

# THE SIGN OF THE WORM

## Images of Death and Immortality in the Fiction of E. R. Eddison

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BY HELMUT W. PESCH

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The following essay was first published in an American critical anthology in 1985. Unfortunately, the text was edited by someone unfamiliar with the texts and the ideas discussed. I never received any proofs and saw the unauthorized changes for the first time when it appeared in print, including some odd phrases, unnecessary additions and several factual mistakes introduced by the editor. For the present purposes, the text has been retraced to the original manuscript version.

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Among the writers rediscovered in the course of the fantasy revival of the late sixties, the Englishman Eric Rücker Eddison (1882–1945) is regarded as a minor master, although he has received less critical attention than others of his kind. One of the reasons for this neglect may be the fact that Eddison's works are written in a dense and highly mannered prose, which – though admirably suited to his larger-than-life heroes and their superhuman deeds – takes some effort to get accustomed to, a language as it was never spoken or even written, although it recalls to some extent the diction of seventeenth-century writers like Christopher Marlowe or Sir Thomas Browne.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the relationships between his characters and what they represent are at least as important, and increasingly so, as the story elements. Understanding Eddison's philosophical system, on which his creation is based, is a task few might care to undertake.

Eddison's reputation among fantasy connoisseurs mainly rests on his first novel, *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922), his three-volume Zimiamvian cycle, comprising *Mistress of Mistresses* (1935), *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (1941) and the unfinished *The Mezentian Gate* (1958, posthumously). Besides, he has written a historical novel of the Viking age, *Styrbiorn the Strong* (1926), and a translation of the Icelandic *Egil's Saga* (1930), paying homage to the earlier translations by William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon.

*The Worm Ouroboros* is regarded by many critics as a “flawed masterpiece”.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Eddison is criticized for placing the action of the novel on the planet Mercury without paying attention to astronomical fact. “Unlike the practitioners of science fiction”, writes L. Stevenson in his supplemental volume to *The History of the English Novel*, “Eddison makes no effort to invent plausibly grotesque details to differentiate the remote planet from Earth. Landscape and inhabitants are indistinguish-

able from those of Europe, and the social conditions are an amalgam of feudal, classical and oriental elements.”<sup>3</sup> Even a moon shines down on Eddison’s world. Maybe it is true, as one of the early fan critics <sup>[92]</sup>suggested, that this is less the astronomers’ than the astrologers’ Mercury, “the mutable unpredictable planet where anything can happen”, although this analogy probably should not be pushed too far.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, critics have found fault with the nomenclature of the various races, who are called “Demons”, “Witches”, “Goblins”, or “Imps”, evoking associations in the reader which they do not fulfill by stature or behavior, and with the curious beginning of the novel, and its strange end.

Eddison makes use of a frame tale as an “Induction” to the story proper:

There was a man named Lessingham dwelt in an old low house in Wastdale, set in a gray old garden where yew-trees flourished that had seen Vikings in Copeland in their seedling time.<sup>5</sup>

Although the tale begins with the formula of the sagas, the figure of Lessingham is at best a descendant of the Vikings. He is without question an English gentleman of the Edwardian Age, who in his dream is wakened by a martlet, a heraldic bird, and conveyed to Mercury in a chariot drawn by a hippogriff. There his guide introduces to him the Lords of Demonland at a reception in which he invisibly participates; he appears once more as a witness of the next scene, which takes place at a later date and a different location, and is never mentioned again.

Orville Prescott writes in his preface to the novel that presumably the author simply forgets his observer, just as he “forgets” that the action takes place on another planet.<sup>6</sup> But the sheer pleasure a reader may derive from the main story itself, the sweep of its narrative, and the splendor of its prose do not lessen the probability that this seemingly awkward contraption was introduced or at least retained deliberately. To begin with, the frame tale is a conventional device; ever since Chaucer it has been used to disclaim responsibility for a story that may be morally or otherwise unacceptable to the audience. It is used this way by early novelists like Defoe or Fielding and again by Victorian writers such as H. Rider Haggard and his successors as a means of legitimating a tale of fantasy within preconceived notions of literary realism.<sup>7</sup> Even the dream device itself has been used in the utopian writings of William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball* (1886–87) and *News from Nowhere* (1890), and more obliquely and for a different purpose, in the fantasies of George MacDonald.

