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have time, will travel!

BY LIN CARTER

A COUPLE of years ago I had the amusingly humiliating task of up-dating a science fiction story of mine. It involved a spaceship yclept the 'Mayflower II', and I had to go through the manuscript laboriously, page by page, and change every 'II' to a 'III'. This sort of thing happens to most SF writers at one time or another; I imagine quite a few of them have been up-dating their work recently, in these post-Sputnik, post-Explorer days. It's one of the occupational hazards you risk when writing SF laid in the near future.

There is one field of science fiction, though, that very seldom involves this kind of revision, and the stories in this school have little if any chance of ever really going out of date. 25 years from now, or 100, or even 500, time-travel fictions will still be readable and current when most, if not all, of our first-spaceship-to-the-Moon (or to Mars, or Alpha Centauri) stories will be only amusing antiques. Even when history catches up

to the space-pioneering literature, it will still be possible to grind out time-travel tales. As a fictional theme, time-travel can't become dated by technological advance because it is basically unscientific (or even anti-scientific) to begin with, and belongs more to the province of the fairy-tale, than to true science fiction. And fairy-tales, of course, never go out of date at all—because they are not grounded in the everyday world.

So, the harassed hack laboring in his air-conditioned garret need have no fear that the time-travel epic over which he has been sweating, and for which his agent has been clamoring so loudly, will become technologically obsolete tomorrow afternoon, when some third-rate Dr. Huer announces successful tests on his Ultra-Tempoliner Duo-Micronic Chrono-Transportotron. According to all we have learned, *circa* this year of grace 1959, regarding the nature and function of time and the natural laws governing it, time-travel is about as impossible

as Alladin's Lamp or Siegfried's *Tarnkappe*. If someone invents a working time machine tomorrow, or in my lifetime at all, I will be about as completely flummoxed as L. Sprague de Camp would be if Lost Atlantis emerged from the briny deeps next Wednesday, complete with pseudo-Greek temples, *vril*-powered airships, and a race of sage, white-bearded, toga-clad Elders, claiming responsibility for Stonehenge, Angkor Vat and the Sphinx, and asking to be taken to the current leader of the Rosicrucian Society. To come up with a real, functional time-travel gadget, you will first have to come up with a few brand new natural laws—and also do some pretty complete house-cleaning in theoretical and practical physics.

But, of course, the validity of time-travel as a scientific theorem has never interfered with anybody's interest in using it as a fictional device, nor dampened the ardor of the SF-reading public, God bless 'em, in buying time-travel stories. The tales continue to entertain and delight despite their very large content of sheer flapdoodle, just as fairy-tales can still divert and amuse, even in this atomic age when even Junior knows there are no pixies in the bottom of the garden. "TT" is a basic staple by now, a standard subject, a sure-fire gimmick with a preconditioned captive audience prepared to salivate (imaginatively speaking) at the first throbbing of a single tempo-tron.

But have you ever wondered just who started it all?

It was not, as almost everybody would be willing to swear, H. G. Wells. Believe it or not, the first story to use a time-machine was not *The Time Machine*. No, the laurels belong to...well, who else but Lewis Carroll?

Let us define terms for a moment. There have been and will be many

different methods and manners of navigating the timestream. One of the oldest ways is to have your hero fall into a magical sleep and do sack time for a couple of centuries before waking up to marvel at how much the old world has changed. This type of non-mechanical time-travel is very ancient. Washington Irving used it, in 1819, for his *Rip Van Winkle*; so did Charles Perrault (1628-1703) for his *Sleeping Beauty of the Wood*; and so did the old Celtic romancers, who used a variation of this theme in their tales of the Land of Youth, the Irish fairyland—as, for instance, in the story of Ossian who rode into Tirnan-Og, spent a few days there, fighting ogres, rescuing maidens, and what-not, then returned to Ireland to visit his father, the hero Finn, and discovered that while he had spent three days in the Land of the Young, three hundred years had passed in the mortal world.

But this is not real time-travel, of course, this is time-travel via a spell or curse, involving use of magic, not mechanism. The very first true time-travel story in literature is to be found in Chapter 21 of Lewis Carroll's neglected masterpiece, *Sylvie and Bruno*. Remember the Professor's square gold watch with the six or eight hands?

"This," he began, "is an Outlandish Watch...which has the peculiar property that, instead of *its* going with the *time*...the *time* goes with *it*." The Professor goes on to explain that when he moves the hands, time moves accordingly. "To move them *forwards*, in *advance* of the true time is impossible: but I can move them as much as a month *backwards*," he says, and proceeds to turn time back a quarter of an hour as proof.

And that, I submit, is the first time-travel story ever written.

But, of course, time-travel as a school of science-fiction really begins, to all extents and purposes, with

Herbert George Wells. A struggling young journalist at the time he wrote the story, Wells was living a hand-to-mouth existence of lodgings at Sevenoaks in Kent. There came a sterile time, when all the magazines that were likely to publish his articles and tales were heavily over-stocked with them. He had previously touched lightly on the idea of time-travel, in a brief piece published in Henley's *National Observer* in 1893. Now he got the idea of making a small novel out of the idea, more to find a new market than for any other reasons.

