Science Fiction: Metaphor, Parable, and Chronotope (With the Bad Conscience of Reaganism) (1984)

Note 2020: In comparison to its first book publication, this text was slightly redone 1984–86 and in 1999 and 2004. It has now been slightly edited for style clarity.

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In this study, I wish to explore the depth presuppositions for analyzing SF as a specific kind of narrative. So, to begin with, what is a narrative text? Assuming that any text unfolds a thematic-cum-attitudinal field, and that fiction does so by presenting relationships between fictional agents (primarily by means of events in spacetime)[1] – how does, within the domain of fiction, a narrative text differ from a metaphoric text? All of these theoretical questions have been, quite properly, subjects of entire bookshelves. To supply a first answer pertinent to understanding SF, I shall first discuss metaphor and larger "metaphorical texts," touch upon the central analytic categories of model, paradigm, and possible world, and then focus on the connecting link between a metaphoric and a narrative text, the parable. My hypothesis is that all fictional texts are – by way of their paradigm or model – based on metaphoricity, but that the

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1   See for a longer discussion of agents my essay "Can People"; and of space my "On Topoanalysis," forthcoming in *Poetics Today* 1986. Earlier versions of this essay carry my thanks to people who helped, but I'd like to stress the frequent discussion with my McGill colleagues Marc Angenot and Irene Bellert, as well as with Umberto Eco and Louis Marin.

narrative texts add to this a defined presentation in space and time, the chronotope. I shall conclude by applying this hypothesis to SF as a specific type of story and by analyzing an S-F story by Cordwainer Smith, in order to test how much illumination the hypothesis may provide.

1. On Metaphor

1.0.

In one of the most recent and most illuminating syntheses of metaphor analysis, Umberto Eco notes that the incomplete 1971 *bibliographie raisonnée* by Shibles registers ca. 3,000 titles, and yet that these thousands of pages contain only few which add anything fundamental to the two or three basic concepts introduced by Aristotle (Eco, "Metafora" 191). I shall therefore in my first part, dealing with some basic properties of metaphor, focus only on those key aspects which are indispensable for my argument, without at all pretending to a complete survey, much less a new theory of metaphor. I simply wish to derive from the discussions of metaphor which I found most useful (Aristotle, Beardsley, Bellert, Black *Models*, Black "More," Eco "Metafora," Henry, Lewis, Richards, Ricoeur "Process," Ricoeur *Rule*, Shelley, Whalley) the basic orientations necessary for envisaging similarities and differences between metaphor and narrative.

1.1.

If "connotation" is taken to mean the difference between an ideal dictionary entry and an ideal encyclopedic entry about the same term, that is, any meaning of a term which is "normally" thought of as secondary (Eco, "Metafora" 206–08 and passim), then metaphor "create[s] new contextual meaning by bringing to life new connotations" (Beardsley 43). Its synthesis does not obliterate discordances, but in order to have any unity at all, its two terms have to share some connotations. In the example

"This man is a lion," the meaning of the lexeme "man" and the lexeme "lion," which are the metaphor's two terms, gets to be extended by the context or intratext of the metaphor as a whole. From literal dictionary meaning current in a given culture and sociolect, the meaning modulates into some selection from the encyclopedia of cultural commonplaces, presuppositions, and categories (cf. also Eco *Lector*). This is usually an imaginary encyclopedic entry current in a given sociolect and ideology, but it can also be a new entry, invented *ad hoc* by the metaphor's author and enforced by its context.

The sum of all the cultural *topoi* and categories implied and presupposed by a text constitutes the ideological system of its social addressee. The maxims of this system encompass the connotation chosen in a metaphor. In "This man is a wolf," the "normal" connotation of a wolf in our epoch would probably be *cruelty*, a connotation encompassed by the ideological maxim of Social Darwinism where man is necessarily wolf to man. On the contrary, under the maxim of a tribal society, where wolves may be totemic ancestors or reincarnations of people, the above metaphor will work in a totally different, axiologically quite opposed way. The two semantic domains and cultural categories of "wolf" and "man" which in a metaphor act as lenses and filters for seeing each other, will be very different; *a fortiori*, so will be their interaction, which in a feedback spiral uses the movement between these domains to emphasize some and suppress other traits potentially present in "wolfness" (lupineity) and "manness" (humanity). "The wolf-metaphor … *organizes* our view of man" (Black, *Models* 4l) and vice versa: when wolf and man are projected upon each other, a new whole emerges (cf. Richards, Black 38–42 and 236–37, Eco "Metafora").

The two semantic domains interacting in any metaphor *can* work upon each other because the connotations of their representative terms within the metaphor have a common ground. Aristotle (chap. XXI [1457b]) defines metaphor in two main ways, the strongest way being "transference by analogy":

> . . . for example, to scatter seed is to sow, but the scattering of the sun's rays has no name [in Greek]. But the act of sowing in regard to grain bears an analogous relation to the sun's dispersing of its rays, and so we have the phrase "sowing the god-created fire."

In modern language, Aristotle has here picked out the single semantic property or seme of scattering and used it as the common ground between the relation sowing/grain and the relation sun's beaming/light rays. All other semes are neglected in order to establish this common ground; however, while suppressed, they continue to function subterraneously as qualifying dissimilarities: in this case such is, for example, the action of the hand in throwing grain, which also implies a person sowing, the corpuscular nature of the material being scattered, etc. (cf. Henry 65–67).

1.2.

The discussions of 1.1 hold fully only for what is variously called the high-grade, full(-fledged) or true metaphor (Whalley 491 and 494, Black *Models*, Lewis 140–41ff.) – a unique presentation of previously non-existent meaning. On the other end of the metaphor spectrum is the low-grade metaphor, which transposes pre-existent meaning. In the "full-fledged" metaphor, new meaning, accessible to us in no other way, is being formed and thus explored. We have no other ways at hand for thinking through the relationship such a metaphor refers to; if it fossilizes or dies by lexicalization into a "literal" lexeme, we shall for the time being cease thinking about that relationship (cf. also Köller 40). For an example from cultural-cum-ideological history, *animales* comes in classical Latin from *anima* = breath; when this is later lexicalized into the dead metaphor of "soul," the dead-end quandary of medieval theology whether animals have souls could arise (and SF has to go back to Greek for its lay naming of beings with souls or conscious intelligences – *psychozoa*). To the contrary, if a low-grade metaphor – such as the late Latin word for and root of "arrive," *adripare*, whose literal meaning is "come to a shore" – dies, no great harm is done since we have other ways of thinking about the relationship of bodily translation in space up to a final point. I shall have occasion to return in section 3.5 to the parallel between this polarization of high vs. low-grade metaphor and my opposition of true vs. fake novum. Here I would just like to note that the low-grade, or indeed fake, metaphor can be recognized, first, by the lack of textual preparation and

sustainment of the metaphoric confrontation; and second, by the fact that inserting a copula such as "to be" or "to seem" will destroy the metaphoric confrontation or fusion and reveal the emptiness of that metaphor. Using Whalley's example "When the play ended, they resumed/ Reality's topcoat" (494), if we put "Reality is (or: seems) a topcoat" (or vice versa), it becomes apparent that the resumption of a topcoat upon leaving theater is already a re-entry into extra-ludic reality of which any topcoat is a part. Thus, the supposed modifying term is contained in the first term, and we do not enter upon a synthesis of discordant semantic domains. Instead, we are here faced with what is in relation to the full metaphor only a formal mimicry.

