

# PROMETHEUS

## Early Utopias

By Amy H. Sturgis

In his well-respected 1960 survey of the science fiction genre, *New Maps of Hell*, Kingsley Amis said, “Though it may go against the grain to admit it, science fiction writers are evidently satisfied with the sexual status quo.” What I’d like to do today is to look back, way back, into the history of the genre and talk about five works that contradict this idea.

Long before Hugo Gernsback had coined the term “scientific fiction,” women were using what would become the genre to make political statements about the sexual status quo in their societies. I’d like to introduce you to five women who wrote utopian science fiction to communicate their messages, not only about feminism, but also about what it means to be human.

The first lady I’d like to discuss is Annie Denton Cridge, who lived from 1825 to 1875. (Hey, I did say I was going way back!) She was born in the UK, but she spent most of her adult life in the United States, where she immigrated in 1842. Like many thinkers of the late 19th century, Annie embraced the three S’s: socialism, spiritualism, and science. This heady combination of ideas led her to be quite the eclectic gal, and she became an abolitionist, a medium, a women’s rights activist, and an advocate of free love, among other things. Miss Cridge’s contribution to genre fiction came in 1870, with the publication of her feminist utopian novel (this title’s a killer), *Man’s Rights; or, How Would You Like It?*

The novel unfolds as a series of dream-visions, in which the narrator is transported to Mars. The Martian society is the exact inverse of the one that Cridge herself experienced, so Mars is ruled by serious, thoughtful, reasonable women while the men of Mars are kept at home in a sphere of domesticity. The women are free to pursue power and careers, while the men do the child-raising and the homemaking. The women wear sensible clothes, while the men are caught up in a series of fashions that are both difficult to wear and inhibiting, as well as downright degrading. But Cridge is not making fun of the Martian men; she’s suggesting that they are in a pitiable circumstance. All in all, *Man’s Rights* becomes a rather subtle work of political philosophy. Rather than suggesting that the world would be wonderful if only women could run things and men could be oppressed, Cridge suggests through her unfolding story of Mars a more humane—or should I say

Martian—solution to the problem of gender equality. Martian women prove to be interested in the issue of Martian men’s rights, and a revolution of sorts occurs in the society. She describes this in an interesting way. Part of the solution, she suggests, is technological, as industrialization and automation make available devices that save time and do things more efficiently. Then, in fact, a lot of the drudgery that falls to Martian men is lifted, and men can pursue things like education and careers.

The other solution she suggests is intellectual. It requires a revolution in the way that Martians think. For example, she writes about the problem of vice through the example of prostitution. She shows how the Martians change their laws, so that the prostitutes (who are, of course, men) are considered not criminals, but victims, and the real criminals are their clients (in this case, women). In fact she gives quite a vivid—and, at the time, eyebrow-raising—account of the overnight sting operation that occurs once this law goes into place, and arrests are made of the women clients who are

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# PROMETHEUS

The newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society

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## 2009 Prometheus winners

On July 6, 2009, the Libertarian Futurist Society announced the winners of the Prometheus Awards for Best Novel and Best Classic Fiction. The Prometheus Awards will be presented at Anticipation, the 67th World Science Fiction Convention, August 6-10, 2009, in Montréal, Quebec, Canada.

The winner of the Best Novel award is *Little Brother*, by Cory Doctorow (TOR Books). The Hall of Fame award was won by "The Lord of the Rings", a 3-volume novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, written in 1955. Doctorow will receive a plaque and a one-ounce gold coin, while a smaller gold coin and a plaque will be presented to Tolkien's estate.

This was Doctorow's first nomination for a Prometheus award. *Little Brother* is a powerful cautionary tale about a high-school student and his friends who are rounded up in the hysteria following a terrorist attack. Doctorow focuses on the consequences and costs of the repression by government agencies in the aftermath of the attack. Marcus Yallow and some of his friends are rounded up and imprisoned in a general sweep, and Marcus' attempt to assert his rights earns him harsh treatment. After they are released, he works to undermine the terrorist state and build tools that make it possible for private citizens to communicate privately and to organize out of the government's sight. The emphasis is on how people find the courage to respond to oppression.

"The Lord of the Rings" has been nominated several times in the past. Tolkien's novel evokes the struggle between freedom and absolute tyranny and the dangerous temptations of power over others. His heroes (the hobbits) are everymen, but they rise above their humble station and struggle to ensure that their world will not be dominated by an absolute dictator. This classic work has delighted many readers of all ages for several decades, and has become the standard model for a quest novel. The struggle to escape oppression is central to the action, though it's taken for granted by the protagonists who just want to be left alone, but willingly shoulder the burden so others can be free.

The other finalists for Best Novel were *Matter*, by Iain Banks (Orbit Books), *The January Dancer*, by Michael Flynn (TOR Books), *Saturn's Children*, by Charles Stross (Ace Books), *Opening Atlantis*, by Harry Turtledove (Penguin/Roc Books), and *Half a Crown*, by Jo Walton (TOR Books). Twelve novels published in 2008 were nominated for the 2009 award.

The other finalists for the Hall of Fame award were *Falling Free*, a novel by Lois McMaster Bujold (1988), *Courtship Rite*, a novel by Donald M. Kingsbury (1982), "As Easy as A.B.C.," a short story by Rudyard Kipling (1912), *The Once and Future King*, including *The Book of Merlyn*, a novel by T. H. White (1977), and *The Golden Age*, a novel by John C. Wright (2002).

The Prometheus awards (originally created in 1979) honor outstanding science fiction and fantasy that explores the possibilities of a free future, champions human rights (including personal and economic liberty), dramatizes the perennial conflict between individuals and coercive governments, or critiques the tragic consequences of abuse of power—especially by the State.

## Without Warning

By John Birmingham

Del Rey, 2009

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

John Birmingham gained recognition in science fiction with his Axis of Time novels, in which a multinational naval force from the mid-21st century gets dropped into the middle of World War II, changing the balance of power and producing culture shock on both sides. In *Without Warning*, the start of a new series, the starting point is a different fantastic event: the sudden depopulation of most of North America by a mysterious energy field that causes spontaneous human combustion. The story tracks a handful of characters, mostly Americans, through the radically altered political landscape that results.

