"Some Eden Lost in Space": The wider contexts of Frederick Philip Grove's 'The Legend of the Planet Mars' (1915)

Title:
"Some Eden Lost in Space": The wider contexts of Frederick Philip Grove's 'The Legend of the Planet Mars' (1915)

Authors:
Fayter, Paul

Department:
None

Keywords:
science fiction;Mars;Frederick Philip Grove

Publication Date:
15-Sep-2013

Abstract:
As an historian of science (especially of Darwinism), of theology, and of science fiction I have explored the question of extraterrestrial life for thirty-five years, focusing on Mars as a multidisciplinary case study for the past twenty. In my collecting and bibliographic work on the last two centuries of Martian material I noticed a curious paucity of Martian stories in Canadian literature (about which I am an amateur). There are thousands of post-1800 texts covering fictional, speculative, and non-fictional treatments of Mars, Martians, and voyages to and from the Red Planet. Not surprisingly, for a planet named after the Roman god of war, accompanied by two small satellites named for Mars's twin sons, Deimos and Phobos, a great many stories imagined Mars as an alien landscape for wild adventure and pulpy battles and romances. Not unexpectedly, most of the primary sources I was gathering came from France, the U.K., Germany, Italy, and America. What about Canada? Apart from recent stories by Rob Sawyer—i.e., End of an Era (1994), "The Blue Planet" (1999), "Come All Ye Faithful" (2003), "Identity Theft" (2005), "Biding Time" (2006), and Red Planet Blues (2013)—and a few other examples, I was drawing blanks. Was Canada insulated from historic epidemics of international Martian mania? I've not been obsessive in my searching for Canadian sources; in matters Martian the scientific, theological, and literary action did lie elsewhere, after all. However, in searching my own files a few years ago, I came up with forgotten notes I'd made after a trip to Winnipeg about an unpublished poem set on Mars, written by Frederick Philip Grove (1879-1948), preserved in the University of Manitoba's Archives, and dated "1915" i.e., two years after he began work on Consider Her Ways (1947), and two years before Edgar Rice Burroughs's John Carter of Mars series (1917-1943). My paper will examine this century-old text which—like Rob Sawyer's fresh, genre-blending stories—raises important human moral and religious questions from an imagined extraterrestrial perspective. "The Legend of the Planet Mars" deserves to be better known by Canadian sf readers as a neglected but worthy addition to the literature on Mars. An earlier, shorter and unpublished version of my paper was delivered at the Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy at Toronto's Merril Collection in 2005.

URI:
http://hdl.handle.net/11375/23227

Appears in Collections:
Science Fiction: The Interdisciplinary Genre

Files in This Item:

File | Description | Size | Format
--- | --- | --- | ---
SF2013_McMaster_Fayter_P.pdf | Open Access | 372.55 kB | Adobe PDF

Show full item record
Frederick Philip Grove is one of the most important and debatable novelists in Canadian literature. An intriguing aspect of this man is the mystery surrounding his origins. Grove kept secret his life prior to his arrival in Winnipeg, Manitoba in December 1912. His unpublished articles further reveal Grove’s wide variety of interests and concerns and include such topics as literature, education, art, democracy, farming, urbanization and mechanistic civilization. Several articles are actually typescripts of his addresses and lectures. First, the correspondence of Frederick Philip Grove has been divided into two parts: regular or rather fully developed incoming and outgoing correspondence and short term correspondence consisting of one or two letters between the parties. Mars has the largest dust storms in the solar system. They can last for months and cover the entire planet. The seasons are extreme because its elliptical (oval-shaped) orbital path around the Sun is more elongated than most other planets in the solar system. On Mars the Sun appears about half the size as it does on Earth. At the closest point to the Sun, the Martian southern hemisphere leans towards the Sun, causing a short, intensely hot summer, while the northern hemisphere endures a brief, cold winter: at its farthest point from the Sun, the Martian northern hemisphere leans towards the Sun... This allowed scientists to begin studying Mars prior to launching space missions. By the end of this century, large parts of the planet will not have any usable water. But think about this. In transporting us and our stuff all over the planet, we are also creating a highly efficient network for the global spread of potentially catastrophic diseases. There was a global pandemic just 95 years ago – the Spanish flu pandemic, which is now estimated to have killed up to 100 million people. And that's before one of our more questionable innovations – the budget airline – was invented.