary vision of a twisted figure upon that wheel of torture in the balzing sun. And, marvellous triumph over death! out of a world that could do such a deed had come this great peace and universal beauty about him!

But Father Amerton was pressing his questions. 'But did you not realise who he was? Did not this world suspect?'

A great many people thought that this man was a God. But he had been accustomed to call himself merely a son of God or a son of Man.

Father Amerton stuck to his point. 'But you worship him now?'

'We follow his teaching because it was wonderful and true,' said Urthred.

'But worship?'

'No.'

'But does nobody worship? There were those who worshipped him?'

There were those who worshipped him. There were those who quailed before the stern magnificence of his teaching and yet who had a tormenting sense that he was right in some profound way. So they played a trick upon their own uneasy consciences by treating him as a magical god rather than as a light to their souls. They interwove with his execution ancient traditions of sacrificial kings. Instead of receiving him frankly and clearly, and making him a part of their understandings and wills they pretended to eat him mystically and make him a part of their bodies. They turned his wheel into a miraculous symbol, and they confused it with the equator and the sun and the ecliptic and indeed with anything else that was round. In cases of ill luck, ill health or bad weather it was believed to be very helpful for the believer to describe a circle in the air with the fore-finger.

And since this teacher's memory was very dear to the ignorant multitude because of his gentleness and charity, it was seized upon by cunning and aggressive types who constituted themselves champions and exponents of the wheel, who grew rich and powerful in its name, led people into great wars for its sake and used it as a cover and justification for envy, hatred, tyranny and dark desires. Until at last men said that had that ancient prophet come again to Utopia, his own triumphant wheel would have crushed and destroyed him

afresh....

Father Amerton seemed inattentive to this communication. He was seeing it from another angle. 'But surely,' he said, 'there is a remnant of believers still! Despised perhaps - but a remnant?'

There was no remnant. The whole world followed that Teacher of Teachers, but no one worshipped him. On some old treasured buildings the wheel was still to be seen carved, often with the most fantastic decorative elaborations. And in museums and collections there were multitudes of pictures, images, charms and the like.

'I don't understand this,' said Father Amerton. 'It is too terrible. I am at a loss. I do not understand.'

Men Like Gods, pp.58-61.

By presenting this sympathetic analogy of the Christ's Passion and Crucifixion, Wells sought to show how a Christ-like prophet could exert a benign, temporal influence which would help shape a more humane society, but which would gradually diminish after the critical times as that primary influence became less and less necessary for maintaining the new ethical code.

Wells argues that it is the legacy of the prophet which should be valued, on the basis that it has intrinsic value; Amerton, here representing all Christian believers, venerates the prophet himself as much as his ethics, whose merit proceeds from their source - Christian values are 'revealed'. Compare this argument with Aldous Huxley's rather caustic discussion of the legacy of Christ:

In cases where the adored man is no longer alive, adoration cannot corrupt its object. But even the best human persons have their defects and limitations; and to these, if they happen to be dead, must be added the defects and limitations of their biographers. Thus, according to his very inadequate biographers, Jesus of Nazareth was never pre-occupied with philosophy, art, music or science, and ignored almost completely the problems of politics, economics, and sexual relations. It is also recorded of him that he blasted a fig-tree for not bearing fruit out of season, that he scourged the shopkeepers in the temple precincts and caused a herd of swine to drown. Scrupulous devotion to and initiation of the person of Christ have resulted only too frequently in a fatal tendency, on the part of earnest Christians, to despise artistic creation and philosophic thought; to disparage the enquiring intelligence, to evade all long-range, large-scale problems of politics and economics, and to believe

themselves justified in displaying anger, or as they would doubtless prefer to call it, 'righteous indignation.'

In many cases devotion is directed, not to a living human person, nor to a human person who lived in the past, but to an eternal, omniscient, all-powerful God, who is regarded in some way as a person.

Ends and Means(1937), pp.238-239.

Of course, as he had already pointed out, Huxley was even more sceptical about the effectiveness of the kind of cult of scientific humanism which Wells advocated:

To what effect can rites and formulations, symbolic acts and objects be made use of in modern times? The question has been asked at frequent intervals ever since organized Christianity began to lose its hold upon the West. Attempts have been made to fabricate synthetic rituals without much success. The French Revolutionary cult of Reason and the Supreme Being died with the Thermidorian reaction. Comte's religion of Humanity - 'Catholicism without Christianity,' as T.H. Huxley called it - never took root. Even the rituals and ceremonies devised from time to time by successful Christian revivalists seldom outlive their authors or spread beyond the buildings in which they were originally practised.

While acknowledging the success of 'the cults of nationalism and socialism,' he continues:

To create a ritual, as Comte did, in the hope that it will create a religious emotion, is to put the cart before the horse.

Idem., pp.228 & 229.

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