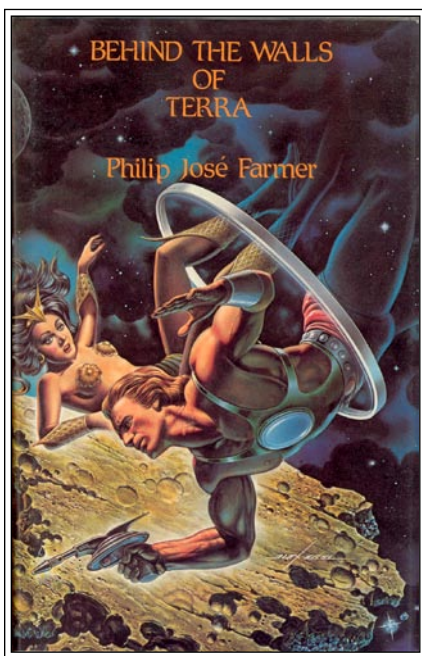


“For ‘the making and glimpsing of Other-Worlds’: Literature of the Fantastic in the Schlobin Collection at East Carolina University”

by William Joseph Thomas

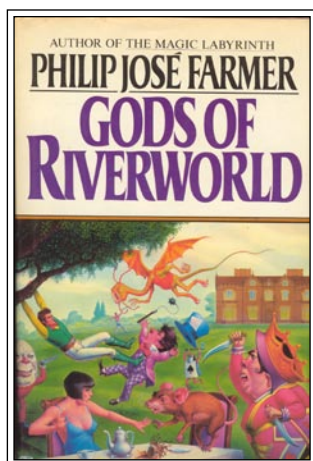
Harry Potter is just the latest in a long line of characters from fantasy that have captured our attention, and his movies vie with *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* for box office bragging rights. Big Brother has integrated himself into daily American life—at least through recent television seasons. Long a part of film—Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* was made in 1927—and still a major segment of television production—think about the countless spin-offs of *Star Trek*—the imprint of science fiction and fantasy cannot be denied. These genres are prevalent in every aspect of popular culture, from printed texts to oral stories, and span the spectrum of visual arts. Harry Potter and *Star Wars* have inherited the telling of science fiction and fantasy stories from hundreds of years of folk tales, supernatural stories, and utopian novels. Consistently—and persistently—popular in print and other media, literature of the fantastic includes not only wizards, dragons, and magic, but stretches its boundaries to include also science fiction, gothic and horror fiction, and that which is weird or supernatural.



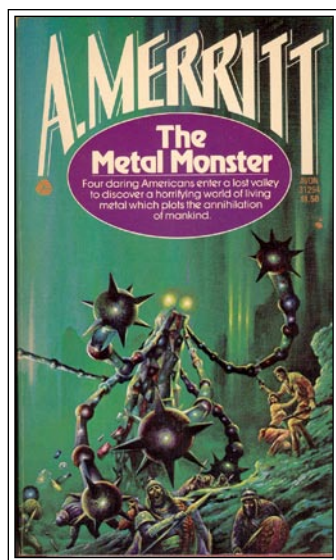
Behind the Walls of Terra, by Philip José Farmer. © 1982 Phantasia Press. Used by permission.

All of these forms of writing are represented in a new collection at East Carolina University’s Joyner Library: The James H. and Virginia Schlobin Literature of the Fantastic Collection. Literature of the fantastic—fantasy, science fiction, horror, and the weird—all builds, perhaps, on the uncertainty and anxiety created by the “marvelous” and the “uncanny” aspects of fantasy identified by Tzvetan Todorov.¹ Roger Schlobin describes fantastic literature as that which is impossible, based on what is known at the time, and his inclusiveness suggests an approach to literature of the fantastic which may be close to that of Rosemary Jackson: that is, fantasy is a *mode* of writing, rather than a genre.² Brian Atteberry extends Jackson’s observation to describe fantasy as a “fuzzy set,” held together by the wonder at its center rather than boundaries of genre.³

The wonder at the center of literature of the fantastic, and the craft of its writers, command greater scholarly attention now than ever before, attention that has grown dramatically over the last twenty-five years. Several major associations focusing on literary and cultural studies now regularly include sessions on fantasy, including the Modern Language Association and its regional associations, the Popular Culture Association, the American Studies Association, and the National Council of Teachers of English.⁴ The International



