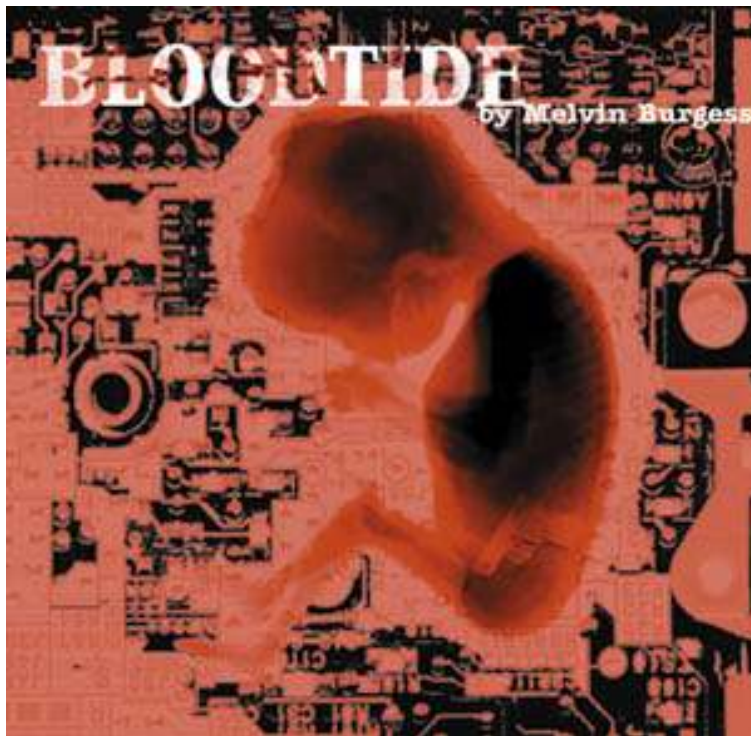


## Bloodtide Education Pack

written by Jo Darby, Education Director – Pilot Theatre



This resource pack aims to introduce some of the ideas and approaches central to **Bloodtide**. It offers page to stage access to the production in a dynamic and practical way and will hopefully provoke discussion and practical work of your own.

### What's in this pack?

This resource pack includes:

- background information on Pilot Theatre
- information on the author of **Bloodtide**, Melvin Burgess
- interviews with the artistic team
- discover **Bloodtide's** Viking origins
- a discussion of themes and issues
- parallel texts
- preparatory and follow up workshops based on the production's themes, style, creative process

Each workshop can be adapted to suit your group's interest and age and covers a range of subject areas, including Drama, PSHE, Media Studies and English.

**Keep in touch...**

You can keep in touch with Pilot and the production by accessing our regularly updated and interactive web site at [www.pilot-theatre.com](http://www.pilot-theatre.com)

Our discussion board allows you to ask questions about any aspect of the production or Pilot's work and get a personal response from the team including the director. Audio, video and still images of the production's rehearsal and performance are available on-line as well as audience and critics' reviews.

**Why not join our text club by texting 'pilot' to 07887 926101 on your mobile to receive free text updates on all our work**

**Any suggestions?**

We would welcome any comments or suggestions you have concerning our education packs and national education programme. You can e-mail me on [jo@pilot-theatre.com](mailto:jo@pilot-theatre.com)

# PILOT EDUCATION

## **Core Activities**

Pilot Theatre develops, creates and tours pioneering new theatre work for young people. We are a national touring theatre company based in Yorkshire with over twenty years of experience in working with educational and community establishments. We support all our work with a national education programme aimed to encourage active participation and direct contact with professional artists. This work includes workshops, training sessions for teachers, resource packs, play-days and a thriving youth theatre.

## **National Education Programme**

A full education programme supports all our national touring productions and includes practical workshops that take place in secondary schools, colleges, universities, pupil referral units, Special schools and community/youth groups. Pilot support its work by education packs and video and audio clips that can be downloaded for free from our website [www.pilot-theatre.com](http://www.pilot-theatre.com)

Training sessions for teachers, post show talks and further chances to contact the company directly are also available. Our work links to the following subject areas and relates to courses in: Drama, Theatre Studies, English, Personal and Social Education, Performing Arts, Dance, Expressive Arts and Media Studies. Pilot Theatre also designs individual projects for education and community groups, often working with disaffected and disadvantaged groups of young people.

## **Pilot Youth Theatre**

We also run Pilot Youth Theatre for 14-25 year olds who want to work with theatre professionals to experiment with a range of dramatic techniques to produce their own work. Sessions run in Wakefield and Castleford (in association with Airedale High School) Performance projects include **Our Town** (The Millennium Dome) **Eclipse** by Simon Armitage (Wakefield Opera House) and **Brokenville** by Philip Ridley at (York Theatre Royal Studio and Wakefield Arts Centre) as part of The National Theatre Shell Connections Scheme which we are also participating in during 2004.

## **[www.pilot-theatre.com](http://www.pilot-theatre.com)**

Many young people contact us directly through our website, via the discussion board where ideas are exchanged between Pilot artists and young people. The site also has numerous of reviews of our productions that have been written by young people inspired after seeing the show. The site also includes video and audio clips from current and past productions, text and images and a unique timeline that documents the rehearsal process on-line.

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## Synopsis of play

Val Volson is the King of London and a man with a dream. He will unite London and then conquer the rest of Britain bringing back the old days of civilization. In order to do this he arranges a marriage between his daughter and his only rival in gangland London.

When the god Odin appears at their wedding, it becomes clear that more is at stake than a simple marriage. The groom, Conor, his new wife Signy and her brother Sigg are cast into a conflict that will tear all of England apart.