Therefore, the full-fledged, "interaction" or transformational metaphors cannot be paraphrased without a significant loss of cognitive yield (Black, *Models* 45–46); while the low-grade, "substitution or comparison" metaphors *can* be exhausted by paraphrase into commonplaces – for example, "on leaving theatre, spectators pick up coats and reenter reality."

1.3.

If we do not confine cognition to analytical discourse only but assume, in a more realistic vein, that it can equally – and in all probability necessarily – be based on imagination, then *metaphor is a specific cognitive organon*, not an ornamental excrescence. Its specificity of reference is still poorly understood, but metaphor seems to be directed toward and necessary for an insight into continuously variable processes when these are being handled by language, which is composed of discrete signs (Hesse, Ortony). If metaphor is such a dialectical corrective of all analytical language, it necessarily refers, among other things, to what a given culture and ideology consider as reality. This means that some conclusions educible from any metaphor – for example, "people are cruel," "wolves are conscious" – are pertinent to or culturally "true" of given understandings of relationships in practice. The metaphor can affirm such an understanding or (in the case of full-fledged metaphors) develop "the before unapprehended relations of things" in ways at that moment not

formulatable except by way of metaphor (Shelley 357, cf. Shklovskii, *Khod* 115 and *O teorii* 12). Exploding literal semantic and referential pertinence, turning heretofore marginal connotations into new denotations, it proposes a new, imaginative pertinence by rearranging the categories that shape our experience. Metaphor sketches in, thus, lineaments of "another world that corresponds to other possibilities of existence, to possibilities that would be most deeply our own …" (Ricoeur, *Rule* 229). In so doing, it re-describes the known world and opens up new possibilities of intervening into it.

In more analytical language, the sum of all literal statements that can be educed from a full-fledged metaphor will be both too restricted and too abundant. *Too restricted*, not exhaustive: people are perhaps cruel like wolves, but how should one formulate the hesitation between "people are instinctive" and "wolves are conscious" – connotations or implications simultaneously also present within the overdetermination of this, as of any metaphor – in sense-making literal propositions? *Too abundant*: for "the implications, previously left for a suitable reader to educe for himself, with a nice feeling for their relative priorities and degrees of importance, [will be] now presented explicitly as though having equal weight" (Black 46). Thus, literal statements are both frozen into connotative univalency and ponderated into cognitive equivalency; in order to acquire analytical functionality, such propositions are left with a binary choice between the 1 of true and the 0 of false rather than with a spectrum of possibilities. To the contrary, cognition through a full metaphor, reorganizing the logical space of our conceptual frameworks, increases understanding of "the dynamic processes of reality" (Eco, "Metafora" 212). It is, thus, not necessary to think of any such imaginative cognition as a mystical transfer but rather as a hypothetic proposition with specifiable yields and limitations. Parallel to other forms of cognition – say, analytic conceptual systems, plastic representation, music or mathematics – metaphoric cognition can be partly or wholly accepted or rejected by feedback from historical experience, verbal and extra-verbal. However, its potentially cognitive function is not an extrinsic but a central quality of metaphor (cf. Eco, "Metafora" 209ff., and Ricoeur *Rule*). Technically, it is graspable as the distinction between vehicle and tenor (first introduced, though not fully clarified, by Richards). Following refinements by students of parable, I propose to call

vehicle the metaphoric expression as a whole taken literally and *tenor* the meaning it conveys.[2]

1.4.

What can, then, be considered as the basic conditions for a full-fledged metaphor? I think there are three:

- it is *coherent* or *congruent*: the connotations admissible in interpretation must have a cultural-cum-ideological common ground;
- it is *complex* or *rich*: consonant with a/ above, it can use all the connotations that can be brought to bear, "it means all it can mean" (Beardsley 144);
- it contains or embodies a *novum*: "it constitutes a set of conclusions which would not follow from any conventional combination of words …" (Bellert 34); it is "not inferrible from the standard lexicon" (Black, "More" 436); it is "the emergence of a more radical way of looking at things" (Ricoeur, "Process" 152). This novum is necessarily (at least in part) historico-referential insofar as it disrupts the synchronic cognitive system current when it was coined. The criteria for deciding which metaphors are to be seen as dead, remotivated or farfetched are all drawn from historical semantics and pragmatics.

We may call these basic conditions the three axioms of *coherence, richness*, and *novelty*. Beardsley – who admits only the first two – notes that such axiomatic conditions may be considered as analogous to Occam's razor in literal, for example scientific, texts (145). While I agree with Bellert not only

2   A confusion of central importance is unfortunately present, from Richards on, between "tenor (or topic) vs. vehicle" employed in the meaning "Subject vs. Modifier" (used by psycholinguists such as Hoffman and Ortony, also by Ricoeur) as against the meaning "metaphor focus vs. the metaphor's semantic referent" (used by most students of biblical parable, cf. Bultmann, Crossan, Dithmar, Funk, Jeremias, Jones, Linnemann, Via). I am in favor of the latter use, though I acknowledge the question still awaits clarification. I shall for present purposes eschew the probably indispensable semiotic formalization of this approach, which would have to speak about semic fields, isotopies, Porphyry's trees, or meaning quadrangles if not hexagons – cf. Eco, *Theory* and "Metafora," Henry.

that among the conditions for metaphor are consistency and novelty, but also that any metaphor necessarily contains a multiple reference to what in a given sociolect and ideology is taken for reality, I do not think it is necessary to erect such a partial "reference to reality" (38) into a separate condition or axiom, since it is already implied in my second and third axioms as the norm against which both the richness and (as I just argued) the novelty are necessarily measured: Occam's razor again. I shall return to this in 3.5.

1.5.

This argument can be opened up in the direction of larger texts by adopting Bellert's delimitation of a *metaphorical text*. It is "a text not supposed to be interpreted literally … but assumed to have an interpretation different from that which would follow merely from the application of conventional semantic rules to the constituent expressions and their combinations" (25). I would point out that this delimitation holds for a text of any kind, and there is no reason to confine it to lyrics or small forms.

Thus, the interpretation of metaphorical texts can, on the one hand, not even begin unless an intertext of the literal or conventional senses of its constituent propositions is first assumed. On the other hand, the metaphor is defined by violating at least one semantic, syntactic or pragmatic conventional rule in a meaningful way, by a "paradigmatic deviance" (Ricoeur "Process" 144). A shuttling operation is established between the metaphor's initial semantic impertinence, its *pars destruens*, and (in successful cases) the *pars construens* of its final heightened pertinence.

2. Metaphors and Larger Texts

2.1.

