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Out There in Children's Science Fiction: Forward into the Past

Not surprisingly, SF intended for young readers is not much different from SF intended for adults. Such books represent a wide variety of SF themes and situations; they form a distinguishable sub-genre only because their main characters are almost always youngsters themselves, and because, in comparison with other SF, they tend to describe less complicated situations in a simpler way.¹

Nevertheless, a disproportionately large number of SF novels for young readers explore a pattern found much less frequently in adult SF: they begin in enclosed cities and describe how their protagonists move out into a larger world outside. In John Christopher's *Wild Jack* (1974), for instance, a boy from such a city learns that self-sufficient tribes survive happily in the wilderness beyond its limits.² Similarly, Adrien Stoutenberg's *Out There* (1971) describes how youngsters from a domed city confront danger and learn to live with themselves during an expedition into the wilds "out there." Indeed, the idea of going "out there" is so attractive that the American publishers of a 1975 novel for youngsters by Elizabeth Mace, published in Britain as *Ransome Revisited*, renamed it with the same title Stoutenberg chose; and although the flavor of this more complex *Out There* is not adequately evoked by the title, the book does describe how youngsters confront the world outside their original homes.

All these novels deal significantly with ideas of constriction and freedom by representing them with closed environments and the open spaces outside them. In the light of adult SF that follows this pattern, that's not particularly surprising; while there are, of course, exceptions, many adult SF novels and stories about closed cities represent similar ideas with similar images. Gary Wolfe says that "like the hulls of the spaceships in stories of outer space exploration, the walls of the cities become images of barriers that must be broken" (p. 93), and Brian Stableford has suggested that the theme of such novels "is almost always *escape* from the claustrophobic comfort which kills initiative to the wilderness which offers evolutionary opportunity through the struggle to survive" (p. 120). The best known works of this sort intended for adult readers are E.M. Forster's classic novella *The Machine Stops* (1909) and Arthur C. Clarke's novel *The City and the Stars* (1956): both describe a young man's claustrophobia in a theoretically perfect city and the delight he feels in the less urbanized world he discovers outside it.³

In fact, the potential to discuss such themes may explain why oppositions between cities and open spaces are so popular in SF intended for youngsters. A potent cliché of adolescence is the idea that young people wish to escape the

protectiveness of parents and other adults—a protectiveness they find claustrophobic; and in SF for young readers, breaking out of an enclosed city can easily stand as a metaphor for growing up and leaving the protected world of childhood. In the books for young readers I mentioned before, there are explicit parallels between the maturing of their young main characters and their emergence from closed cities.

But while that may account for the popularity of closed cities in SF intended for young readers, it doesn't explain why four particular SF novels for young readers that describe enclosed cities are so very similar to each other. Andre Norton's *Outside* (1976), H.M. Hoover's *This Time of Darkness* (1980), Suzanne Martel's *The City Under Ground* (1982, a translation of *Quatre Montréalais en l'an 3000* [1964]), and Ann Schlee's *The Vandal* (1983) are not only much like each other; anyone familiar with children's fiction will quickly recognize that they are also significantly similar, in structure, in theme, and even in imagery, to numerous other novels intended for young readers—not just the SF novels I mentioned above, but other novels also, novels as different as Frank L. Baum's classic fantasy *The Wizard of Oz* and Robert Louis Stevenson's classic adventure *Treasure Island*—and that the qualities they share with each other are expectable characteristics of children's fiction. These books belong to two different genres at the same time—not just SF, but also children's fiction.⁴

The continuity between these four SF novels and other fiction intended for young readers is intriguingly confirmed by the existence of a fifth novel that is surprisingly like these four—but that is not SF. Mary Q. Steele's *Journey Outside* (1972) also describes how a youngster breaks out of an enclosed and highly restrictive society and finds a larger world outside. Here, however, the enclosed society is not a technologically advanced city; it is that of a group of primitive tribesmen who live on a series of rafts that float endlessly on a river in an underground cavern, a river that turns out to be circular. This novel offers none of those logical explanations for the oddity of the situation it describes that we expect of SF.