Author Melvin Burgess creates an intriguing interpretation of the 'magic returns' plot. Genetic replicators can combine human, animal and even steel into new creations...the half-men. Conor preaches a crusade against the half-men, and is willing to destroy anything to seize and hold more power. Yet true magic also walks. The old gods are walking the world again. Their plans bend the plans of men to the gods' purpose.

Melvin Burgess has been hailed by The Times as having "exceptional powers of insight", a gift he brings compellingly to bear in this futuristic reworking of one of the Norse myths. London is in ruins and in the hands of two warring ganglords, Val Volson and Conor. To cement a truce between the two families, Val offers Conor the hand of his spirited 14-year-old daughter. But the wedding feast is disrupted by the dramatic coming to life of a mysterious one-eyed prisoner whom the people believe to be the god Odin, come to play a part in the affairs of men. War, revenge, love and hate, intrigue and magic combine in Burgess's most complex and gripping tale.

## Melvin Burgess, Writer of Bloodtide

"I was born in Sussex in 1954 - far too long ago. I was an extremely dreamy and shy child, and I used to used to wander round muttering to myself and playing games with imaginary friends. My parents had to shout - "He's in the land!" to explain to people why I apparently couldn't hear what they were saying to me. I did very badly at school - I was daydreaming too much to concentrate on anything much. It wasn't until I was pretty nearly grown up that I started to think that the world around me might be at least as interesting as what was going on in my own head.

I did poorly at school, although occasionally teachers would think I had a lot of promise. In those days we had an exam called the eleven plus, which you did just before you went to High School. If you were a clever kid with a good brain, you passed and went to Grammar School to learn brainy things, and if you were a dumb kid, you failed and went to Secondary Modern School and learnt how to do things with your hands. I was a kid with hands. I went to Secondary Modern School.

I wasn't very happy at my new school. I remember having a lousy teacher there, who bawled me out for doing a story in a way she hadn't ordered - I'd done it as a diary. She was furious! - called me out in front of the whole class and made a fool of me. So, she got no good stories out of me. My parents moved again, to Reading in Berkshire. This new school was going comprehensive - children of all abilities were to go there. I got on much better there, due to one or two very good teachers who helped me along, but I was still a poor worker, and came away with two very bad A levels, in Biology and English. Mine was only the second year to do A levels - I'm sure, if they hadn't been just gagging to let anyone do them, no one would have let me near the exams at all..

Life got rapidly better for me after I left school, but for the first few months I hadn't got a clue what to do. My dad eventually filled in an application form for a job as a journalist with the local newspaper. Somehow I got the job and went off to do a course for six months training.

The course was great - it was my only real time as a student - but by the end of it I had decided that I really wanted to write and that no other career would do. I packed in the job as soon as I got back home, much to the editor's disgust. "I think the saddest, thing, Melvin, is that you have deprived someone else of a career opportunity," he intoned. Then I got on with writing my first book, which, of course, no one wanted to publish.

For the next fifteen years, I wrote on and off, had casual jobs here and there, spent a lot of time out of work with not much to do, and I enjoyed myself enormously. I moved to Bristol after a couple of years where I lived until I was thirty. Inner-city Bristol was a great place to live, with a big racial and cultural mix. I learned a lot there and got my feeling for life. My book Junk is

based on Bristol in those years, and although it is not biographical, you can pick up a lot of the atmosphere and meet a few of the people in its pages.

I was living in London aged about thirty five when I began to think it was time for me to really try hard to see if I could make writing work for me. I'd written a great deal off and on for years, a lot of it experimental, but I'd never really put getting published over writing what I felt like writing. So I had a go - I did short stories, radio drama, and children's fiction. I had some success in all three, but my book *The Cry of the Wolf*, was short-listed for the Carnegie medal. So that's what I've been doing ever since.

I now live in Manchester, with my wife Judith, my son Oliver and my stepson Sam. I have a daughter, Pearl, who lives with her mother in Odessa, Ukraine.

For more information about Melvin Burgess visit:

[web.onetel.net.uk/~melvinburgess](http://web.onetel.net.uk/~melvinburgess)

## Melvin Burgess – A Biography

Writer of acclaimed and often controversial children's fiction, Melvin Burgess was born in Twickenham, Middlesex. He grew up in Ilfield near Crawley in Sussex and moved to Reading, Berkshire at the age of twelve. After leaving school he enrolled on a six-month journalism course. He moved to Bristol at the age of 21, and began writing. He continued writing after he moved to London in 1983 experimenting with short stories, radio plays and children's fiction. His first published book, **The Cry of the Wolf** (1990) was short-listed for the Carnegie medal.

It was for his controversial teenage novel **Junk** (1996) that he gained wider recognition. Winner of the Carnegie medal and The Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, it is an honest and disturbing account of teenager homelessness and heroin addiction on the streets of Bristol. **Bloodtide** (1999) was joint winner of the Lancashire County Library Children's Book of the Year Award. His most recent book the comedy **Lady: My life as a Bitch** (2001), also received a great deal of publicity for its frank exploration of the sexual behaviour of a teenage girl. His controversial new teenage novel, **Doing It** was published in Spring 2003

Melvin Burgess now lives with his family in Manchester.

[www.contemporarywriters.com](http://www.contemporarywriters.com)

**Interview with Melvin Burgess by Jo Darby – Education Director**  
**05.12. 03**

**1. What aspects of the book do you think will most successfully translate onto the stage and why.?**

Probably the characters' thoughts and then how they change and their transformations through the story. I think the change in Signy from victim to Monster is very intriguing.

**2. Have you every thought of making BT into a film – who would you have play Siggie and Signy?**

I would love to see Bloodtide made into a film. Occasionally a company makes enquiries but as yet nothing has come of it. It would require a lot of money spending on it to get it looking right and if you do that you need a happy ending to get the public in and make that investment back – its too dark a piece for that and there's no nice ending.

