



**Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies**

**TALES OF RESONANCE  
AND WONDER:  
LOCATING SCIENCE FICTION**

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Raymond Williams was almost certainly the single most important intellectual spokesman for the early British New Left of the 1950s and 60s. He was a key figure in the development of British cultural studies and also the founder of cultural materialism as a school of literary and cultural theory.<sup>1</sup> He was variously - and inaccurately - likened to a British Lukács (Eagleton, 1976, 36), a British Bloch (Pinkney, 1989, 28-31) and even, according to *The Times*, 'the British Sartre'. He also had an enduring interest in science fiction (henceforth SF), which extended to participation as an editorial consultant for the journal *Science Fiction Studies* and authorship of the 1978 SF novel, *The Volunteers*. His 1978 essay on 'Utopia and Science Fiction' is one of the classic theoretical statements on the relationship between SF, utopia and dystopia. Like Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible* (1986) and Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), it stressed the close kinship between the genres but, unlike them, it nonetheless insisted on their conceptual separateness. For Williams, these were different albeit cognate genres. This essay will use the categories of Williams's cultural materialism - especially 'selective tradition', 'structure of feeling' and 'emergent, residual and dominant' - and of post-Williamsite 'new historicism' - especially Stephen Greenblatt's notions of 'resonance' and 'wonder' - to interrogate, not only Suvin's and Jameson's understandings of the relationship between utopia and SF, but also Williams's own. It will ask and attempt to answer three very general questions about SF: first, what was it? second, what wasn't it? and third, when was it?

## 1. What was Science Fiction?

The first question is one of definition and we academics love definition. It is surely difficult to imagine a more archetypically academic definition than Suvin's: '*a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition*'; distinguished by '*the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional "novum" ... validated by cognitive logic*' (Suvin, 1979, 7-8, 63). The testable, even examinable, questions come relatively easily: where is the estrangement in this novel? what exactly is its novum? is it strangely new? is it hegemonic? is it validated by cognitive logic? It is a nicely canonical definition insofar as it's confined to literature, as distinct from film or television, but nicely contrarian, insofar as it seeks to expand the canon to include something as inherently disreputable as SF. It is simultaneously theoretically rich and respectably radical, insofar as it derives from Russian Formalism by way of Brecht and from Bloch out of Gramsci. Suvin's definition is, in short, just what the Doctor of Philosophy ordered.

But academics aren't the only ones attracted to this exercise: the history of SF is littered with definitions and definers, be they writers or fans, editors or critics. Clute and Nicholls's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* lists no fewer than eleven main candidates under its entry on 'Definitions of SF' (Clute and Nicholls, 1993, 311-314). Less traditionally magisterial but more inclusive, *Wikipedia*

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is dedicated to Kathy Wench, my teenage sweetheart and first love, who grew up to be Kathryn Turnier and died of pancreatic cancer on Christmas Day 2007; and to Marion and Marc, who must learn to imagine life without her. I am grateful for the help accorded me by the staffs of the Monash University Library Rare Books Collection, the University of Liverpool Library Special Collections and Archives Division and the Science Museum in South Kensington, London.

currently lists twenty-seven. The most famous is probably Hugo Gernsback's in 1926 on the range and scope of his new magazine *Amazing Stories*: 'the Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story - a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision' (Gernsback, 1926, 3). But Brian Aldiss's 1986 redefinition<sup>2</sup> surely runs it close: '*the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science) ... characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode*' (Aldiss, 2001, 4). If Gernsback's opening editorial was essentially prospective in intent, its referents were nonetheless retrospective: Verne, Wells and Poe. Aldiss's reference to the Gothic is similarly so: hence his decision to trace the 'origins of the species' to Mary Shelley (Aldiss, 2001, 3-37). Verne himself credited Poe as an early influence (Verne, 1979); Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is clearly indebted to *Frankenstein* (Philmus, 1993); Verne and Wells emphatically insisted on their differences from each other (Verne, 1997, 101-2; Wells, 1934, vii); and everyone - Zamyatin, Čapek, Huxley, Orwell - insisted on their debt to and differences from Wells (Zamyatin, 1970; Čapek, 1925, 180-181; Čapek, 1996; Huxley, 1969, 384; Orwell, 1962, 169-72; Orwell, 1970a). Orwell also defined his work in relation to the 'kind of book' represented by Zamyatin's *My* (Orwell, 1970b, 118). And even Shelley explained the novelty of her fiction in similarly retrospective terms, as concerned with the possible consequences and ethical implications of a hypothetical scientific development, rather than the supernatural phenomena of more conventionally Gothic romance: 'The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment' (Shelley, 1980, 13).

Of these, only Aldiss would have described his work as 'science fiction': Gernsback's early magazines were published as 'scientifiction'; Verne wrote *voyages extraordinaires* and *romans scientifique*; Wells 'scientific romances'; Poe 'tales of the grotesque and arabesque'. But the repeated intertextual referencing nonetheless suggests the presence, if not of a genre, then at least of a tradition. This same blend of prospectus and retrospect is present in almost all definitions of SF. Kingsley Amis described the genre as narrative dealing with a situation 'that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesised on the basis of some innovation in science and technology', in the first instance by reference to extracts from Wells's *The War of the Worlds* and Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (Amis, 1961, 15-18). Judith Merril famously redefined the genre as 'speculative fiction', by way of a potted history of the whole of twentieth-century American and British SF, loosely centred on Campbell and Orwell (Merril, 1971, 60, 65-79). Joanna Russ described it as a literature based on 'The What If and The Serious Explanation', by positive reference to Delaney, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Bradbury, negative to Tolkien (Russ, 2007, 205). Kim Stanley Robinson argues that it is a 'historical literature', by reference to Golding, Burgess, Mailer, Fowles and Guy Davenport (Robinson, 1987, 54, 61). The only important exceptions are nominalist definitions, such as Norman Spinrad's in 1973: 'Science fiction is anything published as science fiction' (Clute and Nicholls, 1993, 311-314). But these necessarily beg the question of what actually does get published as SF, which in turn redirects us once again towards the SF tradition and its long history of definitions and redefinitions.