That a writer should produce a non-SF novel for young readers which closely mirrors the plot, the central themes, and the images of four SF novels is interesting. That five different writers from three different countries should so closely duplicate each other's idea of an SF novel for youngsters is even more interesting—especially when the most striking similarity among the five is that each provides yet another version of the journey out from an enclosed space which occurs so disproportionately in SF intended for young readers, and even more especially when such journeys are a common feature of many stories for children and novels for adolescents. For these reasons, an exploration of these five novels should throw light on some of the problems that inevitably arise in SF that is also intended as literature for youngsters.

The citizens of the cities in all four of the SF novels wear uniform clothing (in two cases uniformly white), live in rooms off a corridor that looks like a vast number of other corridors, and are regulated by computer terminals. In two cases, the cities are underground, like the one in *The Machine Stops*; and in *Journey Outside*, the river that is home for Dilar's people flows underground. Much is made of this separation from the world outside; the people

who live in these enclosed places are convinced that the world outside is dangerous, and we are told that various cities were first sealed against pollution or radiation. Inside, all these people have the comfort of security—a world that is limited but safe, and safe because it is limited. It sounds much like childhood.

The limitations are social as well as physical. In *The City Under Ground*, we hear of “the conformity which the first founders believed necessary for life in a closed space” (5:38); and early in *The Vandal*, Paul speaks of “the beautiful regularity, the changelessness of his home” (2:9). At one point or another, the young protagonists of these books all respond positively to that changelessness; they all use the word “safe” to describe their homes.

But most of these places show signs of decay—as does Forster’s city, which collapses at the end of *The Machine Stops*. In *Outside*, the systems are failing and no more children are being born; in *This Time of Darkness*, the underground city has blocked ventilators and clogged drains; in *The Vandal*, the population seems to be decreasing, so that fewer school positions will be needed (9:85); and in *Journey Outside*, the number of rafts gradually diminishes as Dilar’s people continue their endless round. This decay clearly stands for the debility of age, as opposed to the energy of the young protagonists.

But these books go further than that; they treat the enclosed societies they describe as metaphors for closed minds. In suggesting that the city is dying “from not knowing enough” (17:119), *This Time of Darkness* only says openly what the other books imply. Their young protagonists share a quality summed up by Clarke’s Alvin in *The City and the Stars*: “Diaspar might be sufficient for the rest of humanity, but it was not enough for him” (3:18). These books seem to be attacks on conservatism, on blind acceptance of what one’s forebears have wrought. Not surprisingly, their self-reliant protagonists get what they want; they go outside, and they respond to the vast world they find there with delight, for it represents a canvas large enough for their own vast curiosity.

So far, these books sound like straightforward allegories of maturity; their protagonists achieve the freedom of the world outside only when they no longer require the security of home; going out is growing up. In praising the act of going out, these books seem to express a faith in human ability to confront immensity and conquer it, a faith expressed frequently in adult SF—at least in traditional mainstream SF. Outside Diaspar, for instance, Clarke’s Alvin finds at least one city as wonderfully advanced as his own, and evidence of a vast history of human accomplishment and defeat throughout the galaxy; and although he is humbled by it, he is also excited and challenged. *The City and the Stars* clearly exemplifies the escape from initiative-killing comfort that Stableford believes to be characteristic of such novels; as Gary Wolfe suggests, Clarke proclaims “the values inherent in seeking the unknown, or put more simply, the values of scientific progress” (p. 114).

Wolfe similarly claims that Kuno’s move out of his city in *The Machine Stops* is “an analog of eventual human migration into space” (p. 103); and Kuno does indeed aspire to more than his city can offer. But he does not move

towards a more glorious future of the sort Alvin finds beyond his city. Instead, he turns backwards, towards the past: the world outside is most significant for having a direct connection with the way things once were: "We have come back to our own. We die, but we have recaptured life, life as it was in Wessex, when Aelfrid overthrew the Danes" (3:182). *The Machine Stops* stands counter to a forward thrust expressed by *The City and the Stars* and by much traditional SF, which often implies a basic faith in the possibilities of change—what Stableford calls "evolutionary opportunity" and Wolfe calls "scientific progress."

