

Post-dog tales about human extinction

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And what do you think of the idea of dogs
taking over and inheriting the Earth?

Alan Brown (2019)

For my dog Fidži

Clifford Donald Simak (1904–1988) was recognized as the third Grand Master of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America in 1977.^{*} He had been writing for an unbelievable fifty-seven years, starting with publishing his first story in 1931 and ending with a final novel which was published in 1986 when he was eighty-two. His science-fiction writing was primarily a hobby while he worked as a full-time journalist, most notably for the *Minneapolis Star* and then for the *Minneapolis Sunday Magazine*, until his retirement in 1976. Simak's works encompass twenty-seven novels and more than 120 short stories in the genre of speculative fiction, and he was one of the first writers to expand science fiction beyond its borders into the fantasy genre.

During his life, Simak received the most prestigious awards for science-fiction writing, including three Hugo Awards and one Nebula Award. Despite this, "Simak is not remembered or celebrated as widely as some of his contemporaries" (Brown 2019). He is far less known than Isaac Asimov (who admired Simak and was inspired by him, also corresponding with him for decades), Robert Heinlein, or Philip K. Dick, who is known mostly for the Hollywood film adaptations (*Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, and *Minority Report*) and TV (*The Man in the High Castle*) of his writings. In the four decades since his death, Simak has been somewhat marginalized in science-fiction literary history: "He [has] become a kind of footnote to the main action of the Golden Age [of science fiction]" (Cokinos 2014, 133). As Robert J. Ewald points out, this reflects the fact that during his long and productive literary life Simak was "virtually ignored by critics in America [...] and was pigeonholed as a Midwest pastoralist" (Ewald 2006, 5).

Simak's science-fiction stories are mostly seen today as overly sentimental and neo-romantic. It is true that Simak loved to place his stories in countryside settings

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which were based on his memories of the place where he was born and where he grew up – the upper Midwest (Millville in Wisconsin) of the beginning of the twentieth century. People from a sleepy small town in the middle of nowhere represented to him humanity in general – with its bigotry, anger, ignorance, and cupidity – exhibiting both the worst that is in humans as well as their best qualities, such as self-sacrifice and a true concern for others, when, for instance, they are confronted by aliens who are usually wiser and gentler than them (DeMarr 1995). In Simak's stories, human encounters with aliens mostly take place in the countryside, and not in New York, or on a spaceship or some exoplanet in deep space.

Fortunately, this stereotypical perception of Simak has undergone important change since the beginning of the twenty-first century, as the devastation of life, and even human extinction, has become a more realistic scenario than previously thought. The Simakian pastoral style and themes have been recently reassessed from the perspective of environmental philosophy. What was previously seen as sentimental and outdated pastoral writings now seem to be very much in accordance with the highly appreciated eco-humanistic science fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson. The Simakian romantic pastoral style of writing could be seen from this new perspective as the lyricism that embodies Aldo Leopold's Land Ethics philosophy (DeMarr 1995; Cokinos 2014).

The present article focuses on an analysis of Simak's novella *City* ([1952, 1973] 2016), which is one of the classics in science-fiction and fantasy literature, "a work of singular beauty and remarkable visionary power, the finest book of one of the greatest of the pioneering science-fiction writers of Campbell's Golden Age" (Silverberg 1995). Since 1952, when it was first published, new editions have been appearing almost continuously to the present day. *City* was immediately recognized for its excellence by the science-fiction community and in 1953 was awarded the International Fantasy Award, which was the most prestigious appraisal for writings before the Hugo Awards; this brought Simak into the company of such writers as J.R.R. Tolkien and Arthur C. Clarke. The excellence of *City* was confirmed retroactively in 2020 by the world science-fiction and fantasy community with a Retro Hugo Award, one of the most prestigious accolades in the field.¹

