



The Fountains of Youth

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This is a science fiction novel of enormous scope and ambition, filled with wonders that expands Brian Stableford's on-going future history series. Hundreds of years in the future, further ahead than the settings of Inherit the Earth and Architects of Mortality, Mortimer Gray is born into a world where he can potentially live forever.

But after a traumatic natural disaster that kills millions, Gray devotes the next five hundred years of his life to the study of death and its effects on human civilization, viewed from a post-death perspective. Through it all we see the broad, large-scale accumulation of change and the growth of humanity on Earth and out to the stars as Gray experiences his boundless lifetime.

The Fountains of Youth Details

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Author : Brian Stableford

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From Reader Review The Fountains of Youth for online ebook

David says

Just couldn't finish. Didn't like the narrator. The prose was unexciting, especially the lack of dialog (I get it was written as a memoir, but the narrator wasn't interesting), and nothing much happened.

Bryan says

Fictionwise has this download working once again, so I can now read the book I purchased!

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in July 2001.

The third novel in Stableford's trilogy about the efforts made by the human race to postpone and eventually eradicate death is rather different to the first two. Set farthest into the future, its characters are the first generation of true emortals, not subject to death by ageing or disease. While the earlier novels were both murder mysteries, *The Fountains of Youth* purports to be the autobiography of Mortimer Gray, a historian who has written an epic history of death - a subject which fascinates those who are no longer subject to it.

The genre of autobiography is ideally suited to the more thoughtful mood of this novel, which is to a large extent an exploration of the psychological effects that the abolition of death might have. The ideas include the rather disturbing aestheticisation of death, with suicide parties and even the tailoring of new diseases to overcome the advanced immune systems of the emortals. Gray's work is used, against the wishes of the author, as an inspiration for this kind of movement.

The novel which came into my mind while reading *The Fountains of Youth* was Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*, but it is really more like Robinette Broadhead's story in Pohl's *Gateway* series. Stableford's narrative fails to convey as alien a personality as Stapledon's arrogant last man, nor does he make a rapid pace of change in the long life of his central character as apparent as Pohl does. Stableford's concerns are different, and the character of Gray is different; he is not interested in technology and he is not writing out of contempt for the past. Gray is almost a scholarly hermit, not paying that much attention to what goes on around him except as it affects his obsession with death, and even his interest in that is quite philosophical.

One very odd thing about Mortimer Gray is that, in a world where death has been virtually abolished, he keeps on encountering it. He survives a major catastrophe when quite young, but that is just the first in a series of accidents. Of course, the historian of the human battle of death needs such an encounter to suggest the theme of his work, but it makes his attitude to death atypical and for him to continually just escape from it is not very believable.

One of the interesting ideas in the novel, not really connected to its main theme, is the way that the history is structured. Each of its ten parts consists of a vast organisation of supporting evidence, in the form of links overlaid on the future equivalent of the World Wide Web - clearly using a more sophisticated form of

hypertext than we do at the moment - with an overriding commentary. It certainly seems to me that as new generations arise who grow up familiar with the ideas of hypertext, its use will become more and more sophisticated, and the linear narrative with the occasional link which is the form of most web pages today (including this one) will be less and less common.

The novel is more obviously a vehicle for Stableford's ideas than the preceding ones, because these ideas here are more to do with psychology than technology. In the end, this makes the novel more thought provoking but less gripping.
