Fantasy Strikes Back

Other World and Other Time

In the first volume, we already identified the mission that the Inklings C.S. Lewis and Tolkien conceived in the 1930s to write fantasy versions of the science fiction of H.G. Wells. Tolkien, as noted, couldn’t finish his assignment to write a fantasy version of the sci-fi conceit of time travel. Instead, he delivered the lecture “On Fairy-Stories,” which in print served as the manifesto of the fantasy genre. Tolkien’s ambivalence toward Wells in the essay allows a blending of genre borders, when his objection to the machine in *The Time Machine* does not eclipse his admiration for the work as successful fantasy. As we will see, in his fantasy trilogy’s revision of science fiction, Lewis doesn’t have any difficulty dumping on Wells but runs aground instead in his ambivalent relationship to psychoanalysis (and, in tandem almost, to modern spiritualism).

In *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), Lewis’s protagonist Ransom (conceived as Tolkien’s cameo in the trilogy) has read H.G. Wells’s *The First Men in the Moon* (another near-miss comp that Tolkien excluded in the process of delineating his new genre in “On Fairy-Stories”). It’s a cautionary tale that Ransom heeds. He resolves to take care before confiding to his Martian hosts just how destructive mankind is. But Ransom goes ahead and risks it after all, because the natives are wise.

Ransom’s experiences of outer space already turned up the contrast with the control text. All that he encounters “appealed away from the Wellsian fantasies to an earlier, almost an infantile,
complex” and cast off the “nightmare, long engendered in the modern mind by the mythology that follows in the wake of science” (29):

He had read of “Space”: at the back of his thinking for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds. [...] “Space” seemed a blasphemous libel for this empyrean ocean of radiance in which they swam. (ibid.)

Upon his return to earth, Ransom joins Lewis in studying the old astrology and plotting the universe according to the medieval map of the solar system under a canopy of equidistant stars. “We have found reason to believe that the medieval Platonists were living in the same celestial year as ourselves – in fact, that it began in the twelfth century of our era. [...] The dangers to be feared are not planetary but cosmic, or at least solar, and they are not temporal but eternal” (159–60).

Weston is the scientific mastermind who abducted Ransom to supply the aliens on Mars a human sacrifice, which is how Weston misunderstood the leader’s wish. It is a projective identification that suits Weston’s colonial ambition to mutate white man into pure mind, indeed over-mind, the divinity in a technosecular cosmos. Throughout the “Space Trilogy,” Weston and his cohorts are delegates of the nihilism of science fiction, which is the contemporary byproduct of infernal rebellion against God.

The danger from “Weston” that the spaceship heralded is the spread of White Man’s Burden to other planets. Ransom shook it off through contact with other worlds that refuted the influence of science fiction. “The old dreams which he had brought from earth of some more than American complexity of offices or some engineers’ paradise of vast machines had indeed been long laid aside” (107). But the spaceship also breaks through the ban separating Earth from its medieval cosmic prehistory. It is by this breach that the cosmic spirits or gods are able to watch and do battle with the demonic proponents of a science-fiction universe,

1 C.S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet (London: Voyager/Harper Collins, 2000), 45. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
first on Venus, then on Earth. For these subsequent installments, Lewis dropped first the machine technology of space ships, then the setting of outer space.

At the close of the first novel in the “Space Trilogy,” then, we learn that now that the spaceship is no more and Weston has absconded with its secret, the prospect of a return engagement lies through the passage of time, which the scholarship undertaken by the characters Ransom and Lewis was opening up: “If there is to be any more space-travelling, it will have to be time-travelling as well” (167). It is by this conclusion that the posthumously published unfinished work, *The Dark Tower*, can be recognized as Lewis’s first try at a sequel. It opens with a remake of the introductory discussion of traveling in time in *The Time Machine* (a pendant, thus, to Ransom’s earlier monologue of disagreement with Wells’s space-travel fiction). But whereas the interlocutors in Wells’s novel consider dislocation in thought brought about through imagining and fantasying psychological proof enough that we’re already time tripping, Lewis’s version involves a more “scholastic” reflection on memory.

Right from the start, the travel-machine must be ruled out because “the sort of time-travelling you read about in books – time-travelling in the body – is absolutely impossible.” The material world consists of preexisting recyclables: “All the matter which makes up your body now will be being used for different purposes in 3000. [...] In other words, [...] there are no spare particles to be had in the universe at any given moment” (18). If movement in time is possible, “it must consist in looking at another time while we ourselves remain here – as we look at the stars through telescopes while we remain on the earth” (19). What is needed, then, is a chronoscope.

Remaking the reflections of Wells’s inventor of the time machine, the chronoscope’s inventor recalls the breakthroughs in his studies that led him to reconstruct by his ocular device the “organ of memory and prevision” (24). “The first thing I thought of, when I had abandoned the false trail of a time machine, was the possibility of mystical experience” (19–20). By this possibility

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he means to say, however, that the “human mind has a power, under certain conditions, of rising to experience outside the normal time-sequence” (20). But to maintain the allegorical orbit of time travel between science fiction and fantasy, he finds he must nevertheless rein in mysticism: “mystical experience took you out of time altogether – into the timeless, not into other times, which was what I wanted” (ibid.).

The inventor of the chronoscope next reconsiders memory along a line that the Catholic philosopher Heidegger also threw out in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1952) for discarding the nineteenth-century psychological apparatus of perception in favor of memory as a mode of going and being there.3 “On metaphysical grounds there is a good deal to be said for the theory that memory is direct perception of the past [...]. When we remember, we are not simply getting the result of something that goes on inside our heads. We are directly experiencing the past” (20).

The inventor of the chronoscope allows that it is not only our past that we go to in the experience we call memory: “the fragments of our own lives are the only fragments of the past which we recognize. [...] When you get a picture of something that happened ages before your birth, you call it imagination; and in fact most of us at present have no test by which to distinguish real fragments of the past from mental fictions” (21). We are brought before the prospect of the real ongoing past in fantasying for which déjà vu is seen to stand surety (23).

Memories afford proof but also stagger the prospect: “You don’t recognize [...] the past ones and, of course, you recognize none of the future” (22). To live in time the mind works sequentially, testing first the real events for recognition value: “you see the resemblance at once; but if the dream comes first, you just ignore it until it is pointed out to you” (23).

To construct an instrument that bypasses the linearity of recognition, the inventor of the lens called chronoscope copied “the time-organ” (ibid.), which required, however, that the “Z substance,” the fluidum of “the organ of memory and prevision,” be isolated and injected (24). The resulting lens “behaves

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just like memory – moving from place to place and sometimes jumping, in obedience to laws we don’t yet know” (28). Scene changes reminiscent of the jumps of daydreaming, give the long and the short of time (40).

The view afforded by the chronoscope upon a period unknown to archaeology (27) never strays more than ten miles from a tower that is its riveting focus. “That’s not very like memory” (28). Or, rather, it’s very like traumatic memory. Inside the tower they witness a curious idol: a man with a sting coming out of his forehead. He pierces the men and women who come to him for a session and who then leave the room transformed into “automata” (35).

What the chronoscope-viewers are facing isn’t a trick (38) played by an occult or a technical medium (26), nor is it another era. The forbidding twist came when the viewers realized that the chronoscope is two-way: “Stingingman” was taking stock of the three time-viewers one by one (36). Ransom is revising his earlier knee-jerk response that what they were viewing was in hell (38), when he reflects: “it is much too mixed up with us for that. And I’ve been wondering for several days whether the past and the present and the future are the only times that exist” (49). Mr. Lewis is in the story, too; he is the first person narrator.

It follows that one of the users of the chronoscope sees his double in the tower, which means that the body paradox no longer applies in his case (52). When he next recognizes his own fiancée doubled in the girl brought in for a stinging, he crosses over (55).