It seems that after a long period of marginalization of Simak in the science-fiction literature discourse, the situation is about to change. In recent years, the first works have appeared which begin to analyze Simak's *City* from posthuman perspective. For example, the entry on Simak in the *Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction in Literature* recognizes *City* as "a forerunner of posthuman science fiction" even though posthumanity is narrowed down to an Anthropocene theme of "offering a panoramic view that sees most of humanity move to Jupiter and take on new bodies, leaving the Earth to intelligent dogs and robots" (Brooker 2014, 269). An important turning point in views of Simak in the history of science-fiction literature, which goes beyond its traditional location in the Golden Age of Science Fiction, is the recognition of Simak as one of the forerunners of Anthropocene science-fiction literature. According to Gerry Canavan, Simak, together with H. G. Wells and Kurt Vonnegut, was an early anticipator of the science fiction of the Anthropocene "decades before

the concept was formalized by geologists” (Canavan 2016, 139). Similarly, in another study Simak’s *City* is compared to the posthuman novel *La Possibilité d’une île* (2005; *The Possibility of an Island*, 2006), written by the very popular contemporary French novelist Michel Houellebecq, who explicitly appraised Simak for his futurity retrospective narrative technique and used it in his novel (Feyel 2016).

A posthumanist reading refers to identifying oppositions between the human and the non-human at work. While a posthuman reading is “to project an otherness to the human”, the posthumanist reading is in contrast “the deconstruction of the integrity of the human and the other” (Herbrechter and Callus 2008, 96). In the post-humanistic perspective the borders between human and non-human categories are blurred, as they are between humans and post-dogs in Simak’s *City* (Feyel 2016). My goal here is to explore *City* not only from a posthuman, but also a posthumanist perspective (Ferrando 2013). As Bruce Clarke asserts, “posthumanism’s discursive project aims to decenter the human by terminally disrupting the scripts of humanism” (Clarke and Rossini 2017, 141). In principle, *City* is a posthuman novella describing the process of human extinction on Earth. But it is also a posthumanist imagination about a situation when humanity is confronted with non-human “critters” (post-dogs, Jovian Lopers, human mutants, and ants). Therefore the theme of voluntary human extinction, or rather the desertion of humans’ biological existence should be re-read from both a posthuman and a posthumanist perspective. I argue that to name the whole fixup novella after the first story was misleading because *City* is not one of the “urban science-fiction stories.” In my opinion, a more appropriate title for the book would have been “Desertion”, the title of the fourth story, because this story together with the following fifth tale, “Paradise”, explains what would happen if people had the opportunity of instantly entering paradise (Nick Bostrom’s “posthuman mode of being”), even at the cost of leaving the human body. Finally, I hypothesize that the founding father of the Golden Age of Science Fiction, John W. Campbell, the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine, regarded as the prime shaper of modern science fiction, initially refused to publish “Desertion”, and never published the final tale, “The Simple Way”, very likely because the posthumanist character of these stories contradicted his “classical” view of science-fiction literature.

SIMAK’S POSTHUMAN FIXUP NOVELLA *CITY*

City came out in 1952 as a series of eight tales. Two decades later, Simak wrote “The Coda” (“Epilog”), which was added to later editions. The tales pretend to be fragments of the legend, which had originally been narrated for ages by post-dogs and transmitted from generation to generation, before being transformed into written form as explained in the “Editor’s Preface” at the beginning of the book. Each tale is introduced by a short note which dwells on the debate among post-dog scholars about the meaning of these tales.

The first talking dog, Nathaniel, the first post-dog, appears in the third tale of the legend, “Census”. As the character Webster explains, dogs have two handicaps: they cannot talk and they do not have hands. Speech and hands made humans a civilized biological species (“[b]ut for speech and hands, we might be dogs and dogs be

men”; [1952, 1973] 2016, 68). Speech and hands would do the same for dogs if their tonsils were surgically modified in a way that would make dogs able to speak, and robots would be programmed to serve dogs and substitute their missing hands. Such uplifted dogs turned into post-dogs (Hauskeller 2017). Post-dogs have a mission in *City* – to continue in humanity’s dream on Earth because humans had resigned from this endeavor once they had decided to convert themselves into alien beings (Lopers) on Jupiter. As Alan Brown posted recently on his blog regularly reviewing classic science fiction at *Tor.com*, an online magazine and community site for science fiction and fantasy, Simak, as a longstanding dog owner, did not see the world “going to the dogs” as a bad thing (Brown 2019).

Simak originally had no intention of writing *City* as a book. The stories had originally been written for the *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine over nine years from 1943 to 1951. Simak was a regular contributor to the magazine in the legendary period which is now called the Golden Age of Science Fiction (1938–1950). The first four stories – “City”, “Huddling Place”, “Census”, and “Desertion” – were published in the magazine in 1944; “Paradise” and “Hobbies” then followed in 1946 before “Aesop” in 1947 and finally “The Simple Way” (also known as “Trouble with Ants”) in 1951. A year later, he created a fixup novella from these stories and wrote the short introduction from the fictional editor and eight short notes in such a way to then create the eight chapters. For the title of the whole book, the name of the first story, “City”, was chosen.