Some thoughts on casting:

Brad Pitt – I think he's a great actor, maybe as Conor

Al Pacino – as Val

Pete Postlethwaite and Sean Bean would make great half men.

I'm not very up on young actors and actresses but perhaps some one like Sarah Michelle Geller who plays Buffy the Vampire Slayer would be a good Signy.

**3.How relevant is BT to young people in society today?**

Bloodtide is not an issue book. It deals with human themes, big themes that affect everyone, like treachery, betrayal, love and distortion of love and loyalty and friendship. So its relevant to teenagers and everyone really.

**4.What did you read when you were a teenager?**

I did read Lord of the Rings but was more into Gormenghast by Mervyn Peake because its really character driven , something I really wanted for Bloodtide.

**5.Which contemporary writers do you read now?**

All sorts really. I've read the Philip Pullman books and thought Life of Pi that won the Booker Prize was great.



## **6.How do you feel about another person adapting your writing?**

I'm quite happy about it – its always interesting to see how other people see your own work.

## **7.What can we expect in the sequel?**

It based on the second half of the Volsung Saga about Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. There's the killing of the dragon a great half mutated creature and a then a tragic lover story. **Bloodtide's** features of cloning and murder are again present, but above all else is the tragic destruction of a pure and loving heart.

For more info about Sigurd the Dragon Slayer click here: [www.sacred-texts.com/neu/tml/tml33.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/tml/tml33.htm) and scroll down to p 314 where the Sigurd story starts.

## **Interview with Marcus Romer, Adaptor and Director of Bloodtide**

18.12.03

### **1.) What is the hardest aspect of adapting Bloodtide for the stage**

Well, condensing a large novel with over a hundred characters into a stage play for 7 actors! and knowing which bits to leave out without affecting the story.

### **2.) Have you taken any other outside sources as inspiration for the adaptation?**

Yes movies, the internet and literary references. Macbeth, Bladerunner, Lord of the Rings and Star Wars - oh and Memento.

### **3.) If you were to make a film of Bloodtide which famous actors would you use and for which parts?**

If I couldn't use the cast we have (who are brilliant) then I suppose I would have to call Jonny Depp, Samuel L Jackson, Ewan McGregor Orlando Bloom, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Keira Knightley.

### **4.) Pilot are known for using new technology in their productions - what role do you see this playing in Bloodtide?**

Well we will be using live cameras, two projectors which will be running two dvd players with dvd's in and gameplaying!

## **Bloodtide's Origins**

### **Norse Myths**

Much of **Bloodtide** is inspired by The Volsung Saga, a Norse myth from 900 AD that made up part of the Icelandic Poetic Edda's. These texts began life as oral literature and were finally written down on between 1000 and 1300 AD. In Scandinavia, in the centuries after the Middle Ages, knowledge of the Volsung family and Sigurd story never died out among the rural population. Full of supernatural elements, including the schemes of one-eyed Odin, a ring of power, and the sword that was reforged, the tale remained alive in oral tradition. In the nineteenth century, the tale of the Volsungs was rediscovered, becoming widely known throughout Europe.

These stories have many similar elements to our blockbuster movies today, full of gore, sex, revenge and apocalyptic violence. They are pieces of great, tragic literature, with vivid descriptions of the emotional states of the protagonists, Gods and heroes alike. Women played a prominent role in this age and many of them are delineated as skilled warriors.

Many of these elements can be seen in **Bloodtide**, from the clever fighting spirit of Signy to the violent desecration of London and the emotional bond between Siggy and his brothers.

The impact of these sagas from Iceland, a sparsely inhabited rocky island in the middle of the Atlantic, on world culture is wide-ranging. Before Melvin Burgess took inspiration for **Bloodtide**, JRR Tolkien creatively mined the stories for atmosphere, plot material, symbolic objects and the names of many characters in his trilogy and in music Wagner based some of his great opera's on their dramatic incidents.

To read more of the saga go to [www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~cherryne/volsung.html](http://www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~cherryne/volsung.html)

**"the story is taken from an ancient tale, a saga from the Icelandic Vikings known as the Volsunga Saga, which I read when I was a child and remembered all my life. I was always very keen on myths and legends, and Norse mythology in particular, because of the power of the stories and the dark elements in them - you always feel that the abyss is opening up at your feet. But I didn't want to write about blokes with beards in iron helmets - I wanted to write about modern people. Updating the myth, making the imagery real for today was a real struggle. Some of it was easy. For instance, exchanging swords and battle axes for automatic weapons made the warfare and violence much more real; but the people were very hard."**

### **Melvin Burgess**

## Bloodtide and Modern culture

Fused with the ancient Norse influences in **Bloodtide** are more modern ones. Burgess says he was particularly aware of the features of 21<sup>st</sup> century culture that were being accessed by young people through other mediums but not literature. The sporadic and pacy, multi narrator style of the book acknowledges life in a modern multi- media society. Since **Bloodtide** was written the success of films like the Matrix have only confirmed the desire for a view into an apocalyptic, dystopian world where the human world meets the future head on.

**“there was a real shortage of exciting, difficult, dangerous books for young people - the sort of thing your parents wouldn't care to recommend to you. There's a market for this sort of thing in music, computer games, film and so on, but books tend to be a bit goody-goody. I hope Bloodtide will fill that gap. I wanted it to shock, stir you up, lift you up and bring you down. My son and stepson were playing a lot of computer games at the time, which were very violent in their imagery, and watching films of the same kind of thing. I thought, well, it's exciting, and no one actually gets hurt,. Why are there no books like this? When writing the book, I had these kind of games in mind, plus magazines, like 20001 AD; also films, like Bladerunner, Alien and so on.”**

**Melvin Burgess**

### Contemporary Relevance:

The setting of **Bloodtide** resonates with many aspects of the world today. The apocalyptic nature of the book has always maintained significant impact. In light of recent events, most notably September 11<sup>th</sup> Burgess's vision of a devastated landscape and gross destruction of society seems even more pertinent.