The first part of Suvin's *Metamorphoses* is an account of the structure of a genre, the second, of the history of a tradition, running from More's *Utopia* to Čapek's *Válka s mloky* (*War With the Newts*).

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<sup>2</sup> The 1973 wording, in *Billion Year Spree*, had 'man' rather than 'mankind'. The change was made for the 1986 edition of *Trillion Year Spree*.

If there is an obvious logical complementarity between these exercises, there is also a practically unresolved tension, in this particular instance, between the literary theorist, aiming to define the genre, and the literary historian, attempting to chart its evolution. So Suvin is simultaneously insistent that the 'concept of SF' cannot be deduced 'empirically from the work called thus', but that it is 'inherent in the literary objects'; that it can be reached only through an effort 'to educe and formulate the *differentia specifica* of the SF narration', but that 'the scholar does not invent it out of the whole cloth' (Suvin, 1979, 63). At first sight, this is bewildering: if the concept inheres in the literary objects, then why can't it be deduced from them? The end product - but also the axiomatic premise - is his famous definition cited above, in which theory clearly triumphs over history, genre over tradition. But what follows is, nonetheless, the history of a tradition, of which 'the significant writers ... were quite aware' (Suvin, 1979, 12).

Which leads me to two propositions, one on genre, the other on tradition, both deriving ultimately from Williams. Suvin describes genre as 'a socioaesthetic entity with a specific inner life, yet in constant osmosis with other literary genres, science, philosophy, everyday socioeconomic life, and so on' (Suvin, 1979, 53). This nicely combines a formalist sense of generic specificity with a historicist sense of the possibility of variation over time. But there is something strange, nonetheless, about his use of the term 'entity', which suggests an overly formalist, perhaps even fetishistic, conception of the socioaesthetic: socioaesthetic a genre may be, but an entity it surely is not. The problem here lies with Suvin's understanding of genre as overwhelmingly a matter of classification. It is this, of course, but it is also a set of practical conventions, combining a complex mix of prohibitions, recommendations and prescriptions, which together constitute a cultural technology for the production and reception of particular kinds of text. Williams argued that 'form', a term he preferred to genre, was primarily a matter, not of classification, but of social relationship: 'a social process which ... becomes a social product'. Forms, he continued, are 'the common property ... of writers and audiences or readers, before any communicative composition can occur' (Williams, 1977, 187-188). Understood thus, that is, as a prospectively productive force within the literary mode of production, genre loses the fetishistic quality it acquires in Suvin. Understood thus, it also becomes clear why genre inheres in literary objects, but cannot be deduced from them: they bear its impress because it pre-exists them as a tool for their manufacture.

An analogous argument may be mounted with respect to tradition. For Suvin, tradition is inherited from the past, developed and modified in the present, then handed on to the future as a gift from the present-become-past. Hence, his description of Wells as 'the central writer in the SF tradition':

He collected ... all the main influences of earlier writers - from Lucian and Swift to Kepler, Verne, and Flammarion, from Plato and Mary Shelley, Poe, Bulwer, and the subliterate of planetary and subterranean voyages, future wars, and the like - and transformed them in his own image, whence they entered into the treasury of subsequent SF. (Suvin, 1979, 220)

There are other ways of theorising tradition, however, most importantly for my purposes through Williams's notion of 'selective tradition'. Culture, the latter observed in *The Long Revolution*, exists at three levels, the lived culture of a particular time and place, the recorded culture of deposited texts, artefacts and knowledges, and the selective tradition sustained subsequently. The tradition thus formed is, at one level, 'a general human culture', at another, 'the historical record of a particular

society', but at yet another 'a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture' (Williams, 1965, 68). Selection is a retrospective process, made and remade, not by the past, but in and for a sequence of successive 'presents', as 'a continual selection and re-selection of ancestors' (Williams, 1965, 69). The position is restated, in more expressly Gramscian terms, in *Marxism and Literature*. 'It is a version of the past', Williams writes, '... intended to connect with and ratify the present. What it offers ... is a sense of *predisposed continuity*' (Williams, 1977, 116). Williams's argument was directed at the high literary canon and had as its immediate target cultural conservatives like Eliot and Leavis. But what holds for Leavis's 'Great Tradition' also holds for Suvin's 'SF tradition'. It too is necessarily selective.

Which returns us to our starting point in that plethora of 'Definitions of SF', since each of these represents an attempt to redefine the tradition selectively by re-selecting its ancestors. This is as true of Suvin as of Gernsback or Aldiss. As Parrinder rightly observed of Suvin's *Metamorphoses*: "Cognitive estrangement" may be taken to be a fact about the 1970s, just as T.S. Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility" was a fact about the 1920s' (Parrinder, 2000, 10). Which is not to suggest that all definitions are equally valid - though logically they are, since all definitions are by definition true - but only that they are all equally socioaesthetic, to borrow Suvin's term, and therefore necessarily to some extent weapons in the struggle for the power to define. This selectivity is most apparent wherever a redefinition explicitly prescribes either inclusion or exclusion. In Suvin's case, the relevant instances are, respectively, utopia, which is included by virtue of its bearing on the novum, and fantasy, which is excluded by virtue of its lack of cognitive adequacy.

## 2. What Wasn't Science Fiction? Utopia and Fantasy

Suvin defines a fictive utopia as an '*imaginary community ... in which human relations are organized more perfectly than in the author's community*' (Suvin, 1979, 45). Thus understood, he argues, utopia becomes '*the socio-political subgenre of science fiction*', that is, social-science-fiction (Suvin, 1979, 61). This *non sequitur* had the effect of expanding SF, at a stroke, to accommodate not only More and Bacon, Rabelais and Campanella, Saint-Simon and Fénelon, but also Aeschylus and Aristophanes. It was a clearly controversial move, at odds with much contemporary usage amongst SF writers, fans and critics (there is no entry, for example, in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* for either Aeschylus or Aristophanes). It has supporters, nonetheless: Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* cites it with approval on at least five occasions (Jameson, 2005, xiv, 57, 393, 410, 414-415). In effect, Suvin and Jameson were each attempting a redefinition of the selective SF tradition aimed at retrospectively 'englobing' the genre of utopia. For both, the attempt was inspired in part by Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*).

