

# Nuclear Texts & Contexts

Fall 1990

No. 5

## Facing Apocalypse II

*Facing Apocalypse II*, the much-postponed and revised conference on apocalyptic imagery organized by Robert Bosnak, finally took place at Salve Regina College in Newport, Rhode Island, June 14-17. Although the focus was on environmental rather than nuclear issues, the participation of a substantial number of Soviet scholars guaranteed that the Chernobyl disaster received a good deal of attention.

The presentation by Dr. Adolph Harash of Moscow State University in which he speculated about the prophetic dreams reported by some inhabitants of towns near Chernobyl intrigued the many Jungian dream therapists present. Discussion of these dreams rather obscured Harash's more urgent message: that the victims of Chernobyl are still receiving inadequate medical care and being discriminated against.

He read movingly from a book of poems by one of his patients: a young woman half-blinded and made extremely ill by the explosion. Calling herself "Sirota" [orphan] she began writing poems about the explosion and its aftermath almost as a form of therapy. I arranged with Harash to try to have these poems published in English, along with an article by him telling Sirota's story. Two Washington D. C. -based translator-poets—Elisavietta Ritchie and Leonid Levin—have completed the translations, and we are awaiting Harash's introduction to seek a publisher.

Distinguished Soviet writer Ales' Adamovich gave an impassioned speech on Chernobyl as well, and Psychologist Vera Abramenkova displayed and discussed the influence of the accident on children's drawings of nuclear power plants. Literary scholar Yuri Karyakin gave very interesting talk on Dostoyevsky's apocalyptic imagery, relating it to the nuclear age.

Dr. Bosnak presented materials relating to a film he has been making on children's dreams about nuclear war, and I presented my "Nuclear Chic" slide show of nuclear war imagery in current pop culture.

Although there was simultaneous translation throughout, most of the Soviet participants spoke at least some English, and private discussions between sessions were extremely interesting and stimulating. Maureen Barnes' anti-nuclear war play *Threshold* was given a reading at the conference as well. **PB**

---

### Other Meetings

The deadline has passed for a call for papers sent us by member Lotte Larson, but readers may wish to inquire about the proposed session in "Protest Issues and Actions," a permanent section of the Popular Culture Association, whose 1991 Annual Conference will be held in San Antonio, Texas, March 27-30. For details, contact Lotte Larsen, Library, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, OR 97361 or phone her at (503) 838-8888.

Paul Brians. "Nuclear Chic: Images from the Beginning and End of the Atomic Age." Delivered at the annual meeting of the Consortium on Peace Research, Education and Development, Dayton, Ohio, September 6, 1990, the annual meeting of the Science Fiction Research Association in Long Beach, California, and Moscon, a science fiction convention in Moscow, Idaho, and at various other venues, some sponsored by the Washington Commission for the Humanities.

John Gery. "The Ambiguous Paradise in James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*," South Central Modern Language Association Convention, San Antonio, Texas, October 25-27, 1990.

## Reviews

*Papers on Language and Literature*. 26 (Winter 1990). Special issue devoted to nuclear war fiction criticism, edited by Alvin Sullivan with advice from Jean Kittrell. Contents: William J. Scheick: "Nuclear Criticism: An Introduction," Daniel L. Zins: "Exploding the Canon: Nuclear Criticism in the English Department," Jacqueline R. Smetak: "'So Long, Mom': The Politics of Nuclear Holocaust Fiction," J. Fisher Solomon: "Probable Circumstances, Potential Worlds: History, Futurity and the 'Nuclear Referent,'" Hamida Bosmajian: "Conventions of Image and Form in Nuclear War Narratives for Young Readers," Sydna Stern Weiss: "From Hiroshima to Chernobyl: Literary Warnings in the Nuclear Age," Louise Myers Kawada: "Enemies of Despair: American Women Poets Confront the Threat of Nuclear Destruction," Paul Brians: "Nuclear Family/Nuclear War," Mark Osteen: "Against the End: Asceticism and Apocalypse in Don DeLillo's *End Zone*," Peter Schwenger: "Postnuclear Post Card," William J. Scheick: "Atomizing a Postage Stamp." [Note: all the authors are members of ISSNTC.]

It has become part of the folklore of the Nuclear Age to note that in the 1940s when the government constructed a plutonium processing facility at Hanford, Washington, it provided a single highway leading into the compound but eight leading out—in the advent of evacuation such foresight was geared to save lives. In a larger sense, however, such construction designs have become metaphorical for our collective decision to move away from rather than confront the nuclear reality that has so dramatically redefined our perception of our own age. It is to just such willed neglect that this collection takes aim.

This collection argues first that widening the canon to include relevant nuclear texts is, in many ways, a responsible, even ethical act at a time in the evolution of the Humanities when such urgent connection with the immediate community is undervalued, thereby marginalizing the single most critical defining issue of the twentieth century. As Daniel Zins emphatically argues in his opening tract, we have lost such engagement of the immediate as the "pernicious legacy" of the New Criticism. Zins further points out that rethinking the canon—developing what he calls "nuclear literacy"—could include the literary artifacts of two generations trying to encompass the premise of Hiroshima. Although Zins is regretfully cagey about the fictions he considers possibilities, he does point out that such canonical revisions could include nonfiction (he cites Kahn and Lifton, for example) and even government publications encoded in the cryptics of nuke-speak. Such review of the very real documents of the students' world outside the walls of academia might, Zins posits, encourage critical thinking—a healthy break from the tedium of cheap cynicism and all-too-easy concessions of acceptance, gestures which, Zins cogently argues, we are at least in part responsible for legitimizing

through our irresponsible neglect of our own nuclear culture. They are strong words but serve to startle as any opening salvo must.

