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Emad El-Din Aysha celebrates the work of Hosam El-Zembely
Stefan Ekman and Audrey Taylor offer a practical examination of world-building
Javier Martínez Jiménez excavates the role of cities in H.P. Lovecraft
Fiona Moore and Alan Stevens treat *Doctor Who* as a postcolonial case study
Umberto Rossi listens in to the uses of recorded sound in Philip K. Dick

Nina Allan dances to the tune of Keith Roberts' *Pavane*
Paul Kincaid asks if critics hate everything
Christopher Owen interviews Sephora Hosein about the Judith Merrill Collection

Conference reports by Paul March-Russell, M.J. Ryder, Katie Stone and Agata Waszkiewicz

In addition, there are reviews by:

Zeynep Anli, Marleen S. Barr, Amandine Faucheux, Rachel Claire Hill, Chris Hussey, E. Leigh McKagen, Sinéad Murphy, Chris Pak, Andy Sawyer, Lars Schmeink, Patrick Whitmarsh and Mark P. Williams

Of books by:

Nik Abnett, Yoshio Aramaki, Gerry Canavan, Giancarlo Genta, James Gunn, Everett Hamner, Ulrike Küchler, Silja Maehl and Graeme Stout, Jeannette Ng, Michael R. Page, Ahmed Saadawi, John Timberlake, Peter Watts and Henry Wessells

Cover image: N.K. Jemisin's acceptance of the Hugo Award for Best Novel, Worldcon 76, 19 August 2018



N.K. Jemisin : Hugo Triple Award Winner

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Foundation

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Editorial

Paul March-Russell

This editorial was originally written the day before Jodie Whittaker debuted on British TV as the first female Doctor. As I have observed before, the campaign for equality and diversity has been one of the chief characteristics of sf culture during my time as editor – alongside its obverse, the racism, misogyny and homophobia associated with groups such as the Sad or Rabid Puppies. This year's Hugo Awards, after previous attempts at gerrymandering the results, was notable for its parade of female victors, the most prominent being N.K. Jemisin, winning the Best Novel award for the third year running. And then ...

The far-right blogger, Vox Day, leaked part of Robert Silverberg's response to the award, a malicious attempt to co-opt one of the key figures of the American New Wave to his years-long vendetta against Jemisin. In her acceptance speech, Jemisin declared:

This is the year in which I get to smile at all of those naysayers [...] who [...] suggest that I do not belong on this stage, that people like me cannot possibly have earned such an honor, and that when they win, it's meritocracy, but when we win, it's identity politics. I get to smile at those people and lift a massive shining rocket-shaped finger in their direction.

Writing on a private mailing-list, Silverberg acknowledged that he had not read the *Broken Earth* trilogy, but responded:

In her graceless and vulgar acceptance speech last night, she insisted that she had not won because of 'identity politics', and proceeded to disprove her own point by rehearsing the grievances of her people and describing her latest Hugo as a middle finger aimed at those who had created those grievances.

Understandable howls of protest followed on social media, as well as misinformed accusations of racism; misinformed because Silverberg's critics were essentially playing into the divide-and-rule tactics of Vox Day. A subsequent comment by Silverberg that 'I wasn't being racist, I simply feel that a Hugo acceptance speech should express gratitude, not anger' did little to quell the tide of criticism. (Neither did a fuller response posted on 27th November at File 770.)

What to make of all of this? It probably didn't help Silverberg's cause that he had once infamously described James M. Tiptree's writing style as 'ineluctably masculine', comparable to that of Ernest Hemingway, not long before Tiptree revealed her true identity. Or that Silverberg had himself made a questionably

vulgar joke at the 2016 Hugo Awards ceremony. But then Neil Gaiman, recently shortlisted by the alternative Nobel Prize in part because of his commitment to equality and diversity in literature, used the 'F' word when receiving his first Hugo. Writers are only human and everybody can make a fool of themselves – maybe Silverberg's biggest error was to believe that a private mailing list on the internet could truly be private.

In the ambushing of Silverberg – by both the appropriation of his words and the ensuing backlash – what comes to the fore is the misunderstanding between generations of fans. Now 83, and a long-standing critic of fan culture's inability to accept the literary experiments of the New Wave, Silverberg comes across as hopelessly adrift in an era of digital and social media. But younger fans too, alert to the issues and intersectionality of identity politics, were unthinking in their dismissal of Silverberg as racist or out of touch. Both Silverberg and his critics could justifiably be accused of talking past one another.

If Silverberg's comments were not intentionally racist, then what were they? We need, I think, to contextualize Silverberg. Like his near-contemporaries, Philip K. Dick and Harlan Ellison, Silverberg made the transition from the digests of the 1950s to the more experimental fictions of the late 1960s – although, in truth, the American New Wave was primarily an extension of the Futurian ethos. (James Blish's citation of James Joyce and Ezra Pound, as well as Judith Merrill's advocacy for Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds*, are particularly significant in this regard.) We tend to associate the New Wave with left-wing and countercultural politics but, in truth, many significant New Wave authors tended to be politically and/or socially conservative – J.G. Ballard is the paradoxical emblem of that tendency. Like the poet John Ashbery (whose 'The Instruction Manual', was the starting-point for one of the archetypal New Wave texts, Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren* [1975]), Silverberg disdains the public expression of political commitment. Ashbery, although a campaigner against the Vietnam War, wrote that:

All poetry is against war and in favor of life, or else it isn't poetry, and it stops being poetry when it is forced into the mold of a particular program. Poetry is poetry. Protest is protest.

Such a sentiment is hardly one that will win many converts from amongst younger sf fans, for whom art and protest form one of the many intersections coursing through identity politics. From today's perspective, it could even be argued that the respective positions of Ashbery and Silverberg act as a mask for the privilege of white, male, educated power (Ashbery's homosexuality notwithstanding). And maybe that is true, but it also means that the young have a tendency to rush to judgement – to disregard the aesthetic stance, which

Silverberg feels is worth defending, as so much dither.

For the irony is this – much more unites Jemisin and Silverberg than divides them. Both the *Broken Earth* trilogy and the stories of Marjipoor, which Silverberg began after his acrimonious split with sf fandom, are masterpieces in far-future and extraterrestrial worldbuilding. Both strain at the boundaries between fantasy and science fiction due to their large-scale extrapolations. And both are superb in their literary execution. Jemisin is quite right – the success of her novels is not due to their identity politics. Instead, her triumph is the longed-for victory of literary aspiration, which Silverberg and others had sought-for fifty years ago, over the crass simplicities admired by the likes of Vox Day.

This issue is a general issue with articles and contributors who are truly international. In particular, I am delighted to include an interview with Sephora Hosain, librarian of the Judith Merrill Collection, and, following Anne Charnock in the last issue, another of 2018's big award-winners, Nina Allan. We are sad to announce the departures of both Dean Conrad, who has made a major contribution to how the journal represents film and TV, and Sean Guynes-Vishniac, who is joining Michigan Publishing. Allen Stroud, who originally joined the editorial team as Dean's replacement, takes over as Reviews Editor from this issue onwards. He also swaps places with Will Slocombe who will be joining the editorial team instead. Please note the change of address for books to be sent for review.

Better Late than Never: The Transmutations of Egyptian SF in the Work of Hosam El-Zembely

Emad El-Din Aysha

Science fiction in the Arab world is finally coming into its own, as evidenced by a recent flurry of publications in Arabic. Despite the events of the Iraq War in 2003, which forms the backdrop to such acclaimed sf novels as Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) and Ahmed Khalid Tawfiq's *Utopia* (2007), the catalyst for this proliferation in sf came from the Arab Spring that began in late 2010. Shortly after the January revolution in Egypt, Hosam El-Zembely founded the Egyptian Society for Science Fiction, which proceeded to publish a series of four anthologies that dealt explicitly with post-Arab Spring themes. From then on, commercial sf hit the Egyptian bookshelves, along with traditionally marginal genres such as horror, thrillers and detective fiction. El-Zembely, however, was already a contemporary pioneer in Egyptian sf, having published three novels in 2001 alone: *The Half-Humans*, *America 2030* and *The Planet of the Viruses*. Consequently, analysis of his efforts both before and after the Arab Spring enables us to see the development of Egyptian sf throughout this traumatic period in the Arab-speaking world.

The Medical and the Moral: Distinguishing Features of Early Egyptian SF

El-Zembely is a distinguished ophthalmologist and university professor. This comes as no surprise to the average Arab reader, since a great many authors in and out of sf in Arab countries are medical professionals or graduates. Ahmed Khalid Tawfiq and Nabil Farouk both trained in medicine whilst Alaa Al-Aswany, author of *The Yacubian Building* (2002), is a practising dentist. Going to medical school has traditionally been the guarantor of a good career in Egypt; the pioneering short storywriter, Yousef Idris, was also a medical doctor. But sf writers, such as Mustafa Mahmoud in the 1960s, have also been powerful advocates for the public understanding of science within the framework of Islamic culture. A medical doctor by training, Mahmoud was also a renowned public communicator of science in Egypt. Like Nihad Sharif, he was also a family friend of El-Zembely's and an early inspiration via such novels as *A Man Under Zero* (1967).

Even sf writers who were not medical doctors by training, such as Sharif and the great playwright and literary critic Tawfik Al-Hakim, frequently incorporated medical themes into their writing. The promotion of scientific literacy is a concern of many Arabic sf writers; and El-Zembely, both a scientist and a devout Muslim, is no exception. Notions of progress, society, civilization or humankind as a whole take on a different colouration in Muslim hands, with physical, moral and

spiritual dimensions not readily recognizable to the corpus of western sf.

These interrelated themes are repeatedly found in El-Zembely's novels. The hero of *The Half-Humans* is the astronaut captain Seif Al-Din ('Sword of Islam' in Arabic) who is described as having been raised on the principles of 'religion, science, ethics and sports' (El-Zembely 2001b: 41). Sports here is a reference to the physical education of the body and soul along the lines of chivalry, discipline and self-restraint. He is described in no uncertain words as a '21st century knight' (8). At a key juncture in the storyline he squares off against the arrogant king of the shape-shifters in a duel to the death over the king's prize ship. At the end of the contest he is told by the king (a profound atheist): 'It is a shame to kill such a courageous knight... You fought like a hero... Willing to give your life for a cause not your own... You have such principles that I think... I can give you my ship after all, trusting in your word alone, to bring it back to me, safe and sound' (84–85). Likewise, the hero of *America 2030*, intelligence operative Khalid, has learned martial arts from his infancy in the service of the Arab-Islamic Union. During two key fight sequences, when Khalid is about to lose against better trained or physically stronger opponents, he makes it back from the brink and defeats his foes by drawing on his spiritual strength. As the narrator explains during one such incident: 'his defeat here, would be a betrayal of everything he stood for, all the lives that counted on him ... That's when his body learned to *defy all physiological laws*' (El-Zembely 2001a: 99; my italics).

Another character in *The Half-Humans* who embodies this spiritual-biological interface is Shaymaa, a cyborg with a battery-powered metal frame housing reconstituted human tissues, whose name also references the half-sister of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him. Her quasi-mechanical status does not prevent her from being brave and self-sacrificing, and Seif finds himself falling in love with her. Both the scenario and the question as to whether she has a soul or not are familiar ones to readers of Anglo-American sf, but the implication here that *everything* has some level of feeling and consciousness is in keeping with *The Quran*, for example, verses 17.44 ('There is not a thing that does not glorify Him with praise') and 22.18 ('to God prostrates everyone in the heavens and everyone on earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the animals'). Furthermore, both *The Half-Humans* and *The Planet of the Viruses* indicate the influence of Mahmoud's *A Man Under Zero*, in particular, the scientific justification for the existence of non-organic, sentient life-forms (rocks in Mahmoud's novel), again in keeping with the teachings of the Quran.

This emphasis on intersubjective states of radically different being is further complemented by Seif's fellow astronaut, Hazem, who is described as having a telepathic bond with him; a preoccupation with paranormal powers to be found

elsewhere in Arabic sf (Yousef 2013: 33). They are as close as brothers, having grown up without siblings, and quite literally feel each other's pain. The victims in the novel, the species of half-humans – a mix of mankind and an ancient superior race from the Land of the Seven Hills – capture Hazem early in the story and use him to study Seif and his reactions to them, concluding that he will help them out of his deeply ingrained sense of ethical responsibility.

This ethical and spiritual commitment is also conveyed during the initial voyage of Seif and Hazem. We are told how the Islamic Union sent an unmanned probe into the stormy eye of Jupiter, losing contact with it, while a mysterious ailment killed off many of their terraformers on Mars. Despite all the advances in the medical sciences that have cured diseases, aches and pains, death remains the unsolved mystery. The inner world of the human body, and its spiritual makeup and moral limitations, is just as important as journeying into the cosmic unknown. This dichotomy is even more evident in *The Planet of the Viruses*.

Here, the hero is an ophthalmologist, Dr Salah Al-Din (named after the legendary hero Saladin), who is leading a research team trying to find a cure for the herpes pandemic, which is threatening the human race with total blindness. The story is set in the far future with the Muslims united again into an Islamic Union. There are rival teams, from the US and Germany, but it is the Islamic team that makes the critical discovery and saves the world from impending doom. Moral considerations govern their research throughout. What Salah Al-Din stumbles onto while tackling herpes is that it is a *sentient* virus, infecting the human cornea in an effort to communicate with humankind. When he learns this, he doesn't tell his Islamic Union superiors, and almost gets himself and his team into deep trouble with the authorities.

Instead, Salah Al-Din wants a sure means of communication with the virus first before handing over his research. Later, when the virus gives the Islamic Union the means to destroy it (a deadly chemical agent), Salah Al-Din convinces the President that this must be kept top secret, lest another human nation uses the agent against the virus and eradicates an entire species. He also develops an antidote against this chemical agent as a further guarantor, something the President goes along with. As Muslims, they believe they should deal with the virus in a chivalrous, knightly fashion, like the first pioneering Muslims who spread the faith.

EI-Zembely's novels not only take a positive attitude towards science, they also celebrate Muslim know-how and look forward to a utopian vision of cooperation within the Arabic world. For example, in the *Half-Humans*, there is the individual cell analyzer which allows for repairs to be made to living tissue in real time, and ion transmission, a science first invented in the west but perfected

by Islamic Union scientists. This technological prowess, though, is always framed by religious reverence: the people of the Seven Hills act as a constant reminder that all these scientific blessings are the result of God's helping hand, since there are always those who are more advanced than man. El-Zembely's novels then, because of their pedagogic content, are not only agenda-setting, they are also indicative of how Arabic sf is increasingly establishing a distinctive cultural and religious context for the representation of science and technology. This is also paralleled in the real world where Arabic scientists, such as Tidu Maini, an engineer and executive chairman of the Qatar Science and Technology Park, has described his organization as a 'unique experiment in accelerating research in a nation where education and healthcare are the centerpiece of national strategy and intent' (quoted in Determann, 2018: 11).

What gives El-Zembely his importance, though, is not his modishness but the degree to which he grounds his fiction and present-day concerns within the earlier traditions of Egyptian sf – not only Mahmoud but also Nihad Sharif, for example, and the anti-war sentiments of such novels as *The People from the Second World* (1977). Sharif, though, self-consciously used traditional storytelling techniques from Sufi literature (Snir 2000: 276), with the catch that, in addition to the moral emphasis of his stories, his characters also tended to *moralize*. Early Arabic sf has consequently been accused of suffering from 'weak and minor plots, underdeveloped characters not delineated sufficiently' (Asaqli 2017: 1447) in addition to trashy commercialism. The distinguished Syrian sf author, Taleb Omran, has condemned much Arab sf for following the superhero mould (Omran 1989: 103) to be found in both classical Arabic literature as well as contemporary popular culture. *The Half-Humans* is, for instance, indebted to the narrative structure of the Seven Voyages of Sindbad, from *The Thousand and One Nights*, in that every stage in the story involves a challenge, the solving of a riddle, and only the pure of heart proceeds towards his destiny.

From Pulp to Purpose: The Morphology of Heroism

The examples of heroism in *The Half-Humans* and *America 2030* may at first seem tacky and overly romantic. Heroes such as Seif and Khalid, respectively, appear to have no depth and lack characterization. But this apparent failing is in itself replete with lessons.

That is, the notion of the hero is evolving in Arab literature, shifting gears as it were from the one-dimensional figures of earlier fictions to the more complex, dualistic and darkly humorous models common to modern thrillers and cyberpunk. Throughout the 1990s, almost all of the sf produced in Egypt was of the pulp variety, action-packed adventure stories written by such authors as Nabil Farouk and Ahmed Khalid Tawfik, for example Farouk's *Future File*

series. These were essentially pocket books for teenagers; formulaic adventure stories more than proper sf, with equally formulaic heroes (Snir 2000: 270–01). This was a deliberate move on the part of Farouk and Tawfik in an effort to maintain readers, especially among the young, not a reflection of their actual writing abilities and interests, as evidenced by Tawfik's later success.

The same holds true of El-Zembely. When asked at a cultural salon why *The Half-Humans* fits the Young Adult genre, he explains that his target audience were young readers and that quashing scientific illiteracy is one of his chief objectives (El-Zembely 2017). Again, he had to simplify the form and content for a youthful audience, including the representation of his protagonists. Salah Al-Din in *The Planet of the Viruses*, by contrast, is anything but one-dimensional. He's a complicated and sensitive soul, plagued by inner doubts. Moreover, the portrayal of the mechanics of scientific discovery and the hurdles facing research are very accurate and recognizable to any real-world scientist. Nonetheless, in all three novels, the emphasis is more on the *themes*, on serving up heroes for a glorious Islamic future where the Muslims reunite and become leaders of science and exploration once again. The characters are there to facilitate this goal, not complicate it. There is a parallel here with the work of Robert Heinlein in the West, in terms of the contrast between the heroes of his juvenile fiction published in the 1940s and 1950s, and the anti-heroes that occur in his later adult sf, such as *Friday* (1982) and *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls* (1985).

Special mention must go to the role of female characters in this regard. In *The Half-Humans*, Shaymaa engages in unarmed combat and saves the lives of Seif and Hazem on more than one occasion. One of the most important members of the research team in *The Planet of the Viruses* is a woman, Dr Shorouk, the top virologist in Abu Dhabi. It is she who sets Salah Al-Din on the right course to making his discovery. In *America 2030*, Kailing is an East Asian martial arts expert who defeats a man twice her size. Arguably, the juvenile demographic of El-Zembely's fiction, in which he is writing for both adolescent boys and girls, encourages him to write stronger, more convincing female characters. In the process, El-Zembely counters an oft-made complaint made about superhero teams in western comics, where the team includes 'at least one female member', but she is invariably 'depicted as frail when compared to her stalwart male teammates' (Davis and Westerfelhaus 2013: 806). This positive representation also feeds into El-Zembely's hopes for a more unified and egalitarian Arabic future.

It is important to remember that El-Zembely is a key transitional figure whose fiction and edited anthologies have appeared either side of the Arab Spring. The development of his heroes into more complex characters prefigures the work of younger Egyptian sf authors such as Ahmed Salah Al-Mahdi, author

of the post-apocalyptic novels *Malaaz* (2017) and *The Black Winter* (2018), and the duo of Wael and Mahmoud Abel Raheem, authors of *Akwan* (2017), dealing with parallel dimensions and alternate realities. These authors regularly feature male anti-heroes and strong female characters, so that the line between what constitutes good and bad moral behaviour is not only blurred but also posed as a question to the readers. In the wake of the Arab Spring, such involvement of the reader takes on an explicitly democratic dimension. Accordingly, readers have become more sophisticated and demanding whereas, when El-Zembely began writing, readers still needed a simpler heroic model. Nevertheless, such placating of the readers also enabled the basis for a sf-reading culture in Egypt by encouraging them into the weird and thoroughly alien worlds of sf.

Conclusion: The Enterprise of Science Fiction

Early Arabic sf dealt quite explicitly with religious themes, such as the relationship between modernity and scientific advance, and the spiritual and moral values bequeathed to Muslims by Islam. In El-Zembely's novels, Islam is not even on the defensive as regards modernity, catching up as it were, but transformed into a key ingredient of advance. Muslims are democratically governed in all three novels, for example Seif's use of decision-making by majority vote with all members of his crew, whilst leaders who do not respect Islamic principles of charity and humility are portrayed as tyrannical and corrupt, such as the king of the shape-shifters in *The Half-Humans*.

In *America 2030* these principles are extended to world governance. Most of the world is divided into five Unions, or blocs of states: the Arab-Islamic Union; the European Union; the Union of Afro-Asian Peoples; the Union of the Japanese Islands, China and Korea; and the Union of South and Central America Peoples. These blocs oppose a United States, and its few remaining allies (the UK and Australia), which has been corrupted from the inside in its quest for empire. When the five Unions form an alliance, the head of the Arab-Islamic Union *refuses* to lead the alliance, since power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. He insists instead on a rotating leadership by citing the Arab experience with dictatorship, and the failings of once revolutionary presidents such as Abdel Nasser and Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat. The Arab-Islamic Union itself ensures equal rights to all its citizens – Christians included – while the team Khalid leads is made up of people of different faiths (one even sports a cross round his neck). Khalid also admires Greek mythology and befriends the monks of the (pagan) Temple of Apollo during the narrative.

In *The Planet of the Viruses*, Salah Al-Din is pardoned for his breach of procedure because he did not break any central tenants of Islam; even the worldly laws he broke were approximations meant to further the public good.

(The constitution has Islamic jurisprudential clauses in it, but gives leeway for interpretation). Although there are no detailed descriptions of elections or electoral procedures in the novel, the broad principles of democracy are adhered to and dramatized for the Egyptian readership.

Although El-Zembely's successors are more versatile and sophisticated at narrative and characterization, and deal with a wider range of topics and subgenres, they also seem less ambitious when it comes to themes and content. In comparison with El-Zembely's optimistic vision of the future, why aren't their novels dealing with the proper place of religion in politics, democracy, modernity and Islam? What about Muslims uniting and journeys of discovery and scientific advance? In contrast, the tone is bleak and pessimistic, as evidenced by such novels as *Malaaz* and *The Black Winter*. Instead, such grim post-apocalyptic futures are symptomatic of the democratic relapse suffered by the Arab Spring revolutions. The spring turned to fall, according to Ahmed Al-Mahdi (Al-Mahdi 2017), and there has been an attendant rise in political censorship or in publishers not wanting to get into trouble with the new authorities. Such a situation further hampers the development of a still nascent genre such as sf in Egypt. Little or no critical attention is given to works of Arabic sf on television, in national newspapers or in academia.

It must be understood that sf came *late* to the Arab world since the novel and short story themselves came late to the corpus of Arabic and Islamic literature (Johnson et al 2007). The pioneer of the short story in Egyptian literature, Yousef Idris, only began writing in the 1950s. Although the Arabic peoples have a long and proud history of fantasy writing behind them, from *The Thousand and One Nights* onwards, early forays into speculative fiction were blunted by a sense of nostalgia for the more pious days of the past, instead of looking forward to the future. Arabic sf also suffers from much of the same problems that sf suffers from elsewhere in the developing world, since the genre also exists uneasily with others such as magic realism and surrealism which are better known internationally (Molina-Gavilán et al 2007); overladen by local factors of censorship and economic hardship that face struggling authors. Publishers in Egypt regularly take into account the lifecycle of a book by looking at how quickly it ends up in the second-hand market. (This includes the black market, since many printing presses operate illegally, and flood the second-hand book stalls with the same set of novels over and over again). There are no literary agents and few copy-editors; young authors often have to bankroll their own publications and the quality of paper is atrocious with cover images pilfered from the internet. (Copyright laws are very lax in Egypt and other Arabic countries, with the onus on the author not the publisher – a point often explicitly stated in contracts). By contrast, Wael and Mahmoud Abel Raheem were lucky because

they had a young publisher willing to take a risk on new names, whilst most of their writings appear outside of the genre.

The dearth of sf societies and magazines is another case in point, in addition to explicit censorship and even religious condemnation elsewhere (Hankins, 2015). In one notable case in Saudi Arabia, the country's Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice 'raided several bookshops selling the novel *H W J N*' (Knezevic 2013) by Ibrahim Abbas and Yasser Bahjatt, a best-selling, borderline sf novel about a genie who falls in love with a human. While no official explanation was forthcoming it seems the story was charged with blasphemy and Satan-worship and encouraging girls to use Ouija boards.

One could add that the *absence* of subgenre designations is holding back the industry in the Arab world too. Subgenres are very important as a marketing and sales tactic, allowing authors and publishers to target specific audiences and cultivate niche markets. According to Al-Mahdi, the internet is slowly breaking down boundaries and video games, especially multiple online role-playing games, are an important source of inspiration, as are western sub-genres such as cyberpunk and steampunk (Al-Mahdi 2017). By contrast, though, the Islamic concepts that were important to earlier writers, such as El-Zembely, are largely conspicuous by their absence; a partial exception being Ammar Al-Masry's *Shadows of Atlantis* (2017). In reviewing the work of El-Zembely through the prism of contemporary Egyptian sf, I would argue that a synthesis of the older and newer forms of the genre is required. The anticipatory power of positive sf, from the earlier moralistic phase, needs to be coupled with the grittier, multi-dimensional writing and characterizations represented by the current state of the genre. Only this will deservedly carry it forward to the lofty heights that sf has attained internationally.

Note: The author would like to thank Rebecca Hankins and Melanie Magidow in the writing of this article.

Endnote

¹Nihad Sharif (1932-2011) is often seen as the father of Arabic science fiction since he was the first author to specialize in the field, beginning in the 1970s with such minor classics as *The Lord of Time* (1972) and *Number 4 Commands You* (1974) and his classic utopian novel, *The People of the Second World* (1977). Mustafa Mahmoud, in the 1960s, and Tawfik Al-Hakim in the 1950s were established names who only occasionally worked in sf.

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A Practical Application of Critical World-Building

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Every work of fiction is set in a fictional world. While seemingly pointing out the obvious, this statement explains the most fundamental aspect of critical world-building. Some of those fictional worlds may differ just a little from the actual world in which we (authors, readers, critics) live, offering an illusion of identity between actual and fictional. In other worlds, the differences are more substantial with the introduction of amazing technology, mysterious intelligence agencies or magical beings. Fictional worlds have to be built, constructed by their creators and recreated in the minds of their audiences. And in order to critically analyze a fictional world, whether it is presented in a text, a film, a game, or any other medium or combination of media, scholars also need to assemble the world from its various elements. We have previously referred to this activity as 'critical world-building', and the aim of this article is to demonstrate how a work can be read critically by building, analyzing and interpreting its world.

In our article, 'Notes Toward a Critical Approach to Worlds and World-Building' (2016), we suggest that how worlds are built depends upon a person's purpose: that a producer of a fictional world builds it in a different way than the audience of that world, and that when readers relate critically to a world and the stories set therein, their world-building differs again. We suggest that one such difference is the constant relating of a world's details to its entirety and how the world is situated in relation to a wider generic and theoretical context (see also Taylor 2017). Another aspect of critical world-building is to use the *world-architecture* as a starting point, for example, by analyzing and relating the map of a fictional world to the text of the novel (Ekman 2018a; Ekman 2018b).

In this instance, our sample case, the alternate history 'Biographical Notes to "A Discourse on the Nature of Causality, with Airplanes" by Benjamin Rosenbaum' by Benjamin Rosenbaum (2004), has been selected as much for the extensive world-building it encourages as for its short format and online availability. It is set in a world in which the east has colonized the west through an understanding of the 'Brahmanic field' and of causalities other than linear cause and effect. The first-person narrator is an author who works on a 'shadow history' (alternate history) about a world in which the only existing form of causality is linear. Finding himself involved in the assassination attempt of a colonial prince, he tries to employ only linear causality to understand the seemingly unrelated events that unfold. The narrator's pen name is Benjamin Rosenbaum, the same name he gives his fictitious counterpart in his shadow-history world. Thus, the reader seems to be caught between two worlds, each

containing the writer Benjamin Rosenbaum, each a fiction in the other.

Before demonstrating how the fictional world in Rosenbaum's story can be read through critical world-building, and what insights can be gained from that, we will clarify our critical terminology. After that, we will approach Rosenbaum's world from three directions. First, we will analyze the relationship between the worlds of the text, then we will build the world from a close-reading of the first sentence of the text, and finally we will interpret the world as it is built from elements connected to the two women in the story.

Worlds and World-Building: Some Background

The central concept in any discussion about world-building is the idea of a world as a fictional creation.¹ Our understanding of what a fictional world is derives from Marie-Laure Ryan's description of such a world as a 'connected set of objects and individuals; habitable environment; reasonably intelligible totality for external observers; field of activity for its members' (Ryan 2001: 91). She goes on to explain that

the text is apprehended as a window on something that exists outside language and extends in time and space well beyond the window frame. To speak of a textual world means to draw a distinction between a realm of language, made of names, definite descriptions, sentences, and propositions, and an extralinguistic realm of characters, objects, facts, and states of affairs serving as referents to the linguistic expressions. (91)

The world in a text is something understood to extend beyond the 'window' afforded by that text. The window only allows certain elements to be viewed, but there is generally an assumption that there is more to the world than what is visible, just as in the actual world a window affords a glimpse into a wider world, with the assumption that there is more world than can be seen. This assumption is an illusion, but, as Thomas Pavel puts it, the worlds 'neatly hide their deep fractures, and our language, our texts, appear for a while to be transparent media unproblematically leading to worlds' (Pavel 1986: 73). Through any medium or collection of media, all we have access to is an 'always-incomplete image' (Ryan 2001: 91) of the fictional world. This 'always-incomplete image' is constituted by a number of parts or, our preferred term, *elements*, the building blocks of the world. The act of world-building is the combining of elements into a whole through deduction, inference, and interpretation. Such combining must be done with the recognition that worlds are built through webs of connections and interrelations between elements, but also that there will be blanks in the world where there is information missing.

In the process of building the world of Rosenbaum's story, we realized that the different kinds of worlds in the text, and the relationships between them, required us to make some distinctions between various kinds of worlds. We have already used the term 'actual world' for the world inhabited by the reader and writer (in keeping with Pavel 1986 and Doložel 1998) – that is to say, our world. To simplify the discussion, two more terms will be necessary: 'primary world' and 'secondary world.' These terms have been used with slightly different meanings in fantasy scholarship over the years, but here we will only use them to refer to fictional worlds (cf. Ekman 2013: 9–11). The primary world is a fictional version of the actual world, with only minimal differences, a 'simulacrum' of the actual world (Stableford 2004: 6). A secondary world differs from the actual world on a macroscopic level: geography, history, even laws of nature may differ. Mark Wolf rejects the notion of a primary/secondary world opposition, arguing that a fictional world's 'secondariness is a matter of degree' (Wolf 2012: 27). Even though a binary distinction between worlds would be practical, fictional worlds end up somewhere between the poles of 'almost identical' and 'in no way similar' to the actual world. Indeed, as the building of Rosenbaum's fictional world demonstrates, a world's 'secondariness' can be more complex than just a matter of degree: it can be a nesting of worlds within worlds, relating to each other in various ways.

The differences and similarities between the fictional and actual worlds can exist on several levels and be of several kinds. A primary world 'imitates, on a general level if not in every detail, the actual world' (Ekman 2013: 10). In his description of how the fictional world of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865–9) departs from the actual world, Wolf explains that the characters and places are invented 'in a way that disrupts the continuity of [the actual world] as little as possible' (Wolf 2012: 27). His degrees of secondariness create a spectrum of worlds ranging from this minimal departure from the actual world to secondary worlds that are different from the actual world in a wide variety of ways. The more similar the fictional and actual world are, the easier it is to build the world by extending it from the narrator's observations or other descriptions of the world. Whereas Kendall Walton describes such extensions of a fictional world as 'clutter' fit to be ignored (Walton 1990: 148), Brian Attebery sees this property of extension as something useful to story-telling, explaining that 'if the story mentions London, we can assume Paris':

We can fill in Tower Bridge and the dome of St Paul's, whether or not they are invoked specifically. We can supply Henry VIII and Victoria, Samuel Johnson and Virginia Woolf. Even the least well-read can provide traffic and parks and shops and cinemas to fill in the background of what the narrator actually chooses to notice. Ultimately

the world of the story extends in an unbroken path to the reader's own doorstep. Thus the reader does a lot of the hard work of bringing a story to life. (Attebery 1992: 131)

In fantastic discourse, making assumptions about the world is more complicated, but the property of extension can still apply. If the fantastic elements are constructed as surprises, aberrations, revelations or other deviations from an otherwise primary world, readers are meant to extend the world all the way home unless explicitly told not to. They are invited to reconsider the world as a fantastic place, and still provide some of the 'hard work' of bringing the world to life. Attebery does not differentiate between 'story' and 'world' here, and for a fictional world constructed for, or along with, a story, this makes little difference. We prefer to shift the focus to bringing the *world* to life, as there are also worlds built mainly to provide *potential* for stories (such as a world for a role-playing game). It should also be noted that like Walton, Attebery's focus is on readerly world-building. However, critical world-building can also make use of the property of extension in the construction of the fictional world, for filling in blanks, adding background, and providing (assumed) details. Thus, the property of extension is akin to extrapolation: it allows for a certain amount of taking for granted and provides a sense of predictability. By determining how the fictional world is dissimilar to the actual world, and where differences can be expected, it is possible to build parts of the world from its similarities to the actual world. However, in critical world-building, a scholar must keep apart material provided in the description of the world from assumptions made by extending that material.

