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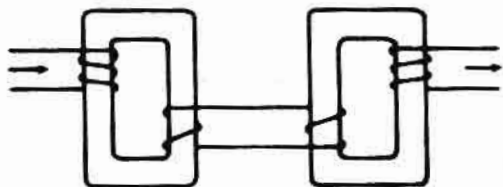
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**LSP AND
THEORY OF TRANSLATION**

Papers from a seminar



Vaasan korkeakoulu. Kielten laitos
Käännösteorian ja ammattikielten tutkijaryhmä

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ANTHRAX
SKATE
MOSHERS
RULE K.O.:
LANGUAGE
AND TONE
IN

COMIC
SCIENCE—
FICTION

RON
GALLAGHER

Ron Gallagher
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At a time when the British tabloid press, and some of the heavies are falling over themselves to report such "important" issues as the Peter Wright case, the squabbles of a defunct political party, and the perils of the royal family, you may be surprised to find a periodical with space to tackle such issues as racial prejudice, the decline of democracy and the hypocrisy of YTS schemes. The strips on the previous page are excerpted from a weekly British comic called *2000 A.D.*. It has the highest circulation amongst under sixteen's in Great Britain, and runs against the tide of the majority of British media, which have, as a whole, become predictable and subservient.

2000 A.D. also represents something genuinely new in the history of British comics in that all its strips may be considered as science-fiction. One of the most frequent complaints which I hear about science-fiction is that it is difficult to read. I hear the same complaint of comics, especially super-hero (or long-underwear as *2000 A.D.* calls them) comics. One of the chief reasons for this is that science-fiction routinely invents new words. Some of these words are nonsense, some have a limited use in the context of the story, some pass into the language. We have science-fiction to thank for the words, "robot", "television", and a host of others. Because of the need for what Darko Suvin describes as "cognitive estrangement"¹ science fiction writers' also give their characters strange sounding names like Zod, Gossey, or Droxx. This is apparently very off-putting to the innocent science fiction reader. Unfortunately *2000 A.D.* has failed to eliminate this particular quirk (especially in its sword and sorcery strips), however one tends to find characters with names like "Citizen Snork", "Melda Dreepe", "Marlon Shakespeare" and "Quququ Qug Quguu". These characters are likely to live in places called "Rowdy Yates Conapts", "Sonny Bono Block", or "Julesy Verne Plaza", and those lucky enough to have jobs travel along "Hagler Boulevard" or "Brynnar Pass". Thus the actors, pop stars and boxers of today become the street names of tomorrow. *2000 A.D.*'s commitment to topicality is typical of science-fiction.

Another reason for difficulty in comic reading is that comics are published serially and one issue is rarely enough to provide context. With Superman or Batman you may feel comfortable. But what about Green Lantern, The X-Men or The All-Star Squadron. Indeed DC comics have recently changed all their familiar characters so radically (in a vain attempt to inject "realism" into the stories) that many assumptions about these old favourites would probably be wrong.²

¹Suvin, Darko, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979.

²See *Crisis on Infinite Earths* mini-series.

In the short space which I have here I would like to indicate some of the problems found with comic science-fiction, particularly with language, and with regard to the subtleties of tone which I believe are an essential characteristic of post-war science-fiction.

When I first picked up a copy of *2000 A.D.* I was completely baffled by the tone. I literally could not figure out who were the good guys and who were the bad guys. Especially when it came to the magazine's main character Judge Dredd (of whom more later). The format of *2000 A.D.* is a mixture of fantasy, sword and sorcery, "hard", "soft" and spoof, science-fiction, in rotating series of various lengths. Characters such as Halo Jones, Strontium Dog, the Mean Team and Bradley the Sprog, wrestle with the usual assortment of robots, mutants, and high technology.



Arnoldo Gloopi is about to find out that on a recent holiday to a distant planet he became a robot. Obviously he hires a private detective to discover how such a change came about. An old science-fictional idea gets the Raymond Chandler treatment.



It is typical of science-fiction to take an existing literary form, in this case the "true romance" comic strip, and give it a science-fictional perspective. The above satire on romantic novels is achieved by a simple displacement of the older theme into the science-fictional realm. It is the story of a girl who has been raised as a robot. However she still suffers from a certain amount of sexual stereotyping, and the usual class

snobbery associated with finding a mate (note the pun on "caste").

The earlier reference to the Poll Tax presupposes a fairly comprehensive grasp of Thatcher's style given that this is supposed to be a children's comic. Another problem for children might be language.

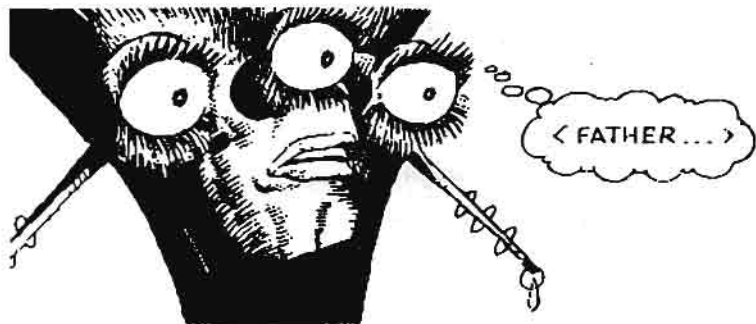


This is an example of a simple way of avoiding swear words. The most common alternatives to swear words in 2000 A.D. are "drokk", "drekk", "grud", and "crem".