It's at the paradoxical heart of the novels for young readers I'm discussing here that they share the anti-technological and even anti-evolutionary bias Forster expresses in *The Machine Stops*. The worlds that these rebellious, forward-seeking youngsters find outside their enclosed cities are like the one Kuno finds—visions of the pre-technological past, places that are less wildernesses with the potentiality for development than they are pastoral paradises that would be spoiled by development. In these books, "out there" symbolizes everything that the technological perfection of the city is not.

Since the world inside is artificial, a creation of men, the cities of these novels are most clearly condemned for their avoidance of the natural. In *Outside*, trees will not grow in the city, and in *The Vandal*, the trees in the city are in cages: "Animals, birds, plants are incompatible with any sort of standard of living worthy of the estates. There was always the fear of contamination" (5:41). The world outside these sterile cities is not merely less technological, but devoid of technology, in every case characterized by greenness and sparkling water and skies full of clouds and stars; and in every case, this world unspoiled by human innovation stands as an ideal, clearly opposite to the stagnating world inside. In *Journey Outside*, Dilar thinks of how his ancestors fled the danger of the world outside to find a better place, and asks himself, "How could anyone want a better place than this...?" (3:28). In *This Time of Darkness*, nature itself reclaims its territory from the devastation of technological advancement: "The land remained, slowly covering its degradation with new plant life" (16:114). *The City Under Ground* is particularly insistent that the natural world outside represents a return, backwards into a past that once was—back to paradise, back to where man was once happy. "Nature has renewed herself in the ruins made by man, and now the whole land belongs to us, more beautiful for having been so long hidden to us.... Here are the sun and the moon and the forests and rivers of prehistory. They are even more beautiful to us than to our ancestors, who did not know how to appreciate them" (17:152). The rediscovery of this world of "prehistory" is no less than a return to Eden: "Like Adam in his earthly paradise, Luke discovered the magnificent world that God had created" (6:49). In all these books, the world God created is directly at odds with the world human beings have made, and the move to "God's world" is a movement from the technological utopia of the future into the natural paradise of the past.

And the past returns quite literally. The move outside for all these youngsters is a re-entry into time, into the knowledge that things were once different and could be different again. Interestingly, however, these books never

suggest what Clarke does in *The City and the Stars*—that a re-entry into time, and a resultant consciousness of history, can lead to the awakening of new and grander possibilities for the future. After these youngsters choose a future different from the eternal present of their static cities and move out, it is not the potentiality of the future which delights them; they are more intrigued by the possibility of restoring the past—regaining what their ancestors lost.

In its endlessly repeating patterns, the technological world inside has lost touch with its own past, even with the passage of time itself; ironically, technological evolution has led to a changelessness that denies the conditions of its own development. In *Journey Outside*, the raft people have forgotten their past—particularly how they came to be where they are—and so are doomed to an eternal present; in *Outside*, history is considered to be “just stories, Kristie, made up stories” (2:40); and in *This Time of Darkness*, “Since history was removed from the learning centers, everyone’s forgotten the old stuff...It’s all past now and forgotten. Nobody lives that way anymore. Everything’s the same now” (11:76). In *The Vandal*, the culture of the estates is founded firmly on denial of the past; everyone’s memory is erased, because “the past is dangerous, terrible, it must be kept out” (8:76) and without it, “nothing is more perfect than this instant. Only the future can exceed it, because the future is an intellectual thing, and therefore truly perfect” (3:14).

Outside, of course, there is the natural world, in which things do change and in which history is therefore possible. So is selfhood. *The Vandal* is particularly insistent that loss of the past equates with loss of individuality, for without individual memories, and therefore without individual characters, the people of the estates are all “kind, quiet, law-abiding citizens” (8:76). Once outside and equipped with knowledge of the past, the young protagonists of these books all develop a new sense of the possibilities of self; in each case, the self-reliance that allowed these youngsters to escape their homes finds its real home outside. So it is all the more surprising that, once home, these self-reliant people express no interest in doing anything with the outside but keeping it just the way it is. It’s this curious descent into complacency that distinguishes them from so many similar characters in adult SF—characters like Clarke’s Alvin and like Chimal in Harry Harrison’s *Captive Universe* (1969), who feel constricted not just by their original homes, but also by the societies they first find beyond the walls of their homes.⁵