The civil war that wages in **Bloodtide** led by rivals Val and Conor is as bloody and cruel as any recent fighting between divided factions in Third World countries such as Somalia, and the level of treachery not unlike that experienced by Iraq under the regime of Saddam Hussein.

**“ Siggie and Signy ran quietly past the shattered tower blocks, broken away and worn by the wind like shells in the sea. The few remaining topmost windows glinted in the moonlight. Past the broken church spires and the crumbling storeys of buildings that once housed banks and the offices of international firms, past the roads breaking up with elder trees and buddleia.**

**Nothing was new, everything was old – ever since the government moved out a hundred years ago and left it to rot under the rule of Gangland.**

**The kids ran out of the tall buildings of the City and on towards the West End. There were no street lights. The poor slept in gangs in the doorways and it was dangerous out, unless you were rich enough to be armed. All around the Westminster and city it was slums and farmland, pigs scavenging in the streets, open sewage pits, rubbish tips."**

**From Bloodtide by Melvin Burgess**

## A good re-telling of the Volsung Saga by Donald Mackensie

Old is the ring tale of the Volsung's doom. By Iceland's skalds was it sung to harp music in other days, and warriors loved to hear it in the feasting hall as they drank mead, while the log fire reddened their faces and the night wind bellowed through the gloom.

Now Volsung became the most powerful king of his time. He was far famed as a warrior, and he ruled his people justly and well. A great house did he cause to be built. In the midst of it grew a mighty oak which was named Branstock, and its branches overhung the roof. It was told that Volsung had for wife the giant's daughter, Ljod, whom gentle Freyja had sent with the magic apple to his queen mother. They had two sons and one daughter, and the first-born were Sigmund and his twin sister, Signy. The lad was as strong and brave as the girl was comely and fair.

At that time Siggeir was King of the Gauts, and he sought to have Signy for his bride. So it came that they were wed in Volsung's hall. A great feast was given and the warriors of the Gauts were there, and they made merry with Volsung's nobles and his two sons.

When the feast was over, a tall, old man entered the hall. He wore a blue cloak, mottled with grey, a round hat which was drawn down over his face, and tight breeches of linen. He had but one eye, and his feet were bare. In his hand he carried a gleaming sword, and he plunged it into Branstock right up to the hilt. None spoke, but they all watched him with mute amaze. Then he spake gravely unto them.

"I gift this sword", he said, "unto the man who can draw it from Branstock. He shall find it a goodly blade indeed, for it hath no equal."

Then he vanished from before them. . . . He was Odin, but no man knew him. Now the chief warriors who were there laid hands, one after the other, upon the sword. But in vain did they endeavour to draw it forth. It stuck deep in the tree, defying them as it tempted them. But at length Sigmund grasped the hilt in his strong right hand, and pulled out the blade, which he thus had for himself as a gift from Odin.

Ill pleased was King Siggeir, for he sought greatly to possess the shining blade for himself, and he made offer to purchase it with much treasure; but Sigmund refused to deliver it up even though the King of the Gauts gave unto him all the gold he possessed.

Siggeir answered not. He sat moodily apart, for he deemed that the young warrior had spoken scornfully. With anger in his heart he devised a treacherous scheme with purpose to gain his desire and to wreak vengeance upon the kinsfolk of his queen. So next morning he made ready to depart, although the wedding celebrations were not ended, and he invited Volsung and his sons to visit him after the space of three months. Volsung gave his word to do so, and took leave of Siggeir and Signy. Unwilling indeed was the fair bride to leave the land of her people, and she would have parted with her husband had her father permitted her.

When three moons had waxed and waned, Volsung and his sons with their followers voyaged in three ships to Gautland. Fair winds favoured them and

they made speedy passage, and on a fragrant evening they reached a haven and went ashore. Then came Signy to them in secret to persuade them to return, because that her husband had collected together a great army to accomplish their fall. But Volsung disdained to go back.

"A hundred battles I have fought," he said, "and I was ever victorious. In my youth I feared not my foemen, and in my old age I shall flee not before them. A man can die but once, and he can escape not death at his appointed time. So we shall fare onward nor fear aught, and no man shall tell that Volsung ever fled from danger or sued for peace."

Signy desired to remain with her kin, but Volsung bade her return to Siggeir and stay with him.

Next morning brave Volsung and his two sons with all their followers went fully armed towards the hall of Siggeir. But a strong force came out against them, and after fierce and long fighting Volsung was slain with all his followers, and his two sons were taken captive. Siggeir then became possessed of Sigmund's sword, which was named Gram.

Earnestly did Signy entreat that her brothers should not be put to death, and although the cruel Gaut king relented somewhat, he caused them to be bound together to a felled tree in a deep forest. In the midst of the night a fierce she wolf came and devoured one of them. Secret messengers bore the sad tidings unto Signy and she grieved piteously. On the second night another son of Volsung was devoured; and so night after night one perished by the wolf until Sigmund alone remained alive.

Then Signy sent her messengers to smear Sigmund's body with honey, and they did according to her desire. In the darkness of night the wolf came to devour him. But when the monster smelt the sweet savour, she began to lick the young hero's face. At length she thrust her tongue into his mouth, and Sigmund seized it between his teeth and bit it off. As he struggled, he burst his fetters and the monster was slain.

Now the wolf was none other than King Siggeir's mother, who was skilled in witchcraft and had power to change her shape.