But simply engaging students with the urgent message of their own history in an attempt as a profession to delegitimize disconnection is far from the sole premise that motivates the critical work here. The collection argues that when we have talked to each other in the high tech vocabulary of any of the critical "isms" currently in vogue, we have neglected that branch of our literature that has for some two generations now struggled to fathom what life suggests with the shadow of extinction crossing it. Can our sophisticated systems of text evaluation work with fictions that so deliberately violate the most sacred premise of such systems—these texts demand a context. So often works that foreground nuclear realities are dismissed to airport racks rather than promoted within the rarefied discussions of literary conferences. But with nerve and a compelling case for the seriousness of their pursuit, essays here work the nuclear event within the heady argument of postmodern critical exegesis. The results are uneven. J. Fisher Solomon's ponderous exercise ("The Nuclear Referent") warps its prose until the tedium of its rhetorical thickness wearies even the most ardent (and repeated) readings. It seems guilty of the very self-enclosure deplored by the larger argument of the collection; here a critic executes elaborate lexical balletics, engrossed by the performance itself rather than in offering even the most slender of accessible asides to the interested reader. Yet two other pieces, one by Peter Schwenger and another, a first-rate piece on DeLillo by Mark Osteen, illuminate nuclear texts with a facile and gentle handling of the most correct jargon of Higher Criticism without wearing out the reader in the effort. These essays, not merely clear but profitable, testify that nuclear criticism can make for readings that shake and confound as the best criticism ought.

In a global way, however, this collection must address a more fundamental issue; each essay, in its fashion, approaches the question of where we are to turn as professionals within the humanities willing to engage the nuclear reality but uncertain of appropriate selections. No canon exists. Disregarding the excesses of speculative fictions or the drugstore racks of political thrillers or the accumulated screeds of evangelicals certain that the premise of Hiroshima can be factored within the calculus of dating the Rapture, more searching essays in this collection seek within such white noise to hear the more authentic voices that dispense with such hyperbole to try to understand what it means to hear Cassandra, to recognize that within the concrete silences of Midwestern missile silos there exists sufficient cause to rethink our civilization.

These essayists, working, if you will, within the canon factory, are not always helpful in locating the critical texts. Sydna Stern Weiss unfortunately bounds through

too much of the contemporary German response to the nuclear reality (particularly in the aftermath of Chernobyl) and hamstringing her essay, leaving it more like the rapid fire shiftings of a laundry list. Jacqueline Smetak limps toward the security of established bromides of nuclear criticism (that, for instance, the war novel as a genre is no longer applicable or that nuclear fiction draws a distinction between sacred and secular apocalypses) and merely rounds up the usual suspects—Hersey, Hoban, Miller, Burdick and Wheeler, et al—but does little more than check them off.

But two others, Louise Kawada's essay on contemporary American women poets (most convincingly on Clampitt and Levertov) and Paul Briens' piece on a clutch of post-Holocaust fiction by women, are valuable for defining in both cases the greater sensitivity of women writers in confronting the nuclear dilemma. These women refuse the endgames of despair and disconnection to confront with unblinking realism the potential destruction of nuclear insanity and to offer as antidote familial love and community strength. Like effective criticism, these essays draw the reader toward rereading not merely the essays but the works themselves, perhaps the highest reward of reading criticism-- nuclear or otherwise.

Yet both essays, for their brave attempts to find those voices of hope within our nuclear community, underscore a far greater challenge to the study of nuclear criticism. Their offerings do not provide an adequate sense of the way in which thinking about the nuclear reality has fundamentally underscored the argument of virtually every significant writer, male and female, in the last generation of American writers (and a significant share of British and Continental writers). By concentrating only on the obvious anger of "cause" poetry and on speculative fiction (literature Bellow has described as "shivery games"), these essays leave a raw sort of hunger. Other fiction has worked so much more compellingly with the nuclear age itself. Paging through this collection raises critical questions--where is the work on Vonnegut, Coover, Lessing, Grass, Percy, Burroughs, Pynchon, Barth, Gaddis, Amis, Burgess, Mailer, and even Bellow himself, to name a few of literature's Nuclear Club. It is unfortunate that here with the exception of the provocative work on DeLillo performed so gracefully by Osteen, this important collection of essays cannot deliver the fundamental texts of the nuclear age, works that define and then dispel the very sort of enervation that the Introduction insists has infected our perception of ourselves and our times. It is difficult to return students again and again to *Ridley Walker* or *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. And it is often difficult to sustain a university-level discussion about shelter fictions that offer visions of mutants slouching about the landscape or of a straggling remnant of humanity ambling off toward its extinction. It is perhaps the work ahead to establish an argument that centers itself, as Osteen's, about any one of dozens of mainstream American writer whose texts quite simply could not have ex-

isted without the nuclear age to give it them their context.

But a more fundamental threat to such a collection—indeed, to nuclear criticism itself—is its very assumption that literature interacts with its history. That history, however, stubbornly

the nuclear reality. More emphatically, the arrogant notion that somehow "good" has triumphed, thus allaying our nuclear anxiety, begs the most obvious historical corrective to such simplistic optimism--it was just such a "good" democratic institution, not the "evil empire," that stands responsible for the single swing of the nuclear club—the devastations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Current events are not redefining nuclear criticism, nor making such valuable studies obsolete. Institutional reform in Eastern Europe is propelled less by moral rethinking and more by economic pragmatism. That we are still within the penumbra of the mushroom cloud, still within its iron logic, sustains and indeed demands nuclear criticism. We are still bound to think of the unthinkable.

