Foundation
The International Review of Science Fiction
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Winter's Tales: Shakespeare and Science Fiction

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Editorial
Paul March-Russell

So, at the Hugos, Jeannette Ng said something very rude – although mostly true – about John W. Campbell.

The fact that she had just received the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer made her comments all the more contentious. The immediate response though, in a virtual re-run of the Jemisin-Silverberg fiasco the year before (see *Foundation* 131), was eminently predictable: Ng had abused the occasion, had spoken improperly, had displayed a lack of knowledge, had politicised an apolitical event, etc. In the ensuing aftermath, however, Ng's intervention provoked the editor of *Analog* to announce a change of name for the prize, as well as an acknowledgement of Campbell's (well-documented) racism, whilst the unrelated John W. Campbell Memorial Award is also likely to change its name. Calls for the James M. Tiptree Award to be similarly renamed led to significant rebuttals on social media, not least from Tiptree's biographer Julie Phillips, before the committee decided upon the equivocal-sounding Otherwise Award. Many agreed that honours were best unnamed after any one individual – the organizers of the Clarke Award held their breath …

What this furore about name-calling (in all senses) did, however, was to obscure the much deeper question of if/how we decolonize science fiction. As John Rieder has shown, the emergence of science fiction in the late nineteenth century was wedded to colonial narratives and assumptions about race, progress and the Other. Over and above the attitudes of individual players, the genre is historically imbricated with racist and colonialist ideologies. There is no escaping the fact that science fiction, like every other cultural discourse of that period, is tainted with the spectre of racism. Consequently, for contemporary producers and consumers of science fiction, the question is: How do we come to terms with the racist origins of a genre that we profess to love?

Ng's response was clearly one of confrontation. To say that she should have either refused the award or to have been acquiescent is plainly not enough. (Or, as Philip Jackson's character puts it at the end of Pete Postlethwaite's acceptance speech in Mark Herman's *Brassed Off* [1996]: 'Don't be so bloody soft.') Like it or not, Ng has done us a service by (unfortunate British colloquialism) calling a spade a spade. Her provocation, though, is an invitation to respond, a demand for dialogue. This is but the first step in how we might decolonize science fiction.

Thirty years on since Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin turned to *Star Wars*, via Salman Rushdie's 1982 *Times* article, for the title of their path-finding critique, *The Empire Writes Back*, 'decolonizing the curriculum'

is the buzz-phrase running through academic institutions. What that means in practice is a little harder to judge. Do we, like Chinua Achebe, call Joseph Conrad 'a bloody racist' and decline to teach him, replacing him instead with Rabindranath Tagore, say, or Mulk Raj Anand? Or, do we insist upon teaching Conrad but differently, teasing out those ambiguities and contradictions in his representation of the imperial mission? (Just as we might tease out the decline and ruin of empires to be found in Campbell's 'Twilight' [1934].) Or do we, more pragmatically, chart a middle course between these two positions? Would such a path be acceptable in our own ideologically fraught times?

These are the questions that face the sf community now. How do we honour our predecessors whilst acknowledging their (more than) failings? In decentring, or offsetting, their influence, what other figures do we bring to the fore, acknowledging that such decisions are not ideologically neutral, not now, not then? What other narratives of the history of science fiction do we conjure and what might their bearing be upon the science fiction that will be, and which is being, produced? These are questions that demand responses; propriety – the shuffling of the feet in the face of an authority that one dislikes but which demands respect – is not a way forward.

Such issues were faced, and continue to be faced, within the performance and study of Shakespeare. *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tempest* all present problems for contemporary audiences not least because they are implicated in the racism, anti-Semitism and misogyny of their day. Yet, they also cast a reflection – as well as a shadow – upon these issues in the light of #MeToo, religious intolerance and rising hate crime. The reproducibility of Shakespeare, both as an icon and the performativity of his plays, have meant not only a continuing fascination with his works in mainstream media (for example, the BBC's recent adaptation of the history plays) but also popular cultural phenomena such as sf. I am delighted then that Sarah Annes Brown has put together a selection of articles culled from the 2018 Anglia Ruskin conference on 'Shakespeare and science fiction'. I am also delighted that we not only review Sam J. Miller's *Blackfish City* – the winner, ironically enough, of this year's Campbell Memorial Award – but that he has also written the latest entry in the Fourfold Library. To mix our Shakespearean plays, we hope that in this season, when 'So hallowed and so gracious is the time', you will find this edition 'As you like it' and 'All's well that ends well'.

Guest Editorial

Sarah Annes Brown (Anglia Ruskin University)

In 2008, a striking casting choice in Gregory Doran's RSC production of *Hamlet* attracted considerable publicity. David Tennant, playing Hamlet, and Patrick Stewart, playing Claudius and the Ghost, were both strongly associated with charismatic figures from TV science fiction; respectively, the tenth incarnation of Doctor Who and Captain Jean-Luc Picard of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The reaction of Charles Spencer, writing in the *Telegraph*, was typical: 'By some extraordinary quirk in the space-time continuum, two of our most famous intergalactic travellers have simultaneously landed on Planet Hamlet' (Spencer 2008). Whereas many mainstream reviewers responded with facetiousness or scepticism to the sfnal credentials of the two stars, other commentators were fans of the TV shows – but unenthused by Shakespeare: 'I am not a fan of the Bard's tragedies', wrote one viewer for whom the real draw was 'the notion of Captain Jean-Luc Picard sharing the same stage as The Doctor' (Greenberger 2010).

Ideally, it should be possible to value both elements here: the play itself, and the fresh resonances which the casting brought to this production. The parallels between Hamlet and The Doctor, in particular, are suggestive. Both are ferociously quick-witted, if sometimes erratic; both experience a sense of isolation, set apart from those around them; and both face moral dilemmas which challenge and trouble them, driven by loss and vengeance but aware of the dangers of such a path. There is even an anachronistic quality about Hamlet: an apparently modern, or at least Renaissance, prince, trapped in a medieval world. His truncated dying words to Horatio, hinting at knowledge unguessed at – 'oh, I could tell you' (Shakespeare 1997: 5.2.337) – seem newly suggestive, when spoken by a Time Lord.

If ghosts from the future haunted Doran's stage, science fiction in its turn seems haunted by Shakespeare – indeed *Star Trek*, especially with Stewart's Jean-Luc Picard at the helm, is saturated with references to the plays. Science fiction is preoccupied with the nature and limitations of humanity, its possibilities for development and decline, and Shakespeare's iconic status as a creative genius and his reputation as a chronicler of the human condition help explain his pervasive presence in the genre. He and his works become a kind of touchstone for the species in much science fiction, both transcending and exemplifying what it means to be human. Again and again, writers are drawn to encounters between Shakespeare and non-humans – robots, aliens, post-humans – imagining their possible responses to his plays.

In April 2018, Anglia Ruskin University's Centre for Science Fiction and

Fantasy hosted a conference to explore this topic, and this special section presents a few of the papers. Although they focus on different media – TV, film, fiction, computer games – and different subgenres – dystopia, post-apocalypse, space opera, superhero fantasy – some recurring patterns can be identified. In particular, each of the six articles demonstrates Shakespeare's cultural authority being simultaneously confirmed and undermined. This ambivalence is unsurprising for 'Shakespearean exceptionalism' - 'the idea that Shakespeare is unique among authors, and that therefore to know Shakespeare is to possess – in one compact and convenient package – the best and brightest of the literary canon' (Garber 2012: 75) - is frequently a source of tension for creators of sf, torn between veneration for such an admired precursor, and resistance to his cultural hegemony.

Kinga Földváry demonstrates how these tensions inhere in HBO's award-winning series *Westworld*. Here Shakespeare is both a 'fading classic' and a uniquely persistent cultural trace, emptied out of meaning and yet imbued with a new kind of power as his words are repurposed as a code which signals – or even causes – ontological uplift for the show's android 'hosts'.

Station Eleven is a key focus for both Berit Åström and Margaret Maurer. In Emily St John Mandel's post-apocalyptic novel, Shakespeare signifies the best of humanity, a cultural icon which must be preserved at all costs. Maurer argues, however, that the novel also works against the idea that Shakespeare is universal or timeless; she identifies a counterbalance in the influence of *Star Trek: Voyager* upon the novel, which inspires the Traveling Symphony of players and musicians to look to the future and seek out new life in a world transformed by plague. Åström compares the different ways in which Mandel and Justin Cronin, in his *Passage* trilogy, draw on Shakespeare as cultural capital. Whereas Shakespeare is lovingly curated by the Traveling Symphony, he is viewed with *ressentiment* by Cronin's vampire-like 'virals' as a symbol of human culture from which they are excluded. In their determination to master Shakespeare for their own ends they curiously resemble Cronin and Mandel themselves. For one reason these writers invoke his works, Åström argues, is to legitimate their own genre publications.

Another race of post-humans is explored in Peter Byrne's essay. The Super Mutants of *Fallout*, like Cronin's virals, are afflicted by Shakespeare envy. Although most of the race reject Shakespeare completely, as a symbol of oppression, one Super Mutant, Strong, seeks more knowledge – but only as a way of gaining the upper hand in the battle between humans and post-humans. However, Strong completely misreads *Macbeth* – given the rather Bloomian tensions in play we might call this a 'strong misreading' – and sets out on a quest to find the mysterious 'milk of human kindness' which he views as a kind

of magic potion which bestows human powers.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe contains plenty of post-humans but rather less anxiety. Although bathos and mockery are the Shakespearean keynotes in films such as *The Avengers*, Ronan Hatfull reveals a subtler, more pervasive pattern of covert allusions to the plays which reflects the Shakespearean credentials of the films' directors – including Kenneth Branagh – as well as the prominence given to RSC actors such as Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellan. My own article suggests that, although in some texts Shakespeare has the power to comfort and perhaps save our devastated species, he is also given more foreboding roles, as the prophet, even the cause, of our extinction. In such post-apocalyptic works, it is as though Shakespeare's plays have replaced the Bible as instruments of prophecy, and Shakespeare himself has superseded God.

In the story, 'The Shakespeare Code' (2008), The Doctor describes Shakespeare as 'the most human human'. There is a fine line between being humanity's supreme representative and being somehow separate from the rest of the species. The very qualities which have made Shakespeare an emblem of liberal humanism have the potential to shade into post-human or supernatural territory. Shakespeare – like science fiction – tests the boundaries of our species.

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Fragmented Shakespeare in Science Fiction: The Case of *Westworld*
Kinga Földváry (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary)

Westworld (2016–), HBO's recent multiple-award-winning series, which has made a strong impact on viewers even in today's series-saturated mediascape, is a rich treasure-trove of Shakespearean allusions, some of them fragmented half-quotations, others with stronger connections to the series' narrative as well. Without claiming that *Westworld* is a straightforward Shakespeare adaptation per se (particularly as I would be the first to contest the use value of such a category in the first place), I would like to argue that the presence of Shakespeare in the series does not simply testify to the continuing tendency of sf to engage in intertextuality, ready to embrace the most diverse of cultural traditions; it also exemplifies the current status of the Shakespeare cult in contemporary popular visual culture.

As the case of *Westworld* manifests, Shakespeare's work is still a source of inspiration for creative authors, although instead of the deep textual awareness that characterized many earlier adaptations, current reworkings engage with the Shakespearean text via the practice of 'textual poaching'. While Michel de Certeau argues that all 'readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write' (Certeau 1984: 174), what we can observe today is a type of media consumption that no longer hides its active involvement but prides itself on shaping cultural products to its own likeness. Douglas Lanier shows how this appropriating attitude characterizes contemporary popular culture in general: 'it uses Shakespeare much as it uses other cultural materials' (Lanier 2002: 52), displaying a complete disregard for the original context and unity of meaning. As a result, Shakespeare appears in popular visual culture in the form of short fragments of text, often nearly random snatches from the original, placed in entirely new contexts at will. At the same time, the way Shakespeare is employed by *Westworld* also speaks volumes about the recognition of Shakespeare as a fading classic, a representative of the old world. In this alternative posthuman universe, the Shakespeare quotes seem to appear as remnants from a previous version and thus signal errors in the system. Although they are never entirely accidental, their fully conscious (if somewhat nostalgic) use implies the continued adaptability of Shakespeare to contemporary culture, but strictly on the terms of the new media consumer.

Science fiction's tendency to engage in intertextual references is practically a commonplace, although in relation to genre films, this typically means references to other sf works. As Keith Johnston argues: 'Films with science

fiction premises have, since the early twentieth century, featured a patchwork of elements borrowed from other media, other films, and larger cultural concerns' (Johnston 2011: 38). He goes on to claim that 'science fiction is, and always has been, a hybrid genre – and therefore one that engages in intertextual references' (38). Descriptions of sf regularly point out nonetheless that the genre is mostly 'intertextual within itself' (Kerslake 2007: 25). As Patricia Kerslake claims: 'many critics agree that intertextuality, the literary link between the reader's existing knowledge and a narrative's hypothesis, is as crucial to the development of SF as earlier scientific experimentation is to technological development' (129). The genre relies on this previous knowledge of its consumers, if for no other reason than to offer a recognizable starting point before taking the reader on a journey into the unknown. In what follows, however, I would like to look at another type of intertextuality, showing how *Westworld* enjoys referencing works of art not only from another medium, but also from outside of the world of sf: the dramatic oeuvre of Shakespeare.

Neither the title nor the concept of the serialized *Westworld* are original inventions, but go back to Michael Crichton's classic 1973 film (also novelized). The creators of the new *Westworld* acknowledge their indebtedness in the opening credits, although the series employs hardly more than the basic concept of Crichton's glorified theme park. Practically the whole script, the serialized conflict, characters and the majority of details – apart from the stereotypical elements that are more or less inevitable in any western or sf context – are all newly created by the HBO team. Since neither Crichton's film, nor its 1976 sequel *Futureworld* or the short-lived 1980 television series *Beyond Westworld*, contained any Shakespearean references, our search for the presence of the Bard may be restricted to the current adaptation.

The search itself offers no extraordinary challenges: series creators Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy make no secret of their indebtedness to literature, and they have repeatedly acknowledged a number of sources that provided them with inspiration for the series. These influences are tangible at practically all levels of the narrative, not only in the main theme and plot, or the general visual feel, but also in the language and style used by certain characters in the dialogues. The influences range from the original film source to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), through the artwork of contemporary Swedish designer Kilian Eng, photographs of the Old West by Edward Curtis and Michael Lesy, video games *Grand Theft Auto* and *Red Dead Redemption*, to a variety of literary sources. The latter include texts often associated with sf – among them Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), poetry of all kinds, and a number of plays by Shakespeare (Carras 2018).

In general, Shakespearean references are built into the texture of the

series in several distinct ways, among them a few indirect allusions through names and themes from Aldous Huxley's Shakespeare-inspired *Brave New World* (1932). However, plot similarities to any Shakespearean drama are negligible – unless we wish to see the doomed love affair between a human and an android as a *Romeo and Juliet* plot, or some of the more bloodthirsty protagonists as reminiscent of Shakespearean villains. We may even view the whole park as a stage where a Prospero-like Ford (Anthony Hopkins) puts on his carefully planned performance (Winckler 2017; Pollack-Pelzner 2016). Some commentators even argue that it is *The Tempest* that holds the key to the whole, admittedly rather complex second series of the show (Livingstone 2018). Nonetheless, these associations rely on the viewer's power to draw sometimes extremely subtle connections, rather than on directly embedded elements that would allow us to label the series as a Shakespeare adaptation. At the same time, there are distinct and isolated textual quotations in the script, which are not simply decorative or stylistic devices, but are also functional, and it is to these quotations that I will turn. The quotations are not evenly distributed among the episodes of the two seasons screened to date; the majority and the most diverse examples come from the first two episodes of the first season, while some later episodes have none, but a few examples can be spotted even towards the end of the second season. Yet, as I show, the small sample examined here is more than sufficient to reflect on the ways the Shakespearean text is employed within the series as a whole.

The first example appears in the very first episode of the series when, after a number of increasingly worrying breakdowns in the androids (referred to as 'hosts'), the morning routine of two of the oldest hosts, Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) and her father Peter (Louis Herthum) is disrupted by the father's failure to respond to the girl's usual question, 'Morning Daddy, did you sleep well?', with his characteristic 'Well enough' (Nolan 2016). After finding a photograph of the outside world, Peter shows signs of distress, and when Dolores is about to go for a doctor, he suddenly – and uncharacteristically – grabs her and says: 'You must leave, don't you see, hell is empty and all the devils are here' (Nolan 2016). The latter part of the sentence is obviously Ferdinand's cry from *The Tempest*, as reported by Ariel to Prospero (1.2.214–15). Peter also whispers something into his daughter's ear, which we cannot hear, but which clearly agitates her even more. The management of the park decide to revoke Peter, but not before trying to diagnose the cause of the problem first, suspecting the latest update.

Later on, when a large number of hosts are recalled for checking, Peter responds to the diagnostic questions with another Shakespeare quotation, announcing that 'when we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage

of fools' (Nolan 2016; *King Lear* 4.6.178–79). Even though Peter is a father figure – his final drive is to protect his daughter at all costs – his distress does not show any parallels to the plight of Lear, who utters this line when provoked by seeing the blind Gloucester. True, his statement comes in a moment of recognition, when he first observes a rupture in his previously coherent universe, and the 'great stage' as a concept has also strong textual relevance in this gigantic theatre. Reto Winckler even argues that '*Westworld* essentially portrays a technologically updated and radically expanded version of an ancient metaphor that also features prominently in Shakespeare's plays: that the world is a theatre' (Winckler 2017: 170). Nonetheless, this does not make us see Peter as a Lear figure, even if we can applaud him (or rather the scriptwriter) for the clever application of the Shakespearean fragment to fit the situation.

Peter's next utterance, in which he casts an accusatory look at Park Director Robert Ford and Head of Behaviour, Bernard Lowe (Jeffrey Wright), lends itself even less to being interpreted as an adaptation. The short speech goes as follows: 'By most mechanical and dirty hand [laughs], I shall have such revenges on you … both … the things I will do, what they are yet I know not, but they will be the terrors of the earth' – and then continues with 'you don't know where you are, do you? You're in the prison of your sins' (Nolan 2016). This somewhat fragmentary text is in fact a combination of a short phrase from *2 Henry IV* (5.5.36) – part of Pistol's description of how Doll Tearsheet was apprehended – followed by King Lear's rage against his ungrateful daughters, right before he disappears into the storm, with the lines slightly rearranged (2.2.441–68). The ending, however, remains unidentified, although fans have not stopped pondering over it in forum posts and comments – possibly because it sounds like some deep moralizing poetry, although not obtained from any particular literary source.

Parallel to Peter's Shakespearean confessions, in the neighbouring diagnostic room, Dolores also reveals what her father whispered in her ear: 'he said "these violent delights have violent ends"' (Nolan 2016), a sentence which had no meaning to her, at least according to her emotionless response (emotionless per command, that is). This latter line, a quotation from *Romeo and Juliet* (2.6.9), will be a recurring utterance, functioning as a password of sorts, from Peter to Dolores to the brothel keeper Maeve (Thandie Newton), and then to all rebelling hosts, cropping up in the script even in the second season. Yet the way the sentence is passed on from one host to another resembles – and is compared to – the spread of a disease, just like the extremely apt metaphor of the computer virus as used in common parlance (and in the control tower of the show).

It is not impossible to find analogies between the old sentence and its new

context. Deborah Netolicky claims that Shakespeare's drama 'explores the dualism of two families and two lovers; it is a play of pairs' (Netolicky 2017: 95) very much in the same vein as *Westworld* is built on binaries. The connection, however, can only be found on the level of association, and the passing on of the quote also serves as a metaphor, illustrating the way Shakespeare (and other intertextual references) are used in the context of popular culture. Having lost the original context, the quotation no longer signifies erudition or a high culture status, but becomes functional in a different way, retaining its primary meaning (for example, an increased focus on the word 'violent' in the *Romeo and Juliet* quote in *Westworld*), disregarding its potentially different metaphorical or other senses. At the same time, the quotation gains in function from the use in the new context: when Dolores repeats the line to Maeve, we no longer ponder on its connection to *Romeo and Juliet*, but rather remember that this line signified a disruption in the system, an error message that may have manifested – or initiated – the spread of a viral infection, which is not a Shakespearean concern, but central to the new context of the TV series.

It is also telling how Christi Carras describes the process in *Variety*, making it clear how natural such a process of appropriation is within the context of contemporary popular media: 'Friar Lawrence delivers the line in the source material to Romeo before he weds Juliet, but the *Westworld* writers *repurposed* it with darker undertones to define the show's eerie appeal' (Carras 2018, my emphasis). 'Repurpose' being the operative word, we can detect an absolutely pragmatic attitude, already confirming the previously mentioned practice of textual poaching, where the creators use their literary sources as common property and give them a new purpose, indeed a new function, and consequently a new meaning as well. There is no sign of 'bardolatry' here, nor of the elitist and exclusionary hermeneutics that has come to dominate the interpretation of Shakespeare's work since the late nineteenth century. What we can witness instead is the postmodern practice of playful and disrespectful re-appropriation, resulting in a reassignment of meaning. In this sense, Shakespeare, who was used 'during the colonial period [as] the quintessence of Englishness and a measure of humanity itself' (Loomba and Orkin 1998: 1), has been reassigned to a radically new position.

In *Westworld*, it is only the machine that quotes Shakespeare, since this type of textual knowledge has no longer any relevance or currency in the real world. Precisely by acquiring Shakespeare as a password, the hosts appear to have moved to a new level of (post)human agency, where they are ready to turn against their own masters and creators. To add another level to the self-reflexivity that characterizes the whole show, towards the end of the second season, Dolores uses the same verb to express her resentment at the cruel pretence

of freedom that is the hosts' due. She claims that their backups give them no advantage, they 'are chains, they are tools you use to rebuild us, repurpose us, and trap us here in your warped fantasy' (Kassell 2018). Repurposing something that has been originally created is thus inherently controversial even within the universe of *Westworld*. On the one hand, it is partly seen as a potential business advantage (in the same way as Shakespeare can be used and reused countless times in new forms to new audiences); at the same time, it also functions as an exploitative and repetitive formula that destroys the life it pretends to preserve.

The new function of Shakespeare in *Westworld* becomes clear in the conversation following the diagnostic sessions, when Ford explains to his colleagues that all of these bits and pieces of text belong to the script of an earlier role played by the same host: the Professor. This character liked to quote Shakespeare, John Donne and Gertrude Stein, even though the latter was 'a bit of an anachronism' (Nolan 2016). We thus realize that what we heard was not improvization on the part of the androids but in fact a kind of script, albeit an old and outdated one. This is all the more surprising as the universe of *Westworld* is not a textual culture. The little frontier settlement in the park has no bookshop or library, and neither the guests nor the staff running the park are the bookish kind. We cannot see any bookshelves in the Mesa Hub, the centre of operations; and whenever paper is used, either in the theme park or in the control tower, is for drawing or design, or once for the jotting down of coordinates, but even personal messages are written exclusively on screens. The single book we observe is Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a book that offers at least as many intertextual clues as Shakespeare, but it also appears as spoken dialogue, read out to a sick child, which we observe in flashbacks. Moreover, there is even some uncertainty as regards the authenticity of these scenes, whether they are actual memories or only artificial ones implanted in Bernard's code, to give him a backstory and thus a more rounded character. Later, we see Bernard offering the same book to Dolores, but only to provoke discussion, rather than writing – and eventually we realize that these reading sessions took place in a previous era, and it is not the host Bernard but his 'original', Ford's partner Arnold Weber, who used Carroll's book to challenge Dolores to new levels of individual thought.

It would appear therefore that whenever books are mentioned in *Westworld*, they seem to be metaphorical, as at the time when Ford refers to the burning of the great library of Alexandria, in which 'the first ten thousand years of stories were reduced to ash' (Kassell 2018), and the accumulated wisdom of antiquity was lost. Yet Ford expresses no regrets over such a tragic loss of human knowledge – in fact, he argues that this ending of an era was also a new beginning: 'those stories never really perished, they became a new story: the

story of the fire itself' (Kassell 2018). For him, the library as a material reality is meaningless: in this digital future, placing any trust in perishable material would indeed be anachronistic, even for Ford. He uses the 'library' as a collective word for stories. In the final episode in the second series, however, when the quest of the hosts for the Valley Beyond comes to its end, and they arrive at a place known to the developers as the Forge, this vast storage unit in which all visitors' data are kept appears in the shape of an actual library. And yet, the beautifully bound books arranged on the shelves contain no letters – they are simply a collection of punch cards; a physical, analogue backup of the digital data that is the single most valuable commodity in this world, treasured way beyond human life, let alone the hosts' existence.

Books have thus practically disappeared from *Westworld*, and Shakespeare has also become script – in fact, code – similarly to the other metadata that have been fed into the androids, to give them a more complex personality. Yet script, although not written but spoken, is central to this world in more fundamental ways as well: this is 'a world predicated on the "code-ification" of existence – a post-human predicament where the algorithmic logic of data and the interchangeability of DNA and binary code play a central role' (Palatinus 2017). When Ford talks to Bernard about the strange disintegration of the hosts' code and consciousness, he contemplates the nature of their work with reference to the complexity and magic of witchcraft: 'we speak the right words, and we create life itself out of chaos' (Lewis 2016). The sentence may recall the words of Prospero, who also created his 'insubstantial pageant' out of 'thin air' (*The Tempest* 4.1.155, 150) with the help of words, but in *Westworld*, Ford's statement underscores the contradiction between his emphasis on words, which also invoke text, and the reality of the show, which is built on images and code, that is, numbers. In a way, the age Ford recalls with his phrase is the superstitious world of the pre-literate dark ages. And if we remember that Peter's earlier build, the Professor, was also part of 'a horror narrative called "The Dinner Party"; [where] he was leader of a group of cultists out in the desert who turned cannibal' (Nolan 2016), the fact that he quoted literary authors does not hide the fact that canonical literature has by now undergone a fundamental change. Instead of carrying an educational value, it appears as a threat, as the eerie, anachronistic and out-of-place script of a monstrous figure, coming back to haunt us from the past – and possibly even devour the present.

This phenomenon is not the 'post-textual Shakespeare' that Douglas Lanier describes, where Shakespeare appears in purely visual images that contain 'not a single word from Shakespeare's text […], despite the fact that they depend for their effect on being identified as "Shakespearean"' (Lanier 2011: 145). What we have here is more reminiscent of the 'fridge-magnet culture' of our times,

where words remain, but only as slogans, and not as parts of larger semantic systems. What is more, here it is only the initiate that is able to identify the textual fragments as Shakespearean, the superior intelligence who has created and who controls *Westworld*, that is Ford, who is himself a remnant of an older era. Seeing that Ford is also the cause of the systemic breakdown, and as he is the one who has included Shakespeare in the script of the android now turning self-destructive, Shakespeare himself (or itself) becomes reinscribed as a signifier of the breakdown, a voice from the past functioning as an error message that can only be interpreted because it is no longer comprehensible in the present. But then again, 'according to Ford, there is no substantive difference between' humans and hosts (Devereux and Kosman 2016: 7). Both appear to follow their own repetitive and endless loops, believing in their own freedom, until they begin to wake up from their dreamlike state, and end up questioning 'the nature of [their] own reality' (Nolan 2016), which is both a symptom and a cause of the systemic breakdown that forms the narrative focus of the series.