The switched double enters the library inside the tower and uncovers the local reversal of our civilization’s scientific emphasis: advanced knowledge of time corollary to little knowledge of space. He identifies this view of the cosmos as positively medieval (84). In a book, Time Angles, he reads up on the theory of time “attraction”: “Any two time-lines approximate in the exact degree to which their material contents are alike” (90). “If two times contained exactly the same distribution of matter, they would become simply the same time” (60). At a certain “moment of intersection the whole series of events in each of these times will then be contemporary to those living in the other” (84).
The tower was recognizable after all. Is it a future replica of the library tower currently under construction in Cambridge (46–47)? The man who already saw that his double is in the other time concludes, instead, “it’s only our own world over again. It only has to be faced, like our own world” (49). What’s current, then, is the datemark, 1938, given only once (60). If two times contain exactly the same distribution of matter, they are simply the same time. Man-eaters have destroyed nearly all the world. Because the island is now under attack, the tower power that makes zombies upholds the island’s war economy against great odds (72).

Ransom hesitates to publish Out of the Silent Planet as real-time travel document because of what psychoanalysis could diagnose. Ransom and Lewis decide instead to publish it as fiction, the fantasy revision of Wells’s science fiction. Initiates, they are sure, will be able to discern the fantasy that is true. That Lewis dropped The Dark Tower is a given when the switched double, who must rescue his double girlfriend from the stinger growing out of his own forehead, admits that the coupling in the doubling doesn’t escape his notice. He has “read psychoanalysis” (63).

Freud’s science is the double that the fantasy genre must leap away from or otherwise get around. The other near-miss comp that Lewis can mark as both already read and not noteworthy is modern spiritualism. Since modern ghost-seeing resembles the infernal ring around the collaring of all figments of fantasy by Christianization, it can be more readily relegated to a reductive part of what the big picture is all about. But it’s more difficult to shake psychoanalysis, and so Freud’s science has to be held up at the border separating fantasy from its rival genre and inspiration, science fiction.

NICE

Lewis skipped his forbidding tale of time travel for the second volume of his “Space Trilogy” and instead turned the unpublished towering prospect of hell on Earth around the third novel’s datemark, 1945, the dial of its denial. That Hideous Strength documents the threat of yet another nihilism pitching so-called
progress on the island that withstood the Nazi menace. The nihilistic organization in Lewis’s anti-science-fiction novel goes by the acronym-name NICE (National Institute for Coordinated Experiments). It is a possible model for SPECTRE in the world of James Bond, also to the extent that it encrypts its purpose by manipulating political opposition: “Any opposition to the NICE is represented as a Left racket in the Right papers and a Right racket in the Left papers.”

Trailing plagiarism charges of improper burial, Fleming deposited in his organization for manipulation of the cold-war conflict the underworld of the recent past. NICE is interested instead in the alleged gravesite of Merlin, which is on the property that the organization purchases at the start of the novel with the express purpose of establishing its headquarters there. NICE outbids a spiritualist group, treated as a laughable contestant. But the competition also cuts too close to NICE’s real purpose, ownership of Merlin’s grave and magical corpus.

NICE’s threat lies in the attempt to marry technology to the primal time of Christianization still associated with the pagan legacies that King Arthur and his knights of the round table circumscribed. Science fiction is thus recast in terms of new improvements upon the recent past, which are making inroads on fantasy in order to score. Considering the occult tendencies of a number of the Nazi ideologues taken together with the Third Reich’s final-victory realization of science fiction, Lewis’s composite picture is a tenable portrait of the defeated enemy. The cosmic evil spirit working to re-encrypt earth, which the trip to Mars breached in the first foray of fantasy into science fiction, plots to draw on the Merlin composite of primal time and Christianity to stoke mankind’s annihilation through science fiction.

Prior to the closing showdown, Ransom holds down the fort of opposition in a utopian-creaturely estate, which he presides over as the Fisher-King, complete with the wound that is his souvenir from the second novel in the “Space Trilogy,” a wound

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that won’t heal or stop dripping (451). Other than lie low, which is the bulk rate of his activity, Ransom does actively recruit the female protagonist, Jane, for her gift of clairvoyance. Her troubling dreams that are really visions prove that she can see the evil unfold behind the scenes at NICE headquarters. At the same time, Ransom treats Jane, and through her, Mark too, her husband. They were without the shadow of a future.

A nihilistic follower of NICE, who extolls good riddance of organic life through promotion of the brain over less and less body (the future profile that Wells projected into the invading Martians) and independence from reproduction, points out that most English women are frigid: “Nature herself begins to throw away the anachronism” (509). Wishing to discuss her troubling dream of decapitation, which seemed syndicated with a murder case in the news, Jane enters the grounds of Ransom’s estate and is immediately transported to associations with Klingsor’s garden (Novalis and Wagner) or with the garden in Alice (398). Next, Jane dismisses Freud’s male views but then immerses herself in contemplation of the mother’s body (399).

First step in her treatment is getting her to see that her dreams are clairvoyant visions: external views or news. At a later turning point, Ransom discusses with Jane how he sees her case and returns to Freud’s dismissal: “But don’t think I’m talking of Freudian repressions. He knew only half the facts. It isn’t a question of inhibitions – inculcated shame – against natural desire. I’m afraid there’s no niche in the world for people that won’t be either Pagan or Christian” (630). It is by this reproach that knowledge of psychoanalysis is kept from disrupting the destiny of the fantasy genre on Earth.

Soon all the gods whose names are up in the lights of the heavens visit Ransom’s home on the eve of NICE’s annihilation. Merlin is the conduit for the naked power of the allied heavenly spirits and brings to an end science fiction’s reign on Earth, which Ransom summarizes for Merlin’s edification.

The poison was brewed in these West lands but it has spat itself everywhere by now. However far you went you would find the machines, the crowded cities, the empty thrones, the false writings, the barren beds: men maddened with false
promises and soured with true miseries, worshipping the iron works of their own hand, cut off from Earth their mother and from the Father in Heaven. (629)

The treatment of Jane intercuts with longer episodes in which her husband Mark keeps trying to fit in at NICE headquarters while the inner circle is watching and keeping him only to bring Jane under NICE control. When he stops short of stepping upon the crucifix placed on the floor (670), he is available for the short-term therapy that Jane, returning home to him, can now administer. Earlier, we are given the inside view of Mark as the standard issue of the secular condition: “It must be remembered that in Mark’s mind hardly one rag of noble thought, either Christian or Pagan, had a secure lodging. His education had been neither scientific nor classical – merely ‘Modern’” (521). Because Jane has read and dismissed Freud and is open to the truth in fantasying (she is, after all, clairvoyant), she can be cleansed of her modern frigidity and deputized Mark’s sexual healer.

Except for occasional words spoken in the Ransom circle, the discourse that dominates in the novel keeps trying to catch up with the evil spirituality behind NICE, but we are constantly advised that each interpreter and exponent of the movement must fall short of its truth and is, anyway, expendable. Even the talking head that models the new man, lifted from the decapitation that Jane saw in her dream vision, and then reanimated (succeeding where a German attempt with the head of a criminal had failed before), is in truth dead and only a prop used by the evil spirit or “macrobe” that claims Earth as its macrophone for speaking to the doomed followers (531, 591–92). The “hideous length” of the novel is also expendable. Then there is the strength not easily conveyed in language associated with the planet Venus to which Ransom returns at the end of the novel, traveling back to the second or central station of Lewis’s “Space Trilogy.”

