

the office of Shoshidai for thirty-five years but his son (p. xiii); 3. Why is the Chinese word for "Shade" transcribed "Ying" and not "Yin"?

Ingrid Schuster

PATRICIA S. WARRICK
The Cybernetic Imagination in Science Fiction.
Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1980. Pp. 282. \$15.

In the introduction to *The Cybernetic Imagination in Science Fiction*, Patricia Warrick confesses to high ambition. Her goals, she says, are to chart the history of artificial intelligence in science fiction; to describe the subgenre of science fiction that deals with computers and robots, analyzing the relationship between that subgenre and the scientific and technological developments it draws from; and to use the subgenre as a testing ground to judge the literary worth of science fiction as a whole. These are lofty goals, and I applaud them; however, I found all too little to applaud in the body of the book. Writing in prose that is murky and often repetitive, Warrick abandons many of the tried and true techniques of literary analysis without successfully opening up the new territory she hopes to explore.

As often happens with theoretical works, the bulk of this text is a defense of a methodology that we are never allowed to see in operation. In this case, Warrick decides to use the computer to analyze stories about computers. Starting with a body of novels and short stories that is large but perhaps not so overwhelmingly large as Warrick makes out (225 stories, mostly short stories, published between 1930 and 1977), she tells us that she selected thirty-three characteristics for computer analysis. We are never told what these "descriptors" are, except that among them are "date of publication, setting in time and space, computer application, and method of plot development" (p. xv). Though the rest are left in mystery, it might be guessed from these few that the resulting computer analysis will be oversimplified and, if the

term might be excused, mechanical. "Method of plot development," for instance, generally turns out to be limited to three choices: conflict, puzzle solving, and everything else. Identifying the plot in a short story as a conflict between man and machine is only the first step in analyzing that plot. We would also like to know what values are placed on each side, how the conflict is introduced and escalated, and whether it is resolved or merely ended.

Without further discussion of her descriptors and the computer correlation of them, Warrick jumps to a general analysis of cybernetic science fiction based primarily on Ervin Laszlo's *Introduction to Systems Philosophy*. She approaches each work of fiction as a system; that is, not merely as a set of elements but as a set of interactions among elements: an order, an organism. The works in question she groups under three headings: isolated systems, closed systems, and open systems. In her discussions of these categories it becomes clear that she is talking not about the story but about the fictional world within the story. Isolated system stories are those in which the scope of the fiction is artificially limited to a microcosm of one or two characters and a single, clearly defined problem. Closed system stories are those which portray static, deterministic societies, primarily, in modern science fiction, dystopias. Open system stories usually portray an evolving universe, one which is transformed during the course of the narrative by exploration and the acquisition of knowledge. Fictional universes are important in science fiction, but not so exclusively important that a work may be judged by its setting without consideration of character, narrative structure, point of view, or style, and yet that is what Warrick seems to be doing. Closed systems are equated with inferior science fiction, isolated systems with early, experimental science fiction, and open systems, because they allow for peaceable interaction of man and machine, with good science fiction.

When, in the final chapter, Warrick takes leave of her methodology to render a judgment of the material, she offers a valid criticism: many science fiction writers substitute subliterate conventions for a real understanding of science and thus fall short of fulfilling science fiction's promise to draw scientific discoveries into the sphere of human values and emotions. She points out with reasonable accuracy the ways in which much science fiction fails as

science, but she does not show how, or indeed whether, it fails as fiction.

It might be best for those whose interest in the field compels them to read this study to begin at the end and work backwards, starting with the useful bibliography and the intriguing summary and simply abandoning it at the point where they feel worthwhile comment gives way to confused and ponderous theory. It is only fair to warn them first, however, of potential stumbling blocks like the unnecessary wrenching of syntax to make "metaphor" into a transitive verb (p. 223); inconsistencies in the use of key terms such as "robot" (pp. xvi and 11) and "android" (pp. xvi, 15); word substitutions such as "related" for "associated" (p. 53), "neuronal" for "neural" or "neuronic" (p. 75), and "graduations" for "gradations" (p. 78); a carelessness about detail that makes a single episode in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* into the subject of the entire opera and distorts the names of L. Frank Baum's Tin Woodman and Tik-Tok the Clockwork Man (all on p. 34); and lengthy forays into the history of science, often of dubious relevance.

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RICHARD I. SMYER

Primal Dream and Primal Crime: Orwell's Development as a Psychological Novelist

Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980. Pp. 187.

One of the convenient things about psychological criticism is that it licenses its practitioners to interpret everything within their range of subject matter in terms of metaphor. The most pedestrian details of daily life come alive with arcane significance, and, of course, works of art simply bulge with keys to the hidden inner rooms of experience. Once the assumption is granted that all human behavior, and most particularly the created fictions through which we attempt to order our understanding of the world, are ultimately nothing more than symbolic events in the unceasing

warfare among our secular trinity of id, ego and superego, then normal canons of evidence, by which we judge statements about the external world, can be set aside. Since we know that all novels are ultimately about sexual guilt, then all we have to do is search the text for the controlling allegorical patterns which demonstrate this and the task of analysis is completed. Meaning is fixed by the unchanging nature of the psychic drama. "Meaning," as that word is used to denote conscious intention, is almost irrelevant, since the wellsprings of intention are, almost by definition, unconscious. That way madness lies.

Which is not to argue that all psychological approaches to literature are invalid. The premises of Freud and Jung have hardly attained to the status of incontrovertible laws, but there is no a priori reason why they cannot generate interesting and useful readings if the critic does not assume that his case is proven in advance and exercises his ingenuity with a decent respect for ordinary standards of proof.

The problem with Mr. Smyer's book is that it operates under no such restraints. Having decided that the real theme of George Orwell's fiction is (who would have imagined it?) sexual guilt—and having neglected, apparently as irrelevant, any consideration of whether in this respect the author is operating according to some deliberate plan or is unconsciously prompted by conflicts submerged within his own nature—Mr. Smyer sets about forcing the novels into conformity with this assumption, relying on very slender lines of inference indeed.

A good case in point is his reading of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, in which, according to Mr. Smyer, the heroine Dorothy is propelled into a mental breakdown involving amnesia and flight from her father's parsonage by her "unconscious incest anxiety." Much is made of this "incest anxiety," and we are asked to credit its existence on the basis of nothing more substantial than the coincidence that Dorothy's sexual coldness stems in part from her having been frightened as a child by some engravings of satyrs with "lean, furry thighs" and that her father's surname is Hare. Surely this is a bit thin to provide the motivating drive for a whole novel. At the end of his discussion, Mr. Smyer suggests that, "in associating this covertly incestuous situation with the name *Hare*, Orwell may be expressing a vague, not fully conscious commitment to follow-