Proceeding toward larger metaphorical texts, attention should be drawn to the well-known but curiously neglected fact that in many poems, prominently including longer poems, there appears the *métaphore filée* or drawn-out (sustained) metaphor. This is a syntagmatic series of

metaphors conjoined by sense, where each single metaphor presents one particular aspect of the paradigm, which is then an integration of all the textually occurring metaphors. That paradigm is the common tenor of them all – so much so that common usage calls the sum of all the syntagmatic occurrences a "metaphor" in the singular (cf. Henry 122–23). In the drawn-out metaphor each syntagmatic occurrence may come from the same semantic domain, which is used as vehicle, but this is secondary to the fact that the *tenor* common to all the single occurrences uses the same semic field. Such drawn-out metaphors are especially abundant and well-known in Baroque and Mannerist poetry, for example, in Marino, Gongora, Théophile de Viau or Donne, as the *concetto* or conceit, but another privileged example could be Hugo, for example, the poem *Dieu* analyzed by Henry (122–23) in terms of heaven as a place of torture.

Just as "a metaphor is a miniature poem" (Beardsley 144), so such drawn-out metaphors are an intermediate stage between, on the one hand, a single independent or lyrical metaphor, and on the other hand, a narrative text syntagmatically deploying an overall paradigm that can be taken as the tenor to which all narrative devices centripetally tend. The *métaphore filée* is an intermediate case in which the concentration on one common and unmistakably sustained tenor is a basic device for unifying the attention of readers in a longer – even though usually a verse – text. Other things being equal, this device does a better job of unification than the scattershot use of unconnected metaphors employing different tenors, whose compatibility and final unity has then to be established as an extra – that is, uneconomic – operation by the reader.

An almost indistinguishable intermediary device is found also, *mutatis mutandis*, in many a stretch of prose that demands a comparable reading attention and unification. A good example are the 80-odd pages in Proust's *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en* fleur where the girls are referred to in metaphors of flowers – thus establishing the "tonal dominant" of those entire three volumes (cf. Henry 136–37).

2.2.

If the theory of metaphor was a minefield, the no-man's-land between metaphor and narrative which we are now approaching is – to continue

this drawn-out metaphor – a desert with shifting quicksand patches and mirages on the horizon. How to fit metaphor, as a rule analyzed only in verse or in isolated sentences, into a "text grammar" or any other approach to textual macrostructures is an almost total *terra incognita*. One crucial signpost is Black's indication that metaphors can (especially in longer works!) be supported by, and draw connotations from, not only the culturally dominant system of commonplaces but also by *new, specially focused* systems of "implications for the literal uses of key expressions, prior to using them as vehicles for … metaphors." I believe this is in fact also implied in every full-fledged metaphor, given that it is a novum. It is only strikingly made explicit as a new, anterior context for the functioning of a metaphor when, for example, "a naturalist who really knows wolves [tells] us so much about them that *his* description of man as a wolf diverges quite markedly from the stock uses of that figure" (both in Black, *Models* 43). In other words, in any metaphoric series or system, textual coherence demands that the shifts in meaning implied by each single metaphor gradually produce also shifts in the "literal" meanings against which each succeeding metaphor of the series is being defined. Barring negative interference by other local, syntagmatic influences, the new context for metaphorization should grow stronger as the series cumulates and it should in all successful cases prevail over the context of cultural commonplaces, of current ideological maxims. This prevalence may be marked by the appearance of a single "encompassing metaphor," approximating closely or indeed identical with the new paradigm and tenor. But the encompassing metaphor may also remain implicit – a case of considerable importance for narrative, and SF in particular.

Thus, we are now entering upon some possibilities of connecting metaphor with narrative, indicated by Vico's description of metaphor – or at least of those fashioned in primitive times by attributing sense and passion to inanimate things – as a "small story (*picciola favoletta*)" (Book 2: 191). This connection may perhaps be most readily established by postulating a "metaphor theme" (Hoffman 405) as a global form of metaphor informing a whole, possibly very long, text by providing a series of metaphoric occurrences, all of which relate to the same paradigm or macro-metaphor used as a system of central presuppositions and ultimate

frame of reference for that text (cf. Black, *Models* 239–41). In relation to the imaginary "possible world" of the text, the metaphor theme acts as its basic cognitive, explanatory or founding hypothesis. I incline to thinking that it is useful to separate this category from the drawn-out metaphor of 2.1 because it is indispensable as well as central to a large, as a rule prose, text; but it is a nice point whether Donne's "A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day" or Proust's *À l'ombre* should be envisaged as the former or the latter. The important and pertinent point is perhaps best formulated (except for the intrusion of the wholly redundant concept of "myth") in Frye's conclusion:

> … whatever is constructive in any verbal structure seems to me to be invariably some kind of metaphor or hypothetical identification … The assumed metaphors in their turn become the units of the myth or constructive principle of the argument. While we read, we are aware of an organising structural pattern or conceptualised myth. (353)

2.3.

Thus far, I have proceeded from a sustained *series of metaphors* by way of a *metaphor theme* ever closer to a global, metaphor-type *paradigm* acting as tenor for a large text that is as a whole its vehicle. The logical next step – much discussed among theoreticians both of metaphor and of science – is the *model.* If one accepts the cognitive status of (full-fledged) metaphor, then both it and the model are *heuristic fictions* or speculative instruments mediating between two semantic domains – say the atom and the solar system in Bohr's early model of electron orbits, based on Rutherford's identical metaphor. "[M]etaphor is to poetic language as model is to scientific language" (Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics" 85).

Reactualizing the discussion about similarities between metaphors and models, Black claimed that their main difference consisted in the necessity for a model to control a coherent theory (that is a set of linked and falsifiable concepts) and not merely a system of presuppositions (Black, *Models* 221ff., in particular 236, 239–40; cf. Hoffman, who also gives a valuable survey of many others on 406–23). However, lucid and convincing

arguments have been put forward to the effect that criteria of choice between hypotheses are, even in strictest natural science, finally reducible to a preference for one model over another, that in fact the necessary criterion of simplicity assumes nature follows a given model of unity or coherence, and that a model is therefore essential to any scientific theory with predictive power (Hesse 101–29). Every theoretical explanation is thus *also* a "metaphoric redescription of the domain of the explanandum" on the lines of an interaction metaphor (Hesse 157 and passim). As to prediction, which entails falsifiability, its (literally true) meaning of "saying earlier" (*prae-dictio*) reveals that this was in itself originally a metaphor. Scientists may usually treat it as dead; but it keeps reawakening, thus testifying that all verbal hypotheses are also, inescapably, a matter of language, that "rationality consists just in the continuous adaptation of our language to our continually expanding world, and metaphor is one of the chief means by which this is accomplished" (Hesse 176–77).

Furthermore, one of the most relevant interpretations of Kuhn's scientific (or indeed philosophy-of-science) paradigm, that overarches any epistemic epoch and is therefore also to be understood as its overall world model, asserts that any such paradigm "has also got to be a concrete 'way of seeing,' … a concrete 'picture' of something, A, which is used analogically to describe a concrete something else, B." Logically, such a paradigm must therefore "either be, literally, a model; or, literally, a picture; or, literally, an analogy-drawing sequence of word-uses in natural language; or, some combination of these" (Masterman 76–77 and 79). I think that for the purposes of this chapter one can, as noted in 1.1, rule out the literal picture or image. What remains, therefore, is an argument, even more consistent than Hesse's, "that there is always an analogy or a concrete model at the heart of any mathematics used in science, and … that it is this analogy which guides and restricts the theory's articulation, excising and removing, by the need to preserve it [that is the analogy, DS], the otherwise excessive possibilities of abstract development inherent in all mathematics …" (Masterman 78; cf. also Gentner).