After the probe to Mars via H.G. Wells’s moon novel, Lewis wrapped the second installment of his trilogy around the restoration of Venus to a cosmic map of original Christianity, which required going back before the Fall. Instead of interplanetary transport, which had already been checked off, the sequels would follow through on Tolkien’s assignment. But the fantasy of time
travel can only be visited in the ruins of *The Dark Tower*, a condemned site of proximity to psychoanalysis. In *Perelandra*, Ransom does travel through space but not in a ship. Instead the spirit divinities of the universe bring him to Venus inside what sure looks like a coffin. If not heaven, then it’s paradise and Adam and Eve live there. Ransom was brought to protect the couple against taking the fall that Weston is on a mission to bring about. The dark spirit, whose control, though breached by the voyage to Mars, still encircles planet Earth, possessed Weston. Although embedded in the fantasy world of no place, no time, what does happen is that Ransom kills Weston. It’s OK because, one, the victim was possessed by the evil spirit and, two, Ransom is given license to kill by the divinity’s literal interpretation of his name: the payment that is due. The third novel is the world theater in which this conflict can be reprised and redeemed.

**Suicide Planet**

Sometimes a work of fantasy is the vehicle for the negative theology of nihilism directed against a particular future belonging to science fiction. In *Melancholia* (2011), Lars Von Trier rolls back Andrei Tarkovsky’s 1972 revalorizing adaptation of the concluding affirmation of Lem’s novel and projects instead a Wagnerian setting of twilight. The melancholic stars of Von Trier’s fantasy space opera – Justine, the rogue planet named Melancholia, and the film containing the mood swings and orbits – take a swipe at the utopian agenda of science fiction. Justine defines herself as someone who “knows things.” She knows that the near miss or fly-by, the alleged course of a gaseous planet plummeting toward Earth, will be in fact a direct hit. She also knows that there is no life on other planets, in other galaxies, no other life tout court. Human existence, which she says is evil, stops here.

Suicidality, says Melanie Klein, knows a few variations on its underlying eviction of the bad from the good. In the scenario that fits Justine,

the subject hates not only his ‘bad’ objects, but his id as well and that vehemently. In committing suicide, his purpose may be to make a clean breach in his relation to the outside
world because he desires to rid some real object – or the ‘good’ object which that whole world represents and which the ego is identified with – of himself or of that part of his ego which is identified with his bad objects and his id.\(^5\)

The footnote Klein drops here ties these reasons, given in object-relations terms, to the “state of mind” explored by Freud, in which the melancholic “breaks off all relations with the external world.”\(^6\)

*Melancholia* ensconces Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s *Hunters in the Snow* (1565) like an epigraph to the end of the world. Inside the outer space station in Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1972), the paintings of the months were souvenirs of Earth, continuity shots with the country estate the protagonist called home, which his father modeled after his own father’s home. That the house of the father is a reconstruction doesn’t compromise transmission or tradition. It offers a transferential correlative to the readiness of the cosmonauts to receive the changes on the surface of the planet Solaris as mimicry signaling communication and inheritance. However, it remains undecidable whether the planet Solaris is alien existence or, if so, how would one know, since contact cannot after all be convincingly made or exchanged.

In Lem’s 1961 novel and in Tarkovsky’s adaptation, the planet is tested as something analogous to artificial intelligence that in turn tests the human subjects by fulfilling their hidden wishes. The planet delivers the protagonist’s lost true love, Hari, who committed suicide years back. But the double lacks a historical sense of her life or an anticipation of death. She returns with just enough memory to recognize that she or their life together can’t be real, which suffices to restart the depression. She embodies the moment before her suicide, the stuck place of his grief that he wants to leave behind.

After bashing against the obstacle to his conviction that dead is better – even after he murders the Hari-double’s current

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6 Ibid.
incarnation, another one is waiting in the wings to start over anew in the same nadir of depression – the protagonist prefers to interpret the planet’s steadfast fulfillment of his wish, admitting no wariness or second thoughts, as a lesson in mourning he must take down. He adapts to the double Hari, who is always back without knowing that she went or that he wished her gone. But then, the scientist colleagues in the Solaris space station, also beset by the doubling fulfillment of their wishes, figure out how to extinguish the comeback capacity of the doubles. Hari’s final second death leaves her survivor nothing, but in this clearing, he comes to affirm his own death, an avowal that concludes the novel.

Tarkovsky’s film adaptation doesn’t go there, but adds instead an epilogue that builds on the memory of the father deposited in the Brueghel paintings. At the end of the film, the cosmonaut, whose mission was identified from the start as spanning the period of time in which, in the meantime, his father will have departed, is back with his father in the house of the fathers. The rain falls inside the house and the hunting in the painting releases the benign haunting contact with the dead father, which Von Trier’s _Melancholia_ wipes away.

Justine proves to her sister Claire that she knows things by correctly guessing the number of beans in a jar, a party game at Justine’s wedding. Claire, the wedding planner, is the parentified child and Justine the identified patient in a family system hosting only dysfunctions. Like Clara in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Sandman,” Claire holds to the clear text of quick fixes by the ego in charge of the self.7 The family estate where Justine’s wedding is being celebrated is lodged on a golf course, its allegorical significance illuminated by the legend and hallucinations of a nineteenth hole.

Where there is a game, there is an outside chance of good fortune, like a hole-in-one, which is underscored whenever a

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bet is placed on the outcome. But Justine, who knows things, is the other hole-in-one that the family system denies by betting on a betterment outcome. That the English “wedding” is etymologically related to the German word *Wette* names the bet that marriage always makes and in which it must lie. In the course of the festivities on screen, Claire and Justine’s narcissistic father calls each of the young women he grabs by the name Betty. Claire leads the family system to place the “bet” inside “wedding” on Justine’s psychic improvement.

In suspense between her husband’s belief in the near miss of the rogue planet’s itinerary and her sister’s certainty that the end is near, Claire turns to the digital portal and consults the archive. In the recycling of always the same inscrutable reports on a current event and entry, Claire recognizes the defensive neutralization of knowledge on the Web, in other words, the truth of Justine’s knowing denunciation of the media.

The drag of betting on what people want is alleviated and carried toward fulfillment by the exceptional tagline alone, which was oracle Justine’s specialty. Because she can summon such slogans, she was able to get ahead in the advertising business, which at her wedding, however, she denounces as “nothing” and quits. Getting a job and going out on a date are the signal accomplishments of the teenager, which are inflated on the night that’s the night into Justine’s all-out reckoning with the media and the meaning of her life.

Friedrich Schiller concludes the contest of distinction in his essay “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” with a warning that fits Justine’s precognition of her crash, which is projected large in *Melancholia*. Faux idealism is terrible, Schiller sets down in the final paragraph, and the proof is the fantast. In a whim, he leaves nature behind to yield without inhibition to the willfulness of desires and the moods of the imagination. Because this excess is free rather than natural and belongs to an inclination that in the infinite is perfectible, the fantast must plummet endlessly in a bottomless depth and can end only in utter devastation.

Justine’s last copywriting assignment was to find the tagline for marketing a campaign that used a facsimile of another Brueghel work, *The Land of Cocaigne* (1567). The nephew of her boss is on assignment to help, somehow, with Justine’s delivery
of the line. Instead she fucks him out in the open and ends her brand-new marriage. Every upbeat, the betting of marriage or the slogan in public relations, is now nothing to Justine. Her sense of compromise and corruption is on the rise and engulfs the earth.

At the digital portal to the media upbeat, it is Claire’s turn to catch the fire of this film and turn away from the social contract of journalism. When she types in the metaphysical password “Death,” she transforms the search into a quest. The screen-thin archive swings open to Wagnerian fantasy, to the “dance of death,” the Liebestod between two planets.

When Claire tries going out with dignity – toasting in affirmation of life to the music of Beethoven – Justine scatters the arrangement and sentiment. The director’s inspiration for the film was his psychiatrist’s one memorable comment while treating him for depression, namely that the depressed find their calm before the storm of catastrophe. Justine finds an I in the storm of the coming apocalypse and enjoys a first: her calming immersion in libido, which she enacts by stripping down to catch the rays of Melancholia at night, the night of nothingness, in which she collects herself, another first. Now her empathy is also collected, focused, not scatter-shot-through with self-destruction. She not only promises fantasy comfort to her young nephew but now can also deliver. Stalwart, she leads her sister and nephew inside the tent of animism – reentering child’s play and offering the illusion of safety. She can lie to them without feeling compromised.