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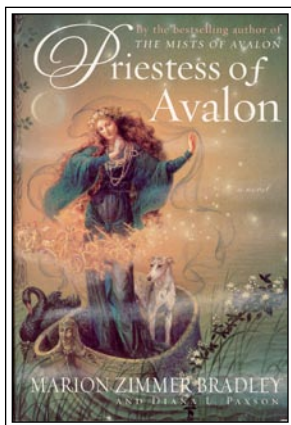
Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts was founded in 1980, and it has experienced continued growth under the direction of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA, founded 1983). Scholarly articles on literature of the fantastic are the exclusive focus of *The Journal of the Fantastic*, published since 1988.⁵ The English Department at East Carolina University regularly offers classes on science fiction and fantasy, and is home to several professors who have contributed scores of books and articles on literature of the fantastic.

Created to bring together materials to aid scholars of literature of the fantastic, and to serve the needs of students of this literature, The James H. and Virginia Schlobin Literature of the Fantastic Collection is a new acquisition for the Joyner Library at East Carolina University. Designed as a research collection and named for the first donors' parents, the Schlobin Collection draws together primary, secondary, and ephemeral materials dealing with literature of the fantastic. Beginning with more than four thousand members of this fuzzy set, ranging from Isaac Asimov to Roger Zelazny, Joyner Library has established a firm basis upon which to build in the future. The Schlobin Collection began with a donation of about 3,000 books and manuscript materials, given by Dr. Roger C. Schlobin, and is growing quickly, with donations of nearly 1,000 books by Dr. Schlobin's sister Susan McGee, and library purchases of two smaller private collections.

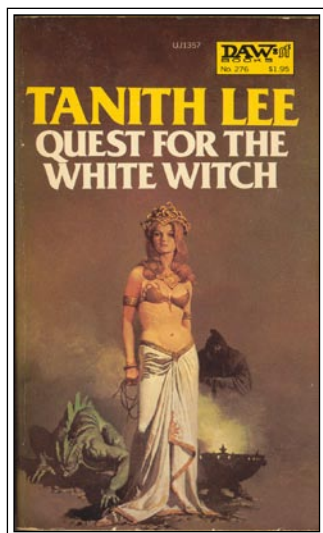
Dr. Roger C. Schlobin is professor emeritus of English at Purdue University and currently a visiting Assistant Professor at East Carolina University. Author of six scholarly books and editor of more than fifty, his other publications include over 100 essays, various poems, short stories, reviews, and bibliographies. He is one of the founders of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts and has been an editor of *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. Dr. Schlobin is also the author of the first original electronic novel to be published over the Internet: *Fire and Fur: The Last Sorcerer Dragon* (Omnimedia 1994). Dr. Schlobin's sister, Susan Genevieve Schlobin McGee, is a nationally-known trainer and author on family violence, and for 20 years ran a battered women's shelter. She is a life long science fiction and fantasy fanatic, and lives with three other fanatics, her partner and two young children, in Northern California.

The nucleus of the Schlobin Collection is primary literature. Novels make up the largest portion of the collection, and while the greatest number are fantasy, science fiction, horror, the supernatural and the weird are all represented. There are numerous selections of the works of Philip José Farmer, Anne McCaffrey, Michael Moorcock, and Roger Zelazny. The Schlobin Collection includes more than one hundred novels by André Norton, due in part to Dr. Schlobin's extensive scholarship devoted to Norton. Feminist fantasy and science fiction are well-represented by authors including Marion Zimmer Bradley, Octavia Butler, Tanith Lee, and Sheri Tepper. Anthologies of fantastic fiction are significant holdings, as well as noteworthy reprints of recovered fantastic works, particularly by the Arno and Gregg Presses.

Also included in the Schlobin Collection are journals, secondary scholarship, and reference materials. Secondary materials provide criticism of the fantas-



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tic and genre studies, single-author bibliographies and studies, and collections of essays from the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. Of particular interest to researchers are several rare bibliographies including Everett F. Bleiler's *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature* and Daniel J.H. Levack's *A Philip K. Dick Bibliography*, signed by both Dick and Levack. Additionally, there are various reference texts and materials for the scholar to peruse such as Gary K. Wolfe's *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy* and Marshall B. Tymn's *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Weird Fiction Magazines*.