The Axis of Time books offered a somewhat handwaved explanation for its “castaways in time” event—in contrast to other recent ventures in the genre such as S. M. Stirling’s Nantucket Island books or Eric Flint’s Ring of Fire series. At the end of *Without Warning*, the key event is still unexplained. Birmingham’s focus seems to be on a kind of double thought experiment: exploring what would happen to world politics without the United States, and exploring how the remaining fragments of the United States would reorganize.

The American armed forces logically are central to both questions. Birmingham’s premise gives him a reason to write about military action and the culture of the military, subjects he obviously loves for their own sake. *Without Warning* can be read as a straightforward war story. But it can also be read as a story about the legal and constitutional relationship between the military and civil society—a question that has been with us at least since ancient Rome began appointing military dictators to hold emergency wartime powers.

Geopolitically, Birmingham’s story can be read as a way of asking what the United States does for the rest of the world, and as a rejoinder to people who think the world would be better off without Americans. He shows the collapse of international order without an American presence: dictatorship in the United Kingdom, civil war in France between Muslims and fascists, nuclear war in the Middle East and the threat of it in South Asia. The huge American armed forces still in existence are no longer capable of playing a stabilizing role, without the United States as a logistic base and without clear command authority from a civilian government. Birmingham also addresses the collapse of the world’s financial system, but not the threat of famine when American agricultural productivity is shut down—unless he’s saving that for a sequel. This book can be read as a defense of the special role of the United States as an imperial peacekeeping power, comparable to Britain in

the 19th century or Rome in the ancient world.

As to American internal politics, Birmingham focuses on a constitutional question: How can the supremacy of civil government over the military be preserved? A major conflict of the novel is between people who want to maintain as much of the Constitution as possible in a country made up of Alaska, Hawaii, and part of Washington, and people who want to put the armed forces in charge. This part of its story reaches its climax with a new constitutional convention. Here, I think, libertarian readers will feel that his heroes are clearly on the right side, favoring the rule of law over authoritarianism.

This is not a novel about a free society, or about a movement toward increased freedom. But it’s certainly a cautionary tale, both about a world without American political influence, and about the potential for authoritarianism within American culture. And it’s a very American novel, not least in its preoccupation with issues of legality even in the midst of chaos.

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## Regenesis

By C. J. Cherryh

DAW 2009

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

C. J. Cherryh’s best regarded books have been her two big novels, *Downbelow Station* and *Cyteen*, both of which won Hugo Awards. Twenty years later, she’s come back to that universe with a third big novel set in the same universe—in fact, it’s a sequel to *Cyteen*. These novels, and several shorter ones, are set in a future in which humanity has expanded through nearby solar systems, including Lalande 46650 and Tau Ceti. *Cyteen*, a planet of Lalande 46650, is the home of Union, a technologically advanced corporate state that has grown to become a great power; in reaction to this, and to the retreat of Earth, the large orbital colony of Downbelow, a planet of Tau Ceti, organized the Alliance, a mercantile republic organized for self-protection against Union and against Earth’s former starfleet, now turned pirate. *Regenesis* comes back to *Cyteen* and to the internal politics of Union.

The most important of Union’s technological advances are biological: rejuvenation drugs, cloning, and advanced educational techniques that amount virtually to programming the brain like a computer. Using this, its scientists have created the azi, mass-produced genetically human workers raised and educated in controlled environments. This will look very familiar to fans of Joss Whedon’s *Dollhouse*: The azi are programmed not only with the skills they need to do their jobs, but with appropriate attitudes and ethics, and with a need to bond to their free human supervisors—and if necessary, they can be reprogrammed, a process in which their memories are erased. But unlike Whedon’s Rossum Corporation, which operates secretly in a world much like our own, Union is an independent state whose entire culture is built on programmable workers. The azi in fact are Aristotle’s “slaves by nature,” not

Full details of the Prometheus Awards ceremony will appear in the Fall 2009 issue of *Prometheus*.

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# Law and institutions in the Shire

By William H. Stoddard

## Social and political structure in the Shire as portrayed in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and related works by J.R.R. Tolkien.

As a fantasy writer, J. R. R. Tolkien is distinguished by, among other traits, a peculiarly high degree of realism in his imaginary worlds. One aspect of this realism is a vivid sense of how societies work, derived from the same source as the more scientifically intended studies of classical sociologists such as Weber: a lifelong immersion in actual texts from past societies. This sense is reflected by, among other elements in his writing, his portrayal of the Shire.

In anthropological terms, the Shire is in transition between two forms of organization: the chiefdom and the state.

The chiefdom level of organization is reflected in the system of folklands such as the Buckland and Tookland, and in such customs as the giving away of birthday presents on one's own birthday—reminiscent of the potlatch of the Pacific Northwest and of similar societies worldwide, which typically have redistributive economies.

The state level of organization is reflected in the presence of a Shirewide civil government, which maintains safeguards for property boundaries (the Shirriffs) and communications (the mail carriers); in the widespread literacy of hobbits; and in the obvious presence of a thriving market economy.

The Shire is unusual for this level of organization in being clearly a republican enclave; perhaps one might speculate that Tolkien was influenced by the “distributivist” theories of Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton, English Catholic writers of an earlier generation with whom he was certainly familiar, and also by his knowledge of the literature and history of ancient Iceland.

## Real texts, real history

The poet Marianne Moore called for poets who were “literalists of the imagination” and who would give readers “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” I have felt for many years that J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-Earth meets this prescription in an exemplary manner. Indeed, the sense that Middle-Earth is a real place with a real history has been remarked by many of Tolkien's readers.

To a great degree, I believe, this is true because of Tolkien's lifelong immersion in reality: specifically, the reality of archaic societies, as reflected in their texts. For Tolkien's scholarly profession on the philological side of the English curriculum demanded that he spend many hours reading such texts and striving to understand them—which meant, in some part, to understand the circumstances of their making.