Impossible Planet

Benjamin’s view of allegory as originally rolling in by the Christian demonization of the corpus of the pagan past can be seen to throw a high beam on an occlusion that cannot be undone. That Venus in the heavens was transformed into the original allegorical sign, Lucifer, goes beyond demonization. To touch both stars bright behind the first star you see tonight renews vows with the Devil and pushes any “other story” into the light of Christianity, the night of nihilism.

Allegory was thus first used to revise the evidence of classical antiquity. The naked pagan body was transferred to the account of the creature, with the Devil at the front of the line. “This is
the basis [...] for the survival of fabulous creatures like the faun, centaur, siren and harpy as allegorical figures in the circle of Christian hell.”

At the close of *Origin of the German Mourning Play*, Benjamin introduced the surprise twist (and twist-off) that there is a half-life to the secular mode of allegorical reading, which lies in allegory’s origin. Through the Devil, original allegory’s poster boy, Benjamin projects a turn or return that, by restoring the Christian context, would spell the end of secular allegory. “Allegory, of course, thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it; the secret, privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of a world without hope. All this vanishes with this one about-turn.”

Benjamin allows that in a secular setting the abyssal contemplation of evil can trigger the return. I followed this out in *The Psycho Records*. In a split-off corner of mass psychology, the Psycho Effect coursing through countless slasher films had for decades denied and defied the ongoing failure in the interpretation of psychopathic violence. But upon conclusion of the termination phase of the cathartic film therapy, we witnessed the change come over the postmodern allegory of horror B-pictures, notably in the *Saw* franchise. Devilish instruction in and testing of psychopathic survival brought psycho violence back, but to an infernally charged screen that can no longer count as secular.

That the secular setting of inquiry into violence is where the Devil returns means, from the fantasy perspective, that the Prince of Darkness is at home there. In the work of fantasy, the Devil never went away, although he is summoned indirectly from industrial–infernal underworlds on Earth reaching back through the uncanny threshold of the Enlightenment and its classical antiquity. Assembly lines of countless zombie soldiers wage total wars of psychopathic violence, against which the human and supernatural alliance prevails. By the relocation of hell to the industrial wastelands associated with science fiction, fantasy can

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9 Ibid., 232.
affirm and draw on the era of Christianization of non-classical heathen Europe. The clearing in which northern paganism and Christianity communicate clears away all other datemarks.

On the map of science fiction, where we tend to find endopsychic perception writ large, the planet Venus seems to be without signifying pattern, in contradistinction to the ways in which Mars or the moon have been retrofitted to the projection of outer space. There are comps out there in the receiving area of “Venus,” notably the reflections of Henry Adams, Gilles Deleuze, and Aby Warburg on aspects of the goddess’s representation, but they all skirt a significant lack of ready-made or unconscious genealogical connection.

_Farewell Fantastic Venus! A History of the Planet Venus in Fact and Fiction_, which Brian Aldiss edited, gives an exhaustive sampling of the slim pickings in the science fiction genre. Although not every entry was scoured for the Aldiss anthology, the examples that remain still strain by their outsider status. Was it on a dare, then, that A.E. van Vogt in _The World of Null-A_ selected Venus, transformed into a Canadian big-tree version of California, as the “other coast” on which the game machine society on earth could fully realize an experimental postmachinic – Anti-Aristotelian – society and mindset? Van Vogt, who wasn’t a stranger to the fantasy genre, deploys his science fiction to push aside the limit concepts of science fiction and enter the other coast of wish fulfillment. There is also in every clearing that van Vogt makes the residual temporal paradox of a crypt.

The Null-A-trained population on Venus is tested, when an overwhelming imperialist foe invades and occupies the planet. The population knows to abandon its ranks and engage instead in all-out guerrilla warfare waged in darkness against the enemy camps, which they seize together with the military equipment: “no one expected unarmed hordes to attack one of the best equipped armies in the galaxy.”¹ The Venusians triumph by going against the imperial strategy: “Conquered people or nations, even whole planetary groups, remain at home and the great mass always submits. They may hate the conqueror for a

few generations, but if the propaganda is handled right, soon they take pride in their membership in a great empire” (228). What was thrown into the scale was the universal government’s prohibition against genocide. The rogue aggressors began tipping this scale by the casualties of the guerrilla warriors, which exceeded what the quick conquest would have exacted. If genocide is proved against a military power, then its government “is declared outlaw, and all those responsible have to be delivered to the League for trial and execution, if convicted. An automatic state of war exists until the terms have been carried out” (229). The blip on the screen of wars Van Vogt has known and foreseen attends this rare use of Venus as sci-fi accessory.

Venus has been available for filming the contest between the B-genres, but with fantasy typically in the ascendant. In Have Rocket – Will Travel (1959), the Three Stooges find on Venus a talking unicorn and a giant fire-breathing tarantula, as well as, however, an alien computer that destroyed intelligent life on the planet and now creates three evil duplicates of the brothers who are stooges for Freud’s second system: Larry the ego, Curly the id, and Moe the superego. Masters of Venus (1962), in which two children accidentally take off into space, identifies the inhabitants of the outer planet as descended from the lost city of Atlantis. But on screen Venus can also be an accident waiting to happen for which neither genre was prepared.

By its title a 1960 East German and Polish coproduction would seem to fold out of The Silent Planet. But the near-future trip to outer space in Der schweigende Stern (a.k.a. First Spaceship on Venus) lands on the impossible planet (and not on Mars as long planned) because Venus is the return address of an extraterrestrial message recently discovered (in 1985) on a spool ensconced in a rock fragment. The world’s largest computer is still working on the spool’s decipherment, but in the meantime the globally integrated crew (Asians, Africans, and white ethnicities from Europe and America) travels to Venus to establish contact with the sender. The prehistory and the preparations are framed by the international press coverage that broadcasts everything we see until take off, which leaves the reporters behind wearing sunglasses.
The main change that the director, Kurt Maetzig, introduced into Lem’s “The Astronaut,” which the film adapts, is the deferral of the decoding of what’s on the spool, which allows the wish to contact intelligent alien life to go for fulfillment in the spirit of optimism and one-world cooperation. Before they land, however, the spool stands deciphered and revealed. It is the Venusian plan for an attack that would exterminate Earth’s population. The crew, no longer under the frame of press coverage, decides not to release this news; the hysteria back on Earth would spread like ignorance. “Humanity survived the atomic bomb through knowledge.”

On Venus, the international crew is treated to a set like an Yves Tanguy painting. When a trap is accidentally sprung, a horde of alien-abstract insects bounces up and down. The insects are artificial, like in Ernst Jünger’s one bona fide science fiction, *Gläserne Bienen* (*Glass Bees*, 1957). They are gadgets used for recording, while the hole in the trap is their archive. Upon entering the archive, crew members discover that there was on Venus a catastrophe beyond their powers of comprehension. While the astronauts explore the black diamonds that could be buildings of some sort, or mountains, or the nerve centers of Venus, a blob emerges and comes after them. “Don’t shoot, don’t shoot,” the Japanese physician warns. Once shot at, however, the blob withdraws.