The notes make the originally independent short stories “textual fragments” of a single legend narrative which describes the extinction of humans. These notes are written as commentaries by post-dog scientists who, with the hindsight of millennia, are distant from the events described in the tales and are eager to understand the true meaning of these fragments of the legend. For Alan Brown, these canine scholars are like “real-world biblical historians, trying to compare the tales of the Bible with historical records to determine what is factual and what is legend and parable” (Brown 2019).

In 1973 Simak was asked to write a new-science fiction story for the John W. Campbell Memorial Anthology as one of the science-fiction Golden Age writers. After initial reluctance, he decided to write the final part of *City*. Because he also felt that eight tales form a complete whole about the saga of the Websters and the Dogs, he wrote “Epilog” as the robot Jenkin’s story. “Epilog” is about Earth after the post-dogs and (almost) all other animals and robots have gone. Since “Epilog” is not a fragment of the legend, there is no introductory note by a canine narrator; nonetheless, “Epilog” became an integral part of many (but not all) later editions of *City*.

As already mentioned above, Simak, along with Wells and Vonnegut, is one of the forerunners of Anthropocene science fiction (Canavan 2016), which – in contrast to the Star Trek vision of the future, where humans are portrayed as an immortal species with the destiny to colonize the galaxies – describes the end of the human species. Canavan focused on a comparison of Vonnegut’s *Galápagos* (1985) and Simak’s *City*. In *Galápagos*, humans evolve into a primitive form of a small-brained sea lion-like species on an isolated (and fictitious) island in the Galápagos archipelago.

Ironically, humans all over the world become infertile due to the spread of a parasite damaging women's egg cells, and they only have the chance to survive through mixing with the Galápagos posthuman species (think of the Neanderthals "surviving" in the human genome in the form of few genes due to their interbreeding with *Homo sapiens*). *Galápagos* and *City*, alongside Wells's *The Time Machine*, are framed in a similar way, being narrated from the far future and employing the trope of "retrospective Anthropocene futurity" (Canavan 2016, 150).

It is clear that to name the whole fixup novella after the first story is misleading. A more appropriate title for the book would be "Desertion", the title of the fourth story, which opens the main theme of the book: the prophecy of the end of the human species on Earth.² Indeed, *City* is not one of the "urban science-fiction stories," as Vivian Sobchack has mistakenly suggested when describing it as "a loosely related collection of short stories unified by their location in a city," nor is it a story covering thousands of years of the process of how a "[city] radically changes its shape, its functions, and its citizenry" (1988, 4). It is true that a city symbolizes human progress and civilization. In the time when Simak wrote *City*, the majority of humans still lived outside of cities, but the urbanization trend all over the world was clear. In 1950 "only" 746 million people lived in cities, whereas in 2009 already more people (3.42 billion) lived in urban settlements than in rural ones, with that number expected to double by 2050. The rapid growth of urban life is one of the characteristics of the new geological period, which is known as the Anthropocene. The death of a city would therefore be a perfect symbol of the decline of human civilization in a future scenario. However, this was just a starting premise for Simak's story about human extinction, which begins with the twilight of cities as a form of human "huddling place". Simak's explanation for the death of the city was that there was no selection pressure on humans anymore, thanks to advanced technologies, and that people did not need to live in such overcrowded places. But this is not the main theme of the novella. In *City*, Simak goes far beyond the theme of urban decline, which is only the beginning of humanity's fate.

Simak was well aware that, for most of its existence, the human species lived in small groups dispersed over the land. From an evolutionary perspective, only relatively recently has external economic pressure pushed people to live in urban settlements with an extremely high population density. When such forces vanish thanks to new technologies, the economy and defense paradigm changes as a consequence and people leave the cities for life in houses in the countryside.

