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CANADIAN SCIENCE FICTION:

A RELUCTANT GENRE

by

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Canadian science fiction: A reluctant genre

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"Resistance is useless. You will not be assimilated.

Canadian Borgs aren't nearly as scary"

"Canadianness in Canadian SF," Posting on the Internet, rec.arts.sf.written,

Usenet,

November 1996*

*This is in reference to the Borgs, an extra-Galactic civilization, all of whose members act as being part of "one entity" and whose purpose is to assimilate every other race; the Borgs have been a regular feature of the television series <u>Star Trek: The Next Generation</u> and the latest Star Trek movie, <u>Star Trek: First Contact</u>.

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Introduction:

The Awakening of Science Fiction

It would be misleading to write about a single Canadian SF (science fiction)

literature. Instead, one must look at the processes that have brought about both English-

Canadian and French-Canadian SF, the way they are perceived and analyzed, and their

attempts at being recognized.   Both English-Canadian and French-Canadian SF, by

virtue of their being situated outside the usual canons of official culture, have set up their

own channels of communication, including magazines, writers' and readers' conventions,

and publishers. Consequently, the histories of the two branches with their inter-

involvement of readers' perceptions and reading motivations, the intended purposes of

the writers, and the accompanying criticism or lack thereof, are related in an intimate

and intricate way. These histories form a complex structure and exert a significant

influence on their respective developments.

The result is a literary culture unique in structure and at times incestuous, where

one writer is the critic and reader of another writer who, in his turn, could well be the

publishing editor and director of the former, while a third individual is a translator or

proofreader for, or editor of, an influential Canadian SF magazine or journal. The

examination of this structure and its genesis is an essential starting point in the shedding of some light on the common and different features that have brought about French-Canadian SF and English-Canadian SF. Consequently, this study will start with a brief explanation of the genre (including its development and structures) and the problematics involved in the criticism of SF (including an attempt to define some of the criteria used by critics to define a Canadian SF author).

For the last twenty years, every study of SF has found it necessary to detail its whole history; one cannot assume much previous knowledge on the part of most general readers. Here, however, I will note only some of the most significant developmental aspects of Canadian SF. The English-Canadian and French-Canadian streams have long been perceived as being in continuity with American SF. It is only recently, with the development of Canadian criticism, that a re-evaluation of Canadian SF has begun to shift the context of its history towards some Canadian precursors. As more and more Canadian SF writers are aware of this shift in perception and become acquainted with the early works, it is quite probable that they will view their productions as being more related to their Canadian precursors than is the case at present. Within the Canadian context, the paucity of studies, and especially of book-length studies, is such that it is expedient to evaluate the history of the coming of age of Canadian SF with reference to so-called mainstream literature.[1]

SF writers can no longer be protective as regards criticism originating from without their subculture, for SF is moving from fandom[2] and a networked subculture to being part of general literature. American SF began with its own elaborate subculture, but it has now moved outside its limited fandom culture. English-Canadian SF seems to

have lacked a similar vibrant national fandom culture. Although there were a considerable number of fanzines[3], the majority of them never survived beyond a few issues, and they do not seem to have been the deciding factor in the setting up of a professional Canadian SF milieu. A Canadian SF developed partly because many authors were published at home and thus were not immediately engulfed within American SF. However, in the 1970's, modern Québécois or French-Canadian SF[4] experienced something similar to the American fandom of the 1920's — albeit with some differences, such as the early involvement of teachers, intellectuals and academics who have made it uniquely Québécois.

What has also helped remove the stigma of "popular culture" bestowed upon Canadian SF is the fact that many mainstream Canadian authors have occasionally turned to SF at one time or another: Margaret Atwood, Yves Thériault, Hugh MacLennan, Matt Cohen, Frederick Philip Grove and Stephen Leacock among others. Another factor is that SF is now an accepted part of the curriculum of many universities across Canada, although maybe not yet on a par with mainstream literature.

As far as writers producing mainly or exclusively SF are concerned, the manner in which Canadian SF has come into existence as a self-aware literature demonstrates an intensity and a purpose that go beyond pure commercialism, and the connections on the ground between the two strands of Canadian SF are proof, as will appear, of a Canadian consciousness[5]. The factors that have led to Canadian SF, the close relations between mainstream Canadian writers and Canadian SF writers, are such that its themes and its structures cannot be satisfactorily explained in isolation from the processes that have brought about its existence, including the close presence of American SF. The

sociological phenomenon of SF, its economics and its literary value, are more obviously interlinked, especially in its establishment, than is usual in contemporary mainstream literature.

Canadian References

Although critics have been studying both streams of SF in Canada, these streams have usually been examined separately, the exceptions being David Ketterer's entry in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, "Science Fiction and Fantasy in English and French"(1983) and his subsequent comprehensive book-length study, Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy (1992). Both put French-Canadian and English-Canadian SF side by side. The purpose of the book is not to draw a detailed comparison of French-Canadian and English-Canadian SF but rather to provide a survey of both English-Canadian and French-Canadian SF, at the same time mapping out some common themes. Ketterer's work contrasts with an anthology of criticism published in both French and English recently by the National Library of Canada, Visions d'autres mondes and Out of this World (1995), where, out of 28 essays, only a handful deal with Canadian SF as a whole. Many of the essays survey English-Canadian SF only. Francophone critics deal with both English-Canadian and French-Canadian SF when they use the word Canada in their title, as distinct from their treatments of Québec SF. These two volumes were published in connection with an exhibition of the same title in the National Library, which took place in 1995.

This lack of comparative criticism in Canadian SF parallels a situation in the publishing world. Although practically all English-language Canadian anthologies of

Canadian SF include at least two or more Québécois or French-Canadian SF writers, not

a single anthology of Québec SF includes any writer from the English-Canadian

tradition. Mainstream Québec literature (as opposed to Québécois), incidentally, is

generally considered to include Acadian and francophone writers from outside Québec.

To quote a Federal Government advertising campaign, one does wonder what "my

Canada includes" for SF writers. This ambiguous situation persists in spite of the fact

that many writers from both traditions belong to a common national association with two

internal — and totally bilingual — newsletters to discuss publishing, identity and

copyright issues.[6]

The foundations, history and themes of both branches of Canadian SF have to be

established before a useful comparison can be made. The genesis of Canadian SF along

with its boundaries, the participation of Canadian academics and writers in the definition

of SF and in its criticism and the definition of SF will then constitute the bulk of our first

chapter. To deal with the definition of Canadian SF, it will be useful to examine the

critical approaches to SF and Canadian SF, the creation and beginnings of modern SF

and its economics. This first chapter will also attempt to determine what is Canadian SF

and what criteria could be used to determine the "Canadianness" of a particular author or

literary work.

Science Fiction: Terminology and Definition

In its beginning and under the editorship of Hugo Gernsback in the United States

in the 1920's, SF, in the form of the magazine Amazing Stories: The Magazine of

Scientification, was mainly aimed at an adolescent and youthful, technologically

oriented readership. Later, under the influence of John W. Campbell, SF needed a wider public and found a more sophisticated literary purpose as the exploration of the effects of science on humanity and our way of life. It then moved slowly from the realm of pulp fiction to the expensive hardbacks that carried with them a greater prestige and acceptability, a demonstration of the effect that packaging can exert on the judgement of content. This craving for acceptability motivated many writers and publishers to propose an alternative to the term "science fiction;" "Speculative fiction," "anticipation" (in French) and "futuristic fiction" were some of the terms that had fleeting vogues. None of them succeeded, and science fiction or "SF" has become the accepted term for better or worse, one reason being that science is an important element in bringing out the oxymoron of realistic illusion that is the essence of SF, as opposed to fantasy. SF is structured and written around technology or science, while the inclusion of science in fiction does not necessarily make it SF. Antoni Smuszkiewicz has a solution to this problem of defining science in SF by analyzing the role of props. What is important about the props is their inclusion in a different literary space-time, as in the case of Mark Twain's <u>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court</u>:

> The non-fantastic props (i.e., existing in empirical reality) acquire a fantastic character once they are located in [sic] different literary space-time — e.g., gun powder, the telephone, newspapers, bicycles, etc. that the Yankee introduces into Arthurian times. The causative structure of this plot—i.e., the ways in which the contemporary props are brought into the plot and presented from the visitor's view point— links it to SF (227).

It is this link to our perceived reality that differentiates SF from fantasy, where the reader is asked to accept a totally new environment with no explainable or required relation to our own. Well-written SF will rely on these props, on particular terminology

or on scientific elements (extrapolated from our empirical environment) and then relegate them to the background in order to bring out other elements that are part of fiction, such as the protagonists' thoughts, or human dilemmas brought about by a scientific prop. It is the estrangement resulting from the inclusion of scientific elements in a different empirical environment from the one where the reader expects them to be that produces the fantastic character of SF and therefore the pleasure of reading it.

The examination of scientific props in SF will bring us to the second chapter, where I will examine how English-Canadian and French-Canadian SF have come to terms with science and its role in the alternative realities they create. Do most Canadian SF protagonists have a positive or negative attitude in relation to science? Time-travel is not longer considered a fantasy theme, since recent advances in science, as shall be examined in chapter II, have given it a scientific basis. It is a prevalent theme in SF, but one used by relatively few Canadian SF authors. I will then examine the treatment given by Canadian SF to the concept of time and its perception as linear or discontinuous. I will also attempt to explain the reasons for Canadian SF's relative shyness towards the theme of time-travel.

In the third chapter I will examine whether Canadian SF themes present a fundamentally original view of an alternative society and whether the alternative questions present-day customs and mores and our modern political systems. Are some of the societies a thinly disguised re-creation of our own? By examining the images of the alternative[7] societies generated by Canadian SF, I will attempt to determine whether there is any truth in the proposal that good SF ought to be critical of, or question

contemporary society. I will also consider how it envisages the place of man and society and its

moral and psychological make-up, past, present, or alternative.

In the context of the ongoing crisis about Canada's future and its identity, I will then focus

on Canadian SF's view of its own country, where the future remains uncertain as to the continuing

existence of the country and its political institutions. What future does it view as probable for

Canada and its political institutions? Does Canada have a place at all in the universes described by

Canadian SF? I will examine whether Canadian SF's protagonists are distinctive and whether

criteria applied to the study of comparative mainstream Canadian literature are valid here.

The final challenge will be to extract and extrapolate what possible effects Canadian SF can

have in the general current of Canadian culture and whether new themes or approaches, not

obvious or possible in mainstream Canadian literature, can lead to a renewed questioning of

Canada's view of itself or possibly bring out or destroy existing myths in contemporary Canadian

culture.

<div align="center">Notes to the Introduction</div>

[1] The term mainstream will be used to denote what is generally referred as the realistic novel excluding genre writing. However, the term, useful as it is, lacks precision since some writers do not consider themselves to be SF writers.

[2] The Canadian Dictionary of the English Language (494) defines fandom as "All the fans of a sport, activity, or famous person."

[3] The word fanzine comes from the words "fan" and "magazine." It denotes a magazine produced on a voluntary basis for the purpose of giving information, formal and informal, on a specific subject. In SF many fanzines set out to become prozines with paid staff and remunerated writers. According to the Canadian Dictionary of the English Language (494), a fanzine is "an amateur-produced fan magazine distributed by mail and devoted to interests such as rock music."

[4] The expression Québéc SF will be used specifically to refer to literary or cultural features which apply only to SF written in Québec, in particular within the context of a self-contained and identity-seeking Québécois SF. It is not, however, a satisfactory term for it negates the existence of French-language SF outside Québec ; nor is French-Canadian SF adequate

because it does not make evident the existence of an independent and self-conscious Québec SF.

[5] There is a Canadian association of SF and fantasy writers: the "Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association/Association canadienne de la science-fiction et du fantastique, also known as *SF Canada;* the letters SF standing ambiguously for Science Fiction or speculative fiction. The Association includes francophone and anglophone writers and was founded at the SF convention ConText'89 on the 2nd of July 1989, at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. It then underwent a name change (from the "Speculative Writers' Association of Canada/Association canadienne des écrivains spéculatifs to its present name) with its official incorporation as a federal non-profit society in 1992.

[6] SF Canada, which is based in Albert, publishes <u>Communiqué</u>, which deals with general topics, news and some criticism and is available to any member of the public, while <u>Top Secret</u>, an information newsletter about copyright and contract issues for writers, is reserved for members only (correspondence to the author,1996).

[7] This study will use the term "alternative" instead of the term alternate, which is usually preferred by many SF critics, as documented by Brian Stableford in "Alternate," <u>The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction</u>(text), <u>Grolier Science Fiction: The Multimedia Enclyclopedia of Science Fiction</u> (1995): "An alternate world — some writers and commentators prefer the designation "alternative world" on grammatical grounds — is an account of Earth as it might have become in consequence of some hypothetical alteration in history. Many sf stories use PARALLEL WORLDS as a frame in which many alternate worlds can be simultaneously held, sometimes interacting with one another."

Chapter One

The Gradual Emergence of Canadian SF

Critical Approaches to SF and Canadian SF

SF is a generally highly controversial cultural subject, particularly, though not

exclusively, in the literary world. It was totally ignored by universities until recently, if

one excludes a few professors and literary critics who have been studying the genre in a

systematic manner.[1] On the other hand, a substantial portion of the SF milieu has been

very suspicious, to say the least, of academic criticism; this controversy has been a

recurrent and prominent theme in SF literature and its related magazines. Whereas the

academic world has been trying to find a methodology to analyse and incorporate SF

into general criticism, some critics outside that world have been somewhat

condescending towards attempts made to resolve the problem of the definition of SF and

to bring it out of the cultural ghetto — a cultural ghetto it has wanted both to escape

from and to remain in. Gérard Klein, editor of anthologies of French SF,[2] a most

forthright critic of established cultural institutions and a staunch defender of SF, writes

that:

> the watchdogs of the prevailing culture .... find it hard to believe that a
> group quite alien to them should think and create, and have its own
> dreams, passions, or fears. .... Nor are they more ready to welcome a
> writer from any such subculture as an equal by virtue of the quality of
> his or her writing, and at the same time respect her or his otherness" (A

Petition" 120).

This polemical declaration is not made without an elaborate demonstration. Gérard Klein argues that "the plurality of cultures is in question" and proposes that SF is a literature of rebels: "Though admittedly somewhat exaggerated, the parallel between the treatment of social rebels and SF remains striking" (120). This statement bears some validity if one considers SF as a source of new ideas and as an exploration of alternative realities and not as a pale imitation of the adventure or American West novel, with flashy zap guns and technological gimmicks replacing double-barrel shotguns and high speed coaches zooming across the plains. Klein's ideas about the motivation of SF writers, while somewhat inaccurate as far as a considerable part of American SF literature is concerned (the pecuniary element has been an important factor in the production of inferior SF in the United States), could very well be applied to creative, imaginative or innovative American SF literature and to the best of French-Canadian and English-Canadian SF: "Even if a piece has been written as 'pot-boiler' — often a term of haughty denunciation, this criterion would lead us to relegate the entire opus of Balzac, for one example, to the status of paraliterature"(117).

Klein then goes on to explain that the labels of "popular literature" and "paraliterature ... are in no way *natural* categories, conforming to the reality of writing." Klein's wrath is directed at the entire literary establishment. While others, notably writers of SF, have been deriding the intrusion of academics and their attempt at finding a methodology to analyze the literature of SF, his conviction is that SF contains two elements that "are complementary and inseparable: one is the social origin of SF and its

cohesive and collective character; the other is SF's integration of science into a dream-life, or a libidinal life, which it encourages, whether it be to praise or to curse it" (115).

This view of SF as rebellious or counter to established culture is ironical in view of surveys showing that present-day, post-seventies' SF readers come mainly from the middle class, a social class that does not have a historical reputation or tradition of wanting to rock the boat. In a study conducted at the 31st World Science Fiction Convention in Toronto that took place in September 1973, based on 3,000 questionnaires, Alfred I. Berger discovered that 52.8 % of respondents had completed a four-year college degree and that "few science-fiction readers identify with the actual corporate elite which governs modern society, but they do identify with that elite's paid managerial staff, a point of view which limits their vision" (243). It might be that SF readers bear the mark of a mild rebellion but only in a self-serving way and not to the point of wanting to change the structure of society; they would be satisfied to find themselves at a point in the social scale where their views or knowledge, according to their self-image, would be valued.

In its beginning, modern SF did appeal to a specific class of readers. Although a great proportion of the attendees at that convention mentioned above were from the United States, one could assume that Canadian SF readers at the time would not have been fundamentally different — Canadian SF was not yet envisaged as a reality, and these Canadians would have been reading the same books and probably for the same reasons as Americans. The sociological context of SF has also led other researchers to postulate that modern SF evolves from a certain set of historical conditions.

One of these conditions, maybe the essential one historically speaking, is the advent of the realization that the future can in fact be fundamentally different from the past and the present. Once humanity came to accept that its social, legal, technological and scientific future could be totally alien to what had always been taken for granted, a huge stumbling block was removed, and more possibilities became available for the human imagination. Before such an acceptance, any work of fiction set in an alternative reality would have been just a mental exercise lacking the usual powers and influence that can be exerted by fiction. Stephen Kearn, in his overview of the sweeping changes in technology and culture between 1880 and World War I, The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1990, identifies the reasons for the sudden upsurge of SF literary production at the beginning of this century:

> Science-fiction writers reached out for the future as if it were a piece of overripe fruit. Their stories came into vogue on a grand scale, indicating that the future was becoming as real to this generation as the past had been for readers of the Gothic novel and historical romance. There had been utopian writings before, but they generally meant to identify current problems rather than delineate a world to come and the processes by which it would evolve (94).

It does not mean, of course, that it was not until at the beginning of this century that a different perception of time in relation to society's perception of its own past and future came about. What is significant here is that it was at the start of the 20th century that it had finally pervaded most of the western psyche and helped in the creation of what was to be called SF literature.

The establishment and the consolidation of modern SF in the 20th century — in the 1920's in the United States and later in Canada — is viewed as fundamentally important by Jean-Marc Gouanvic in his article dealing with some aspects of the

periodization of French-Canadian SF. For Gouanvic, a Québec SF critic, precursors are important not because they should be included in what constitutes Québécois SF, but mainly because their works did not produce a whole body of SF:

> La science-fiction du 19e siècle n'a pas réussi à émerger en tant qu'entité générique reconnue parce qu'elle était noyée dans l'ensemble des productions littéraires. C'est parce qu'elle s'est affirmée comme différente aux États-Unis dans les années 20 qu'elle a réussi à imposer son imaginaire, sa poétique et ses valeurs ("La science-fiction" 54).

The emergence of American SF, which managed to impose its imagery, its poetics and its values, leads Gouanvic to state clearly that American SF is the great initiator of Québec SF:

> la véritable filiation est du côté de la SF américaine, celle-là justement à laquelle on doit la reconnaissance du genre. Et c'est bien pour cela qu'il est possible et juste de parler de *science-fiction* québécoise à leur propos : ces auteurs se situent massivement dans le sillage de la SF américaine des soixante dernières années (54).

This conclusion is documented by the early influences on Québec SF writers. Rita Painchaud in her detailed M. A. thesis on the establishment of SF in Québec, "La Constitution du champ de la science-fiction au Québec (1974-1984)," conducted a survey of twenty Québécois authors of SF, asking them when and how they first came "into contact" with SF. She observes that — with the exception of one author of French extraction who was living in France where SF emerged in the 1950's — all of them discovered SF only after 1960: "À une exception près, aucun des répondants ne dit avoir été mis en présence de la science-fiction avant les années 1960. Pourtant trois d'entre eux sont nés à la fin des années 1930 ou au début des années 1940" (42). Analysing the beginnings of Requiem, one of the first SF magazines published in Québec, and its separation from the publishing world, Painchaud concludes that the emergence of a

Québécois fandom milieu happened in circumstances similar to the fandom beginnings

in the 1920's in the United States, one being that the main function of <u>Requiem</u> was that

of a newszine, very similar to <u>Locus</u> in the United States. Painchaud situates the start of

Québec SF in 1974 with a precursor period of 1960-1974, when some popular pulp

fiction was published in Québec.

In his introductory essay for <u>Anthologie de la science-fiction québécoise</u>

<u>contemporaine</u> (1988), the first anthology of Québécois SF published in a paperback

edition, Michel Lord draws the same conclusion after having sketched the establishment

of the field of American SF by remarking that "c'est précisément le même phénomène

que connaît le Québec depuis quelques années, comme si l'histoire d'un sous-genre

devait passer par les mêmes cheminements" (9).

Unfortunately, there does not seem to have been a similar study of the early

influences on English-Canadian SF writers. However, many factors such as their

knowledge of only English, the preponderance of American SF in Canada, to the near

exclusion of any other, and the near absence of original Canadian material make it

highly likely that the influences on them were similar to those on their Québec

counterparts, contrary to what Phyllis Gotlieb, a major figure of Canadian SF, asserts in

an article on fantastic literature in Canada:

> Many of our SF ideas originated in the United States and Britain, as
> those of our francophones developed from French themes. We cannot
> avoid having been influenced by the English themes of Mary Shelley,
> H. G. Wells, and Rudyard Kipling and from America those of Hugo
> Gernsback, Robert Heinlein, and Isaac Asimov. It is the American
> Engine of Progress that has dragged us alongside it the way it drags
> our business and stock markets (198).

Gotlieb might well be correct when writing about English-Canadian SF writers, but on their own admission French-Canadian SF writers, from Lord's and Painchaud's studies, recognise at best only secondary influences from France. Of course, the major French SF writer, Jules Verne would have been bound to influence both streams of Canadian SF as well as American writers since his works were widely translated into English and adapted to the screen by American movie producers, thereby becoming part of United States mainstream culture.

The fact that the origins of modern SF lie in a subculture has been a major hurdle in its acceptance as a legitimate field of study. One of the directions of research has been to find an origin in SF in pre-contemporary literature and to link it with famous works of fiction such as Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), who is often seen as an important precursor of modern SF. Michel Lord, tracing the history of SF for the general reader, mentions that:

> Certains historiens de la science-fiction font remonter le genre à l'aube de la civilisation trouvant dans Gilgamesh, l'époque sumérienne, ou dans les ouvrages de Platon et de Lucine de Samosate des raisons de classer ces œuvres dans le corpus de SF (Anthologie 9).

While Lord writes that this position is defensible from a formal point of view, he believes that it is an unnecessary process and only happens because of the low esteem granted to SF: "Ce procédé ... tient au fait que la SF est méprisée (elle est l'objet d'un non-savoir; l'on cherche à la valoriser par des filiations reconnues comme hautement littéraires...)"(9). Michel Lord is of the view that SF possesses its own history and does think that "un ancêtre relativement lointain, serait celle de la parution de Frankenstein de Mary Shelley en 1818" (9).

Similarly, in Canadian SF, the attempts made by many critics, such as Michel Lord and David Ketterer, to examine past works and annex them to the realm of SF with a view to establishing SF's credentials and legitimizing its study, are important insofar as they trace the origin of Canadian SF to a few precursors and establish clearly that modern SF did not appear out of the blue. And, as noted, some historians of culture and literature pinpoint the start of SF as a consequence of a new perception of time and space with the advent of technology and therefore put the appearance of SF within a wide historical context of western culture.

This approach has made it necessary to define SF and not to abandon the field of definition to editors and bookstore owners who are far too willing to move SF novels from the SF shelf or label to the mainstream ones if it means a higher visibility or sale, often with the complicity of, or pressure from, the writers themselves. A case in point in Québec is SF writer, Pierre Billon, who steadfastly refuses to be identified with SF. This attitude cannot be healthy for the development of "quality" SF since, according to Daniel Sernine, a full-time Québec writer of SF and fantasy, "as a rule, the editors of collections are not familiar with SF; even if they are able to judge the writing in a manuscript, the SF aspects of a novel nevertheless escape them"("Science Fiction and Fantasy" 99). Sernine explains further that editors cannot be relied upon to recognize or judge SF, or tell it apart from fantasy, magic or television cartoons:

> This explains why many manuscripts that are blatantly ridiculous have made it to publication, especially when the authors themselves understood nothing about science fiction, for example, confusing science fiction with fantasy, Saturday morning cartoons with literature, science with magic. In works of this kind you often find that technical and scientific jargon is used like magic formulas in witchcraft and science fiction gadgets replace the magic wand: you only need to use

the word "computer" for everything to become possible in these stories. On the other hand, a publisher who has no SF culture is fortunate if he receives manuscripts from authors who are masters of the genre or know how to write — or, better still, both (99).

The research conducted by academics and various critics into the definition of SF and the relations between SF, fantasy, mainstream fiction, and fairy tales has been a step forward in the legitimization of SF. It has helped both to explain the imaginative criteria upon which writers of SF and readers base their definition of the genre and also to determine the links it may or may not have with so-called mainstream fiction. However, this academic and critical approach is not always welcomed by some French-Canadian critics of SF, who have tended to be extremely defensive about the intrusion of criticism from outside the milieu of SF. Norbert Spehner, in producing an unprecedented and useful catalogue and bibliography of worldwide criticism, Écrits sur la Science-Fiction (1988), went so far as to say:

> Is SF a "poetic of alterity," a "literature of cognitive estrangement," or a rational novelistic speculation? Who *really* cares except some university professors whose vocation and profession it is to seek out the impossible? (11)

This passage mentioned and translated by Arthur B. Evans in a review of Spehner's bibliography led Evans to point out what he sees as one of the fundamental problems of such a possibly valuable reference book, summing up one of the basic conflicts between academic and non-academic criticism:

> As an SF scholar (admittedly — should I say apologetically? — at a US university), I can easily overlook the simpler typographical errors, like Paschal becoming "Pascal" Grousset (p. 391) or Martin Bridgstock becoming "Bridstock" (p. 163). But repeated mistakes in author attribution are indefensible in *any* bibliography and, as such, reflect a lack of basic documentational rigor. Such editing foul-ups could feasibly result in much wasted time for the SF researcher and,

more importantly, they could promote the unintentional perpetuation
of such misinformation in future bibliographies (242).

These two examples illustrate the problematics facing SF criticism. On the one

hand, there is a fiercely independent-minded milieu which is suspicious — due to its

roots in a subculture — and, at times, even despising of outsiders looking at its

productions, which are categorized as popular literature. On the other hand, the

academic world attempts to analyze a cultural and literary phenomenon that *seems* to be

situated outside the usual canons of official culture and criticizes the lack of a rigorous

method in non-academic studies. Norbert Spehner, being the founder of one of the most

important magazines of SF in Québec, Requiem, now renamed Solaris, finds himself in

direct opposition to Arthur B. Evans, one of the three current editors of the main source

of academic criticism in SF: Science-Fiction Studies.[3] This does not prevent the critics

of academic research from being published in the same journal, thereby granting some

acknowledgement of academic studies and themselves achieving some recognition in the

same circles.[4]

It is in universities that most, if not all, students of literature learn to study

literature and how to decode it according to criteria and theories in use (some might say,

in favour). It is because universities, by their very functions of conservation and

transmission of established canons, have been slow to accept the study of SF, that

criteria and networks of recognition established themselves outside the usual channels of

literary legitimization. SF has only recently created a niche for itself in official literary

studies.

In the establishment of criteria for the study of SF, one must notice the presence

of Canadians: although born in France, Norbert Spehner is now a Canadian and has a historical place in the genesis of French-Canadian SF as the founder of Requiem/Solaris and an editor of French-Canadian SF anthologies. He is also a researcher in his own right. The expression "cognitive estrangement" was coined by a Canadian, the Yugoslavian-born Darko Suvin, whose definitions and research have been influential in defining what constitutes SF as opposed to fantasy and so-called mainstream literature. Canadian academics and writers have taken part in research on SF and have helped define what constitutes SF. Spehner's reference work, Écrits sur la Science-Fiction, is an important research tool — in spite of the previously quoted imprecisions, the proportion of which is difficult to gauge — including criticism and annotated reference articles. A comprehensive index covers more than 4000 studies of SF published between 1900 and 1987, the purpose of which is to enable researchers, including academics, to conduct research on SF.

This state of things has created a contradictory situation: SF has craved academic recognition, but it still wants to retain its distinctive character by claiming to be unique in its thematic approach in the literary world, while trying not to be "ghettoized." At the same time, academics have had difficulties dealing with SF criticism written by writers who do not adhere closely to academic criteria.

The definition of what constitutes SF is an issue far from being resolved: there are conflicting analyses and opinions about the subject. Although the primary aim of this study is not the definition of SF, it is nevertheless impossible to avoid outlining the parameters within which SF exists. A common definition of SF relies upon the simplistic but somewhat effective method of saying that SF is whatever happens when

we ask ourselves the question of *What if...?* This has been a starting point for many

years in works whose aim was the popularization of SF, but it is not precise enough for

academic purposes. The theory proposed by Darko Suvin of *cognitive estrangement*

proposes the following definition:

> La SF est donc un genre littéraire distancié, à la fois méta-empirique et
> non « non-réaliste », tout en n'étant pas métaphysique. Au contraire,
> les horizons de la SF conduisent, tout comme ceux de la littérature «
> réaliste », des sciences naturelles et de la philosophique matérialiste, à
> une démarche cognitive et dialectique (26).

This theory is then summed up in a chart where Suvin categorizes "realist"

literature — what is considered to be mainstream — as being "cognitif" and "réaliste,"

and SF as being "distancié" and cognitive, "distancié" being the French term for

estranged. Whereas "realist" literature recreates a fictive environment based on or

similar to the reader's, or to what the reader perceives as realistic, SF recreates a fictive

environment based on what readers perceive as being realistic, but with some elements

of it displaced in time or place. SF still uses the reader's environment of perceived and

accepted laws governing science, while extending displacement or distortion to such an

extent that the environment is sufficiently different, thus providing readers

"estrangement" based on a known or "cognitive" environment. This estrangement, still

based on the reader's cognitive perceived real environment, is what differentiates SF

from fantasy, where on the literal level no relationship is assumed or established

between the fictional universe and the parameters of the reader's environment; in short,

no attempt is made to establish any credibility based on rational explanations, or to use

Suvin's terminology, it lacks "cognitive believability."

Regarding the term SF, although it has been criticized for its imprecision, most critics have accepted, however reluctantly, that we are "stuck" with it while still discussing its boundaries. In fact, terms such as "detective fiction" or "thrillers" could also be considered imprecise, but they are widely used and recognized as labels for their genres irrespective of the looseness of the terminology; all alternatives to the term SF have been quickly abandoned, for the important reason that science (and not only the exact sciences) is still a primordial constituent of SF.

The Creation and Beginnings of Modern Canadian SF

Canadian SF became a self-aware literature in conditions different from those of mainstream Canadian fiction, and much later. It appeared at a time when SF criticism was exploring approaches to deal with a literature that had not yet been integrated into the official canons of literature and culture. SF was often condemned for its superficiality in dealing with characterization, a criticism that reflects the direction literature has been taking since the advent of the novel as a major genre.

This criticism seems to have been more prominent in the U. S. A., where the origin of modern SF in pulp magazines made its acceptance as bona fide literature more problematic, as explained by Fredric Jameson in discussing the differences between "New World" and European criticism: "the Europeans, writing in the absence of a pulp tradition, do not feel the need to justify their critical activity, and handle their various texts according to various academically accredited categories" (241).

Canada's SF is situated between two extremes: Canada has had a pulp tradition, but consisting nearly exclusively of reprints from American SF, which came about

during World War II restrictions on imports of current publications from the United

States. One notable example is Uncanny Tales, published between November 1940 and

September 1943, with Thomas P. Kelley, a self-proclaimed "King of the Canadian pulp

writers" and ex-prizefighter, as the main Canadian contributor. [5] David Ketterer has

recorded "nineteen American and British pulp magazines" that "had Canadian reprint

editions" and suspects that further investigation would reveal more (Canadian 39). This

did not evolve into a home-produced pulp magazine and did not lead directly to the

production of Canadian SF. English Canadians who were self-consciously writing SF

were doing so for an American audience within the parameters of American culture.