The term 'world-building' itself has come to acquire several related meanings over time, making it somewhat vague, slippery and in need of clarification. In his *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1986), Gary Wolfe includes two predecessors to the term, 'world-making' and 'planet-building' (Wolfe 1986: 140; 90); the former describing the creation of fantasy worlds, the latter the techniques employed to create imaginary worlds of hard science fiction. Today, world-building is applied as a term across genres and media, including the worlds of literature, film, television and games (as exemplified by, for instance, Wolf 2012). It is also a term that has been used to describe the creation of a fictional world from a number of perspectives. Unfortunately, such broad application makes critical discourse on the subject confusing and imprecise. While the transmedial and transgeneric usage can provide interesting insights into the processes involved, precision in scholarship on world-building can be facilitated by a clearer use of terminology.

Fictional worlds are built in different ways for different purposes (Ekman and Taylor 2016). Examples include *authorial* world-building, which covers the

activity of creating the world from scratch, as it were, by assembling it from various elements in order to accommodate a particular narrative, suit a type of game play, or reflect a certain ideology, for instance. The plethora of books, articles, and online sources that offer advice on, or guidelines to, world-building almost exclusively adopt an authorial world-building perspective. *Readerly* world-building includes the cognitive and philosophical processes involved in taking the visual, textual, auditory, or other descriptions of a fictional world and turning them into a mental object with an ontological presence of its own. A largely readerly perspective on fiction, including world-building, is Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990). The concept of the *storyworld*, 'a jointly narratological and linguistic approach to stories construed as strategies for building mental models of the world' (Herman 2002: 2), is often used in world-building discussions that we would characterize as readerly in their approach. Related to readerly world-building is what we tentatively call *aggregate* world-building, the compiling and structuring of details about a fictional world often found in several works, narratives, and/or media. For aficionados of long book series or transmedial franchises, assembling masses of details into a fictional world can turn into a communal activity carried out in, for instance, online encyclopaedias ('wikis'). The aggregate world-building activities are prominent in much of Wolf's discussions. Each of these examples assumes a particular perspective on the construction of the world, and each is a worthwhile object of study. Our own interests lie in what we call *critical world-building*, the examination, analysis, and interpretation of the interplay between a world's elements and its entirety, as well as between the world and its generic and other intertexts, and a critical and theoretical context (Ekman 2018a; Ekman and Taylor 2016; Taylor 2017: 21–8).

These various kinds of world-building offer different approaches to how an imaginary world can be built, and the preceding list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. There may be other kinds of world-building, and any single individual may engage in more than one kind of world-building activity. However, our four kinds of world-building allow us to separate, for instance, what an author does (or does not do) when they put together a world for their story, what a reader does when they (re)construct that world in their minds, and how fans structure a host of minute details into a world spanning several narratives and media. Not least, they allow us to discuss the aspect of world-building that most fascinates us: the world-building that scholars engage in when they put a world together in order to analyze it critically. Critical world-building is not intended as another way to approach the story in a work: it is an analysis and interpretation of the fictional world as artistic creation. World and story might be hard, even impossible, to disentangle in narrative media, while other media (role playing

games and visual representations, for instance), may contain no explicit stories, only the potential for them.

In the following three sections, we will use critical world-building to approach the world of Rosenbaum's short story from three different angles, examining the relation of worlds within his world, taking a close look at what the first sentence of the text can tell us, and interpreting the word we can build from elements related to the two women that feature in the story.

Relating One World to Another

That relationships between worlds are central to Rosenbaum's text is signalled already by the title. It is all too easy to see the text (only) as metafiction, and read the fictional world as a distorted and self-conscious mirror image of the world of the reader. In fact, the worlds in this text are structured rather as a set of Russian matryoshka dolls than as one world as the other's mirror. These dolls become clear when we read the title from the outside in. The actual world, in which the dolls stand and the text exists, is signified by the final 'by Benjamin Rosenbaum.' This is a reference to the historical author of the text, and to the world in which he and his readers lead their lives. Moving inside the outermost set of quotation marks, we have 'Biographical Notes [...] by Benjamin Rosenbaum.' This is the largest doll, the fictional world in which the story is set. It contains another Benjamin Rosenbaum, the protagonist of the fictional story (for all that his fictionality is called into question by the text being called 'biographical notes' rather than fiction). His world is a secondary world, different from the actual world in several major ways, including the nature of causality, technological development and advances, and social and political history. The fictional Benjamin Rosenbaum is also a writer, and his fictional creation is located within the innermost set of quotation marks: 'A Discourse on the Nature of Causality, with Airplanes.' This is not so much a story within a story as a world within a world, a smaller doll nesting within the larger one. It is deceptively similar to the actual world, but is a fictional world nonetheless; from what little we can determine, however, it *may* be a primary world. There is even a hint that the *mise en abyme* that is indicated by the possible mirroring of actual world and world-within-world may be repeated with two other worlds. Inside the fictional world within the fictional world is another world, an even smaller doll not detectable in the title but hinted at in the text: 'Perhaps he was writing my story, as I wrote his [...]. In that case, we both of us lived in a world designed, a world of story, full of meaning' (Rosenbaum 2004: 325). The suggestion is that the fictional authors write each other, each creating the other's world, each placing it inside the other's creation. That suggestion is turned to speculation and wishful thinking by the pregnant 'perhaps': what remains is one fictional

world nested inside another.²

A first step in a critical world-building venture could be to determine how many fictional worlds are actually present, and how they relate to each other. In Rosenbaum's story, one fictional world is nested within another, possible to access only as a fictional object inside a fictional object. The narrator's attempt to think after the fashion of his invented world, to subject himself to its constraints, allows him to understand the events of his own world. But nested fictional worlds can have more direct bearing on the text. A nested fictional world can intensify the atmosphere of the world in which they are inserted, as is the case in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' graphic novel, *Watchmen* (1987). The sense of doom pervading the world of a nested graphic novel adds to the grim mood of the *Watchmen* world and story. Connections between fictional worlds and the fictional worlds nested within them are not uncommon in speculative fiction, with communication or even travelling between the nested worlds possible. In Michael Ende's *Die unendliche Geschichte* (*The Neverending Story*) (1979), the reader, Bastian, communicates with the nested fictional world of Fantastica and later finds himself in it. In Kelly Link's 'Magic for Beginners' (2005), a narrator tells the narratee about a television show in which the characters are fans of a fantasy television show of the same name. Communication seems to occur across the boundaries of these fictional worlds, and generic identity becomes fluid as the fictional worlds are not just juxtaposed but nested. These examples illustrate how nested worlds can be central elements in critical world-building, and that nested worlds are not all nested in the same way. Taking the world relations and their individual effects on the reading into account is central in interpreting the worlds.

Rosenbaum's text constructs a particular relationship between its fictional worlds but, through the way it engages with the alternate history form, it also draws on a particular relationship between the actual and fictional worlds. A 'true' alternate history is, according to Edgar Chapman, 'a story, or perhaps a scenario, where the actual history of our earth is accepted and assumed to be true, until a particular event has occurred which produces a different result from the history we know' (Chapman 2003: 5). In terms of world-building, this means that up to that branching point, the world of the text can be assumed to be – indeed, is meant to be – identical to the actual world. Natural laws, geographical space, past events, historical individuals are assumed to be the same for our world and the fictive one, up until the branching. Depending on the nature and timing of the 'particular event', some or all of these may change after that event, and the fictive ('alternate') world then departs from its actual original. Both the common past before the branching and the developments following upon it are dominant parts of how the fictive world is built. The various

differences, parallels and similarities offer means to make inferences about the fictional world, but they also emphasize its central features. Such emphasis is common in Rosenbaum's world, with the first sentence (examined in the next section) drawing attention not only to the alternative view on science fiction and feminism but to a world with differences in political power and its own gender issues.

The World is in the Details

An important part of critical world-building is close reading of world elements and the construction of a world from what can be inferred and deduced from the details revealed by such readings. Many world elements are possible to analyze in terms of how they relate to, or are coded references to, elements in the actual world. The first sentence of Rosenbaum's text demonstrates how details provide information about the world:

On my return from PlausFab-Wisconsin (a delightful festival of art and inquiry, which styles itself 'the World's Only Gynarchist Plausible-Fable Assembly') aboard the *P.R.G.B. Śri George Bernard Shaw*, I happened to share a compartment with Prem Ramasson, Raja of Outermost Thule, and his consort, a dour but beautiful woman whose name I did not know. (Rosenbaum 2004: 299)

'PlausFab-Wisconsin' is a parallel to our world's WisCon, a feminist ('gynarchist') science fiction ('plausible-fable') convention in Wisconsin. Even though the reference is coded, it demonstrates how close the two worlds – the actual and the fictive – are: not only do both possess a similar genre of fiction (science fiction/plausible fabulation) and have a meeting for its readers and writers, they have also developed an ideology centred around the power-relationship between men and women, although the construction of the word 'gynarchist', by forming it with the Greek roots *gynē* (woman) and *archē* (rule), foregrounds power more strongly than does the Latin-derived 'feminism'. The need for gynarchism also suggests a patriarchal social structure. Through the name of the vessel, *P.R.G.B. Śri George Bernard Shaw*, the Irish playwright's importance can be inferred (in some unspecified way),³ while the Sanskrit honorific *Śri* shows how the dominant culture is not European but of the Indian subcontinent. This dominance is further emphasized by other words of Sanskrit origin: the title Raja (king) and the names Prem and Rama (in Ramasson). These names also bring to the fore cultural intermingling, first visible in *Śri Shaw*: India may be dominant but Shaw – a European but also a former colonial subject – is influential enough to have a vessel named after him. The Raja of Outermost Thule – presumably areas around Iceland, Greenland, perhaps Scandinavia

– has a patronymic surname created in the traditional fashion of Scandinavian languages, still the norm on actual-world Iceland today (the father's name in the genitive followed by 'son'). The colonial attitude that is presented is juxtaposed with cultural intermingling, by imposing honorifics on a subjugated culture but also by adopting their naming norms.

As these first lines of the short story demonstrate, the relationship between the fictional and actual world is key in critical world-building. Already the details given in the first sentence begin to define the world culturally. Its patriarchal, colonial society suggests an inversion of actual-world colonialism: India has established European colonies and mixed Indian and European culture, even to the point of naming conventions. Differences between the actual and fictional world are foregrounded but similarities are also included. Words and names make clear that although there are differences, this is a world which contains men and women, art and Rajas, feminism and science fiction, Wisconsin and George Bernard Shaw.

The interplay of elements is vital, explaining not only how the fictive world is constructed but also how it differs from the actual world, thus underscoring what is of importance to the story and the fictive world as whole. Each piece reflects back on the other, enabling more meaning for the piece as a whole, as well as its world. We have chosen to call this 'dynamic interplay' because of how elements change the interpretation of each other. Analyzing the dynamic interplay of a world requires the probing of world elements to see what they say about the world as a whole and, crucially, how each part impacts the other (Taylor 2017: 23). Our broader discussion below takes into account the individual elements of the story, but also how they combine with others, and what this says critically about the world as a whole.

Two Women in a World of Men

Thematic readings of texts are not new and it is possible to allow thematic contexts to guide what elements are included in critical world-building, and what theoretical lenses are employed in interpreting the world. As discussed elsewhere (Taylor 2017: 21–22), the combination of many different elements leads to fruitful critical world-building. The dynamic interplay between characters and their interactions, nature and technology, political systems and social structures, manners and customs can all be interpreted in a theoretical context to provide a deeper understanding of the world.

The way feminism/gynarchism is presented from the first sentence suggests that the role of women provides a critical way into interpreting Rosenbaum's fictional world. As mentioned above, the story opens with the introduction of 'the World's Only Gynarchist Plausible-Fable Assembly'. That the assembly is the

only one of its kind signals rarity or even a lack of respect, and the PlausFab genre itself is later described by the narrator as 'a half-despised art (bastard child of literature and philosophy)' (Rosenbaum 2004: 304). A possible, even likely, reading is that PlausFab Wisconsin is not the only PlausFab assembly, however, but that it is the only *gynarchist* one. The rarity and lack of respect thus has at least as much to do with its gynarchist nature as its generic focus. This indication suggests that building the world by using a feminist theme could yield valuable insight into the work. Few characters appear in the story, and the majority are men: the protagonist/narrator, the Raja and his bodyguards, and the pirates. Occasional women writers are mentioned but only two major characters are women. For most of the story, their roles and actions reinforce the impression suggested by the singular *gynarchist* PlausFab Assembly.

The dominant impression of women is as silent, unseen, passive, even submissive entities. When the protagonist/narrator enters the compartment where the story begins, he observes how the Raja's 'consort pulled a wisp of blue veil across her lips, and looked out the porthole' (299). She is not given a name, symbolically silenced and hidden from view. The lack of reaction on the part of the men in the room (one of whom is the narrator) indicates that her action is perfectly in keeping with expected, even polite, behaviour. This impression is emphasized by the consort being the one to hide her face: the male Raja does not have to silence or hide her; she obeys a social protocol that dictates her silence and obscurity. The second mention of her adds to this portrayal of the consort – and possibly of women in general – as socially marginalized: 'The prince laughed gleefully. His consort had nestled herself against the bulkhead and fallen asleep, the blue gauze of her veil obscuring her features. "I adore shadow history," he said' (301). His consort is still unnamed and is bracketed, in the text as well as in the description, by the central, powerful Raja. Her passivity and obscurity is repeated; she is asleep and her features remain obscured.

The consort's name captures the intermingling of cultures but also expresses her subjugation to the Raja. The Raja is a powerful member of one of the major colonial powers of the fictional world and his society is the one best described in the text. When, four pages into the story, the consort's name is provided, it is with a command: "'Wake up, Sarasvati Sitasdottir," the prince said to his consort, stroking her shoulder. "We are celebrating"' (302). The gentleness and intimacy of stroking her shoulder suggests affection but not consideration: she is expected to celebrate something that she is unaware of, nor does it concern her. Why the Raja uses her full name at this point is unclear: it could be a belated introduction, a traditional form of address (in the fashion of cultures that use first name and patronymic/matronymic but leave out surnames at a particular level of familiarity), or some other reason. In combination with his

stroking her shoulder, the use of both first name and matronymic comes across as surprisingly formal, hinting at different cultural protocols. The cultural context and mixture of cultures is well established at this point and her name fits into this context: Sarasvati and Sita are Hindu goddesses, and her last name is a matronymic ('Sita's daughter'). The combination of Indian and Icelandic naming traditions points at an intentional mixing of colonizing and colonized societies, but the surnames of the Raja and his consort also contribute to the role of women as passive and men as active: Ramasson and Sitasdottir allude to the *Ramayana* epic and how Prince Rama rescues his wife Sita from the clutches of a demon king. At the same time, the fact that she uses a matronymic suggests that there may be some social capital to be gained from a female parent's name; or it may be a political (gynarchic) statement in and of itself. The text does not provide sufficient information on this point. It is worth pointing out, though, that this demonstrates that names are important in the world, by highlighting cultural intermingling, commenting on personalities, and emphasizing parallels between the fictional and actual world.

The other woman to play a significant part in the story seems at first to compete with the role presented through the Raja's consort, but is set up as inconsistent with social norms. The assassin appears to belie the role of women as submissive, passive and marginalized. She attacks the Raja to save his life through an intricate plan, is a skilled user of needlethrowers and gliders, and ultimately saves the Raja's life as he plummets towards his death. Her martial skills and the derring-do that mark her as a woman of action are undermined in a number of ways, however, revealing her to be a social anomaly. The first time the narrator genders the assassin, she is referred to as 'he' (305). The unquestioned assumption is that an armed killer is male. The Wisdom ant, a thinking, self-aware piece of technology, makes the same assumption (306). It is only once her mask is removed that the Wisdom ant observes that the assassin is female and Sarasvati Sitasdottir's sister, Shakuntala. While not ruling out female assassins, the narrator admires her glider skills more than he cares to ponder her identity or purpose (308). Whether this is because women are rarely glider pilots or whether, to him, it is more interesting that he has found a solution to the shadow-history task he has been set is not clear, but the title certainly hints at airplanes being of more interest.

The assassin's purpose and motivation, once they are revealed, further emphasize that she is not representative of women in general in the society. Apart from her bravery, glider skills and arms training, the portrayal of the female assassin is in keeping with that of her sister: she is silent and hides her face. Her reasons may be different, but she conforms to the same role. Her motivation is at first only speculated on: is it 'political symbolism? personal revenge? dynastic

ambition? anarchic mania?' (308). While informative about the political situation of the world, none of these is correct. Shakuntala has joined 'the anarcho-gynarchist insurgents' (319), who clearly embrace a position that places them outside of, and in opposition to, society and even more marginalized than the gynarchist PlausFab writers. As a member of the insurgency, Shakuntala can be taken to offer a counter-image of women's social role, indeed, of what a gainful member of society should be. Furthermore, her ultimate motivation is revealed to be that she is in love with the Raja, who is secretly colluding with the insurgents. Love and political fervour – and we are not certain in which order – drive her to act as she does. And when Sarasvati realizes that the man she loves is threatened, her behaviour also changes. She becomes less demure and more like her assassin-sister when she begins to fight 'with uncommon ferocity' (322). Both sisters thus demonstrate how the socially accepted female behaviour can change, but that such change is a result of an extreme political position or of extreme feelings.

Conclusion

Critical world-building is about relating details to each other within the world but also to details outside of it. In one world, the 'yellow circle [in which] two round black dots stared like unblinking demonic eyes; beneath, a black semicircle leered with empty, ravenous bonhomie' (308) is the universal device of pirates, in another, it is a sign of good humour and jokes. We cannot interpret the meaning of the former without taking the latter into account. In critical world-building, details matter but only in a wider context. The dynamic interplay between elements reaches beyond worlds, and neither smiley nor skull-and-crossbones will remain unaffected.

Our goal with this essay has been to demonstrate how critical world-building can be applied to a text, by examining a fictional world in terms of its elements and how these interact with each other, and seeing what they say about the world as a whole. This required the recognition that, in fiction, worlds are not simple constructs that can be placed in binary categories, nor is 'world-building' an unambiguous term. We have applied critical world-building in three ways to Rosenbaum's text. A careful reading of how fictional worlds relate to each other and to the actual world offers nuanced constructions as alternatives to metafictional and alternative-history readings. Similarly, careful close readings of the first sentence, in which the world is introduced, reveal some central features of the world. One of these features, the status of the gynarchist PlausFab assembly, offers an angle for a broader thematic interpretation of the dynamic interplay between the various world elements related to the two female characters. Other themes are suggested by that same sentence, not

least opening the text up for post-colonial criticism. Reading these themes is beyond the scope of this essay, but we welcome future scholarship on them ... or on the significance of the smiley face and other cross-cultural devices. ■

Endnotes

¹ The alternative term 'imaginary world' seems to us to be the broader concept: not all worlds that can be imagined are created as part of a fiction. We are aware that the opposite argument is also possible, however, and our settling for one term in favour of the other is, ultimately, simply a matter of taste and the need to avoid misunderstandings that might arise from the use of two synonymous terms.

² Note that our discussion concerns the extent to which the world(s), fictional and actual, depart from and relate to each other as worlds. For broader discussions about how the fictional relates to the actual, see Pavel 1986.

³ Although not made explicit in the story, we can make inferences to Shaw's ambiguous plays about the social position and construction of women within patriarchal and warlike societies, for example, *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893), *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Pygmalion* (1913). And it is worth observing that in the actual world, Shaw is the offspring of another former colony of the British Empire.

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The Impact of the Eldritch City: Classical and Alien Urbanism in H.P. Lovecraft's Mythos

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An interest in the ancient past and its ruinous remains is a constant *topos* in literature. The western tradition of the description of ancient ruins can be traced back to the antiquarian interests of Herodotus, via the Roman period (Pliny, Pausanias), the Middle Ages (Gildas), the Islamic period (al-Bakri) and the Renaissance (Schwyzer 2007: 76–109; Wardropper 1969). It is during the Romantic era, however, that the ruin becomes a central theme and especially in Gothic literature. H.P. Lovecraft and his writings can be placed at the tail end of this tradition. Cities and ruins play an important part in his stories (whether from the Cthulhu Mythos or not), not just as a setting but in many cases within plot (Joshi 2008; Joshi and Schultz 2001: 50–5; Lowell 2004). Despite appearing otherworldly, they reflect ancient urbanism, in particular Graeco-Roman classical monuments and cities.

I want to take advantage of the presence of ruins and ancient cities (both human and non-human) in Lovecraft's works to focus on the point where this intersects with the impact of ancient cities in post-Roman urbanism. The final aim here is to analyze and assess the influence of both human (modern and ancient) urbanism and Cthulhu Mythos-ruins and towns in Lovecraft's oeuvre. In order to do this, I will put forward the two circumstances in which this influence can be seen: first, by looking at mythic cities (pre-human alien cities, pre-historic human cities, and human cities from the Dreamlands), and then at actual and fictional cities physically located in Lovecraft's New England.

Lovecraft, Mythos and the Urban

Although ancient monuments appear frequently in Lovecraft's stories, within his cosmic horror, some are *pre-human* eldritch sites. 'Cosmic horror' is characterized by taking nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nihilism and Gothic a step further; terror is caused by the characters' realization that there is *something* beyond human comprehension, and that it is inherently evil, reducing mankind to a small, insignificant role in the universe (Burlison 1991; Hanegraaff 2007). Lovecraft's protagonists find themselves facing alien ruins, understanding their context and realizing their eldritch implications. It is this realization that results in the characters' horror and insanity.

The urban settings go beyond, however, maddening alien cities and can be divided into four categories. In the first place we find those ancient cities from the Lovecraftian Mythos, which I will be label 'eldritch cities'. These are all the

cities that existed on Earth before the development of *homo sapiens*, which includes both alien cities such as Corona Mundi (the Antarctic city of the Old Ones) and pre-historic human high civilizations (Olathoë of the Hyperboreans). The next category includes the cities from the Dreamlands like Ulthar or Kadath ('oneiric cities'), which belong to a different reality but still connected to the Cthulhu Mythos. Third, we have those human cities created by Lovecraft, such as Arkham and Innsmouth, which will be referred to as 'Arkham-cities'. Lastly, there real-world cities such as New York or Boston, which appear within the Mythos stories. These will be described as 'non-mythos cities'.

The importance of cities in Lovecraft's writings goes beyond their function as setting. He researched into architecture and urbanism, both where he lived in New York and Providence and as a visitor to Saint Augustine, Quebec or New Orleans, and paid considerable attention to significant monuments and town plans (Evans 2005: 103). This information he later used in his stories, for example, in his description of the non-mythos and Arkham cities. In parallel to this use of contemporary urbanism, Lovecraft knew Latin and read classical texts in translation (Joshi 1991: 16). Stories such as 'Ibid', 'The Very Old Folk' and 'The Tree', and poems such as 'The Poem of Ulysses', 'Ode to Selene or Diana', 'To the Old Pagan Religion' and 'On the Ruin of Rome', are devoted solely to classical themes. His occasional use of classical authors and Latin quotations, and his juvenile work *A Manual of Roman Antiquities* (1905), also attest to this influence. This knowledge of the classics went beyond the literary and into the architectonic and archaeological, something which is evident in Lovecraft's use of archaeology, elements of ancient urbanism, and the images he presents of eldritch and oneiric cities.

In principle, Arkham cities appear to be human and to follow patterns of modern American urbanism while the Mythos eldritch cities, and a decaying Arkham-type city such as Innsmouth, are described as ruinous, isolated and in decline (Olkus and Rzyman 2011: 332–6). This would be a way of underlining the odd, inhuman and alien nature that characterizes the Mythos horror, although elements of ancient architecture and urbanism (mostly classical, but not exclusively) appear recurrently: marble decorations, bass-reliefs, arches and vaulting appear alongside non-Euclidean geometry, unexpected plan layouts and mysterious buildings. In this way, the ancient city appears as an underlying layer in the pre-conception of what a city should be and how it looked like.

Eldritch and Oneiric Cities

Perhaps the most famous city belonging to Lovecraft's pre-human category is R'lyeh, even if it is not described in great detail. Depicted in 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928), it lies beneath the Pacific Ocean, 'the dripping Babylon of ancient

daemons' (Lovecraft 2000b: 93), where Great Cthulhu awaits dreaming. The city is built out of Cyclopean masonry and its design follows non-Euclidean geometry. Only the citadel or acropolis emerges from the sea when the narrator, Johansen's ship lands on it, suggesting that the city itself remains underwater and that it is much larger. Johansen does not describe any individual buildings or monuments, only the odd shapes and forms, although it is clear that the city is decorated with bas-reliefs and colossal statues bearing the image of Great Cthulhu. An even vaguer description is given of the arctic Cyclopean ruins in 'The Horror in the Museum' (1933) although it also includes reliefs, pylons and staircases. Similarly, in 'The Temple' (1925), Lovecraft introduces an unnamed sunken city, which the story's narrator identifies with Atlantis, but it is not clear if his identification is correct or not. The city lies in ruins in various stages of decline, although with an architecture completely foreign, not classically Greek, in theory. Elements such as villas, arches, statues, columns, marble buildings and a large open plaza point, however, towards a Roman inspiration. The eponymous temple is equally classic-inspired, even if carved out of the rock: columns supporting a pediment, built atop a flight of steps (a podium or stylobate) with a narrative frieze, superior to classical Greek art. The sunken city is presumed by the narrator to be prehistoric, although no other indication about its chronology is given.

The city of the Old Ones, Corona Mundi in Antarctica, is perhaps the most detailed and best described example of an eldritch city. First identified by the narrator of 'At the Mountains of Madness' (1936) through the presence of regular rock formations on the mountainsides, it is then compared to two recent archaeological excavations of Machu Picchu in 1911-2 and 1915 and the Kish Oxford expedition in 1923-9. In the following chapter, the city is further described as built in mortar-less Cyclopean masonry, of odd and varying geometries. The city includes many buildings, stretching for miles, such as houses, ramparts, tunnels, large towers, a palace, monuments and star-shaped open piazzas. The street layout seems labyrinthine and not in a grid plan. Arches and domes, together with continuous narrative coloured friezes and large sculptures, appear in most of the structures.

The city in 'The Shadow Out of Time' (1936), built by the Great Race of Yith some 200 million years in the past, is another example. It is very similar in its general conception to the Antarctic city of the Old Ones, although chronologically later. The city is built out of megalithic vaulted granite masonry with large paved streets and ramps, similarly extending over miles. The Great Race seems, however, to have built with concrete rather than dry masonry. As opposed to the domed Old One's buildings, the Grate Race had flat roofs covered in gardens. One thing which is perhaps more interesting about this city is that it was built

around and on top a previously existing black basalt city of the Flying Polyps, the archaeological remains of which are scattered throughout the city. Lovecraft also adds the existence of large underground corridors that connected the various buildings and a possibly public square of pillars.

Besides the alien prehistoric cities, there are those coeval human, high urban civilizations which flourished before the Neolithic revolution, and indicate an earlier stage, a parallel line, of human cultural development. These cities are generally not as elaborately described as the alien ones. As described in 'Polaris' (1920), 'The Quest of Iranon' (1935) and 'At the Mountains of Madness', the Hyperboreans who lived in the far north (the land of Lomar) were an urban culture, whose main city was Olathoë, taken and destroyed by the Inutos. Olathoë is simply described as being built out of marble and having a citadel. Another is Teloth, which is described together with fictional Aira, and confused with yet another city, Oonai, in 'The Quest of Iranon'. While Teloth is a granite city with square houses, Aira is white in marble and covered with golden domes.

The last cities described in any length, in 'The Doom that Came to Sarnath' (1920), 'At the Mountains of Madness' and 'The Nameless City' (1921), are Sarnath and Ib, built both by the side of a lake in the land of Mnar, one opposite each other. Both cities are, at the time of the narration, lying in ruins. Ib is simply described as grey and decorated with carved idols, one of which was taken back to Sarnath after its inhabitants destroyed the former. Sarnath is described in quite fantastic detail. Marble walls appear again, their length measured in stadia and cubits for further classical connection. A street grid is also hinted in the description of 'fifty streets from the lake to the gates of the caravans, and fifty more intersecting them' (Lovecraft 2000a: 55). Marble palaces and temples with many columns appear along the list of public monuments, together with clearly Roman elements such as amphitheatres and aqueducts. The 'tower-like temples' (55) would, however, draw influence from Mesopotamian ziggurats or Mesoamerican stepped temples rather than from classical examples.

In the Dream Cycle included within the Mythos narrative there are various cities mentioned, a couple of which are described in full, most others only in passing; most of these feature in 'The Dream-Quest for Unknown Kadath' (1943). Kadath bridges this division between the Dreamlands and the world of the Mythos, for it is to be found in both. It is the home to the gods of men (the Great Ones) and is built upon a mountain, where the streets lead up to the castle where the gods live. Ulthar is described as a village in 'The Cats of Ulthar' (1920) and 'The Other Gods' (1933), but also as a town with narrow streets and suburbs, presided by a temple in 'The Dream-Quest'. Inquanok is a dark, onyx, harbour city, surrounded by a wall. It has a royal palace and a temple to the Elder Ones (with a flattened dome and niched walls) within a round enclosure

full of gardens. The street system connects the city gates with the main sites (the palace and the temple). Thran is a city within a huge wall with curved narrow streets and bazaars.

Two other cities are more thoroughly described. The first is Celephaïs. Mentioned as a harbour city 'in the Valley of Ooth-Nargai beyond the Tanarian Hills' (Lovecraft 1999: 419), Celephaïs is described as having marble walls, bronze statues, streets paved with onyx, and a turquoise temple. The Street of the Pillars is perhaps the most remarkable element of the city's urbanism with a royal palace, bazaars and minarets. The second is not named, but it is the 'marvellous city' dreamt by Randolph Carter (Lovecraft's alter ego), with its 'palaces of veined marble [...] temples and colonnades, arched bridges and silver-basined fountains, and wide streets with blossom-laden urns and ivory statues' and houses with red roofs (Lovecraft 1999: 363). The urbanism of the Dreamlands is not as uniform as that of the eldritch cities. In the case of Carter's city, we are explicitly told that it is made from selected memories of places in his childhood: Boston, Salem, Newport, Arkham, Kingsport. However, while most elements of oneiric cities suggest ancient and medieval urbanism, some place names vary from the fantastic to the locally-inspired Algonquin (Eckhardt 1991: 93).

Lovecraft's New England: Arkham and Non-Mythos cities

Human settlements of the 1920s and 1930s form the core of Lovecraftian locations, but their aspect and urbanism are limited to what New England as a setting could offer (Eckhardt 1991: 80, 91). Of Lovecraft's fictional urban places in New England, the three described in most detail are Arkham, Innsmouth and Kingsport: the first inspired by Salem, the second by Newburyport, and the last by Marblehead (Joshi and Schultz 2001: 6–7, 127; Shreffler 1977: 70, 89). (Both Salem and Newburyport exist as well in Lovecraft's stories.) Other places like Aylesbury or Dunwich appear only briefly or just as references.

Of these, Arkham is the most important location, and there are constant references to it throughout Lovecraft's tales, although in none does he provide a lengthy description. The city is built on a grid system by the Miskatonic River and is home to Miskatonic University and its museum. It also has a hospital, a mental asylum and the Historical Society. Various churches and cemeteries are also mentioned. There are colonial houses still standing around the city centre, although the most notable seem to be Georgian and in a state of decay.

Innsmouth, by contrast, is a small fishing town but is more thoroughly described. The town is 'an exaggerated case of civic degeneration' (Lovecraft 2000b: 390) with many abandoned houses, factories, a railway station, a silted-up harbour with a collapsed lighthouse, damaged pavements, de-cobbled

streets, and only two sources of wealth: a gold refinery and fishing. It also lacks any public amenities like a library or a chamber of commerce, and the church has been taken over by the Order of Dagon.

The town's layout seems to be organized in a street grid with some diagonal avenues converging in a main square by the river. The most remarkable elements – and the source of interest for Lovecraft's protagonist – are the many Georgian mansions which are still preserved as part of the old colonial core of the town.

The harbour town of Kingsport is a 'strange little fishing village' (Lovecraft 1999: 161) near Arkham where people carry out secret and ancient rites. The cliff house is described as always having been there and 'antediluvian' (479), hinting towards an incredible antiquity beyond the actual 17th century town. The hospital is said to have been built on top of secret 'caves or burrows' (Lovecraft 2000a: 314), perhaps the same that link to the crypt under the church mentioned in 'The Festival' (1925). The town consists of a cluster of streets around the hills opposite the harbour, without any hint of an organized grid.

