

DARKO SUVIN

Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Pp. xviii + 317. Paper \$8.95.

Over the past few years, science fiction has attracted to itself a number of apologists, critics, and historians, but there has not been a substantial work that attempted to provide a philosophical basis of this literary genre. Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is such an attempt, and this work gives a foundation to a range of fiction that is at once varied in subject matter and uneven in quality.

Professor Suvin has contributed extensively to the corpus of criticism of science fiction both in his native Yugoslavian and in English; his interests range from Russian speculative fiction to American Utopias; he has, moreover, an unusual command of the disparate threads that make up the historic tapestry of speculative and science fiction. The author is thus well qualified to approach the ambitious and perhaps dangerous task that this book attempts. Whether the book becomes the definitive word on the subject will depend largely not upon Suvin's insights, but upon his own style. Robert Scholes has written that "This is the most serious, learned, and energetic work yet written on the history of science fiction"; the reader will decide for himself how much illumination is possible in the umbrageous forest of terms that Suvin has appropriated to his "poetics."

In his Preface, the author offers the following definition of science fiction: "Basically, SF is a developed oxymoron, a realistic unreality . . . the space of a potent estrangement, validated by the paths and prestige of the basic cognitive norms of our times" (p. viii). The text is divided into two parts: poetics and history. Part One presents Suvin's definitions and includes chapters entitled "Estrangement and Cognition," "SF and the Genological Jungle," "Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia," and "SF and the Novum." The author here provides a new and enlightening insight into the relationship between utopian and science fiction, concluding that "For all its adventure, romance, popularization, and wondrousness, SF can

finally be written only between the utopian and anti-utopian horizons" (p. 62). "SF and the Novum" is a *tour de force* of academic criticism; so much so that one wonders whether at times Suvin may not be indulging himself in ludic pasquinade.

Three-quarters of this book is devoted to introductions to various unconnected points in the history of science fiction. Here Suvin brings together his experience and penetrating observation to give the book its most admirable qualities. Taking as his topics those that have been dealt with extensively by others, Suvin's erudition yet manages to comment freshly upon "The Alternate Island," Mary Shelley, and H. G. Wells. One chapter, "Russian SF and its Utopian Tradition," provides material not within the scope of most Western critics. The connections drawn between the literary traditions and the political events during the past hundred years are provocative.

A final word must be said of Professor Suvin's bibliography: it excellently reinforces the material and the various questions debated in the text. It also indicates, if the rest of the book did not, the broad critical foundations upon which this work is based.

William Prouty

JOHN M. ELLIS

Narration in the German Novelle: Theory and Interpretation
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. 219.

This book originally appeared in 1974; the preface is dated October 1971; all items in the Bibliography—with one exception—are dated 1970 or earlier.

The first and longest chapter "is concerned with the general theory of this undertaking" (p. vii); the following eight chapters are each devoted to the interpretation of an individual *Novelle*. The author discusses: Kleist's *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*, E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Rat Krespel*, Grillparzer's *Der arme*