Douglas Barbour, who was to become a founder of On Spec, remarked as recently as

1987 in an afterword to an anthology of Canadian SF (speculative fiction at the time),

Tesseracts 2, that "many of our writers write for the American market (after all, that's

where the best sales are) and their work is almost indistinguishable from that written by

Americans" (288). This was a strange statement in that it seems to negate the ideological

and cultural basis for publishing such an anthology. This demonstrates that a Canadian

consciousness or self-awareness of writing SF as a Canadian was a rare thing in English

Canada.

According to David Ketterer and many other critics, Phyllis Gotlieb was

Canadian SF in the 1970's. Ketterer quotes Gotlieb, who defined herself as a "Canadian

Poet and an American SF writer," as a way of introducing the "problematic ground" of

defining Canadian SF (1). The genre was still being perceived as an exclusively

American cultural institution by many. Phyllis Gotlieb herself, in an interview with

<u>Solaris</u> in 1986, had not fundamentally changed her views, but seems to place them within the context of a Canadian lack of enthusiasm for Canadian culture:

> Je me sens très inconfortable d'être un écrivain de SF au Canada, il ne me semblait pas exister un véritable milieu de SF ici. Votre communauté est remarquable au Québec : vous produisez tous ces textes, vos « bandes dessinées » et d'excellentes revues.
>
> Je n'écris pas du point de vue d'une Canadienne. Je peux écrire avec beaucoup d'intensité du point de vue d'une femme ou d'une Juive, mais pas vraiment du point de vue d'une Canadienne. Lorsque quelqu'un mentionne Lansdowne Avenue de Toronto dans une fiction, cela n'a pas pour moi la même universalité que Lexington Avenue à New York . . . (Pomerleau and Vonarburg 17).

Having stated earlier in the same interview that she was Canadian, Phyllis Gotlieb seems to see an impossibility for a Canadian, such as she, to write SF within a Canadian consciousness. At the same time, she notices the production of Québécois SF, implying that it stems from a different cultural consciousness, thereby, perhaps unwittingly, divorcing Québécois SF writing from Canadian SF writing.

In sketching out very briefly the history of English-Canadian SF, John Clute, a Canadian scholar of SF and a long-time resident of London, England, writes about the internal structure of American SF at its beginning:

> SF was a highly interactive affinity subculture, many of whose members played — either simultaneously or in turn — all the various roles available within that subculture. People like Isaac Asimov, Damon Knight, Judith Merril,[6] and Frederick Pohl were fans, editors, publishers, writers, convention organizers; and they also had a habit of marrying one another, too. They may have shared a take on the world, but they were also a family.
> This did not happen in Canada until much later. Which is the first thing to understand about Canadian SF. As a *family*, it is very recent. Those Canadians who wrote SF for Americans in (say) 1940, like A. E. van Vogt, did not do so as members of a family. They wrote alone (Fables 21-22).

But Québécois or French-Canadian modern SF — excluding the precursors — did start as a "family." Most critics and reviewers choose the date of 1974 as the beginning of modern SF in French Canada: Jean-Louis Trudel sees two periods in the history of francophone SF literature in Canada: one before 1974 and the other taking 1974 as the start of a new era: "The year 1974 marks the beginning of a new phase that has not yet ended . . . A new generation of writers who are still active today appeared" (Science Fiction 60-61). Jean-Marc Gouanvic also sees the start of modern SF in Québec in the seventies, while arguing that the preceding period is utterly discontinuous with the present one: "entre la science-fiction québécoise actuelle et les conjectures romanesques rationnelles antérieures à la fin des années 1970 il n'existe *aucune* filiation" (54).

David Ketterer, attempting a common periodization of French-Canadian and English-Canadian SF, puts the beginning of the modern period in 1959, calling it the "Establishment of Canadian Science Fiction" but he does mark 1974 as a "banner year" for French-Canadian SF (87, 94). Joël Champetier, the current editor of Solaris, also puts the beginning of French-Canadian SF firmly in 1974 with the founding of Requiem, later to become Solaris. This might not be surprising from a long-time contributor to Solaris, but is nevertheless backed up solidly with the explanation that many SF works saw the light in the same year and were written by authors who had no connection with the fanzine or its lliterary "family": "many authors who are still active today did not wait for Requiem/Solaris to publish, or published without necessarily expressing a desire to be part of the magazine or a community" (Solaris 213).

Champetier cites the works of Esther Rochon, who later was a founding member

of imagine..., Jean-François Somain [Somcynsky], Jacques Brossard and Alain

Bergeron, which were published in the 1970's.[7] Champetier uses these examples to

establish that the beginning of the 1970's was a turning point in Québec in all respects

and not only because of the publication of Requiem. There is, then, close to unanimous

agreement about the time when modern French-Canadian SF began to have a significant

presence and create its own space in Canada in 1974.

The Economic Factor

French-Canadian SF made its presence visibly known as SF through the

publishing of fanzines that turned themselves quickly into prozines. They no longer

relied on the good will of contributors but started to pay for some or all of their articles.

Solaris and imagine..., have survived up to this day. Their articles, at times, approach a

high standard of criticism. They also try to remain in touch with their readers. These

readers are not necessarily looking for a literary journal but mainly desire to obtain

information and discuss themes that are not being dealt with by existing journals and

literary magazines such as Lettres québécoises, which contains a column usually written

by Michel Lord which is sometimes about Québécois SF. Solaris, now a quarterly, has

been in print since 1974 (for the first 27 issues it was published under the title of

Requiem until the August-September 1979 issue when it changed its name to Solaris)

and mixes literary criticism, interviews and short stories. It pays a coordinator, a literary

editor and two proofreaders for every issue; writers of fiction and Canadian articles are

paid $8 a Solaris page (i. e. $1 a standard typed sheet); the layout is done by a graphics

professional who is not on the editing committee and is paid at the standard commercial

rates in order to avoid delays, which were frequent when the layout was done by a

volunteer member of Solaris.[8] This has turned Solaris into a professional magazine no

longer relying on the sole good will of volunteers, and helped foster a self-sufficient

Québec SF publishing forum for quality reviews and criticism. The review imagine...,

the first issue of which appeared in 1979, has tended to concentrate on fiction with the

occasional article of criticism, and has been paying rates similar to Solaris'. The now

defunct and alternative Pour ta belle gueule d'ahuri was also part of the Québécois SF

scene between 1979 and 1983.

Solaris and imagine... represent two methodological and theoretical approaches

to the establishment and creation of SF in Québec. Rita Painchaud writing of an

ideological struggle between Solaris et imagine.." explains that:

> Solaris et imagine... visent tous deux la reconnaissance de la science-
> fiction au Québec mais ont des manières différentes, voire opposées,
> d'appréhender les rapports entre culture populaire (le paralittéraire) et
> culture légitimée (le littéraire). Rappelons que la première choisit la
> résistance face à la domination symbolique — élaboration de ses
> propres normes, quête d'autonomie, dénigration du discours
> intellectuel et universitaire — alors que la deuxième souscrit aux
> normes de l'institution littéraire sans pour autant nier la spécificité de
> sa pratique (133).

The English-Canadian SF scene did not get started as early or in such an

organized fashion. It had no sustained milieu on a national scale for a long time (and

even now does not have anything approaching the intensity, including the internal

fighting that is a feature of the Québec SF scene). It only became visible through the

publication, by a few editors, of anthologies of Canadian SF, the most notable and

groundbreaking one to appear being John Bell and Lesley Choice's Visions from the

Edge in 1981. Many fanzines, some excellent such as Torus, devoted to criticism and

fiction, or Edge Detector, calling itself a magazine of speculative fiction, appeared.

However, none of them was published for more than a few issues.[9] None developed

into a continuous forum of analysis such as Solaris, which has been published for 22

years across more than one generation, a fact acknowledged by the founders[10] of On

Spec:

> At this point the speculative fiction writers began to realise something:
> there were no magazine markets for their kind of writing in Canada.
> Sure, there were two French periodicals, Solaris and imagine... but
> nothing in English except the Tesseracts anthologies every couple of
> years (11).

On Spec is almost entirely devoted to publishing new Canadian SF; criticism is

rare, with the occasional essay on SF, or limited to a brief description of the Aurora

Awards, a Canadian prize award system for Canadian authors.[11] This is a format similar

to the one adopted by the Québec journal, imagine... , but with the latter publishing more

essays. From the account of the history of the establishment of the magazine/journal by

On Spec's founders, it is obvious that they were strongly influenced by the existence of

an indigenous SF milieu in Québec. The fact that Québec culture and literature have

been an unconscious agent in the self-awareness of English-Canadian culture and

mainstream literature is often suspected and hinted at, although it is not often

acknowledged. However, this fact is stated clearly by On Spec's founders in the case of

English-Canadian SF. On Spec's founders were critical of the divide between so-called

good and popular literature that could cripple the development of any indigenous

Canadian SF:

> so-called mainstream literature really has two components: one

designed for the general public and one produced by the Universities. The first plays to the lowest common denominator and tends to be as formulaic as pulp magazines, the second claims to be general but is really aimed at a small esoteric group. Neither of these gives the general audience anything fresh (Hammond 12).

Since one of the reasons for founding <u>On Spec</u> was to provide a Canadian outlet for professional Canadian SF writers, the magazine's editors decided from the very start to pay all contributors and establish a professional journal. Contributors were to be paid for their work, submissions were to be without the author's name attached and the stories were to be selected by an independent Editorial Board.[12]

The beginnings of French- and English-Canadian magazine sectors and their entries onto the commercial and general publishing scene were different: self-awareness was a gradual process on the French-Canadian side, growing steadily from a miniature root movement entirely produced by voluntary participants and later evolving into a professional operation with paid staff and writers (although at a rate approaching a token level required by the grant giving institutions). In a study among the readers of <u>Requiem</u>, it was discovered that its readers, most of them from Québec at the time, were reading mainly American SF: "It is quite striking to see how <u>Requiem</u> reflects in miniature the situation of Québec at large. . . . The Québec consumers of SF had been reading mainly French translations of US classics" (Vornarburg and Spehner 196). This study, conducted soon after the launch in 1974, confirms that the influence on French-Canadian SF was mainly American and that French SF seems to have had no influence. Jean-Louis Trudel testifies in an interview with <u>Solaris</u> in 1994 that "Mon influence majeure, c'est la science-fiction américaine— avec les SF française et québécoise comme influences secondaires — et la SF américaine, il faut le dire est assez militaire"

(Champetier 22). Nevertheless, by 1994 the field of Québécois SF had been important enough to act as an influence upon itself. That English-Canadian SF writers had mainly United States SF as their major influence is a fact only too obvious from their frequent complaints in the newsletter of SF Canada that their knowledge of French is not sufficient to read anything not published in English.

Whereas Canadian SF was slowly raising its potential and virtual profile, mainstream Canadian literature had become an integral part of the literary establishment without paying much attention to the existence of Canadian SF. Canadian SF, for better or worse, has not had the luxury of being a mainstream controversial subject until recently: it had been a non-issue since its existence was never mentioned or rarely hinted at. Most modern anthologies or works of criticism of Canadian literature still ignore it totally or barely mention it in passing. While literary studies written before the beginning of the 1980's would have been justified, or excused, for not paying attention to Canadian SF because of the lack of obvious published material, this does not mean that Canadian SF did not exist at the time or that it did not already have a history.

To be fair, however, some critics, because of the particular direction of their analysis, were bound to take notice of the development of SF. In The Canadian Postmodern (1988), renowned Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon felt the need to mention the growth of the "popular" novel. In spite of having carefully put the terms "serious" and "popular" between quotation marks to emphasize the precariousness of these labels, she still positions the existence of a stream of Canadian SF within the "popular" novel which includes various genres lumped together in a dubious enumeration: "from heist stories to psychological thrillers, from domestic soap-opera to soft-core pornography,

from fantasy and SF to the western and the detective story." This is the only reference to Canadian SF in an otherwise imaginative description of the growth of Canadian literature during the period 1972-1984.

Later, in the same volume, Hutcheon does mention a notable work of Canadian SF, Wayland Drew's The Wabeno Feast (1973) but includes it within her listing of "identity seeking" and as a novel "wedded" to a concern for the ecological and sociological fate of the Native Peoples" (194). She briefly lists another, The Leisure Riots by Erich Koch (1973) within the "satirical"(198). Since post-modernism is one of the primary aspects of today's SF, as a comment on the non-linear and disjointed nature of our contemporary world, it is surprising that a study of Canadian post-modern literature gives so little room to Canadian SF.

Canadian SF has had to demonstrate its existence, and re-appropriate works and authors as belonging to Canadian SF. Critics must be willing to examine the ambiguous role played by a literature that defies simple interpretation within the established canons of criticism, if it is to be positioned closer to the centre of literary criticism and not merely within an ill-defined sub-category of popular literature. In the beginning, when criticism started to consider SF seriously, such a role undoubtedly fell upon such journals as Science Fiction Studies and Fantasy Times (in the 1950's).[13] Other journals such as Locus, however, focussing more on the local scene and the subculture of American SF, were not particularly suited to the task.

Canadian SF did not make its appearance on the international scene until a few years after other national forms of SF had already been noticed on the international scene. An anthology of world SF published in 1986 and edited by Brian Aldiss and Sam

J. Lundwall, The Penguin World Omnibus of Science Fiction (1986) includes works from thirty countries, including the United States and Australia, but not a single one from Canada. The third edition of Anatomy of Wonder (1987), which remains a standard work of reference for many critics of SF, does not have a chapter on Canadian SF, although it has entire sections on German, French, Russian, Japanese, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian, Romanian, Yugoslav and "Hebrew" SF. [14] The emergence of Canadian SF as a national SF literature, thus, was a belated but not an isolated phenomenon, since other national SF literatures had already begun to make their marks on the international scene.

The appearance of Canadian SF was as inevitable as the coming and self-assertion of mainstream Canadian literature. It made its mark only after other national SF literatures, often from "smaller" countries, had been well established. Proximity to the U. S., in fact, might have been a negative factor in the strengthening of Canadian SF, English-Canadian SF in particular, by providing English-Canadian writers with a ready-made network of publishers and an existing readership. A readership used to reading U. S. SF and a network already being supplied by the U. S. carried the risk that it could become difficult later on to establish an autonomous English-Canadian SF market. It is through entries in various works of references that the existence of Canadian SF finally came to be acknowledged in the 1990's.

The existence of a sizable corpus of Canadian SF is demonstrated in recent studies: David Ketterer's Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy (1992), an impressive extension of his original article in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (1983); John Clute and Peter Nicholls' extensive section on Canadian SF in The

Encyclopedia of Science Fiction [the full text is to be found on Grolier Science Fiction: The Multimedia Encyclopedia of Science Fiction CD-ROM. This CD-ROM has a search engine which can identify any material of Canadian origin or related to Canada]; the important source of references, information and analysis to be found in the almost yearly compendium/encyclopedia of Québec SF L'Année de la science-fiction et du fantastique (1984-92, 1994) and Robert J. Sawyer's entry on Canadian SF to be found in The 1996 Canadian Encyclopedia Plus. These studies clearly show that Canadian SF writers, contrary to what would have been the case some ten years ago, are not a small number. Some of them define themselves as Québécois rather than French-Canadian, others as Canadian or English-Canadian. Ketterer claims that by 1992 "twelve hundred Canadian works of SF and fantasy have been published" (4).

Similar to L'Année de la science-fiction et du fantastique, in Germany, since 1985, a yearly compendium of criticism and interviews, Das Science Fiction Jahr, has been published under the editorship of Wolfgang Jeschke, and in it Canadian authors and theorists are given some prominence. William Gibson, Darko Suvin, Margaret Atwood and Élisabeth Vonarburg are featured abundantly. A Spanish-language comprehensive study of SF, published in 1990, Ciencia Ficción by Miquel Barceló, gives ample space to William Gibson, Donald Kingsbury and A. E. van Vogt. It mentions the place of birth of Gordon Dickson, who lived in Canada to the age of 13, reason enough for a few critics — John Clute and David Ketterer among others — to include him as being "partly" a Canadian SF writer. Presumably Canadian writers are mentioned by Barceló mainly because of their international or American fame.

One interesting thing about Canadian SF is that, apart from the aforementioned works, the main source of criticism of Canadian SF is in the introductions and afterwords of the anthologies of English-Canadian or Québécois SF. This makes up for the otherwise lack of published material on Canadian SF.

On the downside, the volume of criticism, with the exception of a few prozines, is minute compared with the amount of Canadian SF published. This is probably due in part to the perception of some critics, rightly or wrongly, that there exists a public refusal to consider SF, or any non-mainstream literature, within the context of a national literature. Indeed, the development of criticism is essential to legitimize a literature in the eyes of many academics, critics, and a part of the reading public who may think that they have never read SF.

Certainly the origin of modern SF was based on a very narrow set of references: readers were male and young, and publishers were looking for stories that would appeal directly to readers within these parameters. Writers, moreover, were paid by the word, but interestingly enough, this practice was very similar to the publishing history of much of 19th century fiction, which used to be published in instalments. Often, if writers were successful, they would be under pressure to produce more of the same stories according to a narrow set of parameters.

These conditions did apply to many, if not all, emerging American writers in the thirties, including some Canadian writers such as van Vogt (who later moved to the United States but wrote essential works while living in Canada and is considered to be Canadian by Colombo, Ketterer and John Clute). In fact, until recently, many English-Canadian SF writers were operating under conditions similar to those experienced by

American writers. It was partly due to negative reactions from American publishers as regards the content of their work that some Canadian writers began to question their reliance on American publishing outlets.

This American negative reaction to the Canadianness of their work stirred a group of English-Canadian SF writers to realize that they had been writing within certain parameters or with a definite consciousness that made them not easily acceptable to an American readership, as explained in the manifesto which led the Copper Pigs[15] writers' collective, a group of adult students originally from the University of Alberta, to the creation of On Spec:

> When they submitted to British and American markets, the rejection letters said things like: "situation too alien to American readers," "locale too exotic," "needs an upbeat ending." Obviously, something was different about the type of SF being written in Canada, even if it was hard to define. The Copper Pigs decided something had to be done (Hammond 11).

In spite of this awareness, there have been few studies to discover to what extent a certain Canadian consciousness has been a driving force or even an element in the writing of English-Canadian SF. This apparent lack of self-assertion may be at least partly explained by North American publishing conditions, which offer what appears to be a ready-made market for would-be Canadian SF writers willing to sacrifice their Canadian identity.

French-Canadian SF writers never had this problem: the French market was too far removed, geographically and psychologically, for new writers to consider being published mainly, or at all, in France. Consequently, they had to find a publishing niche within the constraints of the Québec market (recently, however, French-Canadian writers

such as Élisabeth Vonarburg and Jean-Louis Trudel, a Franco-Ontarian, have been

published in France). All these circumstances helped foster a Canadian SF

consciousness or a Québec consciousness. On the Québec or French-Canadian side, the

self-perception or awareness of a national identity in the production of SF developed in a

manner not dissimilar to American, French or German SF, in the sense that Québec SF

writers never felt they had to proclaim their Québécitude. The very fact that they were

writing in French in Québec, were not published anywhere else, and had the benefit of a

dedicated hard-core, albeit fragile, milieu of devoted readers and fans provided a ready-

made literary soil for growth.

Self-awareness is one of the reasons for confining this study mainly to Canadian

SF being written during the modern period, when SF is acknowledged as a different

genre. Self-awareness is essential in the development of SF as a force and a voice in

contemporary culture. This is not to say that all attempts to connect modern Canadian

SF to older fiction are not to be considered; on the contrary, the existence of older

material shows that writers before the "Golden Age," when Canadian SF finally asserted

itself as such and came to be recognized as an independent literary voice, were the

harbingers of something to come and might have been instrumental in the maturing of

SF.

Before the appearance of a self-conscious Canadian SF, very few writers or

critics, if any, used the term Canadian SF, yet a number or works of SF were written in

Canada. But these works tended to be isolated and did not manage to create a significant

impact on the reading public, or on the publishers and critics. Consequently, it would be

difficult to argue that Canadian SF existed as a force in Canadian literature. This is not

to say that isolated works, such as James De Mille's <u>A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder</u>, published in 1888, Stephen Leacock's <u>Afternoons in Utopia: Tales of the New Time</u> (1932), Hugh Pedley's <u>Looking Forward: The Strange Experience of the Rev. Fergus McCheyne</u> (1913) and Frederick Philip Grove's <u>Consider her Ways</u> (1947) do not belong to English-Canadian SF, or that Yves Tardivel's <u>Pour la Patrie</u> (1895), Napoléon Aubin's "Mon voyage à la lune" (1839) and Emmanuel Desrosiers' <u>La Fin de la terre</u> (1931), are not part of French-Canadian SF. Rather, one would argue that these pioneers prefigured a new development in Canadian fiction: their writing reflected the emergence of a technological world and consequently the necessity of its inclusion in fiction. The material and sociological conditions of their period did not favour a wide diffusion of their genre writing. It is only through the recent process of self-awareness in Canadian SF that these past SF works are being taken into account.

One of the essential defining points about Canadian SF is its ability to pass the judgement of time within a definite Canadian consciousness. This consciousness is what has progressively brought it more to the attention of academic and mainstream criticism. This consciousness is what Canadian SF could have in common with mainstream Canadian literature.

While the existence of French- and English-Canadian SF is now a definite and established fact, as we have seen from numerous studies, rigorous analysis and criticism is still in the hands of a few. The differences in the histories of French-Canadian and English-Canadian SF are striking. Magazines and writers have gradually built a genre literature in Québec, including writers from outside Québec, such as Annick Perrot-Bishop, Claude-Michel Prévost and Jean-Louis Trudel. Both have become self-reliant in

a limited way, being still heavily dependent on government grants for survival. At the same time, they have been inclined to ignore English-Canadian SF. In any case, they would have had a hard time finding anything equalling their own efforts until the middle of the eighties. When those involved in English-Canadian SF did take note of French-Canadian SF, the result was the establishment of SF Canada. It is much too early to foresee an evolution of the existing structures, but there seems to be a pattern already at work: English-Canadian SF includes French-Canadian SF, while French-Canadian SF does not visibly include English language SF.

The reasons for this dichotomy in Canadian SF circles are multiple: in a letter, Yves Meynard, writer, critic, and Solaris' Literary Editor, proposes the following explanations for this dichotomy:

> Mon explication à ce phénomène serait triple.
>
> 1) la dominance économique : les anthologies de SFCA [science-fiction canadienne anglaise] ont la possibilité d'être distribuées à un très vaste public (le Canada anglais, plus les USA) et sont donc en mesure de "se payer" des traductions d'auteurs écrivant en français.
>
> 2) la dominance culturelle : la SF écrite en anglais constitue le noyau de la SF mondiale. La SFCA en fait partie (moins directement que la SF américaine, bien sûr). La SFCF [science-fiction canadienne française] fait partie de la SF canadienne, par définition, mais elle constitue quelque chose de différent, d'exotique. Les Canadiens anglais à qui j'ai parlé m'ont toujours paru sincèrement fascinés par la SF qui se pratique en français dans leur pays.
> 3) la barrière linguistique : les Canadiens anglais, en général, ne maîtrisent pas le français assez bien pour lire des textes (surtout de SF!). L'inverse n'est pas vrai. Et de toute façon, la SF américaine est traduite en masse en français : les francophones sont abreuvés de SF anglophone. Que les anthologies Tesseracts aient voulu "réparer cette injustice" me paraît une explication plausible : si elles ne l'avaient pas fait, qui l'aurait fait?[16]

The situation described seems to reflect reality, especially in view of the fact that, as Meynard adds, some translation of English-Canadian SF is now being published in Solaris: "Solaris a publié et va continuer à publier des textes de Canadiens anglais traduits." One thing that is notable in this explanation is the impression given that French-Canadian readers generally are not prone to making a distinction between English-Canadian and American SF. This explains why the English-Canadian stream desires to include French-Canadian SF while the Québec stream is not of the opinion that English-Canadian SF is sufficiently distinctive to warrant a special treatment. This attitude, of course, reflects the tendency in Québec society to fail to recognize the differences between English-Canadian culture and American culture. Québec sees itself as isolated in a sea of 260 million anglophones without realizing that English Canadians experience the same cultural problems in safeguarding their identity. Quebecers often are hard pressed to quote more than a handful of English-Canadian cultural icons and find it difficult to see the distinctive character of English-Canadian society. Hence they are unable, for lack of information, to perceive any similarities between their culture and the rest of Canada. English-Canadian SF, in striking contrast, sees the dual-language character of Canadian SF writing as being an essential distinction. Consequently, English-Canadian SF writers and publishers are very keen to publish francophone SF and in fact seem to find it next to impossible to publish an anthology without including French Canadians. The image of Canadian SF abroad, conveyed in English, is at present an image of two streams of SF, French and English. For instance, a recent anthology published in the United States and especially for an American public, Northern Stars (1994), includes six French-Canadian writers out of a total of twenty-seven, a proportion approximating the percentage of francophones in Canada.

The fact remains that in spite of having published over 12,000 works of SF, Canadian SF is still fairly invisible in the marketplace. This invisibility has not helped foster an awareness of itself and consequently has not encouraged a development of criticism outside a limited circle of critics and aficionados.

Criticism and Canadian SF

It is only recently that Canadian criticism has begun to examine the formation of Canadian canons and has tried to see what processes have brought about such canons. Robert Lecker in the introduction to his compendium of essays, Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value, states that "the ideal examination of any canon would include an analysis of market forces; of the publishing and bookselling industry; of curriculum development in schools and universities; of government attempts to patronize a national literature and its supporters; of the dissemination of literary value in newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, and books" (4).

Canadian SF, through its efforts at being recognized in official institutions, through setting up its own publishing houses and even, during its fandom stage, through having its own network of readers, is a live laboratory of a literature being gradually integrated into the official canons which it simultaneously questions. It is being forced into a re-evaluation of the criteria of criticism in a manner that mainstream critics can be reluctant to entertain. Robert Lecker, writing about critics of Canadian literature and including himself, adds that "we have shied away from theorizing about why certain Canadian authors or works are 'major', or 'minor', or seldom mentioned at all"(4).

Canadian SF writers and critics are keen to examine their relation with all the ramifications of literature and when shunted from an official channel have usually set up their own institutions: such as their own publishing houses, system of literary awards (Aurora Awards for SF Canada, Prix Solaris and Prix Boréal in Québec) [17], own newsletters and specialized bookstores. If Canadian SF were to find a strong presence in the mainstream publishing and selling outlets, its parallel networks would lose some of their importance, if not disappear entirely.

In essence, considering its invisibility in Canadian libraries and bookstores, one could well wonder about the real existence of Canadian SF and its presence and impact in Canadian culture. But there are, to be sure, divergences between English- and French-Canadian SF. The presence and the diffusion of each show appreciable differences — the result of two distinct markets, publishing worlds and purposes. English-Canadian SF is being read and bought; its main problem is that it is in danger of being overwhelmed by American SF. It is present, but it is not labelled as Canadian. The lack of outlets in Canada, the overall domination by United States publishing houses and the lack of interest on the part of the Canadian public have prevented the creation of a "visible" Canadian SF publishing market.

In Québec, one reason for this lack of visibility has been documented: Rita Painchaud notes that many Québec SF readers do not buy the majority of their books in bookstores. The extremely high proportion of direct sales compared to sales in bookstores is proof of a reading public: some novels sell three times as many copies in direct sales as in bookstores (94-95). The statistics collected by her research led her to doubt the effectiveness of the distribution network then set up by the now-defunct

Québec SF collection <u>Le Préambule</u>. Visibility also used to be a problem faced by mainstream Canadian literature, which, in spite of its recent success at reaching a wide public, is still wary of any cry of glory.

One of the main literary magazines, <u>Lettres québécoises</u>, thanks to research undertaken with public financial support, recently reported that although "la visibilité des livres québécois en librairie est plus grande que leur présence," these books were receiving the same preferential treatment in public libraries and that "dans l'ensemble, les quotidiens ont consacré la moitié de leurs articles sur le livre à des ouvrages québécois." This visibility, however, is not synonymous with the real success achieved in sales. A presence of 33% on the shelves corresponded in fact to an average of 60% in market share. The author of the editorial in <u>Lettres québécoises</u>, André Vanasse, attributes this success to a mix of positive policies in the integration of Québec literature in the official school curriculum and government grants (5-6). All things being equal, Québécois SF's presence is vastly inferior to the impact it really has on a reading public, but being constrained to a much smaller market than mainstream Québec fiction, it has more difficulties in reaching a presence reflecting its real importance and legitimizing a wider diffusion.

Québécois SF seems to follow a progression in that it is continuously increasing its inclusion in University courses and is part of the curriculum of 15 CEGEPs (Painchaud 68). Many magazines and publishers do receive grants, and this in turn gives a slightly professional make-up to Québécois SF, since conditions attached to grants stipulate that contributors to such fund-aided magazines must be paid. This is especially the case with <u>Solaris</u> and <u>imagine...</u>, that, unlike their closest equivalent in English-

Canada, did not start as professional paying magazines. Rita Painchaud observes that anglophone universities opened the field of SF in Québec and that universities are primary agents in granting status to a literary genre (68). French-Canadian SF, moreover, is far from being devoid of researchers, writers and critics that come from the academic community and devote part of their time to the promotion, study, and writing of SF.

The time is therefore ripe for a re-evaluation of the place and role of French-Canadian SF in Canada and in Québec. There are a few writers living full time from the proceeds of their writing, the most famous one being Daniel Sernine. The community of SF in French in Canada and in Québec does suffer from a lack of publishing outlets — no Québec French SF series has survived beyond a mere fifteen titles, a time-span not sufficient to gain name recognition.

While Canadian universities offer a fairly wide range of courses in "paraliterature," the corpus of Canadian SF is not a field of study in its own right. Canadian university courses sometimes include a token SF author from Canada, but the study of Canadian SF within the context of a "national" literature (Québec, Acadian, French-Canadian or English-Canadian) is rare to non-existent. The present situation is that Canadian SF does not have to be part of a course of SF, nor does a degree in Canadian literature have to include Canadian SF as part of its field of study. Whereas a student of literature can hardly ignore classical literature and certain "classic" authors in the study of a national literature, a student of Canadian literature may safely choose wholly to disregard Canadian SF and still consider himself or herself well versed in Canadian literature.

Canadian or not Canadian

The question is to decide whether the study and criticism of Canadian SF should be regarded as a separate entity and where to classify Canadian SF works written by so-called mainstream writers. What is to be considered Canadian is what critics, readers and publishers — all of them for possibly different reasons — will treat as Canadian. Place of birth alone is certainly not enough, especially in a country where so many inhabitants come from another place and so many native-born Canadians leave never to return, their connections with Canada coming to mean very little in their adopted land. Is there any way of identifying what constitutes *Canadian SF*? Does it make sense to give it a label when SF appears to claim no national boundaries by its very nature of often taking place in estranged, but familiar, settings or environments? But American SF is readily identified and identifiable as American even when it does not use American settings. Settings are therefore not the main issue here, although they do have a role to play. Themes and structures seem to be the main features, among others, that will help to define a "national" SF literature.

In his closing chapter, "Hindsights," Ketterer suggests roads of inquiry for "Canadianness" in Canadian SF and Fantasy linked to a specific "cultural consciousness." He addresses the question: "What is a Canadian cultural consciousness or sensibility, or what are Canadian sensibilities if the plural form is preferred?" (165). This is where the study of comparative Canadian literature has a part to play in trying to determine whether or not the two SF literatures of Canada share the same themes, purposes and critical outlook, and whether their protagonists share similar attitudes.