Sigmund found a safe retreat in the wood, where he made for himself a subterranean dwelling. In time Signy came to know that it fared well with him, but Siggeir knew not that Sigmund remained alive and awaited the hour of vengeance.

## Half Men and Womb Tanks

Genetic Engineering enables scientists to create plants, animals and micro – organisms by manipulating genes in a way that does not occur naturally.

The Half Men in **Bloodtide** are the results of Genetic Engineering that has developed beyond the control of scientists and regulated bodies.

Signy's use of these advanced techniques to improve her son and heal herself may indeed be available to us in the not too distant future – the technology is closer than we think and the results for society potentially devastating .

**" as they took the baby away it started to cry. It took only a a moment to take a small sample of blood and a scraping from the inside of his mouth – all that was needed to start a clone. Other genetic material would be added and the creature Signy planned would be growing within a few hours."**

### **Bloodtide p271**

The controversial nature of Genetic Engineering means it regularly hits the news headlines.....

### **'Genie Out of the Bottle' on Human Cloning Science: American and Italian announce a joint project to duplicate a person.**

By Aaron Zitner, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

"A well-known Italian fertility specialist and his U.S. colleague have announced plans to clone human beings, apparently becoming the first scientists with expertise in human reproduction to publicly set such a goal. They may well succeed, cloning experts said Saturday--but not without causing great damage. Cloning would likely produce stillborn and diseased children, they said, and might provoke lawmakers to seek bans on a broad range of medical research, such as work that uses tissue from human embryos to try to cure disease.

The two scientists stressed that their cloning procedure would be offered only to couples who cannot bear children by other means. They said . "Cloning has already been developed in animals. The genie is out of the bottle. It's a matter of time when humans will apply it to themselves, and we think this is best initiated by us with ethical guidelines and quality standards."



## Distorted Humans – the future of Society?

In his article about the future of Genetic Engineering, Darnovsky highlights the disturbing prospect of a world where we can choose to modify ourselves and our children beyond recognition. He speculates about a future where society is divided into the unmodified "Naturals" and a new species he calls the "Gen Rich". Perhaps the world of Ragnar and the halfman lands is not as fictional as we think, the London of Bloodtide may be just around the corner!

### **The New Eugenics: The Case Against Genetically Modified Humans by Marcy Darnovsky**

At the cusp of dot-com frenzy and the biotech century, a group of influential scientists and pundits has begun zealously promoting a new bio-engineered utopia. In the world of their visionary fervor, parents will strive to afford the latest genetic improvements for their children.

According to the advocates of this human future (or, as some term it, the post-human future), the exercise of consumer preferences for offspring options will be the prelude to a grand achievement: the technological control of human evolution.

In *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World* Mr Lee M. Silver (New York: Avon Books) spins out scenarios of a future in which affluent parents are as likely to arrange genetic enhancements for their children as to send them to private school.

Silver confidently predicts that upscale baby-making will soon take place in fertility clinics, where prospective parents will undergo an IVF procedure to create an embryo, then select the physical, cognitive, and behavioral traits they desire for their child-to-be. Technicians will insert the genes said to produce those traits into the embryo, and implant the embryo in the mother's womb. Nine months later, a designer baby will be born. After a few centuries of these practices, Silver believes, humanity will bifurcate into genetic ubermenschen and not long thereafter into different species.

Silver's prediction for the year 2350:

**"The GenRich who account for 10 percent of the population all carry synthetic genes. Genes that were created in the laboratory. The GenRich are a modern-day hereditary class of genetic aristocrats. All aspects of the economy, the media, the entertainment industry, and the knowledge industry are controlled by members of the GenRich class."**

How do the other 90 percent live? Well, Naturals work as low-paid service providers or as laborers."

That rich and poor already live in biologically disparate worlds can be argued on the basis of any number of statistical measures: life expectancy, infant mortality, access to health care. Of course, medical resources and social priorities could be assigned to narrowing those gaps.

But if Silver and his cohort of designer-baby advocates have their way, precious medical talent and funds will be devoted instead to a technically dubious project. Silver pushes his vision still further:

"As time passes,...the GenRich class and the Natural class will become the GenRich humans and the Natural humans **entirely separate species with no ability to cross-breed, and with as much romantic interest in each other as a current human would have for a chimpanzee.**"

Silver understands that such scenarios are disconcerting. He counsels realism. In other words, he celebrates the free reign of the market and perpetuates the myth that private choices have no public consequences:

"Anyone who accepts the right of affluent parents to provide their children with an expensive private school education cannot use unfairness as a reason for rejecting the use of rerogenetic technologies. There is no doubt about it...whether we like it or not, the global marketplace will reign supreme."

Further off, but within the lifetimes of today's children, **they foresee the ability to adjust personality, design new body forms, extend life expectancy, and endow hyper-intelligence. Some even predict splicing traits from other species into children: In late 1999, for example, an ABC Nightline special on human cloning speculated that genetic engineers would learn to design children with 'night vision from an owl' and 'supersensitive hearing cloned from a dog.'**

**" I wonder what optional extras Signy had fitted? Strengthened bones, something from an eagle at the back of the retina? Improvements. What'd she done to his mind? What'd she done to his soul, if you can call it that?"**

**Bloodtide p279**

## Myth and Legend in Bloodtide

**"Odin, A1Father, he was there, watching what he already knew would come to pass. Frey and Freyja, gods of fertility, they would have been there. Other gods, newly born, who had arisen from the bricks and rusty wheels, from the broken machinery and concrete and steel, they came too, to breathe the smell of destiny as if this was the smoke of a sacrifice to them. And Loki, grinning and hanging off the wall like a leech, the god who could twist the passage of time and bring it to where it was doomed to go by sudden, unexpected routes, but who could change nothing."**

**Bloodtide, p 255**

**Bloodtide** has strong mythical elements, interweaving within its story the powers who control the human world and the relationship between those powers and human beings. These powers take the form of the ancient Norse Gods and Shapeshifting spirit creatures who constantly observe the chaos as it unfolds.