With Eddison, however, the frame tale is not merely convention. At least, it has an additional function in terms of narrative organization. Because the story’s exposition is presented not as part of the narrative itself but rather as a commentary to the initial scene, the frame is a necessary condition for the end of the novel, where by a sleight-of-hand Eddison has it start again at that very scene, like the Ouroboros of the title, the serpent devouring its own tail.

The Ouroboros, which literally means “tail-eater”, is an ancient alchemic symbol which may be traced back through the medieval mythographers to late antiquity. The *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo – that compendium of hermetic <sup>[93]</sup>knowledge presuma-

bly written in Graeco-Roman Egypt in the fifth century A.D. – gives as its three basic meanings: “eternity”, “the universe”, and “power”.<sup>8</sup> Generally, the self-devouring serpent symbolizes time as a process of eternal return, the steady movement and cyclic rebirth of the sun in the pre-Copernican world.<sup>9</sup>

The symbol of the worm Ouroboros appears in the story as a ring and a seal of the King of Witchland, the sinister counterpart of the Lords of Demonland, who will not submit to them. When the Demon lord Goldry Bluszco, having vanquished the reigning Witch King in a wrestling match, is magically transported by his successor, Gorice XII, to the peak of a mystic mountain, from which no mortal has ever returned, his brother, Lord Juss, and his cousin, Lord Brandoch Daha, climb the dizzy heights of Koshtra Pivrarcha, the haunt of the Mantichore, to seek the counsel of Queen Sophonisba, who dwells in eternal youth and beauty within the mountain of Koshtra Belorn. The gods had taken her there centuries before when Gorice IV razed her home.

From the Queen the Demons learn that the kings of Witchland, who are all called Gorice, are one and the same person, always being reborn in his successor. Thus another level of significance of the ring is revealed, when Juss realizes that,

“Rightfully, having such a timeless life, this King weareth an his thumb that worm Ouroboros, which doctors have from of old made for an ensample of etemity, whereof the end is ever at the beginning and the beginning at the end for ever more.”<sup>10</sup>

The Queen furthermore tells Juss that his brother may be saved only with the aid of a hippogriff, whose egg is to be found at the bottom of a lake in Demonland. After returning and dispelling the Witch invaders, as well as rescuing Goldry, the heroes then turn toward Witchland itself, laying siege to Gorice’s fortress of Carcë. Gorice, fully aware of the eventual outcome, uses magic a second time in a single lifetime, thereby transgressing a law that binds his unnatural existence, and dies.

But the Demons have no joy in their victory, for the death of their heroic adversaries has also deprived them of their own aristocratic *raison d’être*:

“We may well cast down our swords an Witchland’s grave. For now they must rust: seamanship and all high arts of war must wither: and now that our great enemies are dead and gone, we that were lords of all the world must now turn shepherds and hunters, lest we become mere mountebanks and fops ...”<sup>11</sup>

Sophonisba then pleads for them with the gods, and the gods grant them the favor of starting their tale again at the beginning, and, we may assume, again and again.

“What a fate!” says de Camp.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, this legerdemain way of ending a novel has met with a mixed response. There are, in the first place, substantial <sup>[94]</sup>problems as to the function of previous knowledge in the subsequent replays – a problem, incidentally, which has been quite successfully resolved by Eddison’s American contemporary, James Branch Cabell, in his *Figures of Earth* (1921), an equally cyclic

novel which is partially unintelligible at the first reading because it presupposes events occurring later in the story. Eddison, however, is less concerned with logic than with structural consequences; by turning the story in upon itself, he has transformed it into a kind of *perpetuum mobile*, a selfembedded tale which subsequently may dispose of the initially necessary “Induction”.