Suvin derived the novum, both as term and concept, from Bloch. The term itself first appears in a brief reference to 'the Front and the Novum' towards the end of Bloch's Introduction (Bloch, 1986, 18), but the concepts aren't formally elaborated until chapter 17. There, Bloch argues that a 'philosophy of comprehended hope' must stand on 'the Front of the world process', that is, on the historically 'foremost segment of Being of animated, utopianly open matter' (Bloch, 1986, 200). The Front, he continues, is necessarily related to newness, the New, the Novum. And, if the Novum is really new, it will be characterised by 'abstract opposition to mechanical repetition' and by a specific repetition of its own, that of 'the still unbecome total goal-content itself, which is suggested and

tended, tested and processed out in the progressive newnesses of history' (Bloch, 1986, 202). Historically, the dialectical emergence of this total content - which Bloch terms the *Ultimum* - will eventually end repetition, if only because it represents the highest newness, which will triumph by means of a total leap out of everything that has ever existed, a leap towards the newness of identity (Bloch, 1986, 202-3). Short of the *Ultimum*, however, there remains only the advancing *Front* and the series of *Novums* it encounters. These are not necessarily literary or artistic, but art is nonetheless both '*a laboratory and also a feast of implemented possibilities*' (Bloch, 1986, 216).

Bloch's intentions in *The Philosophy of Hope* were primarily political and philosophical, but the book's range is nonetheless quasi-encyclopaedic, quite literally from dreams to theology. It includes an extensive discussion of utopian literature, from Solon to Morris by way of Plato, the Stoics, Augustine, Joachim de Fiore, Campanella, Owen, Proudhon and Bakunin, culminating in a dismissive account of Wells as 'dilletantism and chaff' (Bloch, 1986, 617). Despite Bloch's enthusiasm for the circus, the fairy-tale and other older popular forms, post-Wellsian SF rates no mention whatsoever. Indeed, Bloch ignores both the German tradition of the *Staatsroman* - the politically-utopian novel, literally, the (ideal) state novel - which has been analysed as a direct precursor to SF (Schwonke, 1957) and the German SF writers published in English translation by Gernsback (Jordan, 1986). The omission is no mere oversight: as late as 1974, Bloch would remain deeply dismissive of the 'purely technological utopias' of '*science fiction*'<sup>3</sup> (Münster, 1977, 71). The novelty of Suvin's argument was to reverse exactly this judgement and to insist, both with and against Bloch, that 'the novum is the necessary condition of SF' (Suvin, 1979, 65).

Suvin's exclusion of fantasy derives from Brecht's insistence on the interrelation of estrangement and cognition in the famous *Kleines Organon für das Theater (Short Organum for the Theatre)*. There, Brecht had argued for his *Verfremdungseffekt*, or *V-Effekt*, 'designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from the stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today'. The purpose of his theatre was thus a knowledge through estrangement akin to Galileo's 'detached eye' (Brecht, 1974, 192). For Suvin, these become the necessary and sufficient conditions for SF: '*the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition*' (Suvin, 1979, 7-8). There is clear prescriptive intent here: to exclude myth, folktale and fantasy (Suvin, 1979, 7-9, 20). Indeed, Suvin's insistence on the cognitive functions of SF is accompanied by a profound aversion to fantasy as exhibiting a 'proto-Fascist revulsion against modern civilization ... organized around an ideology unchecked by any cognition, ... its narrative logic ... simply overt ideology plus Freudian erotic patterns' (Suvin, 1979, 69). To market SF alongside fantasy, as commercial bookshops often do, is thus a 'rampantly socio-pathological phenomenon' (Suvin, 1979, 9). This exclusion of fantasy is perhaps less controversial than the inclusion of utopia: it echoes a long tradition amongst SF writers, editors and readers, reaching back to Gernsback and John W. Campbell, Jr., and, before them, to Wells, Verne and Shelley. And once again Jameson echoes Suvin: 'the scientific pretensions of SF lend the Utopian genre an epistemological gravity that any kinship with generic fantasy is bound to undermine' (Jameson, 2005, 57). Like Suvin, Jameson registers the commercial pressures toward genre-blending between SF and fantasy and, like Suvin, he sees fantasy as 'technically reactionary' (Jameson, 2005, 60). The implication seems clear that only Tolkienesque reactionaries would dabble in such stuff.

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<sup>3</sup> The words are given in English in the German original.

Yet, the empirical convergence between SF and fantasy does seem to be a ‘fact’ of contemporary cultural life. The World Science Fiction Society, which for decades made its annual Hugo Awards on near-Suvinian criteria, broke new ground when it awarded the 2001 prize for the best novel to J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, that for the best dramatic presentation to Ang Lee’s film *Wo hu cang long (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon)*. The following year the latter award went to Peter Jackson for *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In 2003, it was divided into two separate classes, a long form version, which went to Jackson once again, this time for *The Two Towers*, and a short form version, which went to a 2002 episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ‘Conversations with Dead People’. In 2004, Jackson swept the board, taking both the long form prize for *The Return of the King* and the short form prize for Gollum’s Acceptance Speech at the 2004 MTV Movie Awards. SF proper held up better in the novels and in subsequent competition for the best dramatic presentation, except for in 2007, when Guillermo del Toro won the long form prize for *El laberinto del fauno (The Faun’s Labyrinth, English title Pan’s Labyrinth)* and 2008, when Matthew Vaughn won it for *Stardust*. There was no significant sentiment, however, at the relevant World Science Fiction Conventions, that these fantasy awards represented some kind of category mistake. Nor did *Science Fiction Studies* - to which both Suvin and Jameson have been longstanding contributors - balk at including, in its 2003 special issue on the British SF Boom, an extensive discussion of the work of China Miéville (Gordon, 2003a; Gordon 2003b), which makes similar use of fantasy. But, then, neither del Toro nor Miéville are Tolkienesque reactionaries: the first directed two quite explicitly anti-fascist Spanish Civil War films - *El laberinto del fauno* is, in some respects, a sequel to *El espinazo del Diablo (The Devil’s Backbone)*; the second is a key figure in contemporary critical legal theory, a co-editor of the neo-Marxist theoretical journal *Historical Materialism*, an active member of the British Socialist Workers Party and, most importantly for our purposes, the author of the Bas-Lag trilogy, *Perdido Street Station, The Scar* and *Iron Council*, novels as redolent with Marxism as with magic. He also famously described Tolkien as ‘the wen on the arse of fantasy literature’.