As he recalled many years later, in a preface to the Random House deluxe edition of *The Time Machine*, published in 1931: "writing it late one summer night by an open window, while a disagreeable landlady grumbled in the darkness outside because of the excessive use of her lamp, expanding to a dreaming world on her unwillingness to go to bed while that lamp was still alight."

The Time Machine: An Invention was published in 1895. Wells took his time-traveller forwards to 800,000 A.D. and then some thirty million years ahead of that. At the end of the tale, he leaves off with the impression given that his hero traveled back into the remote, prehistoric past and met with an accident—or, at any rate, failed to return to the present.

So, although foreshadowed to a large extent in the pages of Lewis Carroll, time-travel really began, as a province of science fiction, with H. G. Wells—and it very nearly ended there, as well. For with that one story, Wells practically exhausted the possibilities of time-travel; he used exactly one-half of the possible variations open to use in this species of science fiction.

For there are only some four things you can do with time-travel. Wells took his hero forwards into the future to see Utopia (and then, all the way up to see the dying earth of the very

far future), next, presumably, backwards into the equally remote past to look at the dinosaurs. So doing, he did two of the four things you can do in time-travel fiction, which may explain why he never used the gimmick in his stories again. For years and years, after Wells' pioneering, writers took their heroes back into the past to see the dinosaurs (or ancient Rome or Atlantis) and forwards into the future to admire the big buildings. They made small changes, true. Sometimes the future was a Wellsian Utopia, but more often it was a religious state, or a technocracy, or a world of ruins after the Great War of Wars, or a slave-empire dominated by yellow fiends from Asia, or tentacled fiends from Mars, or great-brain fiends from Alpha-Q. None of these were anything like major changes, however, they were merely alterations in the decorations. Wells had laid the foundations of the structure.

And there were all sorts of methods of time-travelling, too. Sometimes you had your hero sleep in suspended animation, as in W. H. Hudson's *The Crystal Age*; or you had him die off in the present and be resurrected by Future science, as Van Vogt did in *The Monster*; or he fell into a 'time-flaw' or 'continuum-warp' or some such flim-flammery, as in *Lest Darkness Fall*. On the other hand, he could time-travel by means of the off-stage actions of some god or demon or super-race (see any file of old science fiction magazines), or by employing some non-mechanical *psi* power (see any file of *current* science fiction magazines). But, however you got him there, and in whichever direction you took him, Mr. Wells had been there before you.

Then, in 1938, along came the third major theme in time-travel, this time the handiwork of Old Master Jack Williamson, who is one of those writers who only seem to hang around in science fiction in order to come up

with a pacemaker every five years or so, and then spend the next half-dozen years resting on their guns while the smaller talents work and re-work and re-re-work their last idea to shreds, whereupon they turn up out of Limbo with a nice shiny new one. This one was called *The Legion of Time*, and it was a real doozy. Williamson, by some private alchemy of his own, concocted the notion that the future is variable, that any number of alternate tomorrows are just waiting to come true, providing enough 'probability potential', or something, swings the weight of time their way. This novel (it was serialized in *As-tounding*, and Fantasy Press brought it out, years later, between hard covers) started the time-paradox school, although minor and isolated, uncrystallized examples can be found earlier. Williamson's hero is constantly being influenced by emissaries of both of the two major alternate 'futures' who co-exist with equal possibility until the decision-point has been passed, and then, all of a sudden one of them never existed at all. This was a honey of an idea and the other writers jumped all over it, and in no time (pardon the pun!) were sending their characters back into the past to shoot their grandfathers or Julius Caesar, and so on—and on.

It's a fascinating field for fictional conjecture, and they haven't tired of plowing it yet. Fritz Leiber, Jr., in his recent serial, *The Big Time* (*Galaxy*, 1958), had two obscure, opposed races called the Snakes and the Spiders fighting a time-war using humans plucked from a wide variety of eras who zoomed around the time-stream assassinating Cleopatra, kidnapping the infant Einstein, etc., changing history in the future.

In 1939, a year after the Williamson novel, along came the fourth and final milestone in TT: a story by one Murray Leinster, also an old pro, called *Sidewise in Time*, which just