They discover the model used for planning the atomic attack in what must have been the operational headquarters. They see the shadows on the wall of their extinct Venusian hosts who were outlined at the instant they were hit by the blast. “Now that’s all that’s left, their shadows,” says the Japanese physician. That she lost her husband recently on another expedition we learn soon after takeoff. She recognizes the site of his demise on the moon just as they are whizzing past it. It is through her grief-stuck sensibility that the others come to entertain empathy with the extinct Venusians. The traumatic history that overlaps with this science fiction is not addressed but rather represented both by the Japanese figure of empathy and the “knowledge” that is a given of the world’s survival. She was right about leaving the blob alone: the ray gun has started an atomic chain reaction that will really slime them big time.
It turns out the Venusian scientists not only could change matter into energy but they could also – “they were ahead of us, we have to acknowledge that” – reverse the process. Now it’s time to catch up with this reversal capacity of the extinct scientists. The weapon, which is still aimed at Earth, can be stopped – whereupon, however, the spaceship, Cosmostrator, will be hurled into space. Even an East German movie cannot charge the United States with a crime that belongs to a context that must be shared, like the knowledge about atomic weapons that now protects the Earth. That’s why all those who carried the Venusian total war effort are extinct, because they’re the Germans in the recent past who were aiming to win the shootout. We have to acknowledge that they might have pulled it off.

Once we’ve gone the distance that defines American science fiction according to Günther, the outer planets have been left behind but not their allegorical attributes. It’s not so much that Altair 4 in Forbidden Planet is or might as well be Venus, but the crypt that the planet carries of the extinguished Krell civilization belabors the ultimate Venus cognate, Wunsch or wish. Under the ban of interdiction the 1956 film demarcates the outer limit of science fiction within the suicidality, impossibility, and keeping silent of planet wish fantasy.

Two thousand centuries ago the Krells were “a million years ahead of mankind,” so ahead they’re long dead. But even the dead plan ahead by enhancing the brains of the living. The original working title of the film was Fatal Planet. Morbius, the sole survivor of the original group of colonists who traveled from earth to Altair 4, enhanced his brain through a Krell device he calls the “plastic educator,” which corresponds, the philologist advises the visiting astronauts, to “finger painting in our kindergartens.” If these devices fit the Krell children we know that we are only remotely related. The strap-on helmet admits a head many times larger than that of a human adult. By the study of the Krell language and the plastic educator’s upgrade of his IQ, Morbius gained access to a technology that augmented or replaced reality through realization of wishes and thoughts. One astronaut visiting the crypt of Krell technology comments: “Aladdin’s Lamp in a science lab!”
While the Morbius home is SF modernist, the backyard, his daughter Alta’s garden, is a fantasy utopia inhabited by deer and a tiger, her “friends.” Morbius, who married on the voyage to Altair 4 where Alta was born, knows that the Krells visited Earth before the origin of man and brought back plants and creatures as souvenirs, which evolved into fantasy landscaping and fantasy tamed animals. The garden blends other boundaries closer to home. It recycles props from the village of the Munchkins on the same stage used for *The Wizard of Oz*.

Like the penthouse-level city (complete with pleasure garden) in *Metropolis*, Morbius’s fantasy home towers above an underworld of still animate technology (but sans the zombie workers of Lang’s breakthrough film). The benign denial of the encrypted technology is Robby the Robot. It wasn’t until there was HAL in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* that the uncanny inheritance of German science fiction began to compute. HAL, I pointed out in *Germany: A Science Fiction*, encrypts “Hel,” the dead wife and mother haunting a doubly double robot in *Metropolis*.

When we first meet Robby – the robot arrives as a welcome committee of one in a space car – one of the astronauts immediately under the robot’s care compares Robby to a “mother.” The Earth-bound question raised by the robot’s gender just doesn’t apply, “is completely without meaning,” as Robby advises, just as it wouldn’t signify in regard to the early mother. But the astronauts are persistent. When on a tour of his home Morbius demonstrates the disposal service inside the robot, the astronauts hail Robby and the “disintegrator beam” as “a housewife’s dream.”

Although, as the visiting astronauts recognize, the robot is already “beyond the abilities of Earth’s scientists,” Morbius dismisses as “parlor magic” his feat of building Robby in consideration of all that the alien technology can in fact accomplish. It follows that Morbius must instruct his visitors in the moral law of robotics. Even when the creator commands the robot to fire at the visitors, Robby demonstrates (to the point of blowing all fuses) the built-in inhibition that prevents any harm coming to rational beings. Morbius added to the Krell technology of wish fulfillment what was otherwise lacking: the fiat of philosophical
ethics. The conscience he gave away in deserting to the Krells he gave to Robby for safe keeping.

The astronaut scientist decides to have a go at the Krell IQ booster. Before he dies of the experiment, he reveals the cause of the extinction of the Krells. He too has to think back to the past of his own civilization to designate what wasn’t known: the id, an “obsolete” term from the old psychoanalytic lexicon. It was “once used to describe the elementary basis of the subconscious mind.” In pursuing creation by thought alone, the Krells, like their heir Morbius, forgot the unconscious wishes of the id.

Morbius takes a group of astronauts on a tour of the subterranean remainder of Krell civilization and we witness what was for a long time to come the special effects standard for many SF films that followed. On the low road, the uniforms of the astronauts were reused in Queen of Outer Space; on the higher road, the influence extends through Star Trek to Star Wars. “Prepare your minds for a new scale of scientific values,” Morbius advises the astronauts. They visit a vast industrial-looking interior of countless vertiginous levels across matching shafts. It counts as a single machine, a veritable Phantasiermaschine that still runs and repairs itself.

All along there was on Altair 4, above the underground remains of an extinct civilization, an “unseen planetary force” to which the other colonists, who were pressing to return to Earth, succumbed twenty years ago. Only Morbius and his wife were “immune” by dint of their resolve to stay on the planet. His wife then died after the catastrophe, but of “natural causes.” This force has not again manifested itself, although Morbius has seen it in his nightmares.

Forbidden Planet was the first film to use an all-electronic score, introducing difficulties in separating sound effects and score in the evaluation of SF movies, which happened to Arrival. With impossible possibilities of wish fantasy in the ascendant special effects arise at the border to invisibility. At one point, a camera POV on an audio track of heavy breathing represents the destructive planetary force. The camera steps back to watch the invisible monster destroy a transmitter visualized by the animation effects imagineered by a specialist on loan from Disney. The look of the threat is further indicated by traces that are hard to
reconstruct. The near misses of visualization set off by the defensive electric force field that the astronauts set up around their camp suggest a foe the size of a house. When a plaster model is made of its footprint it resembles an enormous talon, like that of “some impossible tree sloth.” The scientist on board concludes that such a creature runs counter to any known law of evolutionary adaptation.

Morbius knows that “man is unfit as yet to receive such power” as stands behind the science of the Krells, but still believes that he is in control and by his enhanced brain power can mediate the greater knowledge, and might even, he allows, send portions back to Earth on a schedule. Lots of red flags have gone up and the captain of the investigating astronauts won’t cut a deal with a rogue colonist.

Morbius and his daughter arrive at the camp wary of danger. The commander wonders how he knew? “I seem to visualize it. Call it premonition.” Call it the death wish. Morbius laments: “it’s started again.” We’re the next to last to know. We see Morbius asleep and, when he awakes, we see that the renewed attack upon the astronaut camp immediately stops. At the same time, we learn that Alta also had a terrible dream, which begins to get a rise out of her father’s consciousness. There is no natural death in the precincts of wishing, certainly not for mourners. The apparent continuity error in the concise history of the colony throws a high beam. The id monster, Morbius’s double, all along allowed the scholar, like Victor Frankenstein, to disavow that the remote control he enjoyed over separation and loss ran aground in his own death wishing. When it’s evident that the monster of his unconscious now endangers his daughter, Morbius, the sole heir to the alien civilization, decides to swap the distinction of the Krell inheritance for its extinction.