Yet the evil intent of the originator of this breakdown is partly coloured by nostalgia, which is in fact a central component of the whole enterprise, including the Shakespearean references. The western genre, which was already a nostalgic revisiting of a world forever lost by the time the cinematic genre became popular, is nostalgically evoked in *Westworld* to offer visitors a chance to enter a world where heroism and masculinity can still be found. This nostalgia is further emphasized by the visual atmosphere, plot and characterization, even by the name Ford, which may just as well refer to John Ford, the director of classic westerns, as to industrialist Henry Ford. Among other telling details, the discerning eye may observe that '*Westworld* is filmed in Castle Valley, Utah, where Ford filmed his last four westerns, and it is built upon the foundation of tropes, clichés, and cinematic shorthand that Ford's work popularized' (Bady 2016). Equally nostalgic is the series' inclusion of the Native American tribe referred to as 'Ghost Nation', reminding viewers of the idea haunting the western, what Aaron Bady calls the genre's 'core memory – the genocide and forced removal of the continent's indigenous people' (Bady 2016).

In this nostalgic context, Shakespeare is also invoked by Ford as a remnant of a culture no longer available in the real world. In the same way, the British Raj and feudal Japan in the so-called Shogun World that we encounter in the second season have similarly nostalgic associations. What is more, it is also revealed that the parallel universes of the various locations are in fact copies of each other, and when Maeve and her party of hosts are taken into Shogun World, they are forced to contemplate the similarities and differences between this altered reality and the world they have chosen to abandon. The subjectivity of memory, a key component of nostalgia, thus continues to play a central role

both for the hosts, who are repeatedly thrust back into their earlier existence, even when they were hoping to break free from its confines, and similarly for the guests, who pay a fortune for an experience that can only be found in the nostalgic world of the cinema.

The audience response to the rich intertext of allusions that characterizes *Westworld* is also symptomatic of another layer of contemporary culture: fan reception. On the one hand, the changed materiality of visual products has allowed this new attitude to appear: easy access to digital files or endlessly repeatable viewing experiences make it possible for enthusiasts to rewind and re-watch the episodes as often as they wish, in whatever order they desire, in part or whole, or in brief fragments if necessary. This not only enables but even encourages a thorough research and examination of the most covert references, and as a result, there is again a group of consumers of popular visual culture who take pains to comprehend the nuanced intertextual background of the work, just like the connoisseurs of earlier ages recognized a Shakespeare quotation as a result of their frequent reading experiences or theatre visits. This group of consumers also perfectly exemplifies the active, or even interactive readership that Certeau referred to as poachers more than three decades ago. Active engagement with the work is no longer the prerogative of the author, but neither does the author or creator have control over the interpretation of the text, as behind 'the socio-political mechanisms of the schools, the press, or television that isolate the text […] is hidden […] the silent, transgressive, ironic or poetic activity of readers (or television viewers) who maintain their reserve in private and without the knowledge of the "masters"' (Certeau 1984: 172). Yet, as Henry Jenkins, and his use of the term 'textual poachers' in his study of television fandom and participatory culture, suggests, contemporary fans also make use of 'materials others have characterized as trivial and worthless' (Jenkins 1992: 3). What is more, they respect no boundaries between high or low class authorship when they seek involvement and creative opportunities to shape their cultural surroundings according to their own desires.

Thus the most pressing question that remains for us is what the real function of Shakespeare will be in twenty-first century popular visual culture – will his work be relegated into dusty (or closed and unvisited) libraries? Will his words reappear only to haunt and scare the new generation, for whom script means computer code, rather than a written text to be enjoyed on the page or in a performance? The new tendency to offer graphic novels, manga versions, abridged editions and illustrated Shakespeares instead of the complete text certainly points in this direction. But can the fragmented text 'repurposed' for the sake of a new context ever lead new consumers back to a recognition of the work as a whole? Will the Shakespearean oeuvre be part of our literary

'terraforming' practices in the future – 'creating an Earth-like environment out of one unsympathetic to human needs' (Kerslake 2007: 26)? This and such questions remain – but as long as Shakespeare's appearance does not send humans or androids into a 'deep and dreamless slumber', as the poetic voice command switches hosts off in *Westworld*, there is hope that Shakespeare will not yet disappear from the common cultural code of humanity. What all this depends on is, of course, the even more fundamental hope that the promotional tagline of the series – 'Every hero has a code' – will retain its ambiguity in the future, and that humanity will not completely disappear into code, however tempting the adventure sounds.

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Shakespeare and 'Shakespeare' in Justin Cronin and Emily St John Mandel

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In *Shakespeare and the Apocalypse* (2012), R.M. Christofides discusses the relationship between the playwright, popular culture and the end of the world. He notes an intriguing point of contact between Shakespeare's plays and popular culture today: 'the problem with the apocalypse is that it never actually arrives' (xvii). In this article I investigate a set of novels that not only take as their starting point an apocalypse that turns out not to be one (in the sense that the world does not perish, nor does humanity), but which also draws on and evokes Shakespeare and his works. These novels are Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) and Justin Cronin's Passage trilogy (2010–16).

Both narratives move back and forth between a deep engagement with individual texts, and an invocation of Shakespeare as a symbol of universalism or exceptionalism. Doing so allows the narratives to address and appeal to different audiences: those readers who are interested in Shakespeare and his works and those who are more interested in 'Shakespeare', the term Chris Thurman uses when referring to Shakespeare as a cultural idea rather than the playwright himself or his specific works (2016a: 3). Running the gamut from literary analysis to almost approaching 'Shakespeare as the Coca Cola of canonical culture' (Lanier 2007: 93), Mandel's and Cronin's narratives thus accommodate more than one set of cultural attitudes towards Shakespeare.

The Passage trilogy and *Station Eleven* both tell the story of people surviving a cataclysmic plague that wipes out most of humanity. In Cronin's narrative the plague is caused by a virus which was modified by scientists and the military to create a superior soldier. This turns people into vampire-like creatures, referred to as 'virals', that escape the research facility to attack and kill humans and animals alike. Within a few short years, most of the population of the USA has been killed, and the survivors have to construct a new way of living and interacting. In Mandel's novel, it is a flu virus that threatens humanity, spreading from Georgia to Canada and the rest of North America via air flight. Again, the greater part of the population is wiped out and the survivors are forced to create a new life for themselves.

The time span in the two works is different however. The Passage trilogy takes place from five years before the viral outbreak to the year 1003 A.V. (After the Virus). *Station Eleven*, on the other hand, covers a much shorter period, from three weeks before the outbreak to twenty years afterwards, although there are repeated flashbacks to the youth and earlier life of the Shakespearean

actor, Arthur Leander, and his ex-wives and friends.

The various post-apocalyptic societies presented in the narratives are also different. In the Passage trilogy they constitute various attempts at constructing political and social stability, with a heavy reliance on mechanics, oil production, weapons and military force. In *Station Eleven* there are some references to farming communities developing, but the focus is on a theatre company and orchestra, the Travelling Symphony. However, societies in both novels struggle with loss of cultural memory and, in particular, how to pass knowledge of the old world on to the children. In *The Passage* (2010), for children in a community called First Colony there is no difference between a novel about 'talking animals who lived in a forest behind the doors of a closet' and a non-fiction book about oceans (Cronin 2010: 270). In *Station Eleven*, children are shown maps of the world and are told about electricity, aeroplanes, laptops, but they are unable to envisage what the old world would have been like (Mandel 2014: 262). One character tries to combat the loss of knowledge by setting up a kind of museum at an airport where a community has settled. In this museum, artefacts such as mobile phones, high-heeled shoes, credit cards and iPads are displayed.

Engaging with Shakespeare

Shakespeare's works may appear in narratives in many different forms, sometimes without even being recognised as such. In her study of what she terms 'the ghost meme' in US television, Kristin Denslow suggests that references to his works may be 'subtle' and 'unacknowledged', perhaps even so subtle that the author herself is unaware (Denslow 2017: 98). Indeed, it has been posited that Shakespeare may influence texts 'without their author's or authors' knowledge or consent' (Conkie 2009: 550). As a reader, one may wonder whether the reference is even there.

In *The Passage*, the character Jonas Lear appears out of the pandemonium of the virals' first attack, 'his hair was a dark corona, wild and beautiful', lifting up an injured woman, 'cradling her like a child', while 'he was weeping' (Cronin 2010: 698–99). Using what Denslow calls 'forced reading', a 'desire to make [a text] count as Shakespeare' (Denslow 2017: 98), it is possible to interpret the scene as a reference to King Lear, wearing his wreath of flowers, carrying the dead Cordelia. Such a reading is supported by the revelation in the third novel, *The City of Mirrors* (2016), that Jonas is indeed somehow connected to 'Shakespeare's mad king' and not to Learjet as one character assumed (Cronin 2016: 121). Mandel's references can also sometimes be covert. In *Station Eleven*, the narrator notes that one character habitually refers to a period when he had to work with an incompetent PA as 'The winter of our discontent' (Mandel 2014: 80). No further explanation is given, and there is nothing to suggest that

the reader is expected to find similarities between the character and Richard III, or anything else in the novel and Shakespeare's play.

Textual Engagement

In the main, however, both the trilogy and *Station Eleven* reference Shakespeare and his works in a much more direct manner, on two different levels: on the one hand, an involvement at a textual, analytical level, and on the other hand, through references to a generalised, unspecified, yet complex Shakespeare as 'universally accessible' (Distiller 2014: 33).

Cronin's main engagement with Shakespeare is through the epigraph. In *Paratext* (1997), Gerard Genette defines paratexts, of which the epigraph is an example, as those features surrounding the texts, such as 'an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations' (Genette 1997b: 1), which may function as a 'fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's reading of the text' (2). There are twelve epigraphs in *The Passage*, one at the novel's opening, and then one at the beginning of each of the eleven numbered sections. Of these twelve epigraphs, seven are from works of Shakespeare: Sonnets 64 and 104, *King Lear*, *Henry IV Part II*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*. The longest epigraph is the first which consists of all of Sonnet 64 apart from the final couplet. This sonnet, with its list of natural and man-made objects that are destroyed by entropy, may prepare the reader for a story of loss of love and the end of civilization, if the reader chooses to engage with the epigraph. For, as Genette points out, the epigraph is 'a mute gesture whose interpretation is left up to the reader' (156). So only the reader who is prepared to put in the work will reap the potential benefit. It should be noted, however, that the sonnet speaks of the decay that inevitably follows time, whereas what happens in the novel is the result of one human trying to stop time, death and decay.

In some of the epigraphs, Cronin employs a one-to-one relationship between epigraph and text although, as Genette notes, the meaning of an epigraph is often obscure and its 'significance not clear or confirmed until the whole book is read' (158). It is only after having read the section that the reader can see this relationship. One such instance is the epigraph to section VI. This is taken from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1.1.144–49):

> Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
> Brief as the lightning in the collied night;
> That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and Earth,
> And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold!'
> The jaws of darkness do devour it up.
> So quick bright things come to confusion.

These lines are spoken by Lysander to Hermia, outlining the many things that may destroy love, but this context is not given. Instead, in connection with the six chapters of section VI, the words take on a different meaning. The section is set in First Colony, nintey-two years after the viral outbreak. This community lives successfully behind high walls, in perpetual light. Since the virals are repelled by light, the community uses floodlights at night to keep them away. But this night, the lights fail so that the colonists find themselves 'in the collied night'. They are attacked by virals, who are indeed 'Swift as a shadow' and, since they are exceedingly fast, the attack is 'short as any dream': before the colonists even understand what is going on, the virals are everywhere, killing and eating/drinking the people, so that 'The jaws of darkness do devour' them. The colonists are left wondering what happened and how, so that 'bright things come to confusion'. In this way, Cronin invites the reader to return to the epigraph after reading the section, and reinterpret Shakespeare's words, giving them new meaning. What has been Lysander's description of the obstacles that threaten true love becomes the illustration of the destruction of a community.

Some epigraphs invite a more complex interpretation, such as the one for section IX, lines 118–19 from Act 2, Scene 4 of *Twelfth Night*: 'I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too'. These lines end a speech in which Viola alludes to her love for Orsino. In the play, Viola hides her true identity, only revealing it quite late. Another type of disclosure is made by the character Alicia Donadio, an inhabitant of First Colony. She has set out with a group that survived the attack, in an attempt to destroy the virals once and for all. They encounter a military patrol, part of the Expeditionary Force, which is the only army that remains after the outbreak. When she meets the commander, she reveals that her adopted father, known in First Colony only as the Colonel, was the legendary Niles Coffee, and that through him she is 'Private Alicia Donadio, First Expeditionary. Baptized and sworn' (Cronin 2010: 644). This is a part of her identity she has kept hidden. The Expeditionary does not allow female soldiers, but when it becomes clear that Alicia was sworn in as a child, she is accepted and the soldiers refer to her as 'The Last Expeditionary' (652). In this way, she is not only her (adopted) father's only daughter but she is also a brother-in-arms – the only one of her father's house.

Unlike the epigraph from the *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the context of this epigraph matters. The preceding lines are Viola talking about unspoken love, which is a recurring theme throughout Cronin's trilogy and which comes to the fore in this section. It is intimated that Alicia is in love with another member of the team, Peter, but for him, love and family 'simply did not seem possible' (301). However, when it is clear that Alicia is leaving the party to join the Expeditionary, he feels the loss as that of a missing limb: 'turning his thoughts to the place

where Alicia should be. It wasn't the kind of thing he thought he could ever really get used to' (652). The epigraph thus succinctly sums up Alicia's complex identity, the changes that take place, and the loss of a love that could have been, but remains unspoken and thus unacknowledged throughout the novels. Not all of Cronin's chosen epigraphs seem as apt as these, but many present the opportunity to let epigraph and novel enrich each other and engender a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's text and characters as well as events in the novel.

Unlike Cronin, Mandel engages more directly with Shakespeare throughout the novel. It begins with a performance of *King Lear* in a Toronto theatre, where Arthur Leander dies while performing in Act 4, Scene 6. This performance of *Lear*, and Leander's death, is returned to at the end of the novel in chapter 53, and this particular scene is also rehearsed by the Traveling Symphony twenty years later. As Philip Smith has noted, the lines Leander speaks as he collapses are directly preceded by Gloucester's lines, 'O ruin'd piece of nature! This great world / Shall so wear out to naught' (4.6.135–36), presaging the collapse of the old world (Smith 2016: 289).

However, whereas Smith reads the play as a comment on the novel, here I wish to focus on the way Mandel uses the novel as an opportunity to discuss various aspects of the play, including scenography as well as the meaning of the play and issues of performance. In one of the scenes returning to the fateful performance, Leander, talking to his ex-wife Miranda, discusses how he is working with a 'Shakespearean scholar' who on the one hand possesses 'an impressive pool of knowledge' but who on the other 'is supportive of my vision for the part' (Mandel 2014: 209). Although Miranda reacts to Leander's pretension, its inclusion suggests an ongoing process of negotiation between text and performance, where actor and academic work together. Mandel further addresses traditions of performance and cultural appropriation by commenting that the actor playing Edgar has 'dropped the British accent he'd been using earlier' and reverted to his own Alabama accent (4). This could be seen as a reference to what Chris Thurman, analysing Al Pacino's 1996 documentary film *Looking for Richard*, refers to as 'the sense of inferiority that burdens American actors wishing to perform Shakespeare' (Thurman 2016b: 86). Thus, through a number of brief references and observations, Mandel comments on performance and stagecraft, on traditions of interpretation.

Mandel also uses the play to give depth to the character of Leander. Towards the end of the novel, the text again returns to his last performance. In the run-up to it, Leander makes decisions about the distribution of his wealth, and feels an 'unexpected peace. He would jettison everything that could possibly be thrown overboard […] and in this casting off he'd be a lighter man' (Mandel 2014: 323).

This echoes Lear's decision to divide the kingdom in order 'To shake all cares and business from our age' so that he can 'Unburdened crawl toward death' (1.1.38, 40). Whether Lear actually intends to retire and give up his kingship and authority has been the subject of much debate, but Leander does indeed crawl toward death, although not unburdened. As he runs through his lines one last time in the dressing room, he longs for his estranged son. Before the beginning of the performance proper, Lear is supposed to sit on a balcony on stage, in full view of the audience arriving, a 'tired king at the end of his reign, perhaps not as sharp as he had been, contemplating a disastrous division of his kingdom' (Mandel 2014: 326). On his last night, Leander reflects on the mistakes he has made, finding that 'he was a man who repented almost everything, regrets crowding in around him like moths to a light' (327). Thus, Mandel uses the performance of *King Lear* to discuss acting and interpretation, as well as allowing the characters Leander and Lear to inform each other mutually, giving the reader the opportunity to view both in a different light.

Cultural Engagement: Referencing 'Shakespeare'

In addition to the epigraphs, there are a few brief references to Shakespeare's works scattered throughout *The Passage* and *The City of Mirrors.* Some are used as a kind of shorthand to give information about a character. For example, in *The Passage*, it is mentioned that Jonas's wife Elizabeth, whose illness and death prompt him to carry out the research that leads to the death of millions and the collapse of American society, sits reading 'her beloved Shakespeare in the sunshine' (Cronin 2010: 19). This phrase uses Shakespeare as a 'mystical icon of value' (Lanier 2014: 31), making it clear that not only is Elizabeth an educated and cultured woman who knows the texts, but also that she has a personal, emotional involvement with the author. It is not specified what works she might be reading since that is not important here. To further delineate her character, it is noted in her obituary that she was a Professor of English and the author of '*Shakespeare's Monsters: Bestial Transformation and the Early Modern Moment*' (Cronin 2010: 87). There is, of course, dramatic irony in that she should write a book about 'bestial transformation', even in some sense being the indirect cause via Jonas's undying love for her.

In *The City of Mirrors*, references to Shakespeare's plays are also used to illustrate social inclusion and exclusion. Tim Fanning, a colleague of Lear's, is in this novel revealed as the main antagonist, the first viral from whom all others have descended. In a flashback to 1989, when Fanning has just started college, it is shown that he only has a rudimentary knowledge of Shakespeare via a 'dutiful slog through' *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet*, presumably in school (Cronin 2016: 126). This lack of cultural capital reinforces his feelings of

inferiority in relation to Lear and his fiancée Elizabeth, with whom Fanning falls in love. At Fanning's and Elizabeth's first meeting, Lear describes her as 'the Shakespeare channel' and she makes it clear that if Fanning wants to be part of her circle, he has to 'bone up' (126).

In 122 A.V., Fanning has done just that, having spent years reading and re-interpreting Shakespeare, particularly *Hamlet*. Since Elizabeth died over a century ago and is not available to be impressed, he uses his knowledge to play mind games with the now viral Alicia Donadio. The lines Fanning reads out, about the potential infernal origin of the Ghost and his own intention to use a play to trap Claudius, make no sense to her. She is made uncomfortable by his behaviour, and he appears to take pleasure in her incomprehension, being 'almost smug' (218). The reason these particular lines from *Hamlet* are quoted in this scene is not self-evident, and perhaps that is the intention: Shakespeare's play is not something that unites here but divides and excludes.

Later on, another viral, the mentally challenged Anthony Carter, thinks back to his schooldays, when 'they'd read a book by Mr. William Shakespeare' (263). The play they read was *Hamlet*, but Carter could not understand it because the words 'were like something chopped up in a blender' (263). As with the young Fanning, Shakespeare excludes rather than includes Carter. He only makes sense of the play when the teacher shows the class a dramatization of it. What remains with him is the manner of the old king's murder. The virals are telepathically connected, and Carter hears their voices whispering, which feels 'Like poison poured in his ear' (263). For Carter then, *Hamlet* becomes a way of articulating not only an exclusion from one society but also an inclusion in another, a society he does not wish to belong to. Fanning, by contrast, has some kind of connection to the play, although it is unclear what: 'Like may not be the word' (218) but neither of them has the relationship that Elizabeth has to her 'beloved Shakespeare' (Cronin 2010: 19). Fanning and Carter are excluded both from Shakespeare as well as 'Shakespeare'. The narrative thus draws on an understanding of Shakespeare as carrier of an intrinsic value in order to demonstrate the characters' social exclusion.

In *Station Eleven*, Mandel references Shakespeare the most in the sections about the Travelling Symphony. This company is an amalgam of the remainder of a military orchestra, led by 'the conductor', and a theatrical company, 'Gil's company of Shakespearean actors' (Mandel 2014: 37). Their introduction demonstrates the imbalanced dichotomy set up by the story. Shakespearean actors have names whereas the musicians, excepting a few instances, are known by the instruments they play, so that a child is referred to as 'the daughter of the tuba and an actress named Lin' (37). Indeed, the conductor appears to be nameless, referring to herself only as the conductor: 'It's the only name

I use' (63). The same applies to the different activities carried out within the Travelling Symphony. It is always made very clear that what the actors perform is Shakespeare whereas what the orchestra plays is referred to as music, or occasionally a type of music: 'The Symphony performed music – classical, jazz, orchestral arrangements of pre-collapse pop songs – and Shakespeare' (37). The most specific the narrative ever becomes is when the character Kirsten Raymonde states that the orchestra will be performing 'A Beethoven symphony. I'm not sure which one' (268), and when one character hums 'a Brandenburg concerto' (331). There are nine Beethoven symphonies and six Brandenburg concertos, but neither Kirsten nor the narrator is interested in the specifics. In the world of the novel, there is music and there is Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's universalism is demonstrated by how accessible the plays are to everyone. In this post-collapse world, where memories and knowledge are disappearing quickly, everybody understands and appreciates the plays. In the only performance actually shown to the reader, the audience gives a standing ovation and a 'man in the front row had tears in his eyes' (59). These people, who find it difficult to make sense of signs, texts and symbols from the old world, for whom the 'golden arches of McDonald's are empty signifiers' (Thurman 2015: 57) and for whom a Wendy's is a place to live rather than a fast-food restaurant (Mandel 2014: 50), have no trouble following the Shakespearean dialogue of this comedy. Because Shakespeare's works transcend limitations such as language and culture, they work everywhere and with everyone. Thus, although the company originally set out with a broader repertoire, they find that 'audiences seem to prefer Shakespeare to their other theatrical offerings' (38). This is not only because the plays speak to them, but because of Shakespeare's exceptionalism: they 'want what was best about the [old] world' and that is Shakespeare (38).

Yet, the 'Shakespeare' that the Travelling Symphony perform and represent is rather unspecific. Apart from a few lines of *King Lear* during rehearsal, the only performance shown is that of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and only one scene, Act 2, Scene 1. Smith regards the inclusion of the play as one of a number of 'signs of rebirth' (Smith 2016: 294), but the way the lines are delivered in rehearsal is to frame bantering between the two actors who used to be lovers, which leads to 'Audible snickering from the sidelines' (Mandel 2014: 45). When the scene is played to an audience, the lines punctuate a lecture by the narrator on the life and times of Shakespeare, of plague and death, suggesting a connection between the post-collapse world and Shakespeare's: 'death flickering over the landscape' (57). The specific lines have no bearing on what is going on, apart from the one word 'contagious'. The actors could have performed any other play by Shakespeare or by some other playwright from a

period of plague.

In the rest of the sections about the Travelling Symphony, there is a lot of what might be termed namedropping of plays, for example in a list of what the company has done over the last two years: 'Performance of *Hamlet* and *Lear* in the town Hall, which had previously been a high-school gymnasium, *The Winter's Tale*, *Romeo and Juliet*, the musicians performing almost every night, then *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* when the weather grew warmer' (52). Yet there is no further actual engagement with the texts. These particular plays do not signify anything other than that they are examples of 'Shakespeare', or are members of what Gary Taylor refers to as 'the dozen plays with name recognition' (Taylor 1999: 200).

Within the novel, Mandel thus approaches Shakespeare's works from two different angles. In the sections on Leander, the plays are subject to adaptations, to changes, to stagecraft. In the sections on the Travelling Symphony, there are no discussions of interpretation. There is a brief reference to a suggestion from some of the actors that 'Shakespeare would be more relatable' if performed in everyday clothes (Mandel 2014: 151) but this is rejected by the other actors. After all, the narrative suggests, 'Shakespeare' is universal and thus always relatable.

Shakespeare, Genre and Reading Instructions: Framing the Narrative

Having analyzed the ways in which Shakespeare's works are employed to produce various effects in Cronin's and Mandel's novels, it is also fruitful to ponder why the authors have chosen specifically to engage with Shakespeare. Cronin has given no explanation for the use of Shakespeare: the origin story of the trilogy is that his daughter requested a story which would be 'interesting' and include a character with red hair (Cain 2016), or alternatively, she asked for a 'book about a girl who saves the world […] And vampires' (Richman 2010). Mandel has stated that she wanted to write a novel that shows 'the importance of art in our lives' (Charles 2014). Neither intention requires Shakespeare to be involved. Yet, both authors invoke him.

One reason might lie in the 'generic contract' both novels aim to set up (Genette 1997a: 3). In their US editions, both *Station Eleven* and *The Passage* are labelled as 'A Novel' on the title page, a categorization Genette argues is 'of a purely taxonomic nature' (4). However, it can also be construed as an attempt at controlling the audience's classification of the novels. The paratext, after all, hinges 'on the postulate that the author "knows best" what we should think of his work' (Genette 1997b: 408). Yet, at the same time, 'determining the generic status of the text […] is the business […] of the reader, or the critic, or the public' (Genette 1997a: 4). *The Passage* for example, which was subject to a bidding

war even before it was completed, was sold as a vampire novel, and reviewers have called it a 'vampire fantasy' (Fisher 2010) or 'vampy doorstopper' (Richman 2010). The novels are also regarded by reviewers and critics as a departure from Cronin's usual writing. One reviewer notes that he has been 'until now a writer of literary novels' (Richman 2010). Another stresses that Cronin is an English professor (Charles 2010). The implication is that the Passage trilogy is not as respectable as Cronin's previous novels.

Mandel, on the other hand, struggles with what she regards as the mislabelling of all her writing. She 'never thought she was writing anything but literary fiction' but has found that audiences have received her three previous novels as crime fiction (Charles 2014). With *Station Eleven* she wanted to do something different, only to find that 'if you write literary fiction that's partly set in the future, you're apparently a sci-fi writer' (Charles 2014). As Genette has stated, the allocation to genre 'is known to guide and determine to a considerable degree the readers' expectations, and thus their reception of the work' (Genette 1997a: 5). A tension appears in the language used in the reviews and interviews, which suggests that genre fiction is less valuable than literary fiction, and that both authors have produced works that may be interesting but are not quite literary enough – Mike Peed, for example, suggests in his review of *The Passage* that Cronin has 'slough[ed] off highbrow pretentions' in order to 'write something with a commercial appeal' (Peed 2010).

This tension can arguably be found in the novels themselves, reading them as attempts at creating a kind of literary legitimacy. As Genette claims, the 'generic […] markings *commit* the author', forcing her or him to comply with genre expectations in order to be understood (430), but they are also a way of directing and influencing the reader. By referring to the text as 'a novel', the reader is guided towards a different generic expectation than if it says, for example, 'a novel of horror' or a 'a novel of suspense'. Other paratextual generic markers are the epigraphs and the lists of dramatis personae that Cronin uses as well as Mandel's choice of epigraph, a poem by the Polish-Lithuanian poet Czeslaw Milosz.

