The Ghost from the Grand Banks Short Guide

The Ghost from the Grand Banks by Arthur C. Clarke

Contents

Characters

The characters in The Ghost from the Grand Banks are accomplished shakers and movers in their fields of endeavor, and they are often accustomed to spectacular results, although they are not held immune to failures, to personal quirks, or to variations from traditional conservative lifestyles. Some are well known mainly in their professional circles, while others have celebrity status in wider social circles.

Jason Bradley is an expert professional diver and underwater engineering problem solver. He is a top choice for venturers who want to raise the Titanic. He has access to the equipment needed to approach deepwater problems, and the experience and insight to solve unusually difficult problems with elegantly simple solutions despite pressures and demands from multiple contesting interests.

Donald Craig is a highly talented computer programming specialist whose company electronically edits old movies and videos to make them more suited to the mores of the western societies of the year 2007. His wife, Edith Craig, has rocketed to fame and massive fortune by writing a cure-all program to solve the financial and database software problems of the world's corporations whose hardware and software would not otherwise be able to distinguish the year 2000 from 1900. Still, her concentration on her all-consuming work, coupled with the death of her daughter, has driven Edith to mental break-down—so she is rich, famous and, for a time, nearly catatonic.

Ada Craig, daughter to these highlygifted parents, is named for Lady Ada Lovelace, the world's first computer theorist. Just as Clarke poses the adult characters as having exceptional abilities and accomplishments among their human foibles and failures, he renders Ada as a prodigy, gifted in perception of spatial relationships. The Craigs discover the special talent, however, only after seeing their daughter struggle for dishearteningly poor results in math and basic programming logic in primary school. Ada provokes her teacher and her headmistress to suspend her from school because she insists strenuously that a spatial reasoning answer she has given on a standardized test is correct although the answer key indicates otherwise. As he examines the problem so he can explain her error to Ada, Donald Craig realizes she is right and the test key is wrong. He shows the school staff the proof, and Ada joins her mother in planning the remodeling of their estate according to Mandelbrot set graphics.

Clarke does not develop the motherdaughter relationship in great detail, but does leave the reader with Ada's ability to see instantly highly complex spatial relationships meshing with Edith Craig's deep involvement with Mandelbrot Set graphics, apparently pro-ducing a significant bond between the two which did not arise during the years the Craigs saw themselves as highly productive intellectual professionals with a child who seemed average or below in intellectual skills they themselves relied on for their work and for their understanding of the world. Given the additional connection of gifted parent and gifted child, Clarke uses Ada Craig's death as the trigger for her mother Edith's mental collapse.

The wealthy Parkinson family are party to a major recovery effort directed to the long-lost Titanic. While others in prior eras and in their own time have harbored sundry reasons for seeking the wreck and plotting its recovery, the Parkinsons wish to recover a collection of priceless antique glassware that their great grandfather had been transporting to the U.S. for a museum showing. Born to wealth and power, several of the Parkinsons are introduced off-handedly early in the novel as accomplished in some field of their own: ". . . Rupert Parkinson, famous racing yachtsman . . .," ". . . Gloria Windsor-Parkinson (100 Meters Silver, 2004 Olympics) . . .," ". . . Arnold Parkinson (world authority on Pre-Raphaelite art) . . . ."

The only American on the board of the Parkinson family corporation, Roy Emerson, has made his own fortune as an inventor. Deducing that subsonic vibrations in a film on the surface of a windshield could disperse water and dirt, he made windshield wipers obsolete and rose to the top of a new industry. He finds himself bored or distressed by the amount of time that financial management of his own corporation may require, and he is not always interested in the mundane issues that keep the Parkinson fortunes in glass products healthy. He is first to recognize, however, that a serious inquiry about the cost of producing several million glass microspheres for an undisclosed potential customer signals someone is planning to raise the wreck of the Titanic.

Kato Mitsumasa, as president of Nippon-Turner, a major entertainment corporation, wishes to raise the stern section of the Titanic and move the salvage to the company's Tokyo-on-Sea as an attraction.

The raising of the stern would be filmed for a television special and, once secured at Tokyo-On-Sea, would be part of the set enhanced by multimedia computer graphics giving tourists the "experience" of going down with the ship in a reenactment. A young and astute business leader, Kato knows both how to deal on his home turf and how to negotiate successfully in business and social relationships in western societies. He also has insight into what will make headlines and grab the interests of the consumer societies of his era.