The people who live outside in two of these books for young readers have developed a power unknown to those inside: telepathy. And in both *Outside* and *The City Under Ground*, telepathic powers represent the possibilities of the free human spirit as opposed to the supposedly constricting powers of logic, reason, and scientific development. In *The City Under Ground*, those who live underground have reason but not faith (“It’s very difficult to imagine a creator when everything around you has been made by man” [15:140]) but those who have lived outside, surrounded by what God made and therefore conscious of immensities beyond puny human reason, have developed telepathic powers. Andre Norton similarly opposes “psi” powers and reason in *Outside*, in which Kristie can escape her city only by teleportation, and can teleport only by believing in the impossible: “we must not think that anything is true only because we see it in one way. We must be able to guess that things

can happen which are very strange and different from everything we have known before.... Since Kristie had just wanted to know what was Outside, her dreams could all come true" (6:96, 98).

A similar opposition between technology as representative of constriction and telepathy as representative of individuality occurs in *The City and the Stars*. Alvin's Diaspar is a city of conformists who act upon reason; but beyond its walls he finds Lys, a country of telepathists, and "the civilization of Lys was composed of hundreds of distinct cultures, each contributing some special talent toward the whole" (11:82). For Clarke, however, Lys is as limited as Diaspar; one may have ignored the potentiality of the individual imagination, but the other has ignored the potentiality of scientific thought. Both are closed cities, both need to open themselves to larger possibilities; Clarke's vast vision demands the inclusion of all aspects of human potential, every possible "evolutionary opportunity."

But these novels for young readers are not so convinced of the value of evolutionary opportunity. In making their cities represent the possibilities of technology, and in making them restrictive and stagnant, their authors express a clear prejudice against scientific knowledge; and this is also true of *Journey Outside*, in which a reasoned and logical response to the harsh environment has led people down into the darkness. And all these novels insist that the virtue of outside is its "naturalness"—its resistance to shaping by human beings. In fact, these novels all express the same curious contradiction apparent in *The Machine Stops*: they all admire their protagonist's curiosity and lust for knowledge, they all claim that enclosed places become stagnant by closing themselves off from wider knowledge... and they all dismiss the products of human knowledge as artificial and limiting. While attacking close-mindedness, in other words, they are all surprisingly close-minded about technology.

How odd that close-mindedness is in the context of novels that are SF is particularly apparent in the relationships these books demand between the places they describe, the people who live in those places, and the people who read about those places. Young readers are likely to be attracted to these books because they offer what SF often offers, particularly to inexperienced readers: exotic places and strange possibilities, the wonders of the imagination and the vastness of human potentiality. And these books allow readers to understand the wonders they describe by using a favorite technique of SF writers: their main characters are people enough like ourselves to act as our guides to these exotic places. We see the wonders through eyes similar to our own. But in these books, the ways in which those people much like ourselves *are* much like ourselves require them to confront and deny those aspects of the wonderful place that make it wonderful. Not only do they themselves not find the wonderful places they live in to be wonderful; the main characters in these novels are typical youngsters with typically rebellious attitudes towards their elders, so that they know for sure that the world created by those who came before them is stultifying. Paradoxically, therefore, the qualities these young characters are supposed to share with the youngsters who read about them—impatience with what is and a lust for what might be—are used to deny the value of the same aspects of these books that might have attracted young

readers with such qualities in the first place.