At any rate, whether there be a radical difference between metaphor and model (or paradigm) for mathematized scientism, this can scarcely be upheld when we get to non-mathematical description of a model and/or to the "human sciences." In that case, it seems to me the verifiability

supposedly proper of the model is not much more than the application of the three axioms for metaphoric texts specified in 1.5: coherence, richness, and novelty. Thus, by the time the term "model" is applied to a fictional text, say a writer's opus, I can see no useful difference between saying "Balzac gives us an insightful model of the French society at his time" and saying that his opus is something like a complex and not yet fully understood macro-metaphor. This is what Engels's famous comment that he had learned from *The Human Comedy* more about French society "than from all the professed historians, economists, and statisticians of the period together" (Marx-Engels, *Über Kunst* 122) is, to my mind, saying.

An example very pertinent to the discussion at hand is used by C.S. Lewis. He argues that Flatlanders – beings living in two dimensions – can be a useful metaphor for understanding the fourth dimension. The analogy would go: as Flatland is to the sphere of our three-dimensional life and understanding, so our three dimensions are to the fourth. Therefore, the Flatland metaphor can make us begin cognizing the fourth dimension, by way of understanding at least some of its implications: for example, we should not be surprised if a four-dimensional being could control our space and time, since this is what we could do to the Flatlanders (139–40). Now, mischievously, Lewis omits to mention that his example is taken from a remarkable S-F parable, *Flatland* (1884) by Edwin A. Abbott. This novellette, however, uses geometry for ethico-political tenor, so that the dimensions and limitations in physics signify those in ethics and politics (see VSF 370–73 and passim). In this case "sustained metaphor," "model," and "(prose) text with metaphor-like paradigm actualized in a metaphoric series" mean the same thing.

3. From Metaphor to Science Fiction: The Parable

3.1.

The argument thus far, leading up to the discussion of *Flatland*, can serve to introduce the crucial coinciding between S-F practice and contemporary semiotics: their simultaneous use of the concept, metaphor

or model of *Possible Worlds*. I mentioned this coincidence in my MOSF, but (except for Eco's use of *Flatland* and other unnamed S-F works in his *Lector* 148–54 and the mention in Sparshott 5) I know of only one article on this, pioneering but inconclusive (Volli). To summarize an involved argument very briefly, whatever Possible Worlds might be in logic, each and every fictional text implies in semiotics a possible world, specifying a state of affairs which differs from the "normal," and analyzable as if based on counterfactual conditionals or "as if" hypotheses (Eco, *Lector* 122–73, and cf. Suvin "Performance" with further bibliography). The difference might be, in a text under the sign of "realistic" illusion, confined to some wish-dream or nightmare elements of the plot, but in texts obeying another verisimilitude it might spread to the "furnishing" of that whole fictional world. This is obviously the rule in "estranged" fictional genres such as SF. It is by now a commonplace of S-F theory that its *mode* is a hypothetico-conditional one (MOSF 52 with further references, and cf. the whole of chapters 1 and 2). As different from the logicians' possible worlds, the fictional ones are not exhaustively posed but are created by the reader based on interaction between the fictional "counterfactuality" and feedback references to his/her own presupposed factuality. The world of any fictional work is understandable only as the reader's set of cultural and ideological norms, the social addressee's *vraisemblance*, changed in such-and-such ways. The famous S-F statement and proposition "The door dilated," presupposes, to begin with, that in this text's universe of discourse and possible world there are intelligent beings (psychozoa) who use sight, locomotion, and constructed edifices; and further, that these edifices incorporate building techniques not used in human history up to the writer's time and that the text's "otherwhere" locus is normal for the implied narrator. Finally, this sentence reassures the reader that the *categories* of visual (or at any rate sensual) observation, locomotion, constructed edifices, building techniques, and historical normality are relevant for understanding this universe: the *species* of dilating door may be unfamiliar, but the *genus* of door anchors it again into familiarity. *Per species incognitam sed genus cognitum* (by way of unknown species but known genre) seems to be the motto of most S-F estrangement.

Thus, "possible world" can in this case be analyzed into the following denotations: "worlds" refers to spacetime communities of psychozoa; "possible" refers to their not being ruled out by the basic cultural invariants of verisimilitude – for example, the philosophy of science – dominant in the social addressee's tacit encyclopedia (ideology). This entails a semantically revised universe of discourse "within which the usual denotative and connotative properties of sememes are upset – though not at random, but following the rules of a complete semantic structuring" (to adapt Eco, *Theory* 110, speaking of the cognate estranged literary genre of fairy tales). Of course, this is a generically ideal case: in bad SF, the proportion of random changes rises rapidly, while "Science Fantasy" juxtaposes incompatible structurings within the same text. Nonetheless, on a theoretical level the S-F universe of discourse presents syntagmatically developed possible worlds as models (more precisely as thought-experiments) or as totalizing and thematic metaphors: Eco's above definition is in fact also a definition of metaphor. The main differences between a single metaphor and a fictional text would have to take into account the latter's quite different articulation. The paradigm of a longer fictional (in this case, S-F) text must be sufficiently articulated in its syntagmatic development to permit exploration of the underlying key hypothesis – which is also its metaphor – as to its properties, most prominently the relationships between people it implies; in other words, to permit falsification of its thought-experiment. *In any prose tale, it must be possible to verify examined aspects of the central propositions that have by means of coherence, plenitude, and novelty created the narrative universe of that tale.*

3.2.

The argument about a continuity between a micro-metaphor and a longer literary text needs, of course, to be supplemented by an argument about their clear *differences*. For given purposes and levels of analysis, such differences might be as important as, or even much more important than, the similarities I have been pointing out so far. My contention is not that

a gulf between them does not exist but that it is bridgeable from both sides, and that we can learn of what the bridge consists. From the metaphor side, I have been arguing how any metaphor that goes beyond one sentence begins to organize a narrative argument. From the narrative side, I would argue that the paradigmatic tenor of any fictional text is in some important ways a model or macro-metaphor. I propose to look at this with help of a fictional form which is generally acknowledged to be somewhere in between metaphor and story – the *parable*. It is not without interest that the parable is of quite central importance for the narrative analysis of SF (and I would claim of fiction in general). For easier comparison to Aristotle's canonic example of full-fledged metaphor, the analogy of sowing quoted earlier, I am choosing the three parables of sowing from Matthew 13. This has also the advantage of allowing me to use insights from witty analyses of that text (Crossan, Dodd, Gerhardsson, Jeremias, Marin, Ricoeur "Hermeneutics" 54ff., and cf. other parable scholars adduced in note 2) while taking a different tack from them.

3.3.