Social Concerns

weaving together the personalities Inand plot lines for The Ghost of the Grand Banks, Arthur C. Clarke refers to the plagues of the twentieth century. One plague he poses are the medical effects of smoking tobacco: The twenty-first century society he delineates, despises the addiction. Donald and Edith Craig operate a company that reduces or cuts smoking scenes from twentieth-century films and videos to make them usable in the twenty-first. However, he cites no statistics on deaths attributed to lung cancer, emphysema, or heart disease for the century.

The other plague, AIDS, in the opinion expressed by psychiatrist Jafferjee, is regarded in terms a careful reader could find contradictory: One good thing did come out of the AIDS epidemic—it forced people to be honest: it wiped out the last remnants of the Puritan aberration. My Hindu colleagues—with their temple prostitutes and erotic sculpture— had the right idea all the time. Too bad it took the West three thousand years of misery to catch up with them.

While the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases has brought more societies in the world to recognize that the mechanics of their spread must be publicly discussed, Clarke's Dr. Jafferjee would be likely to find that colleagues in the World Health Organization, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, public health officials, women's rights organizations, and agencies opposing child prostitution in many nations would not share his acceptance of prostitution—temple or otherwise—as "the right idea." Nor would all sociologists and anthropologists agree to trace repressive attitudes toward sexuality solely to the Puritan strain of Christianity in the Western cultures. In this brief brush stroke on the verbal canvas, Dr. Jafferjee seems rather more glib than scientifically insightful, and he does not account for documented tendencies in several Asian societies for some medical practitioners to "save face" for a patient by citing some lesser malady as the cause of problems, and only disclosing the true diagnosis of a terminal illness—if at all—to a family member or friend of the patient.

Thus, Clarke, though a world traveler, and long a resident of Sri Lanka, shows in this issue a far more casual grasp of medical and cultural realities, and more echoing of twentieth-century Western popular opinion than is the case in his fictive use of mathematics, aquanautics, electronics, and computer science.

Clarke is on more solid ground when commenting on and building plot figures on practical applications of abstract mathematical theory. As computer capacities have grown in the latter half of the twentieth century, mathematicians have been able to see the graphic results of both simple and complicated equations.

The elaborate designs of fractals, and particularly the Mandelbrot Set, form the basis for "a major trend in art design," and the Craigs, while still a family, use their great wealth to buy and renovate an estate in Ireland. They make the former stables into computer

labs, and they redesign the estate's lake and its bordering trees and shrubs according to Mandelbrot patterns, much in contrast to traditional shrubbery mazes and flower gardens with geometric patterns outlined by the walkways.

In the 1990s, sundry computer games and various activities on the Internet drew some technophiles into compulsive behaviors. Building on this phenomenon, Clarke portrays his star programmer, Edith Craig, as driven partly by fascination with the graphic results of Mandelbrot set calculations, and partly by grief over the loss of her daughter into a near catatonic state. Again drawing on his close attention to mathematical theory, husband Donald Craig suggests to Dr.

Jafferjee, Edith's psychiatrist, that a therapy be attempted with some absorbing graphics displays and voice-overs of therapeutic commentary. While some progress is made, Donald is less than pleased to discover that his wife's return to a state of self-awareness and interaction with others is culminated by her pairing off with Dolores, her psych nurse, in a lesbian relationship. Donald's displeasure strikes Dr. Jafferjee as somewhat old-fashioned.

The issue of protecting the environment while engaging in a major technical project surfaces from time to time in this novel; "Bluepeace" reportedly will threaten to sue to prevent injury to a giant sea creature or to prevent use of a possible poisonous rocket fuel as a means of raising a portion of the Titanic.

Techniques

While his collaboration with authors such as Gentry Lee on other novels seems to have drawn Clarke a little further into character development in The Ghost of the Grand Banks, Clarke still shows his tendency to give quick summary strokes of background and personality, then to set his characters in motion in brief episodes. The medium-short novel, in fact, has four major sections entitled "Prelude," "Preparations," "Operations," and "Finale," and it is closed by a short chapter of acknowledgments and an appendix that explains in everyday language the basics of the Mandelbrot set of calculations and the geometric patterns they describe. Within the four major sections are enclosed forty-four individual chapters, some as short as two pages of text.

Certain chapters are headed by quotations, giving some a documentary style and others a technical report style. Chapter 15 opens with a selection explaining the Mandelbrot Set, an excerpt from an essay by Edith and Donald Craig. Chapter 22 opens with two articles from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, signed in Jamaica, December 10, 1982. Thus, as Clarke writes from the "past and present" of the twentieth century with various quotations from documentable sources, and builds the fictive "present" of the very early twentyfirst century, the reader can easily lose track of the difference between "historical fact" and "constructed fact" which combine to serve the story line. Clarke blends speculation with established science and technology very smoothly—a trait that has long been a strength in his work.

