

That tension is some kind of crazy instinct. But the me that was so young felt the tension. And he had to release it. It was not long before the mover was telling my mother, "Little Oswald broke the glass." I don't know where he got the name "Oswald," but his account was substantially correct.

What went through my mind before the crime was, well, all the pieces are in place. There's the glass and there is the hammer. All I would have to do is pick up the hammer and swing it. I would like to think that is the only incident of vandalism in my past, but there is a natural instinct to bring the pieces together and to see the act done. When it becomes too easy to do somebody will give into the tension and do it.

Many years later I remember my father reading in the newspaper that a giant forest fire, one that had been doing a lot of damage, had actually been intentionally set. He said he just didn't see why anyone would on purpose start a huge destructive fire. To me it seemed obvious why the perpetrator would intentionally set the fire. If all the pieces were in place and he could do some action that would make headlines all over the state, I can see why someone would do it, particularly if all the pieces were in place. It would be sort of akin to solving a puzzle.

As I write this I am just three days after what is now the worst gun shooting in recent American history. And people are desperately looking for what can the motive possibly be. The shooter was not from the extreme right or the extreme left. He was not a radical Islamist. All the standard explanations are failing. But then when teenagers trash a house or spray-paint on somebody else's wall, we do not start looking to see if it was Radical Islam to blame. The real guilt belongs with the people making good money putting all the pieces in place so Stephen Paddock could easily set up the whole project and then see it be played out. The motive was that the pieces were all in place. The motive could have been no more than the sniper could see in his mind's eye how to set up the attack. Even a "motiveless" attack might have a motive. [-mrl]

BLADE RUNNER 2049 (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: After 35 years the classic science fiction film **BLADE RUNNER** gets a sequel directed by Denis Villeneuve and based on a screenplay by Hampton Fancher among others. The story concerns a search for the author of the false memories implanted in replicants. The film is a long 163 minutes starting at a contemplative (not to say "snail's") pace, yet is a little overstuffed with action later in the second half. It is richer in ideas than is the original film, though it lacks the iconic visuals of that first film did so well. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4) or 8/10

[Full disclosure: I am not a big fan of the original **BLADE RUNNER**. I see it as mostly an action film with a lot of unpleasant visual imagery. I think it is given credit for more intelligence than actually gets to the screen.]

When one thinks of **THE GODFATHER** one thinks of **THE GODFATHER_II** which completes the story and compliments the film. **BLADE RUNNER 2049** is not a sequel in the **GODFATHER-GODFATHER_II** sense but more in the **WESTWORLD-FUTUREWORLD** sense. Dennis Gassner as production designer really creates the look and feel of the world of the film. But he creates a different world than that of the original film. The new "Blade Runner" world uses its own color palette. While the first film had a gloriously detailed setting with a lot to please and intrigue the eye, Villeneuve saves a lot of effort by hiding minute details behind smog, smoke, or mist. This may imply that the environment has deteriorated in the years between the two stories. Some of the models that did stick out of the fog looked to be exactly what they were, models. One odd touch in a world where most animals are extinct (and why is this not killing the humans off?) the lead blade runner uses Peter and the Wolf as an alarm tone that advocates killing or confining an animal that is free.

One stylistic touch of the original **BLADE RUNNER** was its images of the neon-drenched streets of Los Angeles. There are one or two tracking shots on the street in the sequel, but much of the richness of detail is lost with much less of the street culture appearing in the new Blade runner world.

In the original film the Vangelis score helped to create an auditory image of the future world. Benjamin Wallfisch and Hans Zimmer's score is sound devoid of melody projecting a feeling only of unease and discomfort.

The film stars Ryan Gosling, reasonably fresh from his success in **LA LA LAND** playing the character whose name may or may not be Joe. In James Bond fashion he is referred to by the letter K. (Or perhaps it is a reference to Kafka?) In the latter part of the film K gets to know the Deckard of the original story. Also returning is Rachael, played by Sean Young as wooden as she was in the first film. Director Denis Villeneuve who last year navigated around the mysterious and enigmatic, directing **THE ARRIVAL** does it again directing **BLADE RUNNER 2049**. Other familiar faces include Robin Wright, Jared Leto, and, of course, Harrison Ford. Much like the first "Blade Runner" film, I can respect **BLADE RUNNER 2049** more than I like it. I rate it a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 8/10.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1856101/combined>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/blade_runner_2049

[-mrl]

THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE (film review by Dale Skran):

I missed THE GHOST IN THE SHELL when it came out, and dropped like a rock at the box office. While returning from the NSS Space Settlement Summit in California I had a chance to watch it on the airplane.

GHOST received a lot of criticism for "white washing" in that an Asian character was replaced with Scarlett Johansson. This is misguided in a number of ways:

- There is no lack of Asian actors in this film.

- There is a tradition in animated Manga, on which this movie is based, that many of the characters have a Western/Caucasian appearance, even though they may have Japanese names.

