

that assumption and the use of its language to name the symmetries of the whole or of the parts into which the whole divides."

If you and your students understand this language, then this is the text for you. As for me, I had difficulty parsing many of the sentences. The book is written in a literary fashion for which I have had to coin a term: bewilderstyle. This text has much potential, and I hope that a properly edited version appears soon.

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The Trinity Paradox

Kevin J. Anderson and
Doug Beason

Bantam Spectra, New York,
1991. 325 pp. \$4.99 pb
ISBN 0-553-29246-3

My school has a multidisciplinary seminar on the history of the making of the atomic bomb. Students majoring in physics, chemistry, political science, history and basic sciences make up the roster. The readings for the seminar were chosen to illustrate both the technical and human sides of the subject. In addition to articles and reports from the time of the Manhattan Project, there are numerous excellent nonfiction accounts of this epochal undertaking.

But what can we use as an example of its influence on literature and fiction? We could use some rather dated (but still classic) postapocalyptic works, such as Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) or Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959), or a more recent work, *Stallion Gate* by Martin Cruz (1986). Fortunately for us, just as our mandatory book order was due, Bantam came out with *The Trinity Paradox* by Kevin J. Anderson and Doug Beason. Anderson is a technical writer at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Beason, who ran the plasma physics division at Phillips Laboratories, currently works in the White House Office of Science and Technology. The authors have woven a taut tale set against the backdrop of wartime Los Alamos.

In a theme common enough in literature, the heroine, Elizabeth Devane, travels back through time from the early 1990s and is given a chance to alter the past and shape the present. But this is no mere tale of a California activist in J. Robert Oppenheimer's court. Devane (who studied at Berkeley, of course) has a combined knowledge of physics and history potent enough to effect and direct changes. It does not take much before

we are swept along through twists and turns that history did not take. Intentional and unintentional transmutations abound—a careless slip of the tongue starts a chain reaction that leads to the execution of a high-ranking German physicist, while deliberate sabotage of theoretical calculations shifts the emphasis of the American bomb design.

The setting and the people of Los Alamos come alive. The cast is impressive—our students knew most of the characters from their physics texts. (I was particularly pleased to see the inimitable "den mother," Dorothy McKibbin, figure prominently in the story.) In one very amusing incident, the protagonist admonishes one of the younger scientists with the line, "Surely you're joking, Mr. Feynman." We meet, among others, Leslie Groves, John von Neumann, Edward Teller, Werner Heisenberg, Kurt Diebner and Abraham Esau.

Ultimately the story is about Devane. She is a stimulating, memorable literary creation. Her sensibilities and political views were forged in the 1980s and 1990s, but suddenly she is compelled to confront her convictions in a time of horror and atrocity. She chooses her final course honestly and believably. The climax is thrilling and, as one might suspect, explosive.

This book was an exceptional find for our seminar. It acted as a sounding board for a number of important questions surrounding the atomic projects. For example, the students were interested in the Goudsmit-Heisenberg controversy over the goal of German scientists during the war. *The Trinity Paradox* rekindled the discussion because much of the action takes place tracing the German effort.

In the next three years the 50th anniversaries of the establishment of Los Alamos and the Trinity test will be commemorated. We can expect a number of new articles and books about this important period. Consider reading *The Trinity Paradox* (to coin a term) retrospectively. It's not your standard fare, but stimulating and insightful nonetheless.

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