The common ground within each of the three parables embedded in Matthew 13:1–43, is – exactly as in Aristotle's classical example of the full analogical metaphor from 1.2 – the seme of implanting or taking root (successful or failed). It arises out of the basic analogy between sowing the good seed and preaching the kingdom of heaven, which is carefully explained in the framing parts of the text. As Ricoeur rightly remarks, first, "[t]he parable is the conjunction of a *narrative form* and a *metaphorical process*"; second, the problem of "how a metaphor may take the mediating form of a narrative" is "only partially" solved by the contemporary theory of metaphor ("Hermeneutics" 30–31). For, the classical (lyrical or micro-) metaphor is a local unit of discourse, operating at the level of sentence, whereas the parable is a literary genre – even if a small form – operating at the level of text composition, Aristotle's *taxis* (ibidem 92–93). I submit that the major significant accretion to metaphor (as discussed before) effected in such a parable is that the relationship between sowing/good seed and preaching/kingdom of heaven is actualized through a narrative action leading to *a change of state in*

a determinate spacetime. This can be exemplified on the briefest of the three "sowing" parables, the Parable of the Mustard Seed:

> 31. … The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:
> 32. Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. (King James Version)

The vehicle of this parable is a minimal *story* involving precise *space* and *time*, whose characteristic is the deployment of hyperbole and paradox by which the least shall become the greatest, given some preconditions. The space begins with the very small seed, fitting into a man's hand; it is cinematically (both in the sense of moving and of movies) enlarged, by way of the connecting "shot" of sowing, to the horizontal dimension of a field (Luke 13:19 speaks of a garden); in it, the mustard seed grows after a lapse of time – tacitly filled in by the hearers from their empirical norm – to a large tree, whose greatness is verified by the last cinematic shot of many birds finding enough place to lodge in it. The spacetime dimensionality unfolds thus from the point-like seed, through the implied hand and the two-dimensional field, to the dimension of vertical development (accommodating both the upward arrow and the arrow of time) and to a final four-dimensional shot of birds flying into and finding protection within the tree (in Mark 4:32, "under the shadow of it"). As important, the story's spacetime is consubstantial to changes through action: first the sower taking the seed into his hand and sowing it out over the field, second the growth of the seed into a tree, and third the arrival and nestling of the birds.

Now whereas in a metaphor like "The chairman plowed through the discussion" there is certainly an action (the metaphoric focus is a verb), a micro-metaphor or sentence-metaphor cannot, I would maintain until proof to the contrary, envisage a sequential *change of state*, a succession of events tied to a *mutable chronotope* (cf. Bakhtin 84ff.). Though the metaphor compensates for this impossibility by a point-like flash of insight, the cognitive necessity of subjecting aspects and elements of any complex proposition or hypothesis to detailed scrutiny can only be satisfied by a story. It is, therefore, *not action* (by a narrative agent such as the plowing chairman) which differentiates story from metaphor; it is the development

of space and time from seed to field to tree and from sowing through growing time, which add story to metaphor and form the parable – so much richer and more persuasive than an unsupported metaphor would be. The story – the plot – is the organizing backbone of the whole message. Varying Ricoeur, I would say that the kingdom of heaven is not as *who* but as *how* (*what changes have happened when-and-where*); indeed, "the metaphorical power of the parable proceeds from the plot" (ibidem l25). It is the plot that functions as an analogue model, a developed cognitive metaphor, of the tenor (the kingdom of heaven), and not the mustard seed by itself. Precisely because of this model-like function of the plot, the parable shares in the basic common traits of model and metaphor, those of being "heuristic fictions" and "redescriptions of reality" (Ricoeur, ibidem 95, 125, and passim). But it adds to the common characteristics of all heuristic fiction a chronotopic, story-telling articulation in which agential and spatial relationships will be unfolded as *choices* (see my essays on "Narrative Logic" and on "Epic Narration"). Any narrative, even a small parable, is an articulated thought-experiment (which means that it is multiply falsifiable at all the major articulating joints)

The other two parables of sowing in Matthew 13 are significantly longer. The Parable of the Sower (13:3–8) involves four alternative actions: seeds devoured by the wayside, scorched because of weak roots, choked by thorns, or triumphantly bypassing all these threats and bringing manifold fruit. Its plot, thus, suggests alternative time-streams and Possible Worlds, based on qualitatively different spaces. Of the alternative chronotopes, the three initial ones traverse the spread of bad agricultural possibilities: "the whole plot is articulated following an almost land-registry-like topology (*topique*)" (Marin 59). The chronotopes in the plot traverse axiologically the bad ground, beginning with the wayside and continuing with the transitional space between wayside and field where rocks and thorns delimit the field: the plot (the story) is plotted upon the plot (the seeding ground); the tenor in time apparently derived from but in fact projected on the metaphoric vehicle of space. These chronotopes are opposed but also lead up to the climax of the one and only perfect possibility – the seeds falling onto the agriculturally good or deep ground (in the Biblical Greek, with an erotic metaphor: the beautiful earth). Similarly, the four locational and

axiological chronotopes that make up the plot delineate four alternative possibilities in the zero world of the implied reader. They are *typical*, that is they are supposed to exhaust the pertinent possibilities of the seed's destiny; so much so that when the parable is explained in 13:18–23, its tenor is four *types* of narrative agents, or four sub-types of "hearers of the word" (Gerhardsson 175). I do not see how any single metaphor could accommodate four views.

   In the final parable of this group, that of the Tares (l3:24–30), there is furthermore a violent change of chronotope: the sowing and the (potential) springing up of good seed alone is first supplanted by the addition of tares, which spoilage is then presented as undone at the envisaged future gathering. The plot is here incipiently dramatic, because both the seeming inner contradiction of the Mustard Seed (smallness of seed vs. greatness of shrub) and the "objective" antagonists of the Sower parable (birds, rocks, thorns) have been replaced by the agential conflict between the wheat-sowing Protagonist and the tares-sowing Antagonist: again, the most typical "good guy" and "bad guy." True, the Protagonist does not enter into a face-to-face conflict with the Antagonist, but explains to his Satellites (present servants and future reapers) how the Antagonist will be outsmarted at gathering time; however, this only serves to stress the temporal and substantial depth of the conflict. The mingled didascalic actions and dialogs define an already complex sequence of reversals, leading in a full seasonal sowing-to-reaping cycle from clean through contaminated field to a final cleansing by fire. I do not see how any micro-metaphor, however drawn out, could accommodate more than two agents (that is more than one action).

3.4.

Should the above hypothesis about the constructive elements and factors necessary for a bridge between sentence metaphors and narrative texts prove defensible, it would be less difficult to pass from a small narrative form such as the parable to any other, larger narrative form, such as the short story and the novel. We may provisionally define a narrative as *a*

finite and coherent sequence of actions, located in the spacetime of a Possible World and proceeding from an initial to a final state of affairs. Its minimal requirements would be an agent, an initial state changing to a commensurate final state, and a series of changes consubstantial to varying chronotopes (I am spelling out the last element from the seminal discussions of Eco, *Lector* 70, 107–08, and passim, where it already seems implied). Since all of these elements have been found in the above discussion of parable, there is no generic difference between it and any other narration. As Ricoeur convincingly argues, "[m]etaphoricity is a trait not only of *lexis* but of *muthos* [story or plot] itself" (*Rule* 244). It should be therefore possible – if not necessarily always useful – to read any longer narration as an enlarged and otherwise modified parable, and in a final reduction as a metaphor.