That finally is the value of this collection. By ranging from speculative fictions to postage stamps, from the terminal jargon of governmental nukespeak to works of children's literature, these articles offer an important first step in clearing a way toward a coherent definition of a new and potent critical directive. That it shies away from tangling with the larger voices in current literary expression testifies to its important position as prelude--more work will come. This collection attests to the credibility of nuclear criticism without the usual apologies, defining it as a necessary humanistic tool (as opposed to the simple academic tool of so much contemporary criticism) to help understanding what it means to speak within a community cognizant of its status as latter days.

As such, the collection is in its own way a building of roads toward rather than away from such our nuclear reality.

**Joseph Dewey**

**University of Pittsburgh—Johnstown**

---

Vladimir Gakov. *Ultimatum*. Moscow: Izdatel'svo Politicheskoi Literaturi, 1989. 346 pp. [In Russian.]

"Nuclear war usually arouses anxiety to such a degree that the majority of people are concerned with one and only one question: how to protect themselves from thinking about nuclear war in the first place."

A kaleidoscope in time, *Ultimatum* seeks to confront the unthinkable or rather un-imaginable with hypothetical images of a nuclear apocalypse drawn from the only writers who have actually "lived" to tell the tale, i.e. the masters of science fiction.

Speaking, as it were, in a passionate, engagé journalistic style, Gakov surveys the interlocking forces of culture, science and science fiction unleashed by H. G. Wells in his pioneering description of a nuclear fireball in his *The World Set Free*, published in 1914.

Concerned far less with science fiction as art (as he himself admits) than with science fiction as a mirror held

up to our living culture, Gakov relates the futuristic (and occasionally retrospective—the “what if Hitler” etc. subgenre) landscapes of nuclear science fiction to the most urgent problems and issues of the day.

Divided into three somewhat overlapping parts chronicling the nuclear age (namely, “On the Eve,” “The Atomic Clock” and “Ultimatum”), this rich storehouse of facts, opinions and hypotheses by science fiction writers and scientists from American, Europe and Russia, may best be introduced to the American reader selectively. So here are 21 miniatures, chronologically arranged, from Gakov’s tapestry of quotes and comments from the nuclear age.

- “Perpetual peace is a dream, and far from a beautiful one. War constitutes one of the elements of the world order as ordained by God. It is in war that the most noble virtues of man manifest themselves.” (Karl Moltke)

- “A destructive war in which both sides may be annihilated . . . would lead to perpetual peace only at the gigantic cemetery of mankind.” (Immanuel Kant)

- “Nearly a thousand nuclear wars have already taken place. And these wars are described not drily and dispassionately as in military accounts, but, on the contrary, brilliantly, passionately, with pathos! Can we really ignore this unique collective experience of mankind?” (Gakov in reference to Paul Briens’ *Nuclear Holocausts*.)

- “And then it was as if thunder broke overhead.

“The sound struck her like a blow . . . She felt torn out of the world. There was nothing else in the world but a crimson-purple glare and sound, deafening, all-embracing, continuing sound . . . that seemed to be burrowing into [the earth] like a frightened rabbit. (Wells: *The World Set Free*)

- “I shall not permit my collaborators to take out a patent for an explosive that will blow up the world.” (Reverse translation of quotation ascribed to Ernest Rutherford, one of the founding fathers of modern nuclear physics, 1930s.)

- “Yet meanwhile public opinion saw nothing in all these ‘discoveries’ [in nuclear physics in the thirties]. Not surprisingly, even those scientists who were most intimately involved saw only a problem to be solved by equations.”

- “With the help of rays capable of splitting uranium (discovered by him), he (Pax, the anti-hero) demonstrates to the shocked inhabitants of the earth the possibilities of this new weapon. He turns up the heat on the Sahara, displaces the earth’s axis and provokes a whole series of earthquakes all over the world. This the peacemaker undertakes to do with the idea of punishing mankind for its failure to live in peace.” (Gakov on Arthur Train and Robert Williams Wood’s *The Man Who Rocked the Earth*, 1915)

- “Del Rey describes Martians who had endured a world war without resorting to atomic weapons. They were simply too afraid of them to build them.” (On Lester Del Rey’s “Lunar Landing,” *Astounding*, October 1942.)

- “Several days after the magazine came out, the edi-

tors were unexpectedly visited by agents of the FBI. Campbell (the Editor-in-Chief of *Astounding Stories*) was relentlessly interrogated. The Bureau wanted to know how top secret information concerning the Manhattan Project had managed to leak out.” (On Cleve Cartmill’s story “Deadline” (1944) which gave detailed “instructions on how to build a Uranium 235 nuclear device.”)

- “They stretched out their hands and their skin drooped—not only from their hands, but also from their face and body . . . They did not resemble people from this world.” (Reverse translation from Lifton’s *Death in Life*.)

- “Clausewitz’ famous thesis [that war is thee continuation of diplomacy by other means] is today even more unjust than before because war has become an insane enterprise, and the zoological name for the human race should be derived not from ‘sapientia’ but rather ‘dementia.’ (Max Born, *My Life and Views*)

- “There was nothing he could do any longer other than divide his time between politics and equations” (Gakov on Einstein’s last years working on behalf of world peace.)

- “A book subtitled *Report to the Public on the Nature of the Atomic Bomb* [Masters: *One World or None*, 1946] made a great impact on the popular reader. Under one and the same cover were to be found . . . articles, appeals, scientific reports and, among other things, a science fiction scenario of a future atomic attack on Manhattan . . . written by a distinguished physicist, a future Nobel laureate, Mr. Phillip Morrison. The same Mr. Morrison who had been intimately involved with the Manhattan Project and who was one of the first inspectors to arrive at Hiroshima soon after the dropping of the bomb.”