about completed the time-travel repertoire. If you don't want to take your characters forward into the future to see the big buildings, or back into the past to look at Atlantis or the dinosaurs, or poison Lucrezia Borgia and alter the 25th Century, you can always—says Leinster—take him sideways into one of the parallel worlds of what-might-have-been-had-Napoleon-flunked - highschool-or-Columbus-gotten-seasick. The main gimmick of this sub-school is, if Attila the Hun, for instance, had not been turned back at the gates of Rome by Pope Leo the Great in 452 A.D., the world of here-and-now would be very different; and that somewhere in space-time there is an alternate 'today' in whose past history Attila went on to conquer Rome and everything else, which made 1959 a slave-world ruled by his descendents. And somewhere else is another 'present' in which Alexander didn't go swimming that night in Babylon and didn't come down with a runny nose, and thus lived another decade or two and conquered China after all—in fact, an infinite number of variant 'todays' in which any conceivable alternate 'present' is really happening. Leinster's story was so brilliantly original a conception that it not only gave time-travel fiction a shot in the arm, but gave him the honor of writing the first ASF "thought-variant" yarn. The pros were, as always, quick to jump on this bandwagon, too. And the following year when, in *Unknown*, L. Sprague de Camp came up with a fine variation on the Leinster idea, in a story called *The Wheels of If*, which later became the title-piece of his 1948 Shasta collection, the sub-school was confirmed. *Wheels* attracted a lot of favorable comment, and science fiction writers have been going around in the same old groove ever since.

And then, out of a clear blue sky, Robert A. Heinlein came up with an-

other variation on the Theme so clever and original as to almost create another, fifth, class of time-travel fiction. He polished off a little gem called *By His Bootstraps* (*Astounding*, Oct. 1941), that is actually more of a *tour de force* than another milestone. You recall it, the story with five or six characters, all of whom turn out to be the same person—at different times. Instead of taking his hero into the past to ogle pleistosaurs, or into the future to rubberneck at strato-scrappers, or to alter the present by giving Savonarola a hot-foot, or even sideways to take a look at King Washington XIV of Imperial America, he took him *around in a circle to see himself*.

Now, when I first read this one I was convinced it was so much of a *tour de force* that nobody—not nobody, not nohow, not nowhere—could ever use this plot twist again, and so it couldn't begin a new division of TT. But, lo and behold, about eighteen years later Heinlein did the same story all over again in *All You Zombies* (*F&SF*, March, 1959). The twist on the original twist was, in this case, a girl is seduced and made pregnant by *herself* (who changed sex at a later date and came back in time as a man), and later gave birth to herself, or himself, or them, or something like that. Which only serves to complicate an originally pretty complicated plot, and I am presently convinced that not nobody, not nowhere, not nohow can give this gimmick *another* twist—but I'm willing to grant Heinlein eighteen more years to come up with one!

THERE HAVE been no significant contributions to the school since then, although of course many fine time-travel stories have appeared and continue to appear. In 1939, *Argosy* published Arthur Leo Zagat's *Seven Out of Time*, a novel later reprinted by Fantasy Press in 1949: its plot concerned the removal from ordinary

time of seven persons from different ages, and an Otherworld beyond time. A. E. Van Vogt's 'Weapon Shops' series in *Astounding* and elsewhere involved a wide variety of time-travel gimmickery, including a sort of pendulum, swinging from past to future and gaining a sort of static electric charge with every swing, which, when finally released, created so vast an explosion in the very remote past that it turned out to have created the universe. In 1955, the two most important recent additions to the literature both appeared: Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity*, which concerned itself with an organization of Eternals who range through time monitoring and correcting the cause-and-effect sequences in history. In Ike's story, the centuries are numbered and the Eternals go zipping up and down the timetrack like riding past different floors in a fast elevator. The second novel that came out that year was a honey of a yarn by English author Charles Eric Maine, *Timeliner*, in which a scientist goes zooming into the future, reincarnated from body to body like a fussy Buddhist. This time-travel-by-reincarnation was rather new. Prominent among TT fictions as yet unpreserved in book-form is H. Beam Piper's 'Paratime Police' series, from *Astounding* in the early '50's, which attracted much favorable attention.

And early in 1959, John Brunner's Ace novel, *The 100th Millenium* appeared. It gave a colorful, vigorous and fresh picture of a vastly advanced culture to whose degenerate citizens an interesting form of mental time-travel has become an addiction. By a species of telepathy they search back through preceding ages until they find an era whose over-all moral, physical and cultural flavor appeals to them. They then spend the remainder of their lives living in a sort of dream, wearing the antique styles of their favorite eras and acting out,

through telepathic communion with inhabitants of that earlier age, a typical lifetime. Later in the book when earth was threatened by a cataclysm, a mental search through past ages was needed to dig up forgotten or neglected skills and lost scientific knowledge with which to combat the menace.

But none of these stories, and, in fact, no story since *Sidewise in Time* has contributed a fresh, unused basic concept to the literature. This lack of any bright, new plot-twist, however, has not deterred the time-travel writers from their appointed rounds. Far from it. Although by now all of the four plots have been used, re-hashed, and used again, nobody gets tired of time-travel fiction. And there is al-

ways the delectable possibility that one of these days, somebody—anybody!—may come up with another, fifth, way of using time-travel.

Well...whether they do or not, writers of TT need have no fear of their fictions becoming obsolete. Ages from now most probably, when we are flitting from galaxy to galaxy as easily as crossing the street, there will still be time-travel stories written and published in whatever medium the SF magazines will have evolved into by then, long after most other of the standard SF gimmicks have passed from the realm of imagination into the domain of historic fact.

And I bet there will still be people around like you and I, to read them.