That might be said also of *The City and the Stars*—but only if the book ended after Alvin left Diaspar and came to Lys. It doesn't, of course, and the universe Alvin finds beyond Lys is yet more exotic and more wonderful—a feast for the appetite for wonder, not a rebuke for it. But these books for young readers do not just insist that a place of wonder, a place created by the fecund imagination of an SF writer, is stultifying; they also end by praising a place we might well find more familiar than that wonderful one. What these young characters discover to be a proper medium for their lust for what might be, their boundless imaginations, is the world outside their exotically imaginative homes—it is our own world, our world as it was before technology but still more recognizable to us than those exotic enclosed places. What's familiar to us is strange to them, and vice-versa, so that it is only after Dilar gets outside that he thinks, "Oh, who would help him in this alien place, this country of fantasy?" (3:31). And we are asked to share, not just the distaste of these characters for their own wonderful place, but also their wonder in things that we take for granted: the stars, the clouds, the green trees, even the mundane objects of ordinary life. In *Journey Outside*, Dilar "could not resist staring at all these new and wonderful things: eggs, hens, pots made of iron, cloth woven of sheep's wool, pear trees, butterflies, grass and weeds... who could have imagined there were such things to eat? Tomatoes and berries, beans and squash, melons and potatoes..." (4:38, 40). And in *This Time of Darkness*, Amy is awed by a room in which "there were pictures on the wall," where "flowering plants grew by a window," and where she is offered sandwiches and ginger ale (23:155, 160).

In moving from a possible world that might exist in our future into one that we can easily recognize, a world of history, these young characters all move forward into the past. As a result, the apparent message of these books—that curiosity and self-reliance are good qualities—is significantly diluted. Youngsters who already live in a place more like the ones these young characters find than the ones they leave—that is, most readers of these books—clearly have no need to strive to find such places; and meanwhile, of course, the love of the strange and the exotic that might have led young readers to these books in the first place has been attacked in the attack on the inadequacy of those strangely exotic places. Although the young characters in these books have enough curiosity to triumph over constriction, their move from what readers might be curious about to what they already know implies a conservative message of contentment with one's lot. Like *The Machine Stops*, these novels are SF that attacks the basis of what draws many readers to SF in the first place.

Furthermore, closer investigation of what happens in these books reveals a surprising attack on self-reliance underlying the apparent praise for that quality; they all end recommending something curiously like the repressiveness of self that they started out attacking. Granted, all the main characters first become uncomfortable with their societies because they feel repressed by them. But Paul escapes the memoryless city of *The Vandals* not, as we might have expected, through the strength of his own personal memories, but through the pull of an equally impersonal archetypal memory; he

finds himself "running along a path that existed a hundred years ago, before the new enlightenment. . . . In spring, boys and grown men even, ran along the boundary line striking at things, striking at one another with sticks. The whole ceremony was tied up in primitive superstitions" (13:124). Although Paul finally escapes into unknown territory where he can be himself, he can do so only by being wrapped up in the last sheath during a harvest, a ritual left over from ancient times; he is reborn into himself and his own memories by having access to generalized and impersonal memories—rituals and archetypes. Similarly, Kristie gets out of the city of *Outside* by enacting a ritual involving the speaking of old nursery rhymes by a man dressed in traditional motley, so that she loses her sense of self: "Now she neither knew nor cared where she might be going—just following the Rhyming Man was enough" (4:74). Although the protagonists of the other books get outside through self-reliance, the world they find once out is itself a self-subsuming place—a place where one must repress human aspiration lest it lead yet once more to the same destruction and enclosure; in *The City Under Ground*, the world outside implies submission to its creator. The central paradox of these books is that their characters' curiosity and self-reliance leads them into knowledge of why curiosity and self-reliance are dangerous.

The world outside which offers them that understanding is our world, but not as it is now; it is our world as history records it to once have been, or even as we imagine it to have once been, before human ingenuity began to meddle with it. The characters move forward, not just into the past of their own societies, but into *our* past also. It's possible to interpret the enclosed cities these books depict as exaggerated versions of our own, so that rejection of them suggests that the past is not just better than an imagined technological nightmare of the future, but also better than what we have now. Their message, then, transcends mere acceptance of what is; it becomes the conviction that things have gone downhill ever since people stopped accepting what is and began developing technology, so that now we have to go backwards, and deny what already is, to restore a proper attitude of acceptance.

But in both celebrating and showing the dangers of self-reliance, and in both offering wonders and postulating the necessary acceptance of things as they are (or were), these novels are only doing what most novels for young readers do: they are merely proclaiming their adherence to the basic patterns and values of much of the fiction produced for young readers. That fiction typically offers the same paradoxical combination of adventure and conservatism, of wish-fulfillment and cleaving to reality.