Mandel's sense of being mislabelled and Cronin's knowledge that vampires are firmly linked to popular culture may thus explain their choice to include Shakespeare and 'Shakespeare' in the novels as a legitimizing strategy. Genette has suggested that Shakespeare's texts have been used as epigraphs more often than anyone else's in the world, and that is certainly true in Cronin's case. In the three novels, he uses forty-two epigraphs from twenty-four authors, and of those epigraphs, sixteen, or 38%, are from Shakespeare. Although I have argued that the Shakespearean texts perform an important function, the question is whether Cronin could not have found sixteen other equally apt texts. Therefore,

there is reason to wonder whether it is not the case that they also fulfil one of the functions Genette identifies, where what is important is not what is said, but who says it: 'the important thing is simply the name of the author quoted' (Genette 1997b: 159). When Cronin writes about vampires and cataclysmic upheavals set in the future, he wishes to make sure that the audience understands that these are not run-of-the-mill horror stories but sophisticated ruminations on the plight of humanity. To quote Genette again: 'The epigraph in itself is a signal […] of culture, a password of intellectuality' (160). To quote Shakespeare is to make doubly sure that culture and intellectuality is evident. He becomes, as Brandon Christopher has argued, a 'signifier of a particularly literary standard of authorial achievement' (Christopher 2017: 158). Similarly, in *Station Eleven*, it could be argued that Mandel uses 'Shakespeare not as the author of specific works, but rather as a representative of a particular form of cultural capital' (157), in an attempt to guide the readers' perception of the novel. This is particularly evident in the sections concerning the Travelling Symphony, where Mandel engages not so much with Shakespeare, as with the idea of 'Shakespeare'.

Conclusion

In his 2007 discussion of the use of Shakespeare in popular fiction, Donald Lanier argues that the 'Shakespeare trademark' has become 'popular culture's favorite sign of high culture' (Lanier 2007: 95). This is borne out, up to a point, by Mandel's and Cronin's novels. Yet, if we are to regard Cronin and Mandel as popular culture, they are certainly not writing in a 'self-ironized mode of cultural connoisseurship' (97). Although Shakespeare and 'Shakespeare' may be invoked partly in an attempt to control reader reception, drawing on the idea of Shakespeare as a self-evidently universal and exceptional guarantor of high quality, both authors appear to write from a belief in the 'exclusivity, learnedness [and] quality long attached to the Shakespeare trademark' (97). Or, put more simply, both authors seem to genuinely like the texts they are referencing. Approaching Shakespeare and his works as something of transcendental value, something that will survive an (almost) apocalypse, Cronin and Mandel have written narratives that navigate within a complex web of genre expectations, author expectations and audience expectations, creating stories that have the potential to appeal to more than one demographic.

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‘The undiscovered country’: Shakespeare, *Star Trek* and Intertextual Narratives in *Station Eleven*

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Emily St John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* (2014) weaves together multiple timelines to show life before and after a super-virus causes the cataclysmic collapse of twenty-first century society. One of these timelines imagines the explorations of the Travelling Symphony, a group of Shakespearean actors and musicians moving between small settlements some ‘twenty years after the end of air travel’ (Mandel 2014: 35), one of the many technologies that the super-virus brought to an end. The narrative follows Kirsten, a young actress who travels and performs with the troupe. The Travelling Symphony’s motto and rationale is a repurposed *Star Trek* quotation, emblazoned on the side of a horse-drawn caravan: ‘Because survival is insufficient’ (58). Their artistic productions and their very existence are acts of defiance in the face of the world’s seeming destruction.

Both the Travelling Symphony and the narration of *Station Eleven* assert Shakespeare’s exceptionalism and relevance in a post-apocalyptic world. The repeated parallels drawn between Elizabethan theatre and the Travelling Symphony’s artistic pursuits emphasize a new-found appreciation for Shakespeare that is only possible in a return to the darkness of a world without electricity, coupled with the tantalizing possibility of the dawn of a new modernity. Through their supposed lineage to Shakespeare, the Travelling Symphony believes that they are preserving a culturally significant part of the pre-plague world.

However, while the Travelling Symphony imagines themselves as a troupe of Elizabethan actors, they have more in common with a Starfleet crew. Although the Travelling Symphony’s narrative ties them to the past, framing them in terms of *Star Trek* illustrates how their artistic endeavours are not a reconstruction of that past but an exploration of a better future. Further, *Star Trek*’s own use of Shakespeare provides a model for understanding how Shakespeare’s works function within *Station Eleven* as a forward-looking vehicle that can be imbued with new meaning. While the Travelling Symphony’s artistic project is complicated by the long and complex cultural history that surrounds Shakespeare and Shakespearean exceptionalism, *Star Trek* offers an opportunity to imagine Shakespeare as a pathway to a new world.

In order to demonstrate this central argument, I will first consider how the Travelling Symphony define themselves as the artistic descendants of Shakespeare, and as a result, how they align themselves and their artistic projects with pre-industrial Elizabethan society. Second, I will illustrate that

despite what the members of the Travelling Symphony profess, Shakespeare's works are not a universal force, and the Travelling Symphony's Shakespearean performances cannot transcend cultural, historical and temporal limitations. Instead, the Travelling Symphony's productions are mitigated by twenty-first century understandings of Shakespeare and are inherently and inextricably grounded in the material realities of their post-apocalyptic world. Finally, through the decentring of the Travelling Symphony's Shakespeare narrative, another intertextual parallel emerges. By tracing explicit and implicit *Star Trek* references throughout *Station Eleven*, it becomes clear that whether or not the Travelling Symphony recognizes it, their theatrical and exploratory nature links them not to the past but to the future. The Travelling Symphony is on a mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, and to boldly go where no one has gone before.

'What Was Best About the World': Shakespeare and the Apocalypse

While *Station Eleven* dramatizes both pre- and post-apocalyptic performances of Shakespeare, the performers of the Travelling Symphony specifically align themselves with Shakespeare and the Elizabethan stage. Initially, the Travelling Symphony performed a variety of plays but found that 'audiences seemed to prefer Shakespeare to their other theatrical offerings' (38). Dieter, Kirsten's mentor and fellow actor, suggests audiences prefer Shakespeare because 'People want what was best about the world' (38). Dieter's words echo Ben Jonson's eulogy for Shakespeare: 'He was not for an age, but for all time!' (Jonson 1623: A4v). This supposed universality and virtuosity is what gives Shakespeare's plays their appeal and acclaim. In Dieter's mind, not only is Shakespeare the best writer in the world, but he's the best *about* the world, a cherished emblem of the beloved society that was lost to plague.

However, Dieter is not content to argue that Shakespeare is for all times. Instead, he posits that Shakespeare wrote specifically for times of plague, and as a result, the Travelling Symphony and the other survivors share a connection with Shakespeare's writing. Dieter tells Kirsten about 'Shakespeare's plague-haunted life' (Mandel 2014: 308), claiming that he was defined by living 'in a plague-ridden society with no electricity' (288). Dieter imagines that the people of their own plague-torn world are closer to Shakespeare than anyone since the Industrial Revolution; the plague disrupts any linear narrative of progress and technology, returning the Travelling Symphony and their audiences to the past. Shakespeare's plays, as relics of the pre-electric past, allow actors and audience to commiserate, remember and memorialize.

This viewpoint is not exclusive to Dieter, and even the narrative form of *Station Eleven* reinforces Dieter's views on Shakespeare. When Kirsten

performs as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, her experience on stage is interlaced with biographical details about Shakespeare's life, which emphasize the impact of disease and plague:

> 'Then I must be thy lady.' Lines of a play written in 1594, the year London's theatres reopened after two seasons of plague. Or written possibly a year later, in 1595, a year before the death of Shakespeare's only son. Some centuries later on a distant continent, Kirsten moves across the stage […] Shakespeare was the third born to his parents, but the first to survive infancy. Four of his siblings died young. His son, Hamnet, died at eleven and left behind a twin. Plague closed the theatres again and again, death flickering over the landscape. And now, in a twilight once more lit by candles, the age of electricity having come and gone, Titania turns to face her fairy king. (57)

Kirsten would not be intimately acquainted with the number of siblings or children that Shakespeare would have, and these biographical interjections should not be understood as her internal monologue. This rapid listing of deaths, a regurgitation of select biographical material, accentuates the toll that plague had taken on both Shakespeare's personal life and work. In some ways, the narration seems to distance the Travelling Symphony from Shakespeare by highlighting the uncertain year that Shakespeare wrote the play or noting the 'centuries' or 'continents' between these events; yet, at the same time, this distancing is deceptive, as the interwoven lines seek to eliminate the temporal and spatial distance between playwright and player. In fact, it seems Shakespeare and Kirsten momentarily co-exist since the entirety of the passage occurs between a line of dialogue and the ensuing blocking. Despite temporal indicators, it becomes difficult to tell where Shakespeare's story ends and where Kirsten's begins. The spectre of death could refer to Shakespeare's England just as easily as to the opening to *Station Eleven*, when a contemporary performance of *King Lear* coincides with the initial outbreak of the super-virus. Time is configured as a cycle and through it all, through the deaths of Shakespeare, his siblings, his children and so many others, his characters survive. Titania is embodied still, in the present tense, as the past comes alive once again through Kirsten's performance.

In a 2014 interview about the novel, Mandel espouses a similar view about Shakespeare's exceptionalism: 'It seems to me that in a post-apocalyptic scenario, people would want what was best about our lost world, and in my entirely subjective opinion, what was best about our world would include the plays of William Shakespeare' (McCarry 2014). Perhaps it is not surprising that Mandel is fond of Shakespeare; many of her characters in *Station Eleven*, even characters unaffiliated with the Travelling Symphony bear the names of his

characters: Miranda, Olivia, Viola, Arthur. Shakespeare is part of the fabric of the novel. Mandel identifies her affinity for Shakespeare as 'entirely subjective' but she imbues a majority of her characters, including the survivors scattered across a multitude of small towns and settlements, with a love of Shakespeare. The one major exception, a viola player identified solely as 'the Viola', is the subject of playful ridicule for her belief that the Travelling Symphony should perform anything else. Mandel continues:

> There are also a couple of natural parallels between my post-pandemic world and the time in which Shakespeare lived: in Elizabethan England, theater was often a matter of small companies traveling from town to town, and it was pleasing to think of a world in which a traveling company might once again set out onto the road, performing by candlelight in small towns. Also, it seems to me that the citizenry of Elizabethan England would have been haunted by the memory of pandemics in the recent past. The plague swept over England again and again in those years, and it brushed close against Shakespeare's life. Three of his siblings and his only son were probable plague victims. (McCarry 2014)

There are several ways that Mandel's interview directly parallels the quoted passage from *Station Eleven*: the cyclical 'again and again', the personal connections between Shakespeare and the plague, and the 'natural parallels between' the Travelling Symphony and Elizabethan performers. The narration of *Station Eleven* resonates with Mandel's interview, emphasizing how Shakespeare's exceptional writing erases the temporal and spatial barriers between Elizabethan England and her post-apocalyptic USA.

Playhouses and Parking Lots: Elizabethan and Post-Apocalyptic Shakespearean Performance

While Jonson's eulogy might reverberate through the centuries, Shakespeare's imagined universalism is an invention of our society. As Stephen Greenblatt has argued, it is necessary to 'acknowledge that [Shakespeare's] art is the product of peculiar historical circumstances and specific conventions, four centuries distant from our own' (Greenblatt 2000: 1). There is no doubt that Shakespeare's exceptionalism is a cultural phenomenon but it is not inherent in Shakespeare or his writing. If we, across time and space, see ourselves reflected in Shakespeare, then ultimately that does not help us learn about Shakespeare so much as about ourselves. *Station Eleven*, in many ways, is inflected with these twentieth- and twenty-first century notions about Shakespeare and his canon.

David Bevington observes that 'modern Shakespeare in production is excitingly closer to that of Shakespeare's own theatre than was the theatre

world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Or so, at any rate, we like to think, in our desire to make him one of our own' (Bevington 2009: 2). Similarly, Dieter's rhetoric about Shakespeare's art being defined by plague follows a similar impulse: to make Shakespeare one of *his* own. Instead of creating an extraordinary connection between the Travelling Symphony and Shakespeare, Dieter places the Travelling Symphony in a long tradition of people who believe that Shakespeare speaks to or for them specifically.

Bevington's research on Elizabethan production can help to draw comparisons between Shakespeare's original performances and those of the Travelling Symphony. While there were still troupes of travelling players who performed their plays in each small town and village, the beginning of Shakespeare's career coincided with the surge in commercial theatre spaces in the area surrounding the city of London: 'England's premier acting company in the 1580s, the Queen's Men, learned to their cost that touring the provinces with a few big plays was no longer the way to succeed as a business; they quickly lost out in the 1590s to new actor groups who performed in fixed theatrical locations in London and who necessarily required a sizable repertory of new plays' (Bevington 2009: 12). Performing within these designated spaces directly outside of London's official boundaries allowed companies to avoid 'governmental restrictions' (12) while still having access to the city's large audiences. These public theatres flourished and multiplied on the borders of London until the theatres were closed in 1642 at the beginning of the English Civil War. Public theatres, including the famous Globe Theatre where many of Shakespeare's plays were first performed, often consisted of raised thrust stages with standing room for the audience to encircle three sides of the stage. The scenery would not change between shows, although some stages had features that allowed for varied action on stage: a columned canopy, a balcony, or a hidden trapdoor. These public theatres were open-air, and actors performed shows during the afternoon by the natural light of the sun.

Public theatres were not the only model of early modern performance. Some of Shakespeare's plays were performed in more exclusive indoor venues, including the Blackfriars Theatre, the Inns of Court or aristocratic private residences. These ornate spaces allowed for intimate evening performances, adorned with chandeliers that would have lit actors and audience alike. Most companies also brought plays to locales outside of the London metropolitan area, both in England and abroad, although in the years leading up to the closing of the theatres in 1642, 'some of the London companies hardly travelled at all' (Gurr 1996: 40). Andrew Gurr notes that in the century before Shakespeare's career, travelling players moved from outdoor marketplaces to indoor locations: 'An indoor venue had the distinct advantage for players of giving them better

control over their audiences and their purses than an open market-place. To a great extent the switch from open places to guildhalls and inns in the lesser cities around England anticipated London's more gradual shift from amphitheatres to roofed hall-theatres' (40). In addition to guildhalls and inns, Siobhan Keenan adds 'town halls and churches [and] large country houses' (Keenan 2002: 1) to the list of makeshift performance venues for early modern players and audiences. Both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* feature a play-within-a-play wherein a group of players performs within a palatial private residence.

Early modern audiences were not quiet spectators. In public theatres like the Globe, 'groundlings' stood in a crowd around three sides of the stage, their heads at the same level as the actors' feet. Groundlings were notoriously boisterous, known for laughing, jeering, making faces and cajoling the actors on stage. The name for these unruly spectators comes from none other than Hamlet himself, who quips that 'Groundlings: who (for the most part) are capeable of / nothing, but inexplicable dumbe shewes, & noise' (Shakespeare 1623: 3.2.1859-60). But even in the refined spaces of Theseus's palace in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Elsinore Castle in *Hamlet*, the spectators speak to each other and call out to the actors on the stage.

In contrast, the Travelling Symphony's audience sits silently in rows that face the stage and, when the play ends, they give a standing ovation. The actors have a sewn backdrop behind them that is particular to the play that they are performing, 'grimy now from years of travel, painted with a forest scene' (Mandel 2014: 55). The play occurs outdoors at twilight, with the actors lit by candles that substitute for electrical lights. Whereas early modern English acting companies were exclusively men, with boys playing the roles of women, the Travelling Symphony (partially from modern custom, partially from necessity) is a mixed company of male and female actors. Despite the Travelling Symphony's attempts to emulate early modern Shakespearean performance, they are still performing in the shadow of their own pre-plague world. After all, they are staging Shakespeare in a Walmart parking lot.

Considering the use of costumes in the Travelling Symphony's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is perhaps the best way to illustrate how their performances are grounded in contemporary theatrical practices as well as the material reality of the post-apocalyptic future. Their fairies wear cocktail dresses with Oberon and Titania in a tuxedo and wedding dress, items left behind when they no longer had practical use in a post-apocalyptic world. Although a few of the actors think 'Shakespeare would be more relatable if they dressed in the same patched and faded clothing as their audience wore', Kirsten considers 'it meant something to see Titania in a gown, Hamlet in a shirt in tie' (151). While neither Kirsten nor the narration elaborates the precise sentiment that the costumes

are meant to achieve, it appears that the physical presence of obsolete clothing is rendered symbolic on the stage, tying Shakespeare's characters not to the sixteenth century but to a fantasy of pre-plague American life. Shakespeare's plays act as a vehicle for the Travelling Symphony's audience to remember the past – but not Shakespeare's. These plays remind them of their own past lives before the plague.

Similarly, the Travelling Symphony's access to Shakespeare's words is inevitably mediated by twentieth- and twenty-first century editors. In the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Travelling Symphony carries 'three versions of the text' (57) that have various editorial glosses. These three versions may also combine different early modern variations of Shakespeare's texts, as well as update early modern spellings and punctuation in order to make the plays more accessible to modern readers. The survival of Shakespeare's words in the post-apocalyptic landscape is facilitated by paperbacks that have been, like the costumes, scavenged and saved by Travelling Symphony members. Their understanding of his words is mediated both by editorial interventions and the annotations of past readers (which is also why this article returns to the First Folio). Additionally, the Travelling Symphony chooses to perform plays that were popular with twentieth- and twenty-first century audiences − *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Romeo and Juliet* − rather than plays that may have been more popular in other historical periods. Both the text and the performance of Shakespeare's plays are constantly negotiated by the Travelling Symphony's understanding of past and present.

Some readers, though, take the novel's insistence on Shakespeare's exceptionalism or relevance at face value. Maximilian Feldner, in particular, accords with Dieter's point of view: 'Aside from its timelessness and power, Shakespeare is suitable material, considering he lived in a particularly plague-ridden time' (Feldner 2018: 176). In a similar vein, Mark West notes that 'arguments for Shakespeare's relevance appeal to art's mimetic function, the comfort and stimulation audiences receive from seeing representations of their own experience' (West 2018: 8). But arguably, it is Shakespeare's malleability, not his relevance, that acts as the mimetic vehicle to represent pre-plague life to audiences.

'The undiscovered country': The Future(s) of Shakespeare

Though some critics observe the shortcomings of *Station Eleven*'s emphasis on Shakespeare, including offering thoughtful postcolonial critiques about the implications of Shakespeare's exceptionalism (Thurman 2015: 59; Smith 2016: 298; Leggatt 2018: 11), few critics even mention the intertextual references to *Star Trek* within the novel. In fact, Shakespeare's prominence within the critical

response to the novel in itself points to his primacy as a subject worthy of intellectual pursuit. However, not only does *Star Trek* play an integral role within *Station Eleven*, it can also help to shape our understanding of how Shakespeare functions in the novel.

When Kirsten defends the motto of the Travelling Symphony as her 'favourite line of text in the world', despite it being 'lifted […] from *Star Trek*' (Mandel 2014: 119), Dieter complains that's 'the whole problem' (120). In his mind, only Shakespeare's writing is intrinsically worthy of survival. But Shakespeare and *Star Trek* have been connected since Gene Roddenberry's original series aired in 1966 (Dutta 1995: 38–45), although the relationship is best exemplified by Captain Jean-Luc Picard's repeated references in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Given that Picard is played by renowned Shakespearean actor Patrick Stewart, it is hardly surprising that the *Enterprise*'s Captain has a propensity for quoting the Elizabethan playwright. In the episode 'Hide and Q' (1987), Q, an extra-dimensional alien who can alter the frameworks of time and space, belittles humankind as self-serving and short-sighted, while telling Picard that he intends to play a game with the crew of the *Enterprise*: 'Why these games? Why the play's the thing. And I'm surprised you have to ask when your human Shakespeare explained it all so well' (Bole 1987). Picard, in turn, uses Shakespeare's words to defend the potential of humanity:

> PICARD: Oh, no. I know Hamlet. And what he might have said with irony, I say with conviction. What a piece of work is man. How noble in reason. How infinite in faculty. In form, in moving, how express and admirable. In action, how like an angel. In apprehension, how like a god.
> Q: Surely you don't really see your species like that, do you?
> PICARD: I see us one day becoming that, Q. Is it that what concerns you? (Bole 1987)

Picard acknowledges that his use of Hamlet's speech contrasts with what the character may have intended. Shakespeare's words are imbued with new meaning and become an aspirational model of what humankind can be. David Reinheimer, in his examination of Shakespeare in *The Next Generation*, concludes that Shakespeare is used ontologically and ethically to define what humans are and what humans can choose to be (Reinheimer 1995: 46). Shakespeare's words denote the best that humanity has to offer, encompass the intangibility of what it is to be human, and symbolize the shared values and commitment of the *Enterprise* crew. In *Star Trek*, Shakespeare's works are not about the past − they look forward to building a better future.

Shakespeare's exceptionalism is intergalactic in *Star Trek*. Not only does

Q feel comfortable quoting him, the Klingons also claim Shakespeare as their own. During the sixth *Star Trek* film, *The Undiscovered Country* (1991), Gorkon, the Klingon Chancellor, raises his glass:

> GORKON: I offer a toast. The undiscovered country... the future.
> ALL: The undiscovered country.
> SPOCK: Hamlet, act three, scene one.
> GORKON: You have not experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon. (Meyer 1991)

But whether or not you read *Hamlet* in the original Klingon or the 1623 First Folio, the 'undiscovered country' is not usually understood as the future, or if it is, only in the most narrow sense. Hamlet describes the 'vndiscouered Countrey' as 'something after death' 'from whose Borne/ No Traueller returnes' (Shakespeare 1623: 3.1.1732-4). As Mary Dutta observes: '*Star Trek* rewrites Shakespeare as the space adventures of an American hero […] ostensibly updat[ing] the Bard to reflect the values of a more enlightened future. Yet the series' 23rd century Shakespeare propagates [ideologies] as firmly entrenched in the 20th as in the 16th century' (Dutta 1995: 38). Words that once acted as a euphemism for death become the harbinger of a peaceful, post-Cold War future. In this way, *Star Trek* is not unlike the Travelling Symphony, taking the writing of Shakespeare and using it as a vehicle for their own beliefs and agendas.

The Travelling Symphony's use of a motto taken from *Star Trek: Voyager* guides the reader to consider other implicit parallels. For instance, *Star Trek: The Original Series* famously featured a racially and ethnically diverse cast, a practice that continued through *Star Trek*'s many iterations. Similar to their *Star Trek* predecessors, the Travelling Symphony appears to be, based on their surnames and physical descriptions, a racially diverse group of adventurers. Additionally, the Travelling Symphony began when the Conductor, an Air Force military officer − perhaps a captain − set out into the unknown. As the leader of the Travelling Symphony, the Conductor parallels Captain Janeway (Kate Mulgrew), *Star Trek*'s first female captain. The other major difference between *Voyager* and previous *Star Trek* series is that the starship is tragically pulled through a wormhole and is on an estimated 75-year journey back to Earth. While the crew continues to explore new worlds and go on adventures, they are haunted by the reality that they will never see many of their loved ones or their home ever again (Kolbe 1995).

But perhaps the most striking parallel between the Travelling Symphony and a Starfleet crew is their shared doctrine. The Travelling Symphony follows a 'strict policy of non-intervention in the politics of the towns through which they passed' (Mandel 2014: 124), which mirrors the famous Prime Directive which

all Starfleet crews follow: 'no interference with the social development of said planet(s) [that they explore]' (Senensky 1968). In the case of both the Travelling Symphony and Starfleet, the Prime Directive serves as the fundamental policy for all interaction with the outside world. Much like the crew of the *Enterprise*, the Travelling Symphony gets into trouble when they decide to break their own code in order to help a young girl who is about to be married to a cult leader.

Star Trek imagines a future where humans have built a united and enlightened society through technological achievement. As Reinheimer observes: '*Star Trek: The Next Generation* operates from the optimistic premise that today's world and its cultures will survive in spite of themselves' (Reinheimer 1995: 46). *Station Eleven* imagines the inverse, replacing the idealized future of *Star Trek* with a bleak, post-apocalyptic world. The Travelling Symphony lives in a world of isolated populations that live without electricity, much less space travel. However, despite these disparate settings, the Travelling Symphony ends up functioning like a Starfleet crew: 'Far to the north, in a place so distant that in this flightless world it might as well be another planet, the caravans of the Travelling Symphony are arriving at the Severn City Airport' (Mandel 2014: 313). The Travelling Symphony journeys between settlements that are reduced to islands, small worlds of their own making. The refusal of the Travelling Symphony to abandon their optimism imbues the novel with a sense of hopefulness, which Andrew Tate describes as 'the sparks of ingenuity that create civilizations' (Tate 2017: 133), and the belief that 'an ethical, cooperative version of society might be achievable' (137). In *Station Eleven*, the final frontier is not space; it is the familiar made into brave new worlds, into the undiscovered country.

The novel ends with the Travelling Symphony seeking a new path. Clark, a museum curator who lives in the airport, sees a mysterious electrical light to the south, and the Travelling Symphony decides to find the light's source: 'But it's not our usual territory,' Kirsten said [...] excitement in her voice. She was beside herself with impatience to see the far southern town with the electrical grid' (Mandel 2014: 331). It is through *Star Trek* that we can see the Travelling Symphony as more than a nostalgic link to the past and instead as a group of pioneers. They may be armed with Shakespeare instead of advanced technology, but they can and they do embody the spirit of *Star Trek*'s mission. Just as the Travelling Symphony sets off from the airport to explore the lands to the south, Clark imagines 'ships setting out':

> If there are again towns with streetlights, if there are symphonies and newspapers, then what else might this awakening world contain? Perhaps vessels are setting out even now, traveling toward or away from him, steered by sailors armed with maps and knowledge of the stars, driven by need or perhaps simply by curiosity: whatever

> became of the countries on the other side? If nothing else, it's pleasant to consider the possibility. He likes the thought of ships moving over the water, toward another world just out of sight. (332–33)

The imagery of the Travelling Symphony alongside curious sailors 'armed with maps and knowledge of the stars' invokes the intergalactic travel of the *Enterprise*'s crew, who are similarly driven to explore strange new worlds that are just out of sight. But Clark's explorers also summon the historical images of colonial explorers on the brink of another apocalypse and European imperial forces enslaving and subjugating 'countries on the other side'.

Understanding the Travelling Symphony as a Starfleet crew does not counter the postcolonial argument that has been made about the problematic use of Shakespeare as a civilizing tool within *Station Eleven*. While *Station Eleven* 'avoids the problematic representation of Shakespeare in the colonial encounter by presenting a world conveniently free of natives [...] One nevertheless finds a colonial fantasy played out whereby an apparently primitive people are civilized through the work of Shakespearean actors' (Smith 2016: 301). Similarly, *Star Trek*'s willingness to understand the white, male Shakespeare as a symbol of humanity writ large, coupled with its own promotion of western ideals and culture, seems to fall into the same trap. Several scholars have noted parallels between Starfleet and westward pioneers on the frontier (Wills 2015: 1–10), the exportation of American cultural values (Crothers 2015: 66–8) and imperialistic notions of cultural superiority (Boslaugh 2015: 134–38). If the Travelling Symphony is modelled on a Starfleet crew, which in turn is part of an intergalactic organization fashioned after the United Nations, it is hardly surprising that both *Station Eleven* and *Star Trek* have shared and complicated colonial implications.