In **Bloodtide** Burgess takes the mythical Norse land of Ragnarok and gives it a modern twist. He creates the mythical land of Ragnor, a modern version of Minas Tyrath in Lord of the Rings, that seems **" to float on the air, made of glittering stripes of light and glass. At night it shone like a bright little galaxy in the great world.**

Find out more about Norse Gods on pages 21-22

There is also the stuff of legends. Siggys pulling of the sword from the stone reminds us of the Legend of King Arthur, and the Sword Excalibur, his faithful protector in times of great danger.

Half woman Melanie has an air of the Legendary Robin Hood about her, stealing from the rich to give to the poor, when she tends on the ravaged Siggys.

Find out more about King Arthur on pages 25-26

Bloodtide also has many parallels with Macbeth. The escalating tide of violence, corruption, and mis-use of power combined with supernatural imagery and feuding war lords are all elements included in Shakespeares' bloody masterpiece.

For comparative extracts from Macbeth see page 27

## Shapeshifters in Bloodtide

**" As she watched the girl began to flicker, the fur on her face, off her face, on her, off her. As Cherry fell asleep, she changed back to her own true shape."**

### **Bloodtide p161**

Burgess' shapeshifter character of Cherry reflects the Norse belief in peoples who were both spirits and animals. The idea of this type of figure can also be traced throughout ancient and medieval culture.

Early Native American stories tell of heroes who were possessed by the "spirits" of animals. Gaelic legends talk about men who can assume the form of animals. All of these legends are referring to the same creature; Lycanthropes, a being that is a mixture of human animal and spirit. In early legends lycanthropes are often called Werewolves because that is what most humans encountered, however lycanthropes can have aspects of any animal. Whilst in its human form a lycanthrope appears to be completely normal, however the senses of the character are often augmented, with sharper vision, smell and hearing.

In its animal form the lycanthrope appears to be a larger version of the specific animal it is attuned to. In addition however it has all the abilities and disadvantages of being that animal. They retain no human memory or consciousness and simply behave like animals. Usually these are more bloodthirsty and particularly large or powerful, but they are entirely bestial. While in this form the animal regains essence at dawn.

### **Shapeshifters as Cats**

That shapeshifter Cherry metamorphosises into a cat is also significant. In ancient and medieval folklore the cat was associated with witches, magic and sexuality. During the 1500's a common theme in witch trial witness testimony was that of a strange cat which would enter a household at night to attack babies or smother sleepers. This theme was reinforced by the confessions of witches. Some claimed to be able to shapeshift into the form of cats in order to reach their victims. At this time cats were also recognised as familiars – a cipher for a witch's own anger and desires. The explicit sexual nature of cats was also associated with the perceived sexual appetites of witches.

**" A witch had been found living on Conor's estate. It was clear she was a witch even though she was young and beautiful. She had slit pupils, a line of fur down her spine and a tail. She was found guilty and executed by fire – her screams were said to resemble those of cat. "**

### **Bloodtide p189**

## Shapechanging in the Volsung Saga

It chanced that on a darksome night they came together to a house in which robbers lay asleep. There they found two wolfskins, which gave those who wore them power to change their shapes. These they took away, and when they put them on, Sigmund and Sinfjotle were transformed into were-wolves. Then were they fierce indeed. Between them they made a compact that one would call upon the other if confronted by seven men, and then they parted to prowl for their prey in the deep forest.

Ere long Sigmund had to fight against seven men. He set up the loud wolf howl, and Sinfjotle hastened to his aid, and between them they slew all the band. After that they parted, and then Sinfjotle had to contend against eleven men. But Signy's wolf son uttered no cry. He fought fiercely and alone, and slaughtered all his opponents. Then wearily he lay down to rest.

Sigmund came towards him soon afterwards, and when he found that Sinfjotle had surpassed him in valour he sprang upon the youth with wolf anger and did him grievous injury. But he speedily repented what he had done, and carried his companion to the underground dwelling, where he lay nigh unto death. In sore distress was Sigmund, and he vowed never again to go forth as a wolf. Then it chanced that he saw two weasels who fought together. One seized the other as he had done to Signy's son, but it ran speedily to find a herb which restored its companion to full strength again. He sought to find the healing herb, and a raven flew towards him bearing a leaf in its beak, which it let fall at his feet. Perceiving that it was of the herb he desired to find, Sigmund hastened to his hut and laid the leaf upon Sinfjotle's wounds. The youth was at once healed and the affliction passed.

Together the heroes waited until they could regain their wonted shape again. Then they destroyed the wolfskins, lest the one should slay the other.

## Norse Gods and Lands

**ODIN** is the leader of the Norse gods and has a myriad of names including Allfather, Ygg, Bolverk (evil doer), and Grimnir. He also has many functions within the myths including being a god of war, poetry, wisdom, and death. However, he is not considered the "main" god of each of these functions.