My point is, not that Suvin and Jameson are ‘objectively’ mistaken in their definitions of SF, but rather that those definitions are best understood as interventions into the selective tradition, which one will accept only to the extent one shares their purpose. And, to judge by the Hugo Awards, China Miéville and *Science Fiction Studies*, theirs seems to have been a largely unsuccessful intervention, except within the literary-critical academy itself, where it played a crucial role in legitimating SF studies. My own position is less concerned with shaping the selective tradition than with analysing and explaining it. And, for those purposes, I will draw on Williams’s sense of SF, utopia and dystopia as cognate rather than identical and of form as a means of production. Williams’s interests lay, not so much genre boundary definition, or strategies of inclusion and exclusion, as in tracing the differential distribution of characteristic tropes and topoi. There are four characteristic types of alternative reality, he argued: the paradise or hell, the positively or negatively externally-altered world, the positive or negative willed transformation and the positive or negative technological transformation. SF, utopia and dystopia are each centrally concerned with the ‘presentation of *otherness*’, Williams continues, and thus depend on an element of discontinuity from ‘realism’. But the discontinuity is more radical in non-utopian/non-dystopian SF, since the utopian and dystopian modes require for their efficacy an ‘implied connection’ with the real: the whole point of utopia or dystopia is to acquire some positive or negative leverage on the present. By contrast, other kinds of SF and fantasy are free to enjoy greater latitude in their relations to the real.

The willed transformation and the technological transformation are therefore the more characteristically utopian or dystopian modes, because transformation – how the world might be changed, whether for better or worse - will normally be more important to utopia than otherness per se. SF can and does deploy all four modes, but in each case drawing on “science”, in its variable definitions’ (Williams, 1980, 196-199). SF may be utopian or dystopian, and utopias and dystopias may be science-fictional, but the genres are analytically distinguishable, nonetheless, by virtue of the presence or absence of science (and technology). This issue is carefully avoided by Suvin’s treatment of science as equivalent to cognition (Suvin, 1979, 13), but it remains central for Williams. And rightly so, surely, for this is what most clearly distinguishes the SF selective tradition, not only from the ‘older and now residual modes’ such as the Earthly Paradise, the Blessed Islands, the Land of Cockayne, but also from non-SF utopias (Williams, 1980, 198). And there *is* science in both del Toro and Miéville, in the absolutely realistic and unsentimental representations of the dynamics of repression, oppression and exploitation in both Fascist Spain and New Crobuzon, which coexist with and counterpoint the other genuinely fantastic elements: *Magischer Realismus* in Franz Roh’s phrase.

### 3. A New Historicist Interlude

If utopia, fantasy and SF are cognate forms, then - to come finally to the point of my title - this so because all three are tales of wonder. As the names of the most famous American SF pulp magazines make clear, the genre deals in *Astounding Stories*, *Amazing Stories*, *Wonder Stories* and even *Thrilling Wonder Stories* (the first of these was edited by Campbell, the others by Gernsback). I have recently made a determined effort to reconstruct my personal encounter with SF from a combination of memory and archive. Suffice it to note here that the initial occasion was the week of Friday 3 May 1957, when my father gave me my first copy of the weekly *Eagle*. I remember very little about the comic except its first two pages, but these remain vividly present in my memory: splendidly illustrated in full colour by Frank Hampson, they were an episode of *Reign of the Robots*, a story featuring Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future. Dressed in Spacefleet uniform - green where the RAF’s was blue, but with a fawn shirt and brown tie - and wearing a leather and sheepskin flying jacket, Colonel Dare had been led by the Mekon, a fearsome green-skinned tyrant, to the ominously sounding House of Silence in the Venusian city of Mekonta. Now Dare was confronted with what seemed to be the body of Sir Hubert Guest, the British Controller of Spacefleet, and immediately thereafter those of two other Spacefleet officers, the American Captain Hank Hogan and the French Major Pierre Lafayette, along with a British scientist, Professor Jocelyn Peabody. They were not dead, however, but held in suspended animation as hostages to secure Dare’s future collaboration with the Mekon’s megalomaniac scheme to rule the universe. There were no robots in this particular episode, but it would become clear in subsequent weeks that the Earth itself had already fallen to the Mekon’s Treen warriors and their terrible elektrorobots.

Dan Dare had provided the *Eagle* with its front-page story from the very first issue, published on 14 April 1950. Colonel Daniel McGregor Dare was the real star of the weekly comic and of the hardback *Eagle Annual* and the inspiration, too, for a welter of metal and plastic toys, from ray guns to walkie-talkies. I was instantly hooked on the *Reign of the Robots*, which ran until January 1958; hooked on Dan Dare, whose adventures lasted until 1967, when he was finally promoted Controller of Spacefleet; and hooked on SF itself. Is there anything we can learn about SF in general from my

encounter with this fictional Mancunian, born 17 years after me, who grew up to become the Chief Pilot of Spacefleet? Let me note immediately that, by contrast with its less successful rivals, Dan Dare was rendered strikingly plausible by virtue of its consonance with what readers in fifties Britain already 'knew' to be 'true'. Those marvellously realistic Spacefleet uniforms, for example, were realistic precisely insofar as they mimicked the design of existing British military and naval uniforms down to the last button and epaulette. Dan's Irish comrade, Commander Lex O'Malley, was a proper Royal Navy officer, complete with duffle coat and beard: Spacefleet, like the RAF and the British Army, permitted only moustaches. The Mekon was precisely the kind of tyrant, an off-world Hitler, or Nasser to make the reference more exactly contemporary, British readers would expect to find opposed to friendly relations with Earth. Sondar, the first Venusian ambassador to Earth, was precisely the kind of friendly native they would hope to encounter: as early as 10 May 1957 he was busily smuggling help to captive Earthmen; and, after the Mekon's defeat, he would become UN Governor of Venus.