The first symptom of the tension mounting with the sexual attraction between the astronauts and Morbius’s daughter Alta becomes manifest in the fantasy garden. While Alta is well versed in the “theory” of sex, the commander suggests that practice makes perfect, whereupon they kiss. The pet tiger becomes wild and dangerous – “he didn’t recognize me,” she laments – and interrupts the outsider’s courtship. The commander is amazed that she really doesn’t know why the tiger turned. But it wasn’t
the tiger’s jealousy. During Morbius’s first demonstration of the special effects that the Krell wish factory can produce, he started with a familiar subject. He conjured a miniature 3D hologram-like image of his daughter: “alive because she’s alive in my mind.” It’s when he realizes that all the goners in the colony died because they were dead in his mind that he decides that the planet together with its trove must pass out of history. But rather than simply go away upon the Krypton-like explosion, the impossible possibility of the Krell civilization has gone back inside the other factory.

Making the Least Last

For his Venus novel, Lewis credited the inspiration of an episode in the 1930 novel *First and Last Men* by Olaf Stapledon, which went to Venus to spin the rise and fall of an ethereal fantasy estate. Lewis moreover identified Stapledon’s 1937 novel *Star Maker* as his impetus for writing the whole trilogy. That all science-fiction elements in the first novel in the “Space Trilogy” are reabsorbed and liquidated in the fantasy soup of *Perelandra* leaves Wells behind. Stapledon’s cosmic combo of fantasy and science fiction cut so close to Lewis’s pursuit of fantasy proper – but no vicar, I mean no cigar. Stapledon was a philosopher by training and transported his protagonist across space and time experimentally by all the facets or faculties of the imagination in a row: will, wish, fantasy.

*First and Last Men* was a hybrid that ran closer to science fiction by specializing in prediction. The subtitle announces *A Story of the Near and Far Future*. But in a 1930 narrative composed as a future history, the fact that Stapledon’s predictions of the near future are so far off makes the book almost unreadable. In his 1937 novel, therefore, Stapledon makes amends when the protagonist, returning to the present-going-on-recent-past from his immeasurable flight across space and time and around the cosmos, gradually descends over Europe and catches sight of “the flood-lit Führer.”

Subsequent page references are given in the text.
driven exploration of the cosmos, Stapledon’s protagonist sees correctly that coming soon on “the whole planet” there will be a showdown between “two cosmical antagonists, two spirits” (253). This sets a precedent for the conclusion of Lewis’s trilogy, in which the datemarked showdown, however, is fulfilled in the future between science fiction and fantasy.

At the end of *Star Maker*, the protagonist is brought back home to responsibility. The ambivalence in marriage, which was the psychic counterpart to our immunity from decay while yet alive on which Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* concludes, is Stapledon’s starting point. (John Wyndham, too, tended to make his departure from Wells into the same round trip of marriage therapy.) The seven-year itch crosses the mind of Stapledon’s protagonist while he’s out for a walk. He looks back at his home and environs, a view soon augmented by his imagination until it extends beyond the horizon line. In no time, he is soaring through space with stopovers at all the inhabited planets where as a “disembodied viewpoint” (a cinematic pov) he is “able to observe without being observed” (23). Fantasizing (stretching from the wish to escape the ambivalence-itch to the good will to go to school in the universe) sends him flying, while the “sustaining motive” of his “pilgrimage” was “the hunger which formerly drove men on Earth in search of God” (89). Lewis removed “formerly drove” from the sentence to send Ransom (Tolkien) to attend the heavenly academy already on the map of the middle ages.

Stapledon’s protagonist can observe the psychic reality of an individual alien. “I discovered the power of entering into his mind, of seeing through his eyes, sensing through all his sense organs, perceiving the world just as he perceived it, and following much of his thought and his emotional life” (24). Does “much of” stop short of his daydreams? “Psychical attraction” soon takes over where “the method of disembodied flight” by its randomness, its freedom only of space and not of time, kept falling short.

To make it to the next class, he must land in another of the few and far between inhabited planetary systems (63–64).
This method depended on the imaginative reach of our own minds. At first, when our imaginative power was strictly limited by experience of our own worlds, we could make contact only with worlds closely akin to our own. [...] Further, in each world that we visited we sought out a new collaborator, to give us insight into his world and to extend our imaginative reach for further exploration of the galaxy. This ‘snowball’ method by which our company was increased was of great importance, since it magnified our powers. (64)

The magnified powers aim to get past the recognition values of anthropomorphism. The novel expands upon the trajectory of animism long gone to reach to the planets and stars, which are lifeforms, too, and whose motility and language bear comparison with music and dance. Once the powers of attraction that move the protagonist and his colleagues around space and time begin rearranging the planets, the stars react by taking themselves out in explosions that threaten the cosmos. The planets and the stars must instead learn to communicate in a manner comparable to telepathy.

No one in the company of observers is transcendent until the protagonist leaves the group or absorbs it and becomes the cosmos, in which capacity he can encounter the creator, the Star Maker. Now it’s not just the use of the past tense but, in addition, the narcissism of near misses that separates Stapledon and Lewis. The cosmos of space and time through which psychic attraction transports Stapledon’s protagonist is reduced on any given planet to a recycling of always the same rise and fall of civilization, which fits back inside developmental stages. “We were inclined to think of the psychological crises of the waking worlds as being the difficult passage from adolescence to maturity” (132). Thus, once he’s up for it by being the cosmos, he sees the divinity, too, developing in his capacity as creator.

Prompted by his overview of an earlier cosmos, which “was somewhat reminiscent of Christian orthodoxy,” he wonders “how could the Star Maker, even in his immaturity, condemn his creatures to agony for the weakness that he himself had allotted to them” (235). Would the Star Maker outgrow the immaturity of this cruel streak? No. In “tormenting his creatures,” Star
Maker “did but torment himself in the course of his adventure of self-expression” (236). In each creation, evil brings spiritual sensibility and intelligence into conflict. Creation reaches midlife crisis by the will to power split off from wishing well. However, adolescent fantasying on its own is another condemned site: “Yet sensibility itself, when it rejected intellectual criticism and the claims of daily life, would be smothered in dreams” (238).

Among Stapledon’s early publications were studies in philosophical ethics, the field in which he earned his doctorate. In his 1939 summary *Philosophy and Living*, Stapledon situates Kant’s contribution. “He even went so far as to say that a ‘good’ act done with pleasure was not really a *morally* good act at all, since a morally good act must have no motive but the goodness of the act itself. There is nothing good, he said, but a good will.”

But Stapledon criticizes the categorical imperative that tests the goodness of an act by making it a universal law. The defective cornerstone is lying, which under certain circumstances might count as morally right. “Kant apparently failed to see that what I can and cannot will to become a universal law depends in the last resort not on sheer rationality but on my active dispositions and needs” (179).

Stapledon’s cosmology in *The Star Maker* aligns the divinity’s active dispositions and needs, the Star Maker’s passion of creation, with a cruel streak that Kant’s categorical imperative can be seen to contain. In “Das ökonomische Problem des Masochismus” (“The Economic Problem of Masochism,” 1924), Freud declares the categorical imperative to be the direct heir to the Oedipus complex. In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886), Friedrich Nietzsche reads in morals a sign language of affects disclosing tyranny against nature and reason,

which, he adds, doesn’t argue against them. However, dossiers must be kept on those who contributed to philosophical ethics, like Kant, whose categorical imperative shows that he valued his excitement over his own ability to obey.14

In the course of falling short so spectacularly in his predictions of the near future in *Last and First Men*, Stapledon also made Venus the seat in the far future of an era of human evolution that even exceeded the time spent on Earth. Radio and artificial flight are the recognizable highpoints of human civilization that in Stapledon’s style of forecast history, as vast as outer space, recycle through decline and peristalsis. Another standard rate of change is telepathy, which however has a history specific to Martian rule on Earth. In the distant future, Wells’s forecast of World War One is reversed and Mars is given for a time our place in the sun. When the Martian units are finally driven off our planet, we are able and willing to hold onto their telepathy.15 But then, later on in the future, life on Earth is about to blow out and mankind decides to settle on Venus.