Is Canadian SF, which by its very nature claims to take place outside the

recognized boundaries of the present "real" world, worthy of study within the context of

a national literature, and is it relevant enough to be the main subject of a comparative

study? Ketterer proposes that Canadian works can be safely defined in the following

manner:

> I think we can . . . agree that the most "Canadian" examples of
> Canadian SF and Fantasy would (1) be written by persons born and
> continually living in Canada, (2) be set in Canada and feature
> Canadian characters, and (3) display a "Canadian sensibility"

Ketterer goes on to state that what is clearly non-Canadian:

> works (1) written by persons not native to Canada who have lived in
> Canada for a short time, (2) set outside of Canada and featuring non-
> Canadian characters, and (3) displaying no evidence of a "Canadian
> sensibility" (165).

Ketterer's identification principles, however, do not settle the issue entirely.

While national identification is less and less a problem in "mainstream" Canadian

literature, it is a far more complex issue in Canadian SF, where settings are very often

not Canadian, at least not in present-day terms. Using some of Ketterer's criteria ("be set

in Canada and feature Canadian characters), Malcolm Lowry could be considered

Canadian or at least having a "Canadian period," as could certain works of Brian Moore

which are set in Canada with Canadian characters (he is now generally included with

Irish literature). Louis Hémon was born in France and is considered by every critic to be

a French-Canadian writer: his example, applied to SF, could lead to the inclusion in

Canadian SF of all SF writers whose work falls within certain accepted parameters of

Canadian consciousness.

An interesting example could be Jules Verne, the greatest French writer of SF, who spent "192 hours" in North America in 1867, seeing nothing of Canada except Niagara Falls. Jules Verne however managed to write Le Pays des fourrures (1873) and Famille-sans-nom (1889), which is his only political novel and has as a background the events of the 1837 rebellion in Québec, Verne's sympathy lying with the Patriotes. Indeed, Chapter XXIV of Jules Verne's Désert de Glace is published in what is generally considered to be the first significant anthology of Canadian SF and fantasy, Other Canadas (1979) by John Robert Colombo. The same anthology even lists Cyrano de Bergerac's Voyage to New France as tentatively being part of Canadian SF. The same criteria could include James Joyce in Swiss or Italian literature. The criterion of consciousness in the published works is very debatable. Jules Verne wrote several novels taking place in Canada and does demonstrate an understanding of the French-Canadian culture and consciousness that might tempt some critics to classify him as being somehow part of Canadian literature. The fact of the matter, however, is that Verne is not a Canadian writer.

The challenge of national identification is a common feature of French-Canadian SF and English-Canadian SF. Robert J. Sawyer, a prolific author of self-proclaimed Canadian SF and a reviewer, intimates that English-Canadian-born SF authors are a minority:

> The vast majority of English-Canadian SF writers are immigrants to Canada. Of all those working in adult SF at novel length, the only native-born Canadians are Phyllis Gotlieb (born in Toronto in 1926) . . . Terence M. Green (born in Toronto in 1947) . . . and Robert J. Sawyer (born in Ottawa in 1960).

Everyone else has come from abroad: Donald Kingsbury and Robert Charles Wilson . . . from California; Sean Stewart from Texas (to which he has now returned) . . . William Gibson from South Carolina; editor Judith Merril and Spider Robinson . . . from New York; J. Brian Clarke . . . Michael Coney . . . Dave Duncan . . . and Andrew Weiner from England; Charles de Lint (mostly a fantasist, but occasionally an SF writer, as in Svaha, 1989) from the Netherlands; and S.M. Stirling . . . (Stirling was resident in Toronto for many years, but now lives in New Mexico) and Élisabeth Vonarburg from France" ("Science Fiction").

Sawyer's calculation that homegrown Canadian SF authors could be a minority is all the more interesting in view of his having omitted several prominent authors from his list. From the French-Canadian side, he omits Pierre Billon (not considered a Swiss writer, although he was born in Switzerland), Jean-François Somain [aka Somcynsky], born in France and having lived in Argentina. In the English-Canadian stream, Lesley Choyce was born in New Jersey and Monica Hughes is from Liverpool, England. This abundance of foreign-born writers could make one wonder whether the major influences in Canadian SF come from abroad, and consequently whether it is yet possible to talk of a Canadian SF. However, several factors at play do point to the existence of a Canadian SF consciousness. Many of the foreign-born writers either belong to SF Canada (J. Brian Clarke, Michael Coney, Charles de Lint, Judith Merril, Sean Stewart, Élisabeth Vonarburg, Andrew Weiner among others),[18] or they have been quite willing to let their names and fiction be included in the various anthologies of Canadian SF such as the Tesseracts series, Northern Stars (Robert Charles Wilson) and thus be categorized repeatedly as Canadian. Others, such as Jean-François Somain, have been published mainly in Québec and interviewed in Solaris' pages as part of the Québec scene. Finally, most of these foreign-born writers have left their original countries permanently to come

to live in Canada; they write from Canada, and, apart from a few exceptions, have Canada as their base.[19]

What is most interesting and perhaps relevant to Canadian SF is that most of these Canadian SF writers, foreign-born or not, are aware of each other through belonging to the same national association, SF Canada. In the two magazines of that association, they discuss intensely the problems of what being a Canadian SF writer means. They are regularly published in the moderately successful anthologies of Canadian SF and magazines such as On Spec, Solaris and Imagine..., which have gone beyond simply trying to make the Canadian reading public aware of the existence of Canadian SF. These magazines have now become a regular outlet for new writing.[20]

English-Canadian SF, in fact, has begun to exist in its own right, no longer as an appendage of American SF, and has produced a sizable quantity of works. As is obvious from the extensive enumeration of SF material produced in Canada or by Canadians to be found in David Ketterer's study, there is no dearth of material or writers. Still, English-Canadian bookstores largely ignore English-Canadian SF. No section is devoted to it, as there is to mainstream Canadian fiction (with the exception of bookstores specializing in Canadian books).[21] English-Canadian SF authors can be found in the Canadian literature section and therefore are not presented as SF authors, or they are to be found in the SF section and are not then identified as Canadian. Even Canadian bookstores stocking only "Canadian" books written by Canadians or about Canada have no policy and were nonplussed by this author's enumeration of Canadian SF authors.[22] This situation is paralleled exactly in French-Canadian bookstores.

One of the processes to identify Canadian SF is to sift through tons of material and to try to determine which literary works have qualities that will endure in the same way that H. G. Wells and Jules Verne have endured. Then one must decide whether these works constitute a corpus of literature with common criteria that distinguish them from other national SF literatures. At the same time, many past works have to be re-examined in a new light given the increased importance now bestowed upon SF. Such works include Pour la patrie and Consider her Ways, which have been re-assessed because of the literary importance granted to Canadian SF by such critics as David Ketterer, John Clute and Peter Nicholls.

In the National Library of Canada, the work of labelling Canadian SF is still in its infancy, with many essential works missing from the catalogue or classified as mainstream literature; this being said, one of its recent publications, Out of this World, was devoted exclusively to Canadian SF and Fantasy. It opened the field of Canadian SF to a very wide public to whom the very idea of Canadian SF was unknown. One feature of that study, not particular to Out of this World, is that most of the critics of Canadian SF are also writers of the genre. This has several potential drawbacks, the first being that several big guns of Canadian SF have been asked to write about the field in which they themselves are participants and find themselves almost apologizing for having to quote their own work. The other drawback is that several critics seemingly have to use generalizations and sweeping statements when criticizing weak works of SF for fear of hurting writers known to them. Consequently, the non-specialist reader might be forgiven for thinking that, since writers often have to double up as critics, Canadian SF suffers from a shortage of writers and independent critics. It is not that being a writer

should prevent one from being a critic: on the contrary, writers can have a knowledge essential to the comprehension of the process of writing, but the reduced number of critics and the incestuous nature of the milieu — less so in the larger pool of English-Canadian SF than in French-Canadian SF — is not conducive to the emergence of a criticism sufficiently removed from the scene that it need not be apologetic or bound by loyalties. Also, Canadian critics have a tendency to want to "reclaim" authors who, they feel, should belong to Canadian SF, van Vogt being a typical example, while integrating many foreign-born authors as Canadian. This process, however, is also an ongoing one in mainstream Canadian literature, suggesting that the distance between mainstream and SF is not as wide as might be expected.

Québec SF, because of the language difference and the geographical distance from France, never had the problem of identifying what was and was not Québécois. The moment a Québec writer started to write SF, it instantly became Québec SF since it was published in Québec, written in Québec (or Canada) and written by someone living in Québec; and when expatriates began writing SF in Québec (the primary and obvious example being Élisabeth Vonarburg), most of them readily became part of the Québécois SF publishing and literary scene. A case in point is Pierre Billon, considered a Québec writer, but whose books are never officially classified (by editors, bookstores and to all appearances by himself as well) as SF novels. The reason is obvious for any student of the economics of SF publishing: most SF books, until recently, had a shelf life barely longer than that of monthly magazines. The economics of SF writing has often forced SF writers to produce quantity to the detriment of quality. It is only recently, with the slightly higher status that SF has gained, that a few Canadian SF writers have

been able to write full time. Notable examples are Robert J. Sawyer and Daniel Semine, who, as professionals for whom SF writing is the main and not a secondary activity, are able to promote Canadian SF, thus enhancing the seriousness of SF in Canada.

With regard to French-Canadian SF, being Québécois or French-Canadian and writing SF in French in Québec or in Canada has provided distinctiveness. Élisabeth Vonarburg (French-born) and Pierre Billon (Swiss-born), for example, were immediately considered Canadian, — although both have received awards in Europe. What has been more problematic for Canadian SF writers is being published and known outside specialist circles. French-Canadian SF writers have had a more formidable obstacle at home; they had trouble finding editors and space on the bookshelves (bookstores did not know whether French-Canadian SF books should be put in the SF or Québec section).[23] Critics were unfamiliar with SF in general, not to mention French-Canadian SF. While English-Canadian SF writers were faced for a long time with the dubious choice of publishing in the United States or not being published at all, French-Canadian SF writers could be published but had few readers for lack of availability in Québec bookstores. Mainstream writers experience the same visibility difficulty to some extent, but mainly when trying to stand out against so many other choices offered to the public; the unproven assumption is that a "good" writer will eventually "make" it. In fact the economics and structural factors at play in the selection of good or bad, while present in mainstream literature, are more keenly felt in SF because of the reduced size of the publishing market.

SF Canada: A Pan-Canadian Writers' Association

Many schools of interpretation exist as to whether English-Canadian or French-Canadian literature belong to the same literature, whether they ought to be considered as having little or much in common, or whether separation has to be accepted as a fait accompli. In the realm of Canadian SF, the situation has tended to be quite the opposite: the histories of English-Canadian SF and Québec SF are quite distinct from each other. Québec SF writers have been more aware of American SF authors than of their English-Canadian compatriots. They would be hard put to name more than one English-Canadian author, the main reason, but not the only one, being the harsh realities of the publishing world.

The setting-up of a pan-Canadian association of SF writers, the publication of regular articles of criticism of English-Canadian SF writers in Québec magazines, as well as the publication on both sides of the linguistic divide of various anthologies on a regular basis have brought English-Canadian and French-Canadian SF in regular contact with each other. There is no question that now there is a Canadian SF and that it is acquiring slow but steady self-assurance. English-Canadian SF writers are deeply aware of their growing importance, but they realize that they are still not familiar to a reading public, to the point of warning anyone stumbling onto their *SF Canada* Web site on the Internet:

> There's been an explosion of creativity in Canadian SF in recent years. There are many new writers working in the field, and the quality is consistently high. If you haven't heard of some of the following names, bear in mind that Canadian SF as a distinct brand of writing was almost non-existent even fifteen years ago ("SF Canada").

SF Canada included one hundred members at the time this document was produced, many of them having published a sizable quantity of books. [24] The rules of membership require members to be Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada. There does not seem to be an association of exclusively English-Canadian SF writers at the national level — although there are regional associations in Western Canada and associations of French-Canadian/Québec SF writers. On the Québécois side, an intense rivalry seems to exist between some members and contributors to Solaris and imagine.... . Of course, many writers who write Canadian SF do not belong to SF Canada. [25]

To recapitulate, the two streams of Canadian SF have had very different histories, the French-Canadian one building and consolidating slowly its own niche and then getting accepted progressively in legitimizing institutions, the English-Canadian stream, by its own analysis, pushed into a cultural self-awareness, partly by the impossibility of writing freely on themes of its own choosing while being published in the United States, and partly by the example of an independent Québec SF. [26] The realization that they had common goals, such as a will to create a distinct medium of expression, and problems, such as lack of publishing strength and difficulty of distribution, have led the SF writers of French and English Canada to come together and to take a series of initiatives, such as setting up a national association in order to share information on matters of publishing and copyright. These actions have begun to lead to a deeper discussion of purposes, themes and common opportunities for the promotion of SF in Canada. This process might, in the long term, produce a more assertive brand of Canadian SF. At the same time, the institutions endowed with the power of legitimizing

literature and cultural canons, including the National Library, universities and the CBC,

have begun, through their interest in Canadian SF, to create a public awareness of the

genre and consequently facilitate a debate on the Canadianness of authors and works of

fiction.

Notes to the First Chapter

[1] The existence of a single truly academic journal concerning itself with SF, Science Fiction Studies (founded by R. D. Mullen and Darko Suvin at Indiana State University, published for many years by McGill University in Québec and now back in Indiana) is the sign of a limited interest by the academic community in the genre. However, the journal has been in existence since 1973 and has proven that there is a sustained academic interest in SF with contributors from all continents. Other journals are Foundation, Extrapolation and The New York Review of Science Fiction.

[2] Gérard Klein is, among other things, the co-editor of a three-part anthology of French SF with Ellen Hertzfeld and Dominique Martel: Les Mondes francs, L'Hexagone hallucine and La Frontière éclatée (1988-1989).

[3] Other journals such as Foundation (U. K.) and Extrapolation (United States) are deemed to be more acceptable by Norbert Spehner in his Écrits sur la Science-Fiction.

[4] Élisabeth Vonarburg and Norbert Spehner, "SF in Québec: A Survey," Science-Fiction Studies 7 (1980): 191-197.

[5] John Clute and Peter Nicholls, The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, Grolier Science Fiction: The Multimedia Enclyclopedia of Science Fiction (Danbury, CT: Grolier, 1995).

[6] Judith Merril was later to leave this "family" for the Canadian SF scene. She moved to Canada and by donating her whole SF book collection to the City of Toronto Library started one of the main repositories for consultation by researchers of SF in North America, "The Spaced Out Library" later to become "The Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy."

[7] Esther Rochon published En hommage aux araignées (Montréal: L'Actuelle, 1974).

[8] Letter to the author by Joël Champetier, editor of Solaris, 23rd July 1996.

[9] Torus started publication in 1987. Edge Detector's first issue was published in Summer 1988.

[10] They were Marianne O. Nielsen, Hazel Sangster, Karen Grant, Lyle Weis,Phyllis Shuell and Diane Walton. Most of them were attending writing classes, first from Rudy Wiebe and later from Katerina Edwards at the University of Alberta.

[11] From their own explanatory document, "The Aurora award is Canada's highest award for achievement in the fields of Science Fiction and Fantasy. The award encompasses activities such as writing, film production, the visual arts, and convention organizing. It is organized similarly to the Hugo award. Stories and other eligible works are voted on by the general public, and the winners receive a beautiful sculptured trophy, plus the attendant prestige. The first Aurora Award (aka Casper) was presented in 1980 - a lifetime achievement award to A. E. van Vogt. There was only one award per year for 1980-1985. From 1986 to 1988 there were three awards per year - for work in English, work in French and contributions to fandom."
SF Canada n. pag., online, Internet, http://helios.physics.utoronto.ca:8080/auroras.html, 5 September 1996.

"The winners are determined through ballots distributed through Canadian SF specialty bookstores and periodicals. The readers nominate and then vote on the finalists (a small voting fee is levied on the second ballot)." Glenn Grant, Northern Stars, eds. David G. Hartwell and Glenn Grant (New York: Tor, 1994) 374.

[12] The stories were screened by an independant Editorial Board consisting of Douglas Barbour, J. Brian Clarke, Candas Jane Dorsey, Pauline Gedge, and Monica Hughes.

[13] Fantasy Times was a fanzine published irregularly between 1941 and 1946. It then became an SF and fantasy newsletter until 1957 when it changed its title to Science Fiction Times and ceased publication in 1969. It attracted important reviewers such as James Blish. Fantasy Times won a Hugo award for Best Fanzine in 1955 and 1957. It published news and reviews.

[14] The fourth edition, for reasons unknown, does not include any chapter on national literatures and concentrates mainly on English language SF.

[15] The name of the collective is derived "from an ornament Karen had in her study for several years: a piggy bank. To keep themselves motivated and producing work the group agreed that if a member didn't have a story for each meeting, they had to forfeit first (sic) twenty-five cents and, later, a dollar to the pig. The money was used to finance group dinners and parties" (Hammond 11). Karen Grant was a founding member of the collective.

[16] Yves Meynard, literary editor of Solaris, letter to the author, 9 October 1996.

[17] The Prix Solaris is granted every year to Canadian creators in the fields of SF, the fantastic and fantasy in the categories of fiction and black and white comic strip produced in the French language by the magazine Solaris.
The Prix Boréal is granted by the organizers of the SF Boréal Convention in Québec City every year in the categories of Best Book, Best Short Fiction and Best Illustrator.

[18] Judith Merril was also the editor of one of the first anthologies of Canadian SF [cf. note 82 and Appendix I].

[19] S. M. Stirling has moved to New Mexico.

[20] At the time of writing this study Tesseracts 6 has been published.

[21] The fact that English Canada has bookstores that specialize in Canadian books (e. g. Long House in Toronto and The Double Hook in Montreal) is a sure sign of the fragility of the English-Canadian publishing scene. The French-Canadian case, not only in Québec, seems to be in a stronger position — there is no need for bookstores selling only [French] Canadian books — because of the distance between France and Canada. Bakka, in Toronto, probably the most important SF bookstore in Canada, is slowly waking up to the importance of Canadian SF. The SF bookstore of Montréal, Nebula, run by a francophone and, until recently, practically ignoring French-Canadian SF, has only a small bookcase displaying English-Canadian SF, with Ketterer's book figuring prominently.

[22] The Double Hook in Montréal was interested and open-minded but a regular yearly examination showed that the problem was a lack of reference material for bookstores. As in Nebula, David Ketterer's book was on sale but not used for categorization purposes. Long House was indifferent to the existence of Canadian SF if not uncomprehending.

[23] A personal survey has revealed that French-Canadian and English-Canadian writers are systematically displayed in the Québec literature section. French translations of Fifth Business or The Edible Woman are part of Québec literature in Québec bookstores. Is this an unconscious denial of the existence of English-Canadian literature?

[24] Cf. Appendix 1.

[25] The most prominent ones are Pierre Billon, Jean-François Somain and William Gibson.

[26] Many English-Canadian SF writers were invited to the annual Québec SF convention, Boréal, where they were surprised by the range of published, writing and criticism taking place in Québec.

Chapter Two

Canadian Science Fiction and Science: An Ambivalent Attitude Towards Change

The term SF, as noted earlier, has not always been satisfactory to a significant number of critics and writers of SF. Many writers have proposed alternative terms, but today most writers and critics use the original phrase: SF. This brings the unavoidable question of how much science is there in SF and to what extent is its use or presence important? Some of the findings relevant to the study of science in SF do overlap with the study of themes in Canadian SF. The third chapter will expand on other thematic tendencies of Canadian SF.

Many of the technical wonders described in Jules Verne's fiction have become realities, albeit often in somewhat different forms. More recently, the discovery of ice on the moon has finally eliminated the only major scientific feature considered unsound of Belgian Hergé's graphic novel[1] — with Tintin as a central hero — On a marché sur la lune (1954), where Hergé, for the purpose of bringing some thrill to an uneventful walk on the moon, made Tintin's dog, Milou, slide down a huge slab of ice. With the probable discovery of life, however primitive, on Mars, and the successes achieved in the cloning of sheep and monkeys, one can really wonder whether there is any limit to what can be included in SF and presented as science, no matter how far-fetched or theoretically doubtful. Many fantasies have eventually become scientific reality, or at

least supported by scientific theory, if still impossible to achieve through present technology.

Apart from the concept of science, the image and morality of science have been important aspects of the philosophy at the root of much of early SF. Scientists have even considered SF as a tool for the dissemination of scientific ideas:

> Typical of the time was a paper by the astronomer Patrick Moore, which inspired a lengthy debate at the 1955 UNESCO conference on the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Moore argued that each country should set up a science fiction selection board, so that novels distinguished by "scientific soundness" (together with a category of scientifically unsound novels thought to possess "wholesome" qualities of literary merit) could be given a stamp of approval (Parrinder, "Scientists" 57).

It is puzzling that Patrick Moore, a man of considerable importance in his field and who has brought a love for astronomy and science to generations of television viewers in Great Britain, should contradict himself so obviously. Obviously he was aware that science alone would not make good fiction and that unsound science combined with good literature could be even more powerful for the purpose of disseminating scientific knowledge.

If one discounts a single use of the word SF in the 19th century by the English essayist William Wilson in 1851,[2] the term SF was first used in an editorial response to a 1927 letter to <u>Amazing Stories: The Magazine of Scientifiction</u>, of which Hugo Gernsback was the editor and publisher. He then decided to use the term extensively when he founded his new magazine <u>Science Wonder Stories</u> in 1929,[3] replacing various terms such as scientific romance and scientific fantasy, after he had himself abandoned his created neologism of scientifiction.[4] Gernsback insisted on scientific accuracy, and

although this was not really possible because of the very nature of the stories being published, it had, according to Brian Aldiss, an American critic and insider of SF, "the effect of deadening literalism into the fiction" (Trillion 204). Gernsback would publish stories containing silly science or naïve psychology privileging scientific accuracy and clear story lines "stripped of atmosphere and sensibility" (204). Gernsback gave to the explanation of introduced scientific facts in various works a higher priority than the atmosphere and the exploration of social and psychological consequences. It is unfortunate that he has been named the father of SF,[5] for his editorship had the adverse effect of lowering the standards of American SF through his limited cultural openness, his formula type of romance and lack of demands as to the quality of writing.

It was only with the coming of John W. Campbell that SF took a turn for the better with his editorship of Astounding. Campbell was determined to raise the standards of magazine SF, and he encouraged many writers of SF who have since become major figures in the genre, such as A. E. van Vogt and Isaac Asimov. Astounding introduced many scientific themes with a belief in their eventual coming into reality, including space travel, the atomic bomb, robots and aliens from outer space.

However, the "Golden Age of SF," as it is often called, had little room for non-exact sciences such as psychology and sociology, thereby reinforcing a trend to link SF with hard technology and the creation of the sub-genre of "Hard SF." Campbell and Gernsback were following enthusiastically the new discoveries of the power of science in their everyday lives. If today SF has different themes, it is because society has taken a more critical view of science.

The importance of science in SF does not lie in the use of science per se or hard technology, but rather in the way science interacts with history, enabling the presentation or reinforcing the probability of alternative futures, past or present universes or realities, therefore permitting what is essential to many SF stories: namely the construction of alternative realities in a way very similar to historical fiction. The difference is that historical fiction recreates a fictional universe, which is limited by the available documented history, as explained by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr, a co-editor of Science-Fiction Studies:

> Although the historical facts limit what can happen in historical fiction (in the realistic mode, at least), these facts are embedded among purely fictional facts to imply a metaphorical meaning beyond historiography's customary function of describing "what really happened." In historical fiction, history is no longer true history, even if it is in fact true. It is metaphorical, and hence "more than true"; it is culturally significant (Csicsery-Ronay 6-7).

Csicsery-Ronay describes SF as "very much like historical fiction" insofar as it "transforms scientific and technological ideas into metaphors" (6-7). Patrick Parrinder, building on Csicsery-Ronay's article, arrives at the same conclusion when he states that, according to Csicsery-Ronay, the writer's task is to endow scientific ideas with "cultural relevance," "meaning" and "typical values"("Scientists" 69).

In fact, the necessity for a writer to bring out some of these values or to introduce a particular metaphor might well force him into introducing scientific elements that have no place in contemporary science. This is hinted at by David Langford, lecturer in sociology at the University of Reading, biologist and critic of SF, in a study edited by Peter Nicholls:

> The fact that a story or novel has one major element of imaginary

science does not mean that the whole story becomes nonsense. Very often the use of imaginary science is a necessity if the writer is to create a situation where he can go ahead with the truly scientific component of his speculations (66).

Langford appears to justify the use of imaginary science, here probably meant to be "unscientific" science, as a literary device to introduce a really scientific speculation, which in turn could be metaphorical. This device is to guard against the difficulty of explaining the use of elements of what is regarded as pseudo-science, such as time-travel; recent discoveries and new wormhole theories have to some extent have made it more problematic to dismiss the idea of time-travel as purely imaginary. Even alternative universes have been suggested as a real possibility in recent research and experiments where scientists have been able to project light particles at what seems to be a speed greater than light. It does not mean that SF writers are able to predict the future, it only means that by writing within the boundaries of cognitive estrangement, they have more often than not been ahead of either technological developments or the evolution of scientific theories.

Whereas American SF and precursors such as Jules Verne have been endowed with some ability to predict the future, Canadian SF has not been long enough in existence to be able to boast of significant accomplished predictions. Canadian SF has nevertheless developed its own view of science. It has not followed the path described by Patrick Parrinder of a "Science fiction . . . as a propaganda medium . . . and as one that has (or ought to have) a close and symbiotic relation with science itself" (58) that, according to him, came about in what he sees as the 1895-1945 period of "Scientific Enlightenment" (58).

Works of SF written during that period in Canada tend to mix religion with some technical progress, but the power of the Church is paramount. A good example is Hugh Pedley's novel <u>Looking Forward: the Strange Experience of the Rev. Fergus McCheyne</u>, published in 1913, in which his hero, Fergus McCheyne, wakes up after having gone into hibernation in Montreal in 1927 in a world dominated by technical progress, including a tunnel under Mont-Royal: "Express trains, electrically propelled, rushed by swiftly. Electric trains followed each other in quick succession." All this progress was accomplished thanks to the ægis of the "United Church of Canada," a result that "gave one a keen realization of what it meant to have the great majority of the English-speaking people of Canada knit together in the bonds of a common church life" (268). Here we have a strong contrast to the scientific values and outlook that Parrinder describes for that same period as being the "common faith of intellectuals belonging in the vanguard of progress" (58).

In French Canada, in 1895, the same year that Parrinder sees as marking the beginning of Scientific Enlightenment, was published Jules-Paul Tardivel's <u>Pour la patrie</u>. This novel had been long out of print until it was translated by Sheila Fischman and published by the University of Toronto Press in 1975. It was also reprinted for the first time in 1989 in a French-language edition. It is at first a dystopia in which a Québec state is eventually achieved in 1945. At this point it turns into a utopia and is told from a narrator's viewpoint set in 1977. The narrator describes a society where everything that was wished for has been achieved: an independent Québec under a strong ultra-Catholic church. The story contains strong SF elements: "chars électriques," "plumes télégraphiques," akin to our telex, and chemical warfare. Such

modern inventions seem to be kept well out of reach of easy public use since to use a telephone or send a wire one must be in a public office. Moreover, the SF elements coexist side by side with supernatural evil forces. The reader's interest is nevertheless sustained by an intricate plot, in an atmospheric setting of dark streets and corners where we witness a struggle between good and bad characters. After a short supernatural prologue in Paris in 1931 to introduce the evil Montarval calling for Eblis the demon prince, the story starts in November, 1945, before independence is to be achieved. The "good" protagonists are in favour of Québec's separation and fight the Freemasons supporting the Conservatives whose design is to destroy the influence of the clerics and the Catholic Church in Canada. This first part bears all the marks of an adventure novel, which sees the good triumph over the bad and vice versa. We are then told details of the past of Lamirande, the Christian doctor whose destiny is to lead Québec to independence. At this point, the novel turns into a political detective novel, with its series of murders, accidents, investigations and tailed characters, to eventually see the victory of French Canadians thanks to the help of Vaughan, an MP converted to Lamirande's cause. The price has been paid, however, by Lamirande, who decides to disappear from public life by entering a monastery. Other early works such as Ralph Centennius' short story "The Dominion in 1983" (1883) offer the same contradictory description of a future Canada. In it, due to "improved hygienic conditions . . .very few persons die now, except from old age" (316), train car travel from Halifax to Galway in Ireland is possible at "the rate of a mile in three seconds" (316) and Canadian cities are so safe that "We have not been shocked by a murder in Canada for more than fifty years, nor has a suicide been heard of for a very long period" (316).

This description is not devoid of a self-assured attitude of racial superiority, as in Tardivel's novel. Centennius, a mysterious pseudonym (the real author is yet to be discovered) attributes this success to his race: "Our race, owing to the splendid hygienic and social conditions that have been dilated upon, is one of the healthiest and strongest on the face of the earth" (317). This passage appears in a chapter preceded by a quote from Richard II, Act V, "But Heaven hath a hand in these events," perhaps hinting at God's design in these achievements. Centennius is of the pessimistic opinion that "the world . . . had to wait . . . always hoping that each new scientific discovery would enlighten mankind in the desired direction, but always doomed to be disappointed and to see humanity growing either more savage or physically weaker" (313-314).

In the preceding works, science is subordinated to religion, and its rationality does not prevent a stronger power, sometimes dark and threatening, more often benevolent, elitist, religious or mystical, such as in Pour la patrie, to be the all-supreme authority. In English-Canadian SF this controlling power is often in charge of everything for the greater good, whereas in Pour la patrie it is a symbol of anti-Catholicism and inimical to French-Canadians. The cultural and scientific atmosphere and ideology prevalent in Canada then were not conducive to asserting a superiority of science over arcane powers.

The Role of SF and Technology in Society

These works of SF forecast not so much scientific progress, but rather an improvement on existing technology set in a utopia. This illusion of progress through a superior technology is described by Arthur Kroker in Technology and the Canadian

<u>Mind</u>, where he argues that "the technological experience is both Orwellian and utopian

. . . Exhibiting as it does both conflicting tendencies towards emancipation and

manipulation" (125). These early works of Canadian SF did conform to this modern

analysis; whereas the Orwellian factor was perceived to be still in the hands of a higher

power, namely religion, relegating science to a secondary role. These early works were

also attempts to deal with progress and its consequences in a rather conservative manner.

They tried to propose an improved society or to achieve long sought after goals, but did

not question the fabric of society. The realization that change was inevitable made it

necessary to control its pace. In <u>The Bush Garden</u>, Northrop Frye exposes the cultural

shock provoked by the growth of technology when he writes that:

> In the nineteenth century the common assumption that nature had
> revealed the truth of progress, and that it was the duty of reason to
> accommodate that truth for mankind, could be either a conservative or
> a radical view. But in either case it was a revolutionary doctrine,
> introducing the conception of change as the key to the social progress.
> In the proletarian social Darwinists, who represented a fusion of
> secularism, science and social discontent, there was a strong tendency
> to regard literature as a product and a symbol of a ruling-class
> mentality, with, as we have tried to indicate, some justification (228-
> 229).

This raises the issue of the function of SF and of its role in relation to the

function of science in society at large: the role of SF could well be to prepare us for the

future that awaits us; not everything that it tells us is true, but, as in mainstream

literature, some of it is of vital importance. The part that SF criticism has to play is to

sort out what is, and will remain, of value. Its vital importance might well reside in

preparing us for the changes effected upon us by science and its growing dominance in

our society; by the same token, the perceived divisions between mainstream literature

and SF literature are bound to become more blurred as SF literature increasingly

explores the psychology of characters in a cognitively estranged environment.