Part of the strip's appeal lay in the depth of its back story. By Dan Dare's time, world government has been established by the United Nations, the flag of which I first saw carried, not by blue berets, but by escaping Spacefleet prisoners battling Treen guards and Elektrorobots on 6 December 1957. They had, of course, previously formed a Spacefleet Underground and, just as British readers would expect, had been busily digging secret tunnels. The all-male 'Inner Council' of the Earth Government, comprising five white faces, one black, one brown - much like the 1950s UN Security Council - heard Dare speak on 16 August 1958. Above this Inner Council, Earth had a Prime Minister, rather than a Secretary General, President or Chancellor, I learnt on 6 September 1958. In an early episode of *The Phantom Fleet*, dated 9 May 1958, Dan and his co-pilot, Digby, barely escaped collision with the Moon Mail-Rocket en route between Earth and Lunar Base. It had emblazoned on its hull 'United Nations Postal Service', but was coloured red, nonetheless, and carried the 'Royal Mail'. Even more startling, there was a cross-channel tunnel between England and France, I learnt on 18 April 1959. The new photon drive, which powered the Nimbus prototypes introduced on 9 April 1960, was a dangerous technology to be handled carefully, very much like the jet engines of the 1950s: 'NOT TO BE USED IN ATMOSPHERE' warned the control panel instructions.

The Interplanetary Spacefleet, in which Dan Dare served, was in effect a fourth, internationalised branch of the British armed forces. Again, there was for British readers in the fifties something very realistic about British command of Spacefleet. Its French, American - and presumably other - officers and spacemen are reminiscent of the Free French and Eagle Squadron volunteers of 1940. The architecture of the urban future, especially that of London, where both Spacefleet Headquarters and Earth Government are located, is a vividly plausible combination of the traditional and the futuristic. The 'Space Ministry', I discovered on 13th September 1958, was very near the City of Westminster 'Whitehall Walkway', which carried pedestrians at 4 miles - not kilometers - per hour. A 1965 story, *The Big City Caper*, had the alien, Xel, make villainous use of the Post Office Tower, which opened that year, but had merely become one landmark amongst others for Dare and Digby. Interestingly, Norman Foster, Nigel Coates and Laurie Chetwood all cheerfully acknowledge their professional debt as architects to Hampson's Dan Dare stories (Glancey, 2008, 24). Lantor, the fabulous city of the five towers on Terra Nova, which Dare reached on 2 January 1960, must have provided part of their inspiration.

The Dan Dare back story included equally credible personal biographies for the leading characters. Dan himself and his co-pilot and batman, Spaceman Albert Fitzwilliam Digby, were from Manchester and Wigan respectively. It would be another half century before Christopher Eccleston's Doctor Who announced in similarly regional accents that: 'Every planet has a North'. But this would be merely a postmodern joke. The world of Dan Dare really did have a North in a way Gallifrey never could. Being English, Dan and Digby were united by region but divided by class: Dan's father had been a space pilot, his uncle a scientist and he himself had been educated at a private boarding school and, later, Cambridge and Harvard; Digby was an orphan, brought up by his Aunt Anastasia - after whom one of their spaceships was named - is married with four children and devoted to football and fish and chips. Sir Hubert is a much-decorated former RAF officer, educated at Shrewsbury and Oxford; Professor Peabody has a D.Phil. from Magdalene College, Oxford, and a B.Sc. from Bedford College, the University of London women's college in Regent's Park, which was sold off in 1985, unfortunately, some years before she would have been old enough to secure entry.

The virtues of Spacefleet's senior officers are clearly inherited from a long line of British heroes from Hornblower to Biggles. Hence the wonderful exchange between Dan and Sir Hubert, on 17 May 1957, discussing a deal proposed by the Mekon:

Dare: If we're going to beat old Melonhead, it's got to be with the *truth - not with lies!*

Sir Hubert: Dan's right! If we defeat the Mekon by giving our word and then breaking it, how can the peoples of Earth and Venus trust us when we regain control?

Less extreme, but thereby all the more realistic, Sir Hubert's closing lines at the end of *The Ship That Lived* fictionalise very common British sensibilities from the immediate decade after 1945:

There is a tremendous rebuilding task ahead of us, men! But, thank goodness, at last we are free to do it - *free from fear - free from tyranny!*

The commonsense of fifties Britain was monochrome, if not racist: hence the Inner Council of Earth Government. But Spacefleet, too, had a strangely uniform palor. The green-skinned Treens were not the only inhabitants of Venus: I met blue-skinned Atlantines on 8 November 1957 and brown-skinned Therons on 22 November. The Earthmen were, by contrast, almost uniformly white: I didn't encounter a dark-skinned one until 12 July 1958, when a Sikh VIP - presumably, from the old Commonwealth - came to negotiate with the Cosmobes.

That commonsense was also, by our standards, astonishingly trusting in scientific authority. And Dan Dare mirrored that too. When the Pescods unintentionally prompt Krakatoa to erupt and so destroy their own submarine base near Java, Dan exclaims:

That cloud's thick with the crimson death - the fall-out will kill *millions!*

With the reassuring voice of British authority, the voice that so reassured South Australia about Maralinga, Sir Hubert replies:

No, Dan - the scientists have checked on that. It will be too diluted to do any harm by the

time it falls!

Rather like Strontium 90, one supposes. My point, however, is not how misleading this all was, but rather how consonant with what its readers already believed: the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament would not be founded until 1958.

However, the greater part of the serial's appeal lay altogether elsewhere: in its capacity to astonish. Stories set in the future, space travel itself, life on other planets, alien cities, suspended animation, robots, all of this was utterly strange and wondrous to my six-year old self, as it doubtless was to most *Eagle* readers. Even women scientists were pretty remarkable. When Peabody was introduced into the serial in episode 5 of Dan's first voyage to Venus, he and his colleagues expressed utter astonishment: 'Gosh!'; 'Jumpin' jets!'; 'A woman'. Sir Hubert had even complained to the Cabinet. But, as Peabody herself commented:

I don't see what all the fuss is about ... I'm a first-class geologist, botanist, agriculturalist and the Cabinet agree I'm the best person to reconnoitre Venus as a source of food - I'm a qualified space pilot as well.