3.5.

Restricting the focus again to direct correspondences, I may perhaps refer to my argument that not only is "each and every poetic metaphor … a novum" but that this also holds for all S-F narrations (MOSF 64 and passim). Superadded to the always necessary fictional properties of coherence and richness, this indicates that the analogies between a metaphorical and a narrative text will be especially strong and clearly visible on the textual surface itself in SF. The three axioms that metaphorical and S-F texts have in common make for what I have called an *ontolytic* effect: the social addressee's empirical norms are being challenged by the estrangement inherent in the oscillation the text sets up between them and a new normative system, between the addressee's "zero world" and the Possible World of the SF text. Such analogies or parallels extend even to the vexed discriminations between *what is and what is not* SF as well as what is *good* and *bad* SF. "Reality's topcoat" was in 1.3 found to be only a mimicry of metaphor, falsifiable simply by putting its two terms into a relation of identity or synecdoche (topcoat = [part of] reality); just so, any S-F tale that can be translated into another literary genre simply by changing surface entities (e.g., the ray guns and aliens into the Indians and six-shooters of the Western) by that token a fake mimicry of SF. Further, even when we agree that something should count as a genuine

metaphor or SF, we need criteria for distinguishing run-of-the-mill from op-timal SF just as we do for low-grade vs. full-fledged and successful metaphor. I suggest that these criteria are quite analogous, given the difference between brief and long writings. Thus, I have argued how the existence of various aspects of a true – not pre-existent and not fully paraphrasable – novum is the touchstone for distinguishing SF from non-SF (MOSF 80–82). The other two axioms found in the discussion of metaphor, coherence and rich-ness, allow us to distinguish the level or quality of an S-F text.

As important as any other aspect is that both the fictional and the metaphoric novum always refer and are relevant to a common human history. Every text of fiction in the wider sense (including epic, lyric, and dramatic writings, to put it in a familiar way), from the micro-text of a metaphor to the macro-text of, say, Shakespeare's late romances or the *Comédie humaine*, implies a Possible World whose tenor is some different possibility of human relationships. This necessarily accompanies the cog-nitive status of metaphors and other texts: as Frege saw, every predication presupposes a "striving for truth," which "drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference" (quoted in Ricoeur, *Rule* 218, and cf. his whole chap. 7). And furthermore, any "second-level reference [that is one which suspends literal description in favour of what I here call the novum] … is properly the metaphorical reference" (Ricoeur 221). Since freedom is "the possibility of making it different" (Bloch, *Experimentum* 143), *esthetic quality is in SF, as in any other metaphoric text, correlative to its ethico-political, liberating qualities.*

4. SF as Parable – Chronotope and Vehicle: The American Ship of the State-Soul and the Bridegroom

4.1.

In order to engage in the interpretation of an S-F text, I need one more piece of theoretical equipment. That is Angenot's hypothesis of the "absent paradigm" as a necessary characteristic of SF, to my mind the

most important theoretical contribution to the study of this genre in the last years. To condense it exceedingly, it argues that to read SF according to the proper contract implied in the genre necessarily means a constant shifting back and forth from syntagmatic flow to an implicit semiotic paradigm. Very significantly, the paradigm is axed on the narrative agents (and I would add on the narrative chronotopes). "Mimetic" or "naturalistic" fiction (cf. MOSF 18–2l and passim) demands that the referential *topoi* be directly coupled with the text being read: the norms of adultery are the presuppositions for Mme. Bovary's adultery. On the contrary, a reading of estranged fiction such as SF proceeds from the syntagmatic events first of all to the rules of authentication that form a narratively coherent possible world (which, I have argued, is also a macro-metaphor). For example, the events in P.J. Farmer's *Strange Relations* are not referred directly to the social addressee's sexual mores but first of all to the tenor and model suggested by each story, the new norm of sexuality. It is only in a second series of operations, fully completed only toward the end of the plot, that the S-F reader can relate the fictional given as a whole – the tenor of the story – to his empirico-referential norms.

This proceeding, paralleling the one in a full-fledged metaphor or metaphorical text, means that SF will – in proportion to its quality – establish an *optimal* distance between the reader's initial "normal" paradigm and the new, not fully existent but sufficiently clearly suggested paradigm of the S-F story. The optimal distance should be neither so great as to render the narration incomprehensible, nor so small as to mechanically transpose culturally "normal" paradigms – say, the detective story or the Western, as argued earlier. Angenot concludes that the basic verisimilitude of SF is "strongly related to the metaphorical … and other transformations from the empirical cognitive systems to the paradigms of the story" (17). Of course, it should also be added that the "switching device" routing the reader from meaning to meaning is neither – as Butor remarked of *Finnegans Wake* – each word (12), nor – as in a metaphorical text – each metaphor, but that this device is in an S-F work each "world-creating" proposition, each narreme or narrative device for suggesting overall paradigm through syntagm. Most notably, such are agents with their actions and chronotopes. Finally, while in a metaphorical series or metaphorical text the principal term or encompassing metaphor may or may not appear (cf. 2.3), in an S-F

story the paradigm necessarily must remain partly implicit, since a fully explicit stipulation of a Possible World is impossible in narrative.

4.2.

I would like, finally, to undertake a short analysis of an S-F text in this optic. As is very often the case in SF, its plot is that of a journey. Retracing on a more concrete level the trajectory of my argumentation so far, I shall – for reasons to become clear soon – start from the nautical metaphor of the "boat of the mind" unfurling the sails for some great, communally significant venture. This *topos* is most memorably deployed into a sustained metaphor toward the beginning of Dante's *Paradiso* (II.1–15, cf. Curtius 128–30):

> O voi che siete in piccioletta barca
> Desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti
> Dietro al mio legno, che cantando varca,
> Tornate a riveder li vostri liti:
> Non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse,
> Perdendo me rimarreste smarriti.
> L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse:
> Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo,
> E nove Muse mi dimostran l'Orse.
> Voi altri pochi che drizzaste il collo
> Per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale
> Vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,
> Metter potete ben per l'alto sale
> Vostro naviglio, servando mio solco
> Dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna equale.
> (O you who in a fragile bark thus long,
> Eager to harken, have followed close behind
> My masted ship, that singing sails along,
> Turn back to view again your safer coast:
> Do not put out to sea, lest peradventure
> Once losing me, you may yourselves be lost.
> Never traversed was the sea where my craft fares:

Minerva breathes, Apollo pilots me,
And Muses nine point out to me the Bears.
You other few, who craned up not too late
Your necks for bread of angels, on which here
The living are fed but never satiate,
You may now launch upon the salty deep,
And glide within my wake, ahead of where
The waters again an equal level keep.

