"The Present of Things Future" in Fiction

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We cannot speak meaningfully of the future without taking into consideration the past and the present. Of those scholars or thinkers who have discoursed on the relation of the past to the present to the future, few have done so as cogently or as memorably as Saint Augustine in Chapter XI of his *Confessions*. There, he ponders over the question, "What is time?" concluding:

> What then is time? I know what it is if no one asks me what it is; but if I want to explain it to someone who has asked me, I find that I do not know. Nevertheless, I can confidently assert that I know this: that if nothing passed away there would be no past time, and if nothing were coming there would be no future time, and if nothing were now there would be no present time. (XI:14, 267)

After a lengthy, insightful discussion of the nature of time, of the past, present, and future, Augustine determines:

> It is now plain and clear that neither past nor future are existent, and that it is not properly stated that there are three times, past, present, and future. But perhaps it might properly be said that there are three times, the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future. These three are in the soul, but elsewhere I do not see them: the present of things past is in memory; the present of things present is in intuition; the present of things future is in expectation. (XI:20)

The past, which by definition must be over and done with, exists solely in the present and only through memory—"history is first and forever a form of storytelling" (Attebery 42). Yet often there occurs when reading history a false assumption that this record of the past is an account of what actually took place "back then" or in other words, the past of things

past. Scholars, such as Hayden White in *The Content of the Form*, warn against such assumptions:

> How else can any past, which by definition comprises events, processes, structures, and so forth, considered to be no longer perceivable, be represented in either consciousness or discourse except in an "imaginary" way? (57)

"'Imaginary' way" is but a synonym for Augustine's thesis that all discourse about the past, whether history of a people, time, or place or an individual's memory of family or personal events is, of necessity, found only in "the present of things past."

Similarly, all representations of the future must, of necessity, be also expressed in the present tense reflecting "the present of things future." Yet, when reading literature set in the future, readers are prone to assume that the writer is attempting to predict future events; that is, that the writer has actual knowledge of *the future* of things future rather than only of *the present* of things future. Much discussion of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), for instance, has centered on how accurately or inaccurately Verne predicted the form and use of the submarine, yet the submarine itself had already made its appearance under the sea in the American Civil War several years before Verne completed his novel. Rather than creating *sui generis* the submarine in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, Verne was reacting to reports about primitive submarines and elaborating on their possible uses, but more centrally he was envisioning how people might behave in a confined space confronting unusual or unknown experience, and, in the character of Captain Nemo, exploring the phenomenon of the nationless person. In Augustine's phrase: Verne was dwelling on the present of things future [**1**].

Within twentieth-century fiction the present of things future mainly takes three forms: the representation of the far future centuries or millennia from now, the near future which may be as close as a half dozen years ahead, and the avoidance of any future in favor of a timeless eternity or its rough equivalent. These representations of the future take place within the context of a shift in the notion of perceived reality based upon the changing perception of time and of events within time which has occurred in the twentieth century. "Reality is traditionally a protean concept—every age restructures it, and the image of the resulting change in philosophical climate probably appears first in literature and its allied arts" (Collins xi) and the twentieth century is no exception.

The Far Future in Fiction

In H. G. Wells classic novel, *The Time Machine* (1895), the hero invents a machine and uses it to travel into the far future to the year 802,701 when humans have evolved into the ineffectual Eloi and the subterra-

nean cannibalistic Morlocks. Reporting on this encounter upon his return to England, the Time Traveller provokes a stock response from the narrator when he describes the Eloi's communal living—they dwell in one large house and share their food: "Communism" (43). Although the Eloi and Morlocks, conceived and written about in the 1890s, do present warning images about possibilities present in turn-of-the-century England, nevertheless given the Time Traveller's account of the far, far future, the narrator's ejaculation functions as Wells's pre-emptive strike against those readers who, whether they realize it or not, share the narrator's absurd self-assurance and parochial pride that imagines that current political issues or social conditions will persist not for decades or centuries into the future but for almost eight-hundred thousand years. By placing events so far into that future Wells effectively made evaluations of extrapolation or prediction impossible and/or meaningless, yet at the same time he held up a fragmented mirror up to events and values in his own time [**2**]. As John Huntington persuasively contends:

> Viewed as prediction, the novella contradicts itself: the economic pessimism foresees a grim permanence; the cosmic pessimism sees an equally grim movement. And if the cosmic has the last word, that does not disqualify the economic: in terms of mere hundreds of thousands of years the cosmic process, by dividing the classes into species, merely confirms the continuity of the economic. Only on the scale of millions of years does the division of classes cease to be a controlling factor. So we face a problem as we try to derive a message from *The Time Machine*. But the problem is not a flaw: such unresolved, antithetical conflict is central to the way Wells's imagination worked and gives his fiction a profundity, based on the ambiguities of human desire and experience, that is rare in thought about the future." (53)

Similarly, Joe Haldeman, in *The Forever War* (1975), uses the device of time dilation, which allows characters to live 1,200-1,300 years into the far future while physically aging only a few years, not as a trivial predictor of things to come but as a powerful metaphor for the wrenching dislocation experienced in the Vietnam War conducted in a foreign, exotically treacherous landscape against an often invisible, fiendishly clever enemy and in the alienation soldiers experience in attempting to return to civilian life in a country forever changed not only by that highly divisive war but also by a sexual revolution and the conquest of consumerism. At its most extreme, the future society in *The Forever War* sends its conscripted soldier into the far future to fight the last battle in 3138—a battle to be fought in a war concluded over two centuries earlier! After this final battle, the lone survivor returns to an altogether unfamiliar earth populated no longer by humans but by their clones, "over ten billion individuals but only one consciousness" (225). Few images have so trenchantly and accurately mirrored that horrific and wasteful war or

the fantastically disorienting homecoming Vietnam veterans experienced, which is one reason why the prominent critic, H. Bruce Franklin called *The Forever War*, "the finest novel about the Vietnam War" [**3**].

In *Galápagos* (1985), Kurt Vonnegut uses both the fictional technique of an omniscient, if naive narrator, writing a million years in the future for no discernible or possible audience, and the startling nature of earth's future fictional inhabitants a million years from now as ways of commenting satirically on human beings' incredible penchant for self-destruction. The narrator's often incredulous tone, as he observes what humanity appears to do best, accentuates what Vonnegut elsewhere calls "the unbelievability of life as it really is" (*Palm Sunday* 297) which, in this novel, centers on human beings' stupidity, short-sightedness, and unthinking brutality towards one another and the planet. Leon Trout, the narrator, observing those large-brained, terribly mobile, inquisitive creatures from his perspective of "a million years in the future," concludes:

> big brains . . . would tell their owners, in effect, "Here is a crazy thing we could actually do, probably, but we would never do it, of course. It's just fun to think about."
>
> And then, as though in trances, the people would really do it—have slaves fight each other to the death in the Colosseum, or burn people alive in the public square for holding opinions which were locally unpopular, or build factories whose only purpose was to kill people in industrial quantities, or to blow up whole cities, and on and on. (266)

Trout's restrained attitude as narrator nicely mimics that of a doctor diagnosing the illness of a patient. This pose of objectivity becomes in turn a perfect vehicle for Vonnegut's satire of the human mind's delight in devising engines of self-destruction, such as exploding rockets.

Trout's incredulity also helps emphasize the lack of human foresight which applies thinking not to the problem of survival, but to the problem of destruction. Rather than Juvenalian moral outrage, he adopts the more Horacean stance of neutral amazement when describing the functioning, trajectory, and explosion of an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile:

> No single human being could claim credit for that rocket, which was going to work so perfectly. It was the collective achievement of all who had ever put their big brains to work on the problem of how to capture and compress the diffuse violence of which nature was capable, and drop it in relatively small packages on their enemies. (189-90)

Extending this contrast between human creativity and destructiveness Trout compares the rocket's meeting with its target with human sexual consummation: "No explosion . . . in Vietnam could compare with what

happened when that Peruvian rocket put the tip of its nose, that part of its body most richly supplied with exposed nerve endings, into that Ecuadorian radar dish." Instead of completing the sexual image, Trout breaks the narration to insert an apparently irrelevant comment about art in the far future: "No one is interested in sculpture these days. Who could handle a chisel or a welding torch with their flippers or their mouths?" This violent wrenching away from the sexual imagery used to describe the rocket about to hit its target to the objective statement of the lack of sculpture in the future breaks the narrative flow while pointing to the loss of creativity through violence and sets up the next comic effect by suspending but not abandoning the imagery of sexual consummation. Such imagery contrasts sharply with the rocket's destructive function:

> Into the lava plinth beneath it these words might be incised, expressing the sentiments of all who had had a hand in the design and manufacture and sale and purchase and launch of the rocket, and of all of whom high explosives were a branch of the entertainment industry:
> . . .'Tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wish'd.
> William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
> (189-90)