There may have been hardly any women in Spacefleet, nor in Dan's world more generally - I don't recall ever seeing a female Treen or Atlantine - but Peabody was wonderfully proto-feminist; and quite a shock to my primary school sensibilities.

The idea of alien life was even more remarkable: the coldly rational Treens, from Venus's northern hemisphere, whose capital was the fabulous city of Mekonta, built on a network of islands floating in an artificial lake; the more pastoral, but still scientifically advanced, Therons, from the southern hemisphere, who lived quietly in their individual flying houses, in pursuit of aesthetics and virtue; and the Atlantines, descendants of Earthmen kidnapped from the Mediterranean basin for scientific experimentation by the Treens, shortly before the nuclear explosion that destroyed the mountain range holding back the Atlantic. The alien geography is equally remarkable: the Flamelands, a molten belt at Venus's equator, which separates the two hemispheres; the mysterious Silicon Mass, which inhabits the lava plain and lives by consuming solid rock, into which the Mekon would somehow escape on 11 April 1958; and the mines at the North Pole.

Mars, by contrast, had long been uninhabited, its ancient quasi-human civilisation destroyed millenia ago by the space bees of asteroid 2345, the so-called 'Red Moon'. Mercury was inhabited by completely non-human rock-like crystal creatures. And beyond the solar system, the entire universe teemed with life. There are the small, highly intelligent and friendly amphibian Cosmobes, travelling through space in their water-bearing Clustaships, whom Dan encountered on 12 July 1958; and their aquatic enemies, the Pescods, who reached Earth on 18 October. There are even other Earth-like planets, such as Terra Nova, discovered by Halley McHoo and introduced to Dan by Galileo McHoo - a kilt-wearing Scottish Captain Nemo, who built his own 'Little Scotland' in the asteroid belt - on 7 March 1959. There is a complete solar system occupying less space than our moon, encountered on 30 May 1959. On Terra Nova, on 19 September 1959, Dan came up against the Nagrabs, man-eating, human-sized ants. In his pre-ecological times, the solution was simple: grab a missile, 'fly over this colony and wipe the "Nagrabs" out of existence for ever', as he insisted on 7 November. So much for biological diversity. The tamed giant lizards ridden by the Novads, which we met on

31 October 1959, fared much better, no doubt precisely because they were tame.

This peculiar combination of the absolutely conventional and the utterly remarkable is distinctive, not only to Dan Dare, but to SF more generally. One way to theorise this compound would be as a combination between ideology and utopia, in the sense used by Jameson, not in his writings on SF, but in his general hermeneutics. In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson develops the outline of a neo-Lukácsian ‘totalising’ critical method capable of subsuming other apparently incompatible critical methods, by ‘at once canceling and preserving them’ (Jameson, 1981, 10). Against more conventionally Marxian understandings of art as ideology, he argues here for a ‘double hermeneutic’, which would simultaneously embrace both the negative hermeneutic of ideology-critique and the positive of a utopian ‘non-instrumental conception of culture’. For Jameson, all art, all class consciousness, can be understood as at once both ideological and utopian: ‘the ideological would be grasped as somehow at one with the Utopian,’ he wrote, ‘and the Utopian at one with the ideological’ (Jameson, 1981, 286). Spacefleet’s British leadership is ideological, in these terms, but Peabody’s feminism utopian. No doubt, this is so, but it nonetheless fails to explain what is specifically science-fictional about this particular amalgam of the ideological and the utopian.

We might find a better answer, or at least a supplementary one, in Greenblatt’s discussion, in *Learning to Curse*, of resonance and wonder. It has become conventional to treat the new historicists - Greenblatt himself, Catherine Gallagher, Walter Benn Michaels, Louis Montrose - as either North American Foucauldeans or, less commonly, ‘bastard offspring’ of Williams’s cultural materialism (Wilson, 1993, 55). I have no desire to intervene in this now slightly dated controversy: suffice it to note that Greenblatt generously acknowledged his debts to Williams as well as to Foucault (Greenblatt, 1990, 2-3, 146-147). Greenblatt defines resonance as the object’s power ‘to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world’ and evoke ‘the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which ... it may be taken ... to stand’ either as metaphor or metonym; and wonder as its power ‘to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention’ (Greenblatt, 1990, 170). As a contextualising literary-critical method, new historicism has obvious affinities with the former. But Greenblatt is insistent that wonder can also be understood historically: he cites as example its transformation ‘from the spectacle of proprietorship to the mystique of the object’ (Greenblatt, 1990, 179). This latter type of gaze - a ‘looking whose origins lie ... in the art work’s capacity to generate ... surprise, delight, admiration, and intimations of genius’ is ‘one of the distinctive achievements of our culture’, he continues, and one of its ‘most intense pleasures’ (Greenblatt, 1990, 180). Hence, the conclusion that, where philosophy will aim to supplant wonder with knowledge, new historicist criticism aims ‘to renew the marvelous at the heart of the resonant’ (Greenblatt, 1990, 181). It should be apparent that resonance has an ideological aspect, though it is not thereby reducible to ideology, and that wonder may well have a utopian aspect, although they are definitely not coextensive.

Greenblatt’s main interest is in imaginative literature, as he makes clear (Greenblatt, 1990, 170), but his concepts can be applied elsewhere: the essay actually begins with a discussion of Cardinal Wolsey’s hat in the library of Christ Church, Oxford, and proceeds to the State Jewish Museum in Prague. If Wolsey’s hat, then why not Dan Dare’s cap badge? if the State Jewish Museum in Prague, then why not the Science Museum in London? The latter is one of Britain’s most prestigious museums and a major tourist attraction, founded in 1857 to house objects displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851. It is in South Kensington on a site immediately adjacent to Imperial College

London, one of the so-called 'Group of Five' (G5) leading British research universities. From 30 April 2008 to 25 October 2009 it will house an exhibition on the theme of *Dan Dare and the Birth of Hi-Tech Britain*, which charts the comic strip's influence on British science, technology and everyday life. The exhibition's programme notes explain it thus:

After 1945, though war-weary and broke, Britain found huge pride in wartime advances such as radar, penicillin and the jet engine. Discoveries like these were now tipped to kick-start world-beating industries, bring prosperity and bankroll the emerging welfare state.