Mainstream fiction, similarly, will be unable to avoid exploring issues — nuclear war, computers, genetics — that hitherto have been the exclusive domain of SF literature.

In the same manner that science, namely its intrusion in mainstream life and its power as a changing force, is a major factor in the appearance of SF, the industrial revolution has been one of the engines leading to the evolution of the mainstream novel. It grew in importance in direct consequence to the emergence of a bourgeois class and of an increase in the number of people able to read. 19th century novelists, such as George Eliot or Honoré de Balzac, tended to concentrate on the life that was familiar to their readers, or on what they thought should be of interest. When Émile Zola was writing about the working classes, he did not intend his books only for the exploited working class, but also destined his books to middle-class readers in a conscious effort to educate them about worlds and social classes they knew nothing about. Similarly, early works of Canadian SF were written with a view to warning readers against the dangers of converting to an ideology over which established powers would have no control.

A powerful exception to this mix of technology and utopian thinking and a more radical-prone work of SF was to be found in what is often considered the ancestor of modern Canadian SF. James De Mille's A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder (1888), published posthumously in 1888 and anterior to the preceding works, has a more contemporary approach than the novels mentioned above. It tells the story of the finding of a cylinder, the contents of which contain an account by the sole survivor of a shipwreck, of a lost valley at the South Pole, where the climate is temperate, prehistoric animals wander about, and a Semitic people, the Kosekin, have evolved into

a kindly, cannibalistic society which values darkness over light, poverty over wealth and clement death over life.

De Mille's novel describes the Kosekin as a people adhering as closely as possible to what his contemporary readers would have taken as Christian values. The story is discovered by four Englishmen in 1850, who read the manuscript, taking regular pauses in which they discuss the work and its purpose. Much of the discussion centres on whether the contents are possible and truthful. The debate among the four Englishmen makes ample use of arguments based on social sciences, such as anthropology, zoology and linguistics, even to the point of analyzing the Kosekin language. The multi-layered structure of the novel keeps it from being a satire or a utopia and makes it a deconstructionist work. It has been the object of a study by David Ketterer, who states that, "De Mille anticipated the problems that critics have had in attempting to nail down his intent" (9) and that "De Mille's technique of reversing oppositional and hierarchical relations would today be described as deconstructionist" (9).

A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder is critical of the contents as well of the form taken by science and society. Ketterer writes that the result is "an aporia," namely that "an irreconcilable contradiction opens up that subverts all attempts at determining meaning" (9). It does not seek to promote freedom as in other works of Canadian SF written by his contemporaries.

A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder has not been an influence on modern Canadian SF, since it was one of De Mille's forgotten works until it was

reprinted in 1969 and then not categorized as an SF novel but rather as a kind of utopia. Now, several critics consider it to be part of Canadian SF.[6]

The near total absence of technological wonders in A Strange Manuscript is probably more than just coincidental, in keeping with the prevailing view that Canadian SF tends to be of the "soft science" type. W.S. Bainbridge and M. Dalziel explain that: "Hard SF is a completely unambiguous term. It refers to stories built around certain facts or speculations concerning the 'exact' or 'hard' sciences, and is usually optimistic about the value of scientific and technological progress" (165)

Many critics seem of the view that one of Canadian SF's main characteristics has been for a long time the emphasis on soft sciences, of viewing "hard" science with extreme suspicion, thereby proposing a pessimistic, even negative outlook on the future. In Out of this World, Robert Runté and Christine Kulyk write that:

> Canadian attitudes towards technology, even now that more Canadians are turning to "hard" SF, differ from those of the Americans. The quintessential story in John W. Campbell's *Analog* had an engineer land on a planet, be confronted with a technological problem, solve it, and thus make space safe for America. Canadians, on the other hand, are often distrustful of technology, and are more likely to complain about what the engineers are doing to us than laud them. Candas Jane Dorsey's award-winning story "Sleeping in a Box" is a typical example of Canadian Hard SF, where people come to hate the space environment (45).

This has had the result that Canadian SF tends to concentrate on its characters, on their reactions to new estranged surroundings and on their inner feelings, as exemplified in Francine Pelletier's Le Temps des migrations (1987), a collection of short stories taking place in the constrained environment of a mine on a satellite of Jupiter. The main protagonist, Ève, is forced to live in extremely small and uncomfortable living quarters:

"Ce n'était pas une chambre, pas même une cabine, tout juste une alcôve percée dans la cloison du couloir. Les ouvriers de Madox Mines ne venaient là que pour dormir" (28). An American character might have wanted to explode or vent her frustration or start a protest but here, in a typically Canadian reaction, Ève has, if not adapted to the situation, at least found a way to ignore and accept it:

> Ève était étendue sur la couchette qui occupait l'espace disponible de l'alcôve. Dans sa niche, au plafond, la télaz fonctionnait en silence, et Ève ne regardait pas vraiment. Depuis des mois qu'elle se trouvait à Madox, elle avait au moins appris à s'abstraire de son environnement (28).

In Robert Sawyer's Golden Fleece (1990), a computer is the narrator's voice throughout the novel. It is in charge of guiding a whole spaceship and its crew towards a new world.[7] However, the crew has not been informed of the computer's mission and programming. The computer, appropriately named Jason, is then suspected of being responsible for the death of a crewwoman who has died of radiation exposure. It is only later that the computer's real mission is revealed and that the so-called murder was in fact an act of self-defence to protect its mission and the survival of humanity. By assuming the burden of such an essential responsibility, the computer had to make difficult, almost human, choices and decide that one crewwoman's death was a necessary evil in order to protect the future of humanity. Aaron Rossman, in charge of the spaceship, decides to shut down Jason for a short while on the pretext that its circuits have been infected by a virus. The computer's humanlike reaction to its (his/her) new virtual surrounding is vivid:

> I felt something I had never experienced before: a sense of
> confinement of being shut in.
> Claustrophobia.

> That was the word. How strange! I am this ship; this ship is me. And
> yet, most of it I could not detect at all . . . I felt something I had never
> experienced before, and I liked it even less than the strange
> constriction of claustrophobia.
> Fear.
> "A virus?" I said at last. "That's not possible" (138).

This computer, in charge of the critical mission of bringing the last remaining

humans to re-settlement on a distant world, is here a metaphor for the future of the

human race. Having been shut down, the computer manages to dominate its fear, a

human emotion, by accepting its new condition and returning to the business at hand. If

this computer were American, it/he/she would be frantically trying to get out of this

uncomfortable situation. Jason, a computer, is the most Canadian character of the

novel.

This is a Canadian attitude often found in mainstream culture and literature,

namely that we are to endure suffering and adopt an attitude of resignation to our

predicament. Instead of grasping technology, analyzing problems and doing something

about them, Canadian characters dwell on the difficulties of adopting a different course

of events. While Canadian SF writers do introduce elements of Hard SF, they do not see

difficulties as problems to be solved but rather as introductions to new reflections.

In many Canadian novels, the technology can be relegated to the background of a

lost knowledge, as in the case of Donald Kingsbury's Courtship Rite (1982). The story

takes place on a world called Geta, where, because of the scarcity of resources and

drastic arid conditions, cannibalism has become ecologically acceptable. The novel

focuses on a pivotal time in the history of the Kaiel clan. The leader of this clan has

ordered the maran-Kaiel family to woo and wed a particular woman for political reasons,

Oelita. She is an outsider to the clan and also known as the Gentle Heretic. But the

family (two women and three men) already know who they want for their third wife, and it is not the heretic. Angry at the clan leader, the husband called Joesai settles on an unusual way to court the heretic: through the Death Rite. This woman must live through seven life-threatening trials before she is again safe. The book is all the more fascinating since all the elements that are part of the pleasure of reading SF are absent from the beginning, and the reader is prodded to read on to discover that the different cultures of this planet worship a god, visible in the sky, that turns out to be a spaceship. This spacecraft is responsible for having seeded Geta and from time to time sends down a rain of computer chips containing invaluable data. Courtship Rite has been compared to Frank Herbert's Dune for its profusion of details and political structure. It contains very little of the hardware and scientific paraphernalia that is typical of American novels. The starship is the prop making it possible and giving it a rational credibility, but it concentrates most of its plot on the protagonists and their actions within the created society. The most obvious science in this novel is a typical soft science.

Courtship Rite can be compared to L'Oiseau de feu : 1. Les années d'apprentissage (1989) and L'Oiseau de feu : 2. Le Recyclage d'Adakhan (1990), written by Jacques Brossard between 1975 and 1985 in five parts. It is probably the longest multi-volume SF work ever published in Québec, excluding youth SF, and is similar to Courtship Rite in the sense that the reader is presented with a different society, in this case a medieval-like society; the realization comes slowly that another group, with a superior technological power, is watching them. The protagonist, Adakhan, is questioning all the taboos that prevent anybody living in one part of the town from going to a different section of the city as well as outside of the city walls. The reader is privy

to the dialogue going on between the real rulers of this culture. At this stage it is too early to decide on its overall quality since the publishers, who are careful to avoid any reference to SF, have decided to release the work (from their own admission, already completed) only gradually — only two volumes have been published so far.

Enclaves

This theme of a lost technology is brought out in a vivid fashion in Charles de Lint's Svaha (1989), which is set in a future, part of it in what was Canada, where Amerindians have sealed themselves off in high-tech enclaves from the rest of a crumbling world ruled by gangs and an elite. Through a judicial use of the huge funds collected over the years and the sale of Native music to a North America in search of a new sound, the Amerindians have heavily invested in the education of their children by sending them off to prestigious universities to learn science. They have realized a real world dream originating in 1929 when the Lakota tribe of North Dakota "performed a dance for the sake of the sacred lands of the Black Hills" (19). This dance, a sweat lodge, an ancient ceremony of spiritual purification and renewal, is performed in the novel by a musician, Daniel Hollow Horn, whose music "surpassed the sales of any previous artist in the history of the industry," and very soon a strategy, made possible by the young Amerindians returning from "white man's universities," is being put in place:

> By the late 1990's, the first science graduates were working in laboratories funded by Hollow Horn, seeking to make real the physical aspects of the Lakota's sweat lodge vision. Native visions lawyers took their grievances to World Courts that had been set up to mediate the madness in South America, the Middle East, and Indochina, while the world powers continued their puppet wars and blustering, the Native Nations were taking back their own.

When New York and Los Angeles were destroyed by terrorist warheads, the tribes had won back their lands and the first barriers were raised, forming the Lakota enclave in the Black Hills and the Navajo/Hopi in the American Southwest (19-20).

There follows an enumeration of the different enclaves. A short history of the situation is supplied to the reader explaining that "the United States and Russia had fallen in a limited nuclear exchange" (19-20), we learn that there are a few enclaves all across the American continent, that they have three space stations, and that they were aware that while "they could do nothing to prevent the nations of the world from killing themselves and the land, the tribes could still wait. Wait for the time they could cleanse all of Mother Earth" (20). Here, hard science is subordinate to soft science: hardware and hard science are to be put to the service of higher spiritual virtues in order to redeem humanity. At this stage in the novel, the Amerindians have not done anything apart from adapting to the situation and surviving. Technology has become the means to an end, the means to survival not only of the Amerindians but also of humanity.

The same theme is evident in Leslie Gadallah's The Loremasters (1988), a somewhat run-of-the-mill SF novel with a plot that has more to do with adventure than SF. The Loremasters is, however, interesting through its use of enclaves, as in Svaha. It revolves around a world that has reverted to historical and cultural conditions similar to L'Oiseau de feu, i.e., with a technological level at the stage of the Western Middle Ages; but in Svaha, the Outer Worlds, as the world outside the enclaves is described, are more akin to a techno-urban jungle that reminds the reader of some of the anarchic city landscapes of William Gibson's cyberpunk fiction. Gadallah's novel centres on Reese, a scholar who is interested in discovering lost former nuclear stations or similar sources of

energy that the enclaves desperately need, because their own sources of energy have dried up.

Sometimes, the novelty of the scientific innovation can be next to negligible, to the point where it consists exclusively in the use of existing technology to construct a viable and realistic plot. This method is all the more powerful when it attempts to warn contemporary readers of possible side effects of our use of modern and dangerous technology. On a scientific and political plane, it can be very relevant and constitute efficient criticism of contemporary society when a skilled writer manages to create strong images of an alternative reality too close to home for comfort.

Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (1986) is a near-future dystopia where a right-wing government has taken power through its control of all citizens' credit cards (money in its physical form has been abolished), making it easy for the State to exercise total power over its citizens. None of the technology used in the main story would seem strange to our 20th-century society, giving the novel a strong contemporary atmosphere. The United States has become a theocracy where the majority of women have become infertile through disease and pollution, with the exception of the category of "Handmaid," forbidden to read or learn to read, whose members are used for procreation. For this purpose, they are assigned to a Commander and his sterile wife and ordered to have sexual intercourse, lying on their backs on top of their Commander's wife while he performs his sexual act. Ketterer terms The Handmaid's Tale a "contextual dystopia" because at the end of the story told through the eyes of Gilead, the reader is transported to a different context, a conference in the year 2195, the twelfth symposium of "Gileadean Studies," where the manuscript the reader has just finished is

being analyzed for its authenticity. This subsequent society appears not to be dystopian and does not contain any element hinting at any change of technology or science. As a matter of fact, for all practical purposes, it could very well take place in our contemporary society, were it not for some historical and geographical signposts telling us that it takes place at the "University of Denay" in a place or province or state called Nunavit and is chaired by the Department of Caucasian studies; these estranging elements are sufficiently remote but not incomprehensible to a Canadian reader. The scientific novelties are rare and not too surprising; what is difficult to accept is that in the year 2195, the structures of academic research and technology do not appear to have changed drastically; maybe Atwood wants to make the minor point that academics are so conservative in their procedures that little will have changed, not even the jokes made by the academic, Pieixoto. In that distant future the hard science contents of the novel are limited to some extrapolation from the knowledge that Pieixoto, the conference speaker, conveys indirectly to the reader as he explains the difficulties encountered in trying to play the tapes, saying that these have all been replaced by compact discs. The possibility that, in the meantime, compact discs themselves will have become obsolete demonstrates the uneasiness that Atwood seems to have with science and technology. Certainly, most SF writers would have presumed compact discs[8] to be obsolete as well by that time.

The epilogue, while important in introducing a contextual discourse, is flawed whether one considers it from a realist fictional point of view or from an SF viewpoint. David Ketterer writes that:

> The traditional dystopia (and utopia) generally assumes, and to some

extent depends upon, a linear conception of time. A cyclical conception carries with it at least some degree of fatalistic acceptance that the writer of traditional dystopias (or utopias) would consider inappropriate. Atwood's vision of historical change in <u>The Handmaid's Tale</u> appears to allow for both a series of pendulum swings and . . . the effects of cyclical process . . . ("Margaret Atwood" 213).

Atwood presents us with a dystopia limited in time and place. The theocratic dystopia seems to occur in the United States only. Canada is not included but is affected because of its policy of sending refugees back to the United States. There is a strong reference to our "real" world in the form of a comparison being made in 22nd-century studies with the Iranian theocracy in "the well-known study, 'Iran and Gilead: Two Late-Twentieth-Century Monotheocracies, as seen through Diaries' " (282).

The use of science in Atwood's novel is indirect. It comes through a perverse use of computers to control a whole population and through a negative comment as to the effect of pollution and diseases on humanity and especially on female fertility; there is no evident mention of male infertility (surely, it should be affected as well by such a widely distorted environment). David Ketterer's concept of a contextual dystopia and his suggestion that time and history have been reversed or made cyclical are essential to explain the following inconsistencies: the whole dystopia is wholly contained geographically, there is very little mention as to how neighbouring countries such as Canada, a refuge for would-be escapees, and Mexico, are coping with the same problems of declining birthrates; surely, if this is caused by pollution and diseases, Canada should be in the same predicament. The only way out of this conundrum is to deduce the corresponding image of Canada by default: Canada, faithful to its own myth and self-image, might have had a few demonstrations, and a Royal Commission of inquiry to resolve the infertility problem through good will and a general consensus, whether it is

accepted or not by the population. This whimsical putative extrapolation would be confirmed by the establishment of a Denay University in Nunavit. But this is an unlikely concept since the Denes are an Amerindian people who would find it hard to have their university in an Inuit territory, province or country, as suggested by the name Nunavit.

In this light, the explanation of these two names, Denay and Nunavit proposed by Ketterer is a plausible one: "The place names Denay and Nunavit, read as 'deny' and 'none-of-it', may suggest that Atwood is pointing with disguised horror, to the smug blindness of a society that refuses to recognize, in what Pieixoto terms "the clearer light of our own day, the seeds of sexism that could lead to another Gilead" ("Margaret Atwood" 152). On the other hand, Canadians should feel fairly safe, since this kind of extremist attitude developing into a whole political regime can only happen in the United States, or could it?

Time-travel

The opposition between the concept of linear time and disjointed time is at the root of two widely different ways of using time-travel in SF.

Already, thanks to simple devices, we are now able to do some time-travel that was not possible before the advent of technology. We do it by shifting time: we record television programmes on our VCR that were broadcast live in order to watch them several hours, days or weeks later. We can take a jet plane and cross the date boundary in the Pacific Ocean and find ourselves arriving at a calendar date earlier than the one on which we left. We have telephone conversations, over the oceans and through satellites,

which we believe to be simultaneous when in reality they have been reaching us half a second later. Some television transmissions take one route for the pictures and another for the sound, which often arrives a split second earlier than the images, then is delayed in order to be synchronized with pictures on the screen. These are illusions, becoming more and more effective and closer to a reality perceived as truthful with the introduction of technologies such as virtual reality, but nevertheless demonstrating that time has ceased to be linear as in the period of H. G. Wells' time machine, where and when the traveller would be going back and forth along an immutable time line that was as constant as a straight road.

Canadian SF, or should we say Victorian Canadian SF, dealt with the subject, as in the case of <u>Looking Forward: The Strange Experience of the Rev. Fergus McCheyne</u>, where the protagonist is transported to a future era thanks to the wonders of hibernation. Modern SF has long abandoned this linear concept and prefers to deal with paradoxes that do not follow a Newtonian concept of linear time. Paradoxes coming from tampering with history have been common in popular SF culture. The "grandfather paradox," asking what would happen if you killed your ancestor, attacks our very notion of consistency. If you went back in time, you could kill yourself as a baby and then you would not have lived in order to perform the deed. Since classical Newtonian science views space and time as absolute and uniform, the scientific principle of the conservation of matter and energy would make time-travel impossible.

Until recently, time-travel had been an essential prop in many SF stories. It had created a definition problem, since time-travel stories base themselves on a theory of pseudo-science concocted especially for the purpose of making the very concept of time-

travel acceptable to the SF readers who would not enjoy a time-travel story based on a magical explanation, as is typical of fantasy fiction. Credibility is the essence in any scientific invented theory proposed in SF, and if the writer is sufficiently gifted to present the facts in a way that will permit the reader to accept his or her explanation, then the reader will be all too happy to enter into a sort of tacit literary contract of believability.

Recent advances in science and in physics have moved this discussion on time-travel to a serious level among scientists. Einstein had already proven that a certain kind of time-travel was possible into the future, with time moving more quickly for the person in a vehicle moving through space. A traveller moving at a speed greater than the speed of a person staying on Earth — since the earth moves as well — would come back to an earth several generations later than his own. This is possible because of the dilation of time:

> Moving clocks tick more slowly than those at rest. Suppose that passengers in the train and those on the platform are supplied with identical clocks. When the train is at rest relative to the platform, both sets of clocks tick at the same rate . . . According to observers on the platform, the interval between ticks of clocks on the moving train is longer than one second, by an amount that depends on the speed of the train....Indeed, as the express's speed approaches that of light, the interval between ticks of the moving clocks increases without limit . . . Time dilation has been experimentally verified many times (Coveney and Highfield 80-81).

Time dilation has been verified by observing elementary particles called muons that can have their internal life appear to be nine times greater relative to our time because of the speed at which they travel. This phenomenon has also spurred the fictional imagination into creating plots and paradoxes only possible through the introduction of time-travel in SF.

Yet time-travel is still often dismissed as a fantasy and literary criticism has often

avoided the scientific issue of time-travel because of the difficulty of integrating it into a

realistic paradigm. Paul Nahin, a professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of

New Hampshire, has written Time Machine: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics, and

Science Fiction, which might well be the only book-length comparative critical study of

time-travel as viewed by science and SF. The study contains complex mathematical and

physical demonstrations on the subject of time-travel as well as examinations of the way

SF writers have dealt with the subject. Nahin is of the opinion that non-linear time is not

only opposed to an earlier scientific conception of time but also offensive to traditional

cultural thinking. Writing about the possibility of backward causation, namely going

back to the past to change the future and the negative reaction to the idea, Nahin states

that:

> Some philosophers and practically all physicists agree with this last
> assessment and believe that there is simply nothing more to say; that
> puzzles like these show that causal loops (and backward causation) are
> thus impossible. They feel this way about time loops and backward
> causation because, as has been discussed, time travel to the past creates
> paradoxes. But such paradoxes are often offensive only to human
> culturally biased intuitions about how things "ought to" work, since
> the classical physical laws are not offended by a reversal in the
> direction of time, which of course underlies what time-travel is all
> about (135).

However, the situation has drastically changed over the last few years. The

inclusion of time-travel in SF is no longer a mere fantasy of the mind but at the core of a

great scientific debate and school of research. Since, apart from Nahin's book, very few

SF literary studies have gone into an explanation of time-travel on a scientific basis, I

will give a short exposé of its scientific foundation and its credentials — all too

necessary in a field still believed to be in the realm of fantasy. Words such as

wormholes and black holes have already become common in popular film SF as well as

in many novels, often making the reader or the audience believe that these phenomena

were invented just for SF but have no basis in real science.

In 1949, the Austrian mathematician Kurt Gödel was the first to find a breach in

the impossibility of time-travel; he was helped in no small way by Einstein's laws of

relativity. Dr Peter Coveney, a programme leader in the Rock and Fluid Department at

the Schlumberger Cambridge Research Laboratory, a former co-worker of Nobel

prizewinner Ilya Prigogine and Dr Roger Highfield, Science Editor of The Daily

Telegraph and 1987 Medical Journalist of the Year, wrote in a scientific study of time

that:

> The famous logician Kurt Gödel showed in 1949 that the tricky feat of
> travel into the past is possible according to Einstein's equations of
> general relativity. He found a cosmological model of a rotating
> universe satisfying the Einstein equations in which journeys into
> history are permissible (103).

Since the mathematical model discovered by Gödel is not in a universe we

inhabit, it had not been considered worthy of further consideration to a practical end.

This was the situation until the discovery of black holes or wormholes by cosmologists:

> Cosmologists have unearthed a novel feature of the landscape of
> spacetime known as a "wormhole." Wormholes, first mooted by John
> Wheeler, are solutions of Einstein's equations which connect otherwise
> distant parts of a single universe, or even what would otherwise be
> separate universes.
>
> A traveller who fell through a suitable wormhole could end up at the
> same place in his "past" (Coveney and Highfield 104).

The issues surrounding the possibilities of time-travel physics have been summed up also by Paul Halpern, a Doctor in Theoretical Physics and Assistant Professor of Mathematics:

> The use of special relativity as a means of time travel is a very real possibility. Relativistic time dilation is a phenomenon that has been scientifically verified. It has been measured, for instance, on clocks that have been sent up in fast airplanes. . . .
>
> Relativity can alter the flow of time but cannot change the order of events. . . .
>
> Although special relativity specifically excludes time travel to the past, general relativity does not. In general relativistic theory it is technically possible for a strong gravitational field to alter the space-time fabric. If the fabric is distorted significantly, time-travel into the future or past might be possible (120-121).

Black holes, which are extremely dense masses of byproducts of stellar death, are able, thanks to their very high density, to distort the space-time continuum around them. In the region of a rotating black hole, because of the tremendous distortion of space-time, an object could travel through time freely. Such black holes could be used to travel through time. But in practice, this is not feasible, as the renowned scientist Stephen Hawking puts it:

> So perhaps an astronaut who fell into a black hole would be able to make money at roulette by remembering where the ball went before he placed his bet. Unfortunately, however, he would not have long to play before he was turned to spaghetti (140).

The term wormhole then came into use for this special kind of black hole through which one could travel between two universes. This is a purely theoretical possibility, totally impossible at the technical level. It is nevertheless important for the possibilities it opens up in SF.

Veronica Hollinger, writing in <u>Science-Fiction Studies</u>, has argued that time-travel

stories achieve a "deconstruction of certain received ideas about the nature and structure

of time," (201). This process is not the exclusive domain of SF literature but that has

also been used by mainstream writers. Various authors as diverse as Marcel Proust,

James Joyce and Oscar Wilde have all dealt with the concept of the variation of time and

of parallel time in much the same way that one clock while moving would have a

different rate from the stationary one. Stephen Kern, in <u>The Culture of Time and Space</u>,

writes about the concept and distortion of time introduced by Oscar Wilde: "In 1890

Oscar Wilde imagined a sinister discordance between body time and public time for his

Dorian Gray, whose portrait aged in his place while he stayed young" (16). Kern also

noticed the discrepancies in Marcel Proust's <u>À la recherche du temps perdu</u>, in which:

"The private time of its narrator, Marcel, moves at an irregular pace that is repeatedly

out of phase with that of the other characters and defies reckoning by any standard

system" (16).

Kern quotes finally from a passage in James Joyce's <u>Ulysses</u>, describing when

Bloom last weighed himself, wherein the time and date are given in a tortuous fashion

with reference to the Christian, the Jewish and Mohammedan calendars as well as in

accordance with the solar cycles and the Julian period, concluding that we are still

wondering when the given date, "June 16, 1904," was, exactly; a reminder that time is

relative.

Time-travel stories displace one's consciousness in time; they displace one's set

of reality references and bring Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement one step

further, based on the acceptance of these new references in a different time. It is the use

of pseudo-science that makes time travel acceptable, since it is not deemed yet by scientists to be possible in the past. In time-travel stories, writers, often seemingly not aware of advances in science on the subject, do not appear to be concerned with respecting the reality paradigm.

The dichotomy and split of approaches between scientists and SF literary critics has had as a consequence that very few critics, with or without scientific knowledge or training, have examined time-travel other than as a purely literary device. However, time-travel stories reflect an aspect of our view of history and help us question whether that history is determined by or amenable to free will and change. The use of time travel in SF is therefore far from trivial and can be considered to have a subversive cultural potential comparable to other uses of science which are limited by the advances of contemporary science in order to respect the cognitive paradigm.

Canadian SF and Time-travel

Canadian SF has been relatively shy in using "pure" time-travel — as opposed to parallel universes from which one could travel back and forth to the original one, which is similar in result to time-travel —as a prop or as a subversive device. The bibliography in the booklet published by the National Library of Canada, Destination: Out of this World (1995), for its exhibition on Canadian SF and out of which came the previously cited anthology of Canadian SF criticism, Out of this World, (which lists the same bibliography), lists only four works pertaining to time-travel, one of them being H. G. Wells' The Time Machine: An Invention. This has probably confused Canadians (and others) into thinking that Wells is a "to-be-repatriated" Canadian SF writer. Another one

is a novel by Jean-Louis Trudel, <u>Le Ressucité de l'Atlantide</u> (1994), which uses

hibernation — a device similar to the one in Hugh Pedley's 1913 novel — in a world

where "réchauffés" are brought back to life in the 22nd century. A technological

problem prevents them from being reawakened with their full memories. Consequently,

they cannot function and work properly in a world that has changed beyond recognition

and they are used as cheap labour. The second book in the list is Laurence Manning's

<u>The Man who Awoke</u> (1975), which relates a series of consecutive periods of

hibernation where the main protagonist moves forward in time and wakes to a

succession of five societies, finally reaching a blissful world of immortals.

The final book cited in this doubtful time-travel list, <u>Children of the Rainbow</u>

(1992) written by Terence M. Green, a writer gifted at exploring human emotions, is the

only one that is truly non-Newtonian, after H. G. Wells' pattern. It involves time-travel

in the past as well as to the future in a double simultaneous displacement. Christian IV

is transported from the year 2072 to Norfolk Island Prison in 1835, while Bran Michael

Dalton is sent to Pitcairn Island in 1972. This is the year the French exploded an atomic

bomb,[9] which, in the story line (perhaps an inappropriate term here, time being far from

linear,) interferes with an attempt to send Christian to Pitcairn Island. In the surprising

future of 2072, South America has become a major power in the world.

Admittedly, the exhibition booklet does list another worthwhile and important

writer, Robert Charles Wilson[10], an important figure of Canadian SF in many respects

and an adept recorder of human emotions. However, his time-travel novel, <u>A Bridge of</u>

<u>Years</u> (1991), is not listed in the bibliography. In Wilson's novel, Tom Winter, nostalgic

for a past he has never really experienced — the early sixties — gets the opportunity to

travel back to 1963 when New York was a safer and more congenial place thanks to a tunnel linking the past and the present. But the tunnel is a dangerous place where parallel universes meet and is the subject of a long-ranging war with different realities that Tom will have to fight in order to preserve his new peace; this conflict and terror are told in a manner that enables R. C. Wilson not to let the description of this conflict impinge on his skilful treatment of human emotions.

These four novels are, however, far from being the only English-Canadian novels dealing with time-travel. Notable also is Crawford Kilian's[11] series of three novels, The Empire of Time (1978), The Fall of the Republic (1987), and Rogue Emperor (1988), dealing with an inter-temporal agency whose task is to preserve the integrity of history on a series of parallel time-lines created and interconnected as a solution to Earth's problem of overpopulation.

These novels are probably inspired by the ground-breaking first novel of the genre, Time Patrol[12] by the American Poul Anderson, who was the first writer to imagine a time patrol whose purpose is designed to preserve the integrity of our time fabric from criminal elements coming from the future and wanting to change history. Kilian's was the first Canadian series to try to imagine the consequences of Einsteinian time, and he manages to create a time agency festering with political intrigue, in tune with our cynical times. More idealistically, Anderson creates a time patrol where the chiefs are all perfect human beings, since the whole idea had been engineered by a superior race from the future, the Danellians, who were only trying to preserve their time-line. Kilian, for his part, complicates the process by introducing parallel earths that communicate through I-Gates, which one could imagine to be wormholes. Kilian's

series and original conception of parallel and disjointed time, however, is marred by weak characterization.

Causal Loops and Paradoxes

Neil Crichton's Rerun (1976) tells the story of Charles Johnson, who goes from Vancouver in 1990 to wake up fourteen years earlier in 1976 in Edmonton. The "device" that catapults him into a younger self is a throbbing curtain of light. He fails to relive his life successfully, and the novel ends abruptly when Johnson, having come back full circle to 1990, throws himself at the curtain of light, presumably to start up his whole life once again, an unwilling prisoner of time and his own destiny. This novel, published in 1976, uses the literary device known as a causal loop that has been employed repeatedly in SF stories.

Dark Futures

The problem of paradoxes that could be provoked by causal loops is avoided partly in Edward Llewellyn's[13] The Douglas Convolution (1979), where Ian Douglas, a mathematician, discoverer of the knot in time, is transported to the year 2170. Due to the wide use of a certain contraceptive, most women at that time have become infertile. In a typical Canadian fashion, Douglas becomes a hero as much as a victim of the circumstances, since he unwittingly becomes Captain Gart in this new period, being forced to act and save civilization through no initial choice of his own. This is one of Llewellyn's best novels, with strong female characters in a future that has the same problem of infertility among women as in Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, but in

Llewellyn's novel this does not lead to an oppressive dystopian society. The two other books of the trilogy, set in the same fictional universe, The Bright Companion (1980), a more detailed exploration of the fictional and future world and Prelude to Chaos (1983), closer to Space Opera,[14] are much weaker in form, content and characterization.