There is some corroborative evidence for this conclusion at another level of the story, namely, from the poetry quoted throughout by various characters. There is, in particular, a poem on the theme of mutability, taken from Shakespeare’s sonnets (no. *xviii*) and spoken by Sophonisba herself right at the end, culminating in the lines:

But thy eternall Sommer shall not fade  
Nor loose possession of that faire thou ow’st;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wandr’st in his shade,  
When in eternall lines to time thou grow’st:  
So long as men can breath, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.<sup>13</sup>

As Shakespeare grounds the unchanging, time-defying nature of his beloved in his own verse, we find here the topic of immortality integrated into the structure of the novel: It is the book that imparts eternal life to the heroes – and to the villain as well, whose unholy ambition is, in the end, to some extent fulfilled, even if only for his enemies’ sake.

Shades of death abound in the fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century poems quoted throughout the book as part of the characters’ syncretic cultural heritage. The very first poem to appear is a late fifteenth-century lament by William Dunbar, each stanza of which ends on the solemn note of *Timor Mortis conturbat me* (“The Fear of Death disturbeth me”), recited by the Red Foliot. No less significant than the stanzas he recites lamenting the death of the eleventh Gorice, are those he does *not* quote; for the ensuing brawl leads to a very timely interruption, since the unspoken second half of the poem would have told about the deaths of the great poets and artists of old. For art, and beauty, may never die in Eddison’s universe. Even the beautiful roses in a poem by Thomas Carew, which is quoted in praise of the Lady Prezmyra at Carce, are said to sleep in winter in the cheeks of the beloved, distilled to their Aristotelian essence.<sup>14</sup> There is even a sort of ironic antithesis in the story when the drunken Witch, Lord Corsus, sings at the banquet in Carce about the impossibilities that should occur rather than that “the old world is turned anew”,<sup>15</sup> unwittingly testifying to the very event that is to come about.

Still, there is a streak of futility in the ambivalent ending. The heroism, after [95] all, has come to nothing. The heroes have not really won the war, rather their enemies have lost it, lost it by the truly heroic suicides of both Gorice and the lesser lords of Witchland. In the final analysis, it seems to be the adversary who is the real driving power behind it all; and the heroes, while being true to their own nature, do not seem to have much choice in the matter.

But this is to some extent true of all characters in the story, and if the villainy of the Witches seems to be more interesting at times than the somewhat bland heroism of the Demons, it is only because their repertoire is broader and more complex. Even the Goblin, Lord Gro, a character of decidedly Jewish trait and high intellectual sensibility who repeatedly turns traitor by honest conviction, is to some extent fated to do so by his own disposition.

To us, this inherent determinism seems hardly compatible with our notions of heroic action, based on the free choice of the individual. But in Eddison's view, there is no such inconsistency. In connection with the translation of the aforementioned saga he notes:

The two essential facts about the old faith which stand out clearly amid much that is doubtful and obscure are, first, its fatalism, and secondly, the relation of fellowship between men and gods.<sup>16</sup>

And in a later passage, he elaborates:

This proud spirit of fatalism and fellowship with, not subservience to the ultimate Power, is implicit throughout the saga literature. It is, in my judgment, the deep underlying rock on which the greatness of that literature, as an expression of much that is finest and noblest in the human spirit, is founded.<sup>17</sup>

It is obvious that this is not merely a historical judgment but that the author gives expression to his own convictions. To Eddison, the values implied here are not subject to change.

The relationships between human beings and gods are the theme of Eddison's Zimiamvian cycle. Here we meet again with Lessingham, the figure so blithely disposed of in *The Worm Ouroboros*. In the Zimiamvian novels he appears not as a passive observer, but as a character himself – as two of them, in fact. On the one hand, he is an earthly adventurer of the twentieth century – his birth date, November 27, 1882, being the author's own. On the other, he is a nobleman involved in the intrigues of the countries of Zimiamvia, a land mentioned in passing in *The Worm Ouroboros* as a kind of mythical afterworld, and seen in the distance by Juss from the summit of Koshtra Pivrarcha. For Lessingham as well, it seems to denote a world after death, for in the "Overture" to *Mistress of Mistresses*, we find him on his deathbed, at the age of ninety – a date, incidentally, several decades in the author's future (and one he would not live to see). But while the earthly Lessingham is described as a kind of *uomo universale*, equally outstanding as an artist, mountaineer, soldier, scholar, poet, and lover,<sup>[96]</sup> the other Lessingham seems to have inherited the active part of his personality. His rival and alter ego Barganax, bastard son to King Mezentius, is more the contemplative, artistic type, although both display courage and determination in equal measure, and not until the end of the story, when Horius Parry, the villain of the piece, has contrived Lessingham's death, does it become