In this Tolkien was at one both with the classical philologists from the Grimms down to his own time, and with the founders of sociology, such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, who wanted not only to produce a microlevel theory of one

narrow slice of present-day society on which data could be collected by questionnaire surveys and analyzed through statistical software, but to understand the total historical evolution of societies in the large, and who therefore had recourse to a great variety of documents from which social detail might be gleaned. And I think their method can be applied with some interest to Tolkien's own imagined societies.

We cannot readily induce a random sample of orcs to answer question about their early childhood socialization, but we can look at the customs and events Tolkien describes and ask what social forms and processes they grow out of, and how they compare with the customs and event of societies with which we are familiar.

Indeed, the very way in which Tolkien created Middle-Earth encourages such an approach. For Tolkien began with the creation of language: of Quenya and Sindarin and of the non-Elven tongues that surrounded them, And though you can read grammars and vocabularies of these languages that appear to freeze them at a single instance in their histories, Tolkien imagined them in no such way.

His own word lists are full of etymology, and therefore of metaphors crystallized into habitual use until their figurative character was forgotten, of slips of pronunciation become habitual, of names turned into common nouns, and of all the other historical phenomena that historical philologists learn about. His storytelling provided the context within which those languages were spoken and within which their changes took place. And he regularly offered historical comparisons for the societies he imagined—above all, of course, England at various stages in his history, from Anglo-Saxon to early modern, but England envisioned through the eye of a historical scholar.

## Population & political geography

I offer here a case study in Tolkien's realism: an analysis of the Shire as a social order. The Shire, that curiously utopian little enclave so well insulated from most of the history of Middle-Earth, smugly self-satisfied in the manner of Victorian and Edwardian England with its own stuffy matter-of-fact everydayness, yet also had its own history, from which we may learn something.

To begin with then, the quantitative facts, so far as we possess them: Karen Wynn Fonstad (1981, p. 69) estimates that the Shire occupied an area of some 21,400 square miles. Based on the relative body sizes of hobbits and medieval farmers and on the efficiency of preindustrial agriculture, this might have supported some 3,852,000 hobbit farmers, with perhaps 10% as many in other occupations. In fact, Fonstad believes that the Shire was “well-settled, yet uncrowded, with lots of Hobbits but plenty of elbow room” (1981, p. 69), and the picture Tolkien gives us seems to support this. So let us suppose

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that the Shire had between one-third and one-fifth as many inhabitants as would fully occupy it, or between 850,000 and 1,400,000 hobbits.

This area was divided into four Farthings, with one outlying region, the Buckland, across the Brandywine River from the Shire proper. The Buckland was the home region of the Brandybuck family, whom in an early letter (Carpenter, 1981, letter #25) Tolkien lists as one of the twelve wealthiest families of the Shire—the others being Baggins, Boffin, Bolger, Bracegirdle, Burrowes, Chubb, Grubb, Hornblower, Proudfoot, Sackville, and Took. Maps of the Shire, both Tolkien's and Fonstad's, show a region called the Tookland, located at the eastern end of the West Farthing, whose principal settlement, Tuckburrow, was the seat of the Thain, the head of the Took family and leader of the Shire's military forces.

In these two regions, we may guess at the outlines of an earlier time in Shire history, when the great families were more powerful and also more tied to specific folklands. At such a time the Shire's excellent systems of roads and internal communication would have been little developed, its reliance on markets and trade small, and each region would have been very largely self-sufficient. Indeed, the Shire may for much of its history have had nothing very similar to government, not even the very limited government of Bilbo's and Frodo's time. Note Tolkien's remark about the comparable situation in Bree (Carpenter, 1981, letter #210):

The landlord does not ask Frodo to 'register'! Why should he? There are no police and no government ... If details are to be added to an already crowded picture, they should at least fit the world described.

Nominally the Shirefolk owed allegiance to the King of Gondor and Arnor from whom they had received their land grant, but realistically generations might go by without any contact between the Shire and either of these states. And the Shirefolk showed no inclination to appoint their own king, nor to engage in large collective ventures apart from the occasional defensive war.

### Chieftdom

We are approaching one of the most difficult questions in anthropology: the origin and functions of the state. Whether the state is a functional entity that becomes useful at a certain stage of economic development, or a predator or parasite that becomes able to support itself when the people it controls take up a certain way of life, has been debated since anthropologists a century and more ago clearly recognized that many peoples through the world lived well enough without states. (For a lucid discussion of the question, see Carniero, 1970.) We shall not resolve it here. But in any case, it seems clear that the Shire did not have internal conditions favorable to the formation of a state, either endogenously or in imitation of the external states with which it had contact. And, to its good fortune, it was never placed under such harsh and sustained military pressure as to force it to organize a state in self-defense.

We have ethnographic accounts of many real-world stateless societies, which at first present a bewildering diversity. Anthropologists have discerned certain recurring types and patterns within these accounts. Of these, the customs of the Shire suggest the most complex and largest scale form, the chieftdom. Indeed, we may view the array of folklands we are imagining as a group of chieftdoms.

A chieftdom is a group of settlements unified by personal allegiance to a single leader who has few coercive powers but gains influence from wealth and prestige. Typical chieftdoms have a few thousand inhabitants, perhaps from one to ten thousand, though in exceptional circumstances they may attain to one hundred thousand or more. The chief is probably a center of ritual and a war leader, but in everyday life neither of these functions is primary.

Rather, chiefs are important because they redistribute goods. We are not speaking here of anything like a welfare state funded by taxes and typically the activities of chiefs bring more goods to the already well-off than to the poor. But throughout the world chiefs customarily spend considerable effort on accumulating goods, not only by their own work, but by their ability to influence followers to work for them, and then hold large celebrations at which they give these goods away. The potlatches of the Pacific Northwest Coast tribes are perhaps the most famous anthropological example, but the custom is widespread—it can be seen, for example, in the feasts of medieval Europe.