There are good reasons for that. Because we write for young people to offer them pleasure but also feel the need to educate them, fiction for young readers almost always offers both what adults think youngsters enjoy and what we think they need to know. We think youngsters enjoy reading about characters who have what we think youngsters themselves wish they had, and so most novels for young readers are fantasies, descriptions of utopian worlds; even those that describe a recognizably realistic world make it safer and more understandable than most of us know the real one to be. But we also believe it our duty to tell young people that they cannot have what they wish for, and to give them knowledge of the world as we ourselves understand it to

be lest they be hurt by their ignorance of it. For the most humane of reasons, we want to change them from what they are already—or what they might become if left on their own—into people like ourselves, people who understand and accept limitations that we ourselves understand and accept.

As a result, fiction for young readers is often about a youngster who gets what he or she wants and then discovers it wasn't worth having; and many versions of this story tell of a journey away from home that is not only exciting in itself, but also results in a knowledge of the virtues of what was left behind. Countless children's picture-book stories tell how fuzzy animals or little buses leave home, have adventures that excite them but that nevertheless teach them the inadequacy of the adventurous life, and happily return home again; Dorothy spends her time in splendid Oz both enjoying the splendor and trying to get home to dreary Kansas, and the island in *Treasure Island* is both what Jim Hawkins first dreams of and what he learns to despise.

These books all end with statements of acceptance. The little buses and such inevitably conclude that "home is best"—the same conviction Baum provides Dorothy with. And the mature Jim Hawkins who tells the story of his own exploits as a boy is the ultimate staid, moralistic prig—the direct opposite of his younger self, whose lack of good sense he speaks of with much disdain. But for both Dorothy and young readers, Oz is splendid, and for both young Jim and young readers the island is exciting. Most children's fiction expresses conservative attitudes; interesting children's fiction often balances consciousness of social responsibility with praise of self-reliance, understanding of what must be with delight in what might be.

The SF novels I've been discussing are a version of the same balance. Instead of leaving home, going somewhere exotic, and then returning home again, the characters in these novels happily leave an exotic but deficient place which *is* their home for an ordinary place which they find exotic and delightful but which is more like *our* home. If the message of these books is finally more conservative than their original praise for their protagonists' defiance of societal values might imply, they are merely expressing an ambivalence common in fiction for young readers.

This ambivalence means that fiction for young readers in general, and SF for youngsters as a particularly curious example, tends not just to celebrate, but also to discount those qualities we identify as youthful: creativity, imagination, curiosity, self-trust, denial of tradition, hope for the future. I suspect that these are the qualities that SF first emerged from; they are certainly the qualities that a lot of adult SF still celebrates, often without much qualification. Paradoxically, then, these SF novels for young readers stand apart from much adult SF simply because, like many other books for young readers, they distrust the wisdom of youth.

In his discussion of children's SF in *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, Peter Nicholls claims (p. 114) that most "hard" SF for young readers ("hard" meaning not containing elements of pure fantasy) is less distinguished than either SF for adults or other sorts of fantasy for children. The books I've discussed here are competent works of fiction—SF for young readers that is significantly distinct from the formula fiction we think of as typical of SF for youngsters. But even these competent books support Nicholls' claim—they

are merely competent. I suspect that the shortage of good SF for young readers may be accounted for by generic differences between SF and fiction intended for young readers—one of those differences being the characteristic ambivalence of fiction for young readers about acceptance of things as they are, and the liberating potentiality of SF that tends above all to question things as they are. Even the most terrifyingly negative adult SF tends to suggest, not that change is inherently bad, but that some kinds of change are less desirable than others; the mere fact that SF connects its imaginary futures with our own real present implies a positive interest in possibility and change in those that read it. But when SF intended for young readers expresses the ambivalence typical of children's fiction, and makes claims for acceptance that balance its appeal to the desire for change, it inevitably dilutes the power of its own evocations of possibility. Books that can successfully fulfill (or, perhaps, successfully ignore) two such different and even contradictory sets of generic demands cannot be easy to write.

NOTES

1. There is, of course, a lot of SF for adults which describes simple situations in an uncomplicated way; and there is SF for adults in which the main characters are children or teenagers. It's the presence of both qualities at the same time that suggests a particular work might have been intended for young readers.

2. Indeed, John Christopher's SF novels for young readers often ring changes on the idea of the claustrophobic closed city and the freer wilderness outside. In a trilogy beginning with *The White Mountains* (1967), humans live a superficially pleasant rural life as slaves to a race of aliens who live behind the walls of "the City of Gold and Lead." And in *The Guardians* (1970), the young protagonist finds another apparent bucolic paradise outside the walls of his overcrowded city; but this rural paradise turns out to be intellectually claustrophobic, and the novel supports its hero's decision to return to the city and attempt to liberate it from an enslavement its residents are not conscious of. These novels by Christopher represent many novels for young readers, not discussed here, which are either SF or else contain elements of SF, and which offer interesting variations on the basic idea of the enclosed space and the world outside it; a few such books are William Sleator's *House of Stairs* (1974), Monica Hughes's *Keeper of the Isis Light* (1980) and *The Tomorrow City* (1978), Robert Heinlein's *Citizen of the Galaxy* (1957), and Laurence Yep's *Sweetwater* (1973).

3. Similar themes are explored also in the body of SF that describes life on "generation starships"—stories like Robert Heinlein's "Universe" and Brian Aldiss's variation on it, *Non-Stop* (1958). An interesting version of this pattern is Harry Harrison's *Captive Universe* (1969), in which a curious young man who believes himself to be an Aztec living on Earth moves beyond the restrictive society of his tribe to discover that he is really a passenger on such a ship.

4. "Children's fiction" is a difficult phrase that can mean many different things: the fiction written for children; the fiction read by children; or merely a recognizable type of fiction, a genre with its own characteristics. I use the phrase here to mean the latter, for as I suggest later in this essay, I believe that children's fiction does tend to have distinguishing characteristics that allow it to be defined as a genre. I've explored these matters in "Defining Children's Literature," *Children's Literature*, 8 (1980): 184-90, "The Limits of Structure: A Shorter Version of a Comparison between Tony Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Virginia Hamilton's *M.C. Higgins the Great*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 7, no. 3 (1982):45-48, and "The

Apparent Sameness of Children's Novels," forthcoming in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*. One odd characteristic of the genre of children's fiction is that, like the SF novels for young readers discussed here, it usually tells a story of its main character's maturing; even picture-book stories for and about quite young children describe a movement from rebellion to understanding that seems less like common ideas about childhood than like what we usually identify as adolescence.

5. It's clearly no accident that the worlds outside found by characters like Alvin and Chimal have obvious failings and need to be changed, whereas the worlds outside in books for young readers seem to be without flaws.

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RÉSUMÉ

Perry Nodelman. *Là-bas, la science fiction pour enfants: en avant dans le passé.*—Un nombre étonnant de romans de science fiction pour jeunes lecteurs se situe dans des villes fermés. Les personnages juvéniles de ces livres s'échappent presque toujours du cadre stérile et artificiel qu'ils habitent pour découvrir un monde extérieur à la fois plus près de la nature et ressemblant à notre univers. Les auteurs de ces romans livrent des réflexions intéressantes concernant l'enfance, l'adolescence et la maturité en permettant à leurs jeunes personnages, qui vivent dans un endroit étrangement exotique, de découvrir et d'admirer un lieu qui ne leur est pas familier mais qui, par contre, est connu du lecteur. De plus ces attitudes peuvent nous éclairer sur la nature particulière des livres qui appartiennent à deux genres bien différents, la science fiction et la fiction pour jeunes.

Abstract—A surprising number of SF novels for young readers are set in enclosed cities: the young protagonists of these books almost always escape the sterile, artificial environment that is their home, and discover a world outside it that is both closer

to nature and much like our own world. In allowing youngsters who live in a strangely exotic place to discover and admire a place which is strange and exotic to them but quite familiar to us, the writers of these books imply some interesting attitudes toward childhood, adolescence, and maturity. Furthermore, those attitudes may throw light on the peculiar nature of books which belong to two quite distinct genres, SF and fiction for young readers, at the same time. (PN)