clear that they share some common fate, when, in a stunning scene, Parry looks up to find Barganax staring down at him with Lessingham's eyes.<sup>18</sup>

In the end, both Lessinghams, Barganax, and eventually Mezentius himself are more or less perfect embodiments of a principle which Eddison identifies with the Greek god Zeus, who seeks the favor of his mistress Aphrodite, who manifests herself in the various female characters: Lessingham's wife, Lady Mary, on Earth, and Queen Antiope courted in Zimiamvia by his namesake; Barganax's mother Amalie, duchess of Memison; and to the highest degree in his mistress, Lady Fiorinda, who in *A Fish Dinner in Memison* is the only one of the characters to walk between the worlds. Here the scene shifts in alternate chapters, and sometimes within the chapters, from Earth, relating the earlier life of Lessingham, to Zimiamvia and back again, and it may be noted that while the earthly Lessingham, who by allusion is here identified with Barganax, appears as a man who is both a dreamer and a man of action, his beloved appears as two, as Lady Mary whom he paints as Rosa Mundorum, and as the Dark Lady that is Fiorinda, and presumably also the Doña Aspasia of the "Praeludium" to *The Mezentian Gate*.

This proliferation of rôles and identities is certainly confusing at first, and the reader is well-advised to view them as just two personalities in different stages of awareness, as G. R. Hamilton suggests in his sympathetic assessment of Eddison's still incomplete work after the author's death.<sup>19</sup> They are, however, not simply incarnations of gods or manifestations of ideas. In the letter to Hamilton, reprinted with *A Fish Dinner in Memison*, Eddison explicitly repudiates any attempt at an allegorical reading. "There are", he writes, "no hidden meanings, no studied symbols or allegories."<sup>20</sup> It is rather that his figures act in accordance with a philosophy, expounded more fully in that "Letter of Introduction:"

In that conception, ultimate reality rests in a Masculine-Feminine dualism, in which the old trinity of Truth, Beauty, Goodness, is extended to embrace the whole of Being and Becoming; Truth consisting in this-That Infinite and Omnipotent Love creates, preserves, and delights in, Infinite and Perfect Beauty: . . . All men and women, all living creatures, the whole phenomenal world material and spiritual, even the very forms of Being – Time, Space, Eternity – do but subsist in or by the pleasure of these Two, partaking, (every individual soul, we may think, in its degree), of Their divine nature.<sup>21</sup>

Eddison arrives at this philosophical basis by a process of radical reduction. He holds that an humanity's basic question of the purpose of existence, rationalism<sup>[97]</sup> has not given a sufficient answer, thinking that Descartes's affirmation of cogitation *qua* consciousness as the only reality has led through Hume and Kant to the conclusion that every assumption may be reduced to this basic premise.

Therefore, the criterion for the purpose of life must be sought not in reason, but in poetry, being not based on a credibility, but on value. The ultimate value is something that is desirable in itself; the denial of this premise would not be contradictory, as in the Cartesian *cogito*, but would imply complete futility.