### Birthdays, gifts, ring-givers

Now, I doubt that it has escaped anyone that the Shire had exactly such a practice, in the — to our way of looking at things curiously backward — hobbitish way of celebrating birthdays. Tolkien's letters in fact include (Carpenter, 1981, letter #214) a brilliantly lucid multi-page discussion of this custom, which he rightly notes "...opens yet more anthropological matters implicit in such terms as kinship, family, clan, and so on."

In brief, hobbits customarily gave presents away to others on their own birthdays, "as a recognition of services and friendship shown," and typically also held birthday parties at which all those attending received presents. The scale of the giving varied with the wealth and rank of the giver. Bilbo Baggins, for example, gave fabulously large parties and gifts, paid for with the proceeds of his journey to the Lonely Mountain. Other heads of wealthy families, though, such as the Tookes and Brandybucks, also appear to have given large parties and expensive gifts.

Such extensive gift-giving in fact played a vital role in the economies of societies at a certain scale of organization. These societies were those which exploited several different groups of resources, indistinct but geographically neighboring environments. A chief organized production by his efforts to accumulate resources for a feast, and distribution by his giving away food and other wealth at the feast. Tolkien hints at a lingering effect of this kind in his remark about the usefulness of many of Bilbo's gifts (Tolkien, 1965, p.65), especially to the poorer hobbits in the area. This economic pattern in fact

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existed long before anything resembling a market economy or the profit motive was thought of.

As a scholar of Northern European languages and literatures, Tolkien was certainly familiar with the kind of outlook that such a social order creates. Scandinavian kings, for example, were long praised as “ring-givers” for their habit of generously rewarding their followers. Even once a society has passed over the threshold of state formation, its upper classes may be expected to display their generosity at least on periodic ceremonial occasions or to selected people or families.

### Bounds of a minimal state

So far as the archaic Shire may have approached statehood, it did so primarily through its military organization. The office of the Thain refers (*Letters*, Carpenter 1981, letter #183) to the “half republic, half aristocracy of the Shire,” and this is a fair summary: an archaic system of institutions based on the folklands and their chieftains coexisted with a somewhat republican system based on the Mayor and the two attached offices of Postmaster and First Shirriff, under which titles the Mayor managed the Messenger Service and the Watch.

This organization, too, was a rather minimal state, along the lines that Thomas Jefferson favored. Tolkien says (Tolkien, 1965, p.31):

The Shirriffs were the name that the Hobbits gave to their police, or the nearest equivalent that they possessed. They had, of course, no uniforms (such things being quite unknown), only a feather in their caps; and they were in practice rather haywards than policemen, more concerned with the strays of beasts than of people. There were in all the Shire only twelve of them, three in each Farthing, for Inside Work. A rather larger body varying at need, was employed to ‘beat the bounds’, and to see that Outsiders of any kind, great or small, did not make themselves a nuisance.

Tolkien also notes that the messengers were more numerous and busier than the Shirriffs.

This second state formation appears to have grown in fact out of the needs of trade and commerce, that is, out of the Shire’s involvement in a market economy. This in turn had two aspects: the growth of a market within the Shire, where for example it was possible to speculate in pipeweed, and the growth of economic relations between the Shire and other peoples, especially the dwarves of the Blue Mountains who travelled along the Great East Road. The Shire even had an export commodity in pipeweed, one which brought in many of the troubles that our century has inflicted on Third World countries that produce agricultural or mineral products for export.

We must also note another significant fact about the Shire: a large part of its populace could read and write, and carried on extensive written communications which gave the Messenger Service its business. In fact literacy was deeply embedded into the laws of the Shire, which recognized such concepts as the

Will, a written expression of a decedent’s wishes about his property, and prescribed traditional forms for legal documents — Tolkien mentions “seven signatures of witnesses in red ink” (Tolkien, 1965, p.66). So writing was a long established part of Shire customs. Now, writing and reckoning and such skills naturally accompany the growth of a market economy, as they make it possible to keep records and to determine profit and loss of enterprises and to exchange over a wider area than one can personally visit regularly. So, here too, we have evidence of a society well on the way to modernity.

### Sam and customary law

Accompanying this was at least a degree of social mobility. Consider, for example the life of Sam Gamgee. The Gamgees by ancestry were part of the Shire’s rural working class, but Sam’s learning to read from Bilbo Baggins and reading the histories of the Elves began his social ascent, which ended with his long service as Mayor—in effect, chief executive officer of a fairly large state. We are not seeing anything like a rigid class structure.

Now, a question does arise here: if the Mayor was the chief executive of the Shire’s civil government, where were the legislative functions assigned and who exercised them? There is no mention of any sort of a regularly meeting law-making body in Tolkien’s descriptions. The Shire-Moot, he tells us, had ceased to meet (Tolkien, 1965, p.30), and in any case its meetings were too infrequent at any period to allow for regular legislation. One of Tolkien’s letters (*Letters*, Carpenter, 1981, letter #214) mentions the establishment of a rule regarding succession to the property of Shirefolk who passed over sea, and later refers to a “ruling of Master Samwise” (who was then Mayor); did the Mayor combine legislative and executive roles in his own person?

I believe that this was not the case. There is at least one other way of interpreting Tolkien’s statement which is consistent with his phrasing: that Master Samwise was acting not as a legislator consciously designing a wholly new law, but as a magistrate extending existing law to cover a new case, in the traditional manner of English common law. It would be natural enough for the Mayor also to be the principal magistrate of his country when that function was needed. And, in fact, such an approach appears consistent with what Tolkien says elsewhere (Tolkien, 1965, p.30) about the Shirefolk’s view of law:

Yet the Hobbits still said of wild folk and wicked things (such as trolls) that they had not heard of the king. For they attributed to the king of old all their essential laws; and usually they kept the laws of free will, because they were The Rules (as they said), both ancient and just.

Legislation indeed in the states of medieval and early modern times was a far less common matter than in our present time. Law was believed to derive either from nature itself or from the general custom of a people. It was thought to be a judge’s office to find the law, that is, to research into a general body of principles for the correct solution of a specific problem to

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which they might be applied—and indeed, much new law grew up in this way over time. But it was no one's office to make new law by deliberate decision, unless indeed that of the whole people assembled. Tolkien seems to have given us a fairly clear portrait of this view of law.