Station Eleven sees potential at the end of the world and dares to find optimism in the face of catastrophe. Even as the characters mourn the loss of the world that they knew, they reject despair as they forge new connections and new paths together. Perhaps inevitably, these connections and paths are still inflected with previous ways of thinking. The Travelling Symphony's insistence on Shakespeare's exceptionalism carries with it a complex legacy of historical repetitions: the sense of false kinship with Shakespeare, the arbitrary metrics that determine what artistic endeavours are worthy of praise and scholarly attention, the problematic cultural obsession with solitary white male genius and its perpetuation of colonial violence. As Christopher Thurman succinctly observes: 'If Shakespeare survives the apocalypse, so too does whiteness' (Thurman 2015: 59).

When imagining the future, there is the desire to imagine the clean, technological, utopian society of *Star Trek* − the impulse to believe that the

future will by some inherent virtue be better than the present. *Station Eleven* imagines a future that is dirty, regressive and violent, and yet, the impulse to believe in a better future persists. The Travelling Symphony cannot, despite their best efforts, recreate the past of the Elizabethan stage. Neither can they avoid the past, and the far-reaching historical and cultural implications that survive along with Shakespeare. Perhaps the Travelling Symphony's project is just another iteration of the same tired history. But if, as the novel suggests, that despair can be rejected and the world can be rebuilt, 'if there are again towns with streetlights, if there are symphonies and newspapers' (Mandel 2014: 332), then perhaps the Travelling Symphony's Shakespearean project can be seen as both a navigation of a complicated past and an exploration of a better future. As they set off into the undiscovered country, who knows what other worlds they may find.

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'Shakespeare in the Park?': William Shakespeare and the Marvel Cinematic Universe

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An early scene in the Marvel superhero film *The Avengers* (UK: *Avengers Assemble*) (2012) features the following encounter:

THOR	: Do not touch me again.
IRON MAN	: Then don't take my stuff,
THOR	: You have no idea what you are dealing with.
IRON MAN	: Uh … Shakespeare in the park? Doth mother know you weareth her drapes?
THOR	: This is beyond you, metal man. Loki will face Asgardian justice. (Whedon 2012)

When popular culture cites either Shakespeare's work or uses his name for cultural cachet, it rarely does so by coincidence or without reason: 'sometimes the challenge is bringing faint echoes into a clearer contrast. Some texts do not wear their Shakespeare on their sleeve, but carry him in their inner pockets' (Hansen and Wetmore, Jr. 2015: 17). Irrespective of its Shakespearean reverberations, an appraisal of the role of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) as a cultural response to contemporary US politics must emphasize its aspiration to capture what is perceived as the zeitgeist. Consider, for example, *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) as a response to the 1969 moon landings, taking the western genre's prototypical exploration of early American expansionism and rendering this into a mythical narrative relocated to space, the site of America's next expansion. The original *Mad Max* trilogy (1979-85) achieved a similar effect by projecting public anxieties about nuclear war into a dystopian future, evoking images of a conceivable post-apocalyptic world faced by contemporary society.

Recent film adaptations of comic books similarly reflect the preoccupations of modern American culture. Films such as *Thor* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012) and *Captain America: Winter Soldier* (2014) deal with an existential threat, whether the menace of an alien outsider, or foes within an existing hierarchy or government. Arguably, a principal reason for the success of the MCU is due to *The Avengers*' focus on teamwork, comradeship and shared understanding. Contemporary audiences are increasingly drawn to diversity of gender and colour in their ensemble superhero teams, who work together against alien threats, rather than to the ubiquitous male action heroes of the 1980s, exemplified by actors such as Mel Gibson, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis. Finally, the directors and writers centre many of their storylines around bringing together an initially disparate group of individuals in order to oppose a

shared enemy, making possible a utopian reading of these films as the nation's drive to unite against external and internal forces.

My research into the MCU addresses the anomaly posed by Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan's *Shakespeare in America* (2012), in which they seek to present 'some new trends [which] are likely to reshape Americans' relationship with Shakespeare' (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 193), but acknowledge that 'the clearest contemporary trend is that it is increasingly difficult to identify a characteristically "American" Shakespeare' (200). Marjorie Garber also observes that 'what is often described as the timelessness of Shakespeare, the transcendent qualities for which his plays have been praised around the world and across the centuries, is perhaps better understood as an uncanny timelessness, a capacity to speak directly to circumstances the playwright could not have anticipated or foreseen' (Garber 2005: 3).

Adaptation theorists struggle to agree on Shakespeare's anticipation of his own legacy or capacity for appropriation, as demonstrated by the view expressed by Julie Sanders that, because 'Shakespeare's age had a far more open approach to literary borrowing and imitation than the modern era of copyright law encourages or even allows […] Shakespeare would perhaps have expected to be adapted by future writers and future ages' (Sanders 2006: 47–8). Enforcing the principles of Shakespeare's age upon our own time runs the risk of bardolatry, rendering him as 'an all-purpose sage, a single author representing all the world's wisdom' (Garber 2005: 38). Douglas Lanier 'traces the process by which Shakespeare's plays were transformed from ephemeral popular entertainments to centrepieces of the literary canon, the process, that is, of Shakespeare's un-popularization' (Lanier 2002: 21–2). He further refutes the assumption that Shakespeare needs to be reclaimed from his ivory tower, in suggesting that 'we might more profitably imagine Shakespeare in less transcendental guise – as a player, both as an actor who dons and doffs roles in dramas written by others, and in the more contemporary sense, as a figure whose importance and survival depends upon skilfully navigating the ever-changing politics of the establishment and the street' (49). When thus focusing on his beginnings as a working writer and actor, it becomes less problematic to acknowledge Shakespeare as a prominent template for popular adaptation.

Thor's Shakespearean Substructure

As an example of adaptation, *The Avengers*' status is not in doubt; it borrows from and builds upon the Marvel comic book series of the same name, as well as following the standalone films which preceded it within the MCU, thus serving as both sequel and dénouement. However, as a commercial product that co-opts Shakespeare, a superficial view of the film reveals it to be no more

a Shakespearean adaptation than many other contemporary screen franchises, in a long list stretching from *Star Wars* to *Game of Thrones*, where there exists a thematic synthesis of revenge, comic farce, magical wonder and familial conflict.

However, what if one digs beneath these surface comparisons to investigate what Shakespeare is doing in this work of popular culture and, indeed, which 'Shakespeare' is being referenced? The appellation is used here in quotation marks since Shakespearean adaptation theory often omits to differentiate between whether his name is being used to describe the work, the man or his afterlife. Ayanna Thompson notes, for instance, that 'Shakespeare is often used to mean his now-canonical body of work: a synecdoche of sorts in which the name stands for his entire career output' (Thompson 2011: 4). Shakespeare's myriad roles as a cultural entity mean that he cannot be cited without invoking any number of these connotations: canonical writer; critical adjective; one-man heritage industry; a bard of the streets; or a gentleman of the court.

In addition to the application of Shakespeare as a catch-all term, his 'name is also employed to signify a mythical fantasy about the author as a symbol for artistic genius, or as a symbol for the difficulty of the work created by that genius' (Thompson 2011: 4). This ambiguity is problematic, for how do we begin to quantify and define the Shakespeare equation in relation to perceived notions of highbrow and lowbrow forms of culture if we fail to acknowledge his presence in both of these? His legacy is so far-reaching and open to interpretation that such a task is clearly challenging. Therefore, an analysis of how different 'Shakespeares' reverberate throughout American popular culture, as observed in the MCU, seems fitting as a way to reframe an understanding of his continuing purpose and value for both contemporary artists and audiences.

If critics omit to acknowledge the value of partial reference within a hypertext, then they may fail to recognize the shifting and often unconscious process of adaptation. Therefore, when Shakespeare's name is raised by Iron Man, in his mocking of fellow Avenger Thor's outmoded speech patterns, flamboyant costume and noble gait, like Lanier, I am inclined to ask 'what is Shakespeare doing here? Why allude to Shakespeare in a work directed at a mass audience…?' (Lanier 2002: 2). Iron Man's allusion draws attention both to the deliberately heightened tone and appearance of Thor, in contrast to his own colloquial and technocratic interpretation of the modern superhero, and also to the famous Shakespeare festival of the same name, held each summer in New York's Central Park.

This has, further, become a generic term for all festivals of its kind, where 'like baseball games and Fourth of July parades, Shakespeare in the park has become an American summer ritual' (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 176), allowing the quotation itself to serve as a term applicable to the American

adoption of Shakespeare as their own national icon. It also makes explicit the Shakespearean subtext of the Kenneth Branagh-directed *Thor* itself, which was released a year before Joss Whedon's *The Avengers*. Discussing the relationship between these two films, their respective directors and this point of reference, Whedon commented that 'basically, Branagh was doing Shakespearean drama […] and then I got to make fun of it by having Tony Stark call it "Shakespeare in the park"' (Nicholson 2013).

Shakespeare's influence on Marvel's developing cinematic universe is also present in the choice of specific directors for the films themselves, as the case of Branagh ably illustrates. He was hired, in part, to lend *Thor* the tone and gravitas of his earlier Shakespeare film adaptations, the first of which was his much-praised *Henry V* (1989). A closer inspection of *Thor*'s substructure reveals much about the film's use of both Shakespearean allusion and dramaturgy. Tom Hiddleston, the actor who had previously found critical acclaim onstage in Declan Donnellan's *Cymbeline* and Michael Grandage's *Othello* (both 2007), portrays Thor's villainous brother, Loki, and reportedly cited both Cassio and Iago, respectively the antagonists of *Julius Caesar* and *Othello*, as touchstones for his performance as the God of Mischief. He also explains that he and Branagh 'talked about Edmond [*sic*] the bastard son [as] someone who's grown up in the shadow of another man […] the illegitimate, the one who's less loved… underloved, which feeds his lack of self-esteem' (Weinberg 2014), drawing clear lines of influence between *King Lear*'s Gloucester family sub-plot and *Thor*'s central focus on King Odin's acceptance of his son and rightful heir, Thor, contrasted with his rejection of his adopted son, Loki.

Similarly, Chris Hemsworth, who plays Thor, recounts how Branagh 'gave him a copy of the St. Crispin's Day monologue from Shakespeare's *Henry V* and told him he needed to be ready to perform it on camera the next day as part of a "regal diction and cadence exercise"' (THR Staff 2011). Although lacking the Shakespearean stage background of his co-star, this directly informed Hemsworth's performance as the unstable prince, whose trajectory from youthful rebellion to acceptance of kingly responsibility mirrors that of Prince Hal in *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*. To intensify this allusion, *Thor* even has its very own Falstaff in Thor's similarly-named ally, Volstagg.

This Shakespearean relation is not exclusive to *Thor*, though, but also features in other instalments in the MCU. For example, in *Spider-Man: Far from Home* (2019), Stark's assistant Harold 'Happy' Hogan (Jon Favreau) passes on a significant piece of technical equipment to Peter Parker (Tom Holland). The box in which it comes contains the inscription, 'uneasy lies the head that wears the crown' (*2 Henry IV*, 3.1.31). Stark's choice of allusion not only continues his intertextual interaction with Shakespeare but also underlines the film's themes

of inheritance and responsibility, evident also in *Thor*. The trope within the Spider-Man films that 'with great power comes great responsibility' is here given greater heft by not only being compared with Henry IV's weary pronouncement on the burden of kingship but also by being contextualized within Stark's tragic ending in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019).

Joss Whedon's Shakespearean Satire

In Whedon's DVD commentary for *The Avengers*, the director revealed that '"Shakespeare in the park" was a line that [he] threw to Downey on the day of filming. Downey then ad-libbed "Doth mother know you weareth her drapes?"' (Asher-Perrin 2012). The purposeful inclusion of Shakespeare's name during a pivotal scene of conflict, coupled with the improvised parody of Thor's Shakespearean speech patterns by Iron Man actor Robert Downey Jr., serves to satirize Branagh's Shakespeare-inflected take on *Thor*, explicitly acknowledging Shakespeare's influence on both Whedon's product and process of adaptation: 'both Marvel and the Bard cranked out stories about heroes, betrayals and passionate, implausible romances. […] Bringing the Incredible Hulk to life is just like resurrecting Hamlet: fans already know the character – they want to see a personal twist' (Nicholson 2013).

However, the reference point is typical of the level of subtlety prevalent in some directors, amongst whom Whedon stands as a prominent exponent of intertextual practice. A follow-up to this Shakespearean reference is seen in the film's sequel, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), where Tony Stark muses that 'it's been a really long day. Like, Eugene O'Neill long' (Whedon 2015). This intertextual quip comes after the enemy, Ultron, successfully wreaks havoc on the minds of the Avengers and further establishes Stark as the sardonic satirist of the group. Whedon is not simply paying homage to Shakespeare and Branagh by aligning his work with theirs; at the same moment, he is able entertainingly to reflect their heightened flamboyance through lampoonery, inverting Thor's self-serious stereotype of the archaic Shakespearean hero with the typically sardonic wit of the most contemporary Avengers character, who breaks with superhero tradition in his first solo film by publicly revealing his dual identity as Stark and Iron Man.

Shakespeare's allusion in *The Avengers* film operates by placing the playwright in a context which Marvel believes their entire audience will understand and, crucially, will pay money to experience. Shakespeare here serves as a meme, a cultural synecdoche in the broadest possible sense, enabling Iron Man to cast the farcical situation as 'Shakespeare in the park', thereby conjuring up the festival spirit which began with its inaugural performance in 1954 and has been central to the popularization of Shakespeare in America ever since. Thus,

the character's derisive use of the appellation, swiftly followed by his quasi-Shakespearean ad-lib concerning Thor's 'drapes', offer a parodic reading of *Thor* to represent the combination of self-aware pastiche and knowing homage that has become the tonal blueprint for the MCU's commercial dominance and critical success.

Shakespearean Shorthand for Superhero Thespians

This shift in tone has become increasingly prevalent as the MCU has grown, particularly with the release of more recent Marvel films such as *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017). In the latter case, Marvel took the creative decision, after the relative disappointment of *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), to hire the New Zealand director Taika Waititi, known for his work on the satirical comedy show, *Flight of the Conchords* (2007-9), and vampire mockumentary *What We Do in The Shadows* (2014). His appointment introduced a less serious, more comedic tone to the *Thor* franchise, shifting the film away from what Hopkins had derisively termed 'Mock Shakespeare' (Hiscock 2013). This remark was made in the course of an interview during which he admitted that he had not seen *The Dark World* and had already forgotten about it. He further explained that 'all I was concerned about […] was to turn the dialogue that I had into something that was more human instead of too overwritten' (2013).

The symbolic comparison between Odin's (Anthony Hopkins) banishment of Thor and Lear's dismissal of Cordelia, or the division between a legitimate and a bastard son, are unlikely to have been lost on Hopkins who had twice played Lear, once onstage in 1986–87 at the National Theatre, and, more recently, onscreen in Richard Eyre's 2018 film adaptation. The explanation that he found it necessary to tone down the heightened dialogue rather than amplifying any Shakespearean allusions is indicative of the fact that actors such as Hopkins are able to bring their experience to bear, while also adding a level of prestige to augment the stature of superhero projects as cultural entities in their own right. This is clear in the frequency with which seasoned Shakespearean actors such as Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen feature in comic book films as, respectively, Prof Charles Xavier and Magneto in the X-Men series.

Gregory Doran, artistic director of the RSC, indicates a correlation between the Shakespearean actor's experience of delivering heightened language and emotion, and the way in which this is mirrored in modern superhero narratives, suggesting of such performers that they 'have the capacity to scale the heights of human emotion that Shakespeare charts in roles like Lear, Hamlet, and Cleopatra. […] He challenges an actor to go to the limits of human experience, and find the surprising elements of humour and pathos, the absurd and the

pathetic, at the very edges of catastrophe. Perhaps that's why they have the ability to play the almost superhuman scale that science fiction and fantasy demand' (Schou 2014). Colm Feore, who portrays Laufrey, King of the Frost Giants, in *Thor* and had previously appeared alongside Hopkins in Julie Taymor's 1999 film adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*, noted that he had 'just finished playing Macbeth and Cyrano de Bergerac in repertoire […] They all feel, interestingly enough, as if they cross-pollinate, because everything that I've done in the theatre, Branagh is using' (Weintraub 2010). Feore explained further that 'during the breaks, Tony, myself and Ken would be talking in Shakespearian shorthand about what the characters were doing, what we thought they may be like, and how we could focus our attention more intelligently' (Seeton 2011). His responses indicate that, like Hiddleston, he was aware of the comparisons to be made with *Lear*, particularly through the presence of Branagh as a director whose Shakespearean background would inevitably influence the film's execution, development and reception.

Audiences at the Globe in Shakespeare's time would have equally been alert to connections between Shakespeare's plays, such as the comic inversion of *Romeo and Juliet*'s tomb scene within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s retelling of Pyramus and Thisbe. Marvel's audiences are equally conscious of references within films to previous releases in the studio's ever-increasing canon. For instance, in *Thor: Ragnarok*, Waititi included a self-referential moment of parody akin to 'Shakespeare in the park' at the beginning of his film. During Thor's return to Asgard, he discovers that the public are watching a play which re-enacts the apparent death of Loki during the Second Battle of Svartalfheim, which took place during *The Dark World*. The play is performed as a melodrama in exaggerated language that venerates Loki:

> Loki, my boy … 'Twas many moons ago I found you on a frost-bitten battlefield. On that day, I did not yet see in you Asgard's saviour. No. You were merely a little blue baby icicle that melted this old fool's heart (Waititi 2017).

Thor immediately realises that Odin, who is watching the play whilst eating grapes and surrounded by women, is Loki in disguise. Prior to unmasking him, he asks his brother the name of the play, to which Loki replies 'The Tragedy of Loki of Asgard' (Waititi 2017). Waititi thus parodies the previous *Thor* films, and their archaisms in particular, and in the same manner as Iron Man's mockery of Thor in *The Avengers*, invites the audience to laugh at the Asgardian sense of self-aggrandisement through this histrionic play-within-a-film.

Black Panther and the Ghost of *Hamlet*

Black Panther (2018) is an unusual instance of a comic book-based film which was already regarded as an important cultural document before its release. Beyond its many firsts for the MCU, including the franchise's first black director (Ryan Coogler), black lead actor (Chadwick Boseman) and a predominantly black ensemble cast, the film made a number of acute comments on contemporary American politics. For instance, its post-credits sequence took aim at Trumpian isolationism and, to quote the film's protagonist, how 'in times of crisis, the wise build bridges while the foolish build barriers' (Coogler 2018), possibly a veiled reference to Donald Trump's election campaign promise to build a wall on the US-Mexico border. This particular entry into the MCU canon, therefore, has an especially timely resonance because of the ways in which *Black Panther* addresses issues of race and representation when intolerance and hostility have increased with the current administration.

The plot of *Black Panther* follows a young African prince who returns home after his father dies in tragic circumstances, for which he had previously sought revenge in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), and finds himself conflicted about his royal status as well as his responsibilities as both a monarch and son. He encounters opposition on all sides while attempting to assume his father's mantle, and in the film's closing section, meets a rival, Erik Killmonger, who is partially motivated by his own father's death. It is possible, then, to read *Black Panther* as a film structurally influenced by *Hamlet*, but reclaimed for a black protagonist and ensemble cast, just as the play itself was in the RSC's 2016 production starring Paapa Essiedu.

However, the connections extend beyond the specifics of plot and character motivations to the cast members' research and performance background. For instance, in a discussion with National Book Award-winning author Ta-Nehisi Coates, Andy Beta reports that Boseman explained how 'in creating the character of King T'Challa, he looked to William Shakespeare and one of his most famous characters, the indecisive Prince Hamlet. There's a parallel between the dead fathers and a sense of indecision about leading […] but there's also a sense of privilege in T'Challa and an unawareness of other perspectives' (Beta 2018). This suggests that Boseman was not only aware of the parallels that audiences might draw between *Hamlet* and *Black Panther*, but also consciously drew on this comparison in his portrayal of T'Challa. Moreover, T'Challa's deceased father T'Chaka is played by South African actor, director and playwright John Kani, who had previously played both Claudius and the Ghost in Janet Suzman's 2006 production of *Hamlet* as part of the RSC's Complete Works Festival at the Swan Theatre. Although Kani does not deliver any lines that directly allude to Shakespeare's text in *Black Panther* it is inconceivable to imagine that the

experience of performing in *Hamlet*, especially as the Ghost, did not indirectly influence the scenes which he shares with Boseman in the Wakandan Ancestral Plane:

T'CHAKA : Stand up. You are a king. What is wrong my son?
T'CHALLA : I am not ready.
T'CHAKA : Have you not prepared to be king your whole life? Have you not trained and studied, been by my side? […]
T'CHALLA : I am not ready … to be without you.
T'CHAKA : A man who has not prepared his children for his own death has failed as a father. Have I ever failed you?
T'CHALLA : Never. Tell me how to best protect Wakanda. I want to be a great king, Baba. Just like you.
T'CHAKA : You're going to struggle. So, you'll need to surround yourself with people you trust. (Coogler 2018)

This extract from their dialogue can most effectively be interpreted as an evocation of *Hamlet* if viewed through the lens of Kani's Shakespearean background as well as *Black Panther*'s intertextual connections to *The Lion King* (1994), which is itself a *Hamlet* adaptation. Nonetheless, for particular audience members who are familiar with both Shakespeare and superheroes, the scene yields additional meaning by means of its connection to Hamlet's conversation with his dead father, when the Ghost compels Hamlet to act rather than bemoan his loss:

HAMLET : Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak! I'll go no further.
GHOST : Mark me.
HAMLET : I will.
GHOST : My hour is almost come
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.
HAMLET : Alas, poor ghost.
GHOST : Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.
HAMLET : Speak, I am bound to hear.
GHOST : So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.
(*Hamlet*, 1.5.1–7)

In this scene, the Ghost's immediate reaction to Hamlet's expression of pity at his father's imminent return to the purgatorial flames is to quell any sympathy in favour of the need for his son to hear of the nature of his demise, and to take action to avenge his murder. His hurried delivery is in keeping with

his abrupt dispatch at the hands of his own brother. This provides a further connection to *Black Panther* through T'Chaka's murder of his brother N'Jobu, father of Killmonger, at the beginning of *Black Panther*, albeit for honourable reasons. Killmonger's decision to return to Wakanda and challenge for the throne is partially motivated by his desire for power as well as his determination to overthrow white oppressors, but, like Laertes, is also deeply rooted in his grief over his father's death and desire to avenge him.

The constraints of time are different within the Ancestral Plane to which T'Challa journeys, where he meets the ghosts of previous Wakandan kings who bore the mantle of the Black Panther. T'Chaka's response to his son's admission of grief and longing is akin to that of King Hamlet's ghost: T'Challa must overcome these emotions in order to be a successful monarch and maintain the safety of his nation. Although *Black Panther* cannot be perceived as a *Hamlet* adaptation, its links to Shakespeare's play through its performers, structure and interview comments make it a useful example of how, both for economic and artistic reasons, the MCU continues to foster an intertextual relationship with the playwright.

Conclusion: The Limits of Comparison

In examining Shakespeare's place in American popular culture, it is important to note that the playwright represents more than just a cultural and artistic template to be embraced or critiqued: rather, he remains the prominent example of a universal figure, language or set of principles through which the society seeks to understand itself. Shakespearean references in MCU movies enable audiences to understand how the culture which they absorb is part of a universal historical tradition that repurposes real-life problems. These might include issues such as divided families and questions of legacy, interpreted as popular entertainment, as they have done since long before Shakespeare set quill to parchment. A further bonus for consumers of both Shakespeare and superheroes lies in the sense that the worlds which they inhabit are of equal intellectual significance.

It is wise to remain cautious about labelling any art form as 'Shakespearean' without reference to direct links to the playwright's life, work or influence. This was apparent in the response to the unexpectedly sombre ending of *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), during which many of Marvel's heroes are killed by the villain Thanos, whereupon a number of reviewers and bloggers rushed to describe the ensemble film as both 'a full-fledged Shakespearean tragedy' (Truitt 2018) and 'an old-fashioned Shakespearean tragedy' (Bundel 2018). Unlike *Thor*, *The Avengers* and *Black Panther*, this film contains no direct allusions either to Shakespeare's name or to tropes common to his work: indeed, there are no scenes that can be interpreted as variants on particular plays. These writers

attribute the expression 'Shakespearean tragedy' to *Infinity War* in order to express the manner and suddenness with which these characters are brutally discarded. Not unlike the actors who compare Marvel with Shakespeare, they intend this reference to elevate the tragedy wrought by the actions of Thanos to lend *Infinity War* a sense of epic grandeur. In these responses, the Shakespeare synecdoche is being used in the same way it would feature in a news broadcast; to help express mass destruction or loss on a large scale.

In this article, three different types of Shakespearean allusion in the MCU have been examined in order to argue that, in specific instances, the playwright is invoked for both serious and ironic purposes. *Thor* is a cocktail of different Shakespeare plays, drawing as it does from *Lear*'s familial division, Prince Hal's redemptive arc in the *Henriad* and the deceptive practices of myriad Shakespeare villains, from Iago to Cassius. *The Avengers* took this Shakespearean template and directly parodied it in order to reflect both Branagh's directorial interpretation and Hemsworth's performance as the character of Thor. *Black Panther* is more specifically indebted to the individual text of *Hamlet*, but is also linked to *Thor* through connections of uncertain heirs to the throne, lost fathers and threats to their isolated kingdoms.

Shakespeare and Marvel are such prominent expressions of contemporary culture that it is unlikely that the comparisons or allusions will end soon. Marvel has released twenty films in ten years to become the highest-grossing film franchise of all time, with twelve more titles in various stages of production. With a vast array of source material from which to adapt, such as Neil Gaiman's *Marvel 1602* (2003), in which the superheroes are relocated to Elizabethan England and Shakespeare himself appears as a character, it is entirely plausible that the playwright will re-emerge as a figure within the cinematic universe. It is my hope that, by presenting an analysis of the most explicit references to Shakespeare within the MCU to date, this article has laid the ground for an ongoing consideration of how the playwright continues to intersect with this franchise.

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Shakespeare in *Fallout* (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bard)

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While travelling through the charred ruins of Boston – a city largely destroyed in a global thermonuclear holocaust – we receive a message on our wrist-mounted communicator: 'Help! Or Mayday! Or whatever it is one says on a radio. My name is Rex Goodman. I'm being held prisoner on the top of Trinity Tower. I think the super mutants plan on eating me soon' (Bethesda Softworks 2015). As experienced gamers, we recognize the cue to begin a quest when we hear one. But before we examine Mr Goodman's predicament, we must do some expositional unpacking.

Fallout 4, published by Bethesda Softworks, is the most recent game in a series of titles that began in 1997. *Fallout 4* is a video role playing game (RPG) set in a future Earth defined primarily by a single event: The Great War of 2077. In that year, the United States and China, driven to brinksmanship by dwindling natural resources, launch a mutual nuclear strike that devastates the globe. *Fallout 4* takes place roughly two centuries after this cataclysm, at a point where the world's environment has been rendered somewhat (though not entirely) less toxic, and its inhabitants have begun to reoccupy and rebuild the architectural and cultural spaces of the pre-war age.

And by 'inhabitants', we do not only mean 'humans'. Radiation and the perversion of technology have produced a number of new sentient lifeforms. Alongside the humans, for instance, there are the ghouls – former humans irradiated to the point of skinless disfigurement and a significantly slowed aging process. Additionally, most of the fauna of the world are mutations – the world of the game is populated by two-headed cattle called 'brahmin', scorpions the size of mini-cars, and cockroaches, called 'radroaches', the size of corgis.