The Schlobin Collection also contains manuscript materials donated by Dr. Schlobin. The Roger C. Schlobin Papers contain more than 550 items, including more than 2,000 pages, diskettes and compact discs. Bibliographies, correspondence, clippings, contracts, drafts of published and unpublished works of fiction and literary criticism, and manuscripts related to the literary career of André Norton form the basis of the Papers. More than twenty years of correspondence with André Norton forms a highlight of the Schlobin Papers, which also contains Dr. Schlobin's writings for the developing personal computing and software industries in the early 1980s, and texts of talks given at various conferences.

Other collections of literature of the fantastic in North America include the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, the L. W. Currey Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, and the J. Lloyd Easton Collection at the University of California at Riverside. Respondents from the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts also reported significant collections of fantasy and science fiction among the holdings of the Ray and Pat Browne Library for Popular Cultures at Bowling Green State University and at the Paskow Science Fiction Collection at Paley Library, Temple University.⁶ While not as large as the well-known Merrill or Easton Collections, the Schlobin Collection fills a gap among libraries in the Southeast for literature of the fantastic, being the only collection of its kind in this region.

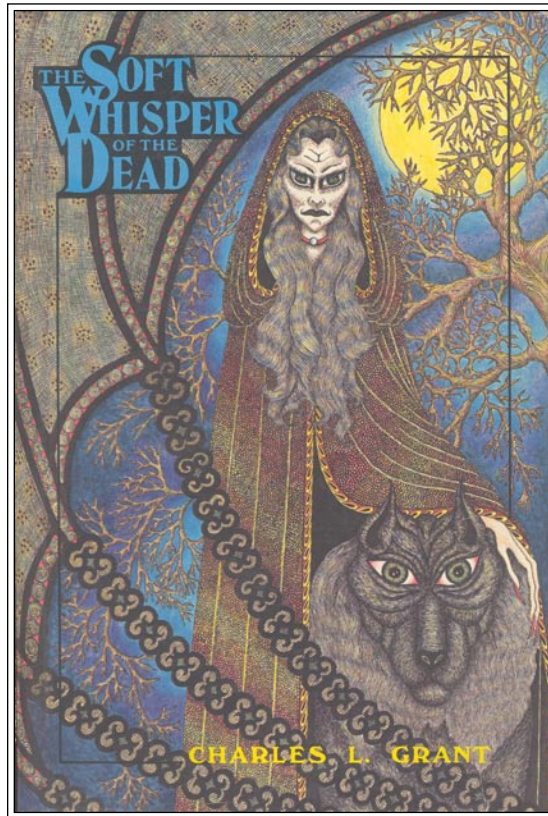
Students of science fiction, fantasy and horror—whether they are taking classes on this literature, teaching them, or are independent researchers—are welcome to the Special Collections at Joyner Library to use materials while in the building. Access to the collection will be provided by the library's catalog and online manuscript finding aids.

Ursula K. Le Guin once described her writing as “describing certain aspects of psychological reality in the novelist's way, which is by inventing elaborately circumstantial lies”.⁷ The writer of fantastic literature is no more prophetic than any other novelist, yet, as noted by Roger Schlobin, fantasy can function as the “‘popular’ key to ‘real’ life”.⁸ The Schlobin Collection provides that key for students, professors and researchers from East Carolina University and beyond.

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References:

- ¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 41.
- ² Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1981), 13.
- ³ Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 12-13, 16.
- ⁴ Roger C. Schlobin, "Fantasy." In *The Greenwood Guide to American Popular Culture*. M. Thomas Inge and Dennis Hall, eds. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 578.
- ⁵ *Ibid*, 579.
- ⁶ *Ibid*, 591.
- ⁷ Le Guin, Ursula. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. (New York: Ace, 1987) xvi.
- ⁸ Remarks at the 1983 Academic Festival, Kutztown University (PA). Roger C. Schlobin Papers (ca. 1965-2004) (Collection #1029, Box 1, Folder f, Item 1), Special Collections Department, East Carolina University.



The Soft Whisper of the Dead, by Charles L. Grant.
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