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This is the author’s radio script of this article.
Will Elliott’s new novel, *Nightfall*, is a post-modern fantasy with plenty of grist for the interpretive mill. A young man named Aden wakes in a fabulous world full of grotesques and archetypes. He can’t remember much about himself, apart from his name and some childhood scenes with his grandfather. He soon realises that this world, named Nightfall, is the one created by his grandfather when writing stories as a hobby, stories he has been familiar with all his life, though they’ve never been published. ‘I tell myself it’s just a bit of fun, but it’s been building in my mind, this place, for I don’t know how long. Since I read Tolkein, probably, and fell in love with dragons.’ (352)

The grandfather, Herbert, is therefore the deity of this strange place and Aden, as his descendant, is treated with suspicion by some and welcomed by others as a saviour. Meanwhile he is trying to work out what is going on: ‘What the hell is all this? Does my granddad write about this world because it exists, or does it exist because he writes about it?’ (171) We are given a clue when we’re told that ‘an atheist in Nightfall was not one who doubted the Worldmaker’s existence, but who believed the Worldmaker dead, insane or having long forgotten his creation’ (208).

Elliott has fun with his characters. His fussy, vain, power-crazed Duke Julius is over the top – but he can blame that on the amateur author. Other characters have their own individual quirks and speech patterns, like the telegraphic Mechanic, and the sinister Assassin. There are three powerful and dangerous women, one who can make any man do her bidding by the power of the light she exudes, and another who paints pictures which come to life. The Duke’s Assistant, who has been profligate with energy and light in the service of his political ends, is coming to understand, ruefully, that his wastefulness is destroying his world.

Clearly it would be easy to overdo the interpretation of this novel’s theological, ecological, political and literary themes. They are all there, it’s true, but this clever entertainment is too playful to be treated with the earnestness this approach requires. Aden himself has difficulty taking it too seriously. His attitude to death is blasé: he keeps being killed and coming to life again, so he happily invites people to kill him in a spirit of intellectual curiosity. With a protagonist like this, the reader is unlikely to become too emotionally engaged, while enjoying the mental puzzles Elliott presents.