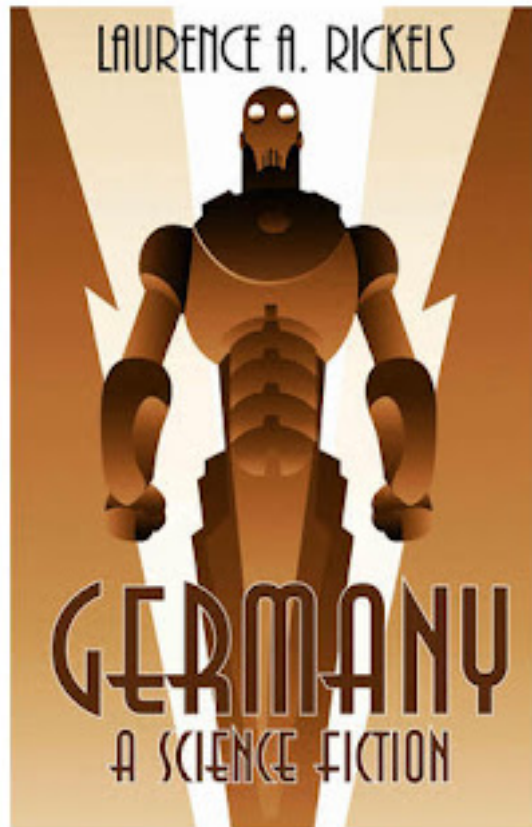


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Book Review: Germany: A Science Fiction by Laurence A. Rickels



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Paperback, 274 pages

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Let me say something about how I came to this book. Editor and publisher D.Harlan Wilson sent me a few books early in the Corona-cation that I have been reading between pressing books that have the three-week library deadline. I knew nothing about this book except for years I had on my list because the title and the cover made me curious. I also trust Professor Wilson with the work he publishes because so far I have enjoyed all of it. An AOP release is one I am going to read.

So here is the thing. I never read the description or back cover. I wanted to go into this book cold. I read the preface and it mentioned lots of classic Science Fiction I am interested in. All I knew about Rickels was that he had written an entire book about Philip K Dick. (who I have devoted two years of doing a podcast to the study of) So I was not entirely surprised that he was interested in PKD but I was shocked that he seemed very interested in PKD's novel the Simulacra.

After a few pages, I felt really stupid when I realized that this was not a novel but a collection of essays devoted to Science Fiction that came in the wake of WW II. That in itself is an interesting idea as the genre was really just hitting puberty when Hitler marched across Europe. The Hugo Gernsbecks and John W. Campbells of the world that were trying to shape the genre through the pulps and was faced with side effects of having trouble getting paper. At the same time Their stories were also the escape from the horrors of the war and carried in the anti-fascist armies.

It could be argued That the Catherine (CL) Moore, Henry Kuttner and AE Van Vogts of the world were doing the shaping during the war but Rickels is more interested in the aftermath. This message of this book is not spelled out in a 2+2 formula. Rickels is not being definitive and exhaustingly hitting the point through every single example. These are separate essays that follow his muse. He seems to be just flowing with the books he is most interested in and sometimes they hit the theme like a bullseye either way for fans of the critical theory of genre there is so much to chew on.

While he does spend time on important classics like the HG Wells and Day of the Triffids for two examples Rickels is not interested in the canon. The proof of that is the time he devotes to minor work of note in the PKD canon. I'll duck because I know some Dickheads think it is all-important which is an opinion, we know even Phil didn't have.

I enjoyed Rickels's attention to pre-apollo space flight and moon shot novels, which is an era I have really thought about getting into. Much of this is due to early pulp writers being fascinated by the German V-2 rocket that was at the center of many of these stories. Damon Knight also wrote about this in his classic collection of reviews and commentary In Search of Wonder.

Of course, I enjoyed the time he spent on Spinrad's Iron Dream but I can't see how with this theme how he could miss it. He points out that the novel in the novel Hitler's "Lord of the Swastika is a work in denial of Science Fiction," in the sense of that the novel is about Hitler's pure wish fulfillment. This is a point we discussed on the Dickheads episode about The Iron Dream but I wish I had this quote to react to.

I am happy with the short but powerful discussion of the Iron Dream a novel that spoofed Toliken so savagely. That said it seems strange to me it didn't get more time, as it is almost on the nose of the theme. Also, the reason Rickels is invoking PKD's Simulacra is an aspect we talked about but didn't go deep into our analysis. That episode featured guest Dickheads Cody Goodfellow and is linked below.

Yeah, I know how that sounds but it is a novel with 54 named characters and almost every chapter adds plotlines like a spreading virus. I mean The Simulacra is odd even in the context Dick's Career. You have A Russian telekinetic piano player time travel, Robot presidents and actresses cast in the role of the ultra-powerful First lady, hyper packed apartment buildings with class-organized populations, and a Jug-band with a Martian pet with the power of suggestion. Oh, don't for the dudes build and Martian shuttle Jalopies and a political revolution.

All that stuff and that is not the reason Rickels was inspired by it to write this book. In the novel post WW 2 Germany and future California are tied together. The actress playing the first lady wants to change Germany's fate with time travel in exchange for leadership tips. Yeah, that is a weird book and it got Laurence Rickels thinking.

After jumping into the commentary Rickels goes deep into the genre, while I found myself wishing for commentary on the occasional author or editor not mentioned. I am thinking of Leguin, Brunner, or Boucher who basically discovered Dick. That is a nitpick. This book is well researched.

I think the chapters hit me harder were the ones focused on PKD, Lem, and Spinrad. Those are authors I am deeply interested in. When Rickels talks about Gravity's Rainbow or Jules Verne it is less in my wheelhouse.

I highlighted and dogged eared many pages but I can't really get into all my thoughts here, except to say these tidbits and knowledge will be helpful in doing the podcast. What more can you ask for in a book about critical theory?

I suppose I should not be surprised that no one else has reviewed this book on good reads. You have to be an academic or a deep dive sci-fi theory dork like me. Shit, this is the kinda book you can implant in my brain. I think the best compliment I can give it is it is going on the shelf two books down from Damon Knight's In Search of Wonder. This is a MUST READ for Sci-fi theorists and I am glad I did.

[Dickheads episode on The Simulacra featuring Cody Goodfellow](#)

[Dickheads on Iron Dream](#)