This may be not particularly sound philosophy, since the conclusion is already implicit in the presupposition, but it serves well as a basis of literary creation. Viewed in terms of absolute principles, our world is no more real than the world of Zimiamvia, even less so. It is a world ruled by cause and effect, a “clockwork world” much less worthy to be wound up again than the world of the Worm,<sup>22</sup> a “mock-show”<sup>23</sup> in which the good is not implicitly that which serves the beautiful.<sup>24</sup> Within the story, it is nothing but “a misconceived and, were it not for its nightmarish unreality and transience, unfortunate episode in the real life of the Gods”,<sup>25</sup> created by Mezentius during the Fish Dinner at Memison – fish in honor of foam-born Aphrodite – to the amusement of Lady Fiorinda, who afterwards pricks it with a hairpin and makes it burst, “leaving, upon the table where it had rested, a little wet mark the size of her finger-nail.”<sup>26</sup> During this short time, half an a hour perhaps, our world has not only run through billions of years of evolution, but the gods themselves, Mezentius and Amalie, have chosen to play a tiny part in it, for a few seconds – as Edward and Mary Lessingham.

Our own world is thus perceived as nothing but a flawed plaything of the gods, against whom lesser beings cannot prevail. Or is it? L. Sprague de Camp, who is very literal-minded, notes that in fact the world of the Worm, as a dream of Lessingham, the world of Zimiamvia as a myth among the Demons, and our world as Mezentius’s creation are mutually dependent.<sup>27</sup> Once more, a circle is closed. Not by chance does Lessingham, in both his incarnations, wear a ring in the shape of the worm Ouroboros, eating his own tail.<sup>28</sup>

This logic, however, is not as unequivocal as it may seem, for in the later novels any relationships of logical sequency are increasingly called into question. *Mistress of Mistresses* opens, as mentioned above, with a short chapter an the dead Lessingham, dated, from internal evidence, July 13, 1973, and switches then to Zimiamvia, some ten months after the death of Mezentius. One part of *A Fish Dinner in Memison* deals with the earlier life of Lessingham, between 1908 and 1933, telling the story of his love, of his wife’s early death, and part of his long wait afterward, while the interlaced Zimiamvian chapters cover only the four weeks of leading to the central event of the Fish Dinner, during Mezentius’s lifetime. The “Praeludium” to *The Mezentian Gate*, eventually, takes place one day before the events at the beginning of *Mistress*, and the novel itself covers the life of Mezentius from events prior to his birth to the day of his death, including the Fish Dinner episode in a single chapter.

[98] Of course these parts could be ordered in a roughly chronological sequence, but even de Camp, who suggests such a scheme, calls its feasibility in doubt.<sup>29</sup> Obviously, the novels are not meant to be read chronologically, and the equation of different time spans and the shifts in perspective are themselves indicative of a denial of time. “Here we are slaves of Time”, Eddison says, “but there the Gods are masters.”<sup>30</sup>

So any development we might wish to look for is certainly not determined by chronological sequence. Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert Boyer, in a recent article on the element of setting in works of fantasy, see Eddison’s early novels as a search for the proper method of relating our primary world to the world of the imagination:

Having “failed” in *The Worm Ouroboros* and having been only partially successful in *Mistress*, in which Lessingham is himself confused by dim recollections of his former existence, Eddison achieves his objective in *Fish Dinner* by interrelation and juxtaposition.<sup>31</sup> They are correct in that his theme of our limited existence and its philosophical transcendence has been as fully exploited in this novel as his philosophy would allow. But his final novel, intended at least by sheer size to be his masterpiece and still impressive in its partially synoptic form, and the questions it raises cannot be dealt with from this limited point of view.

At least in one respect, *The Mezentian Gate* is the most skillful of Eddison’s works, namely for its integration of philosophy and action. It has been said that while the *Worm* is Homeric, the Zimiamvian novels are Machiavellian, not so much because the world of Zimiamvia resembles Renaissance Italy but because the element of intrigue is so predominant in the story itself.<sup>32</sup> What has irritated G. Rostrevor Hamilton and infuriated de Camp, is that the characters do not behave like gods.<sup>33</sup> They are capable of cruelty and cunning and deem themselves superior to other people. Philosophically, this may even be justified; viewed in social terms, it is nevertheless highly suspect. It ought to be noted again, though, that these characters are not just one-dimensional figures representing abstract values. Eddison’s aforementioned dislike of allegory is firmly based on the notion that there are no general principles except as embodied in the particular, and that no single manifestation is sufficient to denote them. The characters in his novels have their individual characteristics, reflecting, no doubt, to some extent the author’s own cultural prejudices.