In Simak's view, humanity had never adapted to living in cities; human nature remained rural, and coming back to live in the countryside returned humans to the environment they were evolutionarily adapted for. As much as advanced technologies make it possible, humans would prefer an individualistic way of living and would even evolve into beings (human mutants) to reach this goal. Simak is at odds with the whole humanist tradition, which since at least Plato and Aristotle has seen humans as ineradicably social beings. Aristotle's well-known definition of humans as *zoon politikon*³ makes it clear that what makes humans "human" is that each individual has to aim for the rise of the *polis*, and hence the prosperity of society and humanity as such. The end of the city is the end of the *polis*. Without cities, not only

do city councils lose their meaning (as described in the “City” tale in the novella), but states and central governments gradually become obsolete as well.

The main idea of the fourth tale, “Desertion”, and the fifth tale, “Paradise”, is considered by many to be pivotal to answering the question of what would happen if people had the opportunity of instantly entering paradise, even if this is at the cost of transforming into a non-human (Jovian) living form. Simak’s answer is that they would exchange human existence, human ideals, and humanity for an enhanced and ultimately happy life in a non-human (alien) form of existence.

The scene for conversion from human to alien form is set up on Jupiter. A small group of scientists from Earth live on Jupiter in special capsules resistant to the extremely harsh environment of this enormous planet, which includes immense gravity, resulting, as Simak describes, in “terrific pressure of fifteen thousand pounds per square inch” and “the alkaline rains that forever swept the planet.” They are trying to find out how people could survive on this planet and whether it is even possible. In order to move around on the planet’s surface, the scientists develop a special converter that allows them to transform into Lopers, the most intelligent form of life on Jupiter. But for some unknown reason, these transformed people disappear, or rather do not come back, which means they do not transform back into their human form. The story revolves around a scientist named Fowler and his old dog, Towser, who convert themselves into Lopers in order to find out why people do not transform back. It is then revealed that as Jovian forms of life, human (or canine) beings enter a whole posthuman stage of existence where they are able to attain ultimate fulfillment and bliss. This state also allows for telepathic communication between humans and dogs, and they can share their wonderful and indescribable new perceptions and understandings of the world. The fulfillment of one’s existence, be it a human or canine one, is so overwhelming that neither Fowler the human nor Towser the dog want to return from “what seemed a drugged existence” back to their original form, which explains what happens to the transformed humans on Jupiter.

Compare the following two examples of the posthuman mode of being – the first from Simak’s “Desertion”, written in 1943 and the second from Nick Bostrom’s essay entitled *Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up*, which was published in 2008:

He sensed other things, things not yet quite clear. A vague whispering that hinted of greater things, of mysteries beyond the pale of human thought, beyond even the pale of human imagination. Mysteries, fact, logic built on reasoning. Things that any brain should know if it used all its reasoning power. [...] We’re just beginning to learn a few of the things we are to know – a few of the things that were kept from us as human beings, perhaps because we were human beings. Because our human bodies were poor bodies. Poorly equipped for thinking, poorly equipped in certain senses that one has to know. Perhaps even lacking in certain senses that are necessary to true knowledge. [...] A sense of exhilaration, a deeper sense of life. A sharper mind. A world of beauty that even the dreamers of the Earth had not yet imagined ([1952, 1973] 2016, 102).

Each day is a joy. You have invented entirely new art forms, which exploit the new kinds of cognitive capacities and sensibilities you have developed. You still listen to music – music

that is to Mozart what Mozart is to bad Muzak. You are communicating with your contemporaries using a language that has grown out of English over the past century and that has a vocabulary and expressive power that enables you to share and discuss thoughts and feelings that unaugmented humans could not even think or experience. [...] [Y]ou feel how every fiber of your body and mind is stretched to its limit in the most creative and imaginative way, and you are creating new realms of abstract and concrete beauty that humans could never (concretely) dream of (Bostrom 2008, 112).

Bostrom argues that becoming posthuman could be an “exceedingly worthwhile type” of the human mode of being. In his understanding, the posthuman mode of being refers to an extreme enhancement of human capacities (health span, cognition, and emotion) which goes far beyond the maximum attainable by the human species. Once you become posthuman, you would not wish to return back to the original human mode. “I can’t go back,” said the dog Towser at the end of Simak’s short story “Desertion”. “Nor I,” said the human Fowler. “They would turn me back into a dog,” said Towser; “and me,” said Fowler, “back into a man” ([1952, 1973] 2016,103).