Odin's symbol is his magical spear named Grungir which never misses its mark. He also owns a magic ring called Draupnir which can create nine of itself every night. It was this ring that Odin laid on his son **Balder's** funeral pyre and which Balder returned to Odin from the underworld. Odin also has two wolves, Geri and Freki, and two ravens, Hugin (thought) and Munin (memory). He sends his ravens out every day to gather knowledge for him. Odin was destined to die at Ragnarok; Fenris-Wolf swallowed him. Knowing his fate, he still chose to embrace it and do battle, showing the true warrior ethic. He is the god of warriors and kings, not the common man. Among his children are: **Thor**, **Hermod**, and **Balder**. He is married to **Frigg**, the goddess of marriage

**LOKI** is one of the major deities in the Norse pantheon. He is a son of the giant Farbauti ("cruel striker") and the giantess Laufey. He is regarded as one of **Aesir**, but is on occasion their enemy. He is connected with fire and magic, and can assume many different shapes (horse, falcon, fly). He is crafty and malicious, but is also heroic: in that aspect he can be compared with the trickster from North American myths. The ambivalent god grows progressively more unpleasant, and is directly responsible for the death of **Balder**, the god of light. On the day of **Ragnarok**, Loki's chains will break and he will lead the giants into battle against the gods. Loki is often called the Sly One, the Trickster, the Shape Changer, and the Sky Traveler.

**FREYA** is a goddess of love and fertility, and the most beautiful and propitious of the goddesses in Norse mythology. She is the patron goddess of crops and birth, the symbol of sensuality and was called upon in matters of love. She loves music, spring and flowers, and is particularly fond of the elves (fairies). Freya is one of the foremost goddesses of the **Vanir**.

**RAGNAROK** ("Doom of the Gods"), also called Gotterdammerung, means the end of the cosmos in Norse mythology. It will be preceded by Fimbulvetr, the winter of winters. Three such winters will follow each other with no summers in between. Conflicts and feuds will break out, even between families, and all morality will disappear. This is the beginning of the end.

The wolf Skoll will finally devour the sun, and his brother Hati will eat the moon, plunging the earth [into] darkness. The stars will vanish from the sky. The cock Fjalar will crow to the giants and the golden cock Gullinkambi will crow to the gods. A third cock will raise the dead.

The earth will shudder with earthquakes, and every bond and fetter will burst, freeing the terrible wolf [Fenrir](#). The sea will rear up because [Jormungand](#), the Midgard Serpent, is twisting and writhing in fury as he makes his way toward the land. With every breath, Jormungand will stain the soil and the sky with his poison. The waves caused by the serpent's emerging will set free the ship Naglfar, and with the giant [Hymir](#) as their commander, the giants will sail towards the battlefield. From the realm of the dead a second ship will set sail, and this ship carries the inhabitants of hell, with [Loki](#) as their helmsman. The fire giants, led by the giant [Surt](#), will leave [Muspell](#) in the south to join against the gods. Surt, carrying a sword that blazes like the sun itself, will scorch the earth.

Meanwhile, [Heimdall](#) will sound his horn, calling the sons of [Odin](#) and the heroes to the battlefield. From all the corners of the world, gods, giants, dwarves, demons and elves will ride towards the huge plain of Vigrid ("battle shaker") where the last battle will be fought. Odin will engage Fenrir in battle, and [Thor](#) will attack Jormungand. Thor will be victorious, but the serpent's poison will gradually kill the god of thunder. Surt will seek out the swordless [Freyr](#), who will quickly succumb to the giant. The one-handed [Tyr](#) will fight the monstrous hound [Garm](#) and they will kill each other. Loki and Heimdall, age-old enemies, will meet for a final time, and neither will survive their encounter. The fight between Odin and Fenrir will rage for a long time, but finally Fenrir will seize Odin and swallow him. Odin's son [Vidar](#) will at once leap towards the wolf and kill him with his bare hands, ripping the wolf's jaws apart.

Then Surt will fling fire in every direction. The nine worlds will burn, and friends and foes alike will perish. The earth will sink into the sea.

After the destruction, a new and idyllic world will arise from the sea and will be filled with abundant supplies. Some of the gods will survive, others will be reborn. Wickedness and misery will no longer exist and gods and men will live happily together. The descendants of [Lif and Lifthrasir](#) will inhabit this earth.

## **Parallel Texts**

### **Extracts from Bloodtide, Morte d'Arthur and Macbeth**

#### **Gods in Bloodtide 1) and 2)**

##### **1)**

"And what kind of a coupling is that? Twin to twin, brother to sister, one not knowing who the other is. Or was it a threesome - human to human to halfman, and a shape that was a present from a god of tricks? Cherry, part human, part cat, part bird, part god - she was in there somewhere. The shape-changer, the mad crippled girl and the boy with the broken face.

As Cherry had predicted, the smell of destiny in the little room attracted those who feed off fate. Had anyone the eyes to see such things, they would have seen the newly awakened gods hanging from the walls, gathering around the window, peering in, watching, taking part. Odin, A1Father, he was there, watching what he already knew would come to pass. Frey and Freyja, gods of fertility, they would have been there. Other gods, newly born, who had arisen from the bricks and rusty wheels, from the broken machinery and concrete and steel, they came too, to breathe the smell of destiny as if this was the smoke of a sacrifice to them. And Loki, grinning and hanging off the wall like a leech, the god who could twist the passage of time and bring it to where it was doomed to go by sudden, unexpected routes, but who could change nothing. Certainly he would be there. He wouldn't miss it for the world."

#### **Bloodtide p 255**



## 2)

The plans of the gods, the twists of fate - don't hope to, understand. Just say this: that sometimes there's the sense that here the gods are focused, here is a moment, a person, a place where they can feed. Such a place or event may bring joy or sorrow or it may signify nothing at all to man or halfman. But when those of us who understand feel that sense of things coming together, then there is a taste of fate ... yes, yes ... even Odin will lick his lips at the thought.

I always knew she was right at the centre of things.

I can smell it around Signy. I can smell it around Siggy, even though he is an unbeliever. The gods, creations of Ragnor, he says! Bits of metal and mixtures of creatures! What difference does it make if your machines are flesh and blood or plastic and steel rods? Destiny is made of the flesh of moments and the breath of centuries. What technician in Ragnor can manufacture a single extra second of time? Or take it away?

