

## Introduction

This room is full of elephants.

The elephant looming in the background of Part One of *Stay* is *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, with David Langford, editor emeritus Peter Nicholls and managing editor Graham Sleight, which has taken up most of my work time since 2006. The columns and reviews assembled here, which cover the period 2008-2014, as a whole provide skimpier coverage than hitherto, though I did get a chance to look at some highlights of the past half-decade. *Stay* is the fifth collection of this sort. *Strokes* (1988) offered reviews from between 1966 and 1986; *Look at the Evidence* (1996) covered 1987-1992; *Scores* (2003) covered 1993 to 2003; and *Canary Fever* (2009) stopped part way through 2008. The first sf review I ever did, of Philip K Dick's *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, was published in Toronto at the end of 1964, just after the release of that great novel: so *Stay* comes at the end of half a century of talk. Coral does this too.

Part Two rides on top of an elephantine mess of unwritten or botched stories, most of them way old now; the five assembled here, all previously published in anthologies, are as much of a Collected I'm ever likely to create.

The elephant in Part Three is the ghost torso of a revision of *The Darkening Garden: A Short Lexicon of Horror* from 2006; a recasting I did not undertake here; the 2006 text is reprinted without changes, though without the 33 full-page illustrations which made the original volume into a work of art in itself. Three circumstances finally persuaded me to leave the book alone.

One): The usefulness of *Darkening Garden* seems increasingly to lie in the fact that it comprises a compact and unitary take on aspects of its central argument - that Horror should be called Terror - and that tampering with the text could only muddle it (see Two below).

Two): As a writer inadequately trained in the industrial humanities, and one disinclined to mime what I cannot master (see comments below on pages 200-204), I've never had much impulse to domesticate a lifelong habit of loose divagation, a pattern of "thinking" that progresses through a literalization of passing metaphors, in much the way the writing of fiction (at least my fiction) seems to proceed. The result of all this can be a kind of

autodidact oneirism (see page 7 below), with any individual term or concept likely to evolve over time into a clade of riffs where usage A breeds with usage B and usage B breeds with usage C, but usage C cannot breed with A. Some of the "usage A" conceits in *The Darkening Garden* have speciated widely since 2006: in some of the essays assembled in *Pardon This Intrusion: Fantastika in the World Storm* (2011); in some of the later pieces assembled in *Canary Fever* (2009); in certain entries contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* or *SFE* (online from 2011); and here in *Stay*. And staying is what they should do.

Three): I only happened upon the term *fantastika* on a visit to the Czech Republic in 2007, a year after *The Darkening Garden* was published, but would have been highly tempted to retrofit it wherever possible into that text, if this could be done without damage (it could not).

The word *fantastika* comes from Continental criticism and general usage, and at its least hortatory can be used as a generalized umbrella designation for the literatures of the fantastic in the Western world. In the sense that it takes its incipit from a particular historical moment in that world, the term is perhaps best thought of as local to that world. I try to keep my own use of the term consistent with the following four conditions.

One): That *fantastika* describes those fictional works which are generically *understood* to be fantastic.

Two): That the term applies to works composed after (say) M Volney's *The Ruins* (1791), when it becomes possible to claim the planet itself as home territory; that it applies to works whose gaze at least theoretically addresses the fate of the world, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818). An *SFE* entry on **Ruins and Futurity** argues a case for Volney's text as an opening of the gate.

Three): That the default reading of a tale of *fantastika* is literal not metaphorical; that metaphors are understood in terms of the world, not vice versa. The term does not therefore describe pre-1800 tales featuring external marvels, like *Fantastic Voyages* from Lucian on, or Land of Fable fantasies like the *Arabian Nights* as translated/transmogrified by French writers in the early eighteenth century. An easy exorbitance, and an explicit geographical distancing from the "real" world, marks tales of this sort as exercises in metaphor, no matter how salutary. *Fantastika* is a grammar of the world; it is not a lesson imparted from without.

Four): That if we take the Western World between 1800 and 2014 as its initiating focus, then *fantastika* is transgressive against owners. On the other

hand, if we take the world in its entirety as focus - a task whose magnitude I fall way short of competence even to assess - then the planetary gaze of fantastika can be seen as colonizing, and its transgressiveness is provincial. But this is perhaps to blame the tool for its user.

As with previous collections of columns and reviews, I've felt free to make clarifications throughout Part One, while attempting not to import hindsight. Where a later thought has come to mind, or when a particularly dumb utterance merits an apology, anything I say [*HAS BEEN PUT IN ITALIC SMALL CAPS BETWEEN SQUARE BRACKETS AND DATED 2014*]. A prefatory note to Part Two (page 229) explains briefly what was done to the stories there (usually nothing). As I said a moment ago, *The Darkening Garden*, which occupies the whole of Part Three, has not been tampered with.

*Look at the Evidence* was dedicated to Helen Nicholls. She died this year, and I would like to renew that dedication to her memory. Judith Clute read the manuscript as always and said Yes or No and did the cover. Liz Hand, to whom *Stay* is dedicated with love abiding, told me where to get on and where to get off, as always. Roger Robinson took the manuscript and the cover and the add-ons and made them stay. Leigh Kennedy made the index as much fun to read as the book hopes to be. The title is a theory, the title is prayer. *Hwæt!*

**John Clute,**  
**Maine, 28 May 2014**