“Paradise” takes place directly after “Desertion”, and it is here that Simak explains the main idea behind “Desertion”: if people are presented with the opportunity to enter paradise, even if it requires them to give up their identity as humans, the human race will disappear. After five years of existence in a Loper body, Fowler converts himself back into his human form and returns to Earth to share with people the posthuman gospel – the news of the possibility to immediately enter paradise on Jupiter. The only obstacle standing between people and the new gospel is the fact that the message about paradise on Jupiter cannot be transmitted through words, as the experience of living in the body of a Loper is subjective and non-transferable. This means that there is no way Fowler is able to use his experience from Jupiter to convince other people to believe him. And it would stay that way if not a genius mutant named Joe, who completed the unfinished Martian Juwain philosophy and thus allowed people to understand and accept Fowler’s Jovian gospel. For Joe, this is just a form of entertainment, a result of childish playfulness. He has no interest in elevating humanity or broadening their horizons, because he has no interest in the future of the human race. The result of his work, however, is not telepathy (used by mutants), but, as Joe explains to Tyler Webster, the chairman of the World Committee:

The Juwain philosophy provides an ability to sense the viewpoint of another. It won’t necessarily make you agree with that viewpoint, but it does make you recognize it. You not only know what the other fellow is talking about, but how he feels about it. With Juwain’s philosophy you have to accept the validity of another man’s ideas and knowledge, not just the words he says, but the thought back of the words ([1952, 1973] 2016, 119).

Thanks to this ability, the Juwain philosophy can advance humanity by “a hundred thousand years in two generations.” The philosophy will also allow people to understand Fowler and his experience with paradise. Fowler visits Chairman Webster, who wonders if it would be a good idea to kill Fowler and thus prevent people from learning about the possibility of entering paradise at the expense of their own extinction.

Indeed, “[t]he people would go to Jupiter, would enter upon a life other than the human life” (126). The Websterian dilemma of his ancestor repeats: the fate of humanity depends on a single person – Webster himself. (One thousand years later, “websters” refer to humans, since the very word “human” has been forgotten.) Just like Jerome Webster could not help humanity because he could not overcome his agoraphobia, Tyler Webster is unable to save humanity from extinction because it would breach the principle of “Thou shall not kill.” In other words, not even the prevention of human extinction constitutes a valid reason for breaking that rule and killing even a single person. In Simak’s work, the ethics of deontology always win over utilitarianism: “For one hundred and twenty-five years no man had killed another – for more than a thousand years killing had been obsolete as a factor in the determination of human affairs” (126). In *City*, Simak himself implies that the story of “Desertion” plays a key role when, in the canine note to the fourth tale, we find out that “short as it is, this fourth tale probably is the most rewarding of the eight. It is one that recommends itself for thoughtful, careful reading” (90).

HUMANS’ HEDONISTIC SUICIDE

Simak’s posthumanist science-fiction imagination of the voluntary hedonistic extinction of humans might receive support from science too. Biochemist Ladislav Kováč came up recently with the “finitics hypothesis” on the end of human evolution. Here, the inevitable end of humanity is not a fiction but rather a scientific prediction. In his own words, “[it] is no science fiction, but a scientific reflection on the present and future of humanity” (Kováč 2015, vii). Kováč argues that in the third millennium, human biological evolution has entered the ultimate phase: extinction. The human species is hedonotaxic: inherently searching for pleasure and satisfaction, and seeking more and more of it. Unfortunately, the hedonic thresholds are steadily increasing (the “hedonic treadmill”). According to Kováč, in contrast to Robert Nozick’s famous argument from “The Experience Machine” (1974), most people would prefer living in a virtual world (a sort of Wachowskis’ *Matrix*) to reality, and they would transfer available energy to the search for pleasure instead of the “reproduction effort”. And this will be the end of humans as a biological species. Kováč could have used for this final phase of human destiny these words from Simak’s *City*: “Paradise! Heaven for the asking! And the end of humanity! The end of all the ideals and all the dreams of mankind, the end of the race itself” ([1952, 1973] 2016, 110).