The Shire at the time of the War of the Ring seems to have moved most of the way from chieftdom to state and from aristocracy to republic. The aftermath of the War, though, brought at least a brief revival of the old offices and functions. In effect, the old offices seem to have lain in reserve—and behind them, the old habits of looking to the regional chieftains for leadership. So, in effect, the two legal and political orders managed a harmonious coexistence.

Now, this mixing of institutions with different origins and histories and roles is nothing surprising in the Primary World. Indeed, hardly any society even approaches having the symmetry of rational design from first principles. Real societies have histories and therefore are complex and not entirely rational—just as is the case with real languages. Tolkien as an inventor of languages clearly was aware of this, in contrast to such utopians as the creators of Esperanto and Loglan. A similar awareness may have shaped his approach to history in general and thus helped give his imagined societies the feeling of reality that pervades them.

The Shire is perhaps unusual, though, in its blend of aristocracy and republicanism. There have certainly been aristocratic republics enough in history, but they have seldom been anything like the Shire. Characteristically they have been city states, from ancient Rome to Florence to Novgorod, where a wealthy mercantile class had come into power. Most rurally based aristocracies have been unified instead by monarchy.

So there is some question as to why the Shire took that particular form.

### Chesterton & Belloc

And here I am going to turn away from description of Tolkien's Secondary World to something closer to literary criticism: since Tolkien in fact does not tell us any of the history that might account for the origins of the Shire's dual government, I am going to talk about the sources for the idea of such a system in Tolkien's own intellectual background.

One of these two sources, I believe, was two writers of the generation before Tolkien: G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. Tolkien refers explicitly to Chesterton, notably in his essay "On Fairy Stories," and though I do not know of any such mention of Belloc, he does turn up elsewhere in the Inklings' writings—Lewis mentions his theory of Distributivism in *That Hideous Strength* (Lewis, 1946, p. 19)—and it seems virtually certain that Tolkien had at least heard about it frequently.

Belloc and Chesterton were the two leading Catholic intellectuals in their generation in England; their prose and poetry was widely read; and they joined in advocating a social order which was in effect an idealization of the Middle Ages, a system in which as many people as possible were small property owners—most notably in Belloc's own *The Servile State* (Belloc, 1913/1977), but in many other writings as well.

John P. McCarthy's *Hilaire Belloc: Edwardian Radical* (McCarthy, 1978) traces the evolution of Belloc's views in detail, showing in his early views a synthesis of republican liberalism and Catholic traditionalism that Tolkien's own offhand remarks bear considerable resemblance to. The "estates, farms, workshops, and small trades" (Tolkien, 1965, p. 30) that Tolkien describes could be a portrait of the society Belloc recommends. On the other side, Belloc's critique of modern industrialism as leading inevitably toward a revival of slavery seems akin in turn to Tolkien's fictional portrayal of Sauron and Saruman and to his factual comments about the horrors of the modern society.

### Iceland & the Shire

A second source can be found in Tolkien's philological studies. One of the numerous languages he studied in his life was ancient Icelandic. Now, ancient Iceland was a thoroughly rural society, scattered about the coastal margins of an inhospitable island. At the same time, it was a highly literate and well-educated one, which in fact left us one of the most impressive bodies of literature from before the invention of printing, and doubly so considering its small population. Its political institutions were a mix of aristocratic chieftainship, republicanism and anarchy. (A very useful brief account of these institutions is given by Friedman [1989] and a more extensive one by Miller [1990].)

For example, the entire island had only one paid official, the Lawspeaker, whose principal duty was to recite the entire legal code over the course of three annual Things or meetings for the settling of disputes—any legal rule that the Lawspeaker failed to remember and that no one else protested against having dropped being removed from the legal code thereafter.

Even the history of Iceland bears at least a superficial resemblance to that of the Shire, in that it was settled by a series of migrations from the East, from Norway, into unoccupied land. The original settlement in each case was by numerous small groups each led by a chieftain. I am left wondering to what degree Iceland furnished a model for Tolkien's imagining of the Shire. At the very least it offers a case for the plausibility of such a rural aristocratic republic as a social order.

Law and government were not, to be sure, Tolkien's primary interest. But he spent most of his adult life in the intellectual effort to comprehend manuscripts from an earlier time in history, for many of which questions of law were vitally important—for example, the Icelandic sagas where one of the main interests of ancient Nordic warriors seems to have been suing each other.

It would be somewhat surprising if none of this had crept into his portrayals of societies of an imagined past, especially when his own remarks show concern that what is attributed to such societies be appropriate to their actual historical circumstances. In fact, I believe that much did, and I hope that this little case study of the Shire has helped to convince you of this and to persuade you to share my appreciation of Tolkien's realism even in the creation of fantasy. This realism, I think, is part of what makes Tolkien one of our greatest writers of fantasy: he is not just making things up in sheer fantasy, he is creating

—Continued on page 11

—*Early Utopias*, continued from page 1

seeking to use prostitutes. Of course, the entire Martian example is a metaphor for Cridge's own time. But, being able to discuss the politics of Mars, and to show how eventually Mars becomes a society of gender equality, enabled Cridge to talk about the society of her own time, and the politics of her own time, in an extremely compelling way.

Ten years after *Man's Rights* came a more technologically sophisticated feminist utopia, that is *Mizora*, by Mary E. Bradley Lane. Not much is known about Lane herself, but we do know that *Mizora* was first published in 1880 and 1881, serialized in the *Cincinnati Commercial*, and then it appeared as a book in 1890. The full title of the work is *Mizora, a Prophecy, A Mss. Found Among the Private Papers of Princess Vera Zarovitch, Being a True and Faithful Account of Her Journey to the Interior of the Earth, with a Careful Description of the Country and its Inhabitants, their Customs, Manners, and Government*.

