

## NOTES AND CORRESPONDENCE

**Two Titans Remembered: Walter James Miller (1918-2010) and E[verett] F[ranklin] Bleiler (1920-2010).** Isaac Newton once remarked that “If I have seen a little further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.” This sentiment is especially fitting for all modern researchers of Jules Verne and of proto/early science fiction, who owe a great debt to the scholarship of Walter James Miller and E.F. Bleiler. Both men died this past summer, Miller at the age of 92 and Bleiler at 90.

Walter James Miller, professor emeritus of New York University, was a recognized poet, playwright, and lover of literature. His importance to the world of sf studies—to the extent that Jules Verne can be considered part of sf (an attribution hotly contested by some Vernians)—comes from his famous essay “Jules Verne in America: A Translator’s Preface,” published in his Washington Square Press edition of Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1965). In this essay, Miller was the first American academic to call attention to what he called the “two Jules Vernes,” the European one and the American one. As Miller explains:

French and other Continental readers ... admire Verne for his attention to scientific method, his concern for technical accuracy, his ability to work wonders with authentic facts and figures.

But American readers have the impression that Verne is somewhat casual with basic data and arithmetic, even with the details of plot and character. Condescendingly, they think of the *Voyages Extraordinary* as “children’s books.” American science-fiction writers have clobbered Verne for his “vagueness” and for the “gaps” in his technical explanations.

Could they be talking about the same author?

The answer is tragically simple. Europeans read Verne in the original French or in good, full-length translations. Americans have based their opinions on slashed and slapdash versions rushed into print in the 1870’s and reissued ever since as “standard” editions. Ironically, although Verne’s books pay full tribute to American daring and know-how, Americans have never been able to judge the true nature and extent of Verne’s genius. (vii)

Miller then goes on to give an extensive analysis of the poor English-language translation of Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues*, comparing it with the French original and citing a host of textual examples to bolster his argument. This critical essay succeeded in popularizing the notion that there was a tangible cause-effect link between Verne’s less-than-literary reputation in Anglophone countries and the many abridged and bowdlerized translations that served as the “standard” editions of Verne’s works in those same countries.

In the years that followed, Miller continued his quest to rescue Verne’s good name by publishing two new translations, *The Annotated Jules Verne: Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1976) and *The Annotated Jules Verne: From the Earth to the Moon* (1978). Both are “completely restored and annotated” critical editions of these important Verne novels. In reviewing the first volume, Marc Angenot (*SFS* 6.2 [July 1979]: 225) judged that Miller’s work “renders SF

criticism a major service and should open up on a new era for Verne's literary fortune in English-speaking countries." Which it did. As a graduate student at Columbia University during this time, I was beginning my research for a Ph.D. dissertation about Jules Verne. Miller's scholarship was virtually the *only* decent English-language criticism on Verne that existed at the time. It had a powerful influence on my own work.

Since the founding of the North American Jules Verne Society in 1993 and the launch of the online scholarly journal *Verniana* (<[www.verniana.org](http://www.verniana.org)>) in 2008, Walter James Miller continued to be an active and valued contributor in the field of Verne studies. With Frederick Paul Walter, he published another, updated translation of *Twenty Thousand Leagues* in 1993 and a new translation of Verne's *The Meteor Hunt* in 2006. His critical introduction to the Luce translation of Verne's *The Mighty Orinoco* (2002) has been described as the best critical commentary on this novel ever written, in either French or English. And he was an indefatigable contributor to the online discussion group Jules Verne Forum (<<http://jv.gilead.org.il/forum/>>) and the quarterly newsletter of the NAJVS called *Extraordinary Voyages*. He will be sorely missed.

As will Ev Bleiler. For well over a half century, Bleiler labored in the fields of sf, fantasy, and detective fiction as an editor, bibliographer, and literary historian. In 1948, he compiled and published *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature* (revised in 1978 as *The Checklist of Science-Fiction and Supernatural Fiction*), arguably the first primary bibliography of speculative fiction, which helped to define the contours of the genre. In its preface (written in 1947), Melvin Korshak chronicles the inside story of this ambitious book project and remarks with prescience on the work's potential impact and with appreciation on its assiduous editor:

For the scholar, *Checklist* can be more than a bibliography—it may be a guide to the opening of new areas of scholarship. A study such as this will aid the historian of popular literary trends in the study of the novel form, tracing as it does fantastic elements in fiction.... [Bleiler's] well-rounded background in fantasy reading and collecting, added to the library techniques of a trained scholar, were invaluable. His influence can be seen not only in such obvious things as the way he chose to present the data to assure maximum efficiency and easier reading but, far more subtly, in the enormous amount of research he did to insure the bibliographical accuracy of every entry. To accomplish this he spent many months in libraries, poring through the reference tomes and library catalogue cards—rechecking the official records on every proposed title. In cases where doubts arose as to the inclusion of certain works, the contents of which were open to question and not available to the editors, he wrote to the authors themselves, or to their heirs, to obtain a well qualified opinion.... Whatever laurels and critical acclaim this volume earns will be due, in large measure, to Everett Bleiler's editorship and vision. (vii-xiii)

Bleiler brought this same level of intensity and meticulous attention to detail to all his scholarly endeavors. With T.E. Dikty he initiated the first "year's best" sf collection in 1949, a series that continued through 1954. From 1952 to 1981 he edited several omnibus collections and anthologies of ghost stories and detective

fiction, along with many single-author anthologies by Wells, Hoffmann, Bierce, Le Fanu, Doyle, Lord Dunsany, and others—many of these released by Dover Books where he served as executive vice-president. In the 1980s, he edited two collections of critical essays, *Science Fiction Writers* (1982, rev. ed. 1998) and *Supernatural Fiction Writers* (1985, 2 vols., rev. eds. 2003). And in 1983, he published the massive *Guide to Supernatural Fiction: A Full Description of 1,775 Books from 1750 to 1960, Including Ghost Stories, Weird Fiction, Stories of Supernatural Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Novels, Occult Fiction, and Similar Literature, with Author, Title and Motif Indexes*, an oversized 720-page compendium of detailed descriptions of (and commentaries on) hundreds of writers, books, and stories. Michael Dirda of *The Washington Post* calls this volume perhaps his “most beloved work” by Bleiler:

Ev could summarize a story in a sentence and give a judgment on it in an even shorter one. And yet he was never perfunctory—everything he wrote felt deeply considered, the product of reflection and comparison. Through this book I was led to read the work of John Collier and James Hogg, among many others. It seemed impossible that anyone could have read so much fiction, much of it ephemeral. I doubt that anyone will ever read again half the stories that Ev covered in the Guide. (“Dirda’s Reading Room,” June 15, 2010)

The *Guide to Supernatural Fiction* was the first of three enormous Kent State UP annotated bibliographies that, perhaps more than all his other work, define Bleiler’s extraordinary imprint on speculative-fiction criticism. As a student of proto/early sf, my own “most beloved” reference books by him are his next two: the trailblazing *Science-Fiction: The Early Years: A Full Description of More Than 3,000 Science-Fiction Stories from Earliest Times to the Appearance of the Genre Magazines in 1930 with Author, Title, and Motif Indexes* (1990) and its equally impressive sequel, *Science-Fiction: The Gernsback Years: A Complete Coverage of the Genre Magazines AMAZING, ASTOUNDING, WONDER, and Others from 1926 Through 1936* (1998), both published with the collaboration of his son, Richard J. Bleiler. When the first volume appeared in 1991 (a few months after its copyright date), *SFS*’s own Dale Mullen—a critic never known for unwarranted displays of enthusiasm—praised it lavishly, saying “This is the book for which I have been waiting most of my life. Written by our preëminent authority on popular fiction, it is the most valuable bibliographical work yet published on its subject, and is not likely to be superseded” (*SFS* 18.2 [July 1991]: 267). It is a shame that Professor Mullen, a recognized expert on pulp-era sf, died in August 1998 and could not review Bleiler’s second volume. He would no doubt have given it a strong thumbs-up as well. In his own review (*SFS* 27.2 [July 2000]: 310-12), David Pringle called it a “breathtaking achievement,” “brilliant and monumental,” and “an essential purchase for all serious scholars of sf.” Both books were Hugo Award finalists and, since their publication, both have yet to be equaled (much less superseded) in their overall breadth and depth. In my own research, they continue to be indispensable.

In much the same way as Dale Mullen was *pater familias* to the editors at *SFS*, Walter James Miller and Ev Bleiler, by the pioneering quality of their

research, were grandfathers to a new generation of sf scholars. All of us who continue to study Jules Verne and other writers of pre-1940 science fiction stand squarely on the shoulders of these two Giants. Our work is an extension of theirs. A more enduring tribute to their memory would be hard to find.—**Arthur B. Evans, SFS**

**SFRA 2010.** The 2010 SFRA conference, “Far Stars and Tin Stars,” held in Carefree, Arizona from June 24-27, brought together questions of the frontier landscape, the alien, and the liminal in productive discussions that ranged from academic sf studies to frontiers and the American West to the current Arizona immigration debate. Conference organizer Craig Jacobsen commented in the conference program that “the guiding principle of this conference is utility”; and thanks to Craig, the 2010 SFRA conference was useful in a multitude of ways, offering a warm and welcoming atmosphere for new scholars, embracing the field’s diversity, and showing how the study of sf can be useful in a world of colliding identities.