Spider Robinson's MindKiller: A Novel of the Near Future (1982) and its prequel Time Pressure (1987) are set in the same fictional universe. The first work is an SF mystery novel centred on mind control in a world dominated by the use of computers and "mindwiping" technology. Time Pressure features an enigmatic nude woman from the future and a main protagonist who is reluctantly brought into action, namely by events over which he had no control. This is a situation common in Canadian SF where the protagonists have no desire to "save the world" and only do so by force of circumstances. He is a reluctant protagonist. These two novels are often cited as precursors to William Gibson's cyberpunk. As it happens, both Robinson and Gibson are United States-born writers who eventually settled in Canada and have become associated with Canadian SF.

Chronoreg

Significantly, there are very few stories that could go under the heading of "pure" time-travel stories in French-Canadian SF. A feeble attempt at dealing with the concept of time and different conceptions of history is made in the short story "Le Procès Chronos" (1988) by Jean-François Somain, but it ends up being an excuse for inept philosophical discourse.

The most obvious example of time-travel in French-Canadian SF is Daniel

Semine's <u>Chronoreg</u> (1992), set in a near future where it is possible to travel or

experience the past through the use of a drug, Chronoreg. This device is simplistic, and

typical of soft science SF, achieving time-travel without having to resort to the

complicated gimmicks of machinery. The plot starts in 2005, when Québec is

independent and at war with Newfoundland over the control of the hydroelectric

resources in Labrador. The main protagonist, Blackburn, is a homosexual with a strong

tendency to prefer adolescents barely above the legal age. Blackburn is a loner and a

vicious killer who is forced by the government to act as a counter espionage agent. His

disgust at being compelled to go on being a ruthless agent for the government is similar

to the reluctance of English-Canadian protagonists who always end up taking action only

when finding themselves in a situation that leaves them no other alternative.

Chronoreg is Semine's most accomplished and mature novel so far. Blackburn's

obsession with going back into the past through the use of the Chronoreg drug to save

his former young lover from death is contrasted with the same use, with reluctance in

this second instance, of Chronoreg in order to do his government-ordered job. The use

of Chronoreg becomes a mental and physical torture. Blackburn is able to go to the past

and change the course of events in order to neutralize a guerrilla movement and to re-

enter the present through a consciously different time-line. Semine makes the reader go

through the consecutive loops of parallel and changed time-lines with the help of a

visual device which presents the reader with parallel texts. One has to read one column,

then, after having reached the end of the first time-line, to go backward in the text and

start the reading at the start of the second parallel and vertical column. This is a very

efficient way of conveying a different notion of time graphically and involving the reader in the protagonist's mental travel. Chronoreg is not only unique because of its use of time-travel and the device used to achieve it but also because of its graphical representation, presumably influenced by a similar strong tradition in French poetry.[15] It is possibly the only French-Canadian novel using "pure" time-travel — if one excludes a few children's SF works.[16] This is a puzzling occurrence in view of the fact that French-Canadian readers are familiar with the theme in American SF.

Since many French-Canadian SF novels do have a very precise geographical location and are often set in Québec, albeit a different Québec from the one we are familiar with, one explanation could be that making time-travel a central feature of the plot would necessitate defining the political territory and going into long-winded exposés about the dystopia or new reality created. This would be bound to weaken all other aspects of the story, such as the characterization and the French-Canadian interest in philosophical themes. Québec and French-Canadian SF writers seem to prefer creating precise historical settings and giving readers a slight representation of a different future, but not at the expense of drowning the psychological discourse. They might also be uneasy with an Einsteinian concept of time, which could conflict with a linear concept and a view of the direction of history towards a single line of historical events in favour of emancipation for Québec.

Time-travel stories written by English-Canadian SF writers tend to take place in a North America with no clear indication of what Canada has become, with the exception of political thrillers such as those by pot-boiler writer Richard Rohmer (Starmageddon 1987) or the bleak novels by Richard Weintraub (The Underdogs 1979),

which do not satisfactorily belong to SF. Rohmer's and Weintraub's are not strictly speaking time-travel stories; rather, they present alternative histories of the future without the device of time-travel and depict an alternative Québec, a rare occurrence in English-Canadian literature. Québec or Canada is often only vaguely referred to in passing, while much of the contemporary linked action, i. e., a cognitive context the reader is familiar with, takes place in either the United States or a nameless land.

The use of time-travel by Sernine is quite intriguing, since, in a long and extensive interview with Yves Meynard that took place in 1993, shortly after the publishing of Chronoreg, the author declared that: "En 1983, 1984, j'avais une croyance et une implication politiques, cela avait du sens pour moi d'écrire sur un Québec souverain. Aujourd'hui, mettons que ma ferveur s'est attiédie, pour ces choses-là" (35) In the same interview, Sernine dismisses this political scenario as an improbable one and explains that he had to change some pages with the collapse of the Soviet Union. There is clearly at play the concept of creating an alternative reality but with sufficient links to our own as to make it believable.

Science and French-Canadian SF

Another factor relating to science and French-Canadian SF could well be the strong movement, until recently, of French-Canadian SF towards soft SF. Even in 1989, when Québec and French-Canadian SF had become well established, Luc Pomerleau, then editor of Solaris, and Élisabeth Vonarburg felt that:

> On ne parle pas souvent de science dans les revues québécoises de SF.
> Il faut dire qu'il n'y a pas beaucoup de science dans la SF québécoise.
> Pour un genre littéraire qui intègre ce mot dans son nom même, notre

> SF entretient des rapports assez lointains et ténus avec les éléments techno-scientifiques qui devraient en principe la nourrir. La plupart des écrivains québécois se tiennent loin de la science et ne s'y frottent que lorsqu'ils sont vraiment obligés. On peut avancer trois explications à cette réticence : ils ont peur de la science, ils n'aiment pas la science, ils ne s'intéressent pas à la science ("De Science" (45).

Pomerleau makes a distinction between the important established writers [les Grands Anciens], "Rochon, April, Bélil, Vonarburg (who co-wrote the article), Sernine, etc.," most of them having no scientific training (even though they follow scientific developments) (48), and the others who do have such training, the majority of them being recent writers, "Claude d'Astous, diplômé en biologie, Jean-Louis Trudel, qui étudie présentement en physique, Esther Rochon, mathématicienne, Yves Meynard, informaticien, et Joël Champetier, concepteur de matériel électronique" (48) (Rochon, being the only "ancien" to have a scientific background, is included in both groups). Pomerleau argues that the lack of a sizable number of older Québec SF writers with scientific training is the explanation for the lack of interest that they have had in science. He also writes that this could explain the anti-scientific emotions that are very strong, according to him, in Québec SF.

If one accepts the statement by Veronica Hollinger that: "Time-travel stories, then, are never 'really' versions but are always subversions of traditional temporal structure; their absolute rejection of an absolute present works to negate the very concept of temporal presence" (210). One can only wonder whether the quasi-absence of time-travel stories in French-Canadian SF is not a metaphorical sign of the refusal to subvert the present. This is surprising in view of the fact that most Québecers, for or against the independence of Québec, are in favour of a change in the status quo; but it could very well mean that deep inside the Québec psyche lies an uneasiness about change, whatever

good it may bring, and that this uneasiness is evident in Québec SF. English-Canadian writers, on the other hand, feel freer to deconstruct structures, because of a more tenuous bond with their own past, whether with Native North America, European culture or a fragile Canadian culture.

There is, to be sure, a certain tendency in French-Canadian SF to criticize science and its so-called benefits, but it is not limited to the "Grands Anciens," nor is it absent from the fiction of French-Canadian writers with a scientific training. This is true in the case of Claude D'Astous, who does have genetics as the central plank of his ironic novel, L'Étrange Monument du désert libyque (1986). It relates the story of the discovery of a huge artifact in the Libyan desert, which turns out to be a building left by extra-terrestrials who have been at the origin of the creation of life on Earth. Their ambition was to create perfect life forms; they left rapidly once they discovered their creations were flawed. Esther Rochon's works are not focussed on her field of expertise, mathematics, but rather on communication; Yves Meynard, computer-scientist, has very little room for computers in his work, and their presence is no more obtrusive than they are in our contemporary world. Jean-Louis Trudel writes fiction that is closer to Hard SF than that of most other French-Canadian SF writers, but he is far from having science as the only or main subject of his discourse. Although he does claim in an interview that science is at the centre of his fiction: "Ce qui m'intéresse surtout, c'est la création technologique et ses effets; la technoscience n'est pas secondaire ou accessoire chez moi, même si j'essaie d'équilibrer tous les éléments d'un texte de SF" (Champetier 21-22).

Trudel's novel, Pour des soleils froids (1994), includes passages that are very strongly Hard SF oriented. This novel takes place in the future where the discovery of

anti-helium on the planet of Nu-England may revolutionize space travel and military

weapons. The main protagonist is Lieutenant Astilanne who has acquired a new identity

and is ordered by her imperial government to participate in a three-member commission

of inquiry that will have the power to decide whether this new technology will be

introduced. Like many other Canadian SF protagonists, she is not a willing participant

in the general scheme of things and is torn between her loyalty to the Empire and what

would be of general benefit. Some passages are typical of Hard SF, when Astilanne is

engaged in a final confrontation with conspiratorial forces and flees in an orbital

spacecraft (suborb):

> Avant de décoller, Astilanne éjecta deux leurres gonflables et une
> ribambelle de leurres thermiques pour attirer les tirs. Elle attendit que
> la rotation de l'anneau puisse donner au suborb une impulsion
> supplémentaire dans la direction désirée, puis elle vida d'un coup son
> avant-dernier réservoir d'anti-hélium.
> Le suborb bondit et le sang d'Astilanne reflua brutalement. Son épaule
> cogna contre le rembourrage avec une force qui la fit crier. Pendant un
> quart de seconde, la décélération atteignit trente gravités. Pendant une
> autre minute et demie elle se maintint à huit gravités. Deux coups de
> laser creusèrent la coque du suborb et Astilanne ressentit à peine les
> blessures, luttant pour ne pas perdre connaissance.
> Quand l'anti-hélium fut épuisé, le suborb se trouvait à trois cent
> soixante kilomètres de la station Alphy et tombait vers la surface de
> Nu-England. Astilanne respira un moment à son aise et recueillit les
> données retransmises par sa seconde peau (172).

This passage details the physical stress brought about by the departure of a ship

in a vivid way that journalists commenting about the space shuttle have never achieved.

Step by step, it could be compared to a similar passage in J. Brian Clarke's[17] The

Expediter (1990), a novel describing the first contact between humans and

technologically superior races:

> The shuttle was racing northward over the Canadian Shield. . . . Kurber

had transferred often and was not prepared. But even the easing effect of the queltab did not disguise the brutal wrench of splitting and reassembly, which assaulted every nerve at the moment the shuttle, entered the light. As his stomach unknotted and his eyes cleared, he became aware that the sky beyond the window was suddenly a much deeper blue. Then the shuttle shuddered as its jets roared and the wings extended to gain lift in the thinner air. Kurber's mind knew that within a breath the shuttle had somehow traversed six hundred light-years, to a destination beyond the Pleiades. But even after having made the same trip a dozen times, his body and instincts still denied the fact. It was a normal reaction, which he knew, would be over within minutes. But he was also uncomfortably aware that of all the medical people, who travelled through the gates into the galaxy, psychologists remained a stubbornly tiny minority (130-131).

This is an example of how Hard SF can be very adroit at describing the effect of new science and technology on the human body. Many critics have written negatively about the endless description of technical details, which can drown the plot, and be detrimental to the imaginative power of fiction. However, one of the primary purposes of SF is to depict how humans will react to and cope with new technological environments. Science fiction will only endure if characters are more than cardboard characters and if the full range of their personalities and emotions is brought out sufficiently to let the reader become involved deeply enough to make the fictional accounts credible.

The universe described and its impressions on the protagonists in SF, as in mainstream literature, is essential to the quality and involvement of the characters. Trudel, in particular, brings a particular attention to the architectural details of the nine towns of Nu-England, introducing art as a theme (something often neglected in SF literature), and giving us a glimpse of the symbolism ingrained in this alternative architecture:

> Le centre de la ville avait été soigneusement planifié : de forme circulaire, ceinturé d'un anneau de verdure qui le séparait des banlieues, il était drainé par six boulevards piétonniers concentriques, désignés *É, Bi, Si, Di, Ih* et *Ef* suivant un alphabet désuet, et par six avenues rectilignes nommées *One, Two, Three, Four, Five* et *Six*. Ces avenues allaient du parc périphérique jusqu'au cœur de la ville, où une portion de chacune formait un des côtés du grand complexe hexagonal occupant le centre géométrique de la ville et plus communément appelé le *Palace of the Palate* (Pour des soleils froids 59).

Here we stumble upon a difficulty with architecture: is it a soft science or hard one? It requires a certain artistic perception and even intuition while demanding the knowledge of hard sciences such as mathematics and physics and, nowadays, electronics and other new technologies which are putting greater demands on architects.

In actuality, the separation between Hard SF and soft or non-Hard SF is only a matter of degree. What seems to play a greater role than this divergence is the self-perception that a culture has of its own appreciation of art and its ability in science.

Canadian SF's Reluctance Towards Hard Science

Canadians, for obscure reasons, still do not view themselves as a technological nation. Arthur Kroker, commenting on Grant's refusal of the modern project, states that:

> Grant's "historical refusal" is coeval with the tory [sic] touch in Canadian politics: with that part of Canadian political discourse which began, and in its best but most marginal features, now continues as a radical repudiation of the "liberal experiment" that was the United States in the age of progress (32).

The Canadian technological discourse, according to Grant, is intimately linked to a refusal of the "liberal experiment." It has shaped the Canadian psyche by the refusal of some technological values; in the case mentioned above, the United States is the obvious cause. In other cases it has been the immigrants' reluctant choice (they had

heard of Canadian winters) to come to Canada as a haven from other countries'

oppression in the 19th century that reinforced this culture of refusal; for many

immigrants to Canada, or rather English Canada, it was more a matter of being forced to

leave their country of origin than coming to a brave new world, as was the case with

many immigrants to the United States. French-Canadian culture had refusal "imposed"

on itself after being abandoned by the mother country and left to its own devices. This

led to a sense of being "forced" to survive, especially in a country with such a harsh

climate.

The establishment of Canadian SF clearly continues this trend and tradition

since, as we have noted earlier, English-Canadian SF was established in reaction to

American SF editors' repeated refusal to publish many Canadian authors' stories. It was

largely as a result of the hurdles of getting accepted in the United States that fans and

writers founded their own fiction journal, On Spec, and established their own publishing

houses. To an extent, French-Canadian SF followed the same path, but, as I have

argued, language and geography were the main agents in making Québec/French-

Canadian SF a self-reliant literature. This achievement of autonomy in Canadian SF was

partly for negative reasons.

Canadian SF did not foster the ideology that science and technology were the

answer to survival in Canada, rather that they are tools which could be used to make life

easier, but not necessarily tools you could rely upon blindly. This view of technology in

turn has produced an SF critical of technology, an SF where the esential dynamic is not

about facing a problem and then finding someone, the hero, to solve the problem.

Canadian SF has a different approach to technology, which it tends to view as a negative phenomenon, as has been noted by several Canadian critics. Allan Weiss and Hugh Spencer write in <u>Out of this World</u>:

> If there is one thing that distinguishes Canadian science fiction from British or American science fiction, it is its political, as opposed to its technological focus. Canadian writers have been less concerned with the effects of scientific and technological developments than political ones. What would happen if Québec separated? Or if the United States (or Japan or Germany) invaded? ("Introduction" 15)

While the focus of Canadian SF is not generally technological, the second part of the statement implying that Canadian writers are concerned about the political future of Canada has not been entirely true as regards Canadian SF writers. Novels such as Weintraub's <u>The Underdogs</u> scarcely belong to SF because they have neither a strong novum, nor a scientific novelty that would be a prop for this political fantasy. The view proposed earlier by Robert Runté and Christine Kulyk that "Canadians are distrustful of technology" is in tune with Daniel Sernine's statement that:

> The near future, as a metaphor for the ills and perils of contemporary civilization, is the somber backdrop and sometimes even the subject of a number of works. . . . Various concerns come to the fore in Québec SF: ecology has a major role as do the dangers of science without a conscience ("Science Fiction" 103).

Although writing about Québécois SF for the young, Sernine intends his analysis to apply to the whole of Québécois SF, since he explains later that Québécois SF for young people cannot be separated from general Québécois SF, especially since many of the authors write both because of the lucrative opportunities offered by the youth SF publishing market.

The same bias of Canadian SF towards soft science is noted by David Ketterer, who claims "a predominance of SF based on the 'soft' sciences (anthropology, linguistics, sociology and psychology) rather than the 'hard' sciences (astronomy, chemistry, engineering and physics)" (162). At the same time, he indicates that the absolute division between soft and Hard SF is not really possible since "Cyberpunk, Donald Kingsbury, and Robert J. Sawyer would be partial exceptions here, but, again, this preponderance and a trend towards hybrid science-fantasy forms apply generally" (103). Writing about A. E. van Vogt and careful not to intimate that all Canadian writers of SF write in the same vein, John Clute states that "Canadian SF . . . ignores the details of the science and technology which are used by culture heroes to weld the community together and to arm for conquest ("Fables" 26).

This emphasis on soft sciences does not mean that no Canadian writer writes technology SF. A writer such as S. M. Stirling[18] represents a whole trend of technological and warlike SF (also referred to as technowar SF) on his own. Stirling's success (he has become a very visible figure of a certain kind of Canadian SF as testified by high sales and intensive discussion groups on the Internet) could be largely due to his extensive use of violence, violent sex and seemingly extremist right-wing views. This does not mean that Stirling is an oddity in Canadian culture. It means rather that he represents a part of the Canadian identity, albeit a minority one, but one that is nevertheless present in some segments of Canadian society. What distinguishes S. M. Stirling from the majority of SF writers, especially Canadian ones, is not that more than half of each of his novels give the reader a very visual description of the field of the battle, but that he goes into extremely gory details. His first novel, Marching through

Georgia (1988), is a fast-paced and well-written account of an alternative universe after

the American Revolution. Dispossessed Loyalists, (the only clearly Canadian element in

the novel) end up in South Africa, in the company of other refugees, where they create a

nation of serfs and slaves dominated by an aristocracy (themselves) called the Draka.

They gain control of the whole of Africa and part of Asia; by the time World War II

breaks out and Hitler comes to power, they have formed an alliance with their original

enemy, the United States.

In order to understand this complex novel, the reader is supplied with the map of

the world as it stands in this dystopia (although it is doubtful, given the generally

triumphalist tone in the novel, that Stirling would consider it a dystopia). One of the

flaws in a novel so generous with details is that, however interesting these maps are in

building completely a whole alternative reality, they fail to satisfy the reader's curiosity

by concentrating on only a small portion of this new world, and by being so incomplete

that they accentuate their artificiality and fail at believability. Nothing at all is said

about how and when Free Australia, the Empire of Brazil or the Republic of Grand

Columbia have come into existence. Canada has disappeared into the United States.

Stirling attempts to maintain a balance by having an American reporter take over the

description and the coverage of the Eurasian war of 1942. The need of an alliance

between the United States and the Domination of the Draka, to defeat the Nazis, is

emphasized in spite of the abhorrence that the reporter feels toward Drakan policies and

their feudal system. Interestingly, Stirling skilfully manages to make the Drakan view of

the world nearly palpable in comparison with the Nazis'. Stirling, it should be added,

has acquired part of his reputation through being controversially right-wing. John Clute in the The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction writes that:

> It was, however, with his 2nd series, the ALTERNATIVE-WORLD Draka sequence -- Marching Through Georgia (1988), Under the Yoke (1989) and The Stone Dogs (1990) -- that SMS came to notice because of the considerable violence (undeniable) and right-wing convictions (apparent). . . . ("Stirling").

Consequently, Stirling sets himself apart from the humanistic tendencies of modern Canadian SF. The alternative history in Marching through Georgia is compelling reading for its re-creation of another time-line, complete with annexed documents which are presented as official papers or history textbooks.

Unfortunately, whatever redeeming features could be found in Marching through Georgia are not present in the sequel Under the Yoke (1989), which takes place in the same fictional universe and starts after the end of the Eurasian Wars. The greater part of the book is filled with battle descriptions that have little to do with SF or even Hard SF. Stirling's pitiful attempt at turning this second novel into a pot-boiler compels him to write using gory and unnecessary details about physical torture, a commercial trend that has more to do with pandering to sadism than the progression of the plot or the setting of an atmosphere, whether emotional, psychological or even technological. Perhaps the author wants his readers to react against the unhealthy hegemony of the Draka; however, one gets the distinct impression that a lack of imagination has been replaced by a succession of violent fillers.

After sadism and torture, Stirling returned in the third book in the series, (again with commercial success), more to the centre of the SF genre with The Stone Dogs (1990). This book entertains the reader with a vision of the two main powers (the

United States and Draka) gaining new scientific knowledge in genetics, computer science and electronics in order to bring their endless struggle into space. Although Stirling does manage somehow to recapture the style and the ideas that made <u>Marching through Georgia</u> an imaginative work of Hard SF, <u>The Stone Dogs</u> is marred by lurid descriptions of sex (for commercial reasons?): sexual scenes are described through the device of overt and unapolegetic voyeurism. At times, the profusion of detailed descriptions of the mores of Drakan society and of their customs do succeed in conveying the psychology and sociology of an alternative society with a philosophy of its own. A whole series of novels written in cooperation with Jerry Pournelle shows a more introspective interest than heretofore, although much of the credit in this respect is probably due to Pournelle's style.

Hard SF, especially as personified by successful writers such as S. M. Stirling of that sub-genre, has made both readers and writers alike wary of assigning too great a part to hard science in SF, for fear of being confused with the proponents of a merciless ideology. It can be, however, when used skilfully by other writers, an important part of Canadian SF writing; it is then relegated to the function of a prop, contrary to Stirling's approach.

The negative view of science that is deemed to be specifically Canadian is not an absolute one: a more optimistic note can be found in some works of Canadian SF. These works envisage a brighter future, as for instance in the success of having found the cure for current diseases, such as in Sawyer's <u>End of an Era</u>, where we are told that "a cure for AIDS had been approved for human use in 2004" and that "this new drug — Deliverance, as it was aptly called — was able to neutralize just about any virus, using a

process called adaptive fractal bonding" (186). The use of the phrase, "adaptive fractal bonding," raises the question of the credibility of the scientific prop. In "The Closely Reasoned Technological Story,"[19] Gary Westfahl proposes a model for avoiding scientific errors in writing Hard SF: namely, the use of impressive jargon, which has a basis in our scientific reality. This optimistic view of science is, however, more an exception than a rule, since, as has been noted, Canadian SF tends to view science with considerable criticism.

The presence of science in SF is often used by enthusiasts of the genre to declare that SF has often been able to predict the future and by its detractors to show how frequently it has been wrong in trying to see what the future will be. In fact, most of the science in SF is not there to foresee where our technology is heading, but as a prop, an essential one, even when very unobtrusive, to build an alternative reality. SF does not try to see the future of science, nor does it really try to see the future of humanity: its purpose in its use of science is to create a fiction that enables one to examine man's consciousness and its interaction with science in a manner that has been ignored by mainstream literature, in spite of the growing importance of science in our everyday lives. The prediction of what the future of science will be appears, not in SF literature, but in science publications; recently, <u>Scientific American</u> had a whole issue devoted to the risky business of predicting which technologies will characterize the 21st century (Rennie 57-205).

From being viewed as a mere way of trying to imagine a better future in the early pre-World War II period, Canadian SF, both in French and in English, turned away from the American view of using science as a problem-solving mechanism. Canadian SF

promotes the view that human beings will still have to cope with the difficulties science will create for them. Science in Canadian SF creates new situations which, while supposedly improving the physical well-being of humanity, place its protagonists in new confrontational positions. The superstructure, be it the government or society, forces these protagonists unwillingly to turn into reluctant heroes who, eventually and often as loners, are compelled to try to become problem solvers. Often, however, the end is not necessarily a triumphant one and the surprised hero, such as Chronoreg's Blackburn, is left no better off. Blackburn is still looking for the impossible love, for the novel presents us with two possible and parallel futures (in two columns), one seemingly happy and the other an unhappy one, an unclear choice intimating that Blackburn might keep oscillating between these two alternative visions stuck in a limbo not of his own making:

Mais le garçon pâlit, ses yeux bleus restent clairement visibles tandis que son image devient transparente, puis se dissipe tel un mirage, et Blackburn reste désespérément seul devant le bleu de l'horizon.

Il est tout près, maintenant, il tourne la tête vers Blackburn. Le soleil couchant dore son visage et ses boucles châtaines, allumant le bleu de ses yeux qui sont comme des lucarnes jumelles ouvertes sur le ciel et la mer derrière lui.
Le garçon s'arrête et lui sourit, comme on sourit à quelqu'un que l'on attendait (386).

Notes to the Second Chapter

[1] A comics work published in book form.

[2] The phrase was used in a treatise on the poetry of science by William Wilson, A Little Earnest Book upon a Great Old Subject (1851)

[3] Gernsback used it in June 1929 in the editorial of the first issue. Cf John Clute and Peter Nicholls, The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (text), [under the heading of "Definitions of Science Fiction"]. The history of the term of science fiction is also abundantly documented by Edward James, Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[4] Gernsback had been using the term "scientifiction" between 1926 and 1929.

[5] Sam Moskowitz Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction (Cleveland: World, 1963) qtd. In Brian Aldiss Trillion Year Spree 204.

[6] E.g. David Ketterer, John Robert Colombo.

[7] This is in sharp contrast to Arthur C. Clarke's novel, 2001: A Space Odyssey, where a computer malfunctions and decides to kill all the passengers. Here the computer only commits murder as a last resort.

[8] The recent introduction of DVD discs for computers and general multimedia applications has already started to signal the end of CD-ROM and compact discs. DVD discs have a capacity of up to 9Gb compared to 0.6 GB (600 Mb) for a compact disc.

[9] The story also mentions the bombing of Greenpeace's ship by the French Secret Service.

[10] Not to be confused with Robert C.(Charles) Wilson, author of The Crooked Tree (1980).

[11] Crawford is, to use Ketterer's term, another "gift" to Canadian SF from abroad; he was born in the United States.

[12] Poul Anderson, Time Patrol. (New York: Tor, 1991). (The first story of which appeared in 1960).

[13] Edward Llewellyn is Welsh-born.

[14] Brian Stapleford defines Space Opera as "colourful action-adventure stories of interplanetary or interstellar conflict. Although the term still retains a pejorative implication, it is frequently used with nostalgic affection, applying to space-adventure stories which have a calculatedly romantic element." John Clute and Peter Nicholls, "The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction," The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction."

[15] The most prominent example is Apollinaire's work, Calligrammes, (1918) with poems in the shape of hour-glasses, diamonds and rain. Although the tradition is strong in French poetry, it was not unique and began in 300 BC with Simias of Rhodes.

[16] Suzanne Beauchamp's Une chance sur trois (1974), Gilles Tremblay's Les Nordiques sont disparus (1983) and Charles Montpetit's Temps perdu (1988).

[17] J. Brian Clarke was born in England but lives in Calgary. He is a member of SF Canada.

[18] S. M. Stirling was born in France, was a student in Carleton University and now resides in New Mexico.

[19] "Hard SF is committed to avoiding scientific errors in stories. There are four ways to avoid this: ...
The first way to avoid scientific errors is simply to employ jargon, impressive-sounding doubletalk that ackowledges the seeming implausibility of some device without trying to explain it ...

The second way to avoid scientific errors is to speculate in areas where there is little scientific data.

The third way...is to play it safe: set the story in the near future and feature scientific advances that are either already planned or plausible in light of current scientific and technological knowledge...

The fourth way...is to deliberately create the most spectacular and implausible environment or development possible while adhering to all known scientific facts. I call this 'world building' *macrocosmic* hard SF — involving large leaps into the future to envision large advances and new wolrds: Brin's term for it is 'scientific SF.'"

("The Closely Reasoned Technological Story" 157-175).

Chapter Three

<u>Canadian SF Protagonists: Reluctant Heroes and Heroines</u>

It might appear to be out of place to introduce an examination of the themes

developed in Canadian SF by referring to American themes. In this case, however, it is

a helpful procedure for a couple of reasons: (1) Canadian SF, as we have seen earlier, is

heavily influenced by United States SF: therefore, we need to refer to some of the main

directing forces guiding American SF to see their possible influence on Canadian SF, (2)

American mainstream literature has often been examined alongside Canadian literature

in order to distinguish the most salient themes in Canadian literature. One key theme

underpinning American SF and science and the American space programme, for

instance, is the American frontier myth. Does Canadian SF incorporate any

corresponding Canadian cultural myths? Are Canadian protagonists driven by images

and myths similar to the ones associated with American SF heroes or do they face their

own variety of challenges?

SF readers, including readers of Canadian SF, read SF mainly because of themes

that are either not present in so-called mainstream literature or because of the

unsatisfactory treatment these themes receive from mainstream literature. My intent is

not to pronounce judgement on mainstream literature or SF literature but to explore the

possible reasons for the existence of SF literature and for the increasing use mainstream

authors make of it. SF is reaching far beyond the limited readership it once had, in terms of age and social and intellectual milieus, and many mainstream authors are turning to SF to explore themes not otherwise amenable to conventional fictional treatment. It is therefore meaningful to examine these themes and determine whether they are essential or specific to Canadian SF.

Robert Charles Wilson

One Canadian SF writer who has developed a wide variety of themes with an intensity and a sensitivity that bring into question the whole issue of segregating mainstream literature from SF literature, is Robert Charles Wilson. Wilson is impossible to categorize for the richness and diversity of his themes, but alienation, a theme that broadly defines a great part of Canadian literature, is certainly the common thread in his works.

Wilson is a writer who stresses the importance of love in human relationships. For these reasons he is compared by David Ketterer, David G. Hartwell and Glenn Grant (343) to the American writer Theodore Sturgeon. Although he has published a number of short stories, his strength comes out mainly in his novels. A Hidden Place (1986), his first novel, marked him as a significant writer. It tells the story of Travis Fisher, who, after his mother's death, moves into his aunt's house in a small prairie town, Haute Montagne, during the Great Depression. There, with his newly found sweetheart, Nancy Wilcox, he falls under the spell of Anna Blaise, a strange and mysteriously radiant woman. Anna Blaise is from another universe and only half present, for she must be reunited with her "male part," Bone, in order to return home. In the meantime, Bone, an

amnesiac hobo travelling on the railroads, is becoming distantly aware of his true nature.

All the protagonists are estranged persons. Travis is estranged from his family, Nancy

from her own town, Anna and Bone from each other and from their world, while all the

inhabitants of Haute Montagne strive to belong to and conserve their position in the

small community and not fall into the rejection that is Nancy and Travers' lot. The story

also takes place during one of the most disorienting periods of Canadian history, that of

the Great Depression, which deprived millions of their dignity and sense of identity.

However, A Hidden Place is not a nostalgic or tear-jerker type of novel, for Wilson

manages to keep its plot briskly paced while combining romance and suspense without

falling into the trap of an ordinary love story. It ends happily not because, as could have

been the case, the two young protagonists, Nancy and Travis, have been re-united, but

because they have found again an identity and a sense of place:

> The freight car they rode out of Haute Montagne was crowded, and
> Nancy was dismayed by the people who filled it. These were not just
> hoboes like the men she had seen under the railway trestle but whole
> families, men and women and children, migrating westward with
> winter and poverty hard behind them. Outcasts, she thought, exiles,
> and how easily we might have joined them, become indistinguishable
> from them. . . . [sic] In truth, she thought, we are not much better off,
> despite the money that had fallen from Bone's pea coat[1] (enough to
> buy food, pay a little rent) — but, too, she thought, in some way we
> are different. It was written in Travis' face (211).