Since the intelligent marine lifeforms of the wet planet won’t cooperate, they are blown away. The settlers are soon beset by metabolic disorders, ranging from rejection of the foreign body of telepathy to profound melancholic dyspepsia over “the deep-seated, unreasoning sense of guilt produced by the extermination of the Venerians” (256). The next species on the future time chart regains “a certain mental stability, at the expense of its faculty of ‘telepathy’” (257). But then out of fascination with the idea of flight the Seventh Men native to Venus evolve into birdlike “pygmies” thoroughly “organized for flight” (259). “The social order of the Seventh Men was in essence neither utilitarian, nor humanistic, nor religious, but aesthetic” (264). When the


15 Olaf Stapledon, *First and Last Men* (London: Penguin 1987), 256. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
aesthetic order goes into decline, the “bat-like” humans, beset by a new race of pedestrians dedicated to science, elect to fly in species formation into a volcano. They fulfill one sage’s counsel during the ascent of their civilization that they eschew “personal immortality,” which would be “as tedious as an endless song” or melody (265). “The lovely flame, of which we all are members, must die, he said, must die; for without death she would fall short of beauty” (265).

Venus Libitina

In *Queen of Outer Space* (1956), the leader of the glamazons on Venus, like all the women comprising her inner circle, wears a mask. The astronauts who landed by accident on planet fantasy don’t know that she’s a victim disfigured by atomic war. But when she removes the mask no more questions need be asked why she wants to destroy mankind. The masked *vanitas* image on screen gestures toward the Venus Libitina, the marriage in classical lore of the ancient goddess of funerals (Libitina) with Venus, which first admitted another side of beauty: its decaying corpse or half-life. By the strict dissociation between benign and malignant fulfillments of the wish, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* straddles both sides of Venus. Schreber circumvents the uncanny turning point of narcissistic wishing and doubling at the highpoint of his delusion. In *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, the only peep show in town – also because it coincides with the divine perspective, which is otherwise focused on corpses – is the psycho posing or “picturing” himself as a sculpted Venus on the way to becoming the technobride of replicational sex. “I venture to assert flatly that anybody who sees me standing in front of a mirror with the upper part of my body naked would get the undoubted impression of a female torso.”16

In 1968, George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* makes a passing reference to the place of Venus in the firmament, which reopens a reading of the obstacle course binding us to and

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banning the impossible planet. Venus was the intended goal of the probe that instead by its radioactive recoil jumpstarted the decaying recently dead on Earth. Around the seemingly realized utopias of primary narcissism in classical antiquity, the uncanny presses upon a border that yields a caption of legibility. The Lamiae and Striges were ghoulish reversals of mothering (found sucking the lifeblood from babies) filling in for what the idealism or eternal youth of the sculpted human form split off: reproduction and death.

At this border, Venus undergoes a series of sub-specializations involving the matrimonial mystery of gender difference. On the meaning of Venus there’s little to read up on in Perelandra; the entirety of That Hideous Strength, however, inhabits the main caption of the goddess’s significance. The first word of the third novel, the first word to follow the conclusion of Perelandra, is “matrimony.”

Already at her Olympian address, Venus starred in marriage and remarriage episodes, now with Mars, now with Vulcan, comprising a virtual sitcom of couples counseling. As we saw in the first volume, touching on the venus barbata with Benjamin writing on Gottfried Keller, the goddess as bearded lady originated in rituals of sex change or exchange, in which a profound balance between the sexes beckoned, and which the Argive women performed in the context of the wedding ceremony. An age-old patriarchal emblem, the beard entered the vernacular in the UK to signify a wife of convenience covering her husband’s homosexuality. Both in English and German, the word has been used for pubic hair, especially on a woman. According to Freud the primal scenario for the invention of weaving was woman plaiting her pubic hair into a phallus.17 Although Freud’s consequent concession that weaving was woman’s one contribution to prosthetic technicity continues to cause consternation, the connection he put through goes to the very art of his own produc-

tion. Add unweaving to the weaving and we arrive at Penelope’s work of unmourning extending the time before substitution and second death.

Weaving and tying the knot were conjoined when the super-heroic adventures of Wonder Woman, a.k.a. Princess Diana of the Amazon nation, commenced in 1941. Aphrodite created the Amazons to be superhuman (in other words, stronger than men) to counter Ares’ ruling that men should command women as their slaves. When QueenHyppolyte, the mother of Wonder Woman, dropped her magic girdle so Hercules could make love not war, the Amazons were bound in slavery. Aphrodite came to the rescue and then led them off the map of antiquity to Paradise Island, where she grounded them. What is enforced by the pur-view and curfew keeping men off the island is the law prohibiting marriage.

When Steve Trevor crash-landed his aircraft onto the beach at Paradise Island in 1941, the ensuing love interest organized the relationship between Wonder Woman and the outside world. Aphrodite had decided that World War Two was being waged between war and love. With the triumph of the United States, love would prevail on Earth.

While Trevor was recovering on the island, the queen mother held a tournament to select the worthiest Amazon for the mission of returning Trevor to the good fight. At the end of the contest, it was her own daughter (who had enrolled incognito against the queen’s wishes) who emerged as Wonder Woman, the name and identity bestowed on the champion.

Although the prizewinner, too, cannot marry, the princess is from her inception as Wonder Woman determined by the prospect of the spousal relation. World War Two is the conflict Wonder Woman must work through with Trevor prior to marriage. At the outset of her mission in the outer world, she adopted the extra identity of Diana Prince. Thus, she can keep close to Trevor in his everyday life, and, whenever he requires her supernatural assist in uncovering and disbanding Nazi plots, she can switch back into Wonder Woman. In the close quarters of the prohibition against marriage, Wonder Woman projected instead an obstacle that her striving could overcome, but only according to standards that exceeded the outcome of the specific
and extraneous war. She will marry Steve Trevor only once crime and injustice have been eradicated from planet heterosexuality.

The trial that tested for the worthiness of one among them to endure the outer limits of the law in a world of violence and sex (and proximity to marriage) was but a variation on the basic exercises that the Amazons practice in their daily routines. Wonder Woman proved champion, therefore, in the tying and untying of knots, the main mode of Amazon relationality and socialization. The ceremonial contest that Wonder Woman won was a highpoint in the customary fitness regime that staggers indefinitely her decision to tie the knot or not. Because the Amazons derive their super powers from “brain energy” released into their muscles, they must train to be fit to be tied. In free-for-all girl roping contests the Amazons raise themselves to their powers.

The creator of Wonder Woman was William Moulton Marston: psychologist, feminist theorist, and inventor. In research that he concluded in the 1920s, in the course of which he invented the systolic blood-pressure test for the detection of deception, Marston had to hand the honesty prize to women. In the 1940s, then, Marston projected an Amazon network of bondage over which Wonder Woman swings her Lasso of Truth. Marston raised the desire for equality or domination to the superpower. If peace were to be given a chance, it would ultimately be up to the superman in both genders to desire binding. “The only hope for peace is to teach people who are full of pep and unbound force to enjoy being bound.”18 And again: “Giving to others, being controlled by them, submitting to other people cannot possibly be enjoyable without a strong erotic element.”19

19 Ibid. While the citations of William Moulton Marston’s work in summary studies and the digital archive suffice to get the paradox across, I did look at one of his available books, Emotions of Normal People (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928), from which I quote directly an exemplary moment of turbulence (or dialectics): “Nevertheless, looking at the weaker or less complex force as a mechanistic-type cause, it is important to observe that by its very element of weakness relative to a stronger or more complex force, it is able to control the latter by causing the stronger force to select this
Zelpst Reflection between Genres

The scattered introjects supplementing the goddess of beauty with her role in the drop scenes of love and marriage come together again in Philip José Farmer’s *Venus on the Half Shell* (1975), itself a liminal work that the author composed around a throwaway fictional title. Kurt Vonnegut attributed it to one of the (non-existent) books of his stick figure Kilgore Trout, a deadbeat science-fiction author occupying the outer reach of satires that Vonnegut composed in the 1960s. Farmer first published the novel under the name Kilgore Trout. What he composed out of Vonnegut’s effects was rumored for a time to be the admired author’s own satiric venture. Farmer had been suffering from writer’s block, but he was able to carry out the exercise of this conceit without impediment – exulting all the way.