Throughout *Galápagos,* similar quotations from poets, dramatists and novelists, statesmen and philosophers appear juxtaposed to the picture of the future downward slide of humanity into the sea caused by its failure to listen to the wisdom contained in such quotations or to find value in the creations of its artists. Vonnegut couples to this "biological regression"—"a return to the past, to the childhood, so to speak, of human society"—familiar from that of the Eloi and Morlocks in Wells's *Time Machine* (Huntington 43, 45) the human failure to protect those who love from the effects of war. This negative path of destruction is clearly exemplified in the rocket's explosive power: "'tis a consummation / Devoutly to be wish'd." Vonnegut's comedy thus reflects human shortcomings and failures, while warning humanity against approaching disaster, yet it does so without either moralizing, preaching, or declaiming.

Galápagos suggests that laughter and good humor may yet enable humanity to survive the inevitable discovery that the world, humanity, and individual human beings are not only imperfect, but are also an endangered species, whereas the earlier novel, *Cat's Cradle* (1963) employs the ultimate, if negative, future setting of the world coming to an end to conclude appropriately that humanity is the ultimate enemy of all life on earth not just their own. When asked on an employment application form what his avocation was, Bokonon, the spurious holy man of the novel, wrote: "'Being alive'"; when asked his occupation he wrote: "'Being dead'" (*Cat's Cradle,* 95). Where *Cat's Cradle* concentrates on

human myopia which choosing the occupation of death leads to all life perishing, *Galápagos* emphasizes the positive factors in natural selection which affirms the human avocation of being alive as the species mutates in order to survive. Rather than the dark apocalyptic humor of *Cat's Cradle, Galápagos's* comedy is appropriately lighter and more positive.

The use of a far future setting for fiction, whether of Verne, Wells, Haldeman, or Vonnegut involves, as C. S. Lewis maintains: "A leap into the future, a rapid assumption of all the changes which are feigned to have occurred. . . ." Lewis goes on to assert that this leap is justified, "is a legitimate 'machine' if it enables the author to develop a story of real value which could not have been told (or not so economically) in any other way" (57) which is exactly what Wells, Haldeman, and Vonnegut have done in these novels.

The Near Future in Fiction

But what if, instead of a leap into the far future, the author takes only a small step into the near future, as in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) or *Breakfast of Champions* (1973)? In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Billy Pilgrim will be assassinated in the very near future, 1976, only seven years after the publication date of the novel in an almost unrecognizable United States:

> He [Billy Pilgrim] has had to cross three international boundaries in order to reach Chicago. The United States of America has been Balkanized, has been divided into twenty petty nations so that it will never again be a threat to world peace. Chicago has been hydrogen-bombed by angry Chinamen. (123)

Through such casual descriptions of spectacular, near-impossible events, Vonnegut warns readers that his near-future is not a prediction of things to come but will happen only in his story. "The future, in fiction, is a metaphor," as Ursula Le Guin convincingly maintains (149), a metaphor that in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* as so often in Vonnegut's novels, allows him to concentrate on major social issues and public policy questions, such as here on the "just war" in which the good side is responsible for generating a massacre [**4**].

The comparable forecasts of future events in *Breakfast of Champions,* on the other hand, resemble more closely those of Vonnegut's fellow satirist, Jonathan Swift who in "The Partridge-Bickerstaff Papers" (1708) provided overwhelming, apparently convincing minute details as he predicted absolutely incredible events, such as the demise of all of the crowned heads of Europe within a few short weeks. In *Breakfast of Champions* the straight-faced narrator predicts such trivial details as a cocktail waitress will get the radial front tires she's been dreaming of, while at the same time sharing the unbelievable news that Kilgore Trout will

receive the Nobel prize in medicine in 1979—just a few short years away. (It's unclear who would be more surprised by the latter event: the most incredulous reader or the gloriously failed science fiction writer himself.)