- “. . . the Heinleins were hustled to the police station [in Khazakistan in the USSR] and made to wait there for hours. Badly frightened, they believed that only luck and bureaucratic bumbling saved them from a visit to the Gulag. Back home Bob almost overnight became an outspoken conservative, an admirer of Goldwater, an advocate of SDI, and an active backer of Jeanne Kirkpatrick for the U.S. Presidency.” (From L. Sprague de Camp’s posthumous tribute to Robert A. Heinlein, *Locus*, July 1988)

- “The most noble human qualities such as heroism and self-sacrifice would [in the event of a nuclear war] be reduced to absurdity.” (Gakov on Ray Bradbury’s views in the early fifties.)

- “. . . technology, created by people, survived them. One could hardly find a clearer metaphor or symbol for the irrationality of nuclear carnage, for its incongruity with both military logic and ordinary common sense (not to mention its moral dimensions):

“Ten o’clock. The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

“Ten-fifteen. The golden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted window-panes, running

down the charred west side where the house had been burned evenly free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.” (Gakov, followed by an excerpt from Ray Bradbury’s “There Will Come Soft Rains”.)

- “And although the American [nuclear] arsenal surpassed by far the Soviet arsenal, yet the residents of the ‘superpower,’ led by their two previous presidents to thoughts of invincibility, were now dejected because this feeling now gave way to one of utter helplessness.” (Gakov on Shute’s *On the Beach* and the Cold War.)

- “It was not a nuclear war that destroyed the earth but a nuclear way of thinking.” (Reverse translation from Kuttner’s *Fury*.)

- “In the majority of contemporary (American) works of science fiction, a world-wide, nuclear catastrophe is perceived as something rather commonplace.” (Gakov)

- “I was watching the picture [the rather crudely anti-Communist Red Dawn] in Moscow on the occasion of one of those Soviet-American gatherings. The Russians in the audience guffawed and even the Americans present seemed to feel uncomfortable about it when I spoke to them.” (Gakov)

- “First we create the enemy. The image of thee enemy makes its appearance before the weapon does. First we kill others in our thoughts and then we invent instruments for their destruction . . . . We belong to the species Homo Hostilis.” (Reverse translation from Sam Keen: *Faces of the Enemy*)

Time and again since that “first” nuclear explosion in 1914, science fiction has prophesied the horrors to come. Yet, like Cassandra’s, its disturbing tales have usually fallen on deaf ears. Even more so, its implicit diagnoses of contemporary political, social and cultural ills and trends have been dismissed as mere fantasies. This, according to Gakov, is the very mission of science fiction. As he says aptly, the purpose of “fantastika” (the Russian word for science fiction) is indeed to fantasize.

The author traces these interrelations in his zig-zag panorama of images, concepts, facts and hypotheses. In doing this he allows the reader to make the connections himself.

Gakov provides the documentation, both real and fantastic. We, on the other hand, must meet it half way by mustering up the courage to think about what must not become unthinkable—not so long as our generation and those succeeding it continue to live under the terrible sign of the Apocalypse.

**Benjamin Sher**

**Russian Translator**

**921 Chartres 15, New Orleans**

*Hiroshima: Three Witnesses*, edited and translated by Richard H. Minear. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990. 393 pp. \$40.00.

I’ll tell you the real story—I swear I will.

*Hiroshima: Three Witnesses* could have been called “Five Witnesses” but the number “three” focuses our attention on the three writers—Hara Tamiki, Ota Yoko, and Toge Sankichi—whose works are collected in this volume and less on the two artists—Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi—whose work is also included. Perhaps that is only right. The writers were living in Hiroshima when the bomb was dropped; the artists arrived days later as members of a volunteer work force. Thus it is only the writers who were witnesses. Yet the book is not really about witnessing. It is about bearing witness. These people engage in an effort to tell us who were not there “the real story” and also tell it to those who were there. Toge’s poem, “Little One,” from which the above quoted lines are taken, is addressed to a child caught in the attack. The poem, as brutal as any in the collection, *Poems of the Atomic Bomb* (1951/52), clearly wishes to go beyond the bombing of one city. It was the war that cut people asunder. Toge’s poems are difficult not because they are hard to understand. The difficulty is in the brutality of the images—“An eyeball that pleads at my feet. / A head boiled white.”—and for an American reader, the shame of knowing who dropped this thing:

Ah, that was no accident, no act of God. After precision planning, with insatiable ambition, humanity’s first atomic bomb was dropped. . . . If Toge had left it at that, that only the Americans were responsible, the poems could be dismissed as simple ranting. But this is not the case. Though *we* are the “pigs in human skin / who use the power of earth’s veins erupting,” the Japanese are not entirely innocent. They, or rather, those in the government, were the fascists who “didn’t know how to bring the war to an end.” Thus the Americans and the Japanese government share the blame but the people must bear the cost: “We must endure this humiliation, / endure it for a long, long time.”

If Toge’s politics had been different, the poems could be read as a call for revenge, but as a Communist (he joined the Party in 1949) such sentiments would be self-defeating. Minear notes the absence of direct references to the United States and, correctly I think, dismisses the possibility that the circumlocutions were due to Occupation censorship. By 1951, that had ceased to be a factor. Minear credits the indirection to Toge’s own aesthetic preferences, calls it a wise choice, but does not make any connection between this choice and Toge’s Christian Marxist values. For a Marxist (ironically, the artists, also Communists, were expelled from the Party for opposing Soviet testing of atomic bombs), the people are one. Another people can never be the enemy; only a government driven by avarice, ambition, and bent on war can be the enemy. Thus Toge dedicates his poems as a gift “from

us in Hiroshima—to the people of the entire world” and criticizes the Japanese government for disregarding the people’s will and leading them again to war.