In an age before globalisation, products from rockets to radios sprang from local roots. Together they reveal a fascinating 'lost world' of British design and invention – a glimpse of a time when the TV in the corner was a Murphy, not a Sony.

During the 1950s, millions of people – children and adults – followed the adventures of Dan Dare, as portrayed in Eagle magazine. Every week Dan Dare ranged across space, battling his arch foe – the power-mad Mekon. Meanwhile, back on Earth, another extraordinary future was unfolding – one which laid the foundation for today's hi-tech consumer society...

Dan Dare's adventures were created by Hampson and his team of artists using an innovative method for drawing strip cartoons, using a film-like approach where the narrative was carried in a more fluid way between frames, and employing physical models of rockets and space cities to draw from life. This evocation of the possibilities offered by future technology enthused a generation, from James Dyson to Stephen Hawking. For many people, from schoolboys to scientists and engineers, Dan Dare symbolised the bright future that technology offered to the post-war world.

In short, the adventures of Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future, were tales of resonance and of wonder. This was not simply a matter of ideological interpellation on the one the one hand, utopian aspiration on the other. The marvellous aspects of these tales are actually at the core of their appeal, but were only ever rendered plausible, nonetheless, by the resonant. The primary effect of Spacefleet's Britishness, for example, was thus not the interpellation of patriotic British 'subjects', in either or both senses of the word, but rather the fictional plausibility of Peabody's feminism to an audience already constituted as British, patriotic and male. Resonance was produced textually by such 'reality effects', which were necessary in their own right, quite apart from their politico-ideological effects, for the stories to work narratologically. These reality effects are, of course, the most ideologically implicated aspects of the tales and therefore the most implausible in retrospect: a society still without a single astronaut or cosmonaut to its credit is as unlikely to command Spacefleet as it is the occupation of Iraq; female professors, by contrast, are now commonplace, even in Britain. But the resonance is nonetheless what made the wonder work. And this is true both of Dan Dare in particular and of SF in general, even literary SF, even canonical SF, so much so, indeed, as to be a constitutive feature of the genre. For SF requires this ideological resonance precisely because its narratives are, at their core, fantastic, unbelievable and unrealistic or - according to taste - marvellous and wonderful.

#### **4. When was Science Fiction?**

Which takes us to the third question, that of periodisation. Part of the purpose of Suvin's definition of SF was to expand the genre so as to include a substantial fraction of the literary and philosophical canon. There are thus, according to Suvin, six main instances of SF in the 'Euro-Mediterranean tradition': the Hellenic (Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Plato, Theopompus, Euhemerus, Hecataeus, Iambulus); the Hellenic-cum-Roman (Virgil, Antonius Diogenes, Lucian); the Renaissance-Baroque (More, Rabelais, Bacon, Campanella, Cyrano, Swift); the democratic revolution (Mercier, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Blake, Shelley); the fin-de-siècle (Bellamy, Morris, Verne, Wells); and the modern (from Wells, Zamyatin and Čapek through Gernsback and Campbell to the present) (Suvin, 1979, 87, 205). Where Suvin detects formal continuities, not only between Wells and More, but between both and Aeschylus, Williams stresses the historical discontinuities between the pre-modern and the modern. This is the general significance of his 'long revolution', but also, for our purposes here, the specific significance of his use of the notion of 'structure of feeling'.

This latter is a key concept in Williams's work, designed to denote:

a structure in the sense that you could perceive it operating in one work after another which weren't otherwise connected - people weren't learning it from each other; yet ... one of feeling much more than of thought - a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones, for which the best evidence was often the actual conventions of literary or dramatic writing (Williams, 1979, 159).

From *The Long Revolution* on, he had used the term to designate both the immediately experiential and the generationally specific aspects of artistic process. In *Marxism and Literature*, these emphases are conjoined with a stress on cultural pre-emergence, in which the experiential and generationally-specific remain at odds with official culture precisely because they are indeed new: 'practical consciousness is what is actually being lived, ... not only what it is thought is being lived' (Williams, 1977, 130-131). Structures of feeling, he continues, 'can be defined as social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available ... it is primarily to emergent formations ... that the structure of feeling, *as solution*, relates' (Williams, 1977, 133-134). A structure of feeling is thus the element within the more general culture that most actively anticipates subsequent mutations in the general culture itself, in short, the Novum encountered by the advancing Front. And a crucial element in the emergent structure of feeling of the mid nineteenth century was, as Williams himself stressed on more than one occasion, the new industrial science and its technologies:

Again and again, even by critics of the society, the excitement of this extraordinary release of man's powers was acknowledged and shared ... 'These are our poems', Carlyle said in 1842, looking at one of the new locomotives, and this element ... is central to the whole culture (Williams, 1965, 88).

It is also what most clearly distinguished the new worlds of SF from the alternative islands of older utopian fiction.

An emergent culture, Williams observed, requires not only distinct kinds of immediate cultural practice, but also and crucially 'new forms or adaptations of forms' (Williams, 1977, 126). The nineteenth century SF novel was exactly this: a new form radically different from those that preceded it. And, insofar as it had been an adaptation of any pre-existing form, this wasn't so much the utopia as the historical novel. Both Suvin and Jameson register the affinities between the latter

and SF: when Suvin introduces pluridimensional temporality into his basic taxonomy of literary forms, he treats SF as the estranged counterpart of historical realism (Suvin, 1979, 21); and Jameson argues that the historical novel ceased to be 'functional' more or less contemporaneously with the beginning of SF, in the simultaneous historical moment of Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862) and Verne's *Cinq Semaines en ballon* (*Five Weeks in a Balloon*, 1863). In an essay first published in 1982, but included unamended in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson writes that the new SF registered a 'nascent sense of the future ... in the space on which a sense of the past had ... been inscribed' (Jameson, 2005, 286). This seems a much more productive starting point for SF history than the post-Suvinian obsession with More which actually opens *Archaeologies* and towards which the 1982 essay itself also moved. For the typical subject matter of SF is future history, euchronia and dyschronia rather than utopia and dystopia, its precursors Scott and Dumas rather than More and Bacon. Verne was, of course, a protégé of Dumas. And Verne's second SF novel, written in the same year as *Cinq Semaines en ballon*, but rejected by Hetzel as too pessimistic and therefore unpublished until 1994, was *Paris au XXe siècle* (*Paris in the Twentieth Century*).