Besides the mythic cities and the towns invented for his New England settings, Lovecraft mentions various other places in his writings. In some cases, like Ipswich, Bolton, Newburyport, Rowley or Essex, these are real towns in Massachusetts which are used to give a sense of location and further veracity to the fictitious Arkham, Innsmouth and Kingsport. In other cases, real world cities form the basis for some of the Cthulhu Mythos stories, where there is an interaction between the supernatural and the urban fabric that goes beyond the setting. These settings are mostly based on Lovecraft's own personal experiences (Eckhardt 1991: 91), for example, in Providence, Rhode Island, Lovecraft was inspired by a Catholic, neo-Gothic church to write 'The Haunter of the Dark' (1936) (Shreffler 1977: 71). As seen above, Lovecraft's alter-ego Randolph Carter is similarly told how his childhood memories form the substance of his marvellous dream city. This psychological excavation, inspired by the interaction between the psyche and physical locations, is complemented in 'Pickman's Model' (1927) by what could be termed as casual urban archaeology in Boston: 'There's hardly a month that you don't read of workmen finding bricked-up arches and wells leading nowhere in this or that old place as it comes down' (Lovecraft 2000b: 49). Not only does this refer to the notable antiquity of Boston as a human settlement, the connection with the ghouls and the passage to the Dreamlands also hint that these tunnels predate the foundation of the city itself.

Ancient Cities and Eldritch Urbanism

Considering this corpus of material, which includes mostly fictional but also

real cities, it is possible to discuss crossed influences between ancient, real, fictitious and eldritch urbanism. This highlights the fact that Lovecraft's use of, and descriptions of cities and architecture were not casual, and that ideas of classical urbanism and architecture were intentionally used to convey an idea of a recognizably superior antiquity. Besides this, classical urbanism is also present in Lovecraft's urban descriptions indirectly through neo-classical (Georgian) architecture and New England colonial urban layouts. Lastly, it is interesting to notice how urbanism in New England is not just influenced by its classical past but also by the eldritch supernatural.

Eldritch and Oneiric cities show all the typical elements which early twentieth-century scholarship (for example, Haverfield 1913; Jones 1940; Robertson 1929) considered characteristic of classical urbanism and architecture. In some cases, the classical inspiration is clear: Sarnath with its aqueducts and amphitheatres, or the sunken city with its column-and-pediment temple and villas, are perhaps the best examples of elements taken from classical urbanism and architecture directly transposed to eldritch cities. There are, however, other elements which indicate classical inspirations.

The ubiquitous use of marble and bronze statues reflects Graeco-Roman ideas of public monumentality and sculpture (Holliday 2015), best exemplified in Augustus' claim that *'ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream [urbem] se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset'* - 'he may be rightfully glorified for he left in marble what he found in brick' (Suetonius 1914: 28). This continues an idealized conception of the ancient city visible all the way from the nineteenth century down to the Islamic Middle Ages (cf. Siraj 1992). The sunken city, Celephaïs, Sarnath, Aira and Olathoë are all decorated with marble (some of them are fully built in white, glittery marble), and Celephaïs is also noted for its bronze statuary. The combination of marble buildings and bronze statue relates to the *Forum Romanum*, the Delphi sanctuary, the Athenian acropolis and other classical sites. In some cities the use of exotic and colourful stones like onyx, basalt, granite or turquoise add an extra point of contrast with the all-white marble ideal of the classical city. Linked to these decorations, although not entirely classical, are narrative friezes. These appear in many examples (Corona Mundi, the nameless and sunken cities, R'lyeh), and although there are clear classical parallels (the Parthenon frieze, Trajan's column), there are other famous non-classical examples in Egypt, Persepolis, Mesoamerica and Angkor Wat. These friezes play a main role in the narrative because they serve to tell the story of the original dwellers (Olkus and Rzyman 2011: 333), enabling the main characters and the readers to learn about them.

When looking at streets we find also hints of Classical inspiration: first in the Hippodamian grid of Sarnath (cf. Stambaugh 1988: 243–54), but also in the



Street of Pillars in Celephaïs, which links directly to the colonnaded (porticated) streets that characterized late Roman towns, especially in the East (Dey 2014), such as those of Ephesus, Jarash (fig. 1), Jerusalem or Palmyra. Open squares and plazas are also common, and they appear in three cases (two amongst the more civilized and scientific of the alien races, the Old Ones and the Great Race, plus the sunken city). In Antarctica these are star-shaped (a recurrent pattern in Old One architecture), and in Australia they are simply described as being underground and having pillars. Open squares in 'At the Mountains of Madness' and 'The Shadow Out of Time' indicate social gatherings, public interaction and perhaps market activity, which would further hint towards the civic life of these eldritch town dwellers, in imitation of the *fora* and *agorai* of the classical world (Dickenson 2016; Russell 2015: 43–76). It should be noted though that in a couple of cases, such as Thran and Celephaïs, we are told about narrow streets, bazaars and minarets, which suggest Islamic rather than classical cities.

Cyclopean masonry and non-Euclidean architecture are another characteristic of the eldritch cities. Cyclopean, even if used in describing larger-than-human elements in Lovecraft's stories, is in itself a term used in classical archaeology to describe certain Bronze Age walls built with megaliths,

particularly in Mycenae (Loader 1998). As for non-Euclidean geometry, it is difficult to envisage an architecture where the dominant features are angles formed by the intersection of lines in a curved space, so that the sum of the angles in a triangle would add up more than 180°. *Entasis*, however, the optical correction in architecture so that structures look Euclidean when in fact they are not (Haselberg 1999), is commonplace in classical architecture – most famously in the Parthenon, where there are hardly any straight angles. Eldritch cities, though, overly exaggerate this distortion in order to upset the spectator, so although non-Euclidean geometry is technically a main characteristic of classical architecture, it should not count as an influence on Lovecraft's descriptions. Instead, it is used as a way of contrasting the human and classical rectangular cities with these alien and non-human, non-rectangular ones.

Other elements of urbanism, such as palaces, acropoleis (citadels), houses, temples and walls appear in most of the descriptions of oneiric and eldritch cities, but these are structures also present in other cultures, so it is dubious that they are modelled on classical influences (although they do form part of the elements which are usually linked to the ideal classical city). A similar conclusion can be drawn from the presence of arches and vaults. These structures may look back to Roman constructions, where arches and vaults were commonplace, but although they were first thoroughly used by the Romans (Robertson 1929: 231), they were not unique to them.

The influence of classical ideas of the city go beyond urbanism and monumentality. It is remarkable that all the high alien civilizations live in cities, and all are urban in nature. This comparison with human society is underlined by the Old Ones in Antarctica, who are described as 'Scientists to the last [...] whatever they had been, they were men' (Lovecraft 1999: 126), mirroring their human 'discoverers'. Even the Mi-Go from Yuggoth, who appear more prominently than any other alien race, dwell in cities on their planet. This centrality of the city is embedded in the Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition, where the city is the last point in the evolution of society and the natural seat of civilization (Edelstein 1964: 63–4).

Since the city was regarded by the classical world as a necessary stage in human development, it is no coincidence that the ancient city also had an indirect impact on Lovecraft's New England through neo-classical, Georgian architecture and the urbanism of the non-mythos and Arkham cities. The urban layout of the latter is created deliberately imitating that of other New England colonial foundations, although with some significant changes. Arkham, as opposed to Salem, has a street grid (Joshi and Schultz 2001: 7), in the same way that the descriptions of Innsmouth hint towards a grid. Both street grids and Georgian architecture, with its columns in the classical orders and its use

of marble, are characteristic of a later period in New England's urban history, which came to substitute the early pioneer colonial architecture and irregular town plans (Home and King 2016; Maudlin 2016: 31–3). The irregular colonial town cluster of early pioneers is, however, preserved in Kingsport as a way of underlining its eldritch antiquity. These street grids and Georgian architectures are directly linked to the full implementation of British authority and to the idea of the existence of an 'architecture of power' across the British Empire, which in turn imitated classical Roman models (Maudlin 2016: 24).

With regards to the impact the supernatural and the eldritch has in Lovecraft's cities, the lack of direct superimposition of pre-human and New England cities prevents nearly any comment on re-use or adaptation of materials or monuments from the former in the latter. There is the one case of the city of the flying polyps destroyed and built over by the Great Race; there the underground tunnels are sealed by the Yithians, the large black towers are left standing, but otherwise the other structures were demolished, with remaining ruined walls seen at various points of the city. In this case, the preservation of some previous monuments (either standing or in ruin) serve as a constant reminder to the Great Race of the looming danger and that they would have to eventually leave that point of time in Earth. Barring this example, there is no building interaction between human and non-human cities. There are, however, certain 'hot spots' of supernatural activity, places which connect this world with other dimensions, which appear in urban contexts, and they have a limited impact on the development of the urbanism in Arkham and non-mythos cities.

Manhattan, Boston and an unnamed French city – presumably Paris – in 'The Music of Erich Zann' (1922) are three places where there are points of connection to other dimensions: either across time, to the Dreamlands, or to the primordial void. In two of these (Manhattan and France), the portal disappears, swallowing in its demise their entire urban surroundings. In this aspect, the supernatural can completely modify the physical layout of the city, even if the inhabitants remain unaware. There are other places where the focal point of supernatural activity predates the establishment of the city, and then are later integrated and hidden into the urban fabric, such as churches and cellars. This presumes cultic agency behind the urban development of these towns.

The presence of secret cults acting in given urban areas (either prompted by pre-existing links to supernatural realms, as in Red Hook with the gap to the abyss, or elsewhere as a result of the establishment of a cult) tends to lead to decayed urban (ruinous buildings, irregular and dirty streets) and social fabric. This is the case of Kingsport, Innsmouth, Federal Hill in Providence and 'The Horror at Red Hook' (1927), set in Brooklyn. Innsmouth, for instance, has been wholly and noticeably taken over by the cultists of the Order of Dagon (until the

federal authorities intervene at the end of 'The Shadow over Innsmouth'). The Order of Dagon is introduced to Innsmouth by Captain Obed, although it is not clear if Deep Ones already existed in Devil's Reef or not, which would may have pre-disposed Innsmouth to become what it became. In Kingsport, perhaps due to its touristic importance, the cult activities are kept secret and limited to the crypt under the church. Another focus which modifies the urbanism there is the odd house built over the cliffs, from 'The Strange High House in the Mist' (1931), which is avoided even by the cultist-ridden inhabitants of Kingsport, partly explaining why the inhabited area has not extended towards it. In Brooklyn and Federal Hill, the cultist activity is not generalized across the local community, but the supernatural presence is directly linked to the transformation of these areas into slums: both had been respectable neighbourhoods but when the links to the supernatural were firmly established, they became less desirable and were associated instead with immigrants. Arkham by contrast, as prone to supernatural activity as it may seem, is not that affected by large-scale supernatural events. Instead, its influence tends to be localized to individual sites, as in 'The Dreams in the Witch-House' (1933), or the activities of private individuals like 'Herbert West – Reanimator' (1922).

Conclusion

In many of Lovecraft's writings, cities are essential elements in the narrative, the ambience and setting, and the horror. Cities, furthermore, come in all shapes and sizes, human and alien, ancient and current. And even if only a few appear recurrently due to the short nature of Lovecraft's stories, the detail and quality of the descriptions given provide with enough evidence to analyze Lovecraft's ideas on urbanism. In this sense, I have tried to tackle two different influences on Lovecraftian urbanism, which overall seem to characterize and determine how his cities look like: firstly, the way in which classical cities, purposefully or not, left a profound imprint on these designs; and secondly, the way in which the supernatural modifies and alters the patterns of the Mythos cities of New England.

The ancient Greek and Roman city, as imagined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was characterized by its imperial connotations, the existence of a common architecture, the use of marble, columns, arches and vaults, and street grids. All of these are decorative and structural elements which appear constantly in oneiric and eldritch cities. In one case, aqueducts and amphitheatres are mentioned, which are characteristically Roman. Strange, non-Euclidean shapes and scales of building are necessarily included in alien cities in order to make a clear visual separation between the humans and the original dwellers, but even Cyclopean masonry and non-Euclidean angles can

be traced back to Ancient Greece and Rome. This contraposition is purposely done, as it implies a comparison between these unreal and disproportionate described cities and our own ideal classical/ancient city, which is rectangular (Euclidean), proportionate and real. Coincidental but significant is the fact that prehistoric human and alien cultures dwelt in cities, rather than in isolated palaces, spaceships, mountain castles or rural villages, which is a concept that stems directly from classical antiquity, equating cities with civilization. Similar (coincidental, significant or unintentional) is the fact that elements of classical antiquity appear in the Cthulhu Mythos indirectly through colonial and Georgian architecture.

While the ancient city has an impact in the conception of various alien cities, in which the supernatural is also taken for granted, in the human cities of New England the classical element is diluted into neo-classical influences, but the supernatural still modifies the way cities are organized and conceived. In Lovecraft's New England we find cities connected with other dimensions through portals, and cultists summoning beings, all of which eventually leads to the tearing of the urban fabric. In this way, we can see classical influences as highlighting elements of civilized living, whereas supernatural activity (even in alien cities) leads to the crumbling of urban life and urban spaces.

I have tried to show that classical cities, both as built and as cultural environments, had a large impact on Lovecraft's imagination: beyond simple urbanism and townscapes into the very idea of city and civilization. These are embedded in Western thought in such a way that in the writings of one particular author of the early 20th century, who would become extremely influential throughout popular culture from the 1960s onwards, the concepts of towns and cities still mirror and recall those of Rome and Athens, even after the addition of a supernatural and alien layer.

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Colonialism and Postcolonialism in the Cartmel and Davies Eras of *Doctor Who*

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Much has been written about the colonial origins of, and subsequent postcolonial movement in, literary science fiction. This analysis is now being expanded to include televised sf, including the popular British programme, *Doctor Who*. In this article, we will focus on the brief period within the series when postcolonial writing dominated, the so-called 'Cartmel Era' of the late 1980s, and in particular the story, 'Remembrance of the Daleks' (1988). We will argue that this moment was enabled by the very thing that is most frequently criticized about that decade, namely, the series' nostalgic revisiting of its own past, in contrast with the superficial cosmopolitanism of 'New *Who*' and the Russell T. Davies Era.

Postcolonialism and Science Fiction

Postcolonialism, broadly defined, refers to the social, political and economic aftermath of colonialism including, but not limited to, the continuation of colonial relations by other means and the acknowledgement of the colonial underpinnings of modern society and science (Cook 2003). Here, we will be focusing upon postcolonialism in its literary sense, as a movement which critiques representations of the colonized, supports the rise of developing-world literature, and challenges and/or subverts colonial tropes (McEwan 2008: 23–4; Langer 2011: 3–10). Under colonialism, literature is frequently a tool for perpetrating colonial relations; consequently, the subversion or reimagining of colonial literature becomes part of the postcolonial project (Reid 2010).

Michelle Reid defines three postcolonial 'strategies for constructing productive spaces, gaps, and disjunctions to "renovate" the dominant English language and literature of the empire':

- Appropriation: capturing and remoulding the language, making it 'bear the burden' of the colonial experience.
- Writing back to the imperial centre: rewriting major canonical works of English literature to resist and challenge the assumptions of the source-text.
- Mimicry: how the colonized adopt the language and forms of the empire but in doing so alter and distort the dominant meanings so they reflect back to the colonizer a displaced image of his/her world. (Reid 2010)

Doctor Who's postcolonial leanings tend to take the second and third forms, as it is speaking from the centre rather than the periphery, rewriting the works

of the centre to challenge their assumptions, as well as sometimes satirizing the tropes of colonial literature. While some might argue that a valid critique of imperialism cannot emerge from a colonizing source, Jessica Langer argues that the blurring of identity between colonizer and colonized renders a postcolonial literature from the ostensible 'centre' valid (Langer 2011: 11–14).

Since the turn of the millennium, there have been several articles and books analysing both the colonial origins of sf and postcolonial developments in the genre. In his article, 'Science Fiction and Empire' (2003), Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues that sf 'has been driven by a desire for the imaginary transformation of imperialism into Empire, viewed not primarily in terms of political and economic contests among cartels and peoples, but as a technological regime that affects and ensures the global control system of de-nationalized communication' (Csicsery-Ronay 2003: 232). John Rieder similarly notes that sf not only emerged in a colonialist context but that it also draws on sciences closely linked with the colonial effort, such as evolutionary biology and anthropology (Rieder 2008). Langer has noted parallels between stories involving human-alien interactions and the way in which colonial literature characterizes the native as something other than human. She argues that 'texts that deal critically with alien encounter function as sites of continued resistance' (Langer 2011: 84). She also considers how sf can be used as a means of exploring the complexities and traumas of the colonial process, and to acknowledge the complexities of power whereby nations can simultaneously be colonized and colonizing.

It should also be emphasized that originating in a colonial context – indeed, being colonial – does not mean that sf is uncritical of colonialism. Rieder observes that while sf sometimes reiterates colonial tropes, it just as often engages in satirical reversals, as in H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Csicsery-Ronay notes that 'To say that sf is a genre of empire does not mean that sf artists seek to serve the empire. Most serious writers of sf are sceptical of entrenched power' (Csicsery-Ronay 2003: 241). As such, *Doctor Who's* origins in colonial fiction do not necessarily mean it is always in tacit, or explicit, support of colonialism.

Colonialism in *Doctor Who*

In his 2007 essay, 'The Ideology of Anachronism: Television, History and the Nature of Time', Alec Charles notes that the series began in 1963, towards the tail-end of Britain's divestment of its colonies, and reviews the series' early seasons as follows:

The Doctor and his companions used their superior technology to interfere in the internal politics of a primitive tribe [...] recognized their kinship with a clan of Aryans and taught them the arts of war [...] were

careful to preserve the historical conditions that would pave the way for Cortes and Napoleon [...] and, when faced with a gang of rogue colonials on an alien world, improvised a disconcertingly happy ending for Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [...]. Most significantly, they did battle with the Nazi-like Daleks, in the first of a relentless sequence of reconstructions of Britain's finest hours. (Charles 2007: 115)

Charles notes, furthermore, the parochial way in which aliens seldom want to invade countries other than Britain (116). There are arguable exceptions postdating the period of Charles' article, but it is worth noting that such recent stories as 'The Impossible Astronaut' (2011) simply expand the boundaries of the English-speaking world to include the USA, whilst the displays of a global threat in stories such as 'The Christmas Invasion' (2005) rely on a set of clichéd images of national monuments to indicate a worldwide invasion, and our narrative focus continues to be on the UK.

Finally, Charles also critiques the representation of the Doctor himself, noting that his costumes recall the height of Empire – cricket whites, frock coats, dinner jackets – and that he represents 'the ideal of colonial liberalism: an objective, asexual savior-explorer – a scientist whose only greed is for knowledge – a man who's out neither for himself nor for a bit of the Other – a post-gendered gunless wonder – an upper-middle-class eccentric licensed by the establishment – a revolutionary who can't change history' (117). The Doctor's apparent rebelliousness against his own people's non-intervention allows him to reinstate the imperial agenda and undermines his own liberal humanism (117); his combination of conservatism and anarchism highlights the contradictions within colonialism, whereby exploitation, oppression and benevolent intervention all figure. The recent casting of Jodie Whittaker does little in itself to change this, as the Thirteenth Doctor is also a white, upper-middle-class eccentric, whilst her tomboy persona reinforces the gender ambiguity which Charles sees as an integral part of the character.

Two recent articles have developed Charles' thesis. Diana Mafe analyses Russell T. Davies' Master stories in comparison to Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), arguing that both are framed by colonialism. She also notes, regarding the multiculturalism of the post-2005 companions, that '*Doctor Who* points to postcolonial histories and experiences by virtue of its cosmopolitan Britain, but the show never unpacks the histories and experiences themselves' (Mafe 2015: 446).

Lindy Orthia focuses more generally on the colonial tropes of the series, concentrating on how images of cosmopolitanism in *Doctor Who* also underline its colonialist legacy. She notes that the series, since its inception, contrasts the colonial past with a cosmopolitan future (one might note, for instance, the

multi-ethnic casting of stories such as 'The Tenth Planet' (1966)), but in which everyone seems to have unquestioningly embraced a 'western', capitalist, democratic, technocratic way of life. She sums it up by saying that:

The urge to a cosmopolitanism of 'many colours one culture' is thus naturalized and essentialized. There are no deep power relations; there is only eternal humanity, different in colour but united in all other respects. This is no melting pot, it is no salad bowl. The appropriate metaphor comes from *Doctor Who's* most famous foodstuff: humanity is so many coloured jelly babies inside a colourless (white) paper bag. (Orthia 2010: 215)

This cosmopolitanism, moreover, extends to the title character himself:

The Doctor is the symbolic cosmopolitan. His opposition to racism manifests as colour-blindness. He is a hero of liberal individualism from the school of being nice to each other [...]. He possesses near-omniscience and near-omnipotence that scientists and imperialists can only aspire to, but like them his tools are Western science and Western morality. Though ostensibly anti-establishment, this all-encompassing vision makes his cosmopolis equivalent to empire. (217–8)

This, Orthia argues, leads to a moral compass for the series which, inadvertently, serves as a failure to condemn colonialism.

We would argue that the classic series went through three distinct, if overlapping, phases in its relationship to colonialism. The 1960s were broadly, and for the most part unquestioningly, colonial. While the narrative may become complicated in such stories as 'The Daleks' Master Plan' (1965–6), the superiority of western science is unchallenged, and western interpretations of history and morality are normative. It is particularly worth noting that the Daleks do not simply take the role of another alien race to be subjugated or uplifted, but instead that of a rival colonial power to the Doctor's.

The second phase of *Doctor Who*, from 1970 through to the early 1980s, is generally critical of colonialism. However, for the most part this involves not subverting or reinterpreting colonialism, but simply rejecting it. The alien-invasion stories of the UNIT era, for instance, are firmly within the Wellsian tradition of putting the colonizer in the position of the colonized. In more futuristic stories, the point-of-view characters are still human, white, western and from a scientific tradition. A notable exception is 'The Mutants' (1972), where the focus is on the Solonian natives developing their own solutions and exacting their own revenge on the colonizer. The third phase was more complex and is discussed in detail below.

The Cartmel Era: *Doctor Who's* Postcolonial Moment

Charles argues, not without justification, that in the early 1980s, under producer John Nathan-Turner, the series sank into a kind of toxic nostalgia, mining its own past and continuity in a misguided attempt at giving the audience what it was perceived to want. Charles proposes that this is generally less a clever pastiche and more the sort of 'industrial postmodernism' seen in the films of Disney and Steven Spielberg (Charles 2007: 110–1). However, Charles does acknowledge that the later series developed a sense of postcolonial awareness during Andrew Cartmel's tenure as script editor between 1987 and 1989, known as the 'Cartmel era'. Orthia similarly, although she believes that *Doctor Who* generally fails to 'acknowledge the material realities of an inequitable postcolonial world shaped by exploitative trade practices, diasporic trauma and racist discrimination' (Orthia 2010: 207), recognizes the Cartmel era as a rare moment in which such acknowledgement was possible.

In particular, she focuses on the character of Ace (Sophie Aldred), the Seventh Doctor's companion. Ace's whiteness, uniquely for a companion in any era, has explicit meaning throughout her time in the series. She grew up as a child in Perivale in a multi-ethnic friendship group, but her South Asian friend Manisha was attacked by a group of white supremacists, prompting Ace to vandalize the Victorian mansion she later revisits in 'Ghost Light' (1989). At the same time however, in 'Battlefield' (1989), Ace also shows that she has, subconsciously, absorbed racist language and tropes of white superiority. As Orthia puts it: 'Ace is neither purely good nor bad; she is neither the purely anti-racist hero nor the purely racist villain. She is a product of her society, and it is complicated, so she must be aware of and fight what society does to her. Ace *cannot* be colour-blind in a world in which race matters' (Orthia 2010: 220). Cartmel himself said, in an interview, 'what I was trying to do [...] was to tell good, coherent science fiction adventure stories which were intelligent and modern; they didn't have any of the old creaky colonialist tropes. Smarter, more enlightened stuff, so I thought' (Kavanagh 2017: 48).

Usually, Cartmel-era postcolonialism takes the form of changes of emphasis, or role, in revisiting familiar themes. In 'Delta and the Bannermen' (1987), for instance, the aliens who walk undetected among humans are tourists, not invaders. 'The Curse of Fenric' (1989) addresses World War Two (the direct presentation of which had largely been taboo in the 1960s and 1970s), from the Soviet point of view rather than the British, highlighting themes of homosexual oppression and female sexual liberation. Both 'Battlefield' and 'Ghost Light' feature a blurred boundary between technology and magic, suggesting that, as Langer puts it, 'indigenous and other colonized systems of knowledge are not only valid but are at times more scientifically sound than is Western scientific

thought' (Langer 2011: 130–1). Although the decade may have begun in a toxic nostalgia, by its end the series had thrown off that toxicity and was using the idea of nostalgia as a means of subverting and challenging earlier narratives.

Case Study: 'Remembrance of the Daleks'

To illustrate this point, we will examine the 1988 serial 'Remembrance of the Daleks' from a postcolonial standpoint. 'Remembrance' openly re-interprets the very first Dalek story in a tale set in 1963, the year of *Doctor Who's* origin. However, this is a 1963 in which the colonial politics which formed a subtext in the original stories are now brought to the fore. While all the humans in the series' opening story, 'An Unearthly Child' (1963), were white, here London has black as well as white citizens, and a seemingly sympathetic character is exposed as a white supremacist towards the story's climax.

Similarly, 'Remembrance' highlights the colonial themes of 'The Daleks' (1963–4) by making the primitives, whom the Doctor manipulates into fighting the Daleks on his behalf, not the alien Thals but the human inhabitants of Britain, itself a colonial power. For example, Ace's assertion that the two factions of Daleks who have arrived in London are embroiled in a conflict over racial superiority may be a misunderstanding, which the Doctor allows Ace to believe in order to manipulate her into acting as his enforcer (Stevens 2000). However, if the conflict is in fact racial (as the author Ben Aaronovitch asserts is the case), then this mirrors how colonial activities frequently rebound on the colonizer, as ideas of ethnic hierarchy, evolution and the undesirability of miscegenation form a feedback loop between activities in the colonies, and at the heart of empire (McEwan 2008). It is significant that Davros, in this story, goes from being the Daleks' creator and spokesperson to actually being their Emperor (Moore and Stevens 2007).

The story also goes against the intentions of the original 1960s series by casting the First Doctor not as a dilettante universe-trotting scientist of admittedly flexible morality, but as a calculating and colonial force, who came to 1963 London to hide a powerful device, a 'stellar manipulator' called the Hand of Omega, to which he later returns, in his seventh incarnation, to retrieve and use it against the Daleks. However much this may be a valid reinterpretation of 'An Unearthly Child', the idea works within the context of 'Remembrance', where the Doctor's colonialist side is made explicit. 'Remembrance' is a story in which the humans of the 1960s are caught in the crossfire of the three-way conflict between the Doctor, the Dalek Supreme and Davros, itself complicated by internal notions of good, evil and superiority. We shall now consider three excerpts: 'The Ripple Effect', 'No Coloureds' and the Doctor's destruction of Skaro.

1. 'The Ripple Effect'

This scene takes place in a café in episode two, in which the Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) is contemplating his decision to use the Omega device to destroy Skaro. He orders tea from John (Joseph Marcell), the Afro-Caribbean counterman, and the following conversation ensues:

JOHN: Hmm? Your tea. Sugar?

DOCTOR: Ah. A decision. Would it make any difference?

JOHN: It would make your tea sweet.

DOCTOR: Yes, but beyond the confines of my tastebuds, would it make any difference?

JOHN: Not really.

DOCTOR: But—

JOHN: Yeah?

DOCTOR: What if I could control people's tastebuds? What if I decided that no one would take sugar? That'd make a difference to those who sell the sugar and those that cut the cane.

JOHN: My father, he was a cane cutter.

DOCTOR: Exactly. Now, if no one had used sugar, your father wouldn't have been a cane cutter.

JOHN: If this sugar thing had never started, my great-grandfather wouldn't have been kidnapped, chained up, and sold in Kingston in the first place. I'd be an African.

DOCTOR: See? Every great decision creates ripples, like a huge boulder dropped in a lake. The ripples merge, rebound off the banks in unforeseeable ways. The heavier the decision, the larger the waves, the more uncertain the consequences.

JOHN: Life's like that. Best thing is just to get on with it.

In the extended, original version of the scene (available at www.chatokeya.net), the dialogue continues:

DOCTOR: What would you do if you had a decision? A big decision?

JOHN: How big?

DOCTOR: Saving the world?

JOHN: Really?

DOCTOR: Really.

JOHN: I wish you the best of luck.

DOCTOR: Let's hope I make the right decision. Things could get unpleasant around here. I'd take a holiday if I were you.

JOHN: Oh really? How long?

DOCTOR: Two or three days, after that it won't matter, one way or the other.

John's ethnicity is a deliberate choice on the part of the writer. The café owner is white (necessarily, as one of the other characters in that sequence is the white

supremacist Sergeant Mike Smith, who would not patronize a café with a black owner), and John is covering for him in a medical emergency. So, for the scene to have been constructed and written as it is, the decision to feature a black counterman has to have been deliberately taken.

The unstated background to John's presence in London is the wave of Caribbean workers brought to the UK in the late 1940s to fill post-war labour shortages, drawing on Anglo-Colonial ties even as Britain divested itself of its colonies (Waters 1997). In a hypothetical present in which colonialism didn't exist, John would 'be an African' (although it's more likely that John simply wouldn't exist, the metaphor is clear). It is significant that John does not actually say whether it would have been better or worse for him to have been an African, or whether he wishes he had been born an African. In the transmitted version of the scene, the Doctor does not ask John if he *should*, therefore, retroactively eradicate the sugar trade; since, as the colonizer, he believes he knows best, he takes a decision based on his conversation – or sees confirmation for a decision already made. Even in the extended version of the scene in which the Doctor does ask John's opinion, the Doctor takes John's non-answer as a justification for making his own decision to eradicate the Daleks, not, possibly, as a sign that the decision should not be considered at all.

The ending of the transmitted scene, where John remarks that the 'best thing is just to get on with it', also bears analysis. John assumes that he is speaking with another subject of colonialism (albeit on the colonizer's side); neither he, nor his white neighbours, can control or change wider social forces, but have to live with the consequences as best as they can. The Doctor however, being colonialism personified, is in a position to act, and takes the idea of 'getting on with things' as meaning to take colonialism to its final conclusion and commit genocide. In neither the transmitted nor extended version of the scene, furthermore, does the Doctor acknowledge, or even seem conscious of, the power relations implicit in the exchange.

The Doctor also seems, in the transmitted version, unconscious or uncaring of the probably negative consequences his actions will have for the people on the ground. In the extended version, more sinisterly, his telling John to take a holiday is an acknowledgement that he *does* realize the potential consequences of his actions, but only cares to warn those humans to whom he has personally taken a liking; there are echoes of this in Russell T. Davies' 'Boom Town' (2005), in which Blon Slitheen characterizes the Doctor as a killer, who will occasionally spare one of his victims in order to salve his conscience. The Doctor, in the 'Ripple Effect' scene, is given an opportunity to face up to his own nature, and fails to take it.

2. 'No Coloureds'

In this scene, also from episode two, Ace is lodging at the home of Mrs Smith, whose son Ace, at this point, sees as a friend and potential romantic interest. Ace wanders idly around Mrs Smith's front room and turns on the television, which is showing the test card. Ace then discovers a sign in the window reading 'No Coloureds' and takes it down. The following dialogue ensues:

ACE: Mrs Smith?

MRS SMITH [OC]: Yes?

ACE: I'm just going out for a breath of fresh air.

MRS SMITH [OC]: All right, dear.

ANNOUNCER: This is BBC television. The time is a quarter past five and Saturday viewing continues with an adventure in the new science fiction series, *Doc* –

The scene ends on one of the much-criticized uses of nostalgia characteristic of Nathan-Turner, an arguably gratuitous shout-out to the series' own premiere in late November 1963. However, by placing the transmission of the story right after Ace discovers the 'No Coloureds' sign, the serial is acknowledging that *Doctor Who*, albeit innocently, was a part of the era's negative as well as positive popular culture.

The fact that the scene focuses on Ace is also important. As Orthia notes, Ace is a companion whose whiteness matters, to herself and to the viewer. She is disgusted by the sign's racism because she recognizes it and has experienced its impact. She is also aware that her whiteness is what makes Mrs Smith see her as an acceptable lodger and that she benefits from the privilege of her skin colour. However, Ace does not confront Mrs Smith about the sign; instead, she goes outside and takes (perhaps sublimated) revenge on the Daleks. By not confronting Mrs Smith, Ace becomes complicit in human racism, albeit unwillingly, and by taking her frustrations out on the Daleks, she is doing exactly what the Doctor wants her to do.

3. The Destruction of Skaro

In this sequence from episode four, the Doctor is speaking with Davros (Terry Molloy) via a television screen. He provokes Davros into using the Hand of Omega to transform his own home sun into a source of power which will allow the Daleks to usurp the might of the Time Lords. But Davros is deceived and, instead, the Hand destroys Skaro before, as it had been programmed to do, it returns to attack Davros' own ship. The climax to the scene reveals a new mercilessness in how the Doctor treats his enemies:

DOCTOR: Do you think I would let you have control of the Hand of Omega?
DAVROS: Do not do this, I beg of you.
DOCTOR: Nothing can stop it now.
DAVROS: Have pity on me.
DOCTOR: I have pity for you.
DALEK: Fifteen.
DOCTOR: Goodbye, Davros. It hasn't been pleasant.
(The Doctor turns off the transmission. Davros heads for an escape pod.)