In writing *Mizora*, Lane took advantage of the "hollow earth" theory, which suggested there could be, quite literally, worlds within our world. The narrator is an inhabitant of our world, but thanks to the Czarist regime in Russia, she is exiled to Siberia. She escapes and finds herself stumbling upon the world of Mizora. In Mizora, men are not allowed. (Sorry, guys! But neither are brunettes, so I wouldn't be there, either.) It's a world of blonde ladies who live quite a technologically superior life for 1880-81, in that they have video phones and chemically prepared, artificial meat, and the women reproduce asexually through parthenogenesis; no men are needed.

Lane uses the world of Mizora to criticize a number of conventions in her own society which she finds to be problematic, most notably the idea that women cannot participate in the political sphere. Through Mizora, she shows that women are capable, and in fact the world that they might create could be superior to the one that they inhabited in her day. She took aim not only at some of the big ideas of her era—for example, criticizing the union of political power and military power—but also at some issues very close to home. She came from a period of time in which tight corsets were the fashion. She made a point of observing that in Mizora, narrow waists were considered to be a "disgusting deformity." So, once again, a 19th-century woman used science fiction in order to make political statements about her own society.

The third novel I'd like to mention is *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future*, by Newcastle journalist Elizabeth Corbett, which was published in 1889. In this novel, much like the better known *Looking Backward* (1888) by Edward Bellamy, the main character wakes up many years in the future. In the case of this book, the narrator is a woman, and she wakes up in the year 2472 to discover that the suffragette movement not only led to women's voting rights, but eventually to women taking over Ireland completely and turning it into a political utopia.

The narrator doesn't travel forward in time alone. She goes with a male companion, and so both of them explore this new Ireland of the Amazonians, and they have very different reactions to what they see. The female protagonist quite likes the world that she discovers in the future, a world in which women grow to be seven feet tall, living for hundreds of years

though never looking over forty, practicing vegetarianism (and euthanasia as well), and dominating all aspects of public and private life.

Perhaps not surprisingly, her counterpart, her male companion, isn't quite as keen on this world or how it treats him as a second-class citizen. Eventually his inability to connect and assimilate to the culture leads the Amazonian leaders to determine that he is insane. Both travelers ultimately make their way back to their original time period, but it's clear that, for the main character, this is not a happy homecoming.

A decade after *New Amazonia* appeared, U.S. author Anna Adolph wrote *Arqtiq: A Story of the Marvels at the North Pole* (1899). This book shared some similarities with its ancestors. It was a feminist utopia. It was also a story that bought into the "hollow earth" theory and suggested that a lost race of humans lived inside of our planet.

The novel begins with a woman creating a flying craft, part balloon and part airplane, in order to go to the North Pole. There she discovers a group of people who call themselves the Arq. (Thus *Arqtiq*.) This isn't, however, like *New Amazonia*, a world of female domination. It has much more in common with Cridge's *Man's Rights* on Mars, as the novel portrays a world of gender equality. In their crystal world beneath the ice, the Arq are telepaths, and the main character finds herself developing telepathy as she lives with them. These people also practice Christianity, and their faith is responsible for part of the egalitarianism of their society. In a way, then, this book also qualifies as a work of religious utopianism.

The Arq have developed a quite high level of technology. Before the adventure is through and revealed to be actually a dream, the Arq and the main character encounter a meteorite from the moon and encounter Lunar people—who are not the kind of folks you would want to have over for dinner. But Adolph makes her central point by envisioning a world in which the sexes coexist in peace and harmony and together create a vastly superior world.

The last work I want to mention is, I think, the most compelling, and that is *Herland* (1915), by the US novelist, lecturer, and social reformer Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Gilman lived from 1860 until she took her own life—in her words, choosing "chloroform over cancer"—in 1935. She is perhaps best known for her semi-autobiographical work of psychological horror, "The Yellow Wallpaper."

*Herland* tells the story of a three-man expedition that discovers a lost world of women, a place that the men come to call Herland. The women in this culture didn't start out to create an all-female society: their ancestors were cut off by war and geography from the rest of the world 2,000 years earlier. Genetically as well as physically isolated, the women eventually mutated and became capable of asexual reproduction. The world that they build is really a remarkable one, fueled by scientific understanding of not only technology, but also botany, biology, and the social sciences. For example, the women of Herland possess understandings of the theories of language and education that are quite sophisticated even by

—Continued next page

—*Early Utopias*, continued from previous page

today's standards. These women are physically fit, mentally sharp, and possessed of a remarkably long-term view of their own efforts, from the genetic engineering of plants for their foodstuffs to the rearing and training of their young.

What I think is particularly interesting about this book is the way that Gilman portrays the three men who encounter Herland. All three are welcomed, treated as honored guests, and eventually brought on board as husbands to Herland wives in order to re-introduce sexual reproduction into this isolated community. One of the men becomes thoroughly convinced of the superiority of Herland, not only because of the gender equality that is shown there, but also due to the elimination of problems such as poverty, illiteracy, warfare, and even cruelty to animals. At the end of the book, he elects to stay.

Another of the characters has a very difficult time adjusting to the idea that the attributes he had thought of as naturally feminine or womanly were actually cultural conventions of his particular time and place, quite likely more imposed than naturally evolved. He is eventually banished from Herland for attempting to rape his wife. The third man, the narrator, is sort of an everyman who falls between the extremes of the other two characters. It is particularly poignant when he finds himself increasingly embarrassed while trying to describe the world from which he came, when he finds it falling short of the unpolluted, non-violent, intellectual world of Herland. The book ends with him preparing—reluctantly—to take his wife back to the world that he had left.

Gilman followed up *Herland* with the book *With Her In*

*Ourland* (1916), the sequel, in which we follow the woman from Herland into our world. By immersing the reader first so deeply into Herland, Gilman manages to make the sequel a very vivid dystopia, in which the reader feels almost like a sociologist studying an alien species, when in fact the reader is actually encountering our own world. And I think it's an important point to make that a lot of the concerns Gilman underscores in both of these books, from education to the environment, are still relevant today.