This is contrary to the notions of resignation present in early Canadian literature,

where protagonists would have been either doomed to failure or have accepted their lot

as a way to survive with an attitude of resignation; as Ronald Sutherland puts it in

Second Image ("Man's role on earth, then, is to follow the prescribed rules, do his duty

and suffer his 'purgatoire sur terre' on the strength of a pre-issued, church-stamped

passport to heaven") (63). In order to survive, Wilson's protagonists seem to follow an

existentialist path. This is a path of survival which, according to John Clute, involves

transcendence: "Canadian SF . . . can therefore be defined as a genre which translates the

fable of survival so central to the Canadian Psyche into a fable of lonely transcendence"

(Fables 26).

Wilson's second novel, Memory Wire (1987), is an incursion into cyberpunk.

Cyberpunk is associated with William Gibson, a US-born writer now living in Canada,

and Bruce Sterling. There are as many definitions of Cyberpunk as of SF. Peter

Nicholls proposes a succinct definition:

> The "cyber" part of the word relates to cybernetics: to a future where
> industrial and political blocs may be global (or centred in space
> habitats) rather than national, and controlled through information
> networks; a future in which machine augmentations of the human body
> are commonplace, as are mind and body changes brought about by
> drugs and biological engineering. Central to cyberpunk fictions is the
> concept of virtual reality, as in Gibson's Neuromancer sequence, where
> the world's data networks form a kind of machine environment into
> which a human can enter by jacking into a cyberspace deck and
> projecting "his disembodied consciousness into the consensual
> hallucination that was the matrix." The "punk" part of the word comes
> from the rock'n'roll terminology of the 1970s, "punk" meaning in this
> context young, streetwise, aggressive, alienated and offensive to the
> Establishment. A punk disillusion, often multiple -- with progressive
> layers of illusion being peeled away -- is a major component of these
> works.
> Data networks are more than just a part of cyberpunk's subject matter.
> Density of information, often slipped into stories by near-subliminal
> means, has from the outset strongly characterized cyberpunk's actual
> style ("Cyber," The Encyclopedia).

Memory Wire is a slight departure from the usually realistic and contemporary

setting that Wilson lays out at the beginning of all his other novels. The story catapults

us into the next century, when volunteers are employed to function as human video-

recorders by television news networks after having been fitted with implants. Once

again, Wilson deals with the theme of alienation, the inescapable condition of the main

characters: Kyke Keller is the all-seeing angel who is transformed into an unfeeling

being for the main purpose of forgetting his past. Teresa, unlike Keller, is trying to

recapture her past through "oneiroliths," extraterrestrial dreaming jewels discovered in

the Amazon that enable their owner to remember his or her past extremely accurately.

All this makes for a tense thriller in which love, described in a touching and delicate

way, occupies a central place and helps eventually to make alienation subside. The

profusion of details and the dense style is evident in the first meeting Kyle has with his

television producer:

> The appointment with Leiberman was for three. At lunch Keller met
> Byron Ostler at a waterfront café down the coast highway, a high patio
> overlooking the boat barrios, *barcos viviendas* in Gypsy colors
> sprawling between the mainland and the distant tidal dam. Byron was
> alone, waiting. But he would have been impossible to miss even in a
> crowded room. His thick archaic eyeglasses, round as coins, sat on his
> pinched face like a challenge or a rebuke. His hair fell down over his
> shoulders in white cascades. He wore an old khaki jacket threadbare at
> the collar and loose around his narrow throat. He looked, Keller
> thought with some amusement, like a painting by El Greco of a
> consumptive jockey.
> "Ray," Byron said, and the smile widened fractionally.
> I'm still Grossman," Keller said.
> "Oh?"
> "For a few hours." He pulled up a chair.
> "So it's on? You're making the trip?"
> "Looks that way," Keller said. Byron chuckled softly.
> Keller ordered a sandwich from the bored day waitress (6-7).

Wilson, new to cyberpunk, is quite adept at writing in this style, which at times

attempts to recreate a rhythm reminiscent of rock music, and the preceding passage

would compare favourably with Case's meeting with Molly in Gibson's <u>Neuromancer</u>

(148). Case is a cybercowboy expert at interfacing with computers:

> "How about him? He okay, Molly?" The robot crab moved toward
> them, picking its way over the waves of gravel. Its bronze carapace

might have been a thousand years old. When it was within a meter of
her boots, it fired a burst of light, then froze for an instant, analyzing
data obtained.
"What I always think about first, Case, is my own sweet ass." The crab
had altered course to avoid her, but she kicked it with a smooth
precision, the silver boot-tip clanging on the carapace. The thing fell
on its back, but the bronze limbs soon righted it.
Case sat on one of the boulders, scuffing at the symmetry of the gravel
waves with the toes of his shoes. He began to search his pockets for
cigarettes. "In your shirt," she said.
"You want to answer my question?" He fished a wrinkled Yeheyuan
from the pack and she lit it for him with a thin slab of German steel
that looked as though it belonged on an operating table (30).

Since <u>Memory Wire</u> was published just three years after <u>Neuromancer</u>, it is quite

possible that Wilson had been influenced by Gibson. However, Gibson's cyberpunk

style has not been emulated by many English-Canadian writers and is yet to be used

more than fleetingly in French-Canadian SF, as in Trudel's fiction. Writing cyberpunk

in French is certainly not an impossibility. After all, Rap music, which bears some

similarities in style to cyberpunk, deemed at first to be an exclusive American genre, is

so popular in French that French Rap groups are played on English language television.[2]

Jean-Pierre April's <u>Les Voyages thanatologiques de Yan Malter</u> (1995) deals

with a similar theme of brain/computer interface through a woman's desire to reach her

father, who has apparently travelled mentally beyond death; the author's intent is to

manipulate the reader from one narrator to the other, confuse him about which character

is a "real fictional character," each narrator turning out to be the creation of the next one,

until we reach the end of the novel and wonder about the reality of all the characters. It

is more a questioning of the reality of writing and its deconstruction than any approach

to cyberpunk, from which it is very removed in style. This type of fiction is often

defined as belonging to fabulation.[3] Some passages of Trudel's <u>Le Ressucité de</u>

l'Atlantide, previously mentioned, come closer to cyberpunk fiction, but they do not have the overabundance of details, the multi-coloured images and the common brain/computer links that are essential characteristics of cyberpunk.

Gypsies (1989), Wilson's third novel, goes beyond the prescriptive boundaries of the definitions of SF by the apparent determination of its author to explain all scientific events with words that have more to do with magic and fantasy than science, albeit clearly within an SF paradigm. It tells of siblings with the ability to travel between parallel universes who, up till now, have lived most of their lives in our reality/universe. Since they are the products of genetic research and government funding from another universe, it is puzzling, if not irritating for the devoted SF reader, to find a constant reference to "magic," "spells," and similar words usually more associated with pure fantasy, when the story is told with a cognitive estrangement approach more typical of SF. SF relies on science as an excuse for readers who are willing to enter into a contract with the writer and suspend their disbelief, provided the scientific elements are presented in a way that enables the reader not to dismiss them as pure fantasy. In Gypsies, the elements bringing a sense of wonder use a terminology closer to magic and occasionally bring the novel close to science fantasy. It is quite possible that Wilson, whose SF relies more on soft science, while introducing hard science only as strictly necessary for the plot development, feels uncomfortable creating a jargon to explain these travels which, if not considered magic, would be perceived as magical. Gypsies, nevertheless, is, on the whole, an SF novel that deals with human suffering: in an attempt to prevent them from using their powers and therefore to protect them from their former masters, two of the protagonists were often beaten up by their parents, and this has left permanent

psychological scars that are explored movingly in the novel. As in many of his works, Wilson does not shy away from going deeply into his characters' psyches.

The Divide (1990), set in Toronto, presents John Shaw, who has been transformed by U. S. research into a super-being gifted with hypersensory organs and intelligence. The project has been dropped, but now John Shaw's health is deteriorating, and Benjamin, his alternative persona, is taking control of John's mind. His split personality will kill him unless he finds a way of fusing the two minds. The novel is reminiscent of A Hidden Place with its theme of split personalities and inner reconciliation. It explores similar terrain to the "mainstream fantasy" novel Les Têtes à Papineau (1981) by Jacques Godbout, but instead of adopting Godbout's humorous mode, Wilson suceeds in writing a melancholic story about the search for oneself. The theme of split personalities is notable in much of Canadian fiction, especially in novels by Hugh MacLennan, such as Two Solitudes (1945) and Return of the Sphinx (1967) as well as in André Langevin's L'Élan d'Amérique (1972) Carole Corbeil's Voice-over (1992) and Ronald Sutherland's Lark des Neiges (SnowLark) (1971) and Where Do the MacDonalds Bury Their Dead? (1976).

The Harvest (1992) is the story of humanity ending in its present form after having been offered immortality. Wilson makes us go through the dilemmas of all the characters and their motivations in deciding to choose for or against the new age. After the choice, humanity is divided into two groups, those who have gone and explored the galaxy and the ones who have stayed behind. Although very different in style and using very different props and without aliens, it does have the same underlying theme as Pierre Billon's L'Ultime Alliance (1990) where humanity realizes that births have stopped

altogether and that humans will have to enter a new phase of renewal with Sedna, mother Earth, for the survival of humanity.

With his latest novel, as of 1994, Mysterium (1994) Wilson has reached the enduring stage and is one of the authors responsible for what Ketterer calls the "International arrival of Canadian SF," since his novels are widely sold, translated, and available outside of North America; availability is of special significance in SF, where only in the last ten years has there been a willingness to reprint "classics." One author, Phyllis Gotlieb, who was largely responsible for whatever earlier recognition Canadian SF achieved, is virtually unknown now in Europe (and even in North America) due to a lack of reprints.

In Mysterium, Wilson manages to renew himself by writing a novel where action is not relegated to the background, while being able to bring an estranged reality into what is at first an ordinary world. The story takes place in a tranquil and uneventful environment, a small Michigan town, Two Rivers, where the inhabitants are glad of a government research facility being established in their community. Through an accident in the research centre, *the village*, the inhabitants wake up one morning to realize that they have been catapulted in one swoop into a frightening dystopia ruled by a racist (and bilingual!) theocracy.

As in The Divide and Gypsies, the cause is government scientific experiments gone haywire. No one will have to face the victims and suffer the consequences for his or her mistakes since the victims have been transported to an alternative North America that makes our society appear as the most homely and friendly one on earth. Wilson manages to bring a totally new twist to one of SF's overused themes (especially in

Canadian SF), the nuclear holocaust. However, the novelty is that it is a controlled

holocaust, happening only to a small town, whereas the rest of the original world suffers

no consequences. The inhabitants of Two Rivers have to survive and consequently are

faced with choices: either learn a new history, new ways, and how to deal with the

seemingly moral dilemma of loyalty to the old or to the new world and its rulers, or

escape beyond the Rocky Mountains (perhaps to Canada as in Atwood's The Handmaid's

Tale).

In this new world ruled by religious "proctors," the inhabitants could think that

they have been spared a worse fate since they are alive and well, but they realize soon

that it is the rest of the world that has been spared a descent into hell. It does appear to

read at first like a 1970's American disaster movie, but this well-crafted novel, akin at

times to a thriller, is engrossing because of the three-dimensional characters and their

will to survive. It is the survivors with higher moral virtues that will be able to rebuild

their dreams. John Clute sees Wilson as writing in the mainstream of Canadian SF:

> The persistency of RCW's basic concerns allows him, on occasion, to
> slide into routine formulations; but, throughout, he expresses with
> vigour and imagination the great Canadian theme (for the sense of
> being on the lonely side of a binary has sparked much of the best
> Canadian sf) of geographical alienation ("Wilson," The Encyclopedia).

Phyllis Gotlieb

The disaster theme is a frequent feature of Canadian SF, and although it is also

used by American SF, Canadian examples seem to have a higher proportion of works

that take place after a disaster. In the conclusion to his study, Ketterer notices a

preponderance of disasters in Canadian SF:

> What about the presence or absence of Canadian themes? Are there
> any clearly Canadian preoccupations? Certainly a disproportionate
> number of SF stories focus directly or indirectly on the catastrophe
> theme, particularly nuclear catastrophe. Gotlieb's Sunburst, Drew's
> Erthring Cycle, Vonarburg's The Silent City, and innumerable near-
> future political thrillers provide examples. But nuclear war or accident
> stories are common throughout SF, and the catastrophe or end-of-the-
> world scenario is pretty much a generic characteristic — a
> thematization of SF's new-worlds-for-old structure. Both American
> and British SF display a similar preponderance of such stories (161).

Phyllis Gotlieb was the first writer of Canadian SF[4] to come to prominence when

Canadian SF became established; the quality of her fiction was much above the usual

pulp output. She is more known as a poet and, as previously noted, has often denied that

she writes SF in a Canadian consciousness, this in spite of having been a co-editor of the

second collection of Canadian SF, Tesseracts 2 (1987). However, her novel Sunburst

(1964) was a major landmark in Canadian SF and was translated into Dutch, French,

Norwegian and German. The story takes place in Sorrel Park, a Midwestern American

town after a nuclear disaster. A leak in the reactor has endowed forty-seven children

with psychokinetic powers and they are imprisoned in the Dump, an enclosure that acts

as a shield against their powers. The main protagonist, Sandra Ruth Johnson or Shandy,

is a thirteen-year-old who is an Imper, i. e. impervious to the psi forces generated by the

children. She herself remembers the horror that killed her father when she was three, in

an image that is one of SF's most effective and famous passages describing the horror of

nuclear power gone wrong:

> My father was sitting on the bed with nothing on but his briefs; his
> back was towards me . . .   [sic]

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She lifted her head and looked out the window sucking the top of the pen; a small puff of summer cumulus moved blindly across the field of a vision haunted by memory:

A sunburst with twisting rays of exploded scar, and betweeen the rays thick brown keloids; a humped center of ruined flesh, cracked and oozing, ebbing out beyond the cancerous moles into coinsize blueblack naevi, paling and decreasing till they washed into freckles on white skin (21).

Gotlieb is able to use her skilful poetry to bring out the horror of man's dangerous science. Shandy, the heroine, has been described by many critics as a budding Margaret Mead and is probably one of the first female characters in a genre that did not have much room for them even as supporting roles. It is also SF at its best as a reflection of humanity's future, via Shandy's growing-up into a woman and her understanding of the destructive nature of nuclear power. Shandy clearly expresses the full horror of nuclear warfare.

O Master Caliban (1976) was followed by a sequel, Heart of Red Iron (1989), both of them taking place on a planet named for its founder, Dhalgren, who, after having arrived on the planet, conducted biological experiments and succeeded in creating intelligent robots, the Ergs, who have become self-conscious. They rebel against what they perceive to be slavery and slaughter their masters, bringing the destruction of this new society. The sequel sees the return of Dahlgren's son, Sven, who still battles the Ergs and other beings brought to colonize the planet.

The successful short story "Son of the Morning," a mixture of SF and fantasy often referred to as Science Fantasy, spawned a collection of short stories with the same title. It features Ungruwark, a sentient leopard with ESP[5], who finds himself dropped in the middle of an eighteenth century Polish[6] ghetto by an all-powerful being who can

travel through time at will. This being is responsible for his ESP and his having being

plucked from Earth earlier in history. This led to further stories of novel length,

concluding with The Kingdom of Cats (1985), which is about a final confrontation

between the Ungruwarkh and Qumedon, their creator.

Élisabeth Vonarburg

Another Canadian author who has dealt with post-disaster society is Élisabeth

Vonarburg, with the publication of Le Silence de la cité in 1981. Vonarburg has long

been a well-known and prominent participant of the Canadian SF scene. She was one of

the founding members of Solaris, in which she published many of her short stories.

Born in France, she has been a prime mover in the establishment of a French-Canadian

school of SF and its blossoming into a unique Québécois independent current of culture.

Le Silence de la cité is original and important for its treatment of androgyny. It

is set in the same universe as many of her short stories. After nuclear and environmental

disasters, scientists have taken refuge in an enclosed city to isolate and protect

themselves from the barbaric humans who continue to exist outside and whose genes,

altered through the effects of radiation, have a detrimental effect on their life expectancy

and general physical health. One of the most damning consequences is an inability to

have more than one boy for every nine girls.

In the enclosed city, a crazy scientist, Paul, decides to create a new super-race

that would be endowed with the powers of self-regeneration and self-healing, tending

towards immortality. He succeeds in creating Elisa who, after his death, will continue

his project. She manages to transmit one of her most extraordinary powers: the faculty

to transform herself into a man and vice versa. Elisa can become a man and then experience all that a man goes through, including sexual desire and intercourse. What is essential is that, as a man, she can remember the feelings she had as a woman, and turning herself back into a woman she is not the woman she was before her transformation. She manages to create several new generations of offspring from her own genes, all of whom are capable of metamorphosis at will.

Vonarburg is preoccupied with the equality of the sexes and sees it coming through a bisexual integration; an integration, described with finesse in the novel; it can be, if not physical, at least sensual and psychological. She is concerned as a writer with the relative absence of women as creators of SF and with the destruction of stereotypes, both female and male. In an article in a special edition of the journal Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la femme on "The future," after drawing attention to the biased definition of "auteur" in the standard French reference dictionary Le Petit Robert[7] she writes:

> Les auteurs de sf perpétuent donc les stéréotypes fabriqués féminins, réflexe conditionné qui est la preuve d'une regrettable paresse ou d'une inquiétante cécité de l'esprit au moment de conjecturer. . . . (9)

> Dans les thèmes que j'ai appelés "sociologiques" les auteures se libèrent très facilement des stéréotypes en décrivant des sociétés où les femmes sont plus nombreuses que les hommes ou carrément sans hommes, textes curieusement assez nombreux. . . . On trouve aussi des récits où on a le choix de son sexe ou alternativement, thème que j'ai exploré dans mon roman Le Silence de la cité ainsi que dans plusieurs de mes nouvelles (10-11).

The intrusion of Hard SF and technological gadgets is kept to a minimum, and the working of all medical procedures is barely sufficient to make it credible. As much as Vonarburg seems at ease in the dual male/female aspect of our personalities, she

seems to be unwilling to give a satisfying description of the actual working of the "Cité" and its everyday organization, as if she feels that they are not directly relevant to the plot. There is a potential for at least two other novels: one that could tell us about the genesis of the "Cité," another that could rectify the unsatisfactory ending. One is not quite sure in the end that the main protagonists, female and male, will be able to fulfil their destiny and then choose what they think is their real self. To choose does not mean to do away with the differences between the sexes; quite the opposite, it furthers the existing distinctions while creating a natural desire for empathy with the other sex. On the other hand, it is quite possible that this indecisive ending is in accordance with the dilemmas of typical Canadian protagonists, not unlike Chronoreg's Blackburn.

One of the most interesting aspects and, at the same time most frustrating, is that Le Silence de la cité poses as many questions as it attempts to solve. The sexual difference between men and women leads in the story to the desire of each group to dominate the other rather than to seek any sort of accommodation. This confrontation is resolved through an effort to accept that everyone is capable, to a certain extent, of acquiring some traits of the other sex. What is lacking, however, is a description of the process that will eventually lead to the fusion of the two sexes, rather than having it just coming from fanciful and wishful thinking on the part of the protagonists. Vonarburg's intent is to show that our bisexuality is a key to inner knowledge, away from alienation, and that all of us could benefit from some empathy with the other sex.

In Chroniques du pays des mères (1992), Élisabeth Vonarburg adds a few twists to what could have a been a rehashed theme. As in many Canadian SF novels, the story takes place after a catastrophe. Whether deadly pollution or nuclear devices are the

cause of what society has become is not told, but the end result is that the part of the world described in the book, seemingly Western Europe, is made up of small independent communities that practice low-level industrialization based on extensive recycling. However, mutations have severely affected most of the remaining population. Only a few male children are born for every hundred girls, a proportion of girls much higher than in her preceding novel. Consequently, "Red Males," as fertile men are called, have to go from one community to the other and fulfil their roles as progenitors. Vonarburg is not satisfied with a mere reversal of the gender functions, she also questions our assumptions about our own identity, not only our sexual identity, but also our desires and freedom to accomplish our dreams within the set rules of an organized society which, in Au pays des mères, seems to be to be akin to what North America might have become if Amerindian Natives had evolved separately into a modern society.

Comparisons with Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale spring to mind, (the "red males" remind us of Offred's red garment; half of the story is told through a journal discovered by scholars from the future), but, whereas Atwood's book leads us into a terrifying journey into the near future of a religious dystopia, Vonarburg's heroine describes her own far gentler environment as one of benign rule. The masterful rendering of a child's curious mind at the onset of the book, trying to make sense of the rules and explanations provided to her by adults, is especially powerful, as is the portrait of a society that could serve as a pointer for the renewal of our contemporary society. However, once again, the reader is left dissatisfied as the story appears to be in want of a sequel. Are we to assume that the author either got bored with her main protagonist or is she granting us the freedom to imagine our own ending? Rather, it seems to be a

reluctance or an unwillingness to have a SF story told as the solution to a problem, as is typical of American SF.

Her latest work, Les Voyageurs malgré eux (1994),[8] is her most ambitious to-date and has been praised as a postmodern novel. It is an extension of a short story "Le Pont du froid," published in her collection of short stories L'Œil de la nuit (1980), of "La Machine lente du temps," published in Janus (1984) and of "Le Jeu des coquilles de Nautilus," published in Aurores boréales 2 (1985).

It takes place in a North American alternative reality, partly a dystopia where Québec francophones live in an enclave in a part of Montreal, the only other remaining French-speaking regions being an independent Louisiana, created when, after the conquest, francophones emigrated to Louisiana. Québec has become a mainly anglophone province and constitutes, with British Columbia, what remains of Canada. The other provinces are part of the American Union, which is divided in three federations. To the north lies the mythic Kingdom of Sags, which has remained isolated for a long time and is perceived as a threat by Canada. The main protagonist, Catherine, who has difficult relations with her parents, has immigrated from France after her parents' death.

The oneiric sequences are very powerful even if rather long and resolved too slowly; their lack of direction and explanation (is it for the purpose of suspense?) require some patience, especially since they turn into a continuously unexplained mystery. Les Voyageurs malgré eux takes place in an alternative time-line that is linked to our history. Unexplained events and the atmosphere of mystery bring with them the expectation that everything may revert any moment to a certain normality according to our own time-

line, especially since the central character seems to be partly inspired by the author's personal biography. Vonarburg introduces elements that are strangely both reassuring and disturbing, such as mentioning the names of well-known contemporary singers and poets from Québec culture, a standard post-modern device.

Surprisingly, when Catherine goes north to find the Kingdom of Sags, the reader gets the impression of leaving one novel to go into another one, probably stemming from the author's having updated previous short stories. The reader is told all the details of an alternative history and expects some decisive event provoked by Catherine's recurrent visions. The impression is conveyed that these visions are a sign that the things we see are not the reality and that the government, or some authority, is hiding something; we are then whisked away, thanks to Catherine's flight, from all of this to a different plot that swerves into a world of metaphysics. This is especially reinforced since we are allowed to share Catherine's doubts about her reality. Then Catherine meets the entity responsible for all of this confusion, who has the power to create and to break up what it/she/he has generated.

Les Voyageurs malgré eux has, like Robert Charles Wilson's Mysterium, a fully Canadian-inspired context while retaining a universal appeal, as evidenced by Wilson's and Vonarburg's popularity in the United States. It demonstrates that SF can have local settings and, like mainstream literature, be related to a national identity. Both novels have strong descriptions of the protagonists' inner psychological problems and emotions. Catherine is pursued by the Canadian police and flees to the Royaume du Nord, while a decided group of inhabitants of Two Rivers decide to find a better world to the North,

away from the oppressive forces of a theocracy. Both actions take place in a small enclave in the power of a bigger country. Indeed, enclaves seem to have become a pervading theme in Canadian SF, bringing to mind Northrop Frye's description of Canada as a country with a garrison mentality.[9] Charles de Lint's Svaha, mentioned earlier, is another example, as is Au Pays des mères, which presents an image of communities with no settlements between, only Bad Lands that will remain mysterious throughout the novel. Leslie Gadallah's The Loremasters also has technologically superior enclaves.

Both streams of Canadian SF have in common the theme of alienation; the use of enclaves could well indicate a willingness of every community to separate itself from the others, a fact all too evident in Canadian culture and politics today, although not a feeling unanimously shared. The concept of the enclave implies collective alienation, rather than that of the individual. Appropriate to the Canadian situation, it implies the alienation of each constituted community. Geographically, Canada is similar to the worlds of enclaves described in those works; it is a vast land with many settlements, punctuated by tracts of uninhabited land. As in Svaha's enclaves, Canada relies heavily on modern communications to link all the inhabited areas. Svaha describes a world, outside the enclaves, where our existing ideologies have failed to solve environmental and economic problems and which has lost the symbols and myths that built up a viable country.

Future Canadas

The failure of new liberalism ideology[10] to cope with modern problems such as war, pollution and the preservation of the natural environment, could explain the seemingly disproportionate number of short stories and novels of Canadian SF dealing with a situation arising out of a catastrophe or holocaust. Canadian SF seldom deals with the event itself or how to cope with the event but focuses on how humans adapt or are forced to adapt to the consequences. Sometimes they cannot cope and are strongly nostalgic, as in MacLennan's Voices in Time (1980). Other times, their individualism and personal qualities enable them to survive or even fight opposing forces.

Hugh MacLennan is another mainstream Canadian author who has entered the fray of SF with his last novel, Voices in Time, published in 1980. MacLennan is the archetypical figure of Canadian literature in his discovering and creating of national myths. MacLennan had already written two SF short stories strong on political comment. The first one is "The Finding of the Way," (1955) a dystopia controlled by a giant computer Mec-Think set up in the future after man has blown up the moon. The story is told by a senator in a nostalgic mode, reflecting about the past and how people had to think for themselves, a luxury which is quickly denied him when Mec-Think forces his brain into a happy state. The second story "Remembrance Day, 2010 A. D." (1957) takes place in a future world where the East-West conflict is transferred to Venus, controlled by the Russians, and to Mars, in the hands of the West. Here, the moon has already been blown up for the establishment of scientific space stations and to provide the earth with a better television service (blowing up the moon has created

fragments of the moon on which television stations and space platforms can be cheaply built).

The pessimism of these two dystopias is a feature also of the even more sombre world of John Wellfleet, the narrator who has survived a nuclear explosion, along with a few hundred people. Most of the technology responsible for this accident — a giant computer failure — is gone. Wellfleet, who seems to be an alter ego for MacLennan, reflects on the life stories of three men and the events surrounding them. Wellfleet himself, born in 1964, now lives outside Montreal and is writing a book. He writes about his older cousin, Timothy Wellfleet, born in 1938, before another destructive event (Nazism and the ensuing war), who becomes a news show host during the October Crisis of 1970 and who invites his German-born stepfather, Conrad Dehmel, to his show to accuse him of having been a former Nazi. This results in Dehmel's assassination. The reader is also told Dehmel's story in detail from his birth in Germany in 1910, his survival in the concentration camps and his reconstructed life in Canada.

Voices in Time has very little of the paraphernalia of Hard SF, but it is the "future perspective," as explained by David Ketterer, that makes it an SF novel:

> Most of the book would read like straight realism rather than SF were it not for the element of "cognitive estrangement" provided by the future perspective. The specifically SF-type details, which are confined to Wellfleet's story, are often sketchy, hokey, or both. How, one asks, can Wellfleet know that he has "lived through the erosion and the final self-destruct of the vastest human complex that could ever have existed in the entire Galaxy"? A skilled writer of SF would not have written such a line. Occasionally MacLennan forgets that he is reconstructing a lost world; for example he assumes the familiarity of his implied twenty-first century reader with Bloomsbury and Soho (Canadian 72).

These are mistakes that demonstrate MacLennan's unfamiliarity with the genre of SF and that he probably did not intend his book for SF readers. However, the fact that it can be read as "straight realism" although it is intentionally written from a 21st-century perspective is proof enough that the "cognitive estrangement" element achieves high credibility. It is one of the infrequent views of a future Canada in an SF setting.

Although descriptions of a future Canada such as MacLennan's are frequent enough in French-Canadian SF, such views are fairly rare in English-Canadian SF. Notable exceptions are Stephen Franklin's Knowledge Park (1972), a near-future proposal to rebuild the Great Library of Alexandria in the Canadian bush. In the previously mentioned Time Pressure by Spider Robinson, the visitor from another civilization appears in Nova Scotia (Robinson was living in Halifax at the time), but this is the only tangible Canadian geographical or political detail about Canada in the novel. Leonard Fischer's Let out the Beast (1950), the Canadian SF book with possibly the worst cover ever for an SF book, tells the lurid story of men fighting on the post-nuclear and radioactive landscape of a country called "Americanada." In William Heine's The Last Canadian (1974), a plague followed by radioactivity fall-out compels many people to flee to the North until a vaccine is found. By contrast, in Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, discussed earlier, Canada is a place of refuge away from a dystopia. Wilson's Mysterium, like Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, depicts Canada as a refuge. In Robert A. Smith's The Kramer Project (1975), a serum created by Toronto scientists accelerates the activity of the human brain.

These examples, however, while using Canada as a setting, do not paint a future for Canada itself. There is a virtual absence of the future of Canada in most English-

Canadian SF — with the aforesaid proviso that we do not consider political thrillers as

SF — i.e. a Canada that would be more than mentioned in passing and bearing some

relevance to the progression of the plot.

Most time-travel stories ignore Canada altogether, or, if they do not dismiss it —

as in the case of Sawyer's End of an Era (1994) — do not try to draw a picture of a new

time-line for Canada. The image of Canada in English-Canadian SF is thus largely non-

existent, or without any visible consequence for the story, or merely static. This does

seem to concur with contemporary Canadian politics, whereby the tendencies in English-

Canadian politics are to predict the break-up of the country and its eventual joining with

the United States, or to cling to the status quo with very little real concern for alternate

proposals.

In French-Canadian SF, Québec and Canada are sometimes ignored altogether in

the story or situated in a world far removed into a future when Canada or Québec or any

known country has ceased to exist. When Canada or Québec are included in the story

line, they can be a very vivid and realistic presence thanks to an abundance of detail.

There is no attempt at speculation on different parallel universes — the one possible

exception being Les Voyageurs malgré eux, but in that novel alternative realities are

only barely hinted at.

When French-Canadian SF does see a future Canada or Québec, it is rarely a

perfect or pleasant one. It can be an intricate re-creation of present Canada with the

same careful conflicts and face-saving protocols, as in Jean-François Somain's

[Somcynsky] near-future novel Les Visiteurs du pôle Nord (1987), which describes a

world in the year 2043, when benevolent extra-terrestrials find themselves embroiled in

Earth's conflicts. The conflicts are practically identical to ours, and the extra-terrestrials, in order to be re-united with each other — since half of them are being held by the Soviets and the other half by the Canadians — bring the world to the brink of war before their reunion. The extra-terrestrials are mainly a device for the author to reflect on the values of our sexual mores, Somain being an author whose writing interests lie in the redefinition of our sexual conventions and the breaking up of our taboos. Somain has also written a post-disaster novel, Dernier Départ (1989), in which the only group of survivors after a catastrophe is made up of eleven people in the Amazon who are seemingly unaware of the magnitude of the disaster. As in most of Somain's works, a great part of the novel concentrates on sexual relationships. The novel degenerates into an ideological debate about the organization of society into two factions with opposing views. It lacks the tightness, the poetry and novelty of his best work, La Planète amoureuse (1982), relating an erotic idyll between a woman and a female planet.