The Irish poet, Desmond Egan contends that: ". . . the greatest weakness of Twentieth Century writing [is] its lack of a sense of value. Not on chaos alone doth man live. In perhaps, but not on" (133). The narrator of the self-reflexive, *Breakfast of Champions*, a fictionalized pseudo-Vonnegut, who metaphorically crosses the spine of the roof of possible suicide in an attempt to "bring chaos to order" (210), does indeed live in chaos. Yet behind or beyond him, Vonnegut as author, clearly rejects living on chaos but instead maintains a clear set of values that question and decry human stupidity, myopia, greed, hatred, veniality, and prejudice. The narrator continually points out, explains, and even illustrates with simple felt tip marker drawings the child's innocent questions and answers: Why do we bomb people? "America was trying to make people stop being communists by dropping things on them from airplanes" (86). Why do we hate? Why are we causing the death of the planet? All of these unanswerable queries are asked without malice or hectoring but with the utmost of innocent good humor. The near future thus provides Vonnegut with an ideal vehicle for his satire in this postmodern novel as it had provided him with an ideal vehicle for confronting the unanswerable moral questions asked in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, such as: why do the good suffer? How could people plan and execute a massacre in the name of righteousness? How could an apparently almost worthless human survive when thousands perished? How could I believe death mattered when he came so casually to so many? And so on and so forth.

Thus in fiction of the near-future, as in fiction of the far future, the future is also always a metaphor—a metaphor which if used well will recall us to present situations, dilemmas, and opportunities which surely is the prime function of all works written in the present of things future.

Avoiding the Future in a Timeless World

Vonnegut's use of the future in his novels may also be his recoiling against the changing perception of time in the twentieth century. Don Gifford in *The Farther Shore, a Natural History of Perception* convincingly documents the shift in how humans perceive time from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth century concluding that this perception has changed remarkably over those almost two hundred years. Gifford quotes William James who a hundred years ago pictured our experiencing of the present as a saddle-back:

> . . . the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a

> *duration*, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward and a forward-looking end. (*Principles of Psychology*, 1:609-10 quoted in Gifford 102).

James's sense of time as the present connected both to the immediate past—the rearward end of the saddle-back—as well as to the immediate future—the forward-looking end of the saddle-back—forms an important part of the moral vision of nineteenth-century poetry, such as that of Gerard Manley Hopkins for example, as it does of early twentieth-century fiction, such as that of James Joyce. The loss of these connections in individual experience, which occurs in the course of the twentieth century, results in part in the loss of a sense of historical continuity as well as the loss of an awareness of the human community stretching both back and forward from the present—an issue Vonnegut addresses positively in *Slapstick* (1976) where a future president of the United States decrees the creation of large extended families for everyone with the result that people in America are "lonesome no more." A more negative example occurs in the Tralfamadorean zoo sequence in *Slaughterhouse-Five* where the earthlings, Billy Pilgrim and Montana Wildhack, are exhibited as specimens of earth life devoid of any community or a connection with history. Vonnegut himself comments on this lack of a continuum in *Breakfast of Champions* where he complains of the lack of culture in America (5).

But there is a second, equally striking, shift in the perception of time in this century: In the beginning of the twentieth century time appeared to reflect the traditional Heraclitean flux, as well as James's duration, whereas at the end of the century, thanks to yet another technological revolution, this one in communication and media, time appears to be more of an instantaneous chaotic simultaneity of non-events "photoflash[ed]. . . far too wide" (Joyce 583). James's duration or saddle-back appears to have disappeared, replaced by what he termed the "specious present" which by definition contains nothing but the ephemeral moment with no room for the more spacious river of Heraclitus. Kathy Aker's *The Empire of the Senseless* (1988) illustrates this phenomenon of existing exclusively in the specious present as it dissolves all connections to the past and future through the piracy of plagiarism. Rejecting the re-shaping of past events in the present tense of memory (see: Augustine, Chapter X), for example, Aker opts for the wholesale copying of events into their new context—a sort of *Forrest Gump* splicing together of people and events drawn from disparate times and places creating a truly specious present where there is room for neither the present of things past nor the present of things present, to say nothing of the present of things future. Rob Latham, in characterizing Aker's literary technique as "collage," confirms not only its non-linear, but also its completely present quality: "The critical impulse of collage is expressed in its deconstruction of the linear and totalizing procedures of mimetic realism. Rather than composing a homogeneous illusionism, collage is a technique of de-composition, cannibalizing extant materials and graft-

ing them together to produce a heterogeneous text" (46). In other words, we are aware of the disparate pieces which go into the composition and which are held together only in the present—a very fleeting specious present at that [**5**].