This scene is often regarded as the moment when the Doctor does something truly unforgivable. In most stories, his genocidal actions are either justified by the narrative or are given to another of the central characters, most famously in 'Doctor Who and The Silurians' (1970). As 'Remembrance' is a postcolonial reworking of 'The Daleks', this scene could be taken as a revisiting of the way in which the Doctor's companion Ian, in the earlier story, provokes the Thals into giving up their pacifist ways and fighting the Daleks. Here, rather than use a third party, the Doctor provokes the Daleks directly into auto-genocide without any excuse, narrative or post-hoc, to justify it. Furthermore, the end of the scene implies that the Daleks' Emperor survives, indicating that imperialism, and thus colonialism, continue in some form.

In sum, 'Remembrance' sometimes plays with, sometimes exposes and sometimes directly challenges *Doctor Who's* colonial themes, actively exploiting the cynical nostalgia of the period by using seemingly gratuitous references to the past, to the series' own continuity, and the continuity of other sf TV (for instance, Nigel Kneale's *Quatermass* serials). The question remains as to whether the revived series, which draws heavily on the Cartmel era in a number of ways, also continues the postcolonial themes, and, if not, what this says about the specific moment in which 'Remembrance' was produced.

Colonialism and Postcolonialism in the Davies Era

While Charles argues that Russell T. Davies reintroduced history and sexuality to *Doctor Who* by situating it in a multicultural and polysexual context, and thereby freed it from the sclerotic colonialism of earlier eras (Charles 2007: 119), the new series on the whole shows a failure to engage consistently with postcolonialism in the way that the Cartmel era did – or indeed, as the wider field of sf is currently doing. As Mafe notes, twenty-first century *Doctor Who* frequently represents a postcolonial Britain, but seldom engages with its power dynamics in the way that contemporary British film and television does elsewhere (Mafe 2015: 447). Orthia, meanwhile, critiques the new series for representing the past, too often, as a place of happy and uncomplicated multiculturalism

(Orthia 2010: 214). This is not to criticize the new series' inclusion of images of historical multiculturalism, which do go some way towards counteracting the anachronistic whiteness of some of the series' earlier representations of the past, but it is to note that it very seldom engages with the realities of racism, in the present or the past.

The Doctor of the revived series remains a colonial figure, albeit no longer primarily as a scientist and importer of technology, and the correct interpretations of history and morality to the benighted, but as a tourist, someone who visits the developing world but engages superficially and for his own pleasure. The Davies Era also frequently had a nationalist subtext in the Doctor's relationship with aliens, for instance the Tenth Doctor's assertion in 'Evolution of the Daleks' (2007) that 'Earth is full' (with overtones of the far-right slogan 'Britain is full'). While the Stephen Moffat era is generally better, we do see the Twelfth Doctor in 'The Zygon Invasion'/'The Zygon Inversion' (2015) insisting that, while the Zygons may remain on Earth, they are not permitted to express their identities but must disguise themselves as humans.

There are a few significant exceptions. One is 'Human Nature'/'The Family of Blood' (2007), set in pre-WWI England, which acknowledges the prejudice which Martha (Freeman Agyeman), as a black woman, would face, even from otherwise sympathetic figures. However, this is an unusual story in that the Doctor himself has taken human form, and thus goes from being a symbolic representation of colonialism to being a human, 'just getting on with things'. Another is the trilogy of linked stories from the same season, 'Utopia', 'The Sound of Drums' and 'Last of the Time Lords', where the final remnants of humanity turn themselves into a Dalek-analogue and return to the past to punish their ancestors in a rare acknowledgement, in *Doctor Who*, of a universe which is neither progressing towards a cosmopolitan future nor existing in a similarly cosmopolitan omnipresent, but where everything is senselessness and anarchy. However, the final story ends with a reset of the cosmic timeline, making this acknowledgement of chaos and complexity only temporary.

Another apparent exception to this failure to confront colonial power relations, 'Planet of the Ood' (2008), seems at first to respond to the criticism of the two-part story, 'The Impossible Planet'/'The Satan Pit' (2006), in which the Doctor appeared to condone the slavery of the Ood species. In the sequel, their slavery is challenged by the Doctor's companion, Donna (Catherine Tate), and the Doctor (David Tennant), shamed, takes up the cause of the Ood. However, Orthia critiques the story for endorsing the idea that the Ood, like colonized nations, must prove themselves 'worthy' of freedom before they can gain it (Orthia 2010: 216). She points out that, although the Ood free themselves, the Doctor is the one who flicks the switch that brings that freedom. She also notes

that in a key exchange, where the Doctor challenges Donna's own hypocrisy in failing to confront modern-day slavery on Earth but then apologizes for his underhand remark, *Doctor Who* is absolving the viewer of their own complicity in the institution (Orthia 2010: 219).

The current series of *Doctor Who*, rather than continuing the postcolonial movement of its predecessor, stands in an uncomfortable position relative to postcolonialism; acknowledging the reality of a postcolonial world, while at the same time continuing the colonial themes of the original series. While the reasons why the postcolonial moment failed to persist are open for debate, we would posit that it is down to the connections between Cartmel-era postmodernism and the Nathan-Turner-era nostalgia which fuelled it. In the hands of a creative team, a focus on nostalgia leads to questioning and subverting the past, exploring its lacunae. The new series, however, initially focused on developing a new identity for the programme: where returning monsters like Daleks or Autons were introduced, it was into a new context rather than with reference to the past. Although the series relaxed its anti-nostalgic stance in subsequent seasons, it has also repeatedly been established that time is not fixed and the series' continuity can change, which may mitigate against the revisiting and reinterpreting of its past.

If the series is to engage with postcolonial movements in wider sf literature, then we propose it needs to interrogate norms and values in the same way as the Cartmel era did, including its own norms and values. This would be a constructive direction in which to take the series, as it is far more effective in the long run to challenge and reinterpret the past, rather than, as John says in 'Remembrance of the Daleks', just getting on with it.

Endnote

¹We use the term 'western' here advisedly as a signifier for hegemonic European/North American dominant culture, while acknowledging the many problems with this (see Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan 2010).

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Vinyl and Tapes: Philip K. Dick and the Reproduction of Sound

Umberto Rossi

John Cline's chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (2014), focusing on sf and music, sees the definition of 'science fiction music' as 'a unique challenge for discussing the intersection of sound and SF' (Cline 2014: 252). Since this chapter has been included in the second part of the handbook, 'Science Fiction as Medium', it is quite obvious that Cline is above all interested in how music can convey a directly or indirectly science-fictional content. Yet the issue of sound and sf may also be tackled in a very different (and hopefully complementary) fashion, that is, by analyzing how sound-related media have been used by sf writers in their works and what added value a science-fictional treatment of those media may yield.

There are few sf writers who were more deeply involved in music than Philip K. Dick. It is not just a matter of the numberless quotations of music pieces in his novels and stories; Dick explored like no other the possibilities of music in its most mediated form, that is, sound recording. This article explores how sound reproducing technologies are used in a set of novels and short stories, and what interpretive problems are posed by those devices, which are both technological – representations of existing or future machines – and literary, as they propel the diegesis like other, more recognizable narrative components, such as Dick's well-known twists-in-the-tale.

The important role played by recording devices has much to do with the historical context of Dick's own life. The year before he was born *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first feature-length motion picture with synchronized dialogue, was released. In 1931 stereophonic sound technology was patented. Seven months after he died in March 1982, the first audio CDs were marketed. These dates help us to grasp the scale of the evolution of sound recording technologies that Dick witnessed in his lifetime. As he later recalled in his April 21, 1974 letter to Canadian folk singer Gordon Lightfoot, Dick worked as a sales clerk at University Radio in Berkeley in 1944:

I ran a record store, [...] I am an authority on classical music, I had a radio music show of my own [...] I used to *order* – I was a *buyer* – and it was my job to know who was good and which record. If I got it wrong, the owner went out of business (which he didn't). (Dick 1991a: 65–6)

Dick did not really have his own radio programme; probably he wrote texts for a programme on KSMO radio sponsored by University Radio, or he just wrote advertising copy (Sutin 1989: 53), but it is true he had a professional

knowledge of records. No wonder then that he wrote his list of the 'finest cuts in the history of the record business' (Dick 1991a: 65) in the remainder of the letter, providing the reference numbers of the records on which those songs could be found. Moreover, Dick was a tireless collector of music records, before and after leaving University Radio in 1951. Both his third and fifth wives, Anne R. Dick and Tessa Busby, maintain that he owned thousands of LPs.

One of Dick's earliest stories, 'The Preserving Machine' (1953), provides us with a specimen of his musical influences. Its protagonist, Doc Labyrinth, worries about the destruction of the cultural heritage which might be easily brought about by nuclear war. He is particularly upset by the possible loss of the scores of such masterpieces as Schubert's trios, but he also mentions Brahms, Mozart, and 'gentle chamber music' (Dick 1999: 150). So he invents a machine 'to process musical scores into living forms' (150) on the basis that, once turned into an animal, the score will have better chances for survival, being endowed with an instinct for self-preservation. Once the nuclear holocaust is over, a future civilization will then be able to reprocess the metamorphosed scores and return them to their original form.

Right at the beginning of the story, a real device appears when Dick tells us that Doc Labyrinth's worries about the loss of musical scores started when 'One evening as he sat in his living room in his deep chair, the gramophone on low, a vision came to him' (150). It may seem an unimportant stage prop, but we should not forget that what the earliest recording technologies accomplished was an ontological transformation: vibrations were turned into a shellac disc which could then be played so as to obtain sounds similar to (or kindred with) the original ones. The recording apparatus is in fact a preserving machine, and this was quite obvious to the recording industry in its pioneer years, as Jonathan Sterne has effectively shown in his history, *The Audible Past* (2003). Doc Labyrinth's experiment is a failure, inasmuch as when a little critter 'that [...] had once been a Bach Fugue' (155) is captured and dropped into the preserving machine, it is converted into a score that, once played, sounds 'hideous [...] distorted, diabolical, without sense or meaning, except, perhaps, an alien, disconcerting meaning that should never have been there' (155). Since the only sound reproduction device present in the story is an old-fashioned gramophone, possibly highlighting Doc's age and eccentricity, plus his outmoded tastes, one may suspect that the failure of the transformative process mirrors the low fidelity achieved by that old reproducing device.

'The Preserving Machine' is a good starting point because it presents us with a science-fictional device (the machine that gives the story its title) and a real device whose workings – and shortcomings – generate the kernel of the whole text. This story, although not one of Dick's best, teaches us nonetheless

that the influence of sound reproduction technologies on his fiction cannot be understood only in terms of the presence of historical or fictional devices that reproduce sound, but must also be measured by focusing on textual devices that are anamorphic images of historical sound reproduction machines.

We can find an interesting example of such devices in the *Exegesis*, where Dick strives to find an explanation for his 2-3-74 experiences. One of his numberless attempts tries to explain those experiences as a sort of precognition, and this entails a very peculiar simile:

Events in the future pop into being, into actualization, the present, but until they do, they are not truly real – not yet actualized – but there in an encoded form, like the grooves of an LP; the only 'music' is where the needle touches – ahead lies only an encoded wiggle along a helical spiral. (Dick 2011b: 61)

Many have tried to depict time since Augustine of Hippo, but vinyl records have not been often used, as far as I know, as objective correlatives. Here we do not have an obsolete device like the gramophone, but what in 1974 (when Dick wrote these remarks) was state-of-the-art sound technology. Yet Dick's use of such technologies is often anachronistic.

'What the Dead Men Say' (1964) is particularly interesting in this regard. Far from being a dress rehearsal for Dick's celebrated novel *Ubik* (1969), this story is a grim and complex political parable. An interplanetary tycoon, Louis Sarapis, has founded 'a little empire on the high seas, worked by men' with 'no legal rights' (Dick 1991b: 247), recruited from such places as Burma, India, and Malaysia. Such ruthless practices allow Sarapis to dominate the Earth to Mars commercial routes by launching cargo starships from the high seas, where trade unions have no jurisdiction.

Though Sarapis has recently died, his lust for wealth and power survives thanks to cryogenic technology: once his body is preserved in a quick-pack, he is able to communicate with his employees and issue orders from his condition of half-life. Communications with dead people in quick-packs are limited to sound: they resemble telephone calls, and, since the time of half-life is limited to one year, they are strangely similar to those provided by prepaid mobile phones. But communication with the tycoon fails, and his employees lack instructions about how to support Alfonse Gam, Sarapis' candidate for the Democratic-Republican National Convention. Then the voice of the dead entrepreneur is picked up by a radio-telescope, emanating from 'a region one light-week beyond the solar system' (251). It is described as a 'far-off uncanny drumming noise, as if something were scratching at a long metal wire' (266). The signal gets stronger and stronger, until it interferes with all forms of electronic communications on

Earth. All the characters can hear is Sarapis's voice droning on, in a hypnotic fashion: 'no one but Gam can do it; Gam's the man who am – good slogan for you, Johnny. Gam's the man what am; remember that. I'll do the talking. Give me the mike and I'll tell them; Gam's the man what am' (279).

Even though Sarapis's public relations manager declines to obey his boss' post-mortem orders from outer space, the dead man nonetheless manages to influence the convention. We subsequently discover that the voice speaking is not Sarapis in half-life, but his recorded and edited voice, used by Gam and Sarapis's daughter to obtain the nomination. One cannot help notice that half-life resembles those earliest forms of phonographic recording which Jonathan Sterne calls 'the resonant tomb', because they were seen as enabling the preservation of the voice of the departed (Sterne 2003: 297–8). Once again, it is a sound reproduction technology, even one obsolete at the time Dick wrote his story, which provides inspiration for the narrative. Moreover, sound recording devices allow for communication with the dead, which chimes in with the spiritualistic uses of telegraph and radio (plus magnetic tapes) as communication channels with the hereafter in the first half of the twentieth century (cf. Sconce 2000). Dick's technological imagination was thus deeply rooted in the cultural history of those media.

The ghostly presence of the gramophone and the phonograph, plus their cultural connotations, can be read as a sort of technological memory, to be explained by the fact that Dick witnessed a deep transformation of the whole mediasphere, first, in the United States and then the rest of the world (cf. Rossi 2009). Gramophones and phonographs, the older types of telephones, thermionic tube radio sets, shellac discs, all these technological antiques were something Dick had surely seen and touched (and listened to) in his childhood, in that world before WW2 which he so effectively depicts in *Ubik* and *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966), where the Washington of 1935 has been meticulously recreated to please (and psychologically regenerate) tycoon Virgil Ackerman.

In *Ubik* Joe Chip's hi-tech, futuristic audio system turns into a Victrola gramophone with bamboo needles and 'a ten-inch 78-speed black-label Victor record of Ray Noble playing "Turkish Delight"' (Dick 1984b: 120), a foxtrot recorded in 1932. In *Now Wait for Last Year* we have a mention of the Packard Bell 'Phon-o-cord' (Dick 1981: 71), a playhouse system endowed with a radio that could record radio programmes on a disc to be played at leisure; the device is used to record one of the programmes Ackerman listened to in his childhood, Alexander Woollcott's *The Town Crier* (1933-6).

The activity of collectors has a lot to do with the preservation of the past, and this is something that Dick understood well: in 1942, while attending a boarding school in Ojai, California, he asked his mother for records, writing

down a detailed list of recorded music by Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Richard Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Rossini, Moussorgsky, and Stravinsky (Dick 1996: 14). The years he spent working as a sales clerk in a record shop only strengthened his love for music and his prodigious knowledge of this art – above all, his awareness of the various old and new devices that allow us to preserve sound.

Whereas stories such as 'What the Dead Men Say' and novels such as *Now Wait for Last Year* and *Solar Lottery* (1955) work towards the recorded gratification of single (possibly great) men, in *The Simulacra* (1964) tapes must bear witness to a whole culture. The first page of the novel shows us Nat Flieger, a sound technician of Electronic Musical Enterprise, or EME (possibly a pun on EMI), getting ready to record a performance of 'the famed Soviet pianist Richard Kongrosian, a psychokineticist who played Brahms and Schumann without manually approaching the keyboard' (Dick 2004: 5). This is just another form of the immortalization of the voices (and musical performances) of great men. But then, when the EME team finds out that Kongrosian is not at home, Nat suggests they could record the music of the 'chuppers' instead, a 'a radiation-spawned race' (102), living in an enclave in Northern California, who are subsequently described as 'Neanderthals' or 'throwbacks' (105).

But it is not only the EME team that is interested in ethnomusicological recordings; we are told that the duo of jug players, Ian Duncan and Al Miller, 'made a thorough study of primitive disc recordings from the early nineteenth-hundreds, as early as 1920, of jug bands surviving from the US Civil War' (160): a research effort which indicates Dick's awareness that among the earliest uses of phonograph technology was the preservation of the music and voices of indigenous folk culture. Sterne, for example, envisions 'ethnographic recording' as 'an extension of the preservative ethos emerging at the turn of the twentieth century' (Sterne 2003: 324), reconnecting it to the then-fashionable embalming of corpses, and based on the belief that native cultures would soon be wiped out by the rising tide of western progress. But Dick operates a savagely ironic inversion of this ethnographic and ethnomusicological practice. Dick sees the chuppers as something that is, at the same time, the disquieting return of a remote past and a new race which will replace *Homo sapiens* after their nuclear destruction. Ironically, those who record and seek to preserve the cultures of vanishing peoples are also those who are about to be wiped out.

Other, maybe even more radical uncertainties afflict recording technologies and their use in Dick's fiction. The future world depicted in *Solar Lottery* is a dystopian society divided into castes of haves and have-nots, born from today's consumer society. For those without qualifications, the only hope is John Preston's belief in the existence of an inhabitable tenth planet, which might be

the springboard for humankind's expansion outside the solar system. Preston's ideas are expressed in his book *The Flame Disc* (also available, significantly, on audiotape). The members of the Preston Society see him as a prophet and saviour but other people mostly consider him a charlatan and a crackpot. When the voice of Preston, who died 150 years before the novel begins, is received via radio at the end of Chapter 9, his tomb is opened, and his corpse examined and unmasked as a fake. The bogus corpse proves the authenticity of a bodiless voice from outer space, thus connecting the preservation of dead bodies to the recording of voices. Preston's voice, though, is revealed as an acousmatic being generated by a recording technology, thus prefiguring the editing and splicing of Sarapis's voice in 'What the Dead Men Say'.

By contrast, almost twenty years later, Dick grants authenticity to one of his characters by means of a vinyl recording. In *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* (1974), interplanetary TV star and singer Jason Taverner abruptly finds himself in a world where nobody knows him and no record about him exists in police archives. He remains an 'unperson' (Dick 1984a: 129) until he is rescued by being presented with two of his LPs, although ironically the records later turn out to be blank. It is only when a jukebox authenticates him in Chapter 22, by playing one of his songs that Taverner exists again in the eyes of the people. In one of Dick's most bewildering metaphysical reversals, the recording is more solid, more true than the recorded individual.

This opposition between fakery and authenticity is taken up in the 1980 short story 'Chains of Air, Web of Aether'. Leo McVane, a communication technician on a faraway and inhospitable planet colonized by humans, is a fan of interstellar pop star Linda Fox, who sings electronic arrangements of John Dowland's 16th-century lute songs. At the beginning of the story, Leo is looking forward to receiving the recording of a live concert of Fox:

His wall clock showed 1830 hours. At this point in his forty-two-hours cycle, he was supposed to accept a sequence of high-speed entertainment audio- and videotaped signals emanating from a slave satellite at CY30 III; upon storing them, he was to run them back at normal and select the material suitable for the overall dome system on his own planet. [...] He started the tape transport at its high-speed mode, set the module's controls for receive, locked it in at the satellite's operating frequency, checked the wave-form on the visual scope to be sure that the carrier was coming in undistorted, and then patched into an audio transduction of what he was getting.

The voice of Linda Fox emerged from the strip of drivers mounted above him. As the scope showed, there was no distortion. No noise. No clipping. All channels, in fact, were balanced; his meters indicated that. (Dick 1994: 425)

During the last years of Dick's life hi-fi was based on vinyl records and magnetic tapes, be they wound in reels or contained by a plastic cassette. Once again, the projection of a future world with its advanced technologies can be understood as an anamorphic representation of the world in which the author lived; as for sound, it is an analogical world, before the digital revolution.

But it is the issue of value that is at stake in the story. Leo considers Linda a great artist, and loves her versions of Dowland's songs; one may even suspect that Leo is in love with her. (Given her first name, she sounds like a science-fictional version of Linda Ronstadt, a singer Dick liked very much for her music and her looks). But Rybus Romney, the woman Leo is striving to help, sees Linda and her songs as 'Recycled sentimentality, which is the worst kind of sentimentality; it isn't even original. And she looks like her face is upside down. She has a mean mouth.' To her 'the Fox is a joke' (429), and this makes Leo see Rybus as a sort of destructive force, bent on spoiling what he loves most.

The economic and sociological subtexts of the story deserve attention. What becomes of music when it is recorded and sold? Does it still have an intrinsic value or, once it enters the capitalistic system of consumption, is it reduced to an opiate of the people? Is Linda's music just 'recycled sentimentality' or is it something valuable, something worth living for? Because Dick's own sf was itself accused of being literary trash, and he repeatedly bemoaned his plight as an underpaid, underrated, neglected hack writer, Dick was well aware of this effect of commodification. The threat of a flood of similar, supposed trash generated by reproductive technologies was brought to attention as early as 1934 by Aldous Huxley:

Prosperity, the gramophone and the radio have created an audience of hearers who consume an amount of hearing-matter that has increased out of all proportion to the increase of population and the consequent natural increase of talented musicians. It follows from all this that in all the arts the output of trash is both absolutely and relatively greater than it was in the past; and that it must remain greater for just so long as the world continues to consume the present inordinate quantities of reading-matter, seeing-matter, and hearing-matter. (Huxley 1934: 275)

Like Huxley's contemptuous depictions of jazz in *Brave New World* (1932), Dick did not particularly care for that musical genre (unlike near-contemporaries within the Beat movement such as Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsberg). Yet, he embraced folk music and rock groups, such as Jefferson Airplane and The Grateful Dead, whom he equated with the younger hippies of the second countercultural wave, with whom he socialized at the end of the 1960s. Dick remained open to developments in electronic music in the late 1970s, in

particular the collaborations between David Bowie and Brian Eno, both of whom feature in *VALIS* (1981) as, respectively, the rock star Eric Lampton and the experimental musician Brent Mini.

By contrast, Dick was well aware that broadcast media could diffuse musical rubbish; this is what we have in *The Divine Invasion* (1981), where the cryogenically frozen Herb Asher has 'to listen to elevator music all day and all night' such as an 'all string version of tunes from *Fiddler on the Roof*' (Dick 2011: 3–4). At the end of the novel, when Herb should be out of the dismal virtual reality of cryonic suspension, he suddenly hears 'soupy string music' again: 'The song "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair"' in 'Eight hundred and nine strings' (224–5). These sickly melodies act as leitmotifs in the novel, a repeated portent for the presence of Belial, the evil lord of a fallen Earth. By contrast, they are countered – at least according to Herb – by the orchestration of Gustav Mahler's Second Symphony, played 'the way it was originally written' (231). Such a distinction, between a value-laden belief in authenticity and the fake aural culture of piped music, echoes that of Huxley. However, throughout Dick's oeuvre, music plays a vital role as a source of inspiration and potential liberation, regardless of it being played live or being recorded. More often than not, music is presented in his fiction in recorded form and is reliant upon similar methods of broadcast to the muzak of *The Divine Invasion*.

When it comes to music as a component of the counterculture, the key text is surely Dick's posthumously published novel *Radio Free Albemuth* (1985), written in 1976. One of its protagonists, Nick Brady, after working for years in a record shop in Berkeley, moves to Southern California to work for Progressive Records, a record label specializing in folk music. Nick's move to Orange County is part of a vast plan (we might call it a divine conspiracy) hatched by VALIS, the Vast Active Living Intelligence System, a mysterious but benevolent alien entity that has sent Nick cryptic messages via a communication satellite to steer him towards a job in the recording industry.

Nick's mission is to sign an obscure folksinger called Sadassa Silvia to record an album that may reveal, albeit on a subliminal level, the evil doings of President Ferris F. Fremont, who has turned the USA into a totalitarian state.

Because of my position at Progressive Records we could do something; we could distribute what we knew [about Fremont's past] in subliminal form on an LP, buried in subtracks and backup vocals, scrambled about in the sound-on-sound that our mixers provided us. Before the Police got us we could pass on what we knew [...] to hundreds, thousands, or millions of Americans. (Dick 2008: 222)

The secret to be revealed is that Fremont is a Communist sleeper, an agent of

the USSR recruited in the 1940s, but it is the process of making the subliminal recording that is of most interest here:

It's a song about 'party time.' It goes something like, 'Come to the party.' It sounds of course like a fun party; you know. Then later the vocal line goes, 'Join the party.' The singer says, 'Everybody join the party.' And a subtrack goes, 'Is everybody at the party? Is everybody present at the party?' Only if you listen carefully, they're saying, 'Is everybody *president* at the party' at the same time the word 'president' is said – repeated, in fact by an ensemble answer: 'President, president, president, join – joined the party,' and so forth. (231)

Whilst, on the one hand, this passage echoes the wordplay and double-meaning of songs such as Jefferson Airplane's 'White Rabbit' (1968), on the other hand, it alludes to the technique of 'backmasking', of purportedly transmitting subliminal messages that are recorded backwards – for example, in the run-out groove to The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) or the alleged Satanic subtext of songs such as Led Zeppelin's 'Stairway to Heaven' (1971). What is of more interest, however, is Dick's understanding of the manipulation of sounds that recording technology allows not only trained musicians but also self-described 'non-musicians' such as Eno. The stress in *Radio Free Albemuth* is more on encoding, on using recording technology to hide a message by means of superimposition, or what one might call – being aware of how often Dick used the adjective in his *Exegesis* – the 'laminating' of sound.

Sound reproduction, then, does not only have to do with the availability of sound (be it music, voice, or noise) and how you listen to it, it also has a powerful impact on how music is produced. The recorded manipulation of sound, with which Dick is interested, echoes the analysis of Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in which the German philosopher hails a new age in which the ritualistic value of the work of art has been wiped out by its technical reproducibility (*technische Reproduzierbarkeit*). Benjamin is more interested in cinema and photography than recorded music, but the kernel of his essay is that reproduction technologies have not only increased the availability of artworks but have also changed their modes of production. He contrasts the painting, which 'has always had an excellent chance to be viewed by one person or by a few' (Benjamin 1979: 236), with the film, that is, 'an object for simultaneous collective experience' (236), just like music played, recorded and/or broadcast. But he also focuses on the place where films are made: the studio, with its machinery, its technical equipment, well different from the theatre stage. Benjamin is aware that the space of 'the movie scene' (235) is illusory, artificial; we might say, virtual. It is the result of

cutting and montage, just like the song imagined by Dick, whose components are almost meaningless, but once assembled by means of sound recording devices, may deliver a revolutionary message.

But the displacement of meaning imagined by Dick goes further than that. The record that Nick has to produce at Progressive Records 'contains only half the information' (Dick 2008: 231). Sadassa Silvia informs him that 'There is another record in production; [...] Valis will synchronize its release with yours, and together the information bits on the two records will add up the total message' (231). This will be accomplished by another figure, apparently coined by Walter Winchell a year before Benjamin's essay, and whose existence had been made possible by sound reproduction, that is the DJ:

A song on the other record might begin, 'In nineteen hundred and forty-one,' which was the year Fremont teamed up with the Communist Party. Alone, the figure means nothing; but the DJs will be playing a track on first the Progressive disc and then the other one, and eventually people will be hearing all the information run together as a single total message. (231)

Benjamin hoped that technical reproducibility, and the new arts based on it, could bring about the politicization of art so as to counter the 'aestheticizing of politics' (*Ästhetisierung der Politik*) fostered by Fascist regimes, and by those avant-garde artists, such as F.T. Marinetti, who sang of the beauty of war. Benjamin's vision of revolutionary art was one that stressed collective enjoyment, technical reproducibility, assemblage, democratic participation, the mobilization of the masses. There are striking similarities with Dick's vision of the encoded, assembled songs in Sadassa Silvia's *Let's Play!* Although Dick's model was the small, countercultural label such as Elektra Records, whereas Benjamin had in mind Dziga Vertov's experiments in the USSR or the large-scale productions of Charlie Chaplin, both optimistically thought that reproduction technologies had opened spaces for revolutionary art; that the commodification of music (and sound in general) would not only produce trash. In Dick's case, salvation and liberation are encoded in a silly pop song but, as with the hallucinogenic sounds of Jefferson Airplane, The Byrds ('Eight Miles High' [1966]) or Jimi Hendrix ('Purple Haze' [1967]), the act of smuggling a dissident message through the commercial space becomes the archetypal countercultural or *samizdat* strategy.

It does not matter that the conspiracy pivoted on Sadassa Silvia's songs ultimately fails or that Nick's friend, Phil Dick, is given a life sentence and, to add insult to injury, the regime publishes cheap sf novels under his name, singing hymns of praise to President Fremont. When Phil is in a concentration camp he is shocked to hear 'Come to the Party!', that is, the song his friend Nick should

have produced, played by 'a local Los Angeles DJ', 'blaring from [the] tiny speakers' of a 'portable transistor radio' (Dick 2008: 284). 'As Progressive was preparing its tape', Phil realizes, 'another company, another group [...] guided by the satellite, prepared another' (285). In the era of technical reproducibility, when the original has ceded its authority to the copy, recorded music is virtually indestructible.

Immortality again, one might say, not of individuals but of art, something in which Dick firmly believed as in *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) or the ending to *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*. What deserves attention instead, however, is Dick's peculiar ontology, an ontology without originals, in which the copy, the reproduction, is not a debased form of some precious, maybe even sacred, original surrounded by a glowing aura. There is a highly relevant passage in the *Exegesis* where Dick writes:

To remember seems to entail (or produce) something more than we tend to realize, e.g. when an LP record 'remembers' the performance of a Schumann song cycle sung by the late Fritz Wunderlich. In a certain very real (true) sense it doesn't just remember *that* Wunderlich sang that song cycle but in point of fact it restores (to perfection as limit) that voice and that music. (Dick 2011b: 240)

Is this faith in a strange afterlife on vinyl? Maybe it is – we know Dick had unconventional religious convictions. But here we have another example of his peculiar ontology, which postulates a world of copies without an original. Some say that – all his shifting realities, simulacra, androids, fakes and virtual realities notwithstanding – Dick yearned for authenticity. The end of his 1978 essay, 'How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later', is quoted as proof of this, where he writes about the fake animals of Disneyland which will no longer be simulations 'when time ends', and 'for the first time, a real bird will sing' (Dick 1995: 280). Yet in his 1976 essay 'Man, Android, and Machine' Dick clearly states that there is no clear demarcation between human and artificial. Being a man or an android, being made of flesh and blood or wiring and tubes, is ultimately unimportant; it is what characters do, strive to do, or do not do which is really relevant: 'As one of us *acts* godlike (gives his cloak to a stranger), a machine *acts* human when it pauses in its programmed cycle to defer to it by reason of a decision" (Dick 1995: 212). We may think that humans are the original and androids are the copies, but that distinction is not so clear. The same applies to music: be it played live or recorded, if it affects us, if it moves us, if it touches us, it is endowed with a power that has nothing to do with what we use to call authenticity. And I believe that music, and the reproduction of music in our age, has a lot to do with Dick's ontology without originals.

At the end of Dick's last novel, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (1982), which begins on December 8, 1980, the day John Lennon was assassinated, new-age guru Edgar Barefoot gives Angel Archer a rare World Pacific record of Kimio Eto, a Japanese *koto* player, which Angel only appreciates for its commercial value: 'I could probably get almost thirty dollars for the record. I had not seen a copy in years; it has long been out of print' (Dick 1983: 249). For her the record has a value inasmuch as it is original; she thinks 'don't tell me the beauty is in the music. The value to collectors lies in the record itself' (246). But she is missing the point. Barefoot gave it to her so that she may enjoy the music recorded on it. Even though Dick was an almost compulsive collector, he didn't miss this point: it does not matter if sound (in this case, music played by 'the greatest living *koto* player' [246]) is recorded on a shellac or vinyl disc, or magnetic tape, or an mp3 file on a flash memory card. What matters is the beauty (or whatever else goes under that name) we find in the music; something that – like Ann Dominic's blue vase in *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* – is 'openly and genuinely cherished. And loved' (Dick 1984: 204).

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The Fourfold Library (8): Keith Roberts, *Pavane*

Nina Allan

Nina Allan is the author of four short story collections and two novels, the most recent of which, *The Rift* (2017), won the BSFA Award and the Kitschies Red Tentacle Award. Her third novel, *The Dollmaker*, will be published in March 2019. A noted reviewer and columnist, she was also the first Chair of the Shadow Clarkes in 2016/17. Nina blogs on sf and other matters at her website, The Spider's House.