But even if there is no strict allegory, there is a certain quasi-allegorical, philosophical layer which appears superimposed on the political intrigue. In the *Worm*, heroic action is an aim in itself, but in *Mistress*, the political action is interspersed with philosophical discussions, mainly situated in isolated places like the timeless gardens of the philosopher magician Doctor Vandermast, who, having aged beyond the desires of the flesh, is almost an image of Death itself.<sup>34</sup> In *Fish Dinner* the action is more or less subordinate to the philosophical preoccupations. Only in *The Mezentian Gate* do both intrigue and philosophical desire interact, leading to a common aim: the death of King Mezentius.

Death is the central theme of Eddison’s final work. It has already been a [99] subject of discussion in the earlier novels, but only under the aspect of transition, as a gate to a fuller, more conscious life. As such, it is discussed by the first person narrator of the “Overture” to *Mistress*, who has some features in common with Doctor Vandermast. In *Fish Dinner* the author has Lessingham say, “Perhaps if people knew, beyond quibble or doubt, what was through the Door the world would be depopulated? Death, so easy, so familiar and dreadless, to a believer?”<sup>35</sup> But there remains a curious problem, still unresolved: Why does Lessingham have to wait another fifty years before he may join his beloved once more in another world? What purpose is there to cogitation that has no aim? In the “Praeludium” – and it ought to be noted that Eddison chooses his titles with care: this is no “opening” or “induction” – the central aspect of death is that of negation. Here, in our world, the thought of

“leaving one’s love alone” is indeed the ultimate terror, even if death – either as a forgetting or a new beginning – holds no fear.<sup>36</sup>

To Mezentius, death is at first only a temporary forgetting, a starting anew with a blank page, as he and Zeus have done again and again. But it cannot “redeem this all-knowing knowing”, the time-transcending knowledge enclosing all existence first revealed to Mezentius in the Fish Dinner episode.<sup>37</sup> It is basically the same problem we have already encountered at the end of *The Worm Ouroboros*: the question of awareness in reënaction, which can now no longer be ignored.

There is one basic difference between the complementary principles of Zeus and Aphrodite, the lover and the beloved. She, though ever-changing, is essentially self-contained. As *ultima ratio* of All that Is, she cannot look beyond death: “He that loveth, and he love not me, loveth Death. Love me who dares. He shall be mine, I his, forever; and if it were possible for more than ever, then for ever more.”<sup>38</sup> God, she says, is indeed able to die, but will not, for her sake. But, to be worthy of her, he, by the very act of desire, must be always striving. The awareness that he has, *sub specie aeternitatis*, already achieved his goal, means to him but a limited fulfillment. Therefore, he also strives to learn “that More than All: which is Not”, committing the ultimate blasphemy against her while at the same time being true to his own nature.<sup>39</sup>

To accomplish this in the plot, Mezentius uses “my creation-old Instrument, Death.”<sup>40</sup> He goads his Queen into attempting to kill Barganax and thereby him. But he uses death, as the artist-creator he is, not in the time-hallowed way, as an instrument of endless return, but as a gate that will lead out of the eternal cycle.

The Ouroboros circumscribes the limited nature of Lessingham and Barganax. But Mezentius eventually relinquishes the sign of the worm.<sup>41</sup> With him, it is no longer needed; his is a mixed symbol, an egg-shaped cup with eagle’s claw, lion’s paw, and hippogriff’s hoof, a symbol of power, strength, and imagination, from which he drinks his lethal draught, drinking, like Gorice, he twice from a cup that is to be tasted but once, and by this act of will transcends the limits of existence.

[100] Still it is hinted that Barganax assumes some aspects of Mezentius at the king’s death, and the analogy of Mezentius lying dead in his island fortress of Sestola and of Lessingham lying in state in his fortress on a Lofoten island at the beginning of *Mistress of Mistresses*, about to enter the history of Zimiamvia (where he has never been mentioned before), is too significant not to identify their similarities, at least by allusion. In this way Mezentius, though dead, will live forever, and the story, though ended, is yet about to begin.