A very different reaction against the frenetic flutter of instantaneous events—images flashed on screens quicker than the eye can register their presence—which destroys both past and present occurs in much of the fiction set at least partially in the timeless world of virtual reality found inside the computer. In novels of the near future, such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) whose setting is "the megalopolitan near-future . . . at once literally and figuratively a multileveled information field (Ruddick 91), or of the far future, such as Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* (1989) and *Fall of Hyperion* (1990) whose setting is the multiple world hegemony where Artificial Intelligences are using humans for their own mysterious inhuman purposes, several characters deliberately choose to inhabit the apparently timeless world awaiting within the computer over "the flesh the cowboys mocked" (*Neuromancer* 285) in the specious present, while others are forced to become part of it and still others are constructs within it. Dixie Flatline exists only within virtual reality, for example, in the form of a construct, a hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, knee-jerk responses (*Neuromancer* 158-59). Nicholas Ruddick aptly comments that this "is a human reduced to the sum of his 'useful' information. But 'reduced' is a loaded word: in fact, if the future is an information field, then Dixie is better adapted to wander it than Case [the human computer jockey hero], who is trapped in the 'meat' of his flesh" (88). Ruddick also accurately assesses Case's desires for the matrix ("that is, cyberspace, a new reality that is the mergent product of an information net of unprecedented complexity" 87):

> Case's desire for the matrix is for a uterine space and is therefore a regressive desire for undifferentiation—through the matrix, as its etymology suggests, is also potentially a place of creative conception and development. For Case, the matrix's most seductive offering is . . . an artificial and timeless landscape that is the last chimera of entropic development." (90)

In order to more immediately and more vividly access the world of virtual reality—what one character in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* calls, "this France that isn't France" (258)—such characters ignore all bodily functions and some will physically connect their brains directly to a computer thus creating cyberspace, "a consensual inner-spatial realm accessed by brain-computer interfacing . . . a very 1980s concept" (Ruddick 84). (BB in *Hyperion* interfaces through a built-in neural shunt [393], thus the body is modified to better access the machine.) Such characters forget Gertrude Stein's warning that "there's no there there" and yield to the ultimate temptation to imagine that "to live here is to live. There is no difference" (*Neuromancer* 305). The more extreme are prepared to trade their life in

the physical world for a non-human presence in cyberspace [**6**]. The ultimate temptation for Case, for instance, is to trade his body and mind for a reunion with his dead, ex-lover Linda within the matrix thus, like Odysseus facing Nausika the last and most human obstacle to his homecoming, abandoning his quest at the moment when he is, if not within sight of his goal, at least closer to it than ever before. For others, this choice of staying in the timeless world of cyberspace, when voluntary and positive, is more reminiscent of those mythological choices involving humans who chose to escape from this visible, impermanent world to an invisible permanent one. In the Irish myth of the Sidhe (the all-powerful Little People) such choices were invariably fatal, as W. B. Yeats illustrates in various poems and plays, but perhaps most clearly and most directly in the early play, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894). The plot of *The Land of Heart's Desire* parallels to a remarkable degree Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, in its twofold dramatic crux: first, forces from the invisible world—the land of the fairies in Yeats and the world of cyberspace in Gibson—invade the actual world, and, second, one of the characters makes a fatal choice, in spite of and in opposition to well-meaning advice, and chooses "the land of heart's desire" in Yeats's play and the matrix in Gibson's novel over the prosaic, everyday world. Both works, as Brian Attebery notes of much written fantastic literature, "incorporate structures and motifs from the recorded texts of oral cultures . . . nearly all modern fantasy has made such raids on the recorded inventory of traditional narratives" (8).

The crucial differences between Yeats's play at the beginning of the century and Gibson's novel at the end lie, therefore, not in those structures and motifs borrowed from oral cultures, but in the nature of the world the characters are escaping from and the one to which they flee. Yeats's Little People are older than Christianity with enormous power over nature and human destiny; Gibson's cyberspace is a recent invention, requires power for its operation, and has considerable sway over humans, especially in its Artificial Intelligence manifestation. Yeats's invisible world intersects with this one at the edges of religion, art, and poetry; Gibson's intersects with this one at the edges of super computers, the infobahn, and artificial intelligences. Yeats's play postulates a world freed from human time partaking of eternity in some mysterious way, while Gibson's novel invents a cyberspace world also freed from human time, linked to other matrices in the Centauri system (*Mona Lisa* 259; compare *Neuromancer* 316), and partaking of the timeless within the confines of a battery-powered computer located in a junk sculpture.