There are three novels that I regularly name in panel discussions as key inspirations, touchstone works that continue to reverberate in both my critical appreciation and understanding of science fiction and in my own writing practice. They are *Roadside Picnic* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (1972), *The Affirmation* by Christopher Priest (1981), and *Pavane* by Keith Roberts (1968). I could have chosen to focus upon any one of these but I have decided to write about *Pavane* for the simple reason that it was the first of the three I read.

I know I first came across *Pavane* at some point in my late teens, when my reading in science fiction was largely defined by the generous back catalogue of Gollancz 'yellowjackets' as stocked by my local library. I had very little conception of sf as a genre, simply that it was these books, with their stories of time travel and space exploration and alien encounters, that most drew my attention. I grew to recognise the trademark weirdness of the authors I most admired – Ian Watson was one, Frederik Pohl was another – and gravitated towards them. I read and reread everything I could lay my hands on by the Strugatsky brothers. There was only one novel available by a writer named Keith Roberts, and when I came to try and find that book again some twenty years later, I couldn't even remember the author's name. 'There's a monk in it, who paints the Inquisition,' I explained to my partner, Christopher Priest, more or less the first time we ever discussed our favourite novels. 'The Catholic church is in power, but there are rebels.' The search for this elusive text had been driving me crazy for some time. Of course, Chris was able to tell me at once that the book I had fallen in love with those many years ago was entitled *Pavane* and that its author was one of the most underappreciated talents in British science fiction.

I have reread *Pavane* several times since that epiphany. It is even more of a masterpiece than I remembered – more complex, more knowing, more developed as text – and indeed I cannot now properly imagine what my teenaged self must have made of it, though she had remembered certain passages from the 'Brother John' sequence more or less by heart, and most of all, something about the novel's form. Roberts' interlaced stories technique must have seemed so natural to her own sensibilities that it bore a profound and lasting influence on her as a writer, even before she properly believed that was what she would

become. As a younger reader I hugged the book close because it seemed in some way very personal to me. As a writer, I find new inspiration in *Pavane* each time I revisit it. As a novel, it remains undiminished by time. As an experiment in form, and even though I might not have been consciously aware of it at first, it helped pave the way for more or less everything I have tried to write.

Pavane opens with a prologue. The year is 1588, and Queen Elizabeth I is dead, struck down by an assassin's bullet. Her death results in a bloody civil war between Protestants and Catholics, leading in turn to an Armada victorious, a Europe under Vatican rule for the next five hundred years:

In England herself, across a land half ancient and half modern, split as in primitive times by barriers of language, class and race, the castles of mediaevalism still glowered; mile on mile of unfelled woodland harboured creatures of another age. To some the years that passed were years of fulfilment, of the final flowering of God's design; to others they were a new Dark Age, haunted by things dead and others best forgotten; bears and catamounts, dire wolves and Fairies.

In just two sentences, the foundations of an entire alternative universe are laid. We now know everything we need to know about Roberts' world in order to enter the story. And then we turn the page and it is 1968, the present day, or at least it was for Roberts when he wrote the book. As readers, we experience that 'oh!' moment, the inner jolt of surprise that characterises all the greatest speculative fiction and that is next to impossible to reproduce in mimetic literature, the moment of disjuncture Darko Suvin defines in science fiction as cognitive estrangement: something is different here, something is not as we expected, *this is not our world*.

Roberts' worldbuilding is of the economical, invisible kind that supersedes the whole galumphing concept of 'worldbuilding', replacing it with narrative that builds story through character, that leaves readers free to discover the speculative elements for themselves as they progress through the story. As Jesse Strange prepares to make a journey from Dorchester to Wareham, we learn that his father has just died, that the internal combustion engine has been more or less vetoed by the Church, that goods are hauled by vast, coal-powered 'road trains', and that it is unsafe to be on the roads after dark because of wolves, highwaymen, and fairies.

These differences between our own world and the world of *Pavane* are never allowed to dominate the narrative through exposition. Rather, they form the river in which our protagonist swims, as unremarkable to him as the circumstances of our own political and social reality are to us. They become properly a part of the story only when the story has reached that point where they are central to it.

Until then, we have Jesse, his proud expertise as a haulier, his duplicitous friend Colin, his doomed love for Margaret...

The language of *Pavane* is supple, fluid, impassioned, rich in detail and ripe with allusion, a modern English sharpened by slang and neologisms yet deep enough to hint at an entire history that we, as readers, have somehow bypassed and now stand in awe of. As always with Roberts, there is no hint of pastiche, of jargon overload. Roberts is not 'writing science fiction', he simply writes. Most of all, *Pavane* is a masterclass in form. Story elements that initially appear tangential are drawn, through the novel's threaded story structure, gradually into the foreground. The revelations, when they come, strike us all the more powerfully for being merely hinted at in earlier chapters. Everywhere, Roberts hides his science fiction in plain sight. It is only when we reach the end that we fully realise how the six sequences of *Pavane* are not in fact 'a series of linked stories' but – like the sequences of the dance for which the novel is named – closely interlocking parts of an inalienable whole.

What I love most about *Pavane* and the aspect that ultimately exerts the greatest influence upon my own work is its embodiment of a truth about science fiction that is rarely expressed but that for me has come to be deeply held: that is, science fiction can be implicit in form as well as content. As Samuel R. Delany brilliantly demonstrates in his essay 'About 5,750 Words', there is no such thing as content in literature – content is the words that are chosen to represent it. When we write science fiction, our choices about the language we use and the form that language takes are exactly as important as what our story is 'about':

Any serious discussion of speculative fiction must first get away from the distracting concept of SF content and examine precisely what sort of word-beast sits before us. We must explore both the level of subjunctivity at which speculative fiction takes place and the particular intensity and range of images this level affords. Readers must do this if they want to understand what has already been written. Writers must do this if the field is to mature to the potential so frequently cited for it.

In so much of science fiction criticism and science fiction writing, language and form have traditionally been afforded lesser importance than 'ideas', a tendency that sadly shows little sign of disappearing. My own belief is that science fiction's potential as a radical literature is reliant on the choices we make, as writers, to innovate at the structural and sentence level. *Pavane* was published fifty years ago this year. If science fiction has rarely produced better since, that is our own fault. Roberts's masterpiece remains a key text for the way in which it imagines a possible future, even as the future it imagines slips further behind us.

Why Do You Hate Everything?

Paul Kincaid

I don't! End of story.

Except it isn't, is it?

I keep coming across complaints that critics will inevitably hate anything that most people love. The popular image of the critic is of someone who rains on your parade for wealth and fame (ha!). A dark and twisted figure who likes nothing better than to trash your favourite story, insult the heroes you engage most closely with, criticize the latest must-read novel.

Well, there's 'criticize' and there's 'criticize'. Personally, I blame the language. Literary criticism contains varieties of meaning that the one word, 'criticize', just cannot encompass.

Yes, a literary critic might criticize a book in the basic, familiar sense of finding fault. At least some do, mostly when they are still learning the trade. It is, to be fair, much easier to say what is bad about a book than it is to say what is good. And eviscerating a really bad book is a convenient way of being witty, or at least sarcastic, in print. So I have had my Dorothy Parker moments – 'This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly. It should be thrown with great force' as she wrote in a review of Benito Mussolini's novel, *The Cardinal's Mistress* – and I suspect that many of my colleagues have likewise. I'm not ashamed of any of those early killer reviews, I don't think I attacked any book that truly deserved to live, but I'm not particularly proud of them either. They were too easy, too much of a monotone; fault-finding is not, in the long run, a particularly satisfying occupation, and there is much more to the craft than that.

At that point, pretty damned early in the career of most putative reviewers, finding fault ceases to be the dominant meaning of the word criticize in literary critical terms. Criticism is a much subtler thing than that old, basic meaning implies.

Let me pause here for a moment and take this opportunity to clear up one point: nobody becomes a critic because they hate books. Quite the opposite: the only possible reason to become a critic is because you love reading. No one would choose to do something, day in and day out, because they hate it. Or if they did, they'd very quickly get sick and tired of the whole shooting match and give up. Now that isn't to say that critics do or should love everything they read: far from it. The job of the critic is to read widely, but not wisely. You don't pick up the next book because you fancy it, you pick it up because you've a deadline looming; and you don't put a book down because it's not working for you, you plough steadily on to the end, because if you don't read a book you're reviewing right to the end it shows, believe me, and you can look a right idiot. That essential lack of control over what you read and when you read it has its advantages: you need to know bad books to properly assess good ones, and vice versa. And the wider your reading, the more critical tools you have at your command. But it can be wearying, getting up close and personal with so many works that fail on even the most basic level can rather take the shine off reading. But then there are the unexpected discoveries, the surprising delights, and the joy of reading is revived. And the joy of reading is what criticism is all about.

So, if criticism is not finding fault, what is it? That is no easier to answer than the question: what is science fiction? Just as I have frequently argued that science fiction is not one thing but many, so I would argue that criticism is not one thing but many.

And by this I'm not just talking about the difference between a review, an essay and a monograph, between something written for a PhD supervisor and something written for a popular audience. Those are superficial differences of tone, language, approach. But the actual labour at the coal face of criticism varies because every book you approach is different, every nugget of pleasure or spasm of pain is different.

Effectively, the more you do, the more you find yourself having to reinvent criticism anew for each new work. In part what you are doing is distilling the work in question, setting out the story (if it is a work of fiction) or the argument (if it is non-fiction) or shall we just say the essence of the thing, in such a way as to make it clear and accessible to anyone who has not yet read it. In part you are analysing it, trying to determine what it is doing, does it work or not, does it succeed on its own terms and what are those terms. In part you are assessing it, arriving at some sort of standard for how well or ill it does any of these things. In part you are contextualizing it, deciding where it fits within the broader story of (for the sake of argument) science fiction, whether it breaks new ground or merely replicates what has gone before. And you are always identifying key aspects of the work that support or contradict the arguments you are making about the work.

Yet this is at best a superficial and very partial account of what is involved. And let us not forget that at the end of the process, writing criticism means writing a piece of prose that should be, in its own right, engaging, entertaining and informative, worthy of the time that someone will spend reading it.

The thing to notice is that fault finding is not part of the process I have laid out so skimpily here. Frankly, when you approach a book that you are going to be writing about, you do so much as any other reader. You are looking to be entertained, engaged, informed, in much the same way as anyone else. Two things will change the reading experience slightly: you may well be making notes, and you will certainly be thinking about the fact that you are going to be writing about the book. But this will slow down the reading experience, it doesn't change it fundamentally. You start the analysis, assessment, and so forth, only when something interrupts that experience, then you need to start looking closely at the text in order to find out what caused that interruption, and whether it was something to be applauded or to be decried.

It is called 'close reading', a term invented nearly a century ago by the Cambridge scholar, I.A. Richards, although it has been disputed by the various warring factions of academic criticism ever since. Basically, it means paying close attention to the text, the actual words used, the order in which they appear, and hence deriving a closer understanding of what the author is actually doing in this work. It's not a particularly specialist skill; anyone who reads can do it, but it can reveal interesting things about a story. This sentence seems straightforward, except that this one word is ambiguous which opens it up to a slightly different interpretation; that precise word choice in the description of the hero might be a clue that he is not really as clever as he appears to be; and so forth. This isn't fault finding, but it is a way of digging down through the layers of the story to find out what makes it good or bad, how it works the way it does.

I used the words 'find out' very deliberately, because for me every work of criticism that I embark on is an exploration, an exercise in discovery. Any review book that sits unopened on my desk is an unknown land. I have no idea where the journey will take me, or what I will make of it all, until I turn the first page and start reading. I may have clues: the author may well be familiar to me, but this particular book could be an exception; I may have come across other people writing or talking about the book, but there's nothing

to suggest that I will agree with them, indeed I am well used to going against the common opinion on certain novels and being the only critic to speak out pro or anti the work. So I stand on the threshold of the new book, nervous with anticipation, not knowing what I am about to encounter or what I will make of it. In that, surely, I am no different from any other reader.

What does any of this have to do with the claim I've come across several times over the last little while, that critics hate everything?

I've laid out this brief outline of a critic's approach to the practice of criticism (or at least, this critic's approach to the practice of criticism) as the necessary groundwork for answering that question. Certain things, I hope, stand out already. If critics only enter the fray because they love reading (as I believe is the case), then it doesn't actually make sense that they are going to hate everything. Hating everything, of course, implies a systematic intent; you are not going to hate everything unless you go into each new book with the predetermined notion that you will hate it. But if each new book is a journey of discovery, then such a predetermination would be a handicap to the reviewer rather than a sensible approach. And if, as I alluded to in passing, a critic might be quite prepared to take an opposite view to every other commentator, there cannot be the implied uniformity of hating everything.

So, going right back to the beginning: I don't hate everything, and neither does any other critic. End of story.

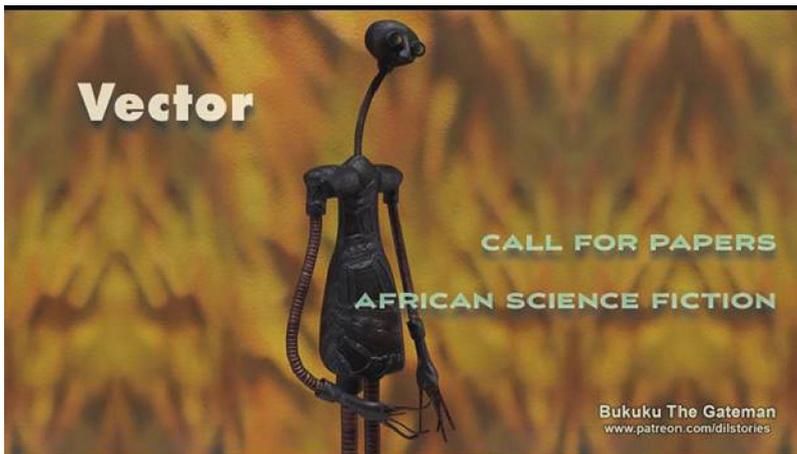
But that still leaves open the question of why such a view, such an attack on the very nature of criticism, arises.

I offer a couple of possible reasons, though the two are inextricably linked. The first is defensiveness. We invest a great deal, both spiritually and emotionally, in the books that speak most directly, most passionately, to us. Anything that can be interpreted as an attack upon that book, therefore, simultaneously becomes an attack upon ourselves. Any critic who is less than enthusiastic about the work may thus seem to be undermining our own sense of worth. Admittedly, this may be due to insensitivity on the part of the critic; we are, after all, human, with all the faults, foibles and blindnesses that implies. But more usually it will be because the critic is looking at different things in different ways to the reader. The critic, for instance, may point out that something is not done well in the book, whereas for the devoted reader what may be much more important is that the thing is done at all.

But this leads us to the second reason: focus. A reader discovering for the first time a book that speaks to them, or about them, is naturally going to focus on the wonders of that particular book. For that reader the context of the book is entirely personal. A critic would be failing in their chosen duty if they did that. A critic is supposed to bring to their review all the knowledge and experience they have acquired in order to place the book in question into a context that is entirely impersonal. And while a book may speak directly and personally to you, the critic may be thinking: well, actually, Author A used a very similar scenario thirty-odd years ago and did it rather better; or, these characters are excellent as mouthpieces for a particular viewpoint, but they are not well drawn as characters; or, take away the way it touches on this precise issue and what is left is an ordinary, overly familiar story. Now, the way the book touches on this precise issue may be what makes it exciting to the impassioned reader, but it is not necessarily what catches the eye of the dispassionate critic.

The fact that a critic does not derive from a book the wonder that you derive doesn't

mean that they hate the book, only that they have read it in a different way, found something in it other than what you love about the work. But then, every reader will find something different in every book; and, naturally, so will every critic. Look around and you will probably find another critic who agrees with your view, but the one who disagrees with you might prove more revealing.



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'Where we can be free and empowered': An Interview with Sephora Hosein

Christopher Owen (Anglia Ruskin University)

Located in the Lillian H. Smith branch of the Toronto Public Library, the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy is named after the science fiction author and editor, Judith Merrill, who in 1970 donated over 5000 items to the library. Today, the Collection has over 72,000 items, making it one of the largest sff collections in the world. In the summer of 2017, I spent several weeks there, studying everything from Afrofuturism to alien theory to worldbuilding. As a PhD candidate, I found the library's impressive collection and quiet study space absolutely invaluable.

One day, I took a break from my research and stumbled upon an article that made me feel like I had entered an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. On my screen was a photo of the woman sitting directly across from me. I clicked the link and learned that the librarian who had been helping me all day, Sephora Hosein, had recently been promoted to the position of Collection Head. After congratulating her, we arranged a short interview in her new office. On her walls hung the work of Canadian science fiction artist Jackie Lee. A pastel print of women and cat astronauts titled *The Future is Female* set the mood as Ms Hosein told me a bit more about herself.

Sephora Hosein: I was born and raised here in Toronto. My parents are Trinidadian immigrants who raised me in the Annex, a neighbourhood not too far from here. I did my Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Language at Glendon, York University's bilingual campus, and then my Master of Arts in Library and Information Studies at the University of Toronto. I have worked for the Toronto Public Library since 2002. I started just with book shelving, and then I moved into a clerical position until I got my degree and secured a librarian position.

While I did not initially set out to be a librarian, I have been a lifelong bookworm. But after talking more with senior librarians, I became really interested in reader's advisory. Reader's advisory is about recommending texts, finding out what someone likes, and then going from there. If they like historical fiction, then maybe they'll like alternate history or steampunk. And then they might branch off further from there. But it's about talking to them first, and seeing what they like already. There's so much out there, if you don't like something, put it down and move onto something else.

Christopher Owen: And what areas or genres of sff do *you* like most?

SH: I'm stupid for anything with magic in it. And I really enjoy horror fiction. I like reading books with darker themes. I also enjoy steampunk; I really love its Victorian elements. And I love Arthurian stories or stories about Vikings, I could go on and on about Vikings! I guess I just like the speculative approach to historical things.

But I also really love Indigenous fiction. I'm really passionate about it, and I'm always looking to incorporate Indigenous fiction here at the Merrill Collection. There are a lot of really great Indigenous writers, especially in this genre. I think about Truth and Reconciliation a lot. By including everyone in the Merrill Collection, especially Indigenous voices, I think it will help work toward Truth and Reconciliation. I think it's really important.

CO: Absolutely! And I think you have a real opportunity to do that here. The Merrill Collection is such a valuable resource. What is it about the Merrill Collection that you value most, or that makes you most proud?

SH: Being from Toronto, I'm proud that *our* library is so renowned. It's the largest sff collection in North America! It's so special for Toronto. The fact that people seek us out from abroad is incredible, and it's a pleasure to be able to help them. But it's also my hope to make this a welcoming, inclusive space where people can relax while enjoying our resources.

CO: Is making the space more comfortable a new initiative you are hoping to start here? Are you hoping to take the Merrill Collection into any new directions?

SH: For sure! I've been thinking about the materials we already have. I want to do more with role-playing games; we have the largest collection of role-playing games anywhere. With games like *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Call of Cthulhu*, we can run programmes that introduce people to tabletop role-playing games. Either by letting them play the games themselves, or just allow them to watch as an introduction.

CO: That sounds like a great way to encourage more people to engage with the Collection. What kind of community are you hoping to foster here?

SH: One of general inclusiveness. There's a way into the realms of science fiction and fantasy for everyone. You can be super niche, or you can read all kinds of things. Or, you don't have to read at all, you could game, or go to conventions, and so forth. No one is excluded here, and everyone is welcome. Even sceptics! It's an opportunity to change their minds, which I think should be a mandate for all libraries. But we have a special opportunity here at the Merrill Collection because there is no limit to speculation.

CO: You're right, there's so much you can and do have here at the Merrill Collection! How do you pick? How do you prioritize what texts you purchase for the collection? I'm sure you want it all, but there's so much out there!

SH: We do have a reading level policy that means that we don't collect juvenile literature. We have some crossover, but most of the texts here are for adults. But outside of that, taste doesn't factor in. Value is placed on genre. Because it's a research archive, we collect quality and first edition items. We do try to find rare items, but within reason – we won't buy something unreasonably priced. And we do keep our eyes out for work by Great authors, especially special items, like autographed books. We don't buy duplicates unless it's something special.

CO: And there's a lot of special things here! What do you think is so special about sff in general?

SH: It's the imagination factor. It challenges you to think about places, technologies, and things outside of your lived experiences. It's the 'what if?' It's not just a suspension of belief but a suspension of *disbelief*. You could read about regular people, or you could read about people with special powers! I don't think that's escapist. I think it's challenging. I think it's world building and imaginative, and that's why I keep going back to it.

Invention and progress begin with ideas. That's the hard part. And it's in sf. There's exciting possibilities in science fiction and fantasy.

CO: And what ideas does someone need in order to progress in a career as a librarian?

SH: There are going to be a lot of naysayers. People will tell you that libraries are dying and don't have a place in society. I say they're wrong. There is always a place for the curious. Being a librarian is such a great way to learn all your life. If you have that drive, go for it! And be persistent!

Also, remember that there are so many *kinds* of libraries and librarians. So there's no limit. You'll find a way to apply what you love to your career.

CO: Last question. Just something fun. If you could live in any fictional world where

would you go?

(Ms Hosein, having read so much science fiction and fantasy, asks to take the day to think of her answer. I thank her for her time and return to my desk to continue my research. On my way out, she catches me, confident in her response to my final question.)

SH: After thinking about all the planets in science fiction that have blown up, I eventually realized where I most want to go: Paradise Island from *Wonder Woman*. A place only for women, a place where we can be free and empowered.

Topics and Themes in Canadian Science Fiction

Deadline for submissions:

Abstracts are due **February 15, 2019**

Finished drafts will be due **August 15, 2019**

The academic journal *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* (<http://www.sf-foundation.org/publications/foundation/index.html>), supported by the Science Fiction Foundation at the University of Liverpool, UK, invites contributions for a special issue on Canadian science fiction. The special issue is guest edited by Heather Osborne (University of Calgary, Canada).

Canadian science fiction encompasses multiple traditions. Several Canadian science fiction writers have become internationally known, including those whose sf works are textured by distinctly Canadian settings. Indigenous and Francophone writers are contributing to the genre while bringing the voice of their communities to their work. Papers for *Foundation's* special issue may be about Canadian science fiction works in any medium: literature, film, and graphic novels.

We invite submissions on topics including, but not limited to:

- Detailed examinations of works by specific Canadian authors;
- The use of Canadian settings in near-future sf, as in Robert Sawyer's *Quantum Night*;
- Themes of colonization and decolonization in Canadian sf, as in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl In The Ring*;
- The impact of Canadian writers and editors on developments in the science fiction and speculative fiction field, as with Judith Merrill's editorial work;
- Indigenous science fiction writers and texts, including the work of Joshua Whitehead, Drew Hayden Taylor, Eden Robinson, Cherie Dimaline, and others;
- Québécois and Canadian francophone science fiction and works, including the work of Joël Champetier, Denis Côté, Yves Meynard, Esther Rochon, and others;
- Whether, and how, Canadian science fiction differs significantly from sf traditions in other nations.

Abstracts of 300-400 words should be sent, in Word or PDF format, to hkosborn@ucalgary.ca, with the subject line "Canadian SF Special Issue." Final drafts should be approximately 6000 words including citations. Please follow the Foundation style guide (<http://www.sf-foundation.org/publications/foundation/styleguide.html>) in all submissions.

Conference Reports

Science Fiction and Communism, American University in Bulgaria, 25–27

May 2018

Reviewed by Katie Stone (Birkbeck, University of London)

'Science Fiction and Communism' offered two days of engaging discussion in which delegates struggled to clarify the ways in which these two vast concepts intersect. For scholars dedicated to the study of Soviet science fiction, as well as those who presented work on subjects as diverse as late Victorian fashion, Maoist informational leaflets or avant-garde Italian film, the event provided a space for working through broad conceptual questions. Speakers explored the relationship of ideology and art, the politics of publication and reader reception, and the role of technology in our understanding of both communism and sf. These questions were addressed from an impressive range of angles, from highly specific and esoteric close readings to sweeping histories, culminating with closing remarks by Darko Suvin and a provocative roundtable discussion on the future of the field.

The conference began with a cocktail party, held at Gallery One in downtown Sofia. Delegates were warmly welcomed and given a tour of the exhibition, *Fantastika in a Time of Communism*, by conference organizer and exhibition curator, Ralitsa Konstantinova. Including artefacts from Bulgaria's space programme, a virtual reality experience which involved wearing an astronaut's helmet and a beautiful series of book covers from the Bulgarian sf imprint, Biblioteka Galaktika, the exhibition set the tone for what was to be an exciting and ambitious conference.

Beginning in earnest the following morning, the conference proper opened with remarks from organizers Konstantinova and Emiliya Zankina. They clearly set out the aims of the conference and urged speakers to move beyond the reductive binary of pro- versus anti-communist which they identified as dominant in Bulgarian sf criticism. There was, in reference to the institutional endorsement of the event, a suggestion of learning from the past mistakes of the Soviet regime. However, while this sentiment risked undermining the effort to move beyond polarized conceptions of sf's engagement with communism, it was confined to the opening address. The remainder of the conference – in part perhaps due to its genuinely international character, with scholars hailing from Romania, Italy, Turkey, Serbia, the US, the UK and, of course, Bulgaria – was marked by nuanced discussion which acknowledged the vast range of communism's historical and geographic iterations, and refused to be reduced to

either endorsement or denunciation of such a complex issue.

The first panel raised an important point regarding the extent of communism's influence on sf beyond the Iron Curtain. The panellists convincingly argued that creators of western sf, from H.G. Wells to Roger Corman, have been engaged in active dialogue with both a communist ideology and the realities of the Soviet regime. Martin Carter's exploration of Corman's pilfering of Soviet film for Hollywood audiences was received particularly warmly and was the first of several interesting engagements with the visual arts over the course of the next two days. In the post-panel discussion, delegates were reminded that each paper could not, alone, hope to define what 'science fiction' or 'communism' might mean, but the conversation then progressed to interesting questions regarding the benefits of reading sf as allegory and the finer details of Corman's career.

The next panel set up what was to be the conference's central subject. Zankina had, at the beginning, pointed out that there are only two courses dedicated to the study of sf in Bulgaria today, despite the significance of sf in the history of both the nation and the Soviet regime more broadly. This panel served to stress the need for an expansion of such study, with Laura Hendrickson providing an impressive forty-year history of Soviet sf which emphasized the heterogeneity of the genre. The post-panel discussion grappled with the topic of utopianism, introduced by Helena Goscilo. Productive strides were made in establishing utopianism as a trope without an inherent ideological leaning; one which has been used and misused in both capitalist and communist sf. However, the delegates struggled to agree upon utopia's temporal aspect, and a traditional definition of the term as a state of unchanging perfection remained dominant.

After lunch the conference reconvened with a discussion of communist children's literature. This was particularly enlightening given the very different and slightly embarrassed attitude to children's literature exhibited in much western sf criticism. The presumption upon which the speakers were working – that children's literature can be science-fictional and that it provides a particularly politicized form of sf – was at odds with the way the subject is often discussed in the west, thus providing a compelling argument for the benefits of a global perspective in all areas of sf criticism. Lively discussion after the panel worked to refine the extent to which this literature should be thought of solely as propaganda, to establish its educational function and to stress its massive popularity, with Konstantinova's paper on the Biblioteka Galaktika series pointing to the huge success of young adult sf in communist Bulgaria, where crowds queued outside book shops for the release of new editions.

An eclectic panel on the visual arts provided an exciting range of topics

from Elif Tekcan's paper on costume in the work of Edward Bellamy and William Morris, to Mauricio Cinquegrani and Angelo Cioffi's work on Italian avant-garde film, and Eliza Rose's exciting paper on Polish artist, Włodzimierz Borowski. While this panel was not particularly cohesive in terms of subject matter, the panellists' capable analyses of the politics of visual artefacts, in terms of both their production and reception, made for a dynamic interplay of ideas. They also provided ways of thinking about sf more expansively in relation to other modes of artistic production.

To that end, the final panel was more of an art-happening than a traditional series of papers. Romanian artists Stefan Tiron and Ion Dimitrescu laid claim to various mysterious phenomena which have occupied US intelligence services for decades. They discussed, enacted and played with a variety of conspiracy theories, both metaphysical and atheistic in nature. They demonstrated that the relationship between sf and communism is one which can be actively intervened-in and disrupted through technologically engaged, activist-inspired performance art, thus providing an enlivening conclusion to a rich day of discussion.

The next day opened with a series of case studies – the concept of the 'zone' in sf of the eastern bloc, on Alex Garland's film *Ex Machina* (2015) and on the sf of Hungarian politician András Hegedűs. Again, the eclecticism of the panel provided a stimulus for the ensuing discussion which ran for a full hour after the papers had finished. The collaboration between Konstantin Georgiev and Alexander Popov, in particular, provoked discussions on the influence which sf has had on the lives of the inhabitants of the various 'zones' of which the Eastern Bloc was composed, which added a new element to the conference's theme.

The second and final panel of the day examined the relationship between theories of Marxism, Maoism and utopianism, and the ways in which they relate to both sf and real-world communism. Virginia Conn's paper on China's Lin Huan Hua – illustrated informational pamphlets produced during the Cultural Revolution – provided a much-needed example of sf produced within a communist regime outside the eastern bloc. A question from Popov addressed another significant absence of the conference: that of genre. While the minutiae of genre definitions often plague sf criticism, the contested nature of the genre's boundaries and the ideological investments of those dedicated to protecting them remain an important element of the field, and their acknowledgement in the post-panel discussion was welcome.

The discussion of ideology led neatly into the day's final session. This was introduced by remarks from Darko Suvin who, unfortunately, could not attend the conference in person but was able to join the discussion remotely. Suvin began by noting the centrality of the relationship between sf and communism

to his work. He stressed the importance of continued study of communism's history, in all of its variety, and pointed out the ways in which sf has always been entangled with both the utopian dreams and the oppressive practices which characterize this history. He thanked the speakers for drawing attention to the less well known aspects of communist sf, including the Lin Huan Hua, Hegedűs's sf novel and Corman's cannibalization of Soviet cinema.

Suvin also framed the conference itself as a political intervention; an insistence upon the principle 'Nothing about us without us'. This idea was taken up enthusiastically in the roundtable discussion that featured the conference organizers along with Miglena Nikolchina, Helena Goscilo and Emiliya Karaboeva. This discussion focussed on how best to continue the study of sf and communism. A particular emphasis was placed upon the importance of resisting Balkanization and expanding into a non-eurocentric framework, with more studies of Latin American and Asian science-fictional responses to communism. Several delegates also mentioned that discussions of gender had remained peripheral throughout the conference. This led to a broader discussion of the position of women within sf studies with one delegate actively cheering when it was pointed out that the final panel was made up of five women despite the fact that this was not a dedicated discussion of 'women's issues'. The conference ended on an invigorating note, stressing the political and scholarly significance of further study in the field and indicating a wide variety of possible avenues for doing so. The American University in Bulgaria kindly arranged transport back to Sofia for all the delegates, where more informal, but no less engaging, discussions of the relationship between sf and communism continued into the evening.

This significant event provided a space for scholars from different disciplines to come together and argue for the legitimacy of the study of sf and communism. With the help of Zankina and Konstantinova, both of whom were unendingly hospitable to all attendees, this argument was made forcefully and with an appropriate sense of political urgency. One can only hope that it will inspire future similar endeavours and open up ever more intriguing areas of study. For those who were unable to attend, or who would like to refresh their memories, the live stream of the conference can be found on YouTube (look under 'Science Fiction and Communism Conference 2018').

CRSF 8, University of Liverpool, 29 June 2018

Reviewed by Agata Waszkiewicz (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University)

The eighth Current Research in Speculative Fiction conference was notable for featuring, for only the second time, a creative writing masterclass the day before

the conference itself. Led by writers Tricia Sullivan and Justina Robson, they offered their personal experiences of working in science fiction, and answered questions concerning the writing and publishing process. They encouraged the participants to explore different techniques and methods, highlighting not only their differences but also how they influence the individual processes in writing narrative. Thanks to the high attendance, the workshops allowed the participants to get to know one another before the main day.

The conference itself was divided into four rounds of panels with over twenty speakers presenting papers on a variety of topics that included philosophy and embodiment, the transgressiveness of monsters, posthumanism and, last but not least, the environment and the Anthropocene. Sullivan returned to open the conference with a powerful keynote speech, drawing upon the same emotions and personal insight which she had displayed during the masterclass. She spoke from her experience of being a female writer in a still predominantly male genre and a woman doing a PhD in astrophysics. She compared the misogynistic and toxic reality of both these environments, proving that not only are they not as different as one might think but also, sadly, not as emptied of problems as one might hope. She finished this extremely personal, touching and important talk by giving words of encouragement to young female writers especially.

The emotions stirred by the speech enhanced the impact of Felix Kawitzky's paper, which entwined semi-autobiographical anecdotes and personal illustrations with analysis of the queerness of non-human bodies in Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* (1987–9), Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013) and Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014). He offered a reading of the bodies belonging to the aliens, the AI and the Fae, respectively, through the categories of grotesque ugliness, grossness and transgression. Kawitzky concluded that their very supernaturalness or otherworldliness can be appropriated by readers who do not feel comfortable in their bodies, and so become a means of personal identification and potential freedom.