Then there are the Super Mutants mentioned by Mr Goodman. These are humanoids of hulking proportions and diminished intellectual capacity, resentful of anything other than themselves, and usually expressing that resentment with dismemberment and devouring. But where the other mutants of this world are an unfortunate and inadvertent by-product of the nuclear war's radiation, the Super Mutants are not. They are not accidents, but the terrible and deliberate creation of humans attempting to control their own genetic destiny.

In response to the threat and immediate aftermath of war, a group of unscrupulous scientists working for a private defence contractor (always a sign of villainy in modern narratives) sought to develop a means of rendering the human population immune to the effects of radiation. These scientists tested the results of their research on unwilling participants, exposing them to what came

to be called the Forced Evolutionary Virus (FEV.) Most of these participants died in agony. Some mutated into mindless abominations. But a few retained a semblance of their former humanity, and became the first Super Mutants, who promptly turned on their creators and began a campaign of vicious, relentless war. Despite their limited mental capacities, the logic of the Super Mutants is surprisingly sound. Their position is that, as the result of humanity's attempt to breed a better species, they are the rightful inheritors of the world. Their hatred for humanity is not simply that of the victims of an abusive parent, but of those who claim just ownership of the new world for which they were created.

In these two motivations – resentment against paternal authority, combined with the political claim to a land usurped by that authority – the Super Mutants begin to reveal their Shakespearean origins, for this description could just as accurately apply to Caliban. With this hint of a Shakespearean strain established in the character of the Super Mutants, then, we may return to our rescue of Mr Goodman. Because, after discovering the location of Trinity Tower in the heart of downtown Boston, and after fighting our way to the top of the Tower past a small army of Super Mutants, we find Goodman locked in a cage, the designated main course on an imminent menu. Imprisoned along with him is a Super Mutant by the apt name of Strong, who has been placed in the cell for having been an advocate of heeding, rather than consuming, Goodman.

Once rescued, Goodman explains what brought him to the Tower in the first place. He reveals that he is an actor – the survival of radio technology in the Wasteland has enabled a few performers to scratch out a career in delivering poorly scripted audio dramas – and that he, with equal parts hubris and optimism, has taken it upon himself to bring what he calls 'civilization' to the Super Mutants. Specifically, he is going to teach them Shakespeare: 'I thought if they could just experience the majesty of Shakespeare, it would change them forever' (Bethesda Softworks 2015).

Whereas other videogames, such as *Final Fantasy IX* (2000), *The Sims 2* (2004) and *Mass Effect* (2007-12), include a familiar quotation, name or reference from Shakespeare, the introduction of Shakespeare to the post-apocalyptic world of *Fallout* offers a variation on the question of context to understanding and appreciating his works. Like postmodern or postcolonial approaches to Shakespeare, the question becomes whether Shakespeare retains significance to those who occupy a significant temporal, cultural or geographical remove from his original context. (And, in the case of the postcolonial approach, the ability or desire to appreciate his work is further complicated by the association of that work with the oppressive colonizers who brought it with them – a complication reflected strongly in the reaction of the Super Mutants to culture associated with their tormentors/creators.) What distinguishes the role of Shakespeare

in *Fallout* from these other circumstantially interpretive frameworks is twofold: first, the divide between the new setting and Shakespeare's original context is marked by the cultural disruption of the apocalypse, and second, the occupants of this new cultural framework are not human.

With the second element in mind, Goodman's stated intention of changing a race of beings already defined by involuntary mutation requires some unpacking. First, it should be noted that it reveals the patronizing insensitivity of Goodman. Given the origins of the Super Mutants, all of whom are products of scientific torture, it is entirely understandable why, when a human appears in their midst offering a product that could change them forever, they promptly begin debating which part of him to eat first. They cannot distinguish between Goodman's Shakespeare and the science that agonizingly transformed them. They regard both as a vicious means by which humans attempt to assert control over them, whether bodily or culturally, though it is not clear that the Super Mutants distinguish between the two.

The overlap between the perverted science that mutated them into monsters and the supposedly transformative words of Shakespeare might cause a bit of self-reflection on our parts, given the degree to which Shakespeare is universally considered to be an essential key to answering the question of what it means to be human, as well as the cultural authority of his name and his legacy. Again, the presence of Shakespeare in the postcolonial experience must be acknowledged, particularly given the degree to which a westernized education was often used by colonizers to groom a ruling class among their subjects. We might consider whether, in the context of Goodman's mission, Shakespeare becomes a cultural weapon used to transform his hearers.

This possibility seems to collapse, however, given the failure of that mission. This failure leads us to consider the implications of that first changed element in *Fallout*, the apocalyptic rupture between cultures, and whether Shakespeare can hold relevance in a world defined by the near-total collapse of a culturally literate society. The *Fallout* games are set in an environment defined by the near-end of global civilization – yet as in so many examples of post-apocalyptic fiction, the label is misleading: if we take 'apocalypse' to mean 'the end of the world', then what takes place cannot be that – all narrative would cease in the absence of anyone to occupy it – and even nuclear holocaust does not constitute a complete end to humanity or its civilization. Instead *Fallout*, like many other post-apocalyptic fictions, speculates upon the state of human nature in an environment profoundly self-altered.

What we have in *Fallout*, though, is less a new civilization than a pared-down version of our own – like many post-apocalyptic stories, it offers a variation on the old question: if your house is burning, and (with residents and pets already

rescued) you can rush in and save one item, what would it be? After the bombs fall, after survival is ensured for those who remain, what elements of culture will be retained or resurrected? And – to turn the question to our purpose here – will Shakespeare be among them? For example, whilst Shakespeare survives in such narratives as David Brin's *The Postman* (1985) and Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) is less optimistic, and Anne Washburn's play, *Mr Burns* (2012), posits that more colloquial works – TV sitcoms – will be re-grafted into the new world as revived artefacts of performance.

The survival of cultural markers is an essential question to the post-apocalyptic genre, and particularly to the creation of new signifiers in the wake of social, economic and cultural devastation. As Andrew Tate suggests, 'The end of the world is, oddly, a rich beginning for narrative' (Tate 2017: 22): the clean slate left behind by the apocalypse offers an opportunity for new narratives, and fresh frameworks of meaning and identity. Indeed, as Tate argues, this is partly the appeal of the fictional apocalypse – the ability to cleanse those cultural establishments that impede the voices and perspectives of those excluded from them: 'One characteristic of twenty-first-century apocalyptic fiction, particularly narratives set after the collapse of society, is a tacit antipathy for the corrupt present in which the novel is written' (132). But, as with all negatively defined agendas, what is being targeted for destruction remains culturally definitive – as Sigmund Freud would have pointed out, what we codify into the taboo becomes a central premise of whatever civilization we create from that code. Moreover, while we may be driven by the desire to tell new stories, to replace the old ones that led us down the path towards apocalypse, the presence of those old stories is contained in the post-apocalyptic circumstance they yielded. In other words, the new stories will always contain the old stories, in one form or another.

This explains the persistence of certain elements of the pre-apocalyptic civilization in every post-apocalyptic narrative. These elements – and they naturally vary from author to author – are arguably offered either as the equivalent to the stereotypical cockroach – the undesirable that even nuclear armageddon cannot kill – or as something so essential to civilization itself that it must be retained even in the cleaned slate of a new order. *Fallout*'s treatment of Shakespeare appears to shift between each of these possibilities – 'unkillable' or 'essential.'

Either is possible, and the game designers have fun in teasing out the answer. This fun is very much part of the culturally interpretive ethos of *Fallout*; the question of which cultural objects will make the nuclear cut is a subject of considerable humour throughout the game. The designers are playful in their decisions as to what remnants of the old world survive the winnowing: for

example, the currency of this new world is not coinage but bottle caps from Nuka-Cola, the game's version of Coca-Cola. Not even nuclear war, they suggest, can eliminate certain corporate brands from existence. Radio stations play a motley assortment of early-to-mid twentieth-century pop songs, ostensibly basing their playlist on whatever random records could be salvaged in the wake of the bombings, though a close listening indicates that the songs are not chosen at random: from the Ink Spots' 'I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire' (1941) and 'It's All Over but The Crying' (1947) to Skeeter Davis' 'It's the End of the World' (1963), the playlist suggests a fairly heavy-handed running gag.

And, thanks to Goodman the cultural missionary, we discover that Shakespeare, too, has passed through the trial of total war. This survival is understandable, given Shakespeare's centrality to our own (western) culture, in which he remains a sacrosanct instance of art, if not of humanity itself. And since these post-apocalyptic narratives are being written by occupants of our own pre-apocalyptic culture, that worship of Shakespeare seems to have a firm grip on our imaginations, even when we imagine the end of the world. As Ramona Wray writes: 'In postmodernity, Shakespeare, perennially a guarantor of historical continuity, is a peculiarly apt repository of meaning to invoke at a time of perceived change, crisis and temporal rupture […] if apocalypse suggests the end, Shakespeare incarnates what has been enduring' (Wray 2009: 30). The first half of Wray's assertion – of Shakespeare's perpetuity and cultural durability – sounds very much like Goodman's biased view, and suggests that the game views Shakespeare as essential to civilization. But in fact the vagueness of the second half of her assertion – that uncertain 'what' that endures – is closer to what the game eventually argues. Shakespeare endures in the post-apocalypse, to be sure. But just like the bottle caps and pop songs, he has been reimagined, repurposed and, like the monstrous cockroaches, mutated.

The Super Mutants' response to the offering of Shakespeare into their cultural ethos is a firm rejection – they neither understand nor appreciate the canon. According to Goodman, he decided to start his audience on *Macbeth*, but apparently, the Mutants found it 'funny' (Bethesda Softworks 2015). This response isn't surprising; despite Goodman's belief in the transformative power of Shakespeare, the Super Mutants consider themselves perfected by human science, rendering further change unnecessary. The Mutants find *Macbeth* funny for the same reason Helmholtz Watson in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) finds *Romeo and Juliet* funny; at enough of a cultural remove, any artefact, however sacred, seems ridiculous. And what use is human culture – and it's clear that that's what they consider Shakespeare to be: the culture of a separate species, irrelevant to their mutated needs and priorities – to the Super

Mutants? Better to eat the messenger than heed the message.

But there is another reaction among the Super Mutants to Goodman's offer – a solitary voice of dissent, who believes that there is value in Shakespeare, and urges, at the potential cost of his life, his fellow Mutants to listen. The voice is that of Goodman's fellow prisoner: Strong. All we are told upon meeting Strong is that, because he sided with Goodman, he was considered a traitor to his species, locked up with him, and scheduled for execution via defenestration from the Tower. Once we have rescued him and Goodman, Strong explains why he chose to listen to Goodman, and specifically to Goodman's efforts to teach the Mutants *Macbeth*. In doing so, he displays a somewhat unorthodox reading of Shakespeare: 'Strong learn secret to human power from Mack Beth. Milk of human kindness. Strong will find milk. Strong will drink milk. Strong will have secret power of humans.' As he later clarifies: 'Milk is secret to humans. Mack Beth say milk make humans strong. Stronger than super mutants! Strong find milk. Drink milk. Make super mutants stronger than humans' (Bethesda Softworks 2015). And so, while Goodman flees the scene (and the narrative of the game), Strong joins us in our wanderings through the remnants of Boston, reminding us every so often of his parallel quest: to find the milk of human kindness, drink it, become as strong as humans and then wipe us out, which he believes the Super Mutants are destined to do.

Obviously, Strong's misreading of Act 1, Scene 4 of *Macbeth* ignores the context of Lady Macbeth's phrasing, which suggests that being 'too full of the milk of human kindness' (Shakespeare 1997: 1364) is the source of her husband's weakness, not his strength. But Strong perhaps shows greater sophistication than we give him credit for: as the double meaning of the word 'kindness' suggests – the milk in question makes Macbeth overly 'kind' to his fellow humans (a priority Strong certainly does not share), but the milk also feeds Macbeth's awareness of his shared identity with his fellow humans – the milk, if you will, of humankind. And given Shakespeare's fairly consistent implication that it is empathy that makes us human – and makes us better humans – then Strong's belief that the 'milk of human kindness' is the secret to humanity's strength – or at least, its identity – might not be too far off the mark.

But this is perhaps following a hypothetical trail past the point of evidence. What is certainly clear is that, for one Super Mutant at least, the words of Shakespeare can transcend the differing species of author and audience, and achieve resonance and meaning for the latter. Shakespeare has survived the apocalypse, and perhaps here we have the game's answer to our original question – Shakespeare has been declared 'essential' and not merely 'unkillable'.

This rosy reading of the cultural exchange ignores almost all of its specifics. Strong has fundamentally misunderstood not just the intent of the author but

the vehicle – the metaphor – by which that intent has been expressed. Strong renders terrifyingly literal that which is figurative – the 'milk' of human kindness is, in his limited understanding, the same as the FEV that created him – a secret concoction that humans use to maintain their superiority but which, exposed to a superior being like himself, will allow him to surpass his creators once again.

Goodman has taught Strong a supposedly civilizing language, but the influence contained in that language – the aesthetics, the empathy of Shakespeare – has been lost. Strong comes to this attempt to improve him with an already established character and culture in place, one that makes him incapable of perceiving Shakespeare through anything other than the lens of the Super Mutant's view of humanity as a whole: brutal, violent and oppressive. (These qualities are, of course, the very ones that Goodman was seeking to eradicate.) Which returns us to our earlier allusion to *The Tempest*, and the cultural authoritarianism of Prospero over Caliban.

For certainly we can read the failure of Goodman to civilize Strong by teaching him language as a reflection of Prospero's failure to civilize Caliban – that is, to render Caliban pliable to the civilized behaviours of respectful obedience. *The Tempest* prefigures the concerns of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620), including the consequences of human knowledge when applied to an environment and its inhabitants, especially when that knowledge is advanced *and* imperfect. Like *Fallout*, *The Tempest* is, among other things, a speculation on the state of humanity in a world it has profoundly self-altered. With this in mind, let us consider Goodman's attempt to civilize Strong with Shakespeare in the context of Prospero's exchange with Caliban. Prospero's disappointment at his failed education of his adoptive child sounds very much like the frustration of Goodman's thwarted cultural missionary:

> Abhorred slave,
> Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
> Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
> Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with. (Shakespeare 1997: 1666)

Whatever civilizing attempts Prospero made to improve his pupil, the means by which he offered his lessons – usurpation, subjugation, imprisonment, torture – have utterly compromised this project – as Caliban makes clear:

> You taught me language; and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
> For learning me your language! (1666)

Without wanting to overstress the parallel between the two narratives, Caliban here uses language that is, for lack of a better term, Super-Mutant-ish. That is, he uses the language of punishment and replacement: punishment for the wrongs Prospero has done him, and a determination to eradicate and replace his tormentor/educator. Here and elsewhere in the play, Caliban characterizes himself as, essentially, mutated as a result of Prospero's infusion of language. Like the scientists who sought to breed a superior human, Prospero has attempted to create a pliable son or servant, and in doing so, has created a creature determined to displace his creator's authority via murder.

Prospero can be mapped on to *Fallout* in two different ways. We might align his use of language to manipulate Caliban with the scientists' use of FEV to create and exploit Super Mutants. But we might soften our perspective and instead associate him with Goodman's misguided but well-intentioned attempts to improve and humanize Strong. If our reading of Prospero is that he is a self-appointed master, attempting to create an obedient slave, then we must go with the former equation. But if Prospero is somewhat more benign – or at least more complicatedly oppressive – if he wishes to be a father to a child, then perhaps he parallels Goodman, attempting to use Shakespeare to raise a good son.

That Goodman, like Prospero, fails in his attempt does not eliminate Shakespeare's relevance to the post-apocalypse. To be sure, neither Strong nor the Super Mutants are civilized by Shakespeare – though one wonders whether perhaps a more talented actor might have met with greater success – but in Strong's powerful response to Shakespeare's language, there is the seed of a more optimistic reading. Strong's response, even if it is only a misreading of a fragment of a single line of a single play, is like the bottle cap we mentioned earlier: divorced from its original function by nuclear fire, and seemingly worthless without that original function, it is rediscovered, and, by a survivor of that fire, given new meaning, new relevance. Strong, inspired by a single line of Shakespeare, decides to join you in your quest throughout the Wasteland. He follows, observes and learns from you. Your choices – which he may approve or disapprove of, given his Super Mutant-ish priorities – inform his view of humanity, and its potential as an opponent – and, eventually, as an ally.

Because, should you display the kinds of choices Strong approves of (in short, should you behave like a Super Mutant in your adventures, adopting an act-first, think-later, eat-your-kills approach to interacting with your environment), Strong will declare you good company, signifying that you, at least, may be spared from his genocidal agenda. He even expresses his new attitude in terms

that suggest Caliban's Act V reconciliation with Prospero: 'Strong learn new word. Strong learn "respect"'—and finally declares that 'Human would make good Super Mutant' (Bethesda Softworks 2015). Strong may not find the milk of human kindness, nor develop a deeper appreciation of Shakespeare than contained in his single line-defining mission, but Strong's Shakespeare-inspired quest can lead him to achieving the respect and empathy that Goodman hoped to inspire in him.

Goodman's mission fails. Shakespeare as an emissary of humanity, as a transformative force for good, is rejected, and seems consigned to the rest of the irradiated ash-heap of pre-war culture. But that failure ought to be celebrated. The actor's mission is to use Shakespeare as an involuntary means of instilling 'Shakespearean' qualities in his subjects, much as Prospero uses language as a means of taming Caliban rather than improving him. We pre-apocalyptic admirers of Shakespeare may approve of Goodman's idealism, but forced empathy is not empathy; it is brain-washing, and not much different from the cruelty of the original FEV that created the mutants in the first place.

But Goodman's mission also succeeds, if only by inspiring Strong's belief in the ability of his own species to grow, to improve, and by inspiring him to seek out others who will help him on his quest for this improvement. Shakespeare finds another path forward to relevance in the post-apocalypse, one achieved, appropriately enough, by role-playing – by an essentially theatrical interplay with Strong, which leads to precisely what Goodman was trying to inspire: an exchange of empathy based on shared cultural behaviour, one enabled, however obliquely, by Shakespeare.

Or, to put it more simply, and to answer the running question: Shakespeare is indeed 'unkillable' rather than 'essential'. Rather, what we discover about him is that what is truly 'essential' about him is his ability to achieve an 'unkillable' status – through repurposing, through mutation. Like the cockroach and the bottle cap, he will survive the apocalypse, but he will be mutated, repurposed, and his avatar will stand eight feet tall, weigh half a ton and likely want to consume us for our milk.

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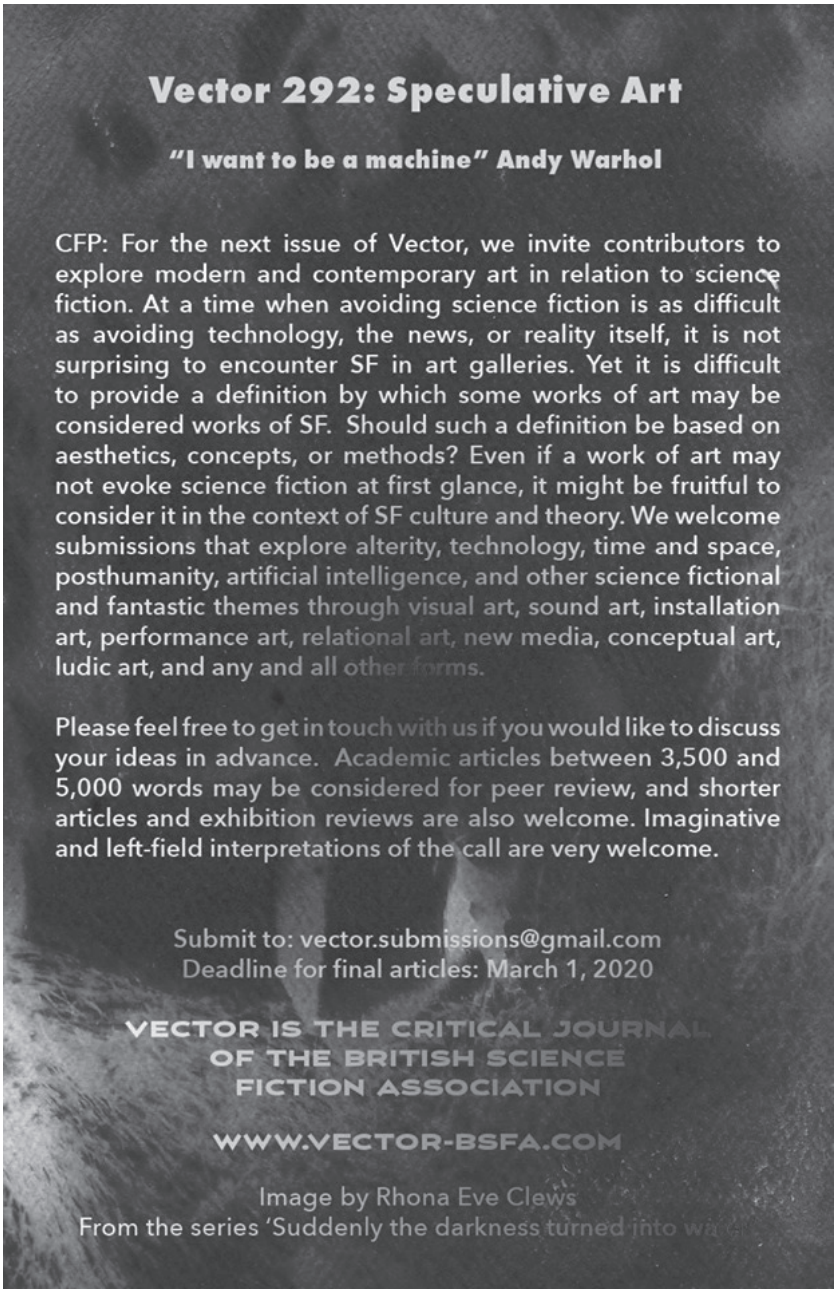

‘Is this the promised end?’: Shakespeare and Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction

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The intersection between Shakespeare and science fiction is rich and varied. In more optimistic scenarios, his works are performed on other planets (Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars* (1992) and *Green Mars* (1993)), are a pervasive presence in *Star Trek* (Lanier 2003: 65), and have delighted more than one alien audience and helped convince them that humans have some worth after all (compare Edith Friesner’s ‘Titus’ (1994) with Dan Simmons’ *Muse of Fire* (2007).) By contrast, in dystopian science fiction, for example Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), Shakespeare functions as an icon of the liberty and culture that has been lost. He has also been summoned, in much post-apocalyptic science fiction, as a witness to our species’ final days. It is as though we feel instinctively that Shakespeare needs to stay with us to the end and help chronicle the death of the human race, and in this article I will explore some of the very different ways in which Shakespeare’s relationship with the apocalypse has been depicted.

Shakespeare, as George Bernard Shaw’s 1901 coinage ‘Bardolatry’ indicates, has often been invoked as a quasi-divine figure, and this status becomes particularly resonant in the context of apocalypse. Although, as Andrew Tate observes, only a minority of modern apocalypses are religiously inflected (Tate 2017: 47–64), ‘even in an era of relative ignorance of the Bible and its specific teachings, a version of the apocalyptic imagination relies on a variety of biblical tropes’ (23). The eschatological functions of God – destroyer, prophet, comforter, saviour – are strangely mirrored in many of the incarnations of Shakespeare in post-apocalyptic science fiction. Within the context of Christian theology, God is characteristically depicted as omni-temporal, existing out of time, and thus endowed with foreknowledge of all future events. Shakespeare has been associated with similar powers. An early hyperbolic hint at a mysteriously timeless Shakespeare can be found in Ben Jonson’s ‘To the Memory of My Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare’ (1623). Read in isolation, the famous assertion that ‘He was not of an age but for all time!’ (Jonson 2012: 640), seems a comment on the perceived universality of his plays and a forecast of their capacity to endure. But the lines which follow contain a more startling implication:

> And all the muses still were in their prime,
> When, like Apollo, he came forth to warm
> Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm! (640)

Shakespeare's genius, Jonson suggests, somehow existed at the dawn of literary history before it became incarnate in the poet. More recently, Travis DeCook has argued that both Shakespeare and the Bible have been imagined as a timeless 'ideal archive'. In other words, they have been perceived as 'a book or other singular material object, but also as a stable, unchanging origin, fully differentiated from the ravages of history outside its bounds' (DeCook 2012: 161). The long-running BBC radio show *Desert Island Discs* offers a familiar coupling of DeCook's two 'ideal archives', in which the works of Shakespeare, alongside the Bible, are granted to every guest castaway, who must then choose just one further favourite book.

It is of course quite possible to treat Shakespeare's works as a kind of secular scripture without ascribing any miraculous power to the author or his plays. But because they are so celebrated and familiar, an aptly doom-laden quotation may echo like a portent in later ears. The sudden irruption of a quotation from *Hamlet*, *King Lear* or *Macbeth* in a post-apocalyptic fiction thus possesses something of the same force and gravitas as Shakespeare's own allusions to the Bible had for his first audiences. In particular, his descriptions of planetary upheaval, death or disaster may acquire a new and more ominous charge in a context of future apocalypse.

Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) includes a powerful early example of Shakespeare's imagined prophetic part in our destruction. Set in the late twenty-first century, this novel charts the inexorable progress of a virulent plague through the world. In the narrator's world though, as in ours, Shakespeare's popularity is undiminished, and his power is framed in emphatically supernatural terms: '[He] was still "Ut magus", the wizard to rule our hearts and govern our imaginations' (Shelley 1998: 281). The narrator, Lionel Verney, recounts an anguished performance of *Macbeth* at the Drury Lane Theatre. We are told that it was designed to offer some solace to the suffering Londoners, 'to drug with irreflection the auditors' (281). But *Macbeth* is itself a play full of violence and horror, and gradually the audience, although temporarily distracted from their own situation, finds in Shakespeare's language a prompt to still more agonized sense of its own hopelessness. In Shakespeare's words, Shelley's doomed playgoers – the walking dead – identify an uncanny prolepsis of their own plight, and find in the text of the play a portent of the future. An 'electric shock [runs] through the house' when the actor playing Ross describes the dire state of Scotland:

> Where sighs and groans, and shrieks that rent the air
> Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems
> A modern extasy; the dead man's knell

Is there scarce asked, for who; and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying, or ere they sicken. (282)

Ross's speech can simply be viewed as a 'found' prophecy – any description of plague or disaster might have been declaimed to similar effect. However, the word 'modern' (although probably used here by Shakespeare to mean 'everyday') may help wrench the words out of time. The eighteenth-century Shakespeare editor William Warburton glossed the phrase: 'That is, no more regarded than the contorsions that Fanatics throw themselves into. *The author was thinking of those of his own times*' [italics mine] (Shakespeare 1765: 464). This effect of prophecy chimes with an observation offered by Marjorie Garber that Shakespeare's works have a 'capacity to speak directly to circumstances the playwright could not have anticipated or foreseen. Like a portrait whose eyes seem to follow you around the room, engaging your glance from every angle, the plays and their characters seem always to be "modern", always to be "us"' (Garber 2005: 3).