And so we see women authors of the late 18th and early 19th centuries taking on politics through science fiction, discovering lost worlds, delving into a hollow earth, or even going to Mars in order to create utopias that would shed light not on worlds that could be, as much as on the worlds that the authors themselves experienced. Two of these works are still in print: *Mizora* by Mary E. Bradley Lane, and *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. I hope you've enjoyed my whirlwind tour of five classics of early feminist utopian science fiction.

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—*Regenesis* review, continued from page 3

merely accepting external control but actively needing it, and less mentally flexible than free humans.

In *Cyteen*, one of Union's greatest scientists, Ariane Emory, was murdered in a political conflict—and then recreated, via a clone deliberately raised in an environment as similar as possible to the original's. The new Ariane Emory proved as brilliant as the original, and survived another deadly power struggle. This novel finds her, at age 18, being drawn into a further power struggle that grows to affect all of Union.

This book isn't particularly about the struggle for freedom; one faction has outright despotic ambitions, but the other is in favor of a controlled society—just one that's less abusive. A small faction wants to abolish azi slavery, but they seem to be regarded as lunatics; some of them have become terrorists. But the less authoritarian faction has one key political virtue: they have a constitution and regard it as essential to maintain its legal forms. And enough of the general population agrees to make an outright power grab untenable. This has obvious applicability to the recent history of the United States, but it also seems to recall the Roman Republic, with its elaborate legal rules, its government by a Senate recruited through elections, and its mixed population of citizens and slaves—and its rules for turning slaves into citizens, a process that also takes place in Union, many of whose citizens are

descendants of azi.

And there are subtle parallels between the political and the psychological. As the constitutional power struggle goes on, several of the characters, including Ari, become involved in interventions in the programming of azi, made necessary partly by political events. Both processes require that everything be done in exactly the right sequence, step by step, taking care not to trigger a violent reaction that could destroy the azi being reprogrammed, or the government of Union. The parallels are striking, and more so because they're more than simply parallel; they're part of the same plot and both contribute to its climactic struggles.

I'm not actually a fan of Cherryh's bigger books, for the most part; my favorites have been, on one hand, some of the smaller Alliance/Union novels, and on the other, the Chanur series, distantly tied to it, which I admire for its well portrayed aliens. But *Regenesis* was very satisfying to read: as tightly focused as *The Pride of Chanur* or *Merchant's Luck*, but larger in scope. The most nearly similar literary achievement I can think of in recent years was Vernor Vinge's *A Deepness in the Sky*, another story about conflict between a corporate state and a mercantile culture. Like Vinge, Cherryh is continuing to grow as a writer; her latest book is evidence of her growing literary power.

## Tale of the Dream Merchant

By Bruce Boston

From the evergreens of Timberidge  
to leagues beyond the Agate Tarn,  
my wares are banned in every town,  
my name and reputation scourged.  
They stoned my stall in Yalderin  
and drove me from the market  
with the flats of their swords.  
They say that I defiled youth  
and traded in enchantments  
that have led good men astray.  
Yet the gods know I am innocent  
and have never meant to harm.

I offer dreams diverse  
to those who have the need.  
My patrons can be anyone  
who seeks to ease the burdens  
and travails of the everyday.  
My prices are so reasonable,  
a silver coin, perhaps a gold,  
they have never made me rich.  
I have not dealt in nightmares  
nor ever tried to force a sale.  
The gods know I am honorable,  
a merchant more than fair.

For those who seek adventure  
I provide most any kind.  
Glory on the fields of war  
with legendary heroes of yore.  
Battles with rocs and basilisks  
and other fabulous beasts.  
Travel through exotic lands  
to realize your fantasies.  
Bloodshed without danger  
and slaughter without loss.  
Rivers forded and mountains  
scaled at negligible cost.  
The gods know that adventure  
can illuminate and please.

For those in need of romance  
I will fill their wanting hearts.  
Princely lads for peasant maids  
to charm their darkest nights.  
For noble lords and ladies  
masquerading on the sly,  
desirous of a different taste,  
I can supply erotic interludes  
with flesh of any age or race.  
I can conjure nymphs or satyrs  
who are guaranteed to satisfy.  
Even the gods play at love  
to occupy their empty hours.

Yet the dreams that offend,  
the ones they seek to ban,  
are fashioned from a higher art  
that moves within men's minds  
and makes them understand  
how to look beyond their fate  
and see the world at large,  
to question among other things  
why some must serve and toil  
while others rule and play.  
The gods themselves have said  
that men can learn to think.

On this far and windy slope  
where I've managed my retreat,  
I live the dreams I want to live  
and I do so without shame.  
I watch the ocean changing  
and I dance along the sands.  
The tides do not judge me  
and the waves will never care.  
The moon may shine alone,  
yet still it lights the heavens  
and proceeds upon its way.  
And wherever the gods reside,  
it must be by an open sea.

From the evergreens of Timberidge  
to leagues beyond the Agate Tarn,  
a pall now hangs upon the land  
that sun and wind cannot dispel.  
Wherever thought is censored  
by the canons of a chosen few,  
when the only lawful visions  
are ones that do not speak,  
when hope is so ephemeral  
you cannot feel it in a song,  
men believe the gods have died,  
and wonder if they ever lived.

For those who wish to dream,  
and those who would be free,  
follow the southern caravans  
beyond the Beggars' Scree.  
You must hike a narrow trail  
through the rocky hills of Lorn.  
From there make your descent  
past the Village of the Outcasts  
to the shores of the Sovereign Sea.  
Look for a house of mortared stone  
that stands against the jagged cliffs.  
And don't forget to bring your gold.  
The gods know I'm a mortal man  
and like others I must eat.

## The Final Word in the Shadow City

By Bruce Boston

after Gary William Crawford

Words are destroyed  
in the Shadow City  
one by one and  
in batches at a time.

Words vanish into  
cracks and crevices  
darker than our lives,  
their definitions  
expunged forever.

Books become  
unreadable as the  
parallel black bars  
of the inspector's  
stamp eradicate  
entire passages.