## NOTES

1. The earliest stylistic model, as evident from the text itself, is Sir John Mandeville's *Travels* (after 1356). Compare it with the fictitious book of travels in *The Worm Ouroboros*, p. 137 of the 1967 Ballantine edition. Eddison also refers with admiration to the "pre-Spenserian" English of Montagu Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888) in his "Terminal Essay: Some Principles of Translation", which appears in his translation of *Egil's Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 241.
2. Orville Prescott, "Introduction", in *The Worm Ouroboros* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967). Cf. also L. Sprague de Camp, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy* (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House, 1976), p. 118.
3. Lionel Stevenson, *The History of the English Novel*, vol. 9, *Yesterday and After* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1967), p. 146.
4. John Boardman, "The Novels of Eric Rücker Eddison", *Amra*, vol. 2, no. 5 (1955); rpt. in *The Blade of Conan*, ed. L. Sprague de Camp (New York: Ace Books, 1979). Jürgen Blasius, in an afterword to *Der Wurm Ouroboros* (Munich: Heyne, 1981), p. 478, recalls the two-headed serpent that is the sign of Mercury as an analogue of the Ouroboros, a comparison, however, not substantiated by the text.
5. E. R. Eddison, *The Worm Ouroboros* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), p. I.
6. Prescott, p. xiv. See also Lin Carter, *Imaginary Worlds: The Art of Fantasy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), p. 33.
7. For a discussion of legitimation in the early novel, see Lothar Fietz, "Fiktionsbewusstsein und Romanstruktur in der Geschichte des englischen und amerikanischen Romans", in *Gestaltungsgeschichte und Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Helmut Kreuzer (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969), pp. 115-31. Similar problems in fantasy fiction have been dealt with in my *Fantasy: Theorie und Geschichte einer literarischen Gattung*, diss., University of Cologne, 1981 (Forchheim: privately printed, 1982).
8. Jack Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London: Muller, 1970), pp. 286 f.; cf. also C. G. Jung, *Psychologie und Alchemie*, 2nd ed. (Zürich: Rascher, 1958), *passim*.
9. On the serpent as a symbol of time, see Erwin Panofsky, "Titians Allegorie der Klugheit: Ein Nachwort", in *Sinn und Deutung in der bildenden Kunst* (Meaning in the Visual Arts) (Cologne: DuMont, 1975), p. 172; 187 n.
10. Eddison, *Ouroboros*, p. 235.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 502.
12. De Camp, p. 116.
13. Eddison, *Ouroboros*, p. 502.
- <sup>[101]</sup>14. *Ibid.*, pp. 95 f.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
16. Eddison, *Egil's Saga*, p. xxv.
17. *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.
18. Eddison, *Mistress of Mistresses* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), p. 368.
19. G. Rostrevor Hamilton, "The Prose of E. R. Eddison", *English Studies* N.S. 2 (1949), p. 48.
20. Eddison, "A Letter of Introduction", in *A Fish Dinner in Memison* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), p. xvii.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. xxiv-xxv.
22. Eddison, *Fish Dinner*, pp. 3, 301.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
25. Eddison, *The Mezentian Gate* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), p. 180.
26. Eddison, *Fish Dinner*, p. 312.
27. De Camp, p. 130.
28. Cf. *Mistress of Mistresses*, p. 233; *Fish Dinner*, p. 142.

29. De Camp, p. 130.
30. Eddison, "A Letter of Introduction", p. xvii.
31. Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert Boyer, "The Secondary Worlds of High Fantasy", in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature*, ed. Roger Schlobin (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 68.
32. Lin Carter, *Tolkien: A Look Behind the Lord of the Rings* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), p. 146.
33. Cf. De Camp, pp. 127; 132; Hamilton, p. 47.
34. Eddison, *Mistress of Mistresses*, p. 116.
35. Eddison, *Fish Dinner*, p. 302.
36. Cf. Eddison, *Mezentian Gate*, p. xxiii.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

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