The conference location, the Carefree Resort and Conference Center, provided an appropriate backdrop for discussions of the frontier, as it embraced the world of the American West (for example, the Red Horse Saloon and the Mesquite Dining Room). It also served as a showcase for Arizona’s dramatic landscape—with luxurious villas to which attendees could return, moments of cultural transition in miniature.

The conference opened with an entertaining and casual short course on sf video-games, conducted by International Guest Scholar Pawel Frelik. From the beginning, then, the conference stressed crossing diverse frontiers in new media, international sf, and emerging fields of scholarship. Thursday’s sessions examined morality in sf television, sex and gender in science fiction, and “eco-sf.” That evening’s events concluded with a Guest Scholar presentation by Margaret Weitekamp, a curator at the National Air and Space Museum, on sf toys (“Ray Guns, Play Sets, and Board Games”), which invited conference participants to further exploration of game theory, toys, and the marketing of sf.

Questions of interiority and memory in sf were the focus during Friday morning’s session, with lively discussions of the New Wave, insanity, and the relevance of psychedelic sf to today’s students in one session and a discussion of cultural memory in sf television in a second. Multiple sessions on various modes of science fiction—film, television, radio, print—occurred throughout the conference, suggesting an ongoing interest in science-fiction frontiers in terms of form and media. Another session, particularly useful for new and emerging scholars, was Friday’s roundtable on publishing sf criticism, during which Brian Attebery (*Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*), Mack Hassler (*Extrapolation*), Karen Hellekson (*Transformative Works and Cultures*), Arthur B. Evans (*Science Fiction Studies*), Craig Jacobsen (*SFRA Review*), and Jennifer Gunnels (*New York Review of Science Fiction*) discussed peer and editorial review and topics of particular interest for each of their journals. Pawel Frelik’s International Guest Scholar presentation (“Gained in Translation: Dispersed Narratives in Contemporary Culture”) was given during Friday’s luncheon; it offered a new

way of thinking about adaptations and translations. Frelik argued that texts should be read as “assemblages,” with no preconceptions about a central single narrative. This flexible way of thinking about narrative is important for sf scholarship, which so often studies texts in translation into other media as well as other languages. Friday’s sessions concluded with two film options, the poolside showing of *Westworld* (1973) and a well-attended screening of 2010 Pioneer Award winner Allison de Fren’s documentary *Mechanical Brides*, an examination of the relationship between fantasy and reality in the creation of the perfect artificial woman.

Saturday’s sessions again emphasized important themes of the conference: strategies for teaching science fiction and sf considered from angles that varied from ecological discussions to cyberspace. A roundtable dealing with immigration and Arizona law SB 1070 prompted vigorous discussion about relations to the Other and isolationism. Another panel presented papers dealing with sf and the American West, from the African-American frontier experience to Robert Howard’s weird fiction. Both sessions stressed the close relationship between sf and frontier narratives, a connection also visible in *Westworld*, the previous evening’s poolside film.

A highlight of Saturday afternoon was the Science Fiction Studies Academy roundtable, during which scholars engaged in teaching sf (Rob Latham, Neil Easterbrook, Joan Gordon, and Lisa Yaszek) offered advice and commentary on bringing science fiction into the classroom. All emphasized the importance of knowing the disciplinary history and current issues and discussions; there was also consensus on the need to strike a balance with more “canonical” areas of research, which not only opens up interdisciplinary connections but also may make specialists in sf more marketable as academics.

The Awards Banquet, held on Saturday night at the resort’s Opera House, featured delicious classic American food and brought everyone together to honor this year’s award recipients. Eric Rabkin received the 2010 Pilgrim Award for his contributions to sf and fantasy scholarship; Allison de Fren received the Pioneer Award for “The Anatomical Gaze in *Tomorrow’s Eve*,” published in *Science Fiction Studies* (SFS 36.2 [July 2009]: 235-65). David Mead received the Clareson Award for outstanding service in promoting the teaching and study of sf. Ritch Calvin’s “Mundane SF 101” was awarded the Mary Kay Bray Award for best review to appear in the *SFRA Review* during the previous year, and Andrew Ferguson received the Graduate Student Paper Award for “Such Delight in Bloody Slaughter: R.A. Lafferty and the Dismemberment of the Body Grotesque,” his presentation at last year’s SFRA conference. The closing reception at the headquarters villa offered attendees the chance to relax, talk, and enjoy themselves in an informal, friendly setting, ending the conference by blurring the boundary between academic discourse and an awesome party.