It is hard to imagine this perceived prophetic quality in Shakespeare's words being evoked more ominously than in Arthur C. Clarke's short story 'The Curse' (1947). The story opens with the description of an unnamed 'little town' whose 'fame spread across the world' (Clarke 1985: 109). After being largely untouched by the passing centuries, it is suddenly wiped out by a stray nuclear missile, apparently fired by chance in the final stages of a full-scale war. The focus narrows to one churchyard in the devastated town, and then to a single grave, which is finally revealed to be that of Shakespeare:

> In the corpse-light of the dying land, the archaic words could still be traced as the water rose around them, breaking at last in tiny ripples across the stone. Line by line the epitaph upon which so many millions had gazed slipped beneath the conquering waters. For a little while the letters could still be faintly seen; then they were gone forever.

Good frend for Iesvs sake forbeare,
To digg the dvst encloased heare
Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones,
And cvrst be he yt moves my bones. (111)

Although the focus on this particular artefact could simply represent an elegiac reflection on one supreme example of all that would be lost if the world was

destroyed, we are left with the sense that some still greater significance is being claimed for the tomb. The story's title seems bound up with Clarke's bleak account of a nuclear war; indeed the reader will at first inevitably assume that the curse referred to in the title *is* the war. (The story's original title was 'Nightfall' – the later title intensifies the link between Shakespeare and the apocalypse.) After the final plot twist has been revealed, the precise relationship between the foreboding epitaph and the apocalypse remains unclear. However, yet again, words ascribed to Shakespeare seem charged with a prophetic power. We may sense – without being provided with any logical basis for such a conclusion – that the curse on Shakespeare's tomb is the cause as well as a late victim of the cataclysmic war, that Shakespeare, as well as being a witness of humanity's decline (as in *The Last Man*), is an agent of its destruction.

This impression is perhaps heightened by the way in which Clarke characterizes the nuclear exchange: 'Then there had bloomed for a moment that indescribable flame, sending out into space a message that in centuries to come other eyes than Man's would see and understand' (110). The flower and fire imagery, the emphasis on a message which would outlive the centuries, even perhaps reach across species boundaries, ironically recall the ways in which a genius such as Shakespeare's is commonly described. The death of the world, and of humanity, is subtly involved with Shakespeare's consummate art. Shakespeare here becomes the emblem of humanity and of something which transcends it, as well as perhaps the seed of its destruction.

The very different visions of apocalypse offered by Shelley and Clarke are unusual in depicting humanity's total destruction. It is more characteristic to find depictions of a few struggling survivors trying to rebuild civilization. As Tate observes, the ruined future of post-apocalyptic fiction 'counter-intuitively, often resembles our deep past' (Tate 2017: 19). This phenomenon goes beyond a replacement of electricity with candles, cars with carts; social structures, even language, often revert inexplicably to earlier forms, creating a dynamic of cyclicality which is perhaps most explicitly articulated in Walter M. Miller Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959). In two post-apocalyptic works from the 1990s, Miroslaw Rogala's *Macbeth: Witches Scenes* (1994) and Ronald Wright's *A Scientific Romance* (1997), the prophetic power of *Macbeth* is used to heighten the unsettling impact of this science fictional elision between the past and the future.

Rogala's enigmatic and fragmented short film deploys anachronism to post-apocalyptic effect. As its title suggests, the film only includes those scenes from *Macbeth* which feature the witches. It is set in a bleak landscape; grainy shots of the witches are interspersed with strange flashes of colour, a surreally fragmenting earth, and glimpses of war. Computers seem transmuted into

instruments of prophecy. However, it becomes uncertain whether they are showing us the future or the past. These are old broken machines, items of rubbish in a desolate wasteland; they appear to be powered by magic rather than technology. Thus there is a still a supernatural frisson when we see flickering images of high-tech warfare on their screens. Rather than adding ingredients to a cauldron the witches manipulate the broken computers with pliers to initiate their spell. The first vision is a robot who repeats the words of the 'Double, double' spell. However, this rather childish and familiar animation is followed by the appearance of a mushroom cloud on the screen, and further images of nuclear destruction accompany these words of Macbeth's:

> Though castles topple on their warders' heads,
> Though palaces and pyramids do slope
> Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure
> Of nature's germens tumble all together
> Even till destruction sicken; answer me
> To what I ask you. (Shakespeare 1997: 4.1.72–77)

The short film's temporal confusions, the difficulty we experience in placing its characters in time, add to the uncanny atmosphere produced by the witches' use of technology. The costume of the actor playing Macbeth is ambiguous, but suggests that he comes from a time in which computers don't exist, and thus beholds the screen with the same wonder Macbeth would have viewed the visions conjured up by Hecate from the 'vap'rous drop profound' (3.5.24). The viewer might easily think of him either as a Medieval thane granted a weird vision of the future, or as a post-apocalyptic warlord seeing glimpses of the past on a briefly revived piece of long lost technology.

In Wright's *A Scientific Romance*, the same speech from *Macbeth* creates an equally strange time loop effect. The novel's premise is that H.G. Wells created a real time machine with the help of Nikola Tesla. At the dawn of the millennium this is discovered by a young archaeologist, David Lambert, who uses it to travel five hundred years into the future. Here he discovers an eerily empty and ruined London in a world transformed by global warming. This is a highly allusive text, heavily indebted to earlier post-apocalyptic works by Shelley, Richard Jefferies and of course Wells himself. The novel's first references to Shakespeare exploit the ease with which his words may be recontextualized to speak to the needs of the present – or the future. Lambert remembers, as a youth in the twentieth century, discovering the last words of *King Lear* on a crumbling Victorian tomb:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey;

> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (Wright 1997: 126)

Recalled in the twenty-sixth century they become an epitaph for the whole of humanity. Later *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides another belated prophecy of apocalypse. Lambert dreams he met Titania, and her account of the upheaval called by her rupture from Oberon (edited from Act 2 Scene 1) now describes the fate of the world:

> Diseases do abound.
> And thorough this distemperature we see
> The seasons alter … change
> Their wonted liveries. (175–76)

However Shakespeare is most powerfully present in the final phase of the book when David's excavations reveal that those who survived a series of plagues fled to Scotland led by a 'king' who modelled himself on King Malcolm, but was opposed by a group who identified with his antagonist Macbeth. Lambert first becomes aware of this group when he finds, scratched on a lintel in Edinburgh castle, the words 'LANG LIV MACBEATH' (212).

Eventually he meets their descendants, a small community eking out a bleak existence on the shores of Loch Ness. In their hall he finds a crumbling coat of arms bearing the motto *Sleep No More* (236). Like the warlord in Rogala's film this curious clan seems out of time, driven back to the past by the horrors of the future. This temporal disruption is most forcefully suggested in a dramatic encounter between Lambert and the clan leader, 'Macbeth', who is beginning to suspect that his strange visitor has come from the past, and demands he explain the meaning of the mysterious cache of documents which have been saved by the community even though they have lost the art of reading: 'Ah'm waiting, David. Ah want answers. And nae fabbs' (275). Words from *Macbeth*, the same which accompanied the vision of nuclear destruction in Rogala's film, come into David's mind:

> *Answer me: Though you untie the winds and let them fight against the churches ... Though castles topple on their warders' heads; though palaces and pyramids do slope their heads to their foundations; though the treasure of Nature's germens tumble all together, even till destruction sicken; answer me* (275).

Earlier in his stay with the clan Lambert had recalled Macbeth's 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' speech; there the words were set out as verse, framed formally as a transcribed quotation (226). But Macbeth's words to the witches are made to seem more urgent and breathless in Lambert's unlineated italics as though they have come to his mind unbidden. He hears in the demands of the future 'Macbeth' an echo from Shakespeare's play and thus casts himself in the witches' role. Here he is a reverse prophet (as the computers in Rogala's film may be) revealing truths about the buried past rather than visions of the future. Yet as he is sending the manuscript back in time, like a message in the bottle, his entire narrative is a record of future events, the last syllables of recorded time.

In *A Scientific Romance*, Shakespeare seeps into the texture of the future, haunting its characters and events. This uncanny permeation of Shakespeare's works into the post-apocalyptic future is a recurring motif in science fiction. Apocalypse literally means an 'uncovering', and it sometimes seems as though the fall of humanity functions as a trigger to unveil hidden secrets or unlock concealed powers in the works of Shakespeare. *Macbeth* heightened the horror felt by Shelley's Londoners, but some later texts forge a more profound and enigmatic sense of entanglement between Shakespeare's works and our future fate. Wright's is a very bleak vision of the future, but often the persistence of his works is a symbol of hope for humanity's remnants, particularly when Shakespeare seems mysteriously immanent in a shattered future world. Yet again there is something of the dynamic, if not the theology, of Christian eschatology at work here. Although Christian teaching is not unified on this issue, apocalypse goes hand in hand with a stronger divine presence on earth – whether through the establishment of a Kingdom of God or a final day of judgement.

A similar prophetic strain is evident in Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) which, like *The Last Man*, depicts the devastating effects of a twenty-first century plague. The novel opens with a performance of *King Lear* in Toronto:

> The king stood in a pool of blue light, unmoored. This was act 4 of *King Lear*, a winter night at the Elgin Theatre in Toronto. Earlier in the evening, three little girls had played a clapping game onstage as the audience entered, childhood versions of Lear's daughters, and now they'd returned as hallucinations in the mad scene. (Mandel 2014: 3)

We hear just a few lines from the play before the actor playing Lear, Arthur Leander, collapses on stage. The first words quoted are Gloucester's 'Dost thou know me?' The opening of this short speech is a chilling absent presence in the scene:

> O ruined piece of nature! This great world
> Shall so wear out to nought. Dost thou know me? (
> 4.6.132–33)

Both Shelley and Mandel transform Shakespeare into a presage of apocalypse. But whereas Shelley's Shakespeare remains on stage, formally separate from future events though poignantly proleptic, in *Station Eleven* 'the world of performance seems to spill over into reality' (Smith 2016: 290). In the novel's opening sentences, the words 'a winter's night at the Elgin Theatre in Toronto' stand as though in opposition to 'This was act 4 of *King Lear*'. Mandel continues: 'The king stumbled and reached for [the little girls] as they flitted here and there in the shadows. His name was Arthur Leander' (3). The actor and character seem one – 'Lear' is embedded in 'Leander' – and later Jeevan, the paramedic who tries to save Leander, feels as though he has become part of the play world.

This sense of *Lear*'s permeation into reality is heightened by Mandel's conflation between the play's famous storm scene and the environment outside the theatre. The snow is falling both in Toronto and onstage, and the scene outside seems no more real than the 'little bits of translucent plastic' (4) which mimic the storm on the heath: 'From the bar the snow was almost abstract, a film about bad weather on a deserted street' (15). The actors gaze at this scene through glass doors, and a few lines later this bubble of unreality is replicated when Kirsten, a child actor, is given a paperweight which had once been Leander's: 'It was a lump of glass with a storm cloud trapped inside' (15) This echoes Jeevan's sense of the snowy park possessing 'the underwater shine of a glass greenhouse dome' (11). Soon the busy city will itself become no more than a frozen memory, recoverable only through images and texts.

These details intensify the significance of Shakespeare in the novel, as does the placement of the performance at its opening. *King Lear*, because it coincides with the very beginning of the plague and is disrupted by the death of the lead actor, acquires a heightened portentousness. In *The Last Man* the plague is already advanced when Verney sees *Macbeth*. It is significant that whereas Shelley's emphasis is on traumatized recognition, in *Station Eleven* the key apocalyptic lines quoted above are omitted from the text, passing over the heads of both actors and audience. The power of the play and the performance seem all the more intense because they are independent of human agency. There is of course no logical connection between plague and performance, but we may be left with the impression that the play has somehow acted as a catalyst for disaster. (And although Leander dies of a heart attack rather than the Georgia Flu, emotionally he still functions in a sense as the novel's 'patient

zero'.)

Clarke, Wright and Mandel all hint at a supernatural Shakespearean presence in their post-apocalyptic worlds. But in each case what seems strange may be accounted for with reference to coincidence, a character's literary sensibilities or the narrator's sleight of hand. A more concrete Shakespearean pressure governs the future world of Iain Pears' *Arcadia* (2015); this is unusual in that its focus is one of Shakespeare's happiest comedies rather than the expected tragedy. This complexly plotted novel opens in 1960s Oxford. Middle-aged don Henry Lytten, a fictional addition to the Inklings, begins work on a fantasy novel about the land of 'Anterwold', which he sees as a utopia: 'the very ideal of paradise' (Pears 2015: 17). His friend Angela Meerson, a time traveller from a grimly dystopian twenty-third century future, turns it into a reality as an experiment. It swiftly breaks free from its creator's control and begins instead to track the events and characters of *As You Like It*.

Rosie, a young girl who feeds Lytten's cat, discovers Angela's portal into Anterwold hidden in Lytten's basement. Rosie is short for Rosalind, and her adventures in Anterwold increasingly resemble those of her namesake. She falls in love with a wrongly accused outlaw, Pamarchon, joins forces with a young singer, Aliena, and disguises herself in male attire before following Pamarchon into the forest. Rosie takes the name of Ganimed (despite not having read the play) and gets Pamarchon to pretend s/he is his beloved. A refugee from Angela's dystopian future who escapes to Anterwold also succumbs to its Shakespearean centre of gravity as he is named Jaqui by the natives because 'he reminded them of some character in a story' (340). As a hermit and eccentric he fulfils the role of Shakespeare's Jacques. Rosie appears in the demesne of Willdon and her own surname is Wilson. Its etymology – Will's son – is drawn attention to by the people of Anterwold who think it's a strange name for a girl. Rosie and Jaqui are 'real', yet are seamlessly incorporated into Anterwold's Shakespearean subtext.

One of the novel's many twists is the discovery that Anterwold, despite its apparently fictional genesis, represents an alternative future for the human race. This revelation is adumbrated by Lytten when he reacts with exasperation to the chilly and clinical science fictional future dreamed up by his friend Persimmon: 'I will just have to hope that we blow ourselves up before we get to your state of perfection' (150). Pears rather disturbingly pits a grey, authoritarian future (Angela's world) against a neo-feudal green world which recalls both Narnia and Sir Philip Sidney's own *Old* and *New Arcadia* (c. 1580–86) as well as Shakespeare's forest of Arden. The price for the latter – should we prefer it – is nuclear war.

In *Arcadia*, Shakespeare plays the same post-apocalyptic roles that he did

in *Station Eleven* – catalyst and comfort – but does so with still more power, mystery and authority. Unlike texts where prophecies of doom are excavated opportunistically from Shakespeare's words, in *Arcadia*, a Shakespeare play actively shapes the contours of a post-apocalyptic world. Returning to the connections drawn by DeCook between the Bible and Shakespeare as 'ideal archives', it is as though Shakespeare's *As You Like It* has replaced The Book of Revelation in supplying a vision of a future which is both terrifying and hopeful – an Arcadia on earth rather than a new Jerusalem. (And, as noted above, Lytten explicitly conceives of Anterwold as a 'paradise'.) It is interesting that *As You Like It* has sometimes been identified as the comic double of *King Lear*, with its focus on wilderness, exile and disrupted family bonds. By contrast with several other science fiction works in which words from Shakespeare's tragedies are framed as a forecast of humanity's destruction, here a comedy provides the blueprint for renewal – for salvation.

As something of a shift can be detected in this article from the bleaker, earlier texts to later, more redemptive versions of apocalypse, it is fitting to conclude with a recent example where apocalypse is averted. The multi-authored *Monstrous Little Voices* (2016) is a linked story collection, written by five different hands. The first stories are set in an alternate Renaissance Europe where historical families such as the Medici rub shoulders with Orsino of Illyria and Prospero of Milan. However, in the final story of the volume, Jonathan Barnes' 'On the Twelfth Night', Shakespeare himself takes centre stage. It moves away from the magic and romance of the earlier tales, and takes us to a world which is both more familiar and more foreboding. The story opens: 'The first intimation of the coming catastrophe arrives after nightfall on the feast day which commemorates the birth of your god' (Barnes 2016: 241). The detached second-person voice of the narrator seems to emerge from a world which is far removed from our own. We soon learn that it is addressed to Anne Hathaway as she lies in bed beside her husband. She is awoken by a knocking at the door and finds on the threshold a man who is strangely familiar to her. He bears a message for Will: 'Tell him that the Guild is coming. Tell him that the void sweeps through the lattice of worlds and that he – Will Shakespeare – is at the very heart of it' (245). The story comprises twelve sections which take us from Christmas to Twelfth Night. As the nights progress, more such strangers haunt the house, different from one another and yet the same: 'One has the quality of a clown, the other that of a sage' (248). These turn out to be alternative versions of Shakespeare from across the multiverse, all of whom have taken slightly different paths in life. Anne's own Will turns out to be an outlier. His son Hamnet survived and he never became a playwright. He is the only Shakespeare who never left Stratford, and the only Shakespeare who has the power to save the

multiverse from utter destruction.

On the tenth night, Anne goes to church where the congregation have fled in horror from 'the blazing scarlet of the sky', and she hears 'the babble words of Revelation, words of Job […] Too much brimstone; insufficient mercy' (278). 'Babble', in particular, downgrades the scriptures; Shakespeare has replaced the Bible as a prophetic text, and Christ as the redeemer of humanity. Although not etymologically linked to 'Babel', 'babble' suggests a writing back to God. Anne beholds the threatening void with horror: 'a bare, empty page which consumes all that is within its path' (279). Her Will, the saviour, is also evoked in textual terms: 'And yet, standing before it, outlined, silhouetted by the unforgiving glare, like an inky pictogram upon blank parchment is Master William Shakespeare' (282). Their world must be destroyed to save both the other worlds and the other Shakespeares. The paradoxical power granted to a Shakespeare who is in a sense the lowliest version of himself, and his willingness to 'make our final sacrifice' (274) as one of the more urbane Shakespeares informs Anne, echoes the paradoxes of Christianity. The fact that his victory is aligned with a decisive mark on the blank page of the void recalls both the second verse of Genesis and the first verse of John's Gospel.

In *Image of that Horror* (1984), Joseph Wittreich suggests that Shakespeare offers a demythologized and secular vision of apocalypse in his tragedies:

> Shakespeare's strategy is to use apocalypse against itself, not to deny it as a possibility but to advance the consummation of history into the future. In *King Lear* apocalypse is not a certainty, nor even a likelihood, but only a *perhaps* – dependent not upon a divine hand to alter the course of history but upon individual men to transform themselves and then *perhaps* history. (Wittreich 1984: 32–33)

Perhaps ironically many modern writers of post-apocalyptic science fiction seem to have re-mythologized the end of the world, replacing God with Shakespeare, and the Bible with his plays. Wittreich's reminder of the importance of typology in Biblical exegesis, for example, the story of Jonah and the whale as an anticipation of Christ's death and resurrection, may help illuminate the function of Shakespeare in such texts: 'The typological premise is that history is reiterative in design; that the past speaks to, and of, the present and future. Episodes from biblical and, later, from mythological history are thus assumed to have some bearing upon contemporary existence, which they are invoked to explain' (18). The haunting exchange between Edgar and Kent – 'Is this the promised end?' – 'Or image of that horror?' (5.3.262–63) – takes on a new significance if we see Shakespeare's plays themselves as a form of scripture. *King Lear* and the other tragedies can be seen as 'images' of the horror which will take place

at the end of the world. It is in the works of Shakespeare rather than the Book of Revelation that the 'promise' is made; whereas God seems remote or even absent in Shakespeare's plays, the same plays are both present and potent – sometimes supernaturally so – in much post-apocalyptic science fiction. His works thus assume the role which Wittreich ascribes to archetypal fictions; they 'possess their own reality and are recreated when the old story has a pointed message for the present moment' (Wittreich 1984: 19).

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The Fourfold Library (9): *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

Sam J. Miller

Being the all-encompassing, trans-dimensional hyperobject that it is, The Fourfold Library never puts away childish things. Such relics of childhood are always eternally present, and the librarians are in a constant taxonomic anxiety as fresh vestiges of children's sf rematerialize, forcing an expansion of shelving into one or another direction. We are delighted that Sam J. Miller has managed to extract one such remnant before it is successfully categorized. Sam is the author of *The Art of Starving* (winner of the Andre Norton Award in 2017), *Blackfish City* (winner of the John W. Campbell Memorial Award in 2019 and reviewed in this issue), and his most recent, *Destroy All Monsters* (2019). A recipient also of the Shirley Jackson Award, Sam is a graduate of the Clarion Writers' Workshop. He lives in New York City and his website is samjmiller.com.

The science fiction canon is still mostly made up of books and stories.

Even though we've had over a hundred years of science fiction cinema, when we think of the most meaningful and formative influences on us as writers and as consumers, we're likely to think of books, not movies. That's because the demands of commercial filmmaking – and the limitations of a 120-page script – make it nearly impossible to achieve the kind of depth that truly transformative storytelling demands. Of course, there are exceptions like *Blade Runner* or *2001: A Space Odyssey* or *Star Wars*, which has had eleven movies (and counting!) and multiple TV shows and over forty years to tell a huge and rich story.

It will be interesting to see how that changes in the future, as the 'New Golden Age' of scripted television continues to produce series with all the same brilliant writing and complex narrative that we've come to expect from the best genre novelists. Science fiction fans will likely already have *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Expanse* on their DRADIS, but there's one show that I would argue belongs at the very top of the list – and most people totally miss it because they think it's for kids.

Few narratives mean more to me than *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. And almost none have taught me as much about storytelling.

That's right: a cartoon for eight-year-olds, on Nickelodeon. Best classified as a secondary-world fantasy – although it contains many sf elements, and its sequel series *The Legend of Korra* is one of the best sf/fantasy blends ever – the show takes place in a world where the Water Tribes, Earth Kingdom, Fire Nation and Air Nomads live in a state of constant struggle. While some people in each nation have the power to magically control their native element, only the Avatar can control all four elements. Each generation sees the Avatar reborn into a new nation, with a new identity – sometimes male, sometimes female – and learning to control all four elements in order to keep balance, as well as

serving as the bridge between the world of humans and the Spirit World.

In the series we follow Aang, a twelve-year-old boy who ran away from home when he found out he was the Avatar, a responsibility he did not want – but running away was the only reason he survived an attack launched by the Fire Nation in an attempt to kill the Avatar so no one could challenge their plans for global conquest. Waking up a hundred years later to a colonized world – and everyone he loved long dead – Aang must learn to bend all four elements if he is going to bring down Fire Lord Ozai and restore balance to the world.

I know; heavy stuff for a kid's show.

The first lesson I learned from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is this: character is the engine of story. Every character in the series is rich, compelling and complex, but for me the most meaningful one is Prince Zuko, son of the Fire Lord, and heir to that country's genocidal empire. Exiled by his abusive father, Zuko has been told that only by capturing the Avatar can he reclaim his honour. At the start of the show he's a villain, determined to bring down Aang and earn his father's respect. But he's also a scared, confused, angry kid, and as he grows up – and makes mistakes – and sees the violence that his country has perpetrated around the world, until (SPOILER ALERT) he decides that the true secret to restoring his honour is not to destroy Aang, but to work with him to defeat his father and end the Fire Nation's brutal imperialism. Together, Aang and Zuko end a century-long war and usher in a bright new era of peace and harmony.

That's the kind of narrative arc that makes a classic.

The second lesson? Kick-ass worldbuilding. The framework of four nations based on the elements is a simple one, but it allows for deep dives into specific corners when the story demands it. Each nation has its own culture and customs and clothing and problems and awesomeness, shaped by their native element (the Water Tribes are adaptive and ever-changing, like water; the people of the Earth Kingdom are diverse and strong, persistent and enduring).

The third way that the show changed me as a writer: it has without a doubt the best magic system I've ever seen. The rules of bending each element seem simple at first. But here's the thing – the magic system isn't separate from the world-building, or the characters. It's all so seamlessly integrated that I saw at once how the best world-building is inextricably tied up with every other facet of what makes a story work. To go back to my fave, Prince Zuko is, ultimately, a decent person struggling to make sense of his own culture's brutality, who has internalized a lot of that violence, but is trying to do the right thing in a complex world where it's never clear what the right thing is.

Avatar: The Last Airbender is also important for its non-western worldbuilding. The look and feel of each nation are inspired by Asian, Inuit and indigenous

cultures from around the world. Each of the four bending skills is based on a specific Chinese martial art and was created, and animated, with the help of real martial arts masters. Dragons are not monsters to be slain – they're sources of wisdom and guidance. While this insight has become more common in the past ten years, when the show debuted in 2005 it was a real revelation to see a rich secondary world fantasy that wasn't trying to be medieval Europe.

Last year, promoting my novel *Blackfish City*, I was on a panel at Book Con with R.F. Kuang, rock star author of the smash hit *The Poppy War* and its sequel *The Dragon Republic*, and we realized we both had a ton of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* influences in our books. Many of my friends and comrades in the field of science fiction and fantasy were raised on it – at a WisCon panel a couple years ago, N.K. Jemisin said of her Hugo-winning trilogy *The Broken Earth* that it was like 'the earthbenders from *Avatar*, if they were rated R'. I am endlessly delighted when I see tiny touches in books and stories that I know were informed by a love for the show. As future scholars attempt to construct a new canon and an archaeology of genre, one of the keys to understanding the present moment may well be *Avatar: The Last Airbender.*

So How Do You Write a Review?
Paul Kincaid

And deep breath. Delete. Start again.

I'm losing track of how many beginnings I've worked out for this piece, or tried to write, or got so far and hit delete.

I mean, in a sense, this is what I've been writing about, so it shouldn't be so hard to sum my thoughts up, tie them all together with a neat bow. After all, what I need to do is just write about what I've been doing for the last forty-odd years. That's easy enough, isn't it?

It's a subject that, theoretically, I know intimately. And because I do, I want to put everything down. But when I do, it doesn't look like much, or sometimes it's too much. How much detail is enough? When does it get self-indulgent or boring? How far do I need to go to get the essence of the thing? These are, to be honest, questions that you need to consider with every piece of writing you do, but when the subject is so close to you it's harder than ever to get the necessary distance to answer such questions.

So, wipe the pixels from the screen, and find a new way into the topic. Again.

Shelves are bending under the weight of all those books on how to write a novel, a biography, a short story, science fiction. How to write just about everything, except a review. I don't know of any books on how to write a review. Maybe there's no market; though the internet is overflowing with people who think they know how to do it.

Or maybe it's just too personal? After all, a review starts when you look inside yourself and consider how you feel about the work in question. And no two people are going to be able to do that the same way.

So keep it personal. Focus. Start again.

I don't remember the first review I wrote. It would have been sometime around 1975 or '76, I suppose, and would have been for some fanzine or other. I do recall my first rejection, though, if you choose to call it that. I had read, with great pleasure, Samuel R. Delany's novel, *Triton*, and immediately wrote a review which I sent off to a fanzine whose editor I knew slightly. It wasn't rejected in the sense of being returned to me, it was just never used. Sometime later, I came across an aside in the fanzine in which the editor said: 'Someone sent me a review of *Triton* which said it was all about philosophy.' As if that was a bad thing.

Well, yes, guilty. I'd just come out of university, where I studied philosophy, so I naturally noticed the philosophical ideas contained in the novel. After all, there are philosophical ideas at the heart of most good science fiction novels, and Delany was pretty blatant about drawing attention to them. What I learned

from this episode was that I was right and the editor was wrong. It was an important moment – you probably need that sort of arrogance when you're starting out as a reviewer.

What I then spent the next forty years learning was how wrong I was. Well, not wrong exactly, I'm still damn sure I'm right most of the time; but not always as right as I think I am.