Occupation censorship was, however, a factor in Ota Yoko’s *City of Corpses* (1948/1950). Not only was the first edition of the book published with the second chapter deleted, but she was visited by an occupation intelligence officer who told her “I want you to forget your memories of the atom bomb. America won’t use the atomic bomb again, so I want you to forget the events in Hiroshima.” She had written *City of Corpses* in the weeks following the attack, sick with radiation poisoning and convinced she was going to die. The purpose of the book was to ensure that not only would she not forget, no one else would either. Her journal is rough and ugly, aesthetically flawed primarily because she rushed to get it done before she might die. When she did not die, she could not bear to reread it so it was published in its original form. It’s rawness makes it difficult to comment on for it has no shape but the source of its power is that rawness. Unlike Toge, she is critical of ordinary Japanese people. Regarding the inadequate response to the disaster, she comments “The Japanese are not quick. They are slow on the uptake and lack fire.” But, like Toge, she also points at the Japanese government. The Japanese are stupid because years of authoritarian rule had made them stupid. The war had crushed them but it is they who must take responsibility for themselves. The answer is democracy but most Japanese don’t really seem to know what democracy is. But in order for Japan and the Japanese to revive or, better, in order to shed the old skin and carve out an image of a new human being, we have no alternative but to clear the way for democracy.

If *City of corpses* can be classified, it would be best called a Jeremiad. She is telling people what happened as bluntly as she can so that none of the horror of it is lost. She is explaining, to the best of her ability, why she thinks it happened and warning people that if they do not do what must be done, it will happen again. Perhaps it is best that the story has no shape for, as it is, it hits one like a brick.

It shapelessness also conveys the process of wrenching transformation she must have been going through. By 1945, she was a popular writer of patriotic stories supportive of the war. How was she to give shape to such a radical transformation that burst upon her so suddenly? The confusion of her book reflects, I think, the physical and emotional chaos brought about by the bomb and made worse by the fact that no one had had an opportunity to prepare for it. She comments that the victims all had “the expressionless face of imbecility.” They were not afraid of the atomic bomb; they “had no time to think about being afraid.” Anyone who had read Freud’s theories concerning repetition-compulsion knows precisely what she is talking about.

By contrast, Hara Tamiki’s *Summer Flowers* (1945-49) is beautifully crafted, a crystalline horror as opposed to Ota’s jumbled nightmare. Perhaps the difference is be-

cause Hara was a better writer, a reclusive poet rather than a writer of pulp fiction. As a long time sufferer from recurring mental illness, he had already learned to control the inner turmoil through his writing. And, as an opponent of the war though silent, he did not have *that* to deal with. Thus, perhaps, the reverse order of his story with the bomb first and events leading up to it second. It is as if Ota had to block out the past, dealing with the causes in an abstracted call for democracy, but Hara, with no prior commitment to the war, could call upon his previous thoughts. In keeping with his reclusive life, he focused on the personal, his own family and the irritable quarrelling they engaged in as they waited for something ill-defined but terrible, packing their belongings for an evacuation which came too late. Because his story comes first in the collection, it is a revelation, particularly for those who have read John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1946). Hersey based his account on interviews with victims and, as such, his book might be mistaken for the Japanese speaking for themselves. It is not. Though the victims speak, they are filtered through an American sensibility and thus are not Japanese per se, but Japanese as we assume them to be. Hersey reports that the victims died in silence, conforming to our view of Asians as patient and stoic. Hara reports no such thing. These people were not the pathetic victims of Hersey’s book for they scream, cry, go mad, quarrel, and stink as their injuries infect and ooze.

This, then, is the value of this collection. For too long, Americans have been listening to American versions of what happened as if the tragedy lay in how bad it made us feel, how ashamed as if their pain were merely the occasion for our own. As the artist Iri Maruki, comments: “The atomic bomb isn’t a matter of buildings. Unless you paint people, it’s not the atomic bomb. . . . we had to paint *people*.” Richard Minear, with his fine translation and excellent introductions to the works of these five witnesses, has given us what was always missing, in a word, the people.

**Jacqueline R. Smetak**  
**Iowa State University**

---

Lifton, Robert & Erik Markusen. *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat*. New York: Basic Books, 1990. 346 pp. \$22.95.

Robert Jay Lifton, the principal author of *The Genocidal Mentality*, is one of the great humanists of our age. He has made a career out of looking deeply into the world of dutiful killers—Nazi doctors, Vietnam warriors and nuclearists—with an eye which is as compassionate as it is critical. In this book he pulls together many ideas from his earlier work about socialized killing to develop a comprehensive psycho-Weberian critique of American nuclear institutions. He pleads for a humanist utopia where feeling, moral responsibility and action are reconnected in what he calls “species consciousness.”

Lifton and co-author Eric Markusen see fear and vulnerability as the root of genocidal violence. They argue

that Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima and the first Soviet nuclear test made Americans feel vulnerable to destruction for the first time in their history. Just as the Germans in the 1930s dealt with their unprecedented vulnerability by developing a Nazi cult of strength, so post-war Americans have dealt with their new insecurity by developing a “nuclearist” cult of strength—“an exaggerated dependency on nuclear weapons for strength, protection, and safety . . . [and] as a solution to death anxiety and the threat of extinction” (p. 70). The genocidal and suicidal risks inherent in this nuclear cult of strength have produced mass psychological numbing and, perversely, an attitude the authors call “nuclear normality”: a delusional and resigned sense that there is no alternative to nuclear weapons and that deterrence is a safe game to play.

Forty years of nuclear deterrence have produced a “nuclear behemoth”—the massive machinery of weapons labs, defense contractors, missile silos and think tanks which has metastasized in the interior of American society. Like the Nazi genocidal bureaucracy, the nuclear behemoth cultivates a “system of nonresponsibility” where decisions emerge from the inertial logic of the system as a whole and everyone assumes someone else has things under control. Meanwhile euphemistic language and mind-numbing regimes of game theory make the contingency plans for genocide both mundane and unreal. This is a Weberian nightmare world the procedural rationality of which is so absorbing that its deeper absurdity is unseen.

