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BOOKS IN REVIEW

Cogging-ative Estrangement. Rachel A. Bowser and Brian Croxall, eds. *Like Clockwork: Steampunk Pasts, Presents, and Futures*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2016. xlvi + 228 pp. $87.50 hc, $25.00 pbk.

In the dim and distant 1990s, when everyone seemed to be writing about cyberpunk, I wanted to examine the *other* 1980s: steampunk and Tim Powers, K.W. Jeter, and James Blaylock. Not everything they wrote was steampunk —but then much of the contents of *Mirrorshades* was not cyberpunk. The label seemed more an attempt to divide the two than a serious taxonomy; neither grouping was especially punk, a word that seemed to differ in meaning on each side of the Atlantic. Of course, there had already been Michael Moorcock's *A NOMAD OF THE TIME STREAMS* trilogy (1971-1981) and his *DANCERS AT THE END OF TIMES* series (main trilogy, 1972-1976), there were various sequels to Wells (of which Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine* [1976] was the best), a number of quasi-Victorian episodes of *Doctor Who*, and various loose adaptations of Edgar Rice Burroughs from Amicus Films. My research never came to fruition, even as through the 1990s and 2000s steampunk continued far beyond those original authors and mutated in a varity of ways. Victorian London, in particular, was repeatedly rewritten in science-fictional terms. The retrofitting aesthetic that both cyberpunk and postmodernism shared bore new fruit in imagining clockwork technologies—analog resurrected to perform digital jobs. Computer pioneers Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace inspired in the electronic age.

In 2010 Rachel A. Bowser and Brian Croxall co-edited a steampunk issue of *Neo-Victorian Studies* (3.1), in the introduction to which they suggested that the subgenre's punk sensibility is "a politics of taking back *control*" (Bowser and Croxall 21; emphasis in original), a sentiment that feels rather less enticing in the age of Trump and BREXIT. The two editors now offer a nine-chapter collection with a substantial introduction. They divide their book into three sections of three chapters each: "Steampunk Spaces and Things"; "Steampunk Bodies and Identities"; and "Steampunk Reading and Revising."

One question they attempt to answer in their introduction is why steampunk has emerged now. One suggestion is that 9/11 is the key—the trauma of the terrorist attack has inspired a series of Freudian Fort-Da games, as we return to what might appear to be more comfortable times but were also times of crisis: "steampunk functions as a model for trauma. It encapsulates the temporal oddities and juxtapositions spurred by an event that happens too soon" (xxxviii). The two Charleses, Lyell and Darwin, had decentered humanity within the universe, stretching the notion of history by millions of years. Steampunk allows an engagement with this new vision of the world with more basic technologies than we have now. The nineteenth century experienced vertiginous technological development to a degree that I am never quite convinced the Internet has yet trumped—the telegraph, the train, and the still and movie camera rewrote time and space.

I am a little skeptical about the impact of 9/11—I have read too many articles where it is the go-to answer. Without wishing to minimize the horror, I fear it is one among many moments of rupture. Compare Fredric Jameson on the postmodern, ambivalent, nostalgic returns to a past before ruptures in *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Something Wild* (1986), and *Time Out of Joint* (1959) ("Nostalgia for the Present" [*South Atlantic Quarterly* 88.2 (1989)], 517–37). I might be more convinced by Bowser and Croxall's invocation of steampunk as fun, and surely one thing we need in the aftermath of 9/11 is fun. It may simply be that there has been a slow dissolution of genre boundaries in the eras of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and superhero movies, an explosion of textual poaching with a mainstreaming of fan culture and a collapse of the highbrow. It is perhaps easier to be inspired by the past than by new technology. All I can say is that when I was a young sf reader there was teasing that I might begin dressing up as a character (I never did) and now there is disappointment that I do not. It has become cool. Indeed, much of it is. Even if traditional sf fans have seen it before. (Get off our lawn!)

In his interesting account of "Seminal Steampunk," Michael Perschon looks back to the works of Moorcock and Jeter, finding them rather different and being rightly skeptical about their punk natures. Contemporary steampunk has diverged from this, and Perschon insists that "we are the ones who determine what it will become and who will determine what steampunk is today, regardless of what it was thirty years ago" (175). Perschon suspects that readers expect *Morlock Night* (1979) to be radical "because of Jeter's early cyberpunk novel, *Dr. Adder* (1984), ignoring the obvious temporal distance between the two" (161). Does Perschon know that *Dr. Adder* actually dates from 1972 and does that have an impact on his argument? But Perschon's chapter is never less than thought-provoking and I would have started with it rather than leave it to the final third of the book.

Perschon is not the only contributor to discuss Jeter—Joseph Weakland and Shaun Duke do as well in "Out of Control: Disrupting Technological Mastery," which reads Jeter's work against Michael Moorcock's *The Warlord of the Air* (1971), the first novel of his NOMADS trilogy. The rest of the trilogy is passed over, and other Moorcock novels are relegated to the endnotes. (It should be acknowledged that this volume has scores of endnotes for each chapter that eat into the word counts and limit the scope for substantive readings of texts. I recall being advised that if something is important, it should be in your argument; if it does not fit your argument, kill your darling. Or perhaps this is evidence of the coolness of steampunk.) China Miéville gets a few mentions throughout the book, not only for the BAS LAG novels, but also for *Un Lun Dun* (2007) and *Railsea* (2012), as does Cherie Priest. These feel too much like an opening critical salvo rather than the last word.

Alongside the late discussion of the battle for definition and control, for me the most interesting chapters are in the section on steampunk, the body, and performance. The clockwork arm of the steampunk fan is an obvious updating of the cyberpunk prosthesis, and the fancy dress of the Victorian dandy is a recurrent fashion (cf. the teddy boy and, indeed, various Time Lords).

Steampunk as cosplay is discussed but I am intrigued to hear more, and perhaps a stronger sense of ethnography needs to be unpacked rather than returning to a textual reading of how-to-be-steampunk magazines. In "Punking the Other: On the Performance of Racial and National Identities in Steampunk," Diana M. Pho introduces readers to various performers, filmmakers, and masqueraders who pick at the colonial and imperialist roots of the British Empire that underpins steampunk. There are layers of irony and of ironic irony here that would keep a critical Lyell occupied for decades. I want to know more.

In the end this book is a sampler for the critical work that many of us should be doing rather than churning out another article on cyberpunk. Steampunk's diversions into complex ethnic identities and non-print forms, as well as its embrace by readers far beyond the traditional sf market, suggest that a new narrative needs to be told about it, and this book is only one start. It might no longer be our lawn to defend.—**Andrew M. Butler, Canterbury Christ Church University College**