Themes

The use of technology to further human evolution is a familiar theme in Clarke's fiction. Chapter 7 is an editorial from the April 15, 2007 London Times which urges that the Titanic be left alone: "There is no need to revisit her to be reminded of the most important lesson the Titanic can teach—the dangers of over-confidence, of technological hubris." As the plot develops, Clarke weaves his characters' lives through complications that echo the editorial. Edith and Donald Craig both make their careers and their fortunes from computer programming, yet Edith's mental collapse involves, in part, entrapment in Mandelbrot graphics. Donald, as mentioned above, devises a way to use those same graphics to "bring her back," but yet loses her to her psychiatric nurse.

Similarly, Roy Emerson has made a fortune with his subsonic Wave Wiper, but none of his subsequent inventions carry on the market. Jason Bradley, the noted deep-sea diving technician, has worked with advancing undersea vehicle technology throughout his career. Ultimately, he dies attempting to use an escape pod.

Theoretically, the emergency vehicle should have withstood the pressure of the deepwater—but in reality, it had never been tested at the depth at which Bradley was trapped. Thus these characters' lives have been made and unmade through their involvement with technology.

Between its sinking in 1912 and its location in 1985 in the Grand Banks region of the North Atlantic off Newfoundland, the ocean liner that had been touted as the marine engineering miracle of its age has fascinated treasure hunters and storytellers. Novels and movies have recounted the fateful voyage several times since the loss of the Titanic. Detailing the interests of the Parkinson family, Clarke develops the "treasure hunter" theme, for the great grandfather of the clan had been carrying a treasure in antique glassware for an exhibition at the Smithsonian in and near his cabins on the luxury liner.

With the last chapter, Clarke presents a Seeker from a far future time and civilization who has come to scan for signs of former civilization on a much-changed earth. The radical leap forward reminds the reader that Clarke is, indeed, a science fiction writer, as the turn of a page makes a gap of untold eons. The Seeker's instruments detect a long-buried iron hulk of some kind, and thus the Titanic draws another salvage effort. The hunt resumes.

In a brief subplot, discovery of the remains of Irish stowaways, "tanned" against decomposition by the tea leaves used to insulate the Parkinson glassware, offers an additional humane mystery that results in both Catholic and Protestant services for the departed. Thus, a hint of cooperation between the long-suffering communities in Northern Ireland is offered—and a reader could infer that Clarke sees the sectarian conflicts which date from the 1600s not subsiding fully by 2007.

Key Questions

The Ghost from the Grand Banks draws much from historical facts about the Titanic and its last voyage, about the undersea operations such as the Glomar Explorer's deployment to salvage a Soviet Russian nuclear submarine in 1974, and about the computer graphic representations generated by the Mandelbrot Set of calculations. Clarke, too, writes from experience as a diver and salvager-treasure hunter, making much of the description of scenes and undersea activities very easy to imagine. Published in 1990, the novel sets much of its action in the year 2007, but at the end, closes the tale with yet another probe of the wreck by an alien craft from far in the future.

1. Clarke is not known for deep development of characters in all of his novels, but in The Ghostfrom the Grand Banks, he gives the reader a fairly good exposure to the lives of Jason Bradley, and Donald and Edith Craig. Among the array of characters are Jason Bradley and the Craigs given enough developmental detail to be "well-rounded" for the reader, or do they seem somewhat shallow? How well-developed as characters are Kato Mitsumasa, Roy Emerson and Rupert Parkinson?

2. Since Jason Bradley and the Craigs are posed as highly successful in their work and independently wealthy, can an average person who may not be a wealthy celebrity relate well to their responses to the problems they face? Do the intelligence and expertise imputed to these fictional people make them "heroes" a reader would wish to emulate?

3. In the course of the story, Clarke has the Craig family explaining the Mandelbrot Set equations and their graphical products to Jason Bradley when he visits their estate. In an appendix, Clarke gives another, more extensive explanation of the equations. The title pages for each of the major sections of the novel carry pictures of a segment of a Mandelbrot graphic. In how many ways does Clarke use the Mandelbrot Set within the novel?

How many major plot lines does he use?

How many subplots?

4. Chapter 21, entitled "A House of Good Repute," presents Evelyn Merrick, a madam operating a house of prostitution and working on a doctorate in psychology by using the case histories of her seemingly upper-class clientele. What attitudes toward sexuality does Evelyn Merrick portray? What other characters in the novel give the reader some perspectives on sexual behavior or sexual orientation? How do these attitudes compare with the traditional view that sexual activity should be limited to a husband-wife relationship? Does the novel include any characters in "successful" marriages?