The 2011 conference (“Dreams Not Only American: Science Fiction’s Transatlantic Transactions”), only the second SFRA conference to be held outside North America, will take place in Lublin, Poland, July 7-10. The conference venue will be Maria Curie-Skłodowska University; the conference organizer is Pawel Frelik. The 2011 SFRA conference will focus on sf emergences, identities,

and transactions between Europe and America, although papers and panels on all topics pertinent to SFRA's interests are welcome. For further information, the email address is <sfra2011@gmail.com>. We hope to see everyone there!—**Kristin Noone, University of California, Riverside**

**Correction.** An error survived the proofing and editing process of my article on “The Historical Death Ray and Science Fiction in the 1920s and 1930s” (*SFS* 37.2 [July 2010]): the polished mirrors of Archimedes were referred to as a magnifying glass. The sentence (on page 254) should read: “Well-known naval historian Edgar Stanton Maclay asserted in the article that the British possessed a powerful weapon based on the principle of Archimedes’s fabled polished mirrors, which supposedly concentrated the heat rays of the sun to destroy Roman ships besieging Syracuse.”—**William J. Fanning, All Saints’ Episcopal School, Fort Worth, TX**

**SFS Special Issue: Science Fiction in/and California.** For this special issue, *Science Fiction Studies* invites scholarly articles dealing with California as a science-fiction space, theme, or concept. The West Coast of the US, and California in particular, has long been a source of inspiration for the sf imagination: the state’s history offers a rich repository of utopian schemes, dystopian realities, collectivist experiments, and commercial and ecological catastrophes. During the Cold War and after, California has represented the vanguard of technoscientific progress, free market ideology, lifestyle libertarianism, and countercultural experimentation. California shares the seismic instabilities of the Pacific Rim and is integrated into the cultural and economic exchanges facilitated and regulated by global capital throughout the region. California exists in the larger cultural imagination as both a much-dreamed-of sphere of spiritual discovery and multicultural hybridity and a nightmarish realm of ecological disaster and race war. The physical and ideological contrast between Northern and Southern California has inspired writers and thinkers, inside and outside the genre, for generations, from Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) to William Gibson’s *Virtual Light* (1993).

In this issue, we hope to promote dialogues between theorists of the new urban geography, such as Mike Davis and David Harvey, and sf writers and critics. Philip K. Dick, Kim Stanley Robinson, Ernest Callenbach, Neal Stephenson, Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Silverberg, Octavia E. Butler, and William Gibson have all depicted California in their work, whether as a site of utopian inspiration or as a dystopic realm where history and authenticity are erased and natural beauty is threatened by economic and ecological mismanagement. California has offered sf writers a fruitful space where forward-thinking blueprints—sociopolitical and sexual utopias, technocultural avant-gardes, impulses towards collective and personal reinvention—are projected onto a beautiful and fragile landscape. We encourage essays that address these concerns or any others related to how California has figured within sf discourse.

Abstracts of 500 words should be submitted by 1 February 2011. Full drafts of essays will be required by 1 May 2011. Send abstracts to Jonathan Alexander

(<jfalexan@uci.edu>) and Catherine Liu (<liu@uci.edu>).—**Jonathan Alexander and Catherine Liu, University of California, Irvine**

**CFP: Popular Culture/American Culture Association.** The Science Fiction and Fantasy (SF/F) Area invites proposals for its 2011 conference (to be held jointly with the national SW/Texas PCA/ACA) at the Marriott Rivercenter in San Antonio, Texas. The goals of our area are (1) to share and support research, scholarship, and publication and (2) to mentor emerging scholars. We invite proposals from professors, independent scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates (with the guidance of a professor). The SF/F Area also encourages proposals from sf/fantasy writers and poets. Anyone interested in submitting a paper for the conference is encouraged to check beforehand to determine if a call for a specific topic (e.g., *DOCTOR WHO*) has been posted.

We welcome any theoretical or (inter)disciplinary approach to any topic related to sf or fantasy. We particularly seek submissions for 2011 that examine ethnicity, race, and otherness. Detailed guidelines are posted on the conference website: <www.pcasff.org>.

Completed papers or 250-word proposals for papers, panels, roundtables, workshops, or creative writing readings should be submitted to Sherry Ginn at <pcasff@gmail.com>. The paper/panel proposal will be acknowledged when received, and the sender will be notified of the submission's status no later than 1 January 2011. Submission deadline is 15 December 2010.—**Dr. Sherry Ginn, SF/F Area Chair, Popular Culture/American Culture Association**