Thee best passages in the book use anecdotes and strikingly frank confessions from interviews with weapons designers and nuclear strategists to give us a window into the inward conflicts of nuclearists. These men are attracted by the excitement and professional camaraderie of the weapons world, but they are pained by revelatory glimpses of the nuclear bureaucracy’s inadequacies and dangers.

Lifton and Markusen are particularly interested in those who stay within the weapons community, as consultants at least, but criticize individual weapons and doctrines they see as especially dangerous. The authors call these men “decent nuclearists” and “socialized critics.” They appear to be critics, but they really legitimate nuclearism by arguing from within, rather than against, its presumptions that deterrence can be morally and strategically viable.

The authors obviously have a point here, but their inability to really address the logic (as well as the illogic) of the “decent nuclearist” position reveals the limitations of their own perspective. In brushing aside any opposition which does not oppose the entire nuclear system, they fail to acknowledge that such “decent nuclearists” as Herbert York and Richard Garwin, even if they do ambiguously legitimate the system, are loathed by many in the nuclear establishment. And, because the authors themselves see nuclear weapons as unambiguously evil,

they ignore the distinction between stabilizing and destabilizing weapons which lies at the heart of the “decent nuclearists’” moral thinking. We cannot understand the “decent nuclearists’” sense of their own decency unless we at least look into their anguished arguments that some nuclear weapons and doctrines are worse than others and that, given the hostile character of international relations, nuclear weapons can protect us against the danger in the world as well as making the world a dangerous place. The authors never quite grasp this.

Yet the connection between dissociation and weapons work is more opaque than the authors suggest. Their argument that Robert MacNamara and Henry Kissinger became more psychologically whole as they moved away from war-fighting doctrines rests on assumptions unstained by any plausible evidence. Also there are people with dissociative ways of being anti-nuclear, and there are weapons professionals who are deeply, painfully aware of the paradoxes of deterrence discourse. For many the threats to fight wars are bluffs to make deterrence more credible: the issue is conscious political dissimulation, not unconscious psychological dissociation. In truth the nuclearist world is more psychologically heterogeneous than Lifton and Markusen allow, and they confuse this issue by casting political judgments in terms of mental hygiene.

The final problem is with the analogy between Nazis and nuclearists which runs through the book. Lifton and Markusen are careful to point out there are crucial differences as well as similarities between Nazis and nuclearists, but the differences soon start to seem more salient. Once the authors have got through conceding that nuclearism is suicidal where Nazism was genocidal, that the Jews were harmless whereas there is a Soviet nuclear threat, and that nuclearists believe they are saving lives whilst Nazis knew they were killing people, then you begin to find the Nazi comparison an annoying distraction from the beautiful core of this book. This is its sensitive analysis of individuals trapped in massive dehumanizing bureaucracy, struggling to know their duty in an insane and dangerous world.

**Hugh Gusterson**  
**Center for Psychological Studies**  
**in the Nuclear Age (Harvard) &**  
**Center for International Studies (MIT)**

---

### New ISSNTC Directory

The 1990 ISSNTC membership directory is enclosed with this issue. To make it more useful, it includes listings for all the members who were paid up at any time during 1989 or 1990, although some members have since allowed their subscriptions to lapse. In space following several entries will be found information about books published, work in progress, etc., which considerably supplements the information printed on page 8 of this issue.

## New Scholarship

- Farrell, James. "Nuclear Friezes: Art and the Bomb from Hiroshima to Three Mile Island." *Art and Culture* 20 (1989).
- Herbert, Gary B. "The Hegelian 'Bad Infinite' in Walter M. Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*." *Extrapolation* 31 (1990): 160-169.
- Hicks, James E. "A Selective Annotated Bibliography of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*." *Extrapolation* 31 (1990): 216-228.
- Jaskoski, Helen. "Thinking Woman's Children and the Bomb." *Extrapolations in Ethnic Studies*, vol 13, no. 2 (July 1990). Considers nuclear issues raised by two Native American writers: Martin Cruz Smith in *Stallion Gate* and Leslie Marmon Silko in *Ceremony*. It will be reprinted in Nancy Anisfield's forthcoming collection.
- Wood, Diane S. "Breaking the Code: Vonda N. McIntyre's *Dreamsnake*." *Extrapolation* 31 (1990): 63-72.
- Zaki, Hoda M. "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler." *Science-Fiction Studies* 17(1990): 239-251. Discusses the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, including *Dawn*.
- 

## Forthcoming Scholarship

- Anisfield, Nancy, ed. *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature*. Popular Press, Bowling Green State University.
- Gery, John. "The Sigh of Our Present: Nuclear Annihilation and Contemporary Poetry," in *World, Self, Poem: Essays on Contemporary Poetry from the "Jubilation of Poets"*, ed. Leonard Trawick (Kent State Univ. Pr.).
- Scheick, William J. "Romantic Tradition in Recent Post-Nuclear Holocaust Fiction." In Allan Chavkin, ed. *Romanticism and the Twentieth-Century Novel*. Revised and expanded from version printed as "Continuative and Ethical Predictions: The Post-Nuclear Holocaust Novel of the 1980s," *North Dakota Review*, 56 (Spring 1988), 61-82 and in Vito Perrone, ed. *Visions of Peace*. Grand Forks: North Dakota Quarterly Press, 1988, pp. 61-82.
- 

## Work in Progress

- Broderick, Mick. *The Apocalyptic Muse*. (A study of nuclear war in film.)
- Caputi, Jane. *Gossips, Gorgons, and Crones: Female Power and the Nuclear Age*.
- Osteen, Mark. "Fission & Schizophrenia in Martin Amis's 'Insight at Flame Lake.'"
- Stone, Albert. *Literary Aftershocks: American Writing and the Bomb*.
- 