It seems that this idea was not welcomed by John W. Campbell, the iconic editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* (1937–1971), where Simak sent “Desertion” in July 1943. Simak needed to write three other short stories set in the timeline before “Desertion”, and these stories were successively published in 1944 in *Astounding Science Fiction* – “City” (the May issue), “Huddling Place” (the July issue), and “Census” (the September issue) – before “Desertion” saw the light of day in the November issue. Campbell is considered to be the father of modern fantasy and science-fiction literature; he singlehandedly transformed the core of the genre from pulpy adventures of super-science to of science fiction. Isaac Asimov once said that he “was the most

powerful force in science fiction ever, and for the first ten years of his editorship he dominated the field completely” (McKitterick 2011). While Campbell himself wrote several science-fiction texts, his main task was to create a platform for authors of science-fiction literature in *Astounding Science Fiction*, which from 1960 was published as *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, with Campbell working for the magazine from 1938 right up until his death in 1977. There is no doubt that Campbell had a very big influence on Simak. According to Francis Lyall (2020), who was in touch with Simak for many years, Simak told him several times how big this influence was – indeed, no Campbell, no Simak. It was because Campbell was appointed to be the new editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* that Simak decided to come back to writing. On the other hand, it was precisely Campbell’s collaborative-writing editing style that pushed away many *Astounding Science Fiction* writers, including Isaac Asimov and Robert A. Heinlein (McKitterick 2011).

The fact that Campbell at first refused to publish “Desertion” became known thanks to an account by David W. Wixon, Simak’s close friend, who after Simak’s death became his literary executor and had access to his personal journals. Thanks to these journals, Wixon learned about the fate of numerous manuscripts, even those that had been rejected. “Desertion” was among them. According to Wixon, the reason why Campbell refused to publish “Desertion”, which is described as “one of the greatest stories the field has ever produced,” remains a mystery. He continues that “since it contains in itself no hint that it had a place in any series, there would have been no reason to hold it up unless it was recognized, even before publication, that it provided the platform needed for its sequel, ‘Paradise’ [published in 1946]” (Wixon 2015, x). Wixon speculates as to whether the concept of a whole book resulting from the series of short stories had already been present “in Simak’s head (or Campbell’s) early enough to explain why ‘Desertion’ was held for later publication” (x).

There is another possible explanation: what if the main reason why Campbell had refused to publish “Desertion” was that Simak’s posthumanist idea of voluntarily giving up one’s human existence was incompatible with Campbell’s perception of science fiction and the role of the human race in it? Campbell, being a science-fiction writer himself, was known to have an immense ideological influence on the authors who wrote stories for *Astounding Science Fiction* to the extent that they were even described as “his literary clones”. Campbell’s views on society were conservative; nowadays, we would say that he adopted the type of anthropocentric worldview rejected by critical posthumanism. He was known to hold prejudices against some science-fiction texts: for example, he refused to publish a novella for such reasons as the main character being black or the presence of a female soldier protagonist. We do not know what Campbell initially disliked in “Desertion” and whether it was the idea of the humans’ defection from Earth to Heaven in Jupiter and the betrayal of the biological species.

On the other hand, Campbell eventually published “Desertion”, but only after Simak had finished another three short stories that loosely preceded it. Campbell also published other stories from Simak where the action takes place after “Desertion”.

The most important of these is the short story “Paradise”, which thematically builds upon “Desertion”. The core idea of this tale is that it is better to allow the extinction of humanity than prevent it by killing even one person and thus breaking a centuries-old principle of people not killing each other. Campbell also published Simak’s “Aesop”, which provides an interesting additional explanation to “Desertion” and “Paradise”. Accepting the hypothesis about Campbell’s rejection of Simak’s theory of a complete and inevitable extinction of the human race in the future, one can thus speculate that this represents a kind of compromise. In “Aesop”, Simak explains why the extinction of the human race is inevitable (the inherent human trait of solving problems by killing) and the only possible way to save its continuity (i.e., the compromise) is for the human race to repeat its history in an extra-terrestrial world until civilization comes full circle. This can happen an infinite number of times, and the human race can exist forever provided there is an infinite number of worlds where civilization can repeat the cycle all over again. In the final tale “The Simple Way/The Trouble with Ants”, the ants reach such a level of civilization that they begin to construct the anthill which reaches gigantic proportions with the prospect of covering the whole Earth, leaving other species without any living space. The dogs and other animals will have to travel to other worlds and leave Earth to the ants because they do not want to break the highest moral imperative – do not kill (them).