A Venus-lookalike robot, modeled after the painting by Botticelli, joins the troupe of the protagonist, Simon Wagstaff (who like Geppetto now leads a group of two animals and a puppet). She was made and programmed on the planet Zelpst where every teenager is given a castle and a bevy of slave-like flesh robots to protect him against harm and fulfill his every wish. “No matter how carefully the Zelpst society was designed to prevent unhappiness and frustration for the humans, it wasn’t one hundred percent efficient.”

Wary of what he wished for, the Venus-robot’s master programmed his bevy not to wound his narcissism. He wanted brilliant conversation, but also wouldn’t tolerate being upstaged. “So every time we thought of a one-upman remark, it was routed to a deadend circuit in us” (132). Sexual rivalry from the male robots or aggressive behavior from either gender would also “be rerouted through a circuit board and converted into an overwhelming sense of shame and guilt” (132–33). At the ultimate limit of safety in wish fulfillment, her master was a melancholic rager “because his robots didn’t love him for himself” (ibid.) or by their “own free choice” (135). We are in the orbit

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of the *an sich.* Simon responds by singing a poem “Aphrodite and the Philosophers,” in which Kant is twice taken to task, his Imperative described as “horse’s laughter up a sleeve” (136).

What keeps Simon trucking is that he wants to know why he was born only to suffer and die. And yet he and his animals have already imbibed the near-immortality that is often the free gift that comes with membership in a science-fiction space-time continuum. But he chooses to live as a mortal who subscribes to “ethics, morality, society as a whole” which provide the “means to get through life with the least pain” (138). On this economic scale, however, Simon’s means remain, says robot-Venus, who was programmed never to lie, no more than “thirty-percent efficient” (ibid.). Because his search for the true answer keeps falling short, Simon and robot-Venus keep on keeping their word, he by imperative, she by programming, until the ambivalence, “what the scientists called negative feedback” (249), can only be split off by the parting that death is unable in their case to perform.

The “Riverworld Saga,” for which Farmer was best known, answered a variant of the prime question: Where do the dead go in science fiction? The dead are dispatched to some place between the outer planets and the new underworlds inside media that were explored by modern spiritualism. In *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* (1971), Farmer’s first installment in the saga, Riverworld is a secularized afterlife. There is no second death. A denizen of Riverworld who dies (again) is re-resurrected in another spot. Sir Richard Francis Burton, an inveterate explorer in the nineteenth-century of the British Empire or White Man’s Burden, discovers that “death” is thus a local means of transport and keeps killing himself to travel on what he calls the suicide express. The Ethicals, who administer the omnipotent conception of Riverworld in consultation with a giant living computer, call Burton to account. But intervention in the process whereby the resurrectee finds salvation is an exception that causes the Ethicals the agony of violating their own moral code.

Through his conversion to the Church of the Second Chance, Hermann Göring befriends Burton as well as the woman who

in childhood inspired Lewis Carroll’s Alice. Both pals, however, earlier “killed” Göring, whose first posthumous impulse was to extend the run of good years of his Nazi past. As in the media underworlds of modern spiritualism, notably the Voice Phenomenon,²² the deceased in Riverworld return devoid of their former setting on opposition, though not beyond its influence at the start of their enrollment.

Riverworld admits not only those who died when mankind was extinguished in the future but the entirety of all humans who ever lived. Before the “converters” did the trick, the Ethicals obtained a historical overview of humanity via a chronoscope.²³ All the characters in Farmer’s novel are therefore historical, more recognizable the closer they are to the time of the reader. While the staging of “resurrection,” including the accoutrement of a “grail” containing basic supplies for survival, suggests a fantasy-scape, sometimes someone wakes up and remembers the laboratory conditions under which he was brought back by energy-matter conversion. This moment of transition, which is science fiction, is not, however, as in The Matrix (1998), the fantasy revelation of a purgatory-like reality behind the illusion.

In Venus on the Half Shell, Simon is haunted by dream visions of his dead relations: “the images of his father and mother slid closer to him while behind them crowded thousands of people, imploring, threatening, weeping, laughing, snarling, smiling” (189). When he downed the elixir that gave him near-immortality he also imbibed the other salient trait of the local planetary culture, periodic possession by the dearly departed. “The stuff also dissolved the barriers between me and my ancestors. [...] And so now they must be demanding equal time too” (220). The ancestors are particularly drawn to attend the lovemaking of their delegate in this world. He explains to robot-Venus his new symptom in their marriage-counseling sitcom, his impotence: “How would you feel if you were screwing in the Roman Colosseum and it was a sellout with standing room only? [...] Especially if your father and mother had front seats?” (220). For his pre-

²² See my discussion of the Voice Phenomenon as underworld in SPECTRE, 81–83.
²³ Farmer, To Your Scattered Bodies Go, 212.
The two figures on the stage, professionally agile and supple-bodied, had begun making love. The action was carried out as a ritual [...]. Presently, as a kind of mounting tempo, the sex of the man began to change. After a time it was the rhythmic motions of two women. Then, toward the conclusion, the figure that had originally presented itself as a woman trans-
formed itself to a man. And the dance ended as it had begun: with a man and a woman quietly making love.

Reined in by extrapolation, the future sexual norm of entertainment cannot admit two males alone on stage.

Inspired by the radioactive mutation, but administering similar effects under experimental control in order to implement specific traits, a scientist has been fashioning behind the scenes a variation on the human species that can withstand the conditions of survival on Venus. When the government that restricted the conquest of space to discovery of already habitable worlds (second Earths) collapses, the mutant lab subjects are sent from the simulation tanks on Earth to their promised land. Thus, the metamorphic byproducts of the war, which are compatible with the imagination of classical antiquity, and achieve a high point in gender-swapping rituals, model what is produced in their image but according to a specific profile: Hobbit-like denizens of Venus. The citational introject extends from the holy family values of the real artificial Venusians to their alien livestock.

The dobbin raced determinedly down the road; in a matter of seconds it had hit full velocity. Feet flying, it sped like a furry ostrich, tiny head erect, legs a blur of motion. Blop-blop was the noise a running dobbin made. [...] As it reached the ditch, the dobbin unfolded two stubby, rattyhided wings and flapped them energetically. The dobbin and the cart rose slightly in the air, hung over the ditch, and then bumpily lowered on the far side.

In the rear view of the dobbin ride, Dick spells out how fantasy signifies: “Behind them Louis’ cabin dwindled. He and Irma had singlehandedly built it; a year had passed in which much had been accomplished. The cabin, made of the same bread-like substance, was surrounded by acres of cultivated land. The so-called corn grew in dense clumps; it wasn’t really corn but it functioned

25 Ibid., 149–50.
as corn.”26 The mainstream of postwar modernism, which dominates Earth, periodically runs on empty. What’s left, call it history, is the allegorization of that which has lapsed into non-function. But the counterculture of “freaks” forgoes immunity and enters instead upon a pure community of child’s play or make-believe made to function. The historical counterculture (and original US readership of The Hobbit) found another Heimat in Silicon Valley. From there the functioning of make-believe could radiate out as other worlds somewhere over the digital relation.

26 Ibid., 149.