## New Fiction

- Armstrong, Michael. *Agviq*. New York: Popular Library, 1990. Expanded from "Going After Arviq." In Janet Morris, ed. *Afterwar*. New York: Baen, 1985. A female anthropology graduate student strives to teach Eskimos their own traditional ways so that they can survive during the nuclear winter. It is revealed that the U.S. launched a first strike.
- Barrett, Neal. *Dawn's Uncertain Light*. New York: Signet, 1989. Sequel to *Through Darkest America*. Brutal adventures in postholocaust America, principal emphasis is on systematic cannibalism in the wake of the death of most animals.
- Beecher, William. *Mayday Man*. New York: Brassey's, 1990. A Middle Eastern nuclear thriller involving Khaddafi, Israel, and the Soviet Union.
- Brust, Steven. *Cowboy Feng's Space Bar and Grille*. New York: Ace, 1990. A fanciful adventure story in which a group of folk musicians travel through time and space to battle a conspiratorial group bent on exterminating most of the human race through nuclear war in order to protect themselves from a common AIDS-like disease. Although the conspirators are defeated, Earth is destroyed, and humanity survives only on other planets. Fairly thoughtful and well-written for its type.
- Crowder, Herbert. *Ambush at Osirak*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1988. New York: Jove, 1989. A complex thriller in which a CIA-backed conspiracy succeeds in destroying both Iraqi and Israeli nuclear plants and in forcing the Iraqis to launch and use small Soviet tactical nuclear missiles, resulting in little physical damage but disastrous publicity for the U.S.S.R.
- Figgis, N. P. *The Fourth Mode*. London: Penguin, 1989. Moving portrait of a number of characters in a small English village located near a missile site, as nuclear war approaches. The novel contains a fair amount of discussion of the failure of people to come to grips with the dangers posed by nuclear weapons.
- Hagberg, David. *Countdown*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990. Yet another *perestroika*-era nuclear espionage thriller involving an evil KGB head and the Israeli nuclear weapons stockpile. Halam, Ann (pseud. of Gwyneth Jones). *The Daymaker*. New York: Orchard, 1987. Post-holocaust culture is maintained by magic. Young girl with exceptional powers seeks to restore the ancient technology embodied in the "Daymaker" (nuclear power plant?), but learns the wisdom of letting the ancient world stay dead.
- King, Stephen. *The Stand*. New York: Doubleday, 1978. Expanded edition, 1990. In this tale about a postapocalyptic battle against the Devil and his minions in a world largely depopulated by the accidental release of a deadly biological warfare virus, the locus of evil is wiped out by a nuclear bomb.
- Lee, Tanith. "Crying in the Rain," in *Other Edens*, ed. Christopher Evans & Robert Holdstock. London:

Unwin, 1987. Effective portrait of life in a high-tech very polluted environment in which rain is greatly feared, perhaps because of radiation, though this is not entirely clear.

Montgomery, R. A. *Trio: Rebels in the New World*. New York: Bantam, 1990. Series published with the following subtitles: *Book 1: Traitors from Within*, *Book 2: Crossing Enemy Lines*, *Book 3: Almost Lost*, *Book 4: The Hidden Evil*, *Book 5: Escape from China*. A combat/adventure series for young adults set after a Soviet-Chinese war and worldwide economic collapse which resulted in the disintegration of the U.S. Only the vaguest of hints suggest that nuclear weapons were used in the war; and America is specifically stated to have eliminated its nuclear arsenal earlier. Book 4 deals largely with the struggle for possession of a half-dozen nuclear bombs.

Moran, Daniel Keys. *The Armageddon Blues*. New York: Bantam, 1988. A young woman travels back in time from the 28th century to forestall a nuclear Armageddon which led to a prolonged nuclear winter and a five hundred year dark age.

Oda, Makoto. *The Bomb*. Trans. D. H. Whittaker. New York: Kodansha International, 1990. A black comedy depicting the construction and use of the first atomic bombs, favorably reviewed in the August 12, 1990 issue of *The New York Times Book Review*.

O'Keefe, Claudia. *Black Snow Days*. New York: Ace, 1990. A young man genetically engineered to survive in a postholocaust environment struggles with despair, resentment against his creator/mother, the resentment of his caretakers and a cult advocating universal suicide. Rather thoughtfully and sensitively developed, despite its fantastic premise. The title refers to the effects of nuclear winter.

Pohl, Frederik. "Fermi and Frost," *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, January, 1985. Also in *The Annual World's Best SF*, ed. Donald Wolheim. New York: DAW, 1985. A somewhat preachy overview of nuclear apocalypse (including nuclear winter) in which one of the principal effects to be lamented is the postponement of humanity's search for alien life in the cosmos. In a postscript, our descendents are able to encounter visiting aliens and benefit from their knowledge to save "all the science and beauty of life."

Rodgers, Alan. *Fire*. New York: Bantam, 1990. An apocalyptic thriller involving a demonic plot to destroy the world through nuclear war and a virus engineered to make resurrection possible. Compare with Stephen King: *The Stand*.

Skobolev, Eduard. *Catastrophe*. Tr. Sergei Sossinsky. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989. (Russian original published 1983.) Pre-Chernobyl novel set after a mysterious nuclear explosion.

Williams, Walter Jon. *Voice of the Whirlwind*. New York: Tor, 1987. A science-fiction thriller about an interplanetary war which involves a nuclear war on a distant planet.