Songs are unsingable  
when their lyrics  
are slashed and  
there is no longer  
any sense or rhyme.

As the shadows  
quicken in layer  
upon layer, erasing  
the shades of our  
language, striping  
away all subtlety  
from our minds,  
our thoughts slow  
and thicken in kind.

Soon all that will  
remain for us to  
speak, to perceive,  
to express, will be  
a single word bound  
by a singular intent  
that comprises the  
bereft vocabulary  
or our lives.

**The Lies of Locke Lamora** (Bantam, 2006)

**Red Seas under Red Skies** (Bantam, 2007)

by Scott Lynch

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

“How much more danger are my children *truly* in than some poor bastard conscripted to fight in his duke’s wars? Or some penniless family dying of a plague with their neighborhood quarantined, or burnt to the ground? War, disease, taxes. Bowing heads and kissing boots. There’s plenty of hungry damn *things* prowling on land, Orrin. It’s just that the ones at sea tend not to wear crowns.” (*Red Seas under Red Skies*, p. 374)

Scott Lynch’s first two novels are definitely low rather than high fantasy: Most of their action takes place in cities with corrupt and authoritarian rulers, and their heroes are a pair of clever rogues living by their wits, in the style of classic picaresque heroes. Lynch’s world is one where Machiavelli’s political theories would come across not as cynical, but as ordinary common sense.

The first novel shows a crisis in the career of Locke Lamora, a brilliant confidence man, when his latest scam gets him into the middle of a power struggle in his native city’s underworld. The second takes him to a new city, where the power struggle is between factions in the officially recognized government; and in trying to survive his own schemes, Lamora gets sent to sea to deal with pirates.

This is the point where the story takes on a hint of liber-

tarian interest. One of the ironies of history is that republics, democracies, and anarchies have often been associated with piracy and brigandage. The pirate ships of the Spanish Main, for example, were organized as partnerships with contractually assigned shares, where policy was subject to debate; the captain’s authority in battle was absolute, but as soon as the fight ended, so did his power, like that of an ancient Roman dictator, who served only for the duration of a war. Lynch shows of the operation of a pirate ship and a pirate freeport set up on similar lines.

Fans of Robert Heinlein will also likely enjoy the story of Locke’s childhood in the first novel, as his mentor trains him in the higher forms of thievery and some unexpected skills associated with it, in somewhat the fashion of Baslim the Cripple training Thorby in *Citizen of the Galaxy*. It seems unlikely that real thieves ever get taught to practice theft as a high art in quite this fashion, but it would certainly be more interesting if they did.

Primarily, though, these are stories of adventure. They have ingenious tricks and deceptions, mystery and suspense and physical danger. They have some of the most vivid scenes of hand to hand combat I’ve read. Lynch never loses sight of the need to entertain the reader, and he does it with impressive skill. And his world may not be one that most of us would want to live in, but it’s almost ideally suited to provide a setting for adventures. The classical definition of adventure is “Somebody else having a really rough time comfortably far away”; it’s hard to imagine a story that would fit it better.

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—*Law and the Shire*, continued from page 7

imagined worlds with an inner consistency approximating that of the real world which he had studied so carefully.

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[*Editor’s Note: Thanks to Fred Moulton for bringing this article to my attention. As J. R. R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings trilogy won this year’s Prometheus Hall of Fame Award, Stoddard’s article provides perspective on the ideas in the books sympathetic to libertarian ideas of society.*

*Moulton also brought to my attention the podcast “Early Utopias,” by Amy H. Sturgis, which I transcribed after receiving permission to run in Prometheus. A full list of other podcasts from Sturgis can be found at her website, [http://www.amyhsturgis.com/?page\\_id=9](http://www.amyhsturgis.com/?page_id=9)*

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## City Without End

By Kay Kenyon

Pyr, 2009

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Books that fall in the middle of a series, such as Kay Kenyon's *City Without End*, face a difficult task: moving the story along without bogging down action, or distracting from the endgame by creating new threads at odds with the original story. *City Without End* is book three in a four book series about humans in an alien universe called the Bright, with the final novel set to arrive in 2010. Since I picked up the first book a few years ago, I have been drawn to her world by its compelling environs, characters, and the world-destroying dilemma.

The series has evolved from a tight focus on protagonist Titus Quinn's mission to rescue his family from a mirror universe. Kenyon now devotes large swathes of time to former minor characters and other story lines, without losing sight of this goal. Quinn's daughter Sidney, now grown in age as well as power, begins to take a more central role, although it seems her sponsors are merely using her as a pawn to achieve their own ends, something she almost fails to see in her hatred of her father for abandoning her. Quinn, on the other hand, who failed to destroy the engine scheduled to destroy Earth's universe, grapples with trying to save both universes and also destroy the current ruling lords behind the doomsday device. Alas, as with the other books, when Kenyon writes about

Earth the colors and characters seem less interesting than in the other universe; this probably speaks more about the latter than the former.

Other characters stepping into the action include Quinn's new wife Ji Anzi, who takes on a complex mission. In trying to find map holes in the universe of the Bright, she instead falls through such a hole into Earth's universe. Here she encounters Caitlin, Quinn's sister-in-law, who still harbors feelings of unrequited love for Quinn. A plot is brewing on Earth, one that will save an elite group of people while sacrificing the rest of humanity.

Other interesting characters abound, such as the Helice, a volatile human who accompanied Quinn into the Bright, now building her own nano AIs to use as leverage against the seemingly unkillable dark lords who rule the land. The intricate society of the Bright seems vividly alien, full of surprises. Although the book dips and stutters at times when moving between all these characters and parallel plot lines, the slow process of revealing more about the origins and potential flaws among the lords who rule like gods powers the book along. While Quinn may have lost some of his focus and intensity from the first novel, he remains implacable in his purpose.

I am impressed at Kenyon's creation. She shows the power of world building that maybe only science fiction can produce, and a myriad of surprises that make each book fresh. Though I look forward to how the story ends, and wonder if both universes survive in the end, I will be sad to leave her unique setting.



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