[Modified from the transl. by J.B. Fletcher])

Dante here contrasts those readers who are sailing in a small boat, fit only
for hugging the shore, with those who, having oriented themselves in time
toward angelic, permanently sustaining nourishment, are now able to
follow his singing ship even in high-sea navigations through waters never
traversed before and accessible only by help of gods and Muses. His meta-
phor is a continuation of the oppositional typifying we encountered already
in Matthew's Parable of the Sower. I suggest it is not too foolhardy a leap
from this tradition – to whose later avatars I shall return – to an unduly
neglected SF writer, Cordwainer Smith, and in particular to his 1960 short
story "The Lady Who Sailed *The Soul*," written with Genevieve Linebarger
(Smith 40–66).[3] Already the title makes its pedigree perfectly clear.

However, as different from Dante's age, when rules of rhetorics and
poetics were complex but clear, so that it was possible for interpretation

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3   The Linebargers' story is cited from Smith. The secondary literature is too
     scanty. As usual, it is best to begin with the reliable entry by John Clute, "Smith,
     Cordwainer," in P. Nicholls ed., *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London,
     1979). Cf. also John Bangsund ed., *Exploring Cordwainer Smith* (Algol P, 1975);
     John J. Pierce, "Cordwainer Smith," in the Ballantine edition cited, viii–xix;
     Gary K. Wolfe, "Mythic Structures in Cordwainer Smith's 'The Game of Rats
     and Dragons'," *SFS* no. 12 (1977): 144–50, and Anthony R. Lewis, *Concordance
     to Cordwainer Smith* (New England SF Assn., 1984). It would be interesting and
     perhaps revealing to attempt disentangling what aspects of the story were contrib-
     uted to by the husband and the wife, but without the unavailable biographical and
     archival evidence this is impossible (as pure speculation, the *Spieltier* story might
     be mainly Genevieve's). Thus I shall refer to both "Smith" and "the Linebargers"
     in references to the authorship.

to claim univocal status, at the latest since the Romantics metaphors and *topoi* are "purposefully endowed with vague meanings, … which cannot be anchored in a pre-established code" (Eco, "On Symbols" 37). Though I shall argue that (paradoxically) Smith's powerfully anchored ideology makes interpretation of his texts as nearly univocal as this is possible in a modern writer, there is no doubt that this great admirer of the French Symbolists shares the privatization happening in that type of poetics and rhetorics, even amid his desperate attempts to harken back to earlier (religious-type) certainties. The very effort to concoct a stable ideology from a recombination of various ideologemes is a privatized effort, however it may then be secondarily rendered public. There is little doubt in my mind that it was precisely this intimate ideological, and therefore also stylistic, kinship to the Symbolists and their own ascendants that made of Smith an inveterate borrower and refashioner from older literatures. Except for Chinese texts, this seems primarily to apply to Romance ones, from Dante to at least Rimbaud (cf., e.g., his stories "A Planet Named Shayol" and "Drunkboat"). In Eco's terms, Smith's texts are halfway between symbol and allegory: from the outside, to the uninitiated, they function on the level of a supposedly futuristic adventure story. However, as in all significant SF, they are under more or less precise inside or esoteric control (Eco, ibidem 41). As I argued in my book, and as Angenot's approach powerfully confirms, "any significant SF text is always to be read as an analogy [to the writer's present], somewhere between a vague symbol and a precisely aimed parable" (MOSF 76). In the best cases SF, just as parable and metaphor, relates to a significant problem of the social addressees in indirect ways, through estrangement into a seemingly unrelated concrete and possible set of situations. The Possible World (intensionally speaking) or the plot (extensionally speaking) as vehicle creates the novum as tenor. The relationships in outer space and/or farther time, the strange new chronotopes, always signify human relationships in the writer's here and now.

　　Worthwhile SF texts therefore always leave in an attentive reader the feeling that more is going on under the surface than a story about starships or mutants, and in Smith's case this feeling is overpowering. His story takes the *topos* and metaphor of the bark of the mind by way of its Symbolistic variant, the "navire de l'âme." This "ship of the soul" recurs especially in Baudelaire (e.g., in the poems "La Chevelure," "Le Serpent

qui danse," "La Musique," "Les sept Vieillards," "Un Voyage à Cythère," "Le Voyage") as well as in Rimbaud, the poets of soul navigation away from the bourgeoisie. However ideologically transmogrified, this is the direct ascendancy of Smith's religious SF concoction, the photon-ship of the soul. Thus, my hypothesis about "The Lady Who Sailed *The Soul*" (how much more parabolic or indeed allegorical can one get?) is that there are different readings for its vehicle and for its tenor, and that the richest reading is the one which takes in both synoptically. The literal vehicle can be mildly enjoyed as a somewhat grotesque love-cum-adventure story as well as a referential puzzle on its own. It is composed of two strands which might be called the "Spieltier" strand and the "Helen America" strand, and I believe that the grotesque in both arises precisely out of a not wholly controlled and comfortable discrepancy between the text's vehicle and tenor. On the literal level, for example, the interstellar ship captained by Helen is propelled by the photon wind from the stars; however, the story's paradigm and tenor is a divine intercession, imitation, and nourishment for the typical narrative agents who stand for super-individual forces. All of this is, then, squarely in the tradition of the New Testament parable and of the (not only Dantean) metaphor theme of the ship of the mind or soul, reworked in a watered down, post-Symbolist, privatized fashion. I can here draw only some bold outlines of such an interpretation, which follows.

4.3.

In the Linebargers' story, the traditional *bark of the mind* is contaminated in a typically Symbolist fashion with the cognate nautical metaphors of the *ark of Noah* transporting representative agents to a better life and the *ship of state* sailing through perilous waters, thus becoming a (star)ship of the collective as well as individual soul. The inner and major strand, the focal narration, is the legendary love story of Helen America (the supreme model of beauty as an American or indeed as America, the USA) and Mr. Grey-no-more. It culminates in a voyage in interstellar space. Or, better, Helen's lonely voyage as ship commander is the culmination of a clearly developed chronotope: that of a painful finding of oneself in the maturity and charity of caring about another (again, first about an individual and

then a collective Other). This tale has – in a manner inherited from Christian tradition, as in the parables of sowing from Matthew – a religious tenor. It can, of course, be read simply on the surface level: literally, its crucial incident or crisis recounts how the sails of the photon-ship *The Soul* slip away from the proper position for the cosmic wind to exert pressure on them, endangering thus the ship with its cargo of 30,000 frozen travelers. The lady-captain Helen America – the exemplary representative of a seeking and mainly frustrated, but ultimately triumphant, USA – fails in all her attempts to adjust the thousands-of-miles long sails – until the vision of her kind lover appears and enables her to right the ship. Significantly, she does so in a very US fashion, by using a gun to destroy the obstacle; thus she continues sailing on to her destination.