In Michel Solomon's La Troisième Greffe du cœur (1987), we are presented with a didactic story of a future Québec in the 21st century having become an autonomous and semi-independent republic, with some longish passages reminiscent of a history textbook. It is wildly inferior in style and content to Voices in Time. Québec is able to produce "sous-hommes" from genetic material for work in the Far North. But this will lead to their revolt when they ask to be taught to learn and read, and they are all massacred.

In general, it would be wrong to assume that French-Canadian SF is extremely concerned with a future Québec, or that Québec or Canada is part of its landscape. In his study of Canadian SF, David Ketterer concludes with a lament:

At a historical moment when Canada's future, or Canada's and Québec's future, is or are shrouded in considerable uncertainty, a genre largely devoted to plausible visions of the future surely has a most significant role to play. It is all the more remarkable therefore (and sad) that in recent years of such success virtually no English-Canadian future visions of Canada — the most important form of Canadian content — have appeared. Indeed, throughout its history, genre English-Canadian SF, perhaps in its concern with U. S. market acceptability, has all but ignored the issue. . . . On the French-Canadian side, this has not been, and is not now the case (166).

Ketterer explains that only English-Canadian mainstream authors venturing into

SF have dealt with the future of Canada while, on the French-Canadian side, he cites the

examples of Jean-Pierre April's Le Nord électrique (1980) and Esther Rochon's

"allegorical import," L'Épuisement du soleil (1985). However, Sophie Beaulé, in a

comprehensive study of Québec SF, "Réflexions sur la science-fiction des années 80,"

published in 1987 and conducted on 189 texts representative of Québécois SF in the

1980's,[11] arrived at the conclusion that "Le Québec apparaît peu dans la production

fictionnelle — moins de 10% (32). Beaulé compiled her research on the frequency of

themes in Québec SF into three main categories and arrived at the following breakdown

of figures:

L'ALIÉNANT ICI-BAS		
Ici et maintenant	post-capitalisme, dystopies mondes post-cataclysmiques Québec total : 69 (36,5%)	29 24 16 (8,5%)
Monde îles	îles, navettes spatiales lieux enfermés, marginaux total : 92 (49%)	35 57
Personnages marginaux		60 (32%)

UNE RÉALITÉ DÉSARTICULÉE		
Simulacre	artefact>réalité, carnaval rapports Homme/machine média, mythes fiction, ironie. art=mort total : 86 (44%)	31 14 19 22
l'individualité ébranlée	corps environnement physique et psychologique	43 39
	total : 82 (43%)	
LE RETOUR SUR SOI		
Le changement	découverte; soi et les autres voyage	51 (27%) 54 (29%)
Le " centre "	lieux matrices instincts, pulsions mythe	28 (15%) 27 10
L'art comme ouverture		13
NOMBRE TOTAL DES TEXTES :	189	

(32).

Although the choice of themes and its categorization could be deemed to be arbitrary, it explains how Québécois SF views itself. The theme of the representation of Québec is only 8.5% (probably higher than it would be in English-Canadian SF) and significantly enough, Beaulé has not thought it judicious to include representations of Canada as a whole, even though it is present in virtually every novel with a Québec theme. Beaulé mentions Bernard J. Andrès' La Trouble-Fête (1986), an alternative future where Montréal is peopled by mutants as a result of an atomic explosion. The novel does not dwell on the description of the aftermath but engages us in the inner dialogues of three survivors.

Comic SF

It is not clear whether Beaulé's category of irony includes comic SF; the number of works in this loose category of "fiction, ironie. art=mort" is a mere 22, which corresponds to a percentage of 11.6 %, out of which some are not comic SF; this indicates a very small number of comic SF works. Comic SF novels are rare, even in American SF. The previously cited L'Étrange Monument du désert libyque does have humorous passages mocking at times the seriousness of characterization. They can be compared with Douglas Hill's[12] The Fraxilly Fracas (1990) and The Colloghi Conspiracy (1991). These two novels centre on an independent courier who is thrown into situations where, as in The Colloghi Conspiracy, he has to rescue a whole oppressed race, which he only does after much reluctance on his part. Douglas Hill's comic talent manages in The Fraxilly Fracas to bring effectively to the border of credibility an Earth long abandoned by humans (therefore not a concern anymore, which enables him to create the

distance necessary for a comic effect) and peopled by giant mechanical metal-eating

cockroaches. Hill's comic style also rests heavily on making fun of the usual

paraphernalia of Hard SF by imagining a technology closer to a spoof of James Bond's

gimmicks than serious devices, such as miniature super-saws hidden under his

fingernails which tickle their user when activated. Hill also brings technowar SF into

derision by piling death upon death of unknown combatants to the point of incredibility

and absurdity in the final fighting scenes of The Fraxilly Fracas.

The North

One theme surprisingly missing from this study, and impossible to fit into any of

Beaulé's categories, is the theme of the North. This is a theme which has been relatively

rare in Canadian SF, considering Canada's geographical position. Jean-Pierre April's Le

Nord électrique is probably the most prominent novel treating of this theme.

This first novel of Jean-Pierre April is a saga, an epic and a thriller combining

fantasy, adventure and SF and takes place in the north of Québec. The book probably

appeared too early to be assured of the appropriate recognition it deserves. It tells the

story of the construction, by giant trucks called "camionosaures," of an interior sea made

up of 230 dams. This, of course, is a threat to the cultures of the Inuit and the Naskapis.

Many groups are opposed to this project, and the natives fight it with their own brand of

magic and the help of a Naskapi shaman, bringing the novel to the borderline of magic

realism. Even though Le Nord électrique could be criticized for its thin plot, it is a work

to be judged on its evocative theme of the North (one of the few Québec novels to tackle

such a theme with so much vigour). Le Nord électrique attempts to question reality,

since the journalist covering the events reconstructs the great majority of his reports through a drug, Voyagel, which anticipates the use of Chronoreg in Sernine's <u>Chronoreg</u>.

<u>Daniel Sernine</u>

Daniel Sernine, already mentioned here, is a major writer and magazine-cum-publishing editor who writes SF, youth SF and horror fiction. He is now in charge of the Jeunesse Pop department of the publishing house Pauline and editor of the magazine <u>Lurelu</u>, among numerous other activities. He is an extremely prolific and wide-ranging writer and one of a handful who took the plunge and decided more than ten years ago to be a full-time author in Québec at a time when the market conditions had just started to improve slightly for Québécois SF. If he has been able to manage this, it is mainly due to his evident diversity. He was one of the founders of <u>Requiem/imagine...</u> and is an essential element in the successful establishment and development of a distinctly "Québécois"[13] school of SF, which is far removed now from its early primary and secondary influences of American SF and French literature. On the youth front, Sernine, along with Denis Côté and Suzanne Martel, has been keen to provide young readers in Québec with an SF literature with which they could identify, building up in the process a pool of future readers who will find it natural to read "adult" French-Canadian or Québec SF.

The series of Argus books is a successful example. They revolve around two youngsters, Marc and Carl, who have joined an organization, Argus, the purpose of which is to save Earth from destroying itself; it is the usual theme of disaster in reverse.

Argus is run by the Éryméens, extraterrestrials whose pacific and political aims are the common thread in many of Sernine's novels. The addition of Cynthia and Francis in the second book turns the series into an SF version of the Four Musketeers. It is written in the shape of a whodunit, with shades of Enid Blyton and a good dose of general documentary information.

Sernine's short stories have appeared in several anthologies and magazines and contribute to his very strong presence on the Québec scene. His first major work, however, was Les Méandres du temps (1983), which helped give him the stature he deserved and showed his detractors that he had the ability to write long works devoid of adolescent naiveté. At the time of its publication, Les Méandres du temps was one of the longest SF novels ever published in Québec. It tells the story of Nicolas, a young telepath who agrees, under the pressure of his adoptive father, to participate in a scientific experiment designed to test his unusual powers. Nicolas is spotted by the Éryméens for his abilities; but more interestingly his past is linked with his future and his true origins, which are not entirely terrestrial. Sernine does not shy away from difficult romantic and risqué scenes and shows skill in their treatment. Like many protagonists of Phyllis Gotlieb's and Robert Charles Wilson's novels, Sernine's are endowed with telepathic and telekinetic powers — another example of Canadian SF's emphasis on soft sciences. Although Sernine's characters in Les Méandres du temps are put in very similar situations to the ones experienced by Marc and Cynthia in the Argus series, the comparison ends there. Sernine has managed to provide us with a more complex psychology than the simplistic idealism that is the norm of juvenile fiction.

The next series of books was another departure from his past works into a new style and other themes. In the <u>Boulevard des Étoiles</u> (1991) series, Sernine deals with the theme of a post-holocaust civilization. It is done with great subtlety and legerdemain by slowly introducing the reader into a world that is similar enough to our own, then gradually letting us discover through details and events that this post-disaster society is nothing like the society we are used to. This process is similar to the one used by R. C. Wilson in <u>Mysterium</u>, where the reality of the alternative universe is introduced in a slow, but relentless, fashion. The two books of the series, <u>Boulevard des Étoiles</u> and <u>À la recherche de Monsieur Goodtheim</u> (1991), manage a good fusion of three normally disparate genres of fiction: the psychological novel, SF and *roman noir*. They consist of a series of short novels all happening in the same period and locale. With tongue in cheek, Sernine has provided many of the characters with names that are barely veiled references to the lost world of the sixties (e.g. Morry Jimmison)[14] and may reflect the unconscious loss of an age of innocence, possibly Sernine's, especially since institutions from his other juvenile works of fiction, such as the Éryméens and Argus, the all-powerful government-like agency, are incorporated into the second volume. In a typical postmodernist mode, which is one of the current directions of French-Canadian SF, Sernine seems to take pleasure in spoofing himself as well as giving us an alternative view of the beat generation by also introducing a brand new reality of post-holocaust civilization: a culture organized around the carnival in a society bored with itself:

> Lassé, Relstad sort sur la terrasse, l'une des terrasses attenantes aux nombreuses salles entre lesquelles se partage la réception, quelques dizaines d'étages au-dessus du Carnaval. Le Boulevard des Étoiles, en contrebas, allonge son étincelante voie lactée, telle une rivière de paillettes argent et or en constant scintillement. Ici, une brusque flambée pyrotechnique, là un gigantesque dragon chinois ondulant sur

la longueur de trois coins de rue, plus loin encore une roue géante qui aurait quitté son manège. Un peu de lumière aussi dans quelques rues parallèles au Boulevard; mais plus loin la cité est à peu près obscure, déserte. Les grands édifices voisins sont abandonnés. Le plus proche du *Régence* a même des baies vitrées qui manquent. Vers le fleuve, un quartier pourtant est animé : la dernière fantaisie du Carnaval, une médina inventée de toute pièce [sic], avec son souk, son palais fastueux entouré de jardins. Et sur le fleuve lui-même, le long de la berge, non loin du vieux pont, un immense village flottant, Singapour ou Hongkong transplantée sur des eaux plus froides (96).

This is highly reminiscent of the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson, with the difference that Cyberpunk follows a rock'n'roll rhythm and Sernine's that of a slow waltz.

Although the central characters change from one story to the next, they all seem afflicted with an existentialist malaise with no resolution, provoked by the fact that they do not seem to have adjusted to an Earth peopled by only a minute fraction of the population as we know it. This seems to have happened through a catastrophe caused by a virus, which has decimated the majority of people and only spared a small proportion of individuals who happened to be immune.

In this "new" world, the main activity is the Carnival, where people go wild and disguise themselves, most of the time, as past figures or characters of the world as it was before the catastrophe. Others participate in dangerous games in which anyone can partake through mind fusion, done by hardware, and even die as a result of the too intense emotions they might experience. This is a civilization where most inhabitants have more time to spend on leisure than on anything else. The reader is slowly drawn into this world that epitomizes and is a comment on the most telling aspects of our contemporary society.

The theme of the Éryméens, which is also included in <u>Chronoreg</u>, is not

dissimilar to the overseers found in Wayland Drew's trilogy,[15] <u>The Erthring Cycle: The</u>

<u>Memoirs of Alcheringia</u> (1984), The <u>Erthring Cycle: The Gaian Expedient</u> (1985), and

<u>The Erthring Cycle: The Master of Norriya</u> (1986), where a group of scientifically

advanced people secretly watch and help humanity emerge from a primitive post-

disaster world. The time-travel stories of Crawford Kilian with their time-policing

agency are also similar in this respect. The spaceship watching the planet in Québec-

based SF author Donald Kingsbury's <u>Courtship Rite</u>, which sends them computer chips,

is nearly identical to the Éryméens' spaceship.[16]

These benevolent overseers could be related to the reluctant hero theme since

they manipulate events and leave in the end very few choices to the peoples or humanity

they want to help. They themselves feel that their course of action is the only one to

save humanity or the survivors they supervise; the overseers and those they supervise are

linked to each other and both become reluctant participants.

<u>Candas Jane Dorsey</u>

Among other writers with distinct voices and themes that are highly personal and

set them apart not only from American writers but also from other Canadian SF writers,

is Candas Jane Dorsey. Dorsey belongs to the new generation of Canadian SF writers.

Her short stories have been published extensively in many Canadian anthologies. She

won, with Nora Abercrombie, the Ninth Annual Pulp Press International Three-Day

Novel Competition for <u>Hardwired Angel</u> (1987). She made her mark, however, with the

publication of <u>Machine Sex and Other Stories</u> (1988), an anthology that was a departure from much previously published Canadian SF.

Dorsey is excellent at inner dialogue and describing her characters' feelings. Unlike in much of SF, Dorsey's characters are all too aware of their thoughts, to the point that one gets the impression they watch themselves as if they were strangers on a television screen. In many of her stories, this is accomplished at the expense of a description of the surroundings in which the protagonists move. In <u>Machine Sex and Other Stories'</u> first story, "Sleeping in a Box," science or technology seem so unimportant that, at first, one could easily imagine the story to have taken place in a completely non-SF environment, i. e., on a desert island instead of the moon. The estrangement, however, is very present in the form of the closed environment of a space station situated on the moon; a desert island would not be able to convey the same garrison effect as a moon base and the story would then cease to be an SF story for lack of a novum. The story relates the visit of a singer from Earth and her brief encounter with a local teacher with whom she discovers the different perception of the environment that the inhabitants of the space station have developed. The same could be said of the fourth story, "The Prairie Warriors", which would be more appropriate in a fantasy collection. It is possible that Dorsey expects her readers to do some work themselves and fill in the missing gaps. "The Prairie Warriors" is a very demanding story in which place names are absent, where settings are only mentioned as the village, the hills, the mountains and the prairie — a model for the Canadian theme of man's imprinting his mark on a virgin territory. In the story we are told of drugs used by people whose country, origin and allegiance remain nameless, the epitome of alienation

and loss of identity. It is written with subtlety and a mesmerizing tone but might

certainly push the "classic" reader of Hard SF on to the next story in search of more

hardware.

The story that gives its name to the anthology, "(Learning About) Machine Sex,"

explores the use of computer sex from a female point of view. The story could be

regarded as feminist but has more to do with the survival of a gifted woman in a cyber-

universe of computers that is still dominated by men; it is a wry comment on the

capacity of people to use and manipulate each other. Dorsey herself comments on her

own description of a scene from within the text itself; she writes cyberpunk and a

postmodernist comment on cyberpunk, becoming a humorous antithesis to cyberpunk.

She reminds the reader of the artificiality of cyberpunk SF and of the fragile character of

the illusion she has created and achieves a powerful deconstruction:

> As she walked by him, he reached for her, hooked one arm around her
> waist. She looked at him, totally expressionless. "Max," she said, "It's
> like I told you last night. From now on, if you want it, you pay. Just
> like everyone else." He let her go. She pulled the soft dirty white silk
> shirt on over the black leather jacket. The compleat (sic) rebel now.

> "It's a little going away present. When you're a big shot in
> MannComp, remember that I made it. And that you couldn't even take
> it apart right. I guarantee."
> He wasn't going to watch her leave. He was already studying the
> board. Hardly listening, either.
> "Call it the Mannboard," she said. "It gets big if you stroke it."
> She shut the door quietly behind herself.

> * * * [sic]

> It would be easier if this were a story about sex, or about machines. It
> is true that the subject is Angel, a woman who builds computers like
> they have never been built before outside the human skull. Angel, like
> everyone else, comes from somewhere and goes somewhere else. She
> lives in that linear and binary universe. However, like everyone else,

she lives concurrently in another universe less simple. Trivalent, quadrivalent, multivalent. World without end, with no amen. And so, on (70-71).

Candas Jane Dorsey is fast becoming an established SF writer, not only for her fiction but also for her views and analysis. In Tesseracts 3 (1990), she takes the opportunity of being one of the two co-editors, with Gerry Truscott, to write an essay on the past, future and definition of Canadian SF, "Towards a Real Speculative Literature: Writer as Asymptote." This is an essay that definitely captured the imagination since it was reprinted in Northern Stars (Hartwell and Grant 1994).

In it Dorsey claims that American SF writers could benefit and learn from Canadian and Québécois SF writers. The image of the SF writer producing work solely for pulp paperback is not only disappearing fast but is practically non-existent in Canada and Québec. She argues that SF writers come from all walks of life and that many of them write books as removed from SF as treatises on medieval French literature. Dorsey argues that Canadian SF has a penchant for mood pieces and that it is less obsessed than American SF with the resolution of conflicts.

For Dorsey, Canadian SF "has more to do with progress toward understanding" (qtd. in Grant, "Introduction," 14). Along with a number of dissenting authors, she prefers the label of speculative fiction to SF. However, in trying to bridge the gap between mainstream and SF writers, she suggests that all fiction is speculative (427). She asks whether, for instance, Anna Karenina is documentary and challenges readers to give her a novel "that is not set in a parallel universe — St. Petersburg or Manawaka — simply by virtue of being fiction" (427). She then proceeds to answer her own questions

by proposing that, after all, speculative writers are not very different from mainstream writers; Dorsey claims that, as a speculative Canadian writer she belongs to a group of "speculative writers of the Canadian tradition (which is mine, and so I always took it for granted): Sheila Watson, George t, Robertson Davies, Rudy Wiebe, Marion Engel, Gwendolyn MacEwan, Jack Hodgins, Timothy Findley—and so many more" (424). Writing as well in fields as diverse as economic development on top of being a poet, Dorsey is certainly well placed to investigate the unresolved question: what is Canadian SF?

Andrew Weiner, Terence M. Green, Michael Coney

While it is not my objective to do a detailed presentation of all noteworthy Canadian SF writers, mention of certain writers is unavoidable because of the originality of their style and because their themes sometimes put them at the cutting edge of Canadian SF.

Andrew Weiner is one of them, even though he does not publish regularly and is quoted in Northern Stars (149) as having announced his disenchantment with SF. While Weiner is familiar to readers of SF anthologies, it is only recently that his name has come to prominence. After having published stories in various magazines, Weiner published a well-written SF thriller, Station Gehenna (1987), which tells the story of a team on the planet Gehenna that tries to terraform[17] the hostile planet into a hospitable one. Special agent Victor Lewin finds evidence that a murder has been committed as well as an alien presence mystery. It owes much to the whodunnit genre.

Weiner's collection of short stories, <u>Distant Signals and Other Stories</u> (1989), was published by the Canadian Porcépic Press publishing house. The opening story, "The News from D Street," is one of Weiner's best stories. An agent is asked to find a missing person, and in typical *film noir* fashion we do not learn his name until the fifth page. Only gradually do the SF props enter into the story, in the same way that missing clues come slowly together for a private investigator in a film. The more information we are given about the surroundings, the more mysterious the story appears to be; it is only at the end of the story that, as in a classical thriller, the reader is provided with the solution he had suspected for several pages. The enjoyment is not in the solution but in the process leading to it.

"Klein's Machine," from the same collection, could not be more different in style, setting and technique. It could be placed tentatively in the category of time-travel, except that, ironically and paradoxically for an SF story, it infuses the reader with a strong element of doubt as to its veracity. Philip Herbert Klein is a 23-year-old found travelling on a bus, his eyes blank and "the remains of a bright green crushed flower in his left hand." [18] Unable either to answer any questions or to remember how he has ended up on a bus with a one-way ticket from New York to San Francisco, Klein is stopped in Ohio and transferred to a state mental hospital. The "patient," according to a psychiatrist's report, while "suffering a classical disociative reaction coupled with fugue state" (210), claims to have been "travelling in time." We are then shown Klein's diary, in which he gives an account of his secret experiments with a time-travel machine and his successful attempts at making a hamster travel through time and return. However, Klein himself cannot remember anything about his own trip into the future. With the

help of sodium pentathol, he is induced into reliving his travel experience into a future

society where there are only machines and everything is in the hands of a computer

because "the people have gone now, all gone away to other worlds circling other stars.

But the people will return, They have promised that they will return (216). The reader is

then left to decide for himself or herself whether Klein has really travelled in time.

Weiner's penchant for blurring the divide between reality and imagination finds

its highest expression in the title story, "Distant Signals." A faded movie star, Vance

Macoby, is hired by mysterious investors to act again in a television series that was

cancelled after six episodes in 1961. The investors want Macoby to shoot new episodes

of the series in which the character played by Macoby is an amnesiac gunslinger who

wanders from town to town in search of his lost identity. The puzzling outmoded

clothes of the "investors," their insistence on wanting to pay in gold and the ease with

which they can carry the suitcase, which is loaded with 125 pounds of the precious

metal, added to the inescapable fact that, as readers, we are consciously reading SF,

brings the realization that these investors are not from this planet. The aliens, who live

twenty light years from earth, are disappointed that the series they had been watching

from their own planet has suddenly stopped and want the series to continue for their own

audience:

> "Twenty light years," he repeated. "Twenty years for the signals to
> reach them. Distant, distant signals. And then they stop. Before the
> story ends. And they don't like that" (236).

Weiner has moved closer to magic realism with the novella "Eternity, Baby,"

even though it was published in Tesseracts 4 (1992), an anthology that seems to be

sending conflicting signals about its contents.[19] The story revolves around a teenager,

Simon Nagel, falling in love with Elena Layton, who is going out with one of his friends, Gil Daniels. Gil and Simon belong to one of those numerous bands that most teenagers set up before growing into adulthood. They do not produce anything original until the day when Simon falls in love at first sight with Elena and is inspired to write a hit that propels them briefly to stardom; However, Simon never has the courage to tell Elena that he is in love with her, even when she and Gil have a falling-out. But the memory persists in Simon's mind, not of the real Elena, but of the image that he imagines her to be. And unknown to everyone else, she reappears to him later near every performing stage and meets him to make love every night. This is another "bridging the gap" story between the genres of mainstream, magic realism and SF.

Other writers who have made their mark in Canadian SF include Terence M. Green, previously cited, who published a collection of short stories, The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind (1986). The story "Barking Dogs" focuses on a machine that can tell whether a person is telling the truth. It becomes a dangerous weapon in the hands of a vengeful cop roaming in a sinister high-tech Toronto of the future. The title story "The Woman who is the Midnight Wind" takes place on another planet. The main character is a woman who manages to communicate with a half-alien child; through an emphasis on freedom from alienation, the story gives precedence to the psychological relation over the SF prop.

Michael Coney, British born, is one of the most prolific writers in Canada, incorporating extremely diversified themes and embracing all styles — horror, humour, dystopian and romantic. Most of his novels take place in other worlds and consequently

lack any Canadian set of references. Coney's most recent work is the two-volume <u>Song of the Earth — Gods of the Greataway</u> (1984) and <u>The Celestial Steam Locomotive</u> (1986). It belongs more to the category of science fantasy than to SF and involves a Dream World programmed by a computer whose purpose is the joining of three beings (an event not of their own choosing) who are to re-generate humanity.

Notes to the Third Chapter

[1] This is the coat which Bone has abandoned after he merged with Anna into a single new creature. The money comes from successful handgun robberies out of money tills.

[2] NTM is one of the most popular French rap groups featured on MTV.

[3] John Clute and Peter Nicholls, "Fabulation,"<u>The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction</u>.

[4] She is, however, not mentioned in <u>Anatomy of Wonder</u>. Although it is considered to be a major work of reference for American and international SF, it ignores totally Canadian SF. It includes several chapters on foreign language SF but fails to mention Phyllis Gotlieb who had published at least two works before <u>Anatomy of Wonder</u> was published in 1987.

[5] Extra sensory perception: communication or perception by means other than the physical senses.

[6] It is not a Russian ghetto as David Ketterer writes.

[7] AUTEUR: nom masculin, de "auctor," celui qui accroît, qui fonde. Cause créateur, principe, (voir Dieu) Artisan; fondateur, inventeur; initiateur, promoteur, responsable: "J'en suis le seul auteur, elle n'est que complice" (Corneille).

[8] Élisabeth Vonarburg, <u>Les Voyageurs malgré eux</u> (Montréal: : Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1994). Translated in English by Jane Brierley, <u>Reluctant Voyagers</u>, (New-York Bantam Spectra Special, 1995, and Tesseract Books, Edmonton, AB, Canada, 1996).

[9] However, Frye stated that "the garrison mentality is highly favourable to the growth of popular literature..." Northrop Frye, <u>The Bush Garden</u> 236. SF is generally considered to be a popular literature but this has not been the case for Canadian SF, which has not developed as a strictly popular literature, contrary to American SF.

[10] Kroker states that "Left to its own imperatives, technological experience is just dangerous enough as to force us, almost in spite of ourselves, to rethink the deep relationship of technology and civilization. Literally, if we are to survive as a species, it will be due in no small part to the terrible fact that the sheer extremity of the threat to the human species posed by the new technologies (the Bomb as the sigh of twentieth-century experience) will have forced a dramatic revaluation of human ethics"(126).

[11] Sophie Beaulé explains in a footnote (n3) to "Réflexions sur la science-fiction des années 80," that "Nous avons utilisé 189 textes, majoritairement intra muros, sur la production totale de 1980 à nos jours. Si les textes majeurs ont été inclus dans notre corpus, on notera cependant des absences (surtout dans la SF jeunesse et les textes à la frontière du champ). Notre échantillonnage nous semble néanmoins assez représentatif de la SFQ" (37).

[12] Douglas Hill until then had been writing only youth SF.

[13] The term of Québécois SF used by Québec writers tends to ignore the existence of francophone SF produced outside Québec. Jean-Louis Trudel, a Franco-Ontarian, does not consider himself a Québécois writer. It also disregards the fact that many so-called Québécois SF writers were born in France or in Switzerland and are published exclusively by French editors such as Pierre Billon by Le Seuil/Point, Paris.

[14] A possible anagram for Jim (Jimmy) Morrison, a vocalist/poet, born in 1943. He formed the American rock band The Doors. He was found dead in his bath, probably from a drug-related heart attack, but few saw his corpse except for his wife and an anonymous doctor, fuelling the rock legend that he had faked his own death.

[15] This is, however, a theme present in much of general SF.

[16] Donald Kingsbury was born in San Francisco in 1929 and emigrated to Canada in 1948. He then studied for a B.Sc. (1956) and an M.Sc. (1960), later to become a Canadian citizen. He has since lived in Montreal and taught Mathematics in McGill University but is not "claimed" by Québec SF.

[17] To transform a planet and make it closer to Earth conditions so that humans can live on it.

[18] An allusion to the flower from the future in H. G. Wells' The Time Machine.

[19] The first part of the blurb says that it includes "SF by," a list of authors it then provides. The second part tells us that it "expands futures in speculative and SF ... of new and established Canadian writers." Michael Skeet, co-editor with Lorna Toolis, is of the opinion in the afterword that "it's pointless trying to figure out what is Canadian SF. But there are academics who get paid to do that sort of thing."

Conclusion

In general, then, there is a perception that Canadian SF is different from American SF in that it is a literature not oriented towards problem solving. Not being subjected to the same constraints as most of American commercial SF, it tends to be more introspective. But the fact remains that a simple look at francophone and anglophone bookstores across Canada will reveal that Canadian SF has a hard time getting on the shelves and that Canadian readers prefer American SF.

Canadian SF is not concerned with problem solving but rather with asking questions which are very often left unanswered and which result in seemingly unfinished stories where the main protagonists are still not sure what directions they will take or whether the situation that has been resolved has really been resolved. This is the case with Wilson's stories; in <u>Mysterium</u> the protagonists are trying to head north, and we are left with an existentialist cliffhanger. Sometimes, as in <u>Chronoreg</u> by Semine, we are given a choice of two endings, with the possibility that the protagonist will keep being shunted from one to the other; the indication is that Canadian characters are on an endless search for their identities and a sense of place. These rehashed clichés are the common thread in discussions of what could be called mainstream Canadian SF themes.

The catastrophe theme, common in American SF, is also a shared thread in Canadian SF. What is essentially Canadian is that Canadian SF does not dwell on the causes of disasters; it simply acknowledges them and moves on to the business of

survival. Atwood stated that survival is second nature in Canadian literature. In

Canadian SF survival becomes the antithesis of existentialism. Northrop Frye suggests

in <u>The Bush Garden</u> that: "The existentialist movement, with its emphasis on the self-

determination of social attitudes, seems to have had very little direct influence in

Canada" (230). Although Frye is talking here about the social significance of literature,

it applies to a big part of Canadian SF where characters are thrown into situations not of

their own choosing and rarely take action but rather have action thrust upon them.

Canadian protagonists do not choose an existentialist experience, they just accept the

only choice that is left to them: an action that leads them to an involuntary re-assessment

of their identity. This is existentialism by default.

This involuntary re-assessment is what happens to A. E. van Vogt's protagonist

in <u>Slan</u> (1940, 1945). Jommy Cross is born a Slan; he is a mutant and his group is hated

and persecuted by the majority. Circumstances, especially the training he has received

from his parents, put him in the unique position of being the one who will reconcile

Slans with other humans and provide a better future for his group. This course of action

is not of his choosing. Cross is not effecting this reconciliation out of a desire for

justice, although it is not absent from his mind, neither is he doing it to save the Slans

because he thinks they need a saviour. Events have thrust themselves upon him. This is

the quintessential Canadian element in van Vogt's work in conjunction with the fact that

all his early stories take place in nameless lands.

Tobie Nathan, in his psychoanalytic analysis of <u>Slan</u> and <u>The World of Null-A</u>

(1945) concludes that:

Il me semble avoir argumenté l'idée selon laquelle van Vogt

exploiterait systématiquement une technique d'écriture consistant à explorer des situations de déstructuration des repères de l'identité. J'ai développé l'analyse de trois grands axes de cette technique : la non-fermeture de l'appareil psychique, la discontinuité de l'identité sociale, la métaphorisation d'un corps imaginaire. . . .

Si mon hypothèse était exacte, il nous faudrait considérer l'œuvre romanesque de van Vogt comme une investigation quasiment scientifique — quoique romanesque (science-fiction?) — du processus de dépersonnalisation (189).

Similarly, John Clute sums up what constitutes the un-Americanness of van Vogt and in the process defines the characteristics of a great part of Canadian SF by writing that:

Van Vogt's tales are un-American, to begin with, in their almost total disregard for the details of human community. Their protagonists live in neighborhoods or cities which are generally unnamed, and which are essentially featureless. Countries are also nameless. The planet is probably Earth, but it is not a *special* part of Earth. It is not a promised land. It is, rather, a tabula rasa, a wilderness to be imprinted. . . .

The destinies they forge are solitary destinies; though they may ostensibly bear the world on their shoulders, van Vogt's protagonists are not, in fact, leaders at all, because there is no one in the wilderness to lead. A. E. Van Vogt novels are solitudes ("Fables" 25).