Maria Quigley continued the exploration of the subversive nature of the monster through the paradoxical image of the girl zombie. The child monster shocks readers and viewers by juxtaposing her assumed purity and innocence with the visceral horror of decaying flesh. In comparison with other, more traditional texts, M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2015) puts the zombie girl in the centre of the action, describing the hybrid nature of her new race of human-hungry children as the very thing that will ensure their survival. Hybridity becomes not solely the negation of humanity but a vision of the earth's future. Similarly, Ralph Dorey in another panel argued that the bodily horror of infections and 'chimeric growth', as seen in zombie narratives across various media, possesses a subversive ability to transform and 'open the world for others'.

Hannah Spruce also addressed monstrousness and abnormality but did so by linking the term 'Criminally Autistic Psychopath' to a media backlash against autism which has connected the condition with violent American shootings. She applied the concept to Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–13) and argued that the author betrays her complicity in a trend that stigmatizes autistic people as evil, dangerous and, in the end, monstrous.

The halfway point of the conference was marked by a 'How to Get Published' panel, in which Will Slocombe (representing *Foundation*), Kerry Dodd (of *Fantastika*), Emily Cox (speaking on behalf of *Femspec*), Chris Pak (from *Vector*) and Mark Bould (*Science Fiction Film and Television*) answered some of the frequently asked questions concerning the publication process, especially for postgraduate students looking to publish for the first time.

Embodiment returned as a theme in the second half of the conference. Here, though, it was discussed in terms of a player's place in relation to the video game interface. In my own paper, I introduced three ways of exploring the mediated spaces between players and games, including the phenomenological embodiment of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, kinaesthetic empathy as applied to the therapeutic role of a dance in the video game *Bound*, and the relation between the realistic image and the functionality in the user interface 2D space of the PlayStation 4 video game *Tearaway: Unfolded*. Mike Ryder, by contrast, concentrated on the remote and drone killing in Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959), Ursula Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) and, most particularly, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985). He raised the question of how either the presence or the absence of a human body influences one's responsibility and accountability, and he asked whether the physical body serves as the ethical defence – that where the use of drones dehumanized the war, the body is needed to humanize it. Ryder noticed the dangers of stripping the heroes from their humanity by offering a closer reading of *Ender's Game*, where the drones have been replaced by child soldiers remotely piloting the ships at the battlefield.

One of the panels in the fourth round addressed the topics of nostalgia and memory. Siravich Khurat analyzed the role of memory in identity formation through the use of chain memory phenomena in one of the instalments of the massively successful Japanese video game franchise entitled *Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories*. Examples from the game were used to illustrate the meaning of memories for identity with a working argument being that while the core personality is not necessarily defined by memory, the latter is understood as the most important part of identity. Arguably, the concept of chained memory equates identity with a chain of memories.

Foreshadowing the second keynote speech, the last round of panels strongly

emphasized the environment and the 'cli-fi' genre. Andrew Stones, drawing upon Isabelle Stengers and Claire Coleman, decolonized climate-change fiction by redefining it as a 'crisis of narratology as such', and comparing it with the reading of cli-fi from the perspective of indigenous and postcolonial readers and writers. He encouraged his audience to take a non-western approach to the topic by assuming that the end of the world has already happened rather than the objective of the apocalyptic plot that requires the attempt to save it. Britta Maria Colligs similarly spoke about climate change fiction from another, less commonly mentioned, perspective and addressed the ecocriticism in fantasy literature. She focused on the depiction of forests, especially through two theories – animism and interrelatedness – both of which allow forests to become characters in their own right and not just a background for the narrative.

Finally, Mark Bould delivered the second keynote of the day, addressing the concept of the 'Anthropocene Unconscious', which, based on Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981), refers to instances of anthropocentric texts that seemingly do not refer to climate change although the connection between the two can be made. Among the multitude of texts that fall into this category, he included *Pacific Rim* (2013) and *Lagoon* (2014), but also mentioned the global cycle of zombie movies that emerged after 2002. Through a reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* (2016), Bould pointed to a conundrum whereby climate change fiction is neglected in academic and political contexts, although speculative fiction offers the perfect tools for talking about climate change because, by definition, it allows audiences to imagine future possibilities.

After Fantastika, Lancaster University, 6–7 July 2018

Reviewed by M.J. Ryder (Lancaster University)

The annual Fantastika conference, now in its fifth year, welcomed more than sixty delegates for two days of lectures and presentations on the theme of time in its many forms. The programme opened with a short introduction from organizer Kerry Dodd before I joined one of two parallel sessions on the topic of 'Colonial Narratives: Beyond Empire'. Helga Lúthersdóttir's paper explored the question of when 'therefore' becomes 'what if' in the colonial history narratives of *Thor* (2011) and *Black Panther* (2018), while Robert Duggan's presentation gave an insight into the work of Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour, and her work on the Moon. Chris Hussey's paper explored the Black Library's *Horus Heresy* series in relation to intergalactic empire building and the symbolism of sovereign rule. The Black Library is the publishing arm of Games Workshop – the company behind Warhammer 40k. Given the size and scale of the Warhammer 40k universe, and its influence on modern sf and 'geek culture', it's remarkable how

little critical work on this exists, so it was most refreshing to hear Hussey's take on this under-represented subject.

I chaired one of the next sessions: 'Refracted Realities / Refracted Identities'. Danielle Girard shared insights on her queer reading of *Star Trek* alongside papers from Sinéad Mooney on alternative histories in Irish sf by women, and Victoria Brewster on temporal boundaries in Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016). Though the three papers were ostensibly quite dissimilar, there was much overlap in terms of questions of desire and non-familial relationships, which led to further conversation during the lunchbreak.

After an enjoyable lunch sat in the sunshine of Lancaster's Alexandra Square, delegates returned for the first keynote of the conference, from Caroline Edwards with her paper, 'All Aboard for Ararat: The Deliquescence of Clock-Time in Contemporary Apocalyptic Flood Fictions'. This broad-ranging lecture considered many modern-day flood narratives and their relationship with time, including Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2006), Stephen Baxter's *Flood* (2008), Megan Hunter's *The End We Start From* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York: 2140* (both 2017). In each of these texts, Edwards argued that islands are depicted as sites of utopian change that hint at different social worlds with their own temporalities beyond capitalistic clock-time. In light of real-world issues surrounding climate change and rising sea levels, these narratives pose significant questions for the power of fiction to act as a driving force of change.

Following Edwards' keynote, I chaired a second panel on 'Re-writing Determinism'. Christopher Petty explored the subject of logic, learning and memory in the time loops of the film *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014). Valentina Salvatierra gave an insightful paper on the classic *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and the use of repeated phrases throughout the text. This was followed by Alexander Popov with an analysis of narrative modalities in Hal Duncan's *The Book of All Hours* (2005). Again, although the papers were quite diverse in their subject matter and approach, common themes of determinism and free will made for interesting discussion, with all three panellists making useful contributions to a debate that tied in with Edwards' keynote.

For the concluding session, I attended the panel on 'Post-apocalyptic Climate Fiction'. Marita Arvaniti spoke on N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* (2015), Oliver Rendle on horrific outlines in post-apocalyptic fiction, and Hollie Johnson on the climate-changed future of Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* (1998). Each of the papers explored apocalypse in one form or another, and it was interesting to see the way they all spoke to each other, in particular in the way visions of the future serve to comment on the present day. This led to a fascinating discussion with each of the papers speaking to contemporary climate issues and raising questions about the way forward. The day was rounded off with a busy social

in Lancaster city centre, with drinks in The Sun Hotel followed by a packed conference dinner at the Blue Moon Restaurant. Much fun was had by all, and conversations continued well into the night.

Delegates were therefore grateful for the later start to the second day. Of the two opening panels, I attended 'Multimedia Remixes of Time'. Tom Abba spoke on digital storytelling, Tess Baxter on art and the salvage narrative, and Charlotte Gislam on time travel in the video game *Majora's Mask* (2000). This was a particularly diverse panel as it featured practice-based research from Abba and Baxter, alongside games studies from Gislam which provided much fruitful discussion on the interrelation between the different fields, and the relative merits of time travel and temporality in helping to create and sustain narrative structures.

After lunch, delegates reconvened for the second keynote of the conference from Andrew Tate entitled 'After Bowie: Apocalypse, Television and Worlds to Come'. In a fascinating lecture, Tate considered the many sf tropes, guises and gestures of David Bowie's work, and the lasting impact of his legacy, including his imaginative experiments with other worlds, dystopian futures and earthbound aliens. Tate then considered a number of contemporary serials including *Life on Mars* (2006–7), *Ashes to Ashes* (2008–10) and *American Gods* (2017–), all of which owe some debt to Bowie and his visionary work, addressing the link between Bowie's complex post-traditional spirituality, his anti-nostalgic approach to culture, and his future-oriented writing.

The final session included a panel on 'Messianic Time in Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn*', which featured a Skype presentation from conference founder and editor of the online journal, *Fantastika*, Chuckie Palmer-Patel. I presented a paper in another of the panels, discussing the role of Charlie Gordon in *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) as a biopolitical paradigm for our age, replicating normative power functions and defining the terms of social inclusion. I was joined in the panel by Julia Wang who presented on 'Forming Subjectivity via Timeslip', and investigated the role of maps and spatial location in creating meaning. The panel, ably chaired by Francis Gene-Rowe, created a lot of discussion. Delegates were particularly interested in the theoretical approaches adopted by both speakers, and the implications for future research.

The programme closed with a roundtable discussion that for many proved to be the highlight of the day. The session featured both keynote speakers alongside Brian Baker and Sara Wasson for a broad-ranging analysis of many of the themes and topics that had arisen. Topics included the queer child in post-apocalyptic futurity, explorations of non-human time, and how we mediate cultural anxiety of a pending cataclysmic time.

It was great to see so many people staying right to the end of the second

day. Many also stayed on well into the evening as the conference moved on for the customary social in town. There were still over a dozen people left in the pub when I left at 9 pm, and it is testament to the growing Fantastika community that so many people were so keen to stay for just as long as they could to make the most of the opportunity. Many thanks go to the conference organizers, the keynotes, chairs and speakers, and all the many delegates who helped make the conference such a wonderful success.

Sublime Cognition: Science Fiction and Metaphysics, Birkbeck College London, 14–15 September 2018

Reviewed by Paul March-Russell (University of Kent)

Following their previous year's success (see *Foundation* 128), the organizers of the London Science Fiction Research Community (LSFRC) expanded their second conference to two days, still reasonably priced at just £16. As before, the theme of the conference followed on from their year-long reading group. Co-organizer Francis Gene-Rowe emphasized in his introduction that the theme was deliberately chosen to both contest and expand upon Darko Suvin's notion of cognitive estrangement by reinvesting his otherwise materialistic framework with the concept of sublimity. First theorized by the classical philosopher Longinus, and subsequently reclaimed by Edmund Burke in the 1750s at the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the sublime has always been positioned at the point where rational cognition ends and feelings of the ineffable and the numinous take over. As Roger Luckhurst summarized in his opening keynote, Immanuel Kant considerably muddied the waters by arguing that such feelings could result in an enlightened reason, thereby restoring the sublime to the realm of cognition. However, in linking sublimity with metaphysics, the conference organizers sought to go beyond such an accommodation.

This linkage tended to skew the conference towards themes of religion and spirituality rather than more aesthetic understandings of the sublime. Provocatively, the conference reclaimed metaphysics as, according to Aristotle, the first priority of philosophy; a hierarchy that a succession of twentieth-century philosophers from Emmanuel Levinas to Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard had sought to reverse by propounding ethics as first philosophy. We could think of metaphysics and ethics as twin poles upon an axis, the former tending towards transcendence ('what is the meaning of life?') and the latter towards immanence ('what life should I lead?'). If the former tends towards a totalizing, let alone totalitarian thought, as evidenced by the post-structural critique of Hegel, then the latter tends towards a kind of mysticism, as evidenced by Levinas' reliance upon Talmudic scripture to describe the relationship

between self and Other. The sublime can instead be regarded as the axial point at which these poles converge. For Lyotard, the pathos of the sublime – its inability to be fully understood – resisted the totalizing tendencies within any metaphysical system; the failure of cognition heralded the moment of the ethical encounter, the recognition of an Otherness, a radical alterity, which goes beyond understanding. Albeit oxymoronic, the notion of a 'sublime cognition' is useful in that it works to foreground the tension between metaphysics and ethics.

This tension was elegantly brought out by Luckhurst's analysis of a 4½ minute sequence from Gareth Edwards' film, *Monsters* (2010), in which the human protagonists encounter the aliens of the title. Luckhurst not only gave an acute summary of the sublime, demonstrating how this scene draws upon familiar tropes such as scale, obscurity, beauty and terror, but also contrasted it with Jeffrey Cohen's 'monster theory', the popular take-up of which since its coinage in 1996 has served to accommodate notions of the sublime to an overdetermined critical formula. In resisting the post-structural 'ethical turn' of Derrida and others, which also underwrites Cohen's theory, Luckhurst gave instead a historicized reading of Edwards' film. Drawing upon his current researches into borders and corridors, Luckhurst re-read the film as an ambiguous allegory about the relationship between Mexico and the US, and in particular, the horrors described by journalist Charles Bowden in his book *Juarez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (1998). Although acknowledging the racial blindness of the film (the two white protagonists survive at the expense of their Mexican companions), Luckhurst nevertheless argued that the sublimity of his chosen sequence speaks to the unrepresentability of the atrocities that have also found popular manifestation in the fast-growing religion of Santa Muerte, the 'Lady of the Dead'. Luckhurst's reading, via Edwards' film, took us beyond pathos and into the historical and ethical uncertainties of corrupt foreign policies, economic exploitation, illegal migration and mass murder.

Luckhurst's keynote also initiated a pleasing aspect of the conference – its internationalism. Serena Volpi, for example, contrasted the cyclical time embodied within African folklore, and dramatized in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed* (1980) and Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), with the linear time imposed by western anthropology. Tanojiri Tetsuro explored the Japanese anime, *Psycho-Pass* (2012–), through the notion of *Ki*, a mystical oneness in which all persons and things are interconnected by the flow of energy. Whereas the technological society of *Psycho-Pass* offers a profane version of *Ki* in the form of a surveillance culture, Tetsuro argued that the series counters this desecrated ideal with a mythological battle between gods and humans. Farzad Mahootian picked up this theme of gods and technology through an engaging reading of Stanislaw Lem's *GOLEM XIV* (1973), in which he argued the super-

computer's utterly indifferent attitude towards humanity shared similarities with Neoplatonic thought to be found not only with the Western tradition but also Arabic philosophy. As another speaker emphasized, the godless transcendence of Buddhism may be most popular with sf writers, and the conference was blessed by the appearance of Llew Watkins, an artist and practising Buddhist. He gave a clear account of one of the key Buddhist texts, *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, and drew out affinities between its cosmologically entangled vision and the worlds presented in Jorge Luis Borges' 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940) and M. John Harrison's *Viriconium* sequence (1971–84). Similarly, Yen Ooi drew upon the Chinese folk legend of the 'Butterfly Lovers' and, in paying attention to the Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist elements of the story, made comparisons with contemporary western sf around themes of reincarnation, transformation and transferable consciousness. Like Watkins, Ooi counselled against direct influence between these texts but argued that, due to the size and diaspora of the Chinese population, such folktales could act as unwitting templates for more obvious science-fictional stories from the west.

The most discussed author, though, was Philip K. Dick and he was the only writer to receive a panel all of his own. In addition, James Burton gave a somewhat freewheeling account of the dialectical tensions within sf, arguing that the genre's alleged emphasis upon reason can only be made by opposing – and thus restating – what it is not: the unreason of metaphysical belief. It came as no surprise that Dick's fiction supplied Burton with relevant examples. Similarly, in tentatively proposing 'a theory of sublime cognition', by drawing upon Christopher Patridge's *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (2005), Mattia Petricola used Dick's *Ubik* (1969) amongst his instances. More convincing, by being less wide-ranging, Rob Mayo (who came suitably attired in a *Prisoner* jacket) compared Dick's *Clans of the Alphane Moon* (1964) with Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) within the context of the anti-psychiatry movement. Although arguably Keyes' target was behavioural psychology rather than psychiatry *per se*, the paper opened-out the critiques of more obviously New Wave texts such as those by J.G. Ballard and Thomas M. Disch.

The second keynote was by analytical philosopher Helen de Cruz. She offered an engaging overview of how philosophy has traditionally used thought experiments to explore metaphysical questions, and the extent to which these experiments have affinities with speculative fiction. Her claim, though, that sf can be more effective by engaging the reader's emotions was less well developed since de Cruz's chosen authors – Ted Chiang, Robert Heinlein and Hud Hudson – only received perfunctory treatment towards the end of the talk. In retrospect, looking at the content of the conference, it might have been useful if a theologian had also been invited to speak. Nevertheless, de Cruz offered a

counterbalance to the Continental theory that tended to predominate.

Utopian speculations also strongly featured. Katie Stone offered a useful summary of how feminist sf has contested the gendered and biological assumptions surrounding human reproduction; her most interesting insight being the extent to which the gynoids of the recent TV adaptation of *Westworld* (2016–) replicate maternal desires. Luke Jones, meanwhile, reflected upon the utopian possibilities of glass architecture, especially as prophesied by the critic and sf writer Paul Scheerbar. Imogen Woodberry presented an alternative take on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) by focusing on the extent to which the collectivity of Huxley's utopia was influenced by mystical ideas of group consciousness to be found in Huxley's sometime mentor, Gerald Heard, as well as Eastern religion. Tom Kewin, by contrast, argued that the techno-mysticism which occurs in Matthew De Abaitua's novels, *The Red Men* (2007) and *If Then* (2015), is subsumed by a dystopian vision of stasis and stagnation – unlike Huxley's notion of an evolutionary consciousness, there is no escape in De Abaitua from an infinite regress; an endless commodification and recirculation of the past as an empty simulacrum. Kewin's paper was complemented by Jo Lindsay Walton's analysis of the figure of The Luggage in Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels as an embodiment of commodity fetishism. Autonomous of the humans who equally disown their responsibility, The Luggage's running amok complements, Walton argued, the havoc caused by the movement of capital that defies human comprehension and financial regulation.

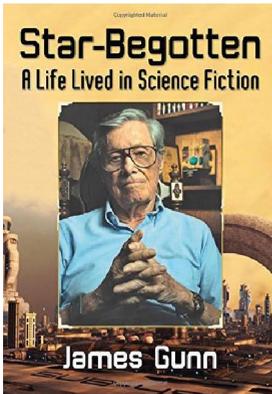
Amanda Pavani and Glyn Morgan both speculated upon the representation of death in sf. For Pavani, her focus was the portrayal of near-death experiences in Connie Willis' *The Passage* (2001). Drawing upon the work of visual theorists, Georges Didi-Huberman and Philippe DuBois, Pavani argued that the imagistic content of Willis' descriptions ultimately exceeds their narrative framing. This was a highly suggestive paper that could have been developed further, in terms of Romantic aesthetics, by linking the image with the ruin, itself an emblem of sublimity that disrupts the categories of past, present and future. The ruinous effect of representation was also explored by Glyn Morgan who, in concentrating upon C.S. Forester's story 'The Wandering Gentile' (1954), argued that such fictions perform a wish-fulfilment fantasy by portraying Adolf Hitler as monstrously evil, and therefore beyond rational explanation, and God as a divine punisher working on the side of the Allies. Yet, as Morgan argued, the question that occurs in such Holocaust testimonies as Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1956) is: where was God in the death camps? If God could let such atrocities happen, is He not in some sense both culpable and complicit? Such questions undermine the simplistic binary of Forester's story but also more contemporary representations of Nazism in film and superhero comics. Lastly, in an often

amusing talk, Christos Callow asked whether an actor can transcend his/her cultural and physical limitations to portray a character that is irreducibly Other? Whilst arguing for more sophisticated acting practice, Callow remained delightfully sceptical of one of the conference's main goals – the pursuit of a spiritual transcendence that, to Callow's mind, could only serve as a distraction from what it means to truly empathize with the Other.

Both days ended with a general discussion. The first used a forum-like format to reflect upon and respond to the day's content. Short position papers were offered by conference organizers Rhodri Davies and Aren Roukema, Katie Stone, and writer and editor Eli Lee. Responses were then taken from the audience using a traditional hands-up system. Most people got a chance to speak and the format was generally viewed as a success by offering a pause within the proceedings. The second day ended with a roundtable discussion, ably chaired by Jim Clarke, and featuring the writers Fiona Moore, Jeff Noon and Justina Robson. By bringing actual practice to bear upon the theorizing of the sublime, this was a superb end to the conference. Robson's passionate critique of gender relations in sf, prompted by a question from Adam Roberts on Burke's gendering of the sublime, was a stand-out moment.

Before the last day closed, Katie Stone announced next year's theme – notions of labour and reproduction in sf. Those able to, can join the LSFRC's monthly reading group (Monday evenings at Birkbeck College), whilst the rest of us can look forward to another invigorating conference in 2019.

Book Reviews



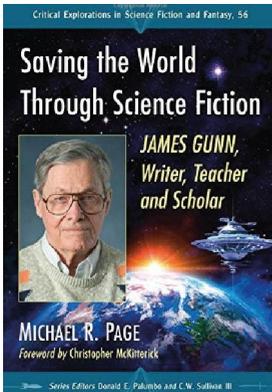
James Gunn, *Star-Begotten: A Life Lived in Science Fiction* (McFarland, 2017, 215pp, £23.95)

Michael R. Page, *Saving the World through Science Fiction: James Gunn, Writer, Teacher and Scholar* (McFarland, 2017, 284pp, \$35.00 [import])

Reviewed by Marleen S. Barr (Fordham University)

I've been in this position before.

It happened when I reviewed Karen Joy Fowler and Debbie Notkin's *80!: Memories and Reflections on Ursula K. Le Guin*. Reviewers are of course called upon to describe a book's positive and negative characteristics. There was absolutely nothing negative to say about sf community members flawlessly celebrating Le Guin's eightieth birthday. So too with James Gunn's autobiography and Michael R. Page's study of Gunn's life and writing. Le Guin and Gunn are alike in that, in terms of their personal and professional qualities, they both epitomize irreproachable and unimpeachable sf community perfection. They are two peas in an sf nirvana pod.



In his foreword to Page's book, Christopher McKitterick provides a moving personal account of exactly what Gunn means to him. McKitterick says this about the man he calls science fiction's 'dad' and 'the father of modern science fiction': 'He's smarter and more knowledgeable and has more experience in the field than most anyone, kind, thoughtful and generous, patient, and able to guide and inspire his students toward becoming the best we can hope to be. [...] Jim is *Dad* because he's everything that the writers and teachers he's mentored aspire to be when we grow up. [...] Not a flashy Dad, the kind who seeks publicity or fame, but the kind who does everything in his power to help his kids do their best.' McKitterick is right on target to the extent that reading this passage in general – and his entire foreword in particular – brought tears to my eyes. With McKitterick's foreword as an inspiration, I want to use the space a reviewer usually devotes to finding fault with a book to offer my own personal homage to Gunn.

Reading Gunn's autobiography and Page's study is analogous to positioning

Gunn's life and writing as a huge edifice, such that the books together open a textual doorway which enables readers to venture within. As Gunn's co-editor (together with Matthew Candelaria) for *Reading Science Fiction* (2008), I had the honour of inhabiting a small corner of a small room within that imposing edifice. After reading Gunn and Page, I realized that I was the only woman who has ever collaborated with Gunn on a book. It is well known that the so-called Gunn's Law states 'Sell it twice'. There is a second Gunn's Law, an edict which he articulated to me: 'co-editing is analogous to marriage; it is necessary to choose wisely'. Gunn invited me into his world. And he was open enough to enter my world as the author of the preface to one of my feminist science fiction critical anthologies. He is also a blurb writer for my second novel and for my short story collection, *When Trump Changed* (2018).

Star-Begotten offers an incredibly detailed historical account that juxtaposes words and pictures in the manner of the sonorous pleasure of watching a Ken Burns documentary. Gunn is thorough to the extent that the description of what happened when we co-edited *Reading Science Fiction* includes details which I had forgotten. He recalls that when he was a child his aunt ate several chocolate bars without offering him a bite. He is precise to the extent that readers are told that when Gunn and his wife Jane served Jack Williamson dinner on a card table in their living room, Williamson brought his own corn muffins because he was allergic to wheat. Such minutiae are a welcome reprieve from our soundbite-sodden society. In contrast to this vacuousness, Gunn's style is analogous to the pleasure of leisurely eating a home baked corn muffin instead of wolfing down a Macdonald's hamburger roll.

Perhaps Gunn's professional success can be attributed to the fact that when he was a child his father treated him with more attention and respect than even contemporary adult celebrities receive in the face of corporate temporal mandates. Gunn's father thought that his son's kindergarten poem was extraordinary to the extent that he printed it on an embellished bordered card. 'It's difficult to pin down what made me want to become a writer, but it may have been seeing what I had written in print and the realization that publication is the purpose and reward of writing', says Gunn in response to his father's attention. Gunn's father's respect for Gunn's early writing continued when the father bound his son's freshman English papers: 'My belief in the magic of publication was once more confirmed, and I decided that my future lay in writing'. Gunn's father, who did not have a college education, was the Kansan wizard who showed Gunn that publication is 'magic'.

Although Gunn's autobiography focuses upon the real and the factual, sf language and imagery is applicable to it. Gunn shares, for example, a transformative childhood moment when he found Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan*

novels in his grandmother's closet. This closet discovery is Narnia-esque. The fantastic also appears in *Star-Begotten* when the following science-fictional sentence rings true: 'One strange thing about Grandma Gunn was that she was silver', since for years she ingested medicinal silver nitrate to the extent that she really turned silver. Gunn, who famously advocates saving the world through science fiction, had childhood experiences which caused him to define writing sf as his world.

Gunn's description of his encounter with H.G. Wells as a fourteen-year old speaks volumes about his honesty. Gunn says that when he tried to shake Wells' hand, Wells 'brushed past me without noticing.' No one would have been the wiser if Gunn instead chose to tell a tall tale about interacting with Wells. This self-effacing honesty also applies to what happened when Gunn attended the 1968 World Science Fiction Convention in Oakland. He 'never was sure that [John W.] Campbell knew who I was.' In that Gunn's non-splashy truthfulness extends to the present, it is a major part of his identity. When Gunn won the Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award in 2010, he notes that he saw the award being presented to Robert Heinlein, Jack Williamson, L. Sprague de Camp and Isaac Asimov. He says, 'I never imagined myself in their company.' This man who so brilliantly imagines sf worlds is modest to the extent of being reluctant to imagine his own out-of-this-world professional achievement.

Honesty and decorum are the watchwords of Gunn's life – and his autobiography. I at first approached reading *Star-Begotten* in the manner of Baby Boomers watching *Mad Men*. Boomers positioned the show as a wayback machine that enabled them to see what their parents were up to before they arrived on the scene. No such details are on offer in *Star-Begotten*. The closest thing to gossip is when Theodore Sturgeon tells Gunn 'that he had had an affair with Judith Merrill that he broke off cruelly.' Meanwhile, Frederik Pohl 'was in the process of sending two women to Las Vegas – Judith whom he was divorcing, and Carol, whom he was about to marry.' This is Gunn's description of his relationship 'to the science fiction marital merry-go-round: I was always an anomaly in the science fiction community, a Midwesterner with a professional position married to the same woman for 65 years.' There is no gossip about Gunn himself in *Star-Begotten*; gossip about Gunn does not exist. Again, I worked with him; I know.

The major foray into Gunn's private life comes from McKitterick, not from Gunn himself. In the manner of Barbara Walters, McKitterick asks Gunn the question many readers wish that they could ask. 'In response to a question about how he, a handsome, best-selling author who attended conventions without his wife... avoided unwanted advances from fans, he chuckled and said, "a gentleman doesn't *notice* unwanted attention".' Gunn says that because of

the respect he felt, he couldn't call Robert Heinlein 'Robert'. I understand. I respect Gunn to the extent that I have difficulty calling him 'Jim'. Although no man can be Superman, I have no trouble calling Gunn, in terms of Baby Boomer youth slang, a 'super' man. Everything about Gunn's life and work relates to achieving a 'vision of a better world'.

Page elucidates this vision. A biographical chapter follows McKitterick's foreword. Chapters Two through Five chronologically recount Gunn's fiction. In Chapter Six, Page emphasizes Gunn's scholarship, in particular, his observation that 'much science fiction is in dialogue with other stories'. Page's *Saving the World* is itself in dialogue with Gunn's *Star-Begotten*; the two books complement each other in that it is interesting to see how the biography relates to the autobiography. Andy Duncan once told Page that 'We are *all* Jim's students.' *Saving the World* enables us all to better study Gunn's experience and oeuvre.

Page's book is replete with insightful critical acumen. He classifies 'Breaking Point' as Gunn's first major achievement and calls the story an examination of 'the psychological challenges of alien environments and the trauma of alienation.' Page situates Gunn's 'Ad Infinitum' in conversation with Frederick Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* and Pohl's 'Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus': 'Gunn makes effective satiric observations on the flood of household consumer products that were changing daily American life and how advertisers were manipulating public taste.' In this vein, Page positions Gunn's *This Fortress World* in terms of Arthur C. Clarke's *Against the Fall of Night*: 'Both are concerned with lost origins and the rediscovery of the past by a young hero.' I was particularly interested to learn that Gunn's description of clothing in *Star Bridge* anticipates 'the decadent citizens of the Capitol in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*.' This connection shows that Gunn's influence is far-reaching to the extent that it encompasses a bestselling *au courant* woman writer. His influence is also applicable to our present political moment. Of *The Burning*, Page writes: 'Gunn captures the growing myopic views that are characterizing our own times in this prescient novel.'

Page points out that Gunn was prescient to the extent that his master's thesis 'influenced the development of the scholarly discourse concerning the [science fiction] field in the coming decades.' Gunn's 'Witches Must Burn' anticipates campus discord; in this instance, his science fiction foresees the social rather than the technological. Page rightly compares Gunn to Aldous Huxley and E.M. Forster. He also insightfully observes that *The Joy Makers* 'is equally scintillating in its analysis – and, perhaps, more frightening' than *The Space Merchants*. Page gives Gunn credit where credit is due.

Page hopes his study has provided 'an illumination on the work, life, and the

wide range of contributions that James Gunn has made to the science fiction field.' According to Page, Gunn's 'warning about a growing anti-intellectualism, an increasing religious zealotry, an insidious irrationality, and a growing intolerance [which] reminds us to be wary of complacency when demagoguery raises its head.' He of course alludes to our current political situation in the US. His description helps me to extend my personal relationship with Gunn to us all.

Gunn was never my dad or my teacher and he is presently my former co-editor. I want to conclude by seriously claiming that this former president of the SFRA and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association, no British royal, is a real president. Gunn, who defies age as much as is humanly possible, is the sun, and the moon, and the stars. He is perfect to the extent that he really seems to be Star-Begotten.

Thank you, *Jim*.

OF SCIENCE FICTION ■■■



Gerry Canavan

Gerry Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler* (University of Illinois Press, 2016, 224pp, £16.99)

Reviewed by Amandine Faucheux (Louisiana State University)

Gerry Canavan's contribution to the Modern Masters of Science Fiction series represents only the second such volume on a woman and the first about an African-American author, a situation reflective of Butler's presence in sf for most of her life. If only for that reason, it is an essential book for any student or scholar sf; fortunately, *Octavia E. Butler* is also a masterfully complex study that will delight both academics and fans.

The book is organized chronologically, each chapter devoted to a significant portion of Butler's writing life. Since Butler wrote stories from a very early age, the first chapter begins in the year of her birth and ends in the year of her first publication, 'Crossover' (1971). The last chapter describes her final years, a time when she was enjoying literary fame while simultaneously being plagued with health problems and a persistent writer's block. Each chapter opens with a list of the important works (published and unpublished) that she wrote during that time period. The chapters consist of a blend of biographical narrative and scholarly analysis. In the conclusion, Canavan outlines the scholarly and non-scholarly works inspired by Butler, and maintains the argument that drives the whole text: that in addition to decades-long attention from scholars, he hopes

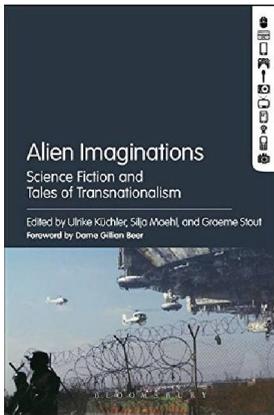
to bring forth 'a second renaissance on Butler scholarship that makes use of the material in the [Huntington] archive to cast new light both on her existing published work and on the work few have seen so far.' The book's appendix consists of Butler's 1980 essay 'Lost Races of Science Fiction', in which she discusses the predominantly white characters (and by extension, writers) of sf texts, a piece that is a precursor to Samuel R. Delany's 'Racism in Science Fiction' (1998).