It is only for a more detailed explication that one would have to know that Smith-Linebarger was both a High Anglican/Episcopalian cum Mason (i.e., intensely religious in a very specific bourgeois way that identifies the nation-state with the supreme transcendental value) and an important member and ideologist of the US intelligence establishment during the Cold War (i.e., intensely political in a very specific Right-wing way that equates flexible piety toward the past with imperial renewal). Basic historical knowledge of Protestantism and the US ideologies of Manifest Destiny in our epoch suffice to read this tenor aright. Clearly, Christ is the Bridegroom and Savior appearing not simply to the individual but also (somewhat blasphemously, I should think) to the personification of the USA as a nation, in order to supplement her insufficient works (technology) by his loving intercession. *The Soul* which after his intervention gets "back on her course" (46) is literally the name of the photon sailship but also, in a Symbolist polysemy, Helen the representatively beautiful and unhappy *individual*[4] as well as America (the USA) the *collective* tenor. The double position of Helen on the ship is, then, indicative: she is both part of and responsible for a very large collective (the pods with frozen people – shades

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4   The Linebargers seem to suggest Helen is unhappy mainly because she is polluted by feminism, though other factors from the world presented to us in the story seem also to interfere. This confusion, clearly flowing out of strong ideological closure, would be one good way to analyze the contradictions of a "bad conscience of the Right wing."

of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*! – towed behind the sailship) and utterly alone (the only conscious being, unless one counts the robots and the vision of her beloved, both of which anyway exist in the narration as her helpers). This paradoxical simultaneity of final individualist isolation and yet supreme collective incidence indicates well Smith's sometimes awkward Symbolist oscillation and correspondences between national and individual destiny. Such a salvational anxiety is not only an *imitatio Christi* but also one of the basic "structures of feeling" in US SF (from, e.g., Heinlein through the *Invasion* and later movies to Le Guin's opus).

    This kind of interpretation seems the only one which can make sense not only of the key vision on the ship in the central strand but also of the story's composition as a whole, that is of both this and the "Spieltier" strand. In that second strand, happening centuries later, the central tale is "realistically" an old legend mentioned and discussed between a compassionate mother and her inquiring daughter. But there are more important subterranean connections: at the end, the daughter has grown up and become fed up both with this type of legend and with an endearing but now worn out animal-cum-toy (a cyborg, I suppose), the *Spieltier*. In her youth it was flexible, but it eventually wore out, lost its shape-changing power, and is now frozen into the semblance of a senile blond doll. A common ground as well as tenor must exist between the sailing (place-changing) theme from the inner legend and the shape-changing theme from the mother-and-daughter tale if Smith's story is to stand scrutiny. The common ground is, clearly, what passage of time does to vitality. The common tenor is, in my interpretation, the renewal (shape-change without loss of function and identity) of *the values Smith-Linebarger holds as necessary for the salvation of the USA in this historical epoch*. Smith's was the somewhat anomalous position of a critic of the system very near the center of the Establishment, a critic very concerned but not at all sure about its durability. A better-known and illuminating parallel might be Kipling and the British Empire around 1900 (cf. e.g., his "Recessional"). Smith's frequently recurring theme is Kipling's warning to the Empire against the arrogance of those used to power, "Lest we forget," and for all their differences they share a kind of Right-wing populism and sympathy for the underdog (and therefore a use of animals or "underpeople" as narrative agents).

Thus, the two strands are related on the surface as the contrary alternatives of aging with success (Helen) vs. without success (the *Spieltier*), but they share the same value-horizon as common tenor for the whole story. The childhood playmate that once inspired affection and security but has grown stiff and bereft of elasticity stands for the danger of the wearing out of some vital aspects of the USA, such as those dominant in the 1940s–50s. The danger that central politico-religious creeds and beliefs, perhaps even the whole nation, could become morally outworn and lose the power of going on when faced with the different salvational challenge of communism was constantly present to Smith/Linebarger: he had a youthful fling with communism and afterwards devoted his professional life to combatting it by means of psychological warfare. This framing narrative strand is therefore, among other things, a foregrounding of the parabolic procedure in the whole story: it sets an unmistakably symbolical tonality. The *Spieltier* has to be treated piously both for the sake of the past and because the values it once carried are reaffirmed in a better and clearer way by the central strand. The last word does not, therefore, belong to the cynical young generation of the *Spieltier* strand but to the inner legend. Helen is dying after a happy married life, and Mr. Grey-no-more tells her for her viaticum:

> If I came then, my darling, I'll come again, wherever you are. You're my darling, my heart, my own true love. You're my bravest of ladies, *my boldest of people* (emphasis added). You're my own. You sailed for me. You're my lady who sailed *The Soul*. (66)

The passage I put in italics is, I think, not bad grammar but the introduction of a conscious interference between "people" as individuals and as a collective, between Helen and America (both of which designations constitute, after all, her name). But all such oscillations lead the interpretation to analogy, which is itself "a third way between univocity and equivocity" (Hesse 141).

4.4.

I cannot in this brief account enter into a number of other interesting but perhaps not central aspects – for example, Smith's characteristic

motif of the modified sensorium correlative to an SF chronotope. Nonetheless, I strongly suspect he would have been extremely content to have his method of writing compared to a New Testament parable, in which – as the Aquinate noted – "traduntur nobis spiritualia sub metaphoris corporalium" (spiritual things are given to us under the metaphors of bodily ones – *Summa theologica* Iq. Ia. 9: "Utrum sacra scriptura debeat uti metaphoris"). I only want to add two points. First, that even the characteristic weaknesses of Smith's – the ideological contriving, sentimentality, and melodrama – flow out or constitute the obverse of his strengths, or more precisely of an improper balance between the individual and the collective, the vehicle and the tenor, the supposedly extrapolative realism and the underlying, centrally important parabolic intention. And second, that in spite of such undoubted weaknesses Smith was one of the first writers (at least in the USA – Čapek's splendid novel *Krakatit* comes to mind as one of the earlier European examples) who successfully proved that and how SF can be used as itself a vehicle for the most important of present-day tenors: *politics as salvation*.

Now ever since Gene Debs's and Jack London's defeats, this realization has perhaps had a better fortune on the US Right than on its Left. But this is a historical accident, supremely important for us living here and now but on a wider view fugitive. Whatever our ideologies as readers, therefore – or to say it more clearly: despite Smith's huge ideological limitations and perversions, so evident now that a debased version of them rules the USA – the importance of understanding what such sacramental politics really signify in the flesh of people (particularly of underpeople), what their structure of feeling may be, is enormous; if only to be able to supersede this particular version of it. But in that case supersession would have to be also a dialectical sublation, an incorporation of its positive or utopian aspects. For all significant stories, from Matthew to Linebarger, exist in a tension between utopianism and ideology; and in many ways we can today, retroactively, see Cordwainer Smith as the bad ethical conscience of Reaganism. I shall therefore conclude this chapter with the words of the great dialectical utopologist Bloch on fabulation or narrativity in general:

> Yarns of this kind are not only paid out, one also counts what has struck in them or one pricks up one's ears: what went on here. From events there comes here a marking (*das Merke*), which would otherwise not be here; or a marking which is already here takes up little happenings as traces and examples. They signify a less or a more, which is to be thought through by narrating, and again narrated while being thought through; that in the stories things are not right because we are and all is not right. (*Spuren* 15, transl. DS)

And, conversely, that in the stories things sometimes turn out right because we might and all might still be right. Even though this righting would have to happen in a way radically different from – indeed, diametrically opposed to – the way Smith's Heavenly Bridegroom indicates to America.

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