Finally, although both works embody the desire for a timeless land their assumptions about human time are quite different. In Yeats's play, desire for eternity is juxtaposed to a partial world whose time is clearly imaged in James's saddle-back of duration, while in Gibson's novel, desire for total absorption in the timeless is juxtaposed to a fragmented world whose time is imaged in James's specious present. What both have in common with each other and with all such fantasies of a time-

less world is, however, their attempt "to replace cultural life with a total, absolute otherness, a completely alternative self-sustaining system" (Jackson 60) [**7**].

No one has thus far traveled millions or thousands or hundreds or even years or months into the future—that happens only within the fantastic world of time travel. (Similarly, no matter how self-reflexive a novel may be, readers are always aware that the author within and the author without are two very different entities, that the Vonnegut narrating *Breakfast of Champions*, for instance, is not the Vonnegut living in New York writing other novels.) No matter how solipsistic or absorbed computer hacks may become, they must at some fundamental level remain aware that "there is no there there" or face the prospect of going mad or starving to death. All of these metaphorical uses of the future in fiction, whether of the far or near future or of another world outside time, have become dynamic narrative conventions which reflect not only the narrative need of their fantasies, but often mirror social or temporal reality as well. Such conventions drawn from techniques of the fantastic all have in common the alteration of time as commonly experienced, whether of Augustine's time present, James's duration, or his specious present. "By forcing a recognition of the arbitrariness of all such narrative conventions," these stories like all good fantasy remind us, as Brian Attebery contends, "of how useful they are, not only in literary slight of hand, but also in formulating our own imaginative understanding of our existence in time, which can only be comprehended through narrative" (67).

Notes

1 Verne is somewhat responsible for the public reading his works as extensions of scientific discovery since he prided himself on the way his work reposed "on scientific bases." In fact, he criticized H. G. Wells for not following in his footsteps: "It occurs to me that his [Wells's] stories do not repose on very scientific bases. No, there is no rapport between his work and mine. I make use of physics. He invents. I go to the moon in a cannon-ball, discharged from a cannon. Here there is no invention. He goes to Mars in an airship, which he constructs of a metal which does away with the law of gravitation. *Ca c'est tres joli*,' cried Monsieur Verne in an animated way, 'but show me this metal. Let him produce it.'" (Qtd in Parrinder 101-102).

2 Compare John Huntington: "If the novella [*The Time Machine*] imagines a future, it does so not as a forecast but as a way of contemplating the structures of our present civilization" (41).

3 H. Bruce Franklin, the internationally acclaimed critic of science fiction and America's war machine, interrupted his International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts Distinguished Scholar address to point dramatically at Joe Handleman sitting in the audience then

exclaimed: "There's the author of the best novel about the Vietnam War, *The Forever War*!" Ft. Lauderdale, FL: March 1990.

4 Among other social issues and public policy questions dealt with in Vonnegut's fiction are: automation (*Player Piano* [1952]), racism, sexism, and pollution (*Breakfast of Champions*), the atomistic, lonely society (*Slapstick* [1976]), ecocide (*Galápagos*), and the incarceration mentality (*Hocus Pocus* [1990]).

5 Whether Aker picked up her technique from Raymond Federman's "Imagination as Plagiarism (an unfinished paper . . .)." *New Literary History* 7.3: 563-78, is doubtful, but she does acknowledge William Burroughs as "my first major influence" (Ellen G. Friedman interview with Aker, 14 quoted in Latham 48) and Burroughs relies heavily on collage techniques. The technique is often effective. Douglas Dix characterizes Aker's work as deploying "nomadic weapons that explode out of her interior onto the plane of exteriority that is the text, representing her becomings and velocities as she traverses the various social, political, historical, and aesthetic fields of our society" (Douglas Shields Dix, "Kathy Aker's Don Quixote: Nomad Writing." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9.3 [Fall 1988] 58-59, qtd in Latham 54.)

6 The reverse process whereby virtual reality invades actual reality is difficult to conceive of, much less actualize, but in *Hyperion* Dan Simmons has a central character, John Keats who is created by the AIs (artificial intelligences), present in virtual reality, who is somewhat human and somewhat machine and somewhat an artificial intelligence, all packed together in a cybrid. In *The Fall of Hyperion* readers learn that humans have become the ultimate computer in the service of the AIs (*The Fall of Hyperion*, especially 410-15).

7 Jackson is speaking here of the "Dracula myth . . . in its countercultural thrust." But what she says about this important myth applies equally well, I believe, to this other myth of the other world, the better place of truth and absolutes which replaces compromise, lies, and frustration.

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