This was the only short story from the series that was not published in *As-tounding Science Fiction*. Instead, it appeared in the January 1951 issue of the mediocre *Fantastic Adventures* magazine (1939–1953), which was edited by Howard Browne.⁴ Does this mean that, in the sense of the abovementioned hypothesis, it was Simak’s pessimism beyond the bounds of the human species that was too much for Campbell? According to Broderick (1995, 7), “Campbell [...] presented science fiction as the optimistic literature of the future”. He refers to Campbell himself:

[S]cience fiction is the literature of the Technological Era. It, unlike other literatures, assumes that change is the natural order of things, that there are goals ahead larger than those we know. That the motto of the technological civilization is true: “There must be a better way of doing this!” Basically, of course, the science fictioneer is simply the citizen of the Technological Era, whose concern is, say, the political effect of a United States base on the Moon (Campbell 1952 [Broderick 1995, 5]).

Robert Silverberg, who knew Simak personally, hinted at such a possibility, stating in the introduction to the 1995 Easton Press edition of *City* that:

Simak, questioned many years later about [Campbell refusing to publish “The Trouble with Ants”], replied, “What I remember him writing was that he thought we had enough of the series. So I took him at his word. I never argue with an editor. He has a perfect right to turn down a story.” But other writers, less kindhearted than Simak or perhaps more knowledgeable about Campbell’s philosophical quirks and prejudices, have speculated that the real reason for the rejection was Campbell’s unwillingness to publish a story so barren of hope for Earth’s human inhabitants. Passively handing the planet over to the ants would never have been an idea palatable to Campbell (1995).

CONCLUSION

City should be re-read as one of the first pieces of posthumanist science-fiction writing. In this novella, Simak confronted the human species with its own ideals, and, although he is pessimistic about the human ability to continue the dream of humanity, he presented a scenario of the posthuman world in which post-dogs continue the fulfillment of humanity's ideals (which are never reached by humans themselves). Future research is needed to challenge the hypothesis suggested here that Campbell initially rejected "Desertion" for publication – and did not publish "The Simple Way" – because it contradicted his own Golden Age vision of science fiction. Probably some answers could be found in Simak's journals and correspondence as well as in Campbell's own correspondence⁵ with science-fiction writers.

NOTES

- ¹ The winners were announced in an online ceremony produced by CoNZealand at the 78th World Science Fiction Convention on Thursday 30 July 2020. The awards were the result of free voting by all members of the World Science Fiction Society. See <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/1945-retro-hugo-awards/>.
- ² In some translations of the *City* novella into other languages, more appropriate titles have been chosen, for example, *Demain les chiens* in French (Tomorrow the Dogs, 1952), *Als es noch Menschen gab* in German (When There Were Still People, 1964), *Když ještě žili lidé* in Czech (When People Were Still Alive, 1970), and *Anni senza fine* in Italian (Endless Years, 1976).
- ³ Aristotle's term *zoon politikon* is usually translated as "political animal". It needs to be pointed out that *politikon* should be rendered as "civic" or "social" rather than "political" in the modern sense (Stevenson and Haberman 2004, 94).
- ⁴ Simak, Clifford D. "The Trouble with Ants." Title Record # 61317. *The Internet Speculative Fiction Database*. Accessed December 27, 2020. <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?61317> and <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pl.cgi?58113>.
- ⁵ "To get a better idea of how Campbell thought and how he interacted with some of the greatest literary minds of the last century, check out his two-volume collected letters. There's much left to learn about this complicated man and the authors who invented SF's Golden Age" (McKitterick 2011). For the letters, see Chapdelaine, Chapdelaine, and Hay 1985, 1991.

LITERATURE

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Clifford D. Simak. "City." Posthumanism. Human extinction. Post-dogs.
John W. Campbell. Human nature.

Clifford D. Simak's fixup novella *City* (1952) should be re-read as one of the first pieces of post-humanist science-fiction writing. This article argues that naming the book after the first story, and not after the fourth one, "Desertion", was misleading because the book is not one of the "urban science-fiction stories". *City* rather explores what would happen if people had the opportunity of instantly entering paradise (Nick Bostrom's "posthuman mode of being"), even at the cost of deserting the human body. A further hypothesis suggested here is that John W. Campbell, the founding father of the Golden Age of Science Fiction, initially refused to publish "Desertion" and never published *City*'s final story, "The Simple Way", in his iconic *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine, because the posthumanist character of these stories contradicted his "classical" view of science fiction.

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