## Nuclear War Fiction in Congress

Dr. Randy Rydell edits a newsletter for Senator John Glenn's Committee on Governmental Affairs, entitled *Proliferation Watch*, concerning the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It is distributed widely to government officials and other interested parties. The second issue, dated August, 1990, contains an article by Senator Glenn entitled "Nuclear Guns of August?" about the dangers posed by proliferation in the Middle East. At the end of this issue Rydell has compiled a twenty-seven item checklist entitled "Apocalypse in the Middle East—Fictional Proliferation." Aside from novels and stories already listed in *Nuclear Holocausts*, it contains several new thrillers, some of which are listed in this issue's "New Fiction" column.

Rydell can be reached by writing him at 340 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510, or by phoning (202) 224-4751. **PB**

## Films

Several years ago, I was approached by a group of Hollywood screenwriters who had been commissioned by Paul Newman to develop a screenplay dealing seriously with the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. Thus I was especially interested in what Newman's new film about the Manhattan Project would look like. None of my suggestions was accepted.

*Fat Man and Little Boy* turns out to be a low-key, unfocussed portrait of the relationship between Robert Oppenheimer and General Groves (played by Newman). The same material was covered much better in *The Day After Trinity*.

In commemoration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, NBC broadcast *Hiroshima: Out of the Ashes*. Despite the title's upbeat reference to the legend of the Phoenix, this was television's most realistic look yet at the suffering caused by the Hiroshima bombing. Yet despite good intentions and fairly good research, it remained a sort of Japanese *The Day After*, psychologically oversimplified and artless.

It was especially disappointing in contrast with Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain*, which entered general distribution in the U.S. this past spring. Some reviewers actually preferred it to Ibuse Masuji's classic novel, on which it was based. Each version of the story has its own integrity. The film adds new characters and entire plot lines and is uncompromising in its depiction of wounds and damage.

A drama entitled "Hiroshima Maiden," which was originally broadcast on the Public Television program "Wonder Works" is available from Public Media Video, 5547 N. Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60640-1199. Phone: (800) 262-8600. Aimed at young viewers, it dramatizes the story of one of the girls disfigured by the Hiroshima bombing.

In the making: a film about Chernobyl called *Final Warning*, starring Jon Voigt. **PB**

## Comics

Adventure Comics has begun publication of three new titles based on post-nuclear war novels and films: *Planet of the Apes*, *City of the Apes*, and *Logan's Run*. The *Apes* comics are based on the films and television shows, the *Logan's Run* comics on the books.

Frederik Pohl's 1985 anti-nuclear war story "Fermi and Frost" is turned into a comic book story by Brent Anderson in the first issue of *Orbit: The Best of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (The story first appeared in the January 1985 issue of *Asimov's*).

*The Terminator* continues to appear in various comic book formats, and is now a television series.

## New Computer Game

Reviewed in the May 1990 *Computer Shopper*, p. 383: *Nuclear War*, a new computer game from New World Computing Inc., P. O. Box 2068, Van Nuys, CA 91404. (818) 785-0519. \$49.95, for the Amiga, versions for other computers also planned. Reviewer Bob Lindstrom calls the game "daring, provocative and satirical," and says it will provide fun "for those with an open mind and a sense of black humor." Among the adversaries you can choose: "Infidel Castro" and "Colonel Malomar Kadaffy."

## Order Form

Please send me the following:

- Issue no. 1 of *Nuclear Texts & Contexts* (\$1.00)
- Issue no. 2 of *Nuclear Texts & Contexts* (\$1.00)
- Issue no. 3 of *Nuclear Texts & Contexts* (\$1.00)
- Issue no. 4 of *Nuclear Texts & Contexts* (\$1.00)
- James R. Bennett & Karen Clark: *Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Bomb: A Bibliography of Literature and the Arts* (\$2.00)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send check made out to ISSNTC to:  
William J. Scheick, Treasurer ISSNTC,  
Department of English, Parlin Hall 108,  
University of Texas  
Austin, TX 78712-1164

## ISSNTC President Resigns

With regret I announce my resignation, to be effective at the end of December 1990, as President of the International Society for the Study of Nuclear Texts and Contexts due to the demand on my time from other necessary professional and personal responsibilities. It was an encouraging and rewarding experience to work in 1988 with the eighteen founding members of ISSNTC, bound by our common interest in creating a communication network for scholars concerned about the survival of the human race due to the threat of nuclear destruction.

I extend particular thanks to the four members of the Executive Board—Paul Brians, editor of our vital organ *Nuclear Texts & Contexts* (NT&C); William J. Scheick, treasurer; and the two at large members, H. Bruce Franklin and Daniel L. Zins—for their helpful suggestions and quick responses throughout the years in which we were forming ISSNTC and planning our first and second general meetings; and express deep appreciation for the time and expertise devoted by Paul Brians as editor of NT&C and by Bill Scheick as treasurer. ISSNTC is fortunate to have the leadership and vision of this board to nominate its next president and guide its further development, including eventually the achievement of allied organization status in MLA.

The number of new members in ISSNTC from all parts of the world in the last three years underscores the enlarging possibilities of international communication and the need for the information NT&C provides. So far there have been 114 members of ISSNTC, with 31 states and the District of Columbia in the U.S. and 9 foreign countries represented. I look forward to receiving future issues of NT&C and have forwarded to Bill Scheick my membership dues for three years to insure that I don't miss an issue! Hope to see you all at a general meeting at MLA in 1991.

**Jean Kittrell**

*Nuclear Texts & Contexts* is the official newsletter of the  
International Society  
for the Study of Nuclear Texts & Contexts

Editor  
Paul Brians  
Professor  
Department of English  
Washington State University  
Pullman, WA 99164-5020

*Nuclear Texts & Contexts* is published using the computer facilities of the Humanities Research Center, Washington State University.

First Printing  
©1990 Paul Brians