Here is an example of 2000 A.D. nodding in the direction of education. It is perhaps a token gesture. However the story itself is once again a

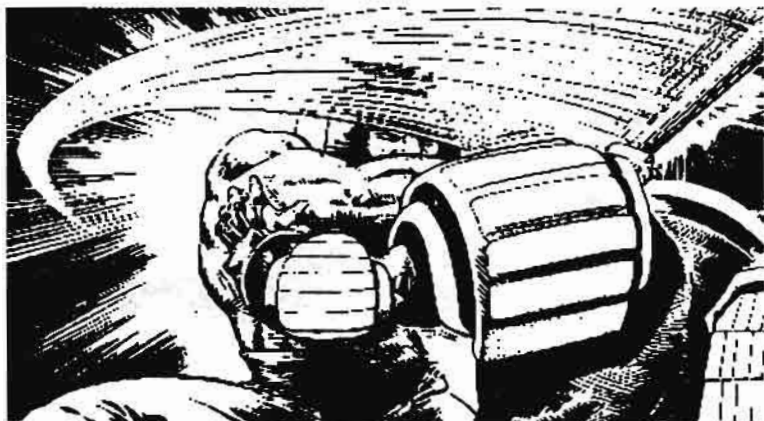
displaced treatment of the familiar theme of racial prejudice. The human being in this story is seen as an alien monster.



This short three caption sequence invites reflection on the theme of prejudice, and its use of television and associated images effects an economy difficult to achieve in prose alone. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that every issue of *2000 A.D.* will feature the media in some way orchestrating events. In one particular story in the 1988 *Judge Dredd Annual*, Dredd is seen manipulating the media for the good of the community.

In such allusions to current debate Dredd is never overtly criticised. Whether he is manipulating the media, planting an *agent provocateur* in a political group, jailing social workers, or simply shooting a perp (perpetrator of a crime) he is always seen to be right.

In Mega-City One 30% of the population commit a crime every year, it is illegal to have more than one job, and democracy has been abolished. The Judges who are policeman, judge, jury and executioner rolled into one, dispense summary justice on the streets from the end of a blaster. Dredd's idea of community policing is to throw everyone in the cubes (cells) for their own good. Opposition is always put down violently. Dredd always wins.



Thus Dredd stories are usually full of scenes such as the above. But in 2000 A.D. it is definitely the citizens vs the Judges. If you examine closely the background of the Dredd strips you may find graffiti on the walls of the blocks saying such things as, "JUDGES SUCK", "JUDGES STINK", "ZAK", and "BEWARE OF THE SPROG". It is as if the staff of 2000 A.D., art droids, scripts droids, etc. were deliberately subverting their own magazine strip. However such scribbles are not the only way for citizens to show their opposition to society.



Against this entirely regimented and totalitarian society Nobby rebels not with violence but by "simpling up". The word "simp" appears to be a 2000 A.D. invention to describe a super-nurd (how *are* you supposed to spell "nurd" then?). With such coinages we move into an area which seems crucial to the coherence of what is called youth culture, the development of a language. This "language", whether it belongs to mods, rockers, hippies, punks or yuppies, is an essential element in establishing identity. When one speaks the same language one can begin to feel one belongs. When one speaks slang one can also exclude the uninitiated. It is a common myth that language is chiefly to do with communication. On the contrary language is most frequently used in phatic and non-phatic modes. Computer people use jargon to preserve the mystery of their alchemy, Whitehouse people use Whitehousespeak to confuse casual observers (whilst communicating perfectly with each other I presume), academics use big words to humiliate their students. 2000 A.D. is conspicuously participating in such linguistic games. It is said that the measure of a good periodical is its letter page. 2000 A.D.'s letter page needs an interpreter

MOSHING ME SOFTLY . . .

Dear Space Face,

I have recently purchased two stickers at a record store. The pictures on them are of Judge Dredd and they are both inscribed with the words: "ANTHRAX - SKATE MOSHERS".

Please could you tell me what an "Anthrax Skate Mosher" is as I am so perplexed that I'm losing sleep over it,

Enthlet Scott Butcher, Stratford-upon-Avon. ES Winner.

Anthrax? Are you speaking of the band or the disease? And Skate Moshers are merely those who mash on skates. Surprised you didn't know that. What puzzles me more is that you buy stickers with messages you don't understand printed on them.

T H A R G ' L L F I X I T

Borag Thungg,

Could you fix it for me as a Squaxx dek Thargo to have a letter printed in your totally, mega-zarjaz, scrotnig, ghaffiebette Galactic comic 2000 AD. Congrats to droids Wagner & Grant, Robinson and Frame for the great new Dredd story, "Oz".

I would also like to thank you for scrotnig stories like *Zenith*, *Universal Soldier*, *Bradley* and *Freaks*. I hope you and your droids make more like this.

Earthlet Un-named, Somewhere in Great Britain. £5 Winner.

I'd love to "Fix It" for you, but as you don't include your name and address in your letter, you're out of luck. Send your name and address to the Nerve Centre so you can at least claim your prize. Earthlot!

The caginess of the editor, Tharg's, responses leads me to believe that he has no idea what his correspondents are talking about either.

Finally, if any of you scrotnig Earthlets or even Betelguesians has any idea what "ANTHRAX - SKATE MOSHERS" means I would be grateful iff you would keep it to yourself..