With this connection between SF and the historical novel tentatively established, I'd like to proceed to a few concluding remarks on the history of SF as a form. Williams identified three distinct levels of form, which he termed respectively 'modes', 'genres' and 'types'. Here 'mode' refers to the deepest level of form, as in the distinction between the 'dramatic', 'lyrical' and 'narrative' modes, which persist historically through quite different social orders; 'genre' refers to relatively persistent instances of each mode, such as the epic and the novel within the narrative mode, which are subject to greater variation between different social orders; and 'types' to radical distributions, redistributions and innovations of interest within given modes and genres, still more variable and still more dependent on particular social relations (Williams, 1981, 194-196). The examples Williams gave of the latter included 'bourgeois drama' and the 'realist novel'. But it should be clear that, in these terms, SF represents exactly such a radical redistribution and innovation of interest within the novel and short story genres, which occurs, in the first instance, in the nineteenth century. This is clearly a much less exclusively literary business than either Suvin or Jameson would have it. Of course, SF texts have rifled through the western cultural legacy in search of inspiration: Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* famously rewrote *The Tempest* with Robby the Robot in the role of Ariel. But SF readers, writers and critics do not claim Shakespeare for their own in anything like the way Gernsback claimed Poe, Verne and Wells; nor that in which Bruce Sterling claimed Shelley's *Frankenstein* as 'a wellspring of science fiction as a genre', albeit only 'humanist' SF (Sterling 1990: 39-41). Borrowings from Shakespeare - or from More or Plato - can be important and interesting; but they are borrowings from outside the selective tradition of SF, nonetheless.

The SF selective tradition was conceived in England and France, that is, at the centre of nineteenth-century capitalism, which was also, in Franco Moretti's terms, the core of the nineteenth-century world literary economy (Moretti, 1998, 174). Just as the earlier decades of the century had been dominated, both in terms of sales and translations, by the historical novels of Scott and Dumas, so were the later by the scientific romances of Verne and Wells. Astonishingly, Verne is still in the early twenty-first century the most widely translated of all French novelists, no matter how inadequate many of the translations (UNESCO, 2008). The SF selective tradition continued in Britain and France throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century (through Huxley, Orwell, Lewis, Wyndham, Hoyle, Clarke, Moorcock, Ballard, Banks, Macleod and Miéville in Britain, Rosny, Anatole France, Renard, Spitz, Boule, Merle, Walther, Brussolo, Arnaud and

Houellebecq in France). The United States has a fitful presence in the early tradition, essentially through Poe and Bellamy, but each of these is arguably more significant for their impact on the Anglo-French core, through Verne and Morris respectively, than on America itself. In the twentieth century the selective tradition's frontiers expanded to include the Weimar Republic (Gail, von Harbou and Lang, von Hanstein), early Soviet Russia (Belyaev, Bogdanov, Bulgakov, Mayakovsky, Platonov, Alexei Tolstoy, Zamyatin) and inter-war Czechoslovakia (Karel Čapek, Troska). Exported to Japan in the post-Second World War period (Abé, Hoshi, Komatsu, Murakami), it also flourished in Communist Poland (Fialkowski, Lem, Wisniewski-Snerg) and more significantly in late-Communist Russia (Altov, Bilenkin, Bulychev, Emtsev and Parnov, the Strugatski brothers, Tarkovsky). During the inter-war period, the genre also flourished in the United States, which very rapidly became central and eventually near-hegemonic (Gernsback, Campbell, Asimov, Heinlein and 'the pulps'), a situation which continues through the New Wave (Delany, Dick, Ellison, Spinrad, Tiptree, Zelazny) and feminism (Le Guin, Russ, Piercy) and on to cyberpunk (Gibson, Sterling) and the new humanism of writers like Kim Stanley Robinson. In the twentieth century, and in America in particular, this 'type' also expanded to embrace other media, notably film and television.

At the risk of over-generalisation, let me suggest that there are three main geo-historical moments in this tradition. Their darker undercurrents notwithstanding - one thinks of Nemo and of the Morlocks - Verne and Wells had generally written from within a self-confidently optimistic positivism, often bordering on the utopian. SF in Germany, Russia and *Mittleuropa* abandoned this liberal futurology, opting either for an explicitly communist utopianism or, perhaps more interestingly, for dystopia, whether communist or capitalist, a theme later reimported into England by Orwell, that most unEnglish of English icons. Positivistic SF would be resumed in inter-war America, but in a different register, nonetheless, as an escapist response to the Great Depression rather than the easy celebration of scientific triumphalism. Hence, the quasi-Marxian character of Isaac Asimov's early 'Futurianism' (Knight, 1977). This second epistemic shift is vital and was a distinctly American achievement. Through it, a marginal sub-form eventually succeeded in generalising itself across the entire field of popular culture, from novel to film to television, so as to become the nearest we may ever have to a postmodern epic. It is a messy beast, of course, as fashionably hybrid as any postmodernist could wish, an 'at once liberating and promiscuous mode', as Williams wrote, which 'has moved beyond the utopian; in a majority of cases, ... because it has fallen short of it.' But, as he also observed: 'it is part of the power of science fiction that it is always potentially a mode of authentic shift: a crisis of exposure which produces a crisis of possibility; a reworking, in imagination, of *all* forms and conditions' (Williams, 1980, 209). A 'resource of hope', then, at least in part, at least potentially.

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