Actually, it's not even a matter of right or wrong. There is no such thing as a right or a wrong review. A review is a matter of opinion. There are well-informed, well-argued, well-supported opinions; and there are uninformed, ill-judged, unsupported opinions. I suspect that the former qualities tend to make for better reviews, but there are always exceptions.

Certainly I would always aim to write the well-informed, well-argued type of review, even if I didn't hit the target, because that gave me a better chance of writing something that other people would want to read and value.

The thing you must do when learning to write reviews is read other reviews. Read widely – fanzines, websites, newspapers, magazines, journals. The first step in learning anything is watch how others do it.

More than that, however, I like to read reviews of books I've also reviewed. To be clear, if I know I am going to be reviewing a particular book, I take great care not to read any other reviews of that book. I don't want my own response to the work being shaped in any way by the opinions of other people. But once I have written a review, I then take care to read what other people have said about the work in question. This is a learning process: it is important to see what you've missed, or what they have missed, to see which aspects of the work they concentrate on, and which they pass over in silence. This is not a matter of changing your mind about the book or the review; that can happen, but not that often. Rather it is about testing your opinions, or what goes to make those opinions. It is a matter of wondering: what did I miss? And is it as important as other reviewers make out? Do I agree or disagree with their reading?

You do this to learn, to keep reminding yourself how many different ways there are to read any individual book, how big a universe is contained within even the shortest novel. When you test yourself against all the ways that a book can be read or misread, when you ask yourself whether your own views still stand up, you are actually learning how to have an opinion.

You are also working to inform that opinion. Having an informed opinion means having the ammunition you need if it comes to arguing your case. And you have to work at that. But that work shouldn't be arduous; quite the contrary, it should be a pleasure.

If you are reviewing science fiction, then the support you need is a broad knowledge of sf. And you acquire that by reading sf. On the assumption that you

want to write about sf in the first place because you enjoy reading it (and if that's not the case, what on earth are you doing here?), then every novel, short story, review, article and essay that you read is part of that essential acquisition of knowledge. The more you read, the more you'll find yourself thinking critically: I liked A more than B, or I thought X was better than Y. So the process of forming an opinion and informing an opinion are one and the same thing. After that, it's just a matter of refinement: why is A preferable to B? Why is X better than Y? The more thoroughly you can answer those questions, the closer you are to writing a review.

This is where the breadth of your knowledge of sf comes in. You start thinking to yourself: well, this is similar to too many other things I've been reading recently, and they haven't really done anything original with the idea. Or: didn't so-and-so cover similar territory years ago? Or, I always used to find thingumybob's characters really sympathetic, but this latest lot don't do anything for me.

All of this is very personal. No two people in the entire history of the world will have read exactly the same selection of books. And even where they have read the same books, they won't have read them in the same way, so what they take from the books will be different from what you take. What goes to form and inform your opinion is necessarily unique. But that's fine, because the purpose of writing a review, the purpose of any piece of writing, is to make the private (your thoughts) public (your writing). And nobody wants to read a review that just repeats what everybody else thinks, anyway.

Some time ago I set down what I consider to be the principles behind a good review, and my opinions haven't changed much over the intervening years. The principles, as I saw it, were honesty, evidence and entertainment. A review has to be something that the reader can trust. If you say a mediocre book is good simply because it is written by a friend, or that a good book is mediocre because you don't like the author, the chances are that nobody will spot it. But eventually it will have an effect, and readers will find that your reviews don't carry as much weight as they used to. And it affects you, too; you won't be writing with the authority you once had because, deep down, you know that your opinions are for sale to the highest bidder.

Evidence should be self-explanatory. Your review is an expression of your opinion, but you didn't arrive at that opinion out of the blue. There is a reason you feel that novel A is derivative, that author B doesn't have the first idea how to drive the language, that story C is taking sf in an innovative and exciting direction. And the reader has to know what that reason is, because that tells them why they should trust what you say. What's more, explaining your reasoning is a way of keeping you honest as a reviewer; if you are having difficulty saying

why the latest novel from author X is so great, it may be because it is not so great after all.

By entertainment I don't mean littering your review with hilarious one-liners. If you know how to tell a joke (which not many people do) by all means include one if you must. But remember that the review is there to provide an opinion of the book, not a showcase for your wit.

Instead, your writing should be worth reading. Let's face it, your job as a reviewer is to examine the work of people who are paid to write, and some will be people who write very well. If you are competent enough at your job to be able to say whether a book is worth reading or not, you should be competent enough to see how the author drives the language, and maybe learn a little from it. I don't mean copy them slavishly, but if you are writing about a superb wordsmith like John Crowley or Karen Joy Fowler, and your own prose is dull, there is something wrong there.

I said earlier that there is no point wanting to write reviews if you don't enjoy reading reviews. By that token, it is part of the job to ensure that others will enjoy reading your reviews. You should have interesting things to say, and you should express them as interestingly and as clearly as you can. Always remember, a review is a piece of creative writing every bit as much as the work you are reviewing.

But this is still dodging the question, isn't it? How do you write a review? How do you plan what you are going to say? How do you put the words down? How do you begin?

Or do you start and stop and start again? Do you take a deep breath, and delete, and start again…?

The Complete *Midwich Cuckoos*: A Further Discovery

David Ketterer (University of Liverpool)

In late 2018, whilst researching the production history of *Village of the Damned* (1960), Anthony McKay discovered a photocopy of the carbon typescript of *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) in the Margaret Herrick Library. Based in Beverly Hills, California, this library is the main repository of print, graphic and research materials of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The typescript, which features corrections that correspond to those in the surviving portions of the ribbon typescript housed in the John Wyndham Archive at the University of Liverpool, had apparently been sent by Wyndham's American agent, Scott Meredith (possibly without Wyndham's knowledge) to MGM Pictures, around the same time as the original (presumed lost) was submitted to Ballantine Books.

We now know that *The Midwich Cuckoos* should include an entire Chapter 10 ('Extra Mural') which is missing from both the UK and US editions. In addition, the typescript Chapter 9 was a very long and important chapter, consisting of pages 108–39, which the UK edition drastically cut. Consequently, in my proposed table of contents (*Foundation* 126), the ordering should now read: Chapter 8 – Coming Events, Chapter 9 – Heads Together, Chapter 10 – Extra Mural.

This new chapter adds significantly to the intense realism of the novel. It opens with the vicar Hubert Leebody receiving a visit from London by his brother-in-law Tom Rushton. Rushton's daughter Mary (Polly in the published text), who had holidayed with her aunt and uncle in Midwich, is pregnant. Leebody assumes that Rushton is accusing him of being the father and reacts angrily. In the UK and US editions, there is a single, incongruous reference to 'Miss Polly Rushton' in Chapter 7.

McKay told me what led to his discovery in an email from 21st March 2019:

> When I first came across the entry for the files in the catalogue I thought they must be two proof copies of the novel, or pages from a commercially printed edition – not an unknown occurrence in the script collections.
>
> It was only when I started my research for the Midwich article that I put together a basic chronology and read [script writer] Stirling Silliphant's claim that he had been sent transcriptions of 'microfilmed pages' that I dug deeper – mainly to disprove Silliphant's outlandish claim.
>
> It was Barbara Gregory's one-page report and an 18 page synopsis dated April 17th, the first dated file in the Script collection, that disproved Silliphant's claim – Silliphant wasn't involved until July '57.

> I ordered a copy of 'Learning from Other Worlds' to get your detailed time-line – then I read your page count – April 17th was a very early date, M-G-M must have had proof pages . . . but this was VERY early – a copy of the manuscript perhaps? I checked against the details in your paper – your description had the same page count as the total of the two un-dated [carbon typescript] files combined – BINGO!

An archivist at the Margaret Herrick Library provided McKay with ten per cent of the 426 pages plus the title page and the first 'CHAPTERS' listing page. I am grateful to Anthony for allowing me access to these pages. The Special Collections at the University of Liverpool have copies of the 108 pages that McKay does not have and are not duplicated in the ribbon typescript.

Let us hope that it will not be too long before Penguin publishes the full-length *Midwich Cuckoos*, which includes not just the portions that can be deduced from comparing the UK and US editions, but also the scandalous Chapter 10 which cannot be thus deduced. Wyndham would have been aware that the implication that a church minister could be an adulterer would have been as offensive to some Christian readers as his novel's theme: the secularized conception of virgin births. Rushton concludes his exchange with Leebody by exclaiming, 'You have a professional obligation to believe in the possibility [of virgin birth], haven't you? You bloody hypocrite!' Ballantine Books seem to have cut the same chapter without securing the author's agreement. Did a Ballantine editor do so because s/he suspected that these climactic sentences might offend Christian readers?

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Conference Reports

CRSF 9, University of Liverpool, 6 June 2019
Reviewed by Lucy Nield (University of Liverpool)

While sf, horror and fantasy are typically covered by the annual Current Research in Speculative Fiction Conference, this year's conference featured a vast array of subjects, including the visual arts and video games. The schedule was divided into three rounds of panels, with twenty speakers, beginning with the first keynote by Nicole Devarenne.

Devarenne focused on the problematic issue of otherness in J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* (1966) and John Christopher's *The World in Winter* (1962). Her interests in sf and postcolonialism were certainly illuminated by her passionate discussion of how race and difference can be negatively presented in speculative fiction. Christopher's novel, for example, appears to play with the boundaries of racial prejudice and the relationship between Britain and its former African colonies. Whilst the novel seems content in seeing the colonial hierarchy reversed, the text also demonstrates how sf can be infected with the realities of contemporary racism. Drawing upon Achille Mbembe's work surrounding power and 'limitless subjectivity' in postcolonial Africa, Devarenne highlighted the colonial ideology and racist overtones built into British sf of the 1960s.

Following this thought-provoking talk, Fruzsina Pittner examined a variety of fictions also focused on otherness and race with regard to Africa, Afrofuturism and stories that attempt to 'disrupt common views of Africa.' Pittner argued that the Other is often defined in sf in terms of violence. Africa is invariably portrayed as either violent or victimized, such as in the film *Pumzi* (2010). Pittner suggested that this imagery had to be challenged as a caricature of Africa. For instance, Octavia Butler's depiction in *Dawn* (1987) of the Oankali as 'benevolent colonisers' can be read as a critique not only of the colonial powers' self-image but also how they portrayed Africa as a culture in need of salvation. For Pittner, Butler exemplified how African diasporic writers can 'take charge' of their own narrative and reclaim their history.

Lyu Guangzhau introduced his comparative research into post-1990 British and Chinese sf. Guangzhau focused on the motif of duality, for example in China Miéville's *The City and The City* (2009), as an analogy for the historical, cultural and social differences between the two traditions. Whilst Guangzhau insisted that British and Chinese sf do not necessarily influence one another, he managed to create a parallel between them, perhaps subconsciously, that showed a clear tension between past and present as well as the fast-changing,

socio-cultural values that freckle both contemporary China and Britain.

After a quick break for lunch, Eamon Reid began with an in-depth analysis of three films, *Elysium*, *Snowpiercer* (both 2013) and *WALL-E* (2008), in terms of the Anthropocene. In each film, humans attempt to escape overpopulated, dying or dystopian Earths, only to find the illusion of security and safety. Filip Boratyn focused on the impact silence can have within human-alien relationships. Boratyn argued that Warren Ellis and Jason Howard's *Trees* (2015-) invites the reader to consider humanity's detrimental influence on the biosphere. Whilst the invading trees do not communicate with humans, their global impact is significant and unavoidable – a fresh metaphor for the effect that humans are having upon the Earth. Boratyn investigated connections between enchantment and the Anthropocene through the non-communicability of silence and the sublime. Lastly, Victoria Crozier argued that Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* (2008) not only reflects upon imagined and real catastrophes but also articulates positive changes to how we perceive and act upon the environment in the real world.

After a short break, I offered two examples – in Adam Roberts' *Bete* (2013) and Matthew Stokoe's *Cows* (1998) – of how giving non-human animals a 'human style' voice can affect human-animal relationships. For example, whilst animals adopt the language of humans, they also accept the concept of violence as a means to an end. By seizing power from humankind, the animals in these novels also challenge the anthropocentric notion that humans are the most powerful species in the world because of their innate capacity for speech and sentience.

The themes concerning animal behaviour, rights and anthropomorphism flowed into the next paper by Matthew Alexander. Alexander explored both the feminization of animals and the animalization of the feminine in the work of David Foster Wallace. Examples Alexander used included sexualized images of meat (portrayed as feminine), sexualized female cartoon characters and the juxtaposition of sexual and animal violence. Alexander paid particular attention to the sixth interview from *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999) in which a female character, identified solely as the 'Granola Cruncher', is objectified, abducted and raped. The story, as Alexander described it, becomes a violent chase between a hunter and its prey that also serves to show how society normalizes such violence.

Finally, Paul March-Russell delivered the second keynote of the day, on Daisy Johnson's *Fen* (2017). Drawing upon Mark Fisher's distinction between the 'weird' and the 'eerie', March-Russell initially contextualized Johnson's short stories in terms of what Robert Macfarlane has called 'the eeriness of the English countryside.' *Fen*, however, treats this preoccupation with otherness

in terms of sexual difference, particularly when focusing on the animal-human encounters within the text. Alongside the disruption of boundaries between human and animals, there is also throughout the stories the eerie presence of monsters, death and the unknown. These spectres also serve to illustrate the theme of becoming Other, in terms of animality, death and sexuality. The 'failure of presence', the eerie and human-animal encounters appear to, as March-Russell suggested, 'live on the threshold of the short story' and (quoting Jacques Derrida) 'the threshold of sexual difference'.

The programme closed with a post-conference wine reception and official conference group photograph. This time allowed delegates to network and discuss papers further. Many stayed later into the evening, to make the most of the opportunity to meet others in their research fields and get involved with the CRSF community. Many thanks go to the conference organizers, the keynotes, chairs and all of the speakers who helped make CRSF 2019 a wonderful day for everyone who attended.

Fantastic Religions and Where to Find Them: Deities, Myths and Rites in Science Fiction and Fantasy, Velletri, Castelli di Roma, 3-6 July 2019
Reviewed by Jim Clarke (Coventry University)

Academic discussion about fantastika is still nascent in Italy, so it was perhaps unsurprising that this wide-ranging conference was not hosted by a university but by a museum director, Igor Baglioni of the Raffaele Pettazzoni Museum of Religions. Nevertheless, the event attracted dozens of scholars from across Italy, Europe and America, including theologians and literary critics, but also filmmakers, medievalists, feminists, comic book artists, shamanists and schoolchildren.

The conference was advertised in two languages, Italian and English, with the former tending to dominate the papers themselves. Speakers included slides in English, so that less polyglot attendees could follow their presentations, but inevitably nuances can be lost and complex debates obscured. I am indebted, therefore, not only to the speakers who took time out to explain their work to me but also to Chiara Crosignani, whose own conference report may be read (in Italian) at https://www.fantasymagazine.it/30249/trovate-a-velletri-religioni-fantastiche-manuale-di-istruzione

Religion is divisive at the best of times, and its reception within fantastika diverges significantly. For fantasy LARPers, as Marcos Bella-Fernandez explained in his paper, religion is seen as a crucial part of the creative diegesis of performed fantasy. Similarly, it has become a trope of fantasy literature that a complex theology is an essential part of the world-building. By contrast, sf's

utopianianism tends to eschew religion as reactionary and regressive. The presence in sf of religion, whether real or invented, is in itself a controversial act, and can function well beyond the kind of anthropological role it performs in fantasy. Consequently, because of this controversy and because *Foundation* is dedicated to the study of sf, this review is skewed towards papers which dealt with sf texts. No offence is intended thereby to the fantasy scholars who presented a fascinating range of papers from J.R.R. Tolkien (Roberto Arduini) to George R.R. Martin (Giulia Mancini). In addition, there was significant discussion of comic books including, on the first day, a roundtable discussion of the current state of Italian comic books.

Speakers on the first day included Nicola Martellozzo, who situated Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* (1967) in terms of Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law. This recontextualization not only questioned the divine status of the Deicrats, already in doubt since Zelazny identifies them as Terran settlers, but also the extent to which they believe in their own divinity. Martellozo argued that this equivocation has ramifications for transhumanism and other techno-utopianisms which seek to elevate humanity to godlike status. If, by contrast, the Deicrats are discredited as a Hindu pantheon, then the only true believer in the novel is their nemesis, the Christian Nirrti.

In a similar inversion, Fernanda Rossini identified Jordan, the *deus otius* of Robert Heinlein's *Orphans of the Sky* (1941), as the creator not only of the generation ship but also its social order. Rossini argued that the resulting theocracy among the crew contrasts with the 'free, scientific' perspective of the 'muties'. Whereas the theocratic indoctrination of the scientific elite amounts to a Marxist critique of the function of religion, the free-thinking muties are akin to Galileo's resistance to the Catholic Church: '*Eppur si muove*' becomes 'Nevertheless, it still moves.'

No less intriguingly, Lucrezia Naglieri took an iconographic approach to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), considering the visual aesthetics of the theocracy depicted in the novel and its televisual adaptation. With frequent reference to Atwood's Biblical source material, Naglieri astutely unveiled some of the less obvious Christian iconography embedded in Gilead society and, particularly, in its power structures and formal human interactions. Most intriguingly, she identified some non-Biblical sources too, from the Bacchantes origin of the Particicutions to the echoes of the Geisha Obi in the handmaid uniforms.

Pascal Lemaire's insightful examination of Byzantine theology and culture in alt-history narratives provided a stimulating opening to the second day's proceedings. Lemaire focused on the influence of Robert Graves's *Count Belisarius* (1938) upon works by L. Sprague de Camp, Robert Silverberg, Harry

Turtledove and Richard Blake. In particular, Turtledove's *Agent of Byzantium* (1987), set in a thirteenth-century world without Islam, reflects the author's knowledge of the culture and era, including a doctorate in Byzantine studies. Despite his extensive analysis, Lemaire noted that there remains scope for further research into this hitherto unexplored area.

The afternoon commenced with my own exploration of the role of Zen Buddhism in Frank Herbert's Duniverse. Although Herbert was a Zen adherent and a close friend of prominent Buddhist proselytizer Allan Watts, the surface-level depictions in the Fremen of Arab culture and Islam have obscured the significant Buddhist influence in the Dune mythos. However, the most provocative and intriguing paper of the day was from theologian Roger Sneed, who queried the representation of Afrofuturism in *Black Panther* (2018) in relation to African-American religious life. Is Wakanda possible or achievable, and if so, what are the ramifications of its cultural expression for African Americans and black people generally, especially in the context of religious faith? These are difficult questions to pose, let alone answer, but Sneed was to be commended for laying out the terms for debate.

A highlight of day three was a presentation by secondary schoolchildren from Nolfi High School in Fano on their class project into Philip K. Dick's short stories, 'Faith of Our Fathers' (1967) and 'The Story to End All Stories' (1968); conducted under the supervision of their teacher Andrew Daventry. Martina Broccoli and her colleagues did well to unravel the implicit theological elements of these notoriously complex stories, identifying a negative capacity in Dick's vision of God. It bodes well for the future of sf scholarship in Italy when secondary schoolchildren can present research that stands up well in the context of experienced post-doctoral scholars. Daventry himself presented a paper on Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy adventures, a set of alt-histories in which the Reformation never happened, magic is coded as science, and Plantagenet rule extends into the twentieth century. For Daventry, these narratives explore themes such as sin and penitence, the nature of free will, and the distinction between human and divine justice. A further group of students from Nolfi also presented on classical reception and religion in H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulu mythos.

Alberto Cecon continued this theme by examining the concept of evil messiahs in Lovecraft. Cecon cleverly linked Lovecraft's inverted pantheons to earlier works such as Lord Dunsany's *The Gods of Pegana* (1905), and also the motif of returning ancient Gods in the work of W.B. Yeats and other Celtic Revivalists. For Cecon, the Cthulhu mythos is a conscious negation of Christianity, evoking not only the blasphemies of Aleister Crowley but also an attempt to transcend the 'limbo of everyday life'. In this sense, for Cecon, Lovecraft can be connected to a tradition of other American writers such as

William Faulkner or Tennessee Williams.

The third day concluded with a panel on Italian fantastika, with Francesca Boldrer exploring the Proteus and Eurydice myths in the work of Italo Calvino, particularly *Cosmicomics* (1965). Mattia Cravero then examined Primo Levi's essay, 'Personal Golem' (1984), in the context of the Jewish tradition extending from writers like Borges, Meyrick, Wiesel and Scholem to the Qabbalistic tradition, and ultimately to the Talmud and Mishnah.

The final day of the conference commenced with Eleonora D'Agostino's fascinating exploration of the evolution of Scientology. Identifying A.E. Van Vogt's *Null-A* series of sf novels as a significant influence on L. Ron Hubbard, D'Agostino then parsed the influence of theosophy and the esotericism of the Ordo Templi Orientis on Hubbard's nascent theology. Positing Scientology as a rationalist idea of the divine, D'Agostino proposed that the religion has evolved and deviated from Hubbard's initiating mythology, often in heretical ways.

Gianni Trapletti next sought to test the plausibility of a religion invented by Kurt Vonnegut for his novel *Cat's Cradle* (1963). Bokononism is a simplistic faith, expressed in fourteen books of teachings and often taking the form of calypsos, which was created by the character Lionel Boyd Johnson on the Caribbean island of San Lorenzo, where all the inhabitants became adherents. It proposes a wise and noble god who is nonetheless puzzled about the world. Everyone equally has a role in God's plan, though they may not know it. For Trapletti, Bokononism reflects Vonnegut's own opinion about religions, in that they may be fallacious but can on occasion function to make the world a better place, and therefore is simultaneously a parody of religion and a plausible religion in itself.

Giuseppe Cuscito examined the sfnal quality of the long-running 'ancient aliens' hypothesis. Though its golden age was the 1970s, when Erich Von Daniken's books sold in the millions, it remains remarkably persistent. Cuscito traced its pseudoscientific and pseudohistorical elements back to Lovecraft and Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society. Unsurprisingly, its contemporary online iteration remains faith-based, is fundamentalist and generally riven by in-fighting and sectarianism, sadly not unlike many more established faith-based communities. The conference concluded with papers on the cosmology of C.S. Lewis's Space trilogy by Liliana Tangorra and pre-Christian religious traditions in Harry Potter by Sebastian Schwibach, thus neatly citing the conference's clever title.

It would be reductive to summarize or syncretize such a broad and variegated range of perspectives. Indeed, the fecundity and quality of the papers suggest both that scholarly interest in fantastika in Italy is growing rapidly, and that the neglected topic of religion in sf is becoming a significant, interdisciplinary and international interest. Given such a range, the publication

of conference proceedings would not merely be bulky but almost impossibly broad. Nevertheless, one yearns to see much of this work in print, in whatever language.

One mark of a successful conference is the length of the reading list you take with you when you leave; things to be read, others to be re-read anew, things one never knew existed before. I left with a desire to return again to authors like Zelazny, but also to watch *Black Panther* with a different eye, and especially to explore Italian graphic novels, from *Dylan Dog* to *Chiantishire*, a terra incognita now become a fascinating imaginative destination. Most keenly, though, one yearns to hear more about some of the dense topics whose surface could only be scratched in twenty-minute slots. One wishes to see Naglieri's eagle eye focused on other dystopian fictions. The extensive work by D'Agostino into Scientology's sf lineage bears more detailed definition and, most of all, one hopes that Lemaire will extend his work on Byzantium in sf into the monograph that it clearly deserves to become.

Embodying Fantastika, Lancaster University, 8-10 August 2019
Reviewed by Oliver Rendle (Manchester Metropolitan University)

The sixth annual Fantastika conference began with a more practical, less theoretical exercise in embodiment: a regrettably rare opportunity to discuss the challenges likely to be faced during a twenty-first century academic career. In a training workshop, co-organizer Mike Ryder shared his professional experience of building and maintaining social media presences. Ryder covered both the purposes and common misconceptions concerning various aspects of online academic profiles; not only demonstrating how the internet can assist young academics at the outset of their careers, but also explaining how poor social media management can hold back those who are reluctant to tackle this new and daunting platform. Working in conjunction with Ryder's talk, careers consultant Elaine Davies addressed the process of writing an academic CV, a topic often neglected in many universities despite its obvious importance. Though the impersonality of the job application procedure threatened to become more than a little disheartening at times, Davies' optimistic attitude to working with the system — and her explanation of the mistakes that applicants most commonly make — was both reassuring and valuable. As an aspiring academic, I found both discussions very informative and far less disillusioning than previous talks. As such, a positive engagement with these subjects was as much a breath of fresh air as it was some much-needed guidance — helping attendees develop skills that are far too often taken for granted.

The latter part of the first day consisted of a roundtable discussion and

group workshop on the theorization of embodiment. Here, Sherryl Vint was joined by Chloé Germaine Buckley and Liz Oakley-Brown to discuss how their interactions with various kinds of theory had changed their career trajectories by affecting both their interests and research priorities. Attendees were able to raise their own qualms with specific theories and, in so doing, help assuage their concerns while also critiquing the blind faith given to a particular framework. Each speaker then guided group discussions of the benefits, issues and reservations participants had with strict adherence to theoretical approaches, largely focusing on the issue of genre labels. The discussion culminated in a questioning of the term 'fantastika' itself, though the verdict was reassuring for the organizers, I am sure. Attendees commented that while genre terms can be useful for marketing and the creative manipulation of expectations, as soon as they become exclusionary they threaten to promote false hierarchies. Similar to negotiating the Lancaster campus itself, academics could avoid the numerous byways and pitfalls of genre terminology by using 'fantastika' as an effective guide through the labyrinth.

With the training day over (and the first social of the conference weighing hazily on some of our minds), day two opened with a welcome by co-organizer Kerry Dodd and the first of the academic panels. The first I attended ironically provided three different insights into how inanimate objects live through us. Leonie Rowland's paper on objectophilia and commodity animism effectively demonstrated how homes, places of supposed comfort, can embody the taboo fears of Japanese society. Using two graphic short stories by Junji Ito, Rowland showed how the sanctuary of tradition and familiarity is reimagined as stifling, suffocating, hostile, even fatal. In a similar vein, Marita Arvaniti explored Jean-Paul Sartre's conceptualization of the vampiric home, an entity that financially, emotionally and physiologically drains the life from its owner(s) in order to prolong its own existence, with an effect embodied most prominently in the female characters residing in such abodes. Both papers focused at least partially on the concept of usefulness and the unnerving reversal of the subject-object relationship, which Dodd honed in on with his own paper on Object-Oriented Ontology. While Rowland and Arvaniti demonstrated how fiction can challenge assumptions concerning quasi-capitalist materiality, Dodd suggested various survival-horror computer games — Object-Shock games — problematize the concept of 'usefulness' itself, forcing us to rethink our utilitarian, anthropocentric paradigms about the outside world.

In the following panel, Lyu Guangzhao and Sarah Dodd both studied Chen Quifan's *The Waste Tide* (2013) from two radically different perspectives. Guangzhao analyzed the social and environmental exploitation perpetrated by the ruling classes, arguing that the victims of this oppressive status-quo were

only able to secure autonomy through utilizing the 'futureless' people and objects that they were initially forced to live with. Conversely, Dodd moved quickly from an overview of *The Waste Tide* as a depiction of 'the Toxic Sublime' to focusing on the novel's protagonist, a cyborg whose technological resurrection triggers social and political upheaval. The panel was rounded off by Chelsea Haith, whose paper addressed posthumanism and the politics of technophilia in Ken Liu's 'Good Hunting' (2012). As with Dodd's analysis, Haith demonstrated how technological advancement can lead to a reclamation of political power, but she also problematized the assumptions that underwrite this utopian belief. Haith argued that such narratives build on a nostalgia that threatens to promote regressive attitudes; Liu's woman/animal/spirit/cyborg symbolizes as much a fetishized return to an unequal past as it does a vision of progress.