That is a thing for the gods and I am their priestess.

is hard. I had to write the runes and talk to the Givers, the gods themselves. I know how to call on the Cunning One, the god of fire and tricks, the giver of shapes. I spoke to him in the way we speak; he accepted the runes and allowed my request.

If I had known what she planned I would not have asked. 'Of course!' she cried. And she wore - me. My bird to get her out of her prison - my Signy flying on my fast wings, while I sat at home in her girl. She took my girl tucked away where shapes fit, deep inside, waiting to be taken out and swell and grip the flesh and make it theirs. All the time, I, obedient Cherry, lay on her bed, sat in her wheelchair, used her mouth to eat. I spoke with Conor and forbade him to sleep with me, as she had instructed. She, my Signy, wearing my cat - she wove her way north and made her way into his house, and there she dressed herself in my finest finery - in me, in my girl. As me she knocked softly on her brother's door... 'Cherry, can I leave here?' she said. 'Yes, yes. But not with me,' I said.

Shapes are easy. You just have to have more than one and you see at once how to take them off and put them on. All magic is like that; something given that you can never understand until you get it and then you see that there's nothing to understand at all. You have your gifts - Sight, Touch, Hearing, The feelings of sex. The gods gave you all these things. And they gave you a boy-shape or a girl-shape to wear. They gave me a girl, a cat, a bird and a nut.

The giving of shapes - or the loaning of them - now, that is hard. I had to write the runes and talk to the Givers, the gods themselves. I know how to call on the Cunning One, the god of fire and tricks, the giver of shapes. I spoke to him in the way we speak; he accepted the runes and allowed my request.

## **Bloodtide p250**

## **Morte d'Arthur by Alfred Tennyson**

### **Book 1 Chapter 5**

#### **How the sword was pulled from the stone and Arthur made king**

THEN stood the realm in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened to have been king. Then Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should to London come by Christmas, upon pain of cursing; and for this cause, that Jesus, that was born on that night, that he would of his great mercy show some miracle, as he was come to be king of mankind, for to show some miracle who should be rightwise king of this realm.

So the Archbishop, by the advice of Merlin, sent for all the lords and gentlemen of arms that they should come by Christmas even unto London there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone; and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus:--Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England. But none might stir the sword nor move it. He is not here, said the Archbishop, that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known.

And upon New Year's Day the barons let make a jousts and a tournament, that all knights that would joust or tourney there might play, and all this was ordained for to keep the lords together and the commons, for the Archbishop trusted that God would make him known that should win the sword.

So upon New Year's Day, when the service was done, the barons rode unto the field, some to joust and some to tourney, and so it happened that Sir Ector, that had great livelihood about London, rode unto the jousts, and with him rode Sir Kay his son, and young Arthur that was his nourished brother. So as they rode to the jousts-ward, Sir Kay lost his sword, for he had left it at his father's lodging, and so he prayed young Arthur for to ride for his sword. I will well, said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword, and when he came home, the lady and all were out to see the jousting.

Then was Arthur wroth, and said to himself, I will ride to the churchyard, and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this

day. So when he came to the churchyard, Sir Arthur alighted and tied his horse to the stile, and so he went to the tent, and found no knights there, for they were at the jousting. And so he handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode his way until he came to his brother Sir Kay, and delivered him the sword. And as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword, he wist well it was the sword of the stone, and so he rode to his father Sir Ector, and said: Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone, wherefore I must be king of this land. When Sir Ector beheld the sword, he returned again and came to the church, and there they alighted all three, and went into the church. And anon he made Sir Kay swear upon a book how he came to that sword.

Sir, said Sir Kay, by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me. How gat ye this sword? said Sir Ector to Arthur. Sir, I will tell you. When I came home for my brother's sword, I found nobody at home to deliver me his sword; and so I thought my brother Sir Kay should not be swordless, and so I came hither eagerly and pulled it out of the stone without any pain. Found ye any knights about this sword? said Sir Ector. Nay, said Arthur. Now, said Sir Ector to Arthur, I understand ye must be king of this land. Wherefore I, said Arthur, and for what cause? Sir, said Ector, for God will have it so; for there should never man have drawn out this sword, but he that shall be rightwise king of this land. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was, and pull it out again. That is no mastery, said Arthur, and so he put it in the stone; wherewithal Sir Ector assayed to pull out the sword and failed.

## **Macbeth by William Shakespeare**

### **Act one, Scene Two**

This report of the viciousness of Macbeth's attack on his victim could equally be spoken about Conor's bloodthirsty slaughter of the Volson family in **Bloodtide**.

#### **Captain:**

But all's too weak,  
For brave Macbeth - well he deserves that name  
Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel,  
Which smoked with bloody execution,  
Like valour's minion carved out his passage,  
Till he faced the slave;  
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,  
Till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops,  
And fixed his head upon our battlements.

### **Act One, Scene Three**

Banquo, alongside Macbeth questions the appearance and nature of the witches. He asks whether they are of flesh and blood, unnatural or unearthly, much the way that the inhabitants of London speak of the halfmen in Bloodtide.

#### **Banquo:**

How far is't called to Forres? What are these,  
So withered, and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth,  
And yet are on't? Live you, or are you aught  
That man may question? You seem to understand me,  
By each at once her choppy finger laying  
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so.

## **Act One, Scene Five**

Lady Macbeth , like Signy in **Bloodtide**, consciously alters herself, changing from victim to powerful monster during the course of the play.

### **Lady Macbeth:**

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. Come you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,  
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief. Come thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry 'Hold, hold!'