The strength of this monograph comes from Canavan's wealth of knowledge on Butler's oeuvre as a fan and scholar, and his hitherto unprecedented access to the recently opened archives at the Huntington Library in California. Because Butler died suddenly in 2006 and so could not manage her papers, and because she was an obsessive self-described 'packrat', these archives span multiple thousands of pages from her early juvenilia to the very last page of her personal journal. Yet Canavan manages to provide a comprehensive overview of her life's work, from the multiple, decades-long drafts of her novels to a paraphernalia of correspondence, 'self-hypnotizing' notes and journals. What's more, the book represents an intimate and complex portrayal of the author, replete with carefully selected glimpses of Butler's self-perception and ambitions as a writer. Not only that but Canavan infuses the text with his and other scholars' analyses of Butler's work that, in the context of the overall book, provide a detailed and thorough understanding of a writer whose oeuvre reflected her contradictory beliefs about humanity.

One of his most compelling analyses concerns her Xenogenesis trilogy (1987–9), perhaps because it is Canavan's favorite. Canavan differs from a wide variety of scholars who understand the novels' complex aliens, the Oankali, as harbingers of a better nonviolent future for humanity (albeit being a forceful and intransigent race). Instead of siding with the Oankali who seem to know better than the self-destructing humans what is good for them, Canavan shows that the Oankali 'do almost *nothing* but harm the humans, in almost literally every possible way.' Outlining in depth their gaslighting techniques, he argues convincingly that the Oankali promote a genocidal imperialist project that systematically disempowers, violates, brutally assimilates and/or displaces human beings. He tamps down some of the pessimism that this analysis brings with a subtle and insightful reading of the texts; he claims that the Oankali's first contact with human beings 'living underground' might mean that they met the (white, male) military officers responsible for Earth's destruction in the first place. Such a reading would explain the Oankali's absolute conviction in humanity's inability to self-govern, concluding, 'Perhaps the entire theory [the Oankali have] developed of humanity as fundamentally broken is scientifically unsound, based on a very bad sampling error.' Here is an example of how Canavan's work in

postcolonial theory, among other fields, brings new and brilliant insights into a text that has yet been widely studied. Reading such passages almost makes one long to have another, parallel monograph that would consist of nothing but scholarly analyses.

This is a book I read over two afternoons. Canavan's limpid writing style makes it an accessible and engaging read. I consider myself a knowledgeable fan of Butler's, yet this short monograph felt like a unique and original perspective that transformed my understanding of her work as a whole. One of the few flaws of this book, though a major one, concerns its lack of images (there are only three, all reproductions of letters or notes), probably for financial or legal reasons. After reading so many details about Butler's work practices as an obsessive re-writer, and her ambiguous personality as someone who wrote herself notes of encouragement and apparently berated herself constantly over her perceived failures, one cannot resist wanting to see her papers more directly. Nevertheless, Canavan's work represents the first step in what he hopes will encourage more scholars, students and fans to make use of these incredible archives. In this context, Butler's epigraph to *Parable of the Trickster* perhaps resonates most strongly with the state of her scholarship at present: 'There's nothing new/Under the sun/But there are new suns.'



Ulrike Kuchler, Silja Maehl, and Graeme Stout, eds. *Alien Imaginations: Science Fiction and Tales of Transnationalism* (Bloomsbury, 2015, 249pp, £96.00)

Reviewed by E. Leigh McKagen (Virginia Tech University)

Alien Imaginations contributes to a growing body of scholarly literature exploring sf alongside issues of postcolonialism and globalization. The collection pairs sf and non-sf texts in thirteen essays to demonstrate the benefit of using sf to explore issues of transnationalism, which, as Gillian Beer notes in her foreword as 'one of globalization's most striking effects'. As Beer observes, 'Science fiction takes on the task of alienation. It helps us to learn how to be foreigners', and in a wide-ranging series of essays, *Alien Imaginations* creates the space to explore the figure of the stranger, the migrant and the refugee through the extraterrestrial. The essays speak strongly to the critical ability of sf to explore contemporary issues, despite the often futuristic setting, and provides a framework to explore

the interaction between cultures and peoples in the twenty-first century.

The collection grew out of the American Comparative Literature Association meeting in Vancouver in 2011. As such, the contributors come largely from the fields of literature, film and cultural studies. Unlike many of the books mentioned in the introduction that form the current field of postcolonial sf studies, including John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) and Jessica Langer's *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2012), the editors and most of the contributors do not have prior experience with the field of sf. Although this has the potential to limit the volume's ability to advance the field of sf research, the theoretical contributions to the 'dialogue between science fiction and critical studies of the global age' are noteworthy, especially in regard to using sf and the extraterrestrial to explore non-sf and non-alien cross-cultural interactions so prevalent in the age of globalization.

Take, for example, Célia Guimarães Helene's excellent essay on Ray Bradbury and Archie Weller. This essay, like many others in the collection, pairs an sf text with a non-sf text to explore issues of identity and alienation/assimilation. After directly connecting colonized subjects with concerns of sf alienation, Helene reads Bradbury's 'Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed' (1949) alongside Australian Aboriginal writer Archie Weller's 'Going Home' (1986) to explore the complex postcolonial notions of hybridity and mimicry. Using sf as a method for reading non-sf advances Helene's argument that it is never possible to return home, nor is total assimilation an option for Billy Woodward, protagonist of 'Going Home'. Unlike the Bitterings-turned-Martians in Bradbury's tale, Billy's location inbetween two cultures problematizes his identity, and when contrasted to the fully assimilated Bitterings, Billy's reality becomes even more pronounced. Recalling Beer's remark that globalization has made us all foreigners, Helene's argument – and those of other authors in the collection – resonates strongly: sf makes us all aliens, and neither full assimilation nor a return home unscathed is possible. Taken together, the various essays in *Alien Imaginations* argue that not only do aliens and cyborgs have much in common with im/migrants and others displaced by globalization but we all live in a postcolonial world. In some way, we are all alien, and thus the alien is an intrinsic part of the contemporary global system, making sf a useful tool to study this alienation in the era of postcolonial globalization.

The book is organized thematically into three sections, labelled 'Alien Languages', 'Alien Anxieties' and 'Alien Identities', although there is much overlap between the sections. The first section is the most overtly focused on comparative literature, and thus less interdisciplinary than the later sections. The four essays in this section speak to postcolonial concerns of language, although without direct engagement with postcolonial theory, exploring how language is

an ineffective barrier between cultures and people. Rather, language is porous and varied, and can be used as a tool to examine issues of estrangement and assimilation. The essays discuss sf classics, including H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), texts that ponder the 'Jewish Question', and writings by Japanese-German writer Yoko Tawada. Tensions of race, class and ethnicity are at play throughout these essays, with discussions of travel between nations and cultures beginning the argument, which threads throughout the collection, that 'the alien is not what lies beyond a boundary or a political or artistic system but is an inherent part of it', calling into question the category of alien as other or outsider.

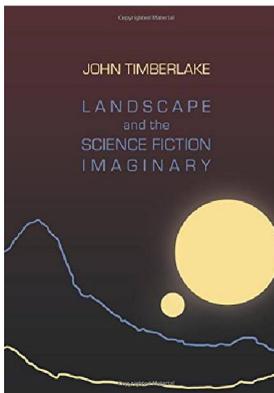
The second section opens with a strong essay by Andrew M. Butler on Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009). Butler's piece theorizes about sf and uses the genre as a lens through which to explore issues of race. Arguing that 'allegory can make poor sf', Butler highlights the dangers of a simple reading of the aliens in *District 9* as analogous to South Africa under apartheid. As the section heading suggests, the four essays in this section explore concern over aliens, especially regarding migration and hybridity. This section also introduces a discussion of the contemporary world, as each essay directly engages with concerns over globalization. Finally, this section introduces another key sf concern of the volume: tensions and overlaps between utopia and dystopia. Through exploration of Cherrie Moraga's Chicana play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (2001), Matthew Goodwin highlights the ways sf can bring to light the dystopian potential of nationalist movements. This inclusion of a clear postcolonial text stands out in a volume that almost exclusively explores European literature and film, and notes the ways a utopia can be very dystopic for certain populations – in this case, where the desire to limit the movement of LGBTQ citizens is 'a nightmare dystopia'.

The final section investigates how alien encounters create the space for sf to explore issues of identity, although as Emilie McCabe argues eloquently, sf rarely provides true critical queering of relationships and identities. Still, McCabe notes, the potential for queering of identity, relationships, even cultures is possible in some sf, and this essay sets up the most critical of the three sections. Included here is Helene's essay (discussed above) and Jen Caruso's exploration of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003) and *Zero History* (2010). Co-editor Graeme Stout explores landscape as a tool for analysis in the films of Michael Winterbottom, offering an insightful approach to another pairing of an overt sf text with one on the refugee crisis to explore issues of estrangement and globalization. The final essay is unexpected, as it focuses on *Hamlet*, theatre and hypertextuality. Reading *Hamlet* as both migrant and cyborg – directly applying an sf concept as the method of analysis – allows

Gerrit K. Roessler to argue that theatre (and *Hamlet* most of all) serves as cyberspace. This is the clearest example of applying sf as concept and method in the collection, and a fantastic example of critical thinking, even if the subject matter is over 400 years old.

While the collection speaks directly to postcolonial concerns, the essays included only infrequently make use of postcolonial theory and analysis to explore those concerns. This is especially noticeable given that so few of the texts discussed are traditionally postcolonial: a surprising choice for a volume that deliberately seeks to contribute to the study of postcolonial sf. Although as noted above the theoretical contributions of the volume are impressive in regard to sf scholarship and questions of transnationalism and globalization, the lack of postcolonial texts stands as a weakness. This effectively limits the subaltern voice, and the decision to start the volume with Wells and end with Shakespeare stands out as fundamentally European.

Shortcomings aside, the volume includes a wonderful mix of well-known sf and lesser known works, guaranteeing the ability to introduce any reader, even sf experts, to something new. The thematic focus on issues of transnationalism provides a broad interdisciplinary basis, especially in sections two and three, and allows for common threads to run throughout the collection, marking it as a useful text for the classroom. The practice of pairing sf texts with non-sf texts offers a unique approach to the value of sf to critically engage contemporary issues, and establishes the text as broad enough to benefit readers from a variety of disciplines, backgrounds and purposes. The book offers a theoretical and insightful examination of the application of sf in the contemporary globalized world where we have all taken on the task of alien imagination.



John Timberlake, *Landscape and the Science Fiction Imaginary* (Intellect, 2018, 197pp, £21.50)

Reviewed by Chris Pak (Swansea University)

Landscape and the Science Fiction Imaginary surveys the core features of sf's engagement with landscape when sf is understood primarily as a visual form. Deprivileging, though not excising, literary sf in his study of the genre, Timberlake foregrounds a wide-range of visual media, from the paintings of Chesley Bonestell and Chris Foss, the photography of Yosuke

Yamahata and Frederick Sommer, the virtual worlds of EVE online and Second Life, and film and TV such as *Star Trek*, *The Martian* and *Project Europa*.

Early chapters read sf against ur-images developed in wider artistic traditions, most notably through the paintings of Nicolas Poussin and Francisco Goya. *Landscape and the Science Fiction Imaginary* thus seeks to reconceptualize sf as a multi-modal form invested in juxtapositions and transformations of visual elements in new contexts.

Timberlake's analysis is based on an understanding of the sf imaginary both as a spatial abstraction situated between the Real and Symbolic and, following William Gibson, as an unevenly distributed temporal relation whereby fragments of the future are encountered in the present. Drawing on the psychoanalysis of Melanie Klein and W.J.T. Mitchell's notion of landscaping as a process or verb, Timberlake shows how sf images mediate between anxiety and anticipation about the present and potential futures, and how these images construct a viewer's relationship to science, technology and time. Timberlake deploys the neologism 'ocularity' to account for sf's relationship to landscape and its investment in the visual, explaining that 'Too see things *through* the ocularity that science fiction offers is to see fragments of the present lodged within a fantasy of future historical time'. Ocularity is an adaptation of a term referring to the number of visual inputs in a system. It has been used in parallel senses to Timberlake's, for example in the construction 'global ocularity' in Fernando Elichirigoity's *Planet Management: Limits to Growth, Computer Simulation, and the Emergence of Global Spaces* (1999), where it is connected to NASA's Mission to Earth program and James Lovelock's modelling of Earth. Timberlake argues for the importance of addressing sf's visual culture as opposed to its literary one because 'it is precisely the unreal, unconvincing aspect of science fiction – its inability to convince us of its fantasies in written word (in literature) and speech (in acting) – which drives the need for so much visual material: it is an excess, over beyond and outside the confines of the written word.' The issue of plausibility with regard to the literary representation of alien landscapes is an important justification for Timberlake's engagement with visual sf. For this reader, however, sf scholarship has already moved beyond such issues of plausibility and realism while the 'false differentiations within the literary genre itself' (hard and soft being Timberlake's example) have likewise been problematized if not exploded.

While some of the justifications for focusing on visual sf in contrast to written sf might appear unconvincing to readers familiar with the latter, Timberlake's analyses of landscape help to broaden our understanding of sf's relationship to visual culture. The first chapter highlights the chiasmic inversions that characterize representations of scale in sf visualizations. Timberlake frames this chapter with an analysis of Poussin's 1648 *Landscape with Polyphemus* and his 1658 *Blind Orion Seeking the Sun*, the latter of which is featured as a

full-colour plate in the book. These images, and those of sf, portray the gigantic amidst a landscape of ideas and is concerned with ideality. Relating his analysis of Poussin to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, H.G. Wells' *The Food of the Gods*, Kim Stanley Robinson's portrayal of Big Man in *Red Mars* and Ursula Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest*, Timberlake draws on Alenka Zupančič's tripartite formulation regarding epic, tragedy and comedy to argue that 'The land of the giants is therefore a landscape of tragedy, more so than epic or comedic'.

Chapter Two is framed by an analysis of Goya's 1779 painting *El Juego de Pelota a Pala* (*The Game of Pelota*), which is also featured in the book. Timberlake suggests that 'If we consider *landscaping* as an ethical ordering of the natural world, then the virtual world might seem to negate such ethical investment'. Building on the notion that virtual and augmented reality 'facilitate, sometimes positively, sometimes *via negativa*, [...] the suppression or inflation of certain relationships with the natural landscape and its *topos*, whether sensorial or perceptual', Timberlake argues that virtual and augmented reality, like the players in Goya's painting, are involved in '*play* in the remnants of the past': they are more interested in appropriating space for their own purposes rather than acquiescing to 'traditional dictates of utility and form'. To illustrate this point, Timberlake turns to the holodeck of *Star Trek* to demonstrate how representations of virtual reality in this franchise often centre on historical settings and characters, but notes that such episodes extend the political preoccupations of the crewmembers into that ludic space.

Chapter three opens with an anecdote involving the author's father who, in his childhood, witnessed a jet engine part being pulled by a horse-drawn cart through his village. This vignette exemplifies the uneven distribution of technology associated with futurity as it breaks into the present and captures in microcosm Foss's own approach to depicting landscape in sf. Foss's mechanical montage of futuristic vehicles and structures, against a backdrop that Timberlake argues is informed by a particular foundational landscape (Tarrant Rushton, near Wimborne, Dorset), is infused with accelerationism: 'a sense of surrender to what is perceived as the inevitable rise of machine power, wherein human bodies are deployed compositionally only to indicate gigantism'. Foss's 'machinic delirium' functions as an ideological inversion of the extrapolations of the 1950s-60s and 'might seem to reflect *ennui* with the tropes and assertions of the genre at the point of his encounter with them'.

The next chapter considers the influence of drama-documentary on shaping sf's imagination of apocalypse. Noting a shift in how landscape was imagined, Timberlake recounts how 'In the twentieth century, "scenes" – typified as horizon-filling, frame-filling, but no more than that – become zones'. The nuclear zone, inaugurated by photographic documentation of the aftermath of the 1945

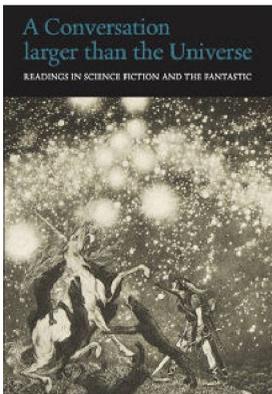
bombing of Nagasaki, is one associated with sterility and periphery, while in the post-Cold War era 'Ecological collapse replaces nuclear ruin, but the forms remain the same'. Timberlake's account of the culture of the Cold War era and the reconceptualization of time and space that occurred in this period offers insights for understanding a formative set of images that have transformed sf's imagination of apocalypse.

The fifth chapter on Pavel Klushantsev and Chesley Bonestell presents the work of these two influential 'monteurs' or 'image technicians' as examples of fictions of science, rather than sf. Less interested in creating symbols than they are schemas, Timberlake argues that they aimed to 'produce images that, as accurately as possible, reflected emerging scientific and technical ambitions, rather than the febrile imaginings of genre fiction'. This formulation resonates with Wells' own distinction between his brand of scientific romance and Jules Verne's project and, while the distinction does enable one to understand how these works are positioned in relation to contemporaneous scientific and technical knowledge, constructing fictions of science in opposition to sf obscures much of the feedback between the two domains. More useful is Timberlake's analysis of the lasting impact of Klushantsev and Bonestell's work: 'it was the ontological claims their work made which had such widespread cultural impact: namely, the implication of a *longue durée* of human history implicit in space exploration that would transcend short-term economic and political issues'. Timberlake connects these schemas to Caspar David Friedrich's 'yearning for the infinite and his perpetual separation from it', and to issues of species-being and species-extinction.

The final chapter extends the analysis of the nuclear zone in Chapter Four to explore the place of the desert as both nuclear test site, a space of speed and freedom, and as resonating with a Heideggerian sense of being and nothingness. Drawing on John Beck's association of the military test site situated in the desert with Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', Timberlake suggests that 'the question of the desert landscape in the science fiction imaginary is as much about what it *not* seen as what is'. The desert is also a space of ecological and geological time: Timberlake offers compelling analyses of P. Schuyler Miller's short story 'The Cave' and the photography of Frederick Sommer, the latter of which 'positions [the] desert as a site of the periphery and the peripheralized'.

Landscape and the Science Fiction Imaginary offers valuable analyses of works of non-literary sf, and makes a strong case for their importance to our understanding of the development of the genre and its engagement with landscape. The works central to each chapter are carefully historicized, and broaden our view of the sf imaginary and its intersection with landscape in

visual culture. One of the book's shortcomings, however, is its failure to engage with wider theorizations of sf. Apart from references to Darko Suvin, Brian Aldiss and Fredric Jameson, there is no acknowledgement of other conceptualizations of the genre, of studies of sf visualizations, for example from any of the writers featured in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, or with the long acknowledged visual and iconic aspect of sf. Another comparatively minor issue are recurring errors in syntax that at times obscure the sense of Timberlake's argument. Despite these shortcomings, *Landscape and the Science Fiction Imaginary* offers a welcome re-assessment of the importance of the visual and its intersection with wider culture.



Henry Wessells, *A Conversation Larger Than the Universe: Readings in Science Fiction and the Fantastic 1762–2017* (The Grolier Club, 2018, 287pp, \$35.00 [import])

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Billed as a catalogue published in connection with the New York Grolier Club's exhibition of science fiction and the fantastic (January 25--March 10, 2018), Henry Wessells' 'conversation' is in fact a gloriously meandering journey, including material previously published in *Wormwood*, *Foundation*, *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and elsewhere. It is like no conventional exhibition catalogue, with all the strengths of being centred around the personal tastes (and collection) of an extremely well-read and acute enthusiast who is determined to share his enthusiasm.

Even before the essays themselves, Wessells lays out that he is going to approach his task with subtlety, reminding us of Damon Knight's famous suggestion that the term 'science fiction' may be a misnomer but 'it will do us no particular harm if we remember that, like "The Saturday Evening Post," it means what we point to when we say it'. Wessells crucially goes on to point out that *The Saturday Evening Post* 'no longer means the same thing it did in 1952 (if it even retains any meaning), and science fiction, too, has evolved in the succeeding decades'. While Knight's 'definition' is one I constantly go back to, it is with the caveat that Knight's 'we' is important. For me, it suggests the nature of a community that is both flexible and ambiguous. How does the *SEP* manifest itself now? It still exists as a physical manifestation (which I have never seen) after a complicated history of purchases and relaunches. Its website contains

an extremely useful archive of the fiction, which I have mined intensively. Are both sf and the *SEP* what Knight saw in 1952? While Wessells' 'conversation' is largely conducted in American English (apart from Jules Verne, Pierre Benoît's 'fantasy of scientific ecstasy' *L'Atlantide* (1919), Jorge Luis Borges and – in a delightful discovery – the as-yet-untranslated eighteenth-century anonymous 'imaginary voyage' *Le Nagzag, ou le Mémoires de Christophe Rustaut, dit l'Africain*), we are linked to the rich Middle Eastern tradition of the fantastic by Richard Burton's translation of *The Arabian Nights*. The archaic, not to mention scurrilous, anglicization of this sixteen-volume epic, Wessells admits, has defeated him (as it defeated Borges) but Wessells, as so often, makes the essential point: 'Burton's edition shows that English literature is inseparable from world literature'. These points, that there is a 'world literature' of the fantastic, and that when we point to science fiction now we are *not* pointing to the same thing that Damon Knight pointed to in 1952, is made clear in the essays. Disguised as a catalogue, this is an extremely valuable book about what we think of as 'the fantastic' and why.

On opening the book at random, I came to the page illustrating Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowses* (1926), recently recommended to me by a family member who know I loved *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977). When I turned to the volume's first page I saw that Wessells was beginning his story with Thomas Leland's *Longsword* (1762), 'The first English-language Gothic novel and the first historical novel', of which I had never heard. There are no supernatural elements in *Longsword*, but its 're-appropriation of history' and melodramatic 'evil monks, menaced maidens, imprisonment in castles and monasteries, infant kidnappings, "secret malignity," poisons, and wild coincidences' seem to draw it into our family.

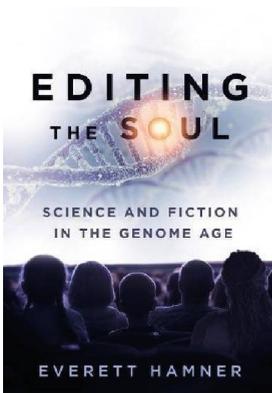
Wessells's thought-provoking, almost throwaway, suggestions come thick and fast: that, for instance, it is no coincidence that the early works of the Gothic, where the monstrous appears as if against the will of the writer, came from people whose extreme wealth depended upon the enslavement and exploitation of others. That the earliest work of prose fiction written and published in America is utopian allegory. That Sara Coleridge, who kept her father's work alive with new editions, wrote the first fantasy novel in English. That we might want to think of Jean Rhys's 'critical fiction' *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) as part of 'our family'. (For, as a fiction about another fiction, where exactly does it stand in the spectrum of realism?) The *marginal*, the barely classifiable, in all their forms, are what seems to interest Wessells, and this reminds us (or, certainly, me) of the shock of 'But what on earth is this?' that overwhelms us when we encounter our first fantasy. While Richard Burton, W.H. Hudson and Richard Jefferies (included via works all published in 1885) may be outside the tradition

of the fantastic as we point to it in at least two examples, they existed at the margins of, even opposing, the received literature of the day.

The section on 'Dark Science' draws a more conventional sf thread through Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain and H.G. Wells, also including Bram Stoker. But even here, a discussion of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) is interrupted by a memory of post-punk Ohio band Devo and their chant of 'Are we not men?' from the litany of Moreau's 'beast-people'. (There is a later section on sf and rock and roll.) In looking at the pre-WW1 fantasies, the golden age that we with the benefit of hindsight can now read as one of uneasy anticipation, his 'Beautiful Books' are those of the small-press limited editions of William Morris, et. al., underlying the elitist nature of this canon-formation. But Morris's *The Sundering Flood* (1897) is the 'first modern work of fantasy with a map': is the novel's title an unwitting foreboding of the transformation of 'beautiful-book' elitism into the mass-market guide to Fantasyland? (Diana Wynne Jones is quoted immediately afterwards.) There is a very useful section on bibliography and scholarship that begins with the very first sf bibliography, William Crawford's 'neither complete nor entirely accurate' 12-page 1935 booklet, and showcases (of course) the work of John Clute. The final section points to 'a few interesting trees' in the middle of the forest (the work, for instance, of Eileen Gunn, Rhys Hughes, Wendy Walker, Karen Joy Fowler and Greer Gilman), but begins with a reference to the panel on Arabic science fiction at Loncon 3 in 2014. Once again, the mixture is writers I have been reading for decades and others completely new to me. The impact is exhilarating.

The slightly rambling, discursive style does not work for all the chapters; as with many conversations, digressions sometimes appear where the discourse is getting *really* interesting. But this style is what makes the book work: again better as a book than as a catalogue. Throughout, it is a delight to read even if Wessells' asides ('I still have the entire series up in the attic' he says of one

pulp series; 'somewhere in the shed' is a cassette of Ursula Le Guin reading her poems) spark uncharitable feelings of envy. Wessells knows and loves books, and he knows how to write about them. This is an important book.



Everett Hamner, *Editing the Soul: Science and Fiction in the Genome Age* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017, 264pp, £19.95)

Reviewed by Lars Schmeink (HafenCity University, Hamburg)

At the beginning was the word... or in the case of Everett Hamner's new study on genetics in contemporary fiction, the observation of specific words, of how discourses of genetics tend towards religious and metaphysical motifs, and how scientists use these to create a mythical aura around their work. From this observation, Hamner derives his main research question: how does our culture present genetics as 'reimagining the nature of our souls?' In the following, Hamner identifies a general pattern of how the representation of new technologies in mainstream fiction evolves along a three-step path. Though these steps are not neatly separated but overlap, they provide Hamner with a useful guideline to his analysis of genetics: first, the new technology of genetics is explored via fantastic imaginations in the second half of the twentieth century, then with the Human Genome Project around the turn of the century, realistic depictions and plausible representations form the second step, before the technology becomes proliferated and imaginings of genetics take on a metafictional quality. From this progression, Hamner sets up the three main analytic chapters of his book on 'genetic fantasy', 'genetic realism', and 'genetic metafiction' respectively.

Before delving into the thicket of genetic representations though, Hamner provides a chapter solidly laying the groundwork for those readers not initiated into genetic research. His 'Brief Genetic Primer' is a well-summarized account of the current state of affairs in genetics – it is valuable and necessary because most of Hamner's analysis hinges on the idea that popular culture misrepresents the actual science of genetics. Without such misrepresentation and a clear understanding of what is possible, probable and impossible, a determination of any work of art as genetic fantasy or genetic realism could not work. In the same chapter, then, Hamner also explains his methodology and his choice of theoretical grounding, which is rather unusual for someone working in the vicinity of science and technology studies. As might be glimpsed from the title and his guiding question, Hamner uses the same specific language of religion to connect the fields of 'religion and science' to show that any borders perceived between them are 'the results of specific cultural negotiations', similar to those surrounding binaries such as 'whites versus blacks' or 'masculine versus feminine'. This 'postsecular theory' reads texts as neither 'religious' nor 'secular', thus allowing Hamner to connect genetic tropes and imaginations to deliver meaning on questions of love, human nature and the soul. As unusual and controversial as this choice may be, Hamner's readings are undeniably observant towards the theological and metaphysical underpinnings of the discourse around genetics.

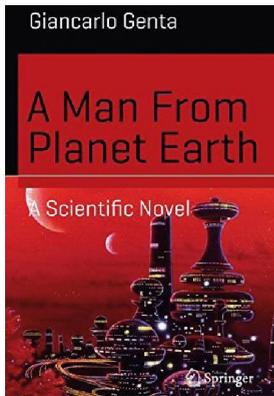
Setting aside questions of methodology, Hamner's readings of the three different categories of genetics in popular culture are timely and important

as genetics actively shapes our constructions of nature, culture and the self. Focusing his readings on the figure of the clone, Hamner then goes on to discuss genetic fantasy via Ursula Le Guin's 'Nine Lives', Pamela Sargent's *Cloned Lives*, Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy and Duncan Jones' film *Moon*. As examples of genetic realism, Hamner expertly interprets the television series *Orphan Black* as well as Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, before moving into even more mimetically inclined literature via Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, two intergenerational novels about migration. In the last analytical section, Hamner discusses Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra's graphic novel *Y: The Last Man* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* novels, before finally settling on the most literary example of genetic metafiction in the novels of Richard Powers, especially *Generosity* and *Orfeo*.

Hamner's interpretations center on the depiction of genetic technologies in relation to what he calls 'technotranscendence', a 'uniquely modern form of the sublime that combines religious and secular awe in the face of industrial and eventually digital achievements'. Whereas the texts discussed under genetic fantasy clearly adhere to a kind of technotranscendent reverie (either in the form of expressed anxieties and fears, or via utopian hopes) of clones as carbon-copies of humans (but not quite), the genetic realist depictions of *Orphan Black* and *Never Let Me Go* reject this, and instead construe varied and nuanced notions of epigenetic individuality, and the bioscientific processes that create them. What is intriguing in Hamner's argument is his broad interpretation of the genetic, and techniques such as cloning, as going beyond scientific processes and functioning within the concept of inheritance, in terms of both biological and cultural replication. It is from this understanding of the genetic that he includes *Middlesex* and *White Teeth* as novels that 'reimagine immigration as a low-tech form of genetic engineering, one that mixes genes and cultural environments'. Seen from this perspective, the novels open unique ways to explore cultural, national and sexual identities, revealing genetic discourse at work in unexpected, seemingly non-sf places. Similarly, Hamner reads his genetic metafiction as commenting on the nature and interconnectedness of narrative, culture, and religion via constructions of genetic scientific discourses. As he argues with regard to Powers' novel *Generosity*, 'genes are not predictors of an absolute destiny but the prerequisite instruments of multiple future compositions, each of which plays out in its own unforeseen manner'.

What *Editing the Soul* shows is that, far from offering simplistic depictions of utopia or dystopia, genetic science has become a variable field for the popular cultural imagination. In genetic fantasies we explore analogies and metaphors of human nature and identity politics; in genetic realisms we discuss real-world concerns, possibilities, and limitations that come with new and radical

technologies; and finally, in genetic metafiction, we are able to turn genetics into a new form of thinking about the broader implications of how culture, religion and narrative function via inheritance, copying and mutation.



Giancarlo Genta, *A Man from Planet Earth: A Scientific Novel* (Springer, 2016, 308pp, £15.00)

Reviewed by Zeynep Anli (Leiden University)

In addition to being a professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, Giancarlo Genta is the director of the Italian SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) project. He has published numerous scientific articles and full-length books which further show the scope of his proficiency. Alongside his academic prowess, he publishes fiction, *A Man from Planet Earth* being his third novel. Genta's work fits perfectly in the Science and Fiction series, with his emphasis on human and non-human intelligence, space warfare and ethical concerns.

The series provides authors with the opportunity to append theoretical information and Genta makes great use of this section in explaining theories that are relevant to the novel, mostly on extraterrestrial intelligences. Furthermore, in his preface, he provides a preliminary discussion of convergent evolution and of the potential similarities between various types of extraterrestrial intelligences. This supplementary account sets the tone for the plausibility of the storyline which presents various characters interacting in a manner quite familiar to Earthlings. In the prologue, Genta outlines a frame narrative for the novel's epic tale. Framing the story in this way provides both creative freedom and greater plausibility for the plot of recovering information from a ship that had been drifting in space for hundreds of thousands of years.

Blending elements of hard sf and space opera, the novel deals with events surrounding the Galactic Confederation's encounter with the Qhruns, an alien species attacking the planets in the Confederation one by one. Although Earth has not yet achieved sufficient maturity to be part of the Confederation, Prof Thomas Taylor is asked to investigate – his bargain is that, if he succeeds in understanding the Qhruns, Earth will be admitted into the Confederation. What follows is a journey of mystery, danger and, hopefully, galactic peace, during which various human and non-human aspects of interstellar life are presented through the plurality of many planets and stars.

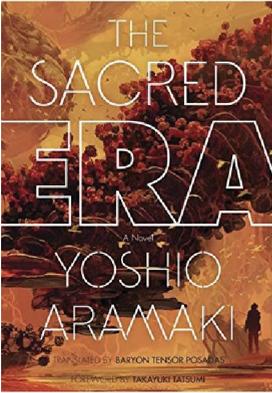
One of the main themes of the novel is that, despite the rate of technological

progress on various planets, ethical behaviour will still remain as a universal concern. The novel covers the confrontation with an unknown danger and the largely harmonious collaboration between intelligent species quite well. The flow of events is neither predictable nor shocking, which makes the novel a captivating read, deriving much of its power from the ethical and practical considerations concerning the experiments conducted on a fragment recovered from Qhrun debris. Space battles coupled with discussions of the experiment create a balance to the storyline. In terms of structure, the novel consists of short thematic chapters, which makes for both readability and suspense.

Taylor is far from being a one-dimensional character. He gradually evolves from a somewhat sullen professor to becoming a stronger and more resourceful character. His ambitious personality gives his crew encouragement and hope against the odds. Interior monologues provide much-needed comic relief, self-reflection and a sense of his personal insecurity. Taylor's chief ally is the ship's computer, Twenty-Six, which offers a commentary on how humans and AIs may interact in the future. Their relationship is presented in such a naturally flowing way that the meaningful and compelling interactions with Twenty-Six strengthen the immersive battle scenes that punctuate the narrative.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of the novel is the experiment conducted on the Qhrun fragment. Discovering biological material and theorizing that there would be humans on board leads to Taylor hesitating in his military strategy. Furthermore, the subjects grown from the biological matter are at first considered to lack intelligence until they start interacting in other ways, at which point Taylor and his crew become ethically responsible for what they have created. The implications that arise from the experiment make for a much more captivating read.

In contrast, Taylor's rise to fame and glory is slightly unconvincing. The Confederation seems a bit too enthusiastic about trusting a man from a type B planet to whom they hand over their military powers. At face value, the Confederation does not appear to be the kind of competent and powerful force that might be expected from a league of space-faring civilizations. More charitably, this might suggest that the Confederation is meant to be read as a fictional analogy for real-world organizations such as the United Nations. In concert with this ambiguity, Genta resists offering a definitive ending to the novel which makes for an accessible and enjoyable read for people from a scientific or non-scientific background.



Yoshio Aramaki, *The Sacred Era* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015, 252 pp, £16.99)

Reviewed by Rachel Claire Hill

Yoshio Aramaki is a widely regarded sf writer in Japan who has received the Seiun Award, Japan's most prestigious prize for sf. Hailed as his magnum opus, *The Sacred Era* follows the interstellar pilgrimage of 'K', an initiate to the ruling priestly theocracy of The Holy Empire of Igitur. Originally published in Japanese in 1978, this new translation includes a foreword by

Japanese sf scholar Takayuki Tatsumi, who describes *The Sacred Era* as heavily influenced by New Wave explorations of 'inner space'. Aramaki's metafictional sf is dense with literary allusions, philosophical rumination and *ekphrasis*: writing inspired by visual art. Throughout *The Sacred Era* are considerations of what constitutes reality when understood through a first-hand subjective, experiential position. These interrogations of reality are conducted through the expansive swathes of outer space traversed by K, making its closest relative within the Japanese sf canon Ryu Mitsuse's existential *Ten Billion Days and a One Hundred Billion Nights* (1967).

The Sacred Era begins on an increasingly desertified Earth, with a declining interstellar civilization dwelling within a pervasive malaise: 'Hell is already here [. . .] Total extinction. That's Humanity's destiny.' After successfully completing a series of intractable theological quandaries known as 'The Sacred Service Examination', K's assignment on the mysterious planet Bosch becomes a catalyst for multiple peregrinations. K leaves the hell of Earth, moving across the Taklamakan Space Desert to the limbo of the purgatorial city of Loulan, before reaching the seeming paradise of Bosch. To further entrench his position as a Dantesque questing pilgrim, K increasingly becomes drawn to the illusive figure of Barbara and the promise of spiritual knowledge she embodies, providing a clear analogue for Dante's Beatrice. In alignment with Dante's fulfilment of faith through increasing proximity to God, K's movement across multidimensional and interstellar space is paralleled by an increasing questioning of the fundamentals of reality, replacing formerly presupposed ontological and epistemological certainties of the material world, with metaphysical and existential insights.

Alongside Dante, other literary allusions include an epigraph from the Book of Job, a passage which provides a vindication of God's justice in the light of human suffering through faith and self-surrender. This prefacing of surrender to unknown divine dictates is problematized in *The Sacred Era* by another of its

literary touchstones, Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925). Job and Kafka's protagonist, Josef K, are aligned in that both characters are singled out for punishment by a faceless authority for unknown reasons. However, whereas Job's is a message of sustained hope through adversity, Josef K's story arc ends in defeat. Aramaki stages a metafictional interplay between Job's faithful surrender and Josef K's refusal to capitulate in K's oscillation between devotion to the official scripture of *The Holy Igitur* and revolt against sanctioned authority through adhering to the hedonistic teachings of the heretical Darko Dachilko.

These literary allusions are further underscored by the metafictional emphasis placed on the role of interpretation throughout the novel, with extracts from scriptural, historical and exegetical texts creating dense palimpsests. The layering of different fictional citations within the narrative reproduces the interplay of illusion and reality enacted throughout *The Sacred Era*. Intertextual hybrids are also constructed through the re-organization of the categories of knowledge, where scientific disciplines are strained through theological lexicons. This collision of formerly incommensurate categories is exemplified by terms such as 'Genetic Theology, Sacred Psychology, Sacred Ontology, Exobiology and Infinite Engineering.' The meeting of these formerly discrete disciplines from science and theology instigates thought experiments akin to what Stanisław Lem, in his hallucinatory fever-dream *The Futurological Congress* (1971), termed 'futurolinguistics'. Futurolinguistics welds two concepts together into a neologism, creating a synthesis of conceptual positions to produce new apparatuses for anticipating the future. Aramaki's iteration of futurolinguistic fusion is indicative of the evolutionary trajectories leading to, as well as the intellectual milieu of, the society in *The Sacred Era*.

The overlaps and slippages in meaning generated by these futurolinguistically oriented categories is performed in the material realm through the central role of visual art and architecture. Throughout Aramaki's work there is a preoccupation with doubleness, which is established in *The Sacred Era* through the repeated incursions of interdimensional mirages, hallucinations, mirroring, optical illusions, doppelgängers and shadow selves. The tripartite unification of consciousness, aesthetics and reality is conceptually enacted and maintained throughout the fabric of *The Sacred Era*, leading to repeated claims like 'this world is an illusion. Shall we go see an even greater illusion?' Hence, in *The Sacred Era*, there are multiple references to M.C. Escher, Hieronymus Bosch and Baroque architecture allied with New Wave preoccupations with the exploration of inner space.

The Sacred Era's theo-scientific paradigm, constructed through fictional citation and futurolinguistically constructed terminology, when coupled with the visual feedback loops conjured through aesthetic experience, has subsequent

ramifications for representations of technology. Thus starships use 'ethereal navigation', the fuel for which is generated through feeding upon the affective and cognitive states of a vessel's passengers. This metabolization of bodily and psychological conditions as energy for hyperspace jumps in turn induces incorporeal states, leading K to experience 'all his body dissolve to the point that he can become pure consciousness.' Unlike conventional depictions of interstellar ships, Aramaki's technologies distort and temporarily reorganize the human form, leading to ecstatic revelations. Thus, Aramaki could be seen to be in dialogue with Koichi Yamano's appeal in his essay 'Japanese SF, Its Originality and Orientation' (1969) that 'if Japanese SF is still in search of originality, it must start reappropriating such gadgets as alien, rocket, robot, mutant, and time machine one by one into the writer's subjective structure.'

More problematically, *The Sacred Era's* technologies are explicitly gendered, with rockets launching upwards 'like a giant phallus ready to violate the heavens.' This gendering of technological apparatuses equates with the novel's continuous objectifying of women. One-dimensional and purposefully interchangeable, reinforced through the wealth of mechanical dolls and other female simulacra, all women throughout the text immediately want to initiate sexual relations with K, regardless of the excessive levels of disgust and disregard he shows them. Women act as a cypher for male desire, existing to satiate and then be discarded, destroyed or devoured. There are multiple occasions of victim blaming, sexual exploitation and senseless violence against women. A case in point is the character Barbara who, after refusing to acquiesce to a man's sexual advances, is murdered, exhumed and transformed into a mechanical doll as punishment. Further violence against women happens in the incorporeal as well as material realm. During interstellar travel, K vampirically hunts and devours the souls of his fellow female travellers so that he can feel 'completely satiated.' These feats of mechanical necromancy and spiritual cannibalism are exemplary of how possessive violence is often enacted in retaliation for resistance to male desire, where women have all sense of agency stripped away to be turned into symbols of servitude and prey. Whilst *The Sacred Era* is replete with interesting examples of experimentation both with its subversion of many sf tropes and its deployment of sf as a means of furthering metafictional work, the sustained misogyny throughout is tedious. As such, *The Sacred Era* speaks for sf's past, rather than to its future.



Nik Abnett, *Savant* (Solaris, 2016, 319pp, £7.99)

Reviewed by Chris Hussey (University of Cambridge)

In Nik Abnett's *Savant*, the possible threat of a world-wide power outage would not only mean the cessation of global communications and industry but would also open up the world to 'prying eyes', which could lead to the end of humankind.

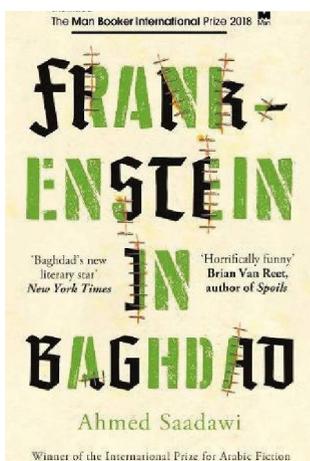
Abnett's work portrays a world that is not dissimilar to current society, but set in the near-distant future where there have been technological advancements, particularly relating to the stratification of society and the commodities this affords the rich. The world portrayed in *Savant* is not bleak or dystopian in the traditional sense, but neither is it utopian. The need to report to 'Service' and acknowledge schedules and tasks at specific times provides an Orwellian slant to the novel, where for the protagonists, life involves being monitored because of their relative importance to the world, maintaining 'the Shield' to protect the earth through their 'exceptional minds'. Tobe, the Master at the centre of the plot, is ably assisted by Metoo, who fulfils the role of caregiver in her interactions with her charge. Both their names are suitably portentous, hinting at how their lives are intertwined at this potential time of crisis.

These 'Actives' reside in the structures of something that could be likened to a university or collegiate system, where they are able to teach and work within the confines of a supportive network, so they can function to their utmost potential with minimal disruption. They are savants, hence the book's title, with their childlike mannerisms and limited comprehension of things that are not their specialist subjects, such as maths or science.

Abnett builds tension and suspense throughout, as the level of threat rises and the stakes become higher. It is testament to the writing style that despite the relative ambiguity the likely repercussions of Master Tobe's actions, which are not revealed until later in the novel, this is not frustrating for a reader. Instead, it feels like an immersive part of the world-building where information is conveyed on a need-to-know basis, because of the structures of their society. The world shaped within the text is also stylized by a multitude of proper nouns, indicating the specifically contextual elements that help to shape the setting, particularly around Service and the structure of their lives. Moreover, the addition of the suffix 'pro' to a number of items, which would normally be commonly available in our current lives, is indicative that these are substituted materials that are in themselves synthetic, part of this future where there is a clear demand concerning resources and how these are subsequently deployed.

Abnett skilfully portrays the protagonists and their interactions with one another, which feel authentic and tender. Metoo's care for Tobe, and indeed her sheer capability makes her role appear to be aspirational, rather than a tokenistic female protagonist lacking depth or emotion. Set against Tobe's ability and childishness, Abnett draws on character traits that strengthen the work to make each person seem relatable, believable and human. Metoo's scorn at Service's insistence to 'Maintain the subject' is palpable. Her acknowledgement that she does not want to maintain but rather 'nurture' her relationship with Tobe indicates their developing empathy. Addressing these themes of attachment and connectedness, as well as separation is poignant, allowing these challenging themes to be engaged with on a deeper level.

The potential consequences in *Savant* are reflective of how damaging changes can be to one's own world, even with surrounding support structures in place. In a similar way, the novel also addresses their failures, such as the suicide of one character, framed within a future that still clearly has challenges relating to the self and identity as a key component. *Savant* is therefore most remarkable for the way it sets up these relationships, and the way Abnett conveys emotion between the characters, which gives the book a different quality to a traditional end-of-the-world narrative. While there are also elements of science and maths included, it does not get caught up in either to the detriment of the novel – but rather helps to reinforce an appropriate level of gravitas surrounding the work of the Masters and their eccentricities. Given the centrality of mathematical probability to the plot, there is a good chance you will like *Savant* as much as I did.



**Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*,
trans. Jonathan Wright (Penguin, 2018, 281pp,
£12.99)**

Reviewed by Sinéad Murphy (University College London)

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is not what it says on the tin. Despite what its title might suggest, Saadawi's novel is no straightforward reimagining of Mary Shelley's iconic novel, focusing as it does on a very different, contemporary vision of the monstrous. Set in 2005–6, Saadawi's novel sees Dr Frankenstein's laboratory exchanged

for the neighbourhood of Bataween in Baghdad. As with many urban areas

throughout Iraq, Bataween has been ravaged not only by the 2003 invasion but by the protracted sectarian violence in its wake; this reality is at the forefront of Saadawi's narrative, which is punctuated by car bombings occurring on a seemingly daily basis. Traumatized by the death of his friend in one such attack, an alcoholic junk dealer named Hadi takes it upon himself to create a 'complete' corpse, 'so it wouldn't be treated as trash, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial'. Suturing together the dismembered body parts of civilian victims, Hadi forms the *shesma* or 'Whatsitsname' – the 'Frankenstein in Baghdad'.

Originally published in Arabic in 2013, the novel won the 2014 International Prize for Arabic Fiction, making Saadawi the first Iraqi writer ever to receive the award. Jonathan Wright's English translation has since been shortlisted for the 2018 Man Booker International Prize. This nomination sees Saadawi join a handful of Arabophone authors who have been acknowledged by the award, alongside renowned writers Naguib Mahfouz and Hoda Barakat. Such accolades suggest not only the prevailing popularity of Shelley's Gothic story, but also a significant interest in Saadawi's self-consciously surrealist approach to narrating lived experiences of post-2003 Iraq.

The novel begins with a frame narrative in the form of a 'top secret final report'. This document details the findings of an investigation into the Tracking and Pursuit Department, an administrative body established by the allied forces and involving Iraqi as well as American security officers. The bureaucratic tone and pseudo-legalese of the report are suffused with a dry humour, and it is revealed that the department employed 'several astrologers and fortune-tellers, on high salaries financed by the Iraqi treasury, not by the U.S authorities [whose] only purpose was to make predictions about serious security incidents that might take place in Baghdad and the surrounding areas'. The absurdism of the opening premise is a defining characteristic of Saadawi's style and is central to the novel's critique of political leadership following the invasion. Combining narrowly fictionalized dates, place names and recognizable events with fantastical narrative devices, Saadawi's novel defamiliarizes sustained, large-scale violence in Iraqi while at once expressing the disturbing ways in which it can become normalized.

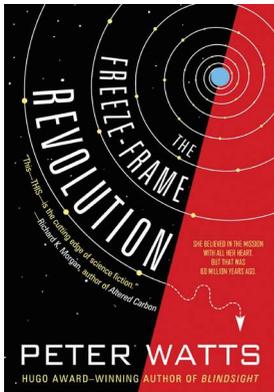
The Whatsitsname is inhabited by the wandering spirit of a hotel guard named Hasib; killed by a car bomb, Hasib's soul has been cleaved from his body. He does not become fully animated, however, until he encounters Elishva, an elderly woman regarded by the local community as possessing a particular kind of spiritual power (*baraka*). Mistaking the Whatsitsname for her son, who never returned from the Iran-Iraq war, Elishva brings 'him out of anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel'. Uncertain as to the means by which Hasib's soul

might be put to rest, the Whatsitsname undertakes a mission: to avenge the deaths of the innocent Iraqi civilians whose body parts he is comprised of. The Whatsitsname's virtuosity is short-lived, however, when he realizes his body is decomposing piece by piece, and each body part must be continuously replaced. Subsumed by the desire to regenerate his failing body, the Whatsitsname proceeds with his project with a peculiar kind of doublethink – keen to avoid renewing himself with the 'illegitimate' flesh of criminals, the Whatsitsname's victims come to resemble the bystanders whose deaths have motivated his mission of vengeance. His murderous violence begins to attract attention, and the Whatsitsname acquires not only a series of provocative nicknames but entire groups of dedicated followers, the leaders of which are referred to as 'The Sophist', 'The Magician' and 'The Enemy'. Portrayed as caricatures rather than characters, these figures are a biting parody of the cronyism through which the Ba'athist party maintained a hegemonic authority in Iraq over the course of several decades. In this sense, the Whatsitsname is a curious and complex allegory: although he literally embodies the horrifying scale of civilian casualties during and following the 2003 invasion, the Whatsitsname at the same time signifies the corrupted institutions of power perpetrating and sustaining this violence.

Although the figure of Whatsitsname drives the plot, he is absent for long stretches of the text, and the novel's cast of characters is so extensive as to warrant a detailed list in its opening paratext. The ethno-religious diversity of actual Bataween is schematized into a series of character vignettes, as the narrative explores a number of sprawling subplots. As the narrative shifts its perspective from one character to the next, the Whatsitsname's fragmented body is evoked at a formal level; as such there are moments of somewhat haphazard plot progression. The characters' experiences remain connected, however, not only by the looming presence of the Whatsitsname but by a persistent tension between the draw to remain in and rebuild Baghdad, and the urge to escape its oppressive levels of violence, political disarray and economic stagnation. It is a theme expressed strongly through Elishva, whose steadfast refusal to leave Bataween, despite the repeated pleas of her adult children to join them in Australia, is expressed in the opening pages of the novel. Elishva's wilful embrace of the Whatsitsname as her long-lost son is her belief in the possibility of recovery and reunion made flesh. Nonetheless, the concluding stretch of the novel sees Elishva finally agree to leave, and she departs mere moments prior to a car bomb explosion which demolishes her home – a bleak pronouncement regarding perseverance in the face of repeated acts of destruction in a post-2003 context. As well as this focus on the fragmentation of the physical environment, Saadawi's text gestures to the destruction of Iraq's

cultural institutions and repositories during and after the invasion of the US allied forces, as the narrative frequently meditates on the act of writing itself. The Whatsitsname's first-person account is delivered indirectly, purportedly as a transcription of as a series of voice recordings. It is the characters responsible for the circulation of the Whatsitsname's story who dominate the trajectory of the plot, and who become the primary subjects of the Tracking and Pursuit Department's investigations – a pointed comment on the persistence of censorship and the suppression of freedom of speech in post-war Iraq.

In a 2014 interview with Al-Mustafa Najjar for the website *Arabic Literature (in English)*, Saadawi explains that he was not influenced by Shelley's novel directly so much as 'the vast cultural space that is called "Frankenstein"'. With *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Saadawi reimagines Shelley's Creature character in an altogether new cultural space, creating a rich polysemic allegory for lived experiences of the material and psychosocial landscape in post-invasion Iraq. Like the Whatsitsname himself, Saadawi's text is much more than the sum of its individual parts, offering a powerful sense of place and the precariousness with which its inhabitants contest. With a dark humour, Saadawi incorporates the implausible into his portrayal of everyday life, in this fantastical, unpredictable narrative of an irreal reality.



Peter Watts, *The Freeze-Frame Revolution: A Novel* (Tachyon, 2018, 186pp, £10.99)

Reviewed by Patrick Whitmarsh (Boston University)

There is an aura of unknowability in all of Peter Watts's work. We begin in the midst of something we don't understand, and there's no guarantee we will be any wiser by story's end. Whether the oceanic abyss of *Starfish* (1999) or the Oort Cloud of *Blindsight* (2006), Watts delivers his readers into scenarios whose conditions unfold over narrative time. Explanations

emerge from context, and usually require more than a little imagination on the part of the reader. One almost gets the sense that he delights in making his readers uncomfortable. In the past, his novels have included works cited entries to ground their speculations in contemporary science. No works cited graces Watts's newest novel, but the author offers an apology in the form of a brief acknowledgements section (in which he also insists that the book is not a novel but a novella). The absence of a works cited suggests not only that the subject matter's plausibility is 'handwavium,' as Watts writes, but that the new novel

is perhaps less hard than soft sf. Softness notwithstanding, exposition in *The Freeze-Frame Revolution* bears resemblance to the author's previous hard sf works, and evokes similar sensations – of distances, homelessness, spinning in the void: 'We were just cavemen', narrator Sunday Ahzmundin says; 'Only the mission was transcendent'.

The Freeze-Frame Revolution pushes some of the mind-contorting concepts for which Watts's fiction is known into the speculative far reaches of the galaxy. The novel is set on a technologically overhauled asteroid called *Eriophora* as it slowly crawls along the contours of the Milky Way. The crew's mission is to conduct 'builds': the construction of artificial wormhole-gates, comprising an interlaced network of deep-space colonization (appropriately, *Eriophora* is named after a genus of orb-weaving spider). The exact purpose of these gates remains shrouded in mystery, however, as the crew never witnesses one of them in use by anything other than alien artefacts referred to as 'gremlins' which occasionally emerge from the gates immediately after their construction. To complicate matters, the novel takes place sixty-six million years after *Eriophora's* departure from Earth. Readers learn that the human crewmembers (who number roughly thirty thousand) are awoken in groups and work in shifts, for no more than days at a time, only to be put back in suspended animation for millennia-long hibernations.

Eriophora is overseen by an artificial intelligence called the Chimp, who controls the crew's suspension cycles and handles the majority of tasks regarding the builds. According to Sunday, the crew provides a human perspective on the Chimp's cold, calculating algorithms; likewise, the Chimp is the functional check on human fallibility. Together, they make the mission airtight. This is their collective purpose and the novel's premise, yet the narrative soon reveals that seeds of distrust have been sown among various crewmembers, owing not least to several unsolved mysteries upon *Eriophora*: is the Chimp altering its logs? Why, and to where, have its backups disappeared? And who is leaving all those strange, graffiti-esque markings on the walls? Watts offers some answers, but not before enticing his readers with *Eriophora's* quiet, unsettling environment.

The suspicion between the humans and the Chimp is an example of a classic sf plot device, and the Chimp's dialogue will likely remind many readers of HAL 9000. Sunday's relationship with the Chimp is particularly endearing, if complicated; but then, all intelligent relationships are complicated, and this dilemma sits at the heart of *The Freeze-Frame Revolution*. Watts explores the paradox and ambiguity of complex imitative entities, and the contradictions that arise when a machine is designed for optimum functionality *and* interactive comradery. Utilitarianism has never been a very human model, and it's unclear what might happen should utilitarian systems be gifted a conscience. In a

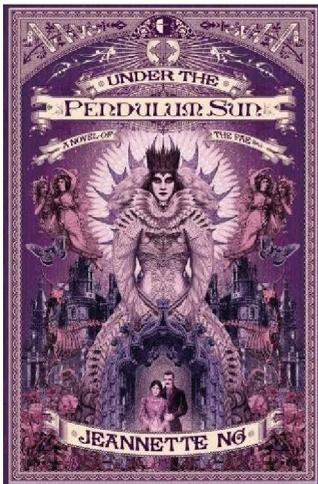
sense, Watts already explored a similar question in *Blindsight*, but in the case of an alien (rather than artificial) intelligence. Put another way, *The Freeze-Frame Revolution* continues its author's speculative interest in the differences between consciousness and intelligence. N. Katherine Hayles' recent study, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (2017), addresses precisely this distinction in *Blindsight*, and signals the growing scholarly interest in sf's critique of consciousness. *The Freeze-Frame Revolution* expands on this critique not by disempowering its human characters in terms of their cognitive capacity (as in *Blindsight*), but by imagining whether human cognitive capacity is the result of exceedingly complex intelligence – a cognitive system that is much more than merely consciousness. The Chimp may not have a human body, but it exhibits some surprisingly human behaviors, including dancing like no one is watching.

On *Eriophora*, however, someone is always watching. Surveillance is another major theme of the novel, likely related in part to the author's personal brushes with the law (Watts has been barred from entering the United States due to an altercation with US border patrol agents). *Eriophora* offers few locations where its crew can avoid the Chimp's observation, and significant portions of the plot involve the construction and manipulation of such areas. This is a narrative about revolution, after all, and revolutions often begin in the shadows. Watts's inventive twist involves the matter of the crew's suspended animation. Without going back into what Sunday calls 'the crypt', the human occupants would perish long before they could establish any line of communication with their crewmates. They cannot achieve the 'poetic awakening' that Georg Lukács attributed to characters in *The Historical Novel* (1937): the experience of 'social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality'. Watts's hapless human characters must create the conditions for such an awakening, which they do by exploring ways to communicate with each other across time, and without the Chimp's knowledge.

Numerous sf scholars have addressed the genre's unique relationship to the historical novel, including Fredric Jameson, Carl Freedman and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay. Watts's recent literary hike into revolutionary terrain rekindles this relationship, positioning sf less as an extension of the historical novel than as a critique of it. *The Freeze-Frame Revolution* complicates the possibility of historical gestalt, of an event that transcends its material limitations, by stringing its human characters along the continuum of deep time. The novel suggests that *Eriophora*'s mission may only conclude with the heat death of the universe, an event that some characters even desire to witness. Watts explores the meaning and value of such desires when weighed on the scales of cosmic time, in which human motivations exponentially approach the infinitesimal. *The Freeze-Frame Revolution* asks what a revolution looks like against the backdrop of supernovas

and Hawking singularities: 'The limits were in our senses, not in reality', Sunday explains, invoking a standard Wattsonian theme; 'human vision is such a pathetic instrument for parsing the universe'.

Yet Watts's novel doesn't lose its human element, and its characters' revolutionary motives are liberal in nature. They want to wrest control over their lives from the Chimp. Watts's focus on the revolutionary plea for emancipation comes largely at the expense of differences among human identities. Racial distinctions are nebulous, sexual proclivities are fluid, and gender categories are ambiguous. The only clues that Watts leaves are characters' names (which do suggest racial diversity) and pronouns (some of which are gender neutral); but little is made of these details. The real difference that *The Freeze-Frame Revolution* focuses on is that between the humans and the Chimp: 'I was there for his birth', Sunday says of the Chimp (suggestively ascribing it a male pronoun), 'years before we ever shipped out. I saw the lights come on, listened as he found his voice, watched him learn to tell Sunday from Kai from Ishmael'. A large portion of the novel centres on Sunday's fondness for the Chimp, and the conflicts that arise at the intersection of friendship and hierarchy. The Chimp's primary goal is mission success, but Watts leads his readers into murky territory. What happens when the algorithms that plot a system's purpose also give rise to the desire for companionship? *The Freeze-Frame Revolution* doesn't propose solutions to all its philosophical questions, but the best sf has never aspired to prescription. In the case of Watts's novel, the brain makes us think, but it also makes us feel.



**Jeannette Ng, *Under the Pendulum Sun*
(Angry Robot, 2017, 400pp, £8.99)**

Mark P. Williams (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Jeannette Ng's *Under the Pendulum Sun* is a genuinely unnervingly atmospheric Gothic novel set in a fantastic secondary world, whose depths and devices are conveyed through stunning set pieces and evocative but often brief encounters, which always suggest much more lies outside of the scope of the story.

The narrative concerns Catherine Helstone, who is making a journey to Arcadia, the kingdom of the Fae, to find and rescue her brother Laon. Laon is an ordained Minister on a mission to bring the Christian gospels to

the Faelands before he mysteriously lost all contact with his sister and the London Mission Society. This premise sets in motion an intense personal quest for Catherine, who is forced to remain primarily in the house the Fae have prepared for Laon while she waits for his return. There she lives with the largely unseen Salamander who acts as caretaker; Miss Davenport, a woman who is a Changeling and so has experience of the human world, specifically England; and a goblin named Mr Benjamin, the one Fae being to have been converted to Christianity by Laon's predecessor, the Reverend Roche. Through the constant questioning of Mr Benjamin, we are introduced to the other aspect of Ng's novel: a profound philosophical interrogation of the relation of historical theology to its Other.

As fits a Gothic narrative, we see directly very little of Arcadia and much of what we do encounter seems threatening or unnerving; Catherine sets foot only briefly in a port city identified by 'the shamble of docks' which gives way to 'Twisting streets full of seeming people'. This scene reminds Catherine of 'crowded London' but she tries 'not to notice the oddities of each figure – the strange colours and the wings and the horns'. Most of the story takes place in a house resembling a Gothic castle which has been named Gethsemane by the Missionaries.

Catherine and Laon grew up in Yorkshire and played on the edge of the Moors. The resonance with Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1848) is more than a throwaway allusion; it gives us an important preparatory glimpse of the Gothic tropes that will persist throughout the text. Their brief introductory scenes of childhood both prefigure the limitations of their experiences in Arcadia and also knowingly refer to the history of the Gothic. Catherine and her brother play imaginary journeys with his toy soldiers as explorers:

But for all our stories, our imaginations were small and provincial. For the talk of tropics and deserts, our childish fictions filled them with the same oaks and aspens that grew in our garden. We built on their landscape, exotic buildings that were just our little whitewashed church in Birdforth in disguise.

This is an embedded allusion to the novels of William Beckford and Horace Walpole, which incorporated details of their homes into the descriptions of the Castle of Otranto and the palaces of Caliph Vathek, but it also functions as a comment on the textuality of fantasy world-building.

Ng's world-making shows traces of Weird fantasy, and bears some comparison with what we are almost obligated to call the New Weird, but its distinctness seems to track back along a more elliptical course. While it is difficult not to also think of Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (2004),

the closest comparison may actually be a different trajectory. As a world, Ng's Arcadia bears comparison with K.J. Bishop's *The Etched City* (2004), China Miéville's Bas Lag novels and Steph Swainston's Fourlands sequence, but this may be because of the still longer shadow of M. John Harrison over all of these. *Pendulum Sun's* literalization of Faerie often treads a line between metafiction and the fantastic which places her close to Neil Gaiman on the one hand, and even Terry Pratchett on the other hand, mainly in the Tiffany Aching novels. In its particular combination of Gothic method and the profound atmosphere of unease surrounding the Fae, as well as the spare but significant use of metatextual moments, Ng's style and play with Gothic elements is comparable to Angela Carter.

Like Carter, Ng is also a literary scholar; both share a clear sense of revelling in the excess of meaning common to both medieval and Renaissance textuality, as well as our more recent formulations of the Gothic. Catherine's journey to Arcadia is at once an exploration of the narrative of the Fall and an analogue of the classical story of Orpheus, itself retold in Middle English as Sir Orfeo, the story of a knight going to the land of the fairies. The sinister fairyland of Sir Orfeo may be one of several darker Elflands submerged within or haunting the edges of Ng's text.

Ng's conception of the Fae is partly related through the mediations of the traveller's tale epitexts. These materials, which haunt the edges of the main narrative, introduce us to a host of literary doubles, which perform functions of both world-building and also narrative foreshadowing regarding the nature of Changelings as they are elaborated later in the novel. Among the literary doubles Ng presents us with are short narrative extracts by True Thomas the Rymer, the double of Thomas of Erceldoune, Victor Frankenstein's double and soul-mate Robert Walton who frames Victor's narrative in letter to his sister Margaret Savile (herself doubling Mary Shelley), the Duchess who visits the Blazing World as an authorial double in the experimental philosophy of Margaret Cavendish's *New Blazing World*, and more besides.

Catherine's encounters present an entire society whose social structures, physical geography and physiognomy are in perpetual flux. The human encounter with the Fae is in a permanent state of unsettlement where the Fae appear to be pure deceivers, a whole world of Machiavellian schemers who delight in human confusion. This is a function of both the Christian perspective of the Missionaries and a product of the heightened state of the narrator's mind; she is effectively a prisoner in the house allocated to her brother.

The effect of this is to make the novel feel as intensely constrained as Catherine and Laon, the terms of their presence in Gethsemane are a 'blood gies' which means they are only really safe within the castle-like house at night

and have only limited protection outside it during the day. Consequently, the world-building side of the novel gives way to claustrophobic 'Gothic half-lights', a term David Punter used to describe Harrison's Viriconium sequence in *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 2 (1996). Comparisons with Harrison are not only warranted by the style of the aesthetic Ng develops but also by the methodology of world-building, or her attitude towards the Faelands themselves. Ng's Arcadia is defined from its outset as a place of fluid boundaries and uncertain geography. We are told it has clear rules, but the reader and main characters are never granted more than fragmentary glimpses and stories about how this world works:

'How far to Gethsemane?'

He tutted to himself, the space between his brows folding like an accordion.

'Two revelations and an epiphany? No, there has to be a shortcut... Two painful memories and a daydr-'

'Sixteen miles,' interrupted Miss Davenport. 'It is sixteen miles away. We'll arrive well before dark.'

What takes some time to establish due to Ng's careful control of information is that this manner of speaking about distance is not just figurative or cultural but indicative of a quality of the world itself, not just of the worldview of the Fae. The plot gives us two revelations and an epiphany as a measure when the same character attempts to bring an urgent message after leaving Catherine and Miss Davenport. Text and world are indivisible; like Harrison, one of the things Ng's narrative aesthetic conveys to its audience is the contingency of meaning and the limitations of our perspectives on the world.

At the conclusion of the novel, Catherine and Laon are ultimately granted both a reconciliation and approval of their Christian Mission, preaching to the Fae, but structurally they are about to become willing participants in some possible future 'Scramble for Arcadia'. Ng leaves us on the edge of a narrative and moral precipice with the Owl-like gaze of Queen Mab on both protagonists and on Imperial Britain's next move. Ng's Arcadia is a haunting, liminal, Gothic landscape where dreams can be solid and memories of real life can melt into the air: *Et in Arcadia Ego*, the words of the tomb hang over the text, unspoken within it, lingering somewhere between an under-expressed threat and a numinous promise.