Following lunch, Vint's keynote explored how individual longevity has been philosophically reinvented by the capitalist economy, using Don DeLillo's *Zero K* (2016) and Rachel Heng's *Suicide Club* (2018) as illustrations. Such books, while seemingly extreme in their depictions of the commodification of human life, instead depict laughably familiar aspects of corporate life. Vint fluently guided us through economic concepts to highlight the intrinsically disturbing ramifications of such capitalist doctrines. Her paper was itself a wonderful embodiment of what the entire conference sought to examine.

The last panel I attended on day two analyzed the close relationship between horror and humour. Valentino Paccosi discussed The Evil Dead franchise (1981–) in terms of a carnivalesque celebration of violence and death. Paccosi argued that while gratuitous gore and the repeated violation of culturally-specific taboos may be outright repulsive (what he termed 'the Absolute Obscene'), such content can be reintegrated within the genre through their darkly humorous celebration. My own paper sought to present the clown figure as not just a monstrous embodiment of contemporary anxieties but also as a counterintuitively *likeable* threat to our way of life. While clowns have, historically, represented both rebellion and the potential for equality through humour, the horrifying incarnations of the clown in twenty-first century cinema, such as *IT* (2017) and *The Dark Knight* (2008), have problematized this association.

The final day began with an appropriately weird mix of papers. Rob O'Connor explored how China Miéville's tentacular monsters simultaneously draw attention to categorical distinctions by being reminiscent of creatures in our own world, while repulsively violating these same boundaries. Steffen Hantke studied three forms of fiction where the individual human body is entirely decentred: the war film, the police procedural and cosmic horror. While O'Connor argued that the cephalopod body is the ideal symbol of the Weird,

Hantke countered that the impersonal power structures and inhuman systems in *The Wire* (2002–8), the recent remake of *Catch 22* (2019) and *Dr Strangelove* (1964) are just as formless, pernicious and unstoppable as any Lovecraftian behemoth, and just as resonant a symbol of cosmic indifference as any single, tentacled monstrosity could ever hope to be. Hantke's paper surprised me as it had never occurred to me to look for evidence of cosmic inhumanity in such human-interest-oriented dramas, but Hantke made it seem like an obvious connection to make.

Similarly, in the next panel, Daniel Pietersen argued against common misperceptions of how stable our identities are and instead for the unavoidability of change in Alex Garland's 2018 adaptation of Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*. Joe Howsin's paper used Stanislaw Lem's novel, *Solaris* (1961), to guide us through the basic concepts of trauma theory. The physicality of the protagonist's hallucination, Howsin argued, is an exceptional demonstration of how emotional trauma inflicts concrete damage on its victims, violating the boundary between the cognitive and the physical, and disrupting our understanding of temporality. As an introduction to the topic and a framework to approach *Solaris* through, Howsin's paper worked effectively. It also raised questions such as who is entitled to talk about trauma? How can art best portray such sensations? Can art help those people suffering under such conditions?

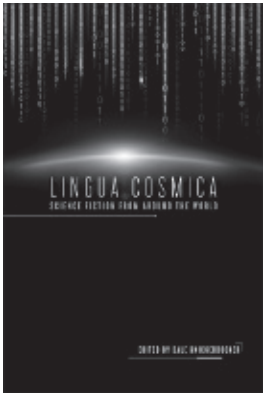
The final keynote, from Sara Wasson, also explored the role of trauma within post-operative medical procedures. Alongside various examples of the dearth between objective statistics and individual experience, Wasson used texts from horror and sf to focus less on the systems perpetrating these types of 'slow violence' and more on the victims themselves. Wasson effectively showed how fantastika can discuss the psychological damage sustained during medical processes, how clinical studies will often dismiss such trauma due to its non-physical symptoms, and how class and race can affect the likelihood that one shall encounter such traumatic circumstances.

The final panel was probably my favourite, partly because of the topic but mostly because of the speakers' infectious enthusiasm. Chris Hussey presented the Space Marines of the Warhammer 40k universe as the grotesque embodiment of the Nietzschean *Ubermensch*: the violent, hyper-physical, sexless, power-fantasy of those ascribing to the Will-to-Power. Conversely, Mike Ryder read these same characters as the military fantasy of a developing country: an inhumane, inhuman super-weapon, laden with all the same ethical paradoxes and moral pitfalls as nuclear armament. While Hussey questioned the sense of responsibility held by an individual that has been engineered to circumvent the limits of human psychology and physicality, Ryder questioned the efficacy of defending one's ideology (from monsters or political and social

upheaval) by warping its fundamental beliefs. In the end, both papers converged on the all-too-complex question, what does it mean to be human?

Unfortunately, thanks to a delightfully on-brand British summer storm, the final roundtable had to be cancelled as attendees scrambled to organize alternative routes home. Nevertheless, the conference was made up of three days of scintillating discussion and hosted by a consistently welcoming group of organizers – Kerry Dodd, Mike Ryder and Marita Arvaniti. To all that attended, I hope to see you at the next one!

Book Reviews



Dale Knickerbocker, ed. *Lingua Cosmica: Science Fiction from Around the World* (University of Illinois Press, 2018, 272pp, £23.99)

Reviewed by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay (University of Oslo)

Lingua Cosmica attempts a panoramic view of non-anglophone and global sf. Divided into eleven chapters, each discusses a specific sf literary tradition and a representative author. The contents include sf from Cuba (represented by Daína Chaviano); Poland (Jacek Dukaj); France (Jean-Claude Dunyach); Germany (Andreas Eschbach); Argentina (Angélica Gorodischer); Japan (Sakyo Komatsu); China (Liu Cixin); Canada (Laurent McAllister); Nigeria (Olatunde Osunsanmi); Finland (Johanna Sinisalo); and Russia (the Strugatskys). While a significant number of the works discussed have been translated and are available in English, the book also highlights works that are not yet translated but deserve to be (for instance, McAllister's *Suprématie* cycle). Knickerbocker's excellent introduction contextualizes the field of global sf as it is at present, highlighting fiction as well as literary criticism. One can also notice clear editorial touches in the way all the contributions in the essay are structured, moving from the context of the national sf tradition to the oeuvre of the author discussed, and finally, the specific work or works under discussion, creating a fine balance between historical contextualization and textual analysis.

The essays are not academically dry but entertainingly and polemically written, poking fun at anglophone sf criticism, or sf criticism that tends to focus on anglophone sf, and its assumptions. Several share thematic similarities, such as the insertion of elements of myth, fantasy and folklore in otherwise sf worlds, for instance in the work of Chaviano, Gorodischer, Osunsanmi and Sinisalo. Such sharing also hints at other kinds of possibilities, for example, a study of how local versions of myths underpin different varieties of global sf, accounting for their similarities at structural or thematic levels, and differences at the level of nova. Another, equally relevant thematic similarity that appears is in how many of these authors answer or subvert canonical anglophone sf, or how they relate to each other in terms of political inspiration and objectives, for instance Gorodischer and Ursula Le Guin in terms of feminist poetics, or Komatsu and his likely influence on Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*

(1971). Another feature of the book is the detailed summaries provided for the works under discussion, which works for a volume of this kind written in English but dealing with non-anglophone sf.

There are some significant omissions in the volume. While the chapter on Nigerian sf is the longest in the book and this reader's personal favourite, *Lingua Cosmica* nonetheless does not focus on other sf traditions from Africa, and because the essay focuses primarily on a film, a second perspective on literature would have been useful. Two other omissions, Arabic and Middle Eastern sf, and Indian sf (in any language), which are both well-developed traditions, would also have been useful, although Knickerbocker does point out that he was unsuccessful in finding such contributors and that an expected contribution on Indian sf fell through. A fourth omission is that of the framework of indigenous futurisms, which also deserves a place in contemporary studies of global sf. This raises our expectation that a second, equally enticing volume is in the works.

If there is one place where the volume may be criticized, it is perhaps through no fault of its own. While it is perfectly possible, as the volume demonstrates, to compare similar literatures from different literary contexts and traditions, what is less clear are the differences between these literatures from each other and from sf as a genre itself. The volume thus works for what it sets out to do, which is to make an argument for global literary connections, but it does not make an argument for why sf is the necessary label for the fiction produced by all these writers, including when these writers themselves eschew such labels. This also calls for further investigation, including of the framework of global sf itself, perhaps in a subsequent volume.

Overall, *Lingua Cosmica* is a useful introduction to the global sf phenomenon, and will serve as a ready reference for an emerging field and companion for courses on global sf. The volume convincingly shows why science fictional futures have been so important across cultures and time periods, but especially now. In an era marked by the insularity of nationalist movements and the supra-national threat of climate change, it is necessary to investigate the significance of multiple futurisms, from wherever they may emerge. This is a great beginning.

Alexis Lothian, *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* (New York University Press, 2018, 352pp, £23.99)

Reviewed by Amandine Faucheux (Louisiana State University)

Alexis Lothian's *Old Futures* is an ambitious attempt to say something new about imagined futures and the role of queer/deviant bodies within them. The book is divided into three parts. Part I examines white women's utopias and dystopias of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their role in national and eugenics projects. Part II focuses on Afrofuturist texts by W.E.B. Dubois, Octavia E. Butler, Jewelle Gomez and Samuel R. Delany, and interrogates the futures these texts imagine for those whose bodies have been marked as redundant. The final part turns to visual media by analyzing two films from the 1970s/80s and fan-produced video remixes ('viddying') of speculative film and TV. Each part of this eclectic archive is linked through what Lothian cheekily calls 'wormholes', short sections that discuss cultural texts as thematic bridges between the book's larger sections.

Lothian's argument is in part a response to queer theorist Lee Edelman's pathfinding claim in *No Future* (2004) that all political rhetoric is built on the image of the innocent child in whose name the future must be constructed. Edelman argues that in the context of this heteronormative reproductive discourse (which he calls 'reproductive futurism'), queerness represents the death drive: sex which has no reproductive function, no role in the production of the future. Lothian offers a different interpretation by attending to texts written by those to whom Edelman paid scant attention: people of colour 'who have been marked as futureless or simply left out by dominant narratives'. Lothian's arguments are not simple and straightforward; nor does she absolve these texts of all complicity in the dominant discourses of their time. The strength of *Old Futures* relies, on the contrary, on the subtlety and complexity of Lothian's readings, claiming that although these queer imagined futures are not 'always hopeful, desirable, or even liveable', they open up possibilities for thinking about the act of speculating in the present.

In Chapter 1, Lothian explores the little-known utopian novels, *New Amazonia* (1889) by Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett and *Woman Alive* (1936) by Susan Ertz. She traces both novels' complicity in a eugenic vision of the future while also identifying ambiguous moments in the texts that do not align entirely with a white, male, heterosexual eugenics agenda. For Lothian these texts are

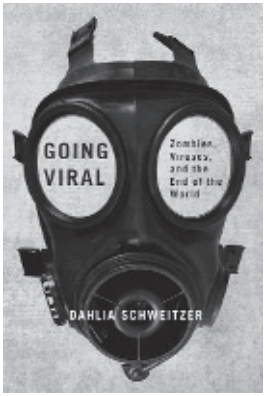
worthy of attention because 'When utopian arguments for women's governance operate in conjunction with imperial formations, they have much to tell us about how feminist politics of reproduction and gendered embodiment function at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race with mechanisms of white supremacy and state power'. Chapter 2 turns to 'dystopian impulses' in Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World* (1926) and Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937). Lothian argues that in both novels 'the production of futurelessness [...] is a powerful element in depictions of gender, power, and especially biological reproduction [that] resonates with the queer project of articulating a politics that might not rely on reproduction: a futureless politics'. The first wormhole following this chapter focuses on the character of the black mother in Alfonso Cuaron's *Children of Men* (2006). Reading the background images of the film in comparison with its narrative, Lothian contends that there is 'something queer about the way she fails to synchronize with the narrative in which she is situated', as a character who both symbolizes the utopian revival of the human race beyond eugenic concerns and a subordinated figure to the scientists who will exploit her by the end of the movie.

Chapter 3 examines the way in which Afrofuturist writers appropriate discourses about reproduction and the future in opposition to the dominant narratives in which they do not figure, starting with Du Bois' 'The Comet' (1920) and reading it alongside Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) and Butler's *Fledgling* (2005). She argues that both narratives imagine the reproduction of a future that does not revolve around the heteronormative production of children and does not rely on conventional discourses about the future available to black women. She also reads these stories as appropriating the white male vampire genre to criticize racism and economic exploitation, concluding that these texts highlight the manner in which 'reproduction, futurity, and consumption need not always be put together in the same predictable ways'. Chapter 4 focuses on Delany's *Dhalgren* (1974) and *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984). Lothian argues that Delany imagines worlds free of white supremacy and heteronormativity, in which sex and eroticism exist in messy, 'unclean', impolite ways. *Dhalgren*'s non-linear and fragmented narrative puts the future in direct conversation with the present moment and refuses to describe coherent identities and experiences, while *Stars* 'institutionalizes queer sexual pleasures, most vividly through the integration of public sex into everyday society' and produces a society with radically different reproductive structures. The second wormhole focuses on *Sense8*'s telepathic group sex scene and reads it as 'the hybrid progeny of two sometimes-utopian fantasies: the queer world of public sex [...] and the science fiction of intimate technological connectivity'. Lothian shows that the sensate scene offers a metaphor for the new kind of

queer eroticism made available online, for example slash fiction, written mostly by women and appropriating established male characters for the depiction of queer sex.

Chapter 5 turns to two little-studied speculative films: Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (1978) and Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983). Lothian reads these movies alongside the more familiar sf blockbusters whose futures reproduce 'temporal lines oriented to the reproduction of capitalism and white supremacy – upward to profess, down to degeneration, on through hetero-reproductivity to futures that preclude the humanity of some'. Jarman and Borden, on the contrary, frame the future in the present moment, rejecting the conventional images and aesthetic of science fiction but relying on its speculative methods: 'Each queerly frames the future as a practice of worlding that begins on the screen and extends beyond it'. Chapter 6, through examples of remix videos, including Lothian's own, makes the argument that such creations are not marginal or incidental but full participants in the meaning-making of the canonical texts they rearrange. Lothian pointedly asks: 'What if the creative labor of [a viddier] and her peers were taken as seriously as the work of critics and scholars, or for that matter the work of remix artists whose creations are screened in galleries?', claiming later that viddying feels to her like a kind of cultural scholarship. This inquiry calls attention to the supposed marginal fan spaces in which people, who do not have access to dominant cultural texts, can still queer them anyway.

Lothian's *Old Futures* is an essential intervention within speculative studies, building on the work of such scholars as Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, while also proposing new and insightful perspectives about the queerness inherent to the act of speculating. The book also makes compelling arguments within cultural studies, new media studies, fandom studies and queer theory. So varied and subtle are Lothian's readings, and so intriguing are many of her ideas, that *Old Futures* will be useful to scholars interested in the 'future' in many different fields. The theoretical density of the writing, however, might represent a difficulty for lay readers and undergraduate students. Lothian's multidisciplinary training and the complexity of her arguments make for a challenging read; nevertheless, accepting that challenge and pushing through will prove extremely rewarding.



Dahlia Schweitzer, *Going Viral: Zombies, Viruses, and the End of the World* (Rutgers University Press, 2018, 216pp, £22.50)

Reviewed by Craig Ian Mann (Sheffield Hallam University)

The title of Dahlia Schweitzer's monograph is a bit misleading. While it does have much to say about the likes of *28 Days Later* (2002), *World War Z* (2013), *The Walking Dead* (2010–) and the *Resident Evil* series (2002–16), its main subject is not really the zombie. Rather, *Going Viral* quickly reveals itself to be concerned primarily with the transmedia 'outbreak narrative', a hybrid of science fiction and horror in which volatile infectious diseases spread rapidly and threaten to wipe out humankind. Sometimes (and this is where zombies come in), they succeed. Schweitzer investigates the cultural workings of the outbreak narrative, explains how it both feeds on and feeds into media and governmental rhetoric surrounding the apparent threat of viral pandemic, and illustrates how films, television shows and video games have used it to comment on the pervading cultural fears of our times.

Schweitzer uses her introduction to historicize an American obsession with playing out narratives of infection, broadly linking the case studies she will analyze later in the book to the nationwide panics induced by the AIDS crisis, the spread of viruses such as Ebola, SARS and bird flu, and the potential use of infections (chiefly anthrax) as biological weapons. Her aim here is not to suggest that these anxieties are legitimate but rather to chart the ways in which they have been inflated by journalists, politicians, and even bodies such as the World Health Organization. By depicting devastating outbreak scenarios, she asserts that movies, television shows and games are equally guilty of fuelling these fears.

In the first chapter, Schweitzer sets about constructing a model for these narratives by outlining their key tropes: a 'necessary accident' that begins the outbreak; a tendency to blame a non-white 'Other' for its spread; a focus on 'security' to prevent the proliferation of disease; the power of contagion to unify communities against common enemies; an 'emphasis on making the invisible visible' so as to visualize disease; and, finally, a 'fear of progress' that suggests 'these narratives are conservative in that they always recommend caution, slow change, a halt to development'. Schweitzer does not, however, argue that the outbreak narrative constitutes a genre in itself, but rather a specific cycle of

sf/horror hybrids that can be divided into three thematic waves: the first, she suggests, begins in the 1990s and rails against globalization by depicting infectious disease as an entity that is able to pass through porous borders; the second arrives in the wake of 9/11 and dwells on the threat of afflictions unleashed by bioterrorists; and, finally, the third uses post-apocalyptic narratives – in which a virus has often wiped out much of the human race before the action even begins – to lament the state of the west in the twenty-first century. The rest of the book is then divided into three further chapters that explore these themes in detail.

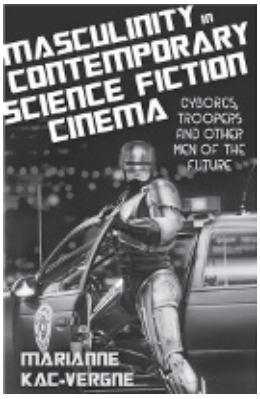
Each of these chapters uses a number of interesting case studies. 'The Globalization Outbreak' compares the narrative workings of *Outbreak* (1995) to *Contagion* (2011) in order to discern how increasing globalisation has caused the key tropes of the outbreak film to shift and evolve. 'The Terrorism Outbreak' uses TV shows such as *24* (2001–10), *Person of Interest* (2011–16) and *The Strain* (2014–17) to explore media depictions of bioterrorism in the years after 9/11. Lastly, 'The Postapocalypse Outbreak' discusses a number of popular zombie narratives. There are, however, some puzzling omissions; for example, the *Cabin Fever* franchise (2002–16) is absent despite its direct relevance to the subject at hand. Schweitzer's starting-point of the 1990s also means that many earlier films are overlooked, for example, *Rabid* (1977) and *Warning Sign* (1985), while *The Omega Man* (1971) and *The Crazies* (1973) are referenced only very briefly. In fact, the only film released before 1990 that Schweitzer analyzes in detail is *The Andromeda Strain* (1971). This seems like an oversight. As clear antecedents, it might have been interesting for the author to outline how these earlier films both confronted the cultural fears of their own times and inspired the contemporary outbreak narrative. Similarly, it seems likely that there is a missed opportunity here to find a connection between outbreak narratives as Schweitzer describes them and the body-horror imagery so common in genre cinema of the 1980s.

The book's scope is not exhaustive, then, but Schweitzer does show a rare dedication to context. She introduces each chapter with a lengthy discussion of the cultural moments that produced her case studies, drawing on a wide range of interdisciplinary research to illustrate how rhetoric associated with infectious disease has become intertwined with such issues as the erosion of the nation-state, homeland security and the onward march of neoliberalism. The structure of each chapter is such that historical, cultural and political contexts are summarised in the first few pages, and then frequently evoked and elaborated upon once the author has introduced her case studies. However, discussion of individual media texts is generally brief, with *Contagion* standing as one of the few that is afforded extended and thorough analysis. To an extent

this brevity is born of necessity due to the sheer number of films and television episodes discussed in each chapter, but detailed textual analysis could have made the connections Schweitzer draws between her case studies and the cultural moment a great deal more convincing.

Nonetheless, the book is consistently compelling if not wholly original. 'The Terrorism Outbreak' presents a fair case for the outbreak narrative as a site for working out post-9/11 anxieties but feels like an extension of the many other studies that have already done the same for other popular genre cycles. Similarly, 'The Postapocalypse Outbreak' suggests several functions for the shambling undead (as metaphors for capitalist modernity and a loss of individual identity, for example) that have been posited many times before. Schweitzer's most significant contribution to sf studies lies firmly in her second chapter, which concentrates on those media texts that map most closely to the narrative model outlined earlier in the monograph. It is here that the author discusses three of the book's most notable case studies – *The Andromeda Strain*, *Outbreak* and *Contagion* – and uses them to chart the development of the outbreak narrative over several decades, constructing a fairly convincing argument that these films progressively allow their deadly infections to spread further and further in order to express a deep-seated cultural fear of an increasingly interconnected world.

Despite its flaws, *Going Viral* deserves attention as the first major book-length study of the outbreak narrative, a cultural form that has been afforded a surprisingly limited amount of scholarly study given its extremely prolific nature. Cinema has been imagining how infectious disease might wipe out the human race since at least the mid-1960s, so this is clearly a cultural form that is deserving of academic attention. Schweitzer's monograph may not prove to be the definitive work on the subject, but it will certainly serve as the basis for further study of the media texts that suggest microscopic enemies might pose the greatest threat to our continued existence.



Marianne Kac-Vergne, *Masculinity in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema: Cyborgs, Troopers and Other Men of the Future* (I.B. Tauris, 2018, 256pp, £85)

Reviewed by Rob Mayo

Marianne Kac-Vergne's first book is the culmination of over a decade's work on the theme of masculinity in late twentieth and twenty-first century cinema, but could hardly seem more timely. The starting point

of the study's timeline is the Reagan era, which Kac-Vergne attributes to a groundswell of support for 'shoring up hegemonic masculinity, that is to say restoring the power of white men at the expense of minority groups'. Kac-Vergne is impressively restrained in drawing parallels to the sitting president of the USA, but her astute readings of blockbusters from *The Terminator* (1984) to *Interstellar* (2014) seem to ask 'how did we get here?' Or, indeed, from *Robocop* (1987) to its remake in 2014, 'how far have we come?'

Kac-Vergne's interest in sf cinema emerges from an understanding of the genre, by way of Darko Suvin and Fredric Jameson, as one of estrangement from societal norms, particularly dominant masculinity. Beyond this, her study is uninterested in retreading debates exploring genre definitions, and instead derives its theoretical basis from gender theorists including Raewyn Connell and Patricia Cayo Sexton. Kac-Vergne also usefully employs Antonio Gramsci's distinction between cultural hegemony and domination, and depicts Hollywood as a force for hegemonic persuasion which nevertheless permits 'cracks and challenges' to the masculine norm. These challenges from groups which are excluded by hegemonic masculinity – women, economically underprivileged men, ethnic minorities – are perhaps allowed greater expression in sf films and, thereby, pose an 'alternative vision of masculinity'.

Kac-Vergne begins, however, with an examination of what Susan Jeffords terms 'hard bodies', fruitfully also introducing Erica Scharrer's concept of the 'hypermasculine'. In 1980s sf cinema this naturally includes Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator*, but also less obvious examples such as Murphy's (Peter Weller) reconstruction as Robocop and Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) in *The Fly* (1986). Kac-Vergne's reading highlights a fascinating continuity between *The Terminator* – in which Schwarzenegger first appears nude and foetally curled – and the depiction of Brundle after his own fateful teleportation, concluding that this visual echo signifies his 'hegemonic regeneration and masculinisation'. Murphy, similarly, is reborn into a cyborg body with (hypermasculine) titanium pectorals that visually echoes another scene in *The Terminator* in which Schwarzenegger emerges unscathed from a fire. Kac-Vergne argues that, while Murphy is emasculated by his traumatic injury, his rebirth as Robocop is consistently evoked to justify violence against a predominantly black underclass. *The Terminator* and *The Fly* are more critical in their depictions of hypermasculinity, especially *The Fly*, which inverts the male gaze by making Brundle the object of Ronnie's (Geena Davis) erotic attention.

The middle chapters provide a series of readings based on minority perspectives: blue-collar, female and African-American. Chapter 2 focuses upon dystopian films, such as *Escape from New York* (1981), which negotiate 'the structures of power *within* masculinity': between the wealthy ruling class

and the downtrodden blue-collar heroes. Kac-Vergne identifies the conflict between Snake (Kurt Russell) and the Duke (Isaac Hayes) as symptomatic of a divide-and-rule policy, on behalf of the ruling elite, between white, blue-collar workers and African-Americans. Kac-Vergne draws parallels with *Blade Runner* (1982), which again stars an anti-heroic assassin who is not only less appealing than his antagonist but also, as Kac-Vergne demonstrates, distanced from the audience by the film's cinematography. Deckard (Harrison Ford) and Snake are initially marginalized from the action, reflecting 'a widespread loss of identity' for men who are accustomed to being of central importance. The second half of the chapter returns to *The Terminator* and *Robocop* but also *Total Recall* (1990), identifying a continuous technophobia, which is resolved by the victory of the blue-collar heroes over their technologically superior enemies.

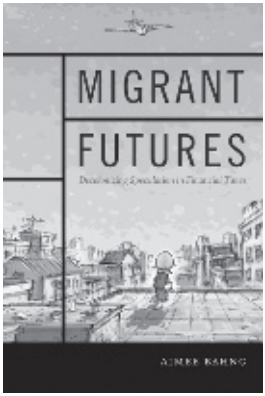
The third chapter contrasts action heroines, such as Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), with Anne Lewis (Nancy Allen) who is increasingly feminized and marginalized in the *Robocop* films, before finally being killed. Kac-Vergne demonstrates this same trajectory at work in both *The Fly* and *Universal Soldier* (1992), which at least stop short of killing their female characters. The chapter highlights similar ambiguities in *Starship Troopers* (1997) and *Ghosts of Mars* (2001), progressing onto female antagonists in *Terminator 3* (2003) and *Elysium* (2013), which in Kac-Vergne's persuasive reading 'combine class resentment with the fear of women taking power'. Finally, she examines *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008) and *I, Robot* (2004) where intelligent female characters are unceremoniously sidelined once the violent, hypermasculine spectacle begins. Kac-Vergne concludes that female characters exist in contemporary sf cinema 'to erase male violence and domination, as well as the persistence of unequal gender relations, as if, on the whole, Hollywood were unable to imagine a future with a different gender order'.

Chapter 4 begins with a fascinating reading of *Predator 2* (1990) and *Demolition Man* (1993) as commentaries on racism which paved the way for more multiethnic films such as *Independence Day* (1994) and *The Matrix* (1999). In *Predator 2*, Danny Glover's protagonist is neither the 'immaculate black man' integrated into white society nor the 'black buck' stereotype embodied more clearly by Wesley Snipes' antagonist in *Demolition Man*, which ends with a 'whitewashed, happy-ending revision of the Rodney King riots'. Kac-Vergne identifies in