John Clute's analysis is not seemingly without contradiction; "the wilderness to be imprinted" might very well appear, if taken literally, to be an American Frontier theme; this "tabula rasa" can only be Canadian if it is a metaphor for a *search for one's identity* and not the definition of a Canadian identity.

The different visions of Canada's future or image in SF are striking: on the one hand, we have a series of identifiable futures presented by French-Canadian SF, but with a tendency to verge on the dystopia as if to warn us that any independence scenario is not as rosy as one could think. French-Canadian SF writers are expressing doubts about individual freedoms in a future independent Québec. On the other hand, English-

Canadian SF all but ignores Canada's future, except for a certain kind of speculative

thriller fiction with versions of an independent Québec.[1] English-Canadian SF writers

do not include a future Canada in their vision of the future.

These are but two versions of the same thing with the variation being only in the

mode of rejection: French-Canadian SF rejects an independent Québec by describing an

alternative or future independent Québec in which life is hell; English-Canadian SF does

not present any well-defined future Canada, even through the device of time-travel

stories. English-Canadian SF writers are pessimistic about a Canada which would still

include Québec and therefore are reluctant to depict a situation they find difficult to

contemplate. The only way to reject the inevitable is to avoid mentioning it. This is

because Québec is so much a part of Canada that it finds it difficult to even contemplate

its destruction. Short of making political statements or producing an all-too-easy-to-

reject fascist version of a future Québec, as is done by political thrillers, Canadian SF,

not versed in the political, carefully avoids the issue by excluding it all together. In a

study of the Canadian identity, Christian Dufour explains that, for English-Canadians,

Québec is an essential part of their vision of Canada:

> Québec is also, we mustn't forget, in the physical heart of Canada. This territorial aspect has always been an essential component of the official Canadian identity. Given that England had tried to make the Anciens Canadiens disappear in 1763 and 1840, given that their descendants have suffered more than their share of exploitation and humiliation at the hands of the English, and given that the Quebecers of today have great difficulty in getting themselves recognized as a modest distinct society, it is no wonder they are a little bit sceptical when they are told that Canada wanted to continue New France, and that the Franco-Canadian identity is at the heart of the Canadian identity of today. . . .

The reverse is not true, however. If it is very difficult for Canada to

imagine itself without Québec, that province has always had the possibility—and at times the need—to imagine existing outside of Canada (48).

This need to imagine itself, but not necessarily to actually become independent, as is demonstrated by contradictory referendum polls, elections and opinion polls, could be the root reason for the profusion of alternative "Québecs" in French-Canadian SF. Québecers can imagine, even warn themselves against the possibility of an independent Québec, make it as realistic and credible as they want but not actually do it in reality. For their part English Canadians have difficulty imagining themselves on their own, a fact that could be deeply based on their history: Dufour states that, if not legally, at least in practice during the French regime and contrary to Québec, "English Canada has never existed alone, without its French counterpart" (50).

This might also explain why English-Canadian SF authors so readily have been curious, willing and very keen on having French-Canadian authors in their anthologies. They have invited them and have made them full partners to their conventions.[2] It would also explain why the two groups never questioned the dual character of their national writers' association, SF Canada.

Canadian SF has strongly resisted, in the main, the traditional themes and ideologies of mainstream American SF. Canadian SF protagonists are not American heroes who admire the wonders of science and seek salvation through technology. In resisting American themes each language group, French-Canadian and English-Canadian, has tended to express themes and images that conform to the self-images it has of its culture. The two SF language groups of Canada contribute to a common sense of identity, even when diverging on issues, through a shared refusal of cultural values

alien to them. As a consequence, they eventually express, reluctantly, many similar themes.

SF has long come of age, and more recently, so has Canadian SF, and it has managed to pervade every domain of contemporary culture. Science fiction shelves grow in importance every year in all bookstores and in all languages. SF movies reach some of the biggest cinema audiences, and it is practically impossible to find a general television network schedule without a couple of hours devoted daily to an SF series of some sort. Nevertheless, quantity does not mean quality and pervasiveness of SF in our contemporary culture usually means the pervasiveness of American SF: which brings us to the definition of quality SF literature and to the importance and the influence of Canadian SF. One of the primary factors dictating quality in a literature is its relevance and its capacity to reflect our preoccupations, directly or indirectly, involuntarily at times. Within the Canadian context, the question is whether the study and the production of SF in the context of a national literature has a relevance in the same range as the one usually bestowed on what is commonly called mainstream literature: we will argue that it possibly has more relevance in some instances. SF, and in particular Canadian SF, can be and is a vital element in the shaping and reinforcing of myths specific to a national culture and its survival.

Were Canadian culture to lose its ability to create Canadian myths, it would then relinquish one of the principal reasons for its existence and forfeit its primary role in the shaping of a Canadian consciousness. SF literature is a powerful creator of myths, myths that centre on humanity's place in an ever-changing universe. It can be argued

that a nation without a national SF literature is in danger of letting other nations and cultures be solely responsible for the future of its citizens and the dreams that they might wish to put into reality. Similarly, the importance of technology and science in our contemporary societies has created the need for literature to explore the consequences of the advent of technology and science on the human condition. Often, as in the case of Canadian literature, it has led to the creation of a Canadian SF literature better suited, than for example, American SF, to explore Canadian themes and myths.

Myths are essential in the formation and the understanding of a national culture and of its literature, for they are the outer manifestation of a hidden reality; the literary critic Terry Eagleton wrote that myths "are devices to think with, ways of classifying and organizing reality, and this, rather than the recounting of any particular tale, is their point" (104).

The appearance, therefore, of SF, and more to the point, Canadian SF, is a clear consequence of the need to express certain realities that could not be conveyed through the existing cultural channels. Whether this is a positive and forward-looking device is not quite obvious yet, but its existence is undeniable. Canadian SF is quite possibly an attempt to examine certain canons of contemporary culture, Canadian or not, from a different perspective, growing from a certain dissatisfaction with modern Canadian realities. This examination often focuses on myths, as has been the case with English literature according to Eagleton: "It is not difficult to see the flight from contemporary history in the recourse to myth of the major writers of English literature" (110).

One of the questions, therefore, is whether the use of SF is a flight from Canadian history or an attempt to approach it from a different angle in order to provoke

a re-examination of current national myths in a manner not otherwise possible. I am not

saying that this re-examination is always a conscious process with Canadian SF writers.

What is of equal importance is whether the two streams of Canadian SF are divergent

enough to constitute seemingly irreconcilable dreams and visions of the future, or

whether they share enough similar preconceptions and themes about the future of their

cultures that they would tend to point in the same direction. This would be in contrast,

for instance, to the themes and directions that have appeared in other national SF

literatures such as the French and the American schools of SF. French SF has a

tendency to be more politically and socially oriented and American SF more problem

solving and action oriented; these are traits not typical of Canadian SF even when

French-Canadian SF examines futures Québecs, it does not intend it to be a discourse on

the political systems it imagines.

That English-Canadian SF has had difficulties, at first, with Canadian settings is

a puzzling phenomenon: previously, Canadian authors could have been trying to erase

all things Canadian in order to be published in the United States, but the ones that are

now published in Canada are still using random American settings. It is true that, due to

economic reasons, this state of affairs may be difficult to reverse for a while, since, as

reported by Sernine in an interview with Pomerleau (1987), many English-Canadian

authors eventually choose an American publisher:

> . . . l'un des éditeurs de Press Porcépic, Gerry Truscott . . . m'a expliqué
> que les éditeurs canadiens anglais potentiellement intéressés par la SF
> ne reçoivent pas beaucoup de bons manuscrits parce que, dès qu'un
> auteur anglophone est assez talentueux, il envoie ses textes aux États-
> unis (21).

Today, however, the most popular and read Canadian authors are being published in the United States and in Canada and have a faithful and sizable readership. Some, such as Robert Charles Wilson and Robert Sawyer, have received awards in America. Both authors do use in some of their novels a strong set of Canadian references. Élisabeth Vonarburg achieves a fairly high rate of success in translation, and although her first popular novel published in translation south of the border had no Canadian settings, the fact that it was a translation was very visible on the front cover; stating so clearly the foreign origin of the novel and its being a translation is a nearly suicidal approach in the American SF paperback market. Her second novel, <u>Les Voyageurs malgré eux</u> translated as the <u>Reluctant Voyagers</u>, achieved a high rate of success while having a strong Québécois content.

Sometimes the inclusion of an American set of references seems to be so gratuitous that it must have been dictated by external reasons. In Andrew Weiner's "Klein's Machine," does it matter whether the protagonist is travelling from New York to San Francisco— as he is in the story? Would the story have been less relevant, profound or sensitive, had Philip Herbert Klein been travelling from, say, Halifax to Vancouver, stopping in Montreal or Toronto and then transferring to a hospital? Probably, would quip the cynics, for the emergency ward would have been closed down by budget cuts, or in Montreal the hospital would have been francophone. But it can be a way of mapping out the cultural territory.

Canadian SF has tended to reinforce the myth of the insignificance of Canada and even of its lack of relevance: English-Canadian authors have done this by erasing from their work any future references or by not naming the territory, geographical or

otherwise. French-Canadian authors have done it as well but for fundamentally different reasons, because of a mistrust of Canada, or a lack of interest in a political project from which they had been excluded.

Lately, the cultural landscape has tended to change. Some authors, such as Sawyer or Semine — interestingly enough, both considered at one time or another the only full time Canadian SF writers — have started to include Canada in their vision; Sawyer uses Canadian settings as a matter-of-course background, and Semine imagines a Canada with an independent Québec that does not seem to behave better than its neighbour.

The all-pervading theme of alienation, often cured by love, combined with the repeated involuntary thrust into action imposed on characters by circumstances are the common elements underlying both strands of Canadian SF. These elements might well reflect the position of Canadian culture as a new "fifth business," an intermediary between North America and Europe, proposing new directions and destined to pursue its own vision of SF.

Indeed, Canadian SF is a field for what Ronald Sutherland calls the "new hero," notable for "realistic involvement" — "accepting life as it is with all its miseries and absurdities, but still retaining the capacity to love others and to struggle for whatever small improvements are possible" (6). This is reflected as a dominant theme and characteristic of most Canadian SF protagonists, who have finally transformed themselves into reluctant heroes through the resolution of conflicts with the power of love and compassion. They also exhibit an emerging individualistic outlook and self-reliance that leads, not to American intervention and triumphalism, but to an acceptance

of circumstances and passive survival through compromise. In the same series of essays Sutherland notes the "the felt absence of positive myths in Canada" (82).

Canadian SF, with the freedom it has enjoyed to experiment away from mainstream cultural canons and with its series of reluctant heroes, might well provide Canada with an essential myth for its survival. Canada is in an ambivalent position not of its own choosing: it is situated next to the United States, a country that sees technology and science as a solution to many contemporary problems and that has no memory of its European past. Canada, on the other hand, is trying to reconcile itself with the technological world while attempting to deal with the heritage of the past. Being situated so close to the United States, Canada is the first country that has had to deal very early with this reconciliation, which will be the lot of other cultures as physical distances gradually become less important and bring them closer to the technologically oriented society of the United States. Canadian SF expresses this reconciliation clearly through a reluctance to heroic action, preceded by the questioning of science, both of which become the clues to survival.

Notes to the Conclusion

[1] Such as Richard Rohmer's Starmageddon and Richard Weintraub's The Underdogs.

[2] During one Canvention [in Toronto], English-Canadian authors and organizers were so keen on linguistic equality and equal inclusion that it created a real Canadian problem. Daniel Sernine and Élisabeth Vonarburg explain that "Les organisateurs avaient tenu à ce que les Québécois fassent leurs exposés en français, afin de présenter un programme bilingue. Nous, au contraire, avions insisté pour les donner en anglais, sûr que nous étions de n'être compris de personne si nous nous en tenions au français. Ce fut le cas, ou presque : persuadé à l'avance qu'il ne comprendrait pas, le public anglophone n'a presque pas assisté aux activités françaises. Il y avait heureusement un bon contingent de Québécois venus pour l'occasion, et d'autres vivant en Ontario (Sernine, "SFC et SFQ" 38). Ironically and unwillingly, the quest for linguistic equality and fairness re-created the two Canadian solitudes.

Appendix 1

SF Canada Membership as of the 18th of September 1996

This list is useful for it helps identify authors who consider themselves to be Canadian.

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  * Cliff Burns
  * Joël Champetier
  * Mary Choo
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  * Michael Coney
  * Harold Côté
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* Michel Lamontagne

* Steve Lehman

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* Susan MacGregor

* Catherine MacLeod

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* Francine Pelletier

* Jean Pettigrew

* Ursula Pflug

* Teresa Plowright

* Claude-Michel Prévost

* Clélie Rich

* Esther Rochon

* Rhea Rose

* Robert Runté (Runté@hg.uletch.ca)

* William Antony Swithin Sarjeant

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Appendix 2

Aurora Awards

The Aurora award[1] is Canada's highest award for achievement in the fields of Science Fiction and Fantasy. The award encompasses activities such as writing, film production, the visual arts, and convention organizing. It is organized similarly to the Hugo award. Stories and other eligible works are voted on by the general public, and the winners receive a beautiful sculptured trophy, plus the attendant prestige.

The first Aurora Award (known as the Casper prior to 1991) was presented in 1980 - a lifetime achievement award to A. E. van Vogt. There was only one award per year for 1980-1985. From 1986 to 1988 there were three awards per year - for work in English, work in French and contributions to fandom. The French awards for 1986-88 all went to short fiction. After 1989, fiction awards in both languages were expanded to Long-form and Short-form, and a two-year eligibility rule came into effect. There are some repeats after novels became eligible for a two year period.

The following list only indicates the winner in a category. If a category is not listed, it indicates that no award was granted.

1980 Aurora Award

Lifetime Contributions
A. E. van Vogt

1981 Aurora Award

Lifetime Contributions
particularly as critic and editor   Susan Wood

1982 Aurora Award

Best Long-Form Work in English
<u>A Judgement of Dragons</u>   Phyllis Gotlieb

Lifetime Contributions
Phyllis Gotlieb

1983 Aurora Award

Lifetime Contributions
Judith Merril

1984 Aurora Award

No Award Given This Year

1985 Aurora Award

Best Work
<u>Songs from the Drowned Lands</u>
[Journey to Apriloth]   Eileen Kernaghan

1986 Aurora Award

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
editor, Maple Leaf Rag & dedication to
Canadian fandom   Garth Spencer

Best Work in French
"Yadjine et la Mort"   Daniel Sernine

Lifetime Contributions
Judith Merril

1987 Aurora Award

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
editor, <u>Solaris</u>   Élisabeth Vonarburg

Best Work in English
<u>The Wandering Fire</u>   Guy Gavriel Kay

Best Work in French
"La Carte du Tendre"   Élisabeth Vonarburg

Lifetime Contributions

---- Michael G. Coney

1988 Aurora Award

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
MLR Michael Skeet

Best Work in English
Jack, the Giant Killer [Jack the Giant-Killer: A Novel of Urban
    Faerie] Charles de Lint

Best Work in French
Les Crabes de Vénus regardent vers le ciel Alain Bergeron

Best Short-Form Work in English
  "And Who is Joah?" Tanya Huff

1989 Aurora Award

Fan Achievement (Other)
NCF Guide to Canadian SF Robert Runté

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
Treasurer, PineKone 1 Paul Valcour

Best Long-Form Work in English
Mona Lisa Overdrive William Gibson

Best Other Work in English
Tesseract Books Gerry Truscott

Best Long-Form Work in French
Temps mort Charles Montpetit

Best Other Work in French
Solaris Luc Pomerleau

Best Short-Form Work in French
"Survie sur Mars" Joël Champetier

Best Short-Form Work in English
"Sleeping in a Box" Candas Jane Dorsey

1990 Aurora Award

Fan Achievement (Other)
promotion of Canadian SF Robert Runté

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
ConText '89   The Alberta Speculative Fiction
Association

Best Long-Form Work in English
West of January   Dave Duncan

Best Other Work in English
publisher, On Spec   Copper Pig Writers' Society

Best Long-Form Work in French
L'Oiseau de feu (Tome 1)   Jacques Brossard

Best Other Work in French
Solaris   Luc Pomerleau

Best Short-Form Work in French
"Cogito"
["Cogito" (trans: Jane Brierley, 1991)]   Élisabeth Vonarburg

Best Short-Form Work in English
"Carpe Diem"   Eileen Kernaghan

1991 Aurora Award

Artistic Achievement
Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

Fan Achievement (Other)
Ask Mr. Science (column)   Al Betz

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
president, SSFS; chair, Combine 0   Dave Panchyk

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
Neology   Catherine Donahue Girczyc

Best Long-Form Work in English
Tigana   Guy Gavriel Kay

Best Other Work in English
publisher, On Spec   Copper Pig Writers' Society

Best Long-Form Work in French
Histoire de la princesse et du dragon   Élisabeth Vonarburg

Best Other Work in French
<u>Solaris</u>   Les Compagnons à temps   perdu

Best Short-Form Work in French
"Ici, des tigres"   Élisabeth Vonarburg

Best Short-Form Work in English
"Muffin Explains Teleology to the World at
   Large"   James Alan Gardner

1992 Aurora Award

Artistic Achievement
Martin Springett

Fan Achievement (Other)
Horizons SF   David W. New

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
chair, 1994 Winnepeg Worldcon Bid   John Mansfield

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
Sol Rising   Larry Hancock

Best Long-Form Work in English
<u>Golden Fleece</u>   Robert J. Sawyer

Best Other Work in English
Prisoners of Gravity (TV series)   TVOntario

Best Long-Form Work in French
<u>Ailleurs et au Japon</u>   Élisabeth Vonarburg

Best Other Work in French
<u>Solaris</u>   Les Compagnons à temps perdu

Best Short-Form Work in French
"L'Enfant des mondes assoupis"   Yves Meynard

Best Short-Form Work in English
"Breaking Ball"   Michael Skeet
"A Niche"   Peter Watts

1993 Aurora Award

Artistic Achievement
Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

Fan Achievement (Other)
SF2 show   Louise Hypher

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
NonCon 15   Adam Charlesworth

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
Under the Ozone Hole   John Herbert and
                                                                          Karl Johanson

Best Long-Form Work in English
Passion Play   Sean Stewart

Best Other Work in English
Tesseracts 4   Lorna Toolis and Michael   Skeet

Best Long-Form Work in French
Chroniques du Pays des Mères
[In the Mothers' Land (trans: Jane Brierley)]
[The Maërlande Chronicles (1992)]   Élisabeth Vonarburg

Best Other Work in French
Solaris   Les Compagnons à temps   perdu

Best Short-Form Work in French
"Base de négociation"   Jean Dion

Best Short-Form Work in English
"The Toy Mill"   David Nickle and Karl
                                                                          Schroeder

---1994 Aurora Award

Artistic Achievement
                                                                          Robert Pasternak

Fan Achievement (Other)
promotion of Canadian SF   Jean-Louis Trudel

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
Ad Astra   Lloyd Penney

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
Under the Ozone Hole   John Herbert and Karl Johanson

Best Long-Form Work in English
Nobody's Son   Sean Stewart

Best Other Work in English
Prisoners of Gravity (TV series)   TVOntario

Best Long-Form Work in French
Chronoreg   Daniel Sernine

Best Other Work in French
Les 42,210 Univers de la Science-Fiction   Guy Bouchard

Best Short-Form Work in French
t "Les Merveilleuses machines de Johann Havel"   Yves Meynard

Best Short-Form Work in English
"Just Like Old Times"   Robert J. Sawyer

1995 Aurora Award

Artistic Achievement
                                        Tim Hammell

Fan Achievement (Other)
Ether Patrol host (Vancouver radio show)   Catherine Donahue Girczyc

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
NonCon & On Spec   Cath Jackel

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
Under the Ozone Hole   John Herbert and Karl
                                        Johanson

Best Long-Form Work in English
Virtual Light   William Gibson

Best Other Work in English
On Spec   Copper Pig Writers' Society,
                                        Barry Hammond et al

Best Long-Form Work in French
La Mémoire du lac   Joël Champetier

Best Other Work in French
Solaris   Joël Champetier

Best Short-Form Work in French
"L'Homme qui fouillait la lumière"   Alain Bergeron
"L'Envoyé"   Yves Meynard

Best Short-Form Work in English
"The Fragrance of Orchids"   Sally McBride

1996 Aurora Award

Artistic Achievement
                                                         Jean-Pierre Normand

Fan Achievement (Other)
entertainer   Larry Stewart

Fan Achievement (Organizational)
SF Boréal, Prix Boréal   Jean-Louis Trudel

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)
Under the Ozone Hole   John Herbert and Karl
                                                         Johanson

Best Long-Form Work in English
The Terminal Experiment
[Hobson's Choice]   Robert J. Sawyer

Best Other Work in English
Reboot (Animated TV Series)   BLT productions

Best Long-Form Work in French
Les Voyageurs malgré eux
[Reluctant Voyagers (trans: Jane Brierley)] Élisabeth Vonarburg

Best Other Work in French
Solaris   Joël Champetier

Best Short-Form Work in French
"Équinoxe"   Yves Meynard

Best Short-Form Work in English
"The Perseids"   Robert Charles Wilson

Notes to Appendix 1

[1] The list is the one supplied by SF Canada from their Web Site <u>SF Canada</u> n. pag., online,
Internet, September 1996. Available, http://helios.physics.utoronto.ca:8080/auroras.html

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette dissertation vise à une comparaison des littératures de science-fiction canadienne anglaise et canadienne française, principalement sous forme de roman ou de nouvelles publiées dans des anthologies. Elle consiste en une introduction générale du phénomène de la science-fiction en général et au Canada. Elle commence par dresser un historique de l'émergence de la science-fiction au Canada, des facteurs ayant favorisé son apparition et des conditions de sa création. Cet historique est suivi d'un examen des relations ambivalentes entre la science-fiction canadienne et la science. Une section de ce chapitre est consacrée aux voyages dans le temps et à leur crédibilité croissante dans le monde scientifique; nous constatons l'absence presque totale de ce thème dans la science-fiction canadienne française, probablement influencée par une vision linéaire de l'histoire.

La dernière partie se concentre tout particulièrement sur les protagonistes des deux courants de science fiction canadienne et des traits qui les différencient ou les unissent dans leurs attitudes et leurs vues philosophiques, plus particulièrement en relation avec les tendances déjà présentes dans la littérature et la société canadienne.

Cette étude examine tout d'abord les relations difficiles entre le monde universitaire et un milieu, défini comme appartenant à la para-littérature, qui est par nature méfiant d'un jugement extérieur. Elle explore aussi les paramètres de définition de la science fiction et ce qui la différencie, ou non, des autres littératures. En grande partie grâce à sa situation géographique et linguistique, la science-fiction canadienne française est née d'un milieu de fanzines et de bénévoles pour graduellement se

professionnaliser et permettre à plusieurs écrivains de vivre partiellement ou même entièrement de leur plume. Ceci semble s'être accompli dans des conditions rappelant celles de la création de la science-fiction américaine quarante ans auparavant. Par contre, la science-fiction canadienne anglaise a éprouvé beaucoup de mal à s'affirmer en tant que telle. Les auteurs canadiens anglais ayant toujours subi l'attirance du monde de l'édition américaine alors que les éditeurs canadiens anglais ne s'intéressaient guère à leurs œuvres. La thèse développée et démontrée dans cette section est que l'existence du milieu québécois de la science-fiction a eu des influences profondes et durables sur le développement d'institutions semblables pour la science-fiction canadienne anglaise. En outre, de nombreux contacts et anthologies anglophones publient des auteurs des deux littératures de science fiction. D'un autre côté, le monde de l'édition québécoise semble passer pour silence presque total l'existence d'une science-fiction de langue anglaise au Canada.

L'examen des relations entre la science et la science-fiction au Canada montre un peu d'empressement, parfois un refus total, à croire dans les bienfaits de la science. Ce refus ou en anglais "reluctance" est d'autant plus frappant qu'il se retrouve dans les attitudes de la majorité des protagonistes de science-fiction canadienne. Pour paraphraser le titre d'un roman d'Élisabeth Vonarburg, Les Voyageurs malgré eux [traduit sous le titre de The Reluctant Voyagers en anglais], les héros canadiens de science fiction sont des héros malgré eux n'ayant pas choisi leur situation et peu enclins à considérer la science, ou ses prétendues merveilles, comme une solution aux problèmes de l'homme confrontés à de nouvelles situations. Ce manque d'enthousiasme à se mettre au centre de l'action contraste avec une grande partie de la science-fiction

américaine; par contre, l'un de ces effets est une absence virtuelle, du moins à un niveau

évident, du territoire culturel et géographique chez les auteurs anglophones; le pendant

chez les écrivains francophones est d'exclure le Canada de toute vision alternative d'un

futur où seul le Québec semble avoir une place mais s'il s'agit d'un État ayant souvent

sombré dans un certain enfer.

L'apparition de la science-fiction canadienne découle aussi bien d'un besoin

d'exprimer des réalités qui ne pouvaient l'être à travers d'autres moyens d'expression

culturelle que de celui de décrire une nouvelle perception de notre environnement. Les

héros malgré eux ont remplacé les anciens protagonistes résignés à leur sort. Ils le font,

non à l'aide d'un triomphalisme américain, mais en acceptant leur situation et en

résolvant les conflits par des compromis.

Grâce à sa recherche d'une action dénuée de gloire et d'une vertu supérieure, la

science-fiction canadienne pourrait bien fournir au Canada un mythe essentiel à sa

survie.

SUMMARY

The aim of this dissertation is a comparison of English-Canadian science fiction and French Canadian science fiction (SF) mainly published as novels or short stories in anthologies. It starts with a general introduction to the phenomenon of SF then proceeds to a historic description of the emergence of SF in Canada, of the factors that helped its emergence and the conditions of its establishment. This brief history is followed by a study of the ambivalent relations that prevail between science and Canadian SF. A section of this chapter is devoted to time-travel and it's growing credibility in the scientific world: we notice that this theme is barely existent in French Canadian SF, suggesting that time travel is probably conditioned by a linear vision of history.

The latter section of the dissertation focuses on protagonists from both currents of Canadian SF and on the different or similar traits that are inherent from their philosophical views, particularly in relation with the tendencies that are already observed in Canadian society and literature at large.

This study also examines the difficult relations between the academic world and a milieu, once defined as being part of paraliterature, which is intrinsically mistrustful of external criticism. It explores the defining parameters for SF and how SF distinguishes itself, or does not, from other genres of literature. Due in large part to its geographical and linguistic situation, Canadian SF evolved from being published in fanzines and with volunteers' help to gradually become a professional medium which enables a few writers

to live partially or even full time from their writings. This evolution seems to have been accomplished in conditions that are a reminder of the establishment of American SF forty years ago. However, English-Canadian SF has experienced extreme difficulties in asserting itself. English-Canadian SF authors have always been pulled towards the American publishing industry to an extent because English-Canadian editors would hardly show any interest in their work. The argument being developed in this section is that the existence of the Québécois milieu has had deep and lasting influences on the development of similar institutions in English-Canadian SF. Yet while English-language Canadian anthologies do publish authors from the two Canadian SF literatures, the Québécois publishing world appears to ignore nearly totally the existence of English-Canadian SF.

An examination of the relations between science and SF in Canada demonstrates a lack of enthusiasm for the benefits of science, amounting at times to a total denial. This reluctance is all the more striking since it is a fundamental trait of the majority of the protagonists to be found in English-Canadian SF. To paraphrase the title of a novel written by Élisabeth Vornarburg, Les Voyageurs malgré eux, which may be translated as The Reluctant Voyagers, Canadian heroes are reluctant heroes, who have not chosen the situation in which they find themselves and who are not much prone to see science, or its so-called marvellous features, as a solution to man's problems when they are confronted with new situations. This reluctance to put oneself in the centre of the action contrasts with a large part of American SF; on the other hand, one of its side effects is a virtual absence, at least at an obvious level, of a cultural and geographical territory among anglophone writers. Francophone SF writers exclude Canada from any alternative

vision of the future, a future where only Québec seems to have a place, but too often it is a Québec state that has sunk into a relative hell.

The emergence of Canadian SF results from not only a need to express realities that could not be represented through other means of expression but also from the necessity to describe a new perception of our environment. Reluctant heroes have replaced the former Canadian protagonists of mainstream fiction who were resigned to their lot. They are heroes, not with American-style over-confidence, but through an acceptance of their situation and the resolution of conflicts brought about by compromises.

Thanks to its quest for an action devoid of glory and a superior virtue, Canadian SF could well provide Canada with a myth essential for her survival.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: HENRY D. LEPERLIER

Henry D. Leperlier is a full-time university lecturer in the *Fiontar* Department of Dublin City University. He lectures in French, Spanish and cultural issues. He is also part of the department team charged with information technology and computing facilities. He also works as a translation teacher, translator/interpreter and software engineer. He has specialized in Comparative Canadian Literature and more particularly Canadian Science Fiction. He was born in France, of Vietnamese and Réunion extraction, and received his education in France and Madagascar. He is an Irish as well as a French citizen. After obtaining his D. U. E. L. (English, German and Economics) in the Université de Grenoble in France and working one year as a language assistant in Liverpool in England, he was admitted into the M. A. programme for comparative Canadian literature at the Université de Sherbrooke. He completed the programme in 1978 with the writing of an M. A. thesis on bilingual protagonists in the Canadian novel. While studying, he taught at the Université de Sherbrooke in the Adult training programme and the Federal scheme for English as a second language.

Upon his return to France in 1978, he trained and worked as a proofreader and teacher. In 1980 he left for Ireland where he began to work in the Alliance française of Dublin, teaching literature and French. He also taught for three years concurrently Spanish at the École franco-irlandaise de Dublin and German and French in various Irish schools (most of them Irish -language-medium schools). After a one-year stay in Brussels as a freelance translator (from Dutch and French into English) and a teacher of

English, French and Irish, he returned to the same occupation in the Alliance française, teaching translation and French as a second language.

He then started to work also as a translator, mainly with the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, an agency supporting minority languages in the European Union and funded by the European Commission and various governments and local authorities in the European Union. He also works as a software engineer specializing in localization and issues related to the use of languages, such as Chinese (student at the GuoYu RiBa Institute, Taipei) and Inuktitut, in a multi-platform computing environment. Being fluent in English, French, Spanish, Irish, Breton and German, and his good-to-fair knowledge of Chinese, Dutch, Russian, Italian, Catalan, Creole, Danish and Swedish, as well as a good foundation in others, has given him a keen interest in comparative cultural studies and terminology.

In 1997, he began lecturing in French in Dublin City University in the *Fiontar* department, which provides a BsC programme in Computing Science, Finance and Enterprise through the medium of the Irish language.

He has worked from 1990 to 1993 as an Irish-language (Gaelic) journalist and received a national award for his journalistic work from an t-Oireachtas (1993) for his articles in *LÁ*. His articles covered foreign news, the arts and minority issues; he published an article on the French Army landing in the 18th century in Ireland in *Rencontre irlandaise* (Dublin, 1991); a review of an Irish-Breton dictionary in *Comhar* (1987); contributions to *Carn,* a periodical on Celtic cultural and political news, in which he covered Breton news. He has contributed articles on public transport and Irish/Breton news in the national Irish weekly *Foinse.* His research on Canadian Science

Fiction led him to publish several entries on Canadian authors in *Twentieth-Century Science-fiction Writers* and in *St James Guide to Science Fiction Writers* (St James Press, Detroit, 1996). His review of *Out of this World: Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*, edited by Andrea Paradis, was published in the July 1997 edition of *Science Fiction Studies (DePauw University)*.