- Strictly from a hard SF analysis, she is an Asian character whose brain is put in robot body that looks like Scarlett Johansson, so the movie is internally consistent. Part of the point of the movie is that she can look like anything she wants to look like, at least potentially.

Unfortunately, I can see why GHOST did not do that well in the box office. If I were twelve, I think I would have loved it, but I'm not, so it seems thin, like a live-action cartoon. The dialog is weak and often hard to understand as various characters ape robotic voices. The term "ghost" is stuffed into the dialog several times so that an idiot can understand the title of the movie.

GHOST has a lot of disturbing images of wires going into heads, robotic eyes, and so on, so many may find it disturbing. The movie also serves to normalize cybernetic enhancements, and takes the position that the Scarlett Johansson character is the next step in human evolution, i.e., a human brain in a robot body. At one point she is told "someday we will all be like you." My guess is a lot of viewers found this more disturbing than not.

The movie looks great, but feels like a thirty-minute cartoon. I'm rating GHOST a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale, although I recommend it to Manga fans and SF fans in general. If you're looking for a really great movie on similar themes, check out EX MACHINA. Even the little known SF-horror movie MORGAN seems fresher than GHOST, again hitting many of the same themes. GHOST is rated PG-13, and due to disturbing images I'd take that recommendation seriously, but it wouldn't bother a kid who watched any significant amount of Manga. [-dls]

Benoit B. Mandelbrot (letter of comment by John Hertz):

John Hertz writes:

Am I right that mark has not yet reviewed Mandelbrot's memoir THE FRACTALIST (posth. 2012)?

I've been much taken with this jest:

Q. What does the B. stand for in Benoit B. Mandelbrot?

A. Benoit B. Mandelbrot

[-jh]

Mark responds:

I live out in the wilds of New Jersey. We are still chewing on A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME, FLATLAND, and GÖDEL, ESCHER, BACH. [-mrl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here are the notes for the second chapter of the annotation of MOBY DICK I am working on. I am not working this slowly; I am actually up to chapter 104. (The page numbers are from the British Penguin edition.)

CHAPTER 2: The Carpet-Bag

Page 26:

To say that Nantucket is "Tyre of this Carthage" to New Bedford is to mean that Nantucketers were the founders of New

Bedford (or at least the progenitors in some sense). Carthage (in present-day Tunisia) was founded three thousand years ago by Phoenician colonists from Tyre (in present-day Lebanon).

Page 28:

"The first thing I did was to stumble over an ash-box in the porch. Ha! thought I, ha, as the flying particles almost choked me, are these ashes from that destroyed city, Gomorrah?" The ash-box was there to provide ashes to spread on icy steps, paths, etc., during the winter. The dark color helped absorb sunlight (and heat) and melted the ice faster, plus the ash provided a grittier surface. In Melville's time, ash (from fireplaces, cooking fires, etc.) was plentiful and free, while salt cost money, and also did not provide a non-slip surface.

Gomorrah was destroyed along with Sodom for its wickedness: "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; ... And [Abraham] looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. [Genesis 19:24,28] It is interesting to note that in the Bible, Sodom is occasionally mentioned on its own, but Gomorrah is only mentioned in conjunction with Sodom. So Melville's choice of Gomorrah rather than Sodom here is intriguing.

Page 28:

Then Ishmael enters what he thinks may be an inn, and reports, "It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of 'The Trap!'" Tophet was a shrine to Moloch in ancient times: "And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart." [Jeremiah 7:31]. It is also another name for Hell. There was no "Black Parliament" in either, but there were several English and Scottish Parliaments given that name. Ishmael's use of the words "blackness of darkness" emphasizes how ironic it is for a black preacher to preach using those terms for the representation of evil. And Melville did not invent them; the preacher's text was Jude 1:13: "Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." With its "raging waves of the sea," how appropriate a text for a sea-faring town such as New Bedford! And is it a prefiguration in miniature of Father Mapple's sermon?

"Pea coffee" is just what it sounds like--a coffee substitute made from roasted English (green) peas.

"It stood on a sharp bleak corner, where that tempestuous wind Euroclydon kept up a worse howling than ever it did about poor Paul's tossed craft." This is a reference to the northeast wind mentioned in Acts 27:14-18: "But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; ..." And of course, to New Englanders, the nor'easter is the most feared storm.

There follows a long analogy to the parable of Lazarus and the rich man from Luke 16:20-25. (This is a different Lazarus than the one who rose from the dead.) When Ishmael refers to "old Dives, in his red silken wrapper," that is the rich man, "Dives" being a Latin appellation for wealth.

Is the painting in the Spouter Inn a well-known painting, or just a generic whaling painting?

[-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Much of what I make is geometric, and has a kind of almost mathematical logic to the form.

--Anish Kapoor

[Tweet](#)

Go to [our home page](#)