5. When Donald Craig shows dismay that Edith has bonded with Dolores and left him, Dr. Jafferjee terms Donald's displeasure that a psychiatric worker would carry on a

sexual relationship with a patient an outdated point of view. The twentieth-century view has been that for a caregiver to become sexually involved with a counselee is unethical and in some states in the United States, it is illegal. In the next century, is that position likely to change? Why or why not?

6. Published in 1990, the novel includes the remark that, in 2007, the designs of the Mandelbrot Set became a major influence in fabrics, wallpaper, and so forth.

What other assertions or estimates does the novel contain about a technical phenomenon and its effect? Have any of them proven true or false as of the current year?

7. In how many instances are environmental concerns mentioned? What activities are linked to "Bluepeace"? What attitudes do the business tycoons hold toward Bluepeace? How balanced is the Bluepeace response to the working world of the business people and engineering crews? How close to real life is Clarke's fictional sketch of an environmentalist position?

8. What causes the massive earthquake that ends the undersea salvage projects?

Does Clarke trace his fictional cause to any historical scientific data?

9. Irony is defined loosely as the difference between expectation and reality. The Mandelbrot Set generates graphics with many semicircular shapes which are composed of many smaller semicircular shapes. Returning to the number of ways Clarke has used the Mandelbrot patterns in the novel, how many of the uses are ironic? How many other themes show up in cycles or patterns in the main plot line or in any of the subplots?

10. What are the effects of the last chapter of the novel—in which the alien probe scans a deserted earth? Is the contrast with the rest of the material, and its near-future events too stark? Does it imply comment on the value or future of humanity?

Literary Precedents

From time to time, Clarke's characters refer to a motion picture or a novel about the Titanic. But even more overt help comes to the reader in Clarke's closing sections of the book. Following the last chapter of fiction, Clarke gives several pages of bibliography and comment in an easy conversational style. He confesses to using the premise of a space ship Titanic in a story "Icebergs of Space," a work he destroyed rather than publish. He has dedicated The Ghostfrom the Grand Banks to moviemaker Bill MacQuitty who made the 1958 film about the Titanic's voyage, A Night toRemember, and he credits Walter Lord's books A Night to Remember (1976) and Night Lives On (1986), as well as Robert Ballard's The Discovery of the Titanic (1987), and Charles Pelligrino's Her Name, Titanic (1990) as most valuable to his rendering of the situation and salvaging of the sunken vessel.

Also in his "Sources and Acknowledgments" section, Clarke credits friends and acquaintances who gave him information not readily available in print sources and lists numerous periodical articles which gave him details to use—or sometimes remanufacture—about everything from sizes of squids to fractal patterns generated by computers.

Related Titles

Clarke's early nonfiction includes several titles specifically dealing with the sea and with diving. For several years in the 1950s and 1960s, Clarke was partner in a diving company with Mike Wilson. In the waters off Sri Lanka—then known as Ceylon—and elsewhere, they engaged in scuba diving, undersea photography, treasure hunting, and writing. With Mike Wilson, Clarke wrote Boy Beneath the Sea (1958), The First Five Fathoms: A Guide to Underwater Adventure (1960), Indian Ocean Adventure (1961), and Indian Ocean Treasure (1964). From that same range of experiences, Clarke was solo author of The Reefs ofTaprobane: Underwater Adventures Around Ceylon (1957), The Challenge of the Sea (1960) and, drawing on a trip to Australia's Great Barrier Reef, The Treasure of the Great Reef (1964). Thus, as Clarke writes of the conditions of the wreckage of the Titanic, or of the thrills and risks of diving and working underwater in The Ghost from the Grand Banks, his fiction brings to the reader not only astute understanding of other peoples' research and underwater filming, but also the realistic detail in description and action that grows from Clarke's own years of experience as a diver.

Among Clarke's fiction titles, Imperial Earth (1976), poses that the Titanic is brought to New York for the 2276 Quincentennial celebration. Cradle (1988), co-authored with Gentry Lee, involves an alien space craft crashing off the coast of Florida, and several characters who are accomplished scuba divers.

Additionally, the disastrous undersea earthquake that disrupts the raising of the Titanic in The Ghostfrom the Grand Banks, prefigures Clarke's co-authoring with Mike McQuary of Richter 10 which explores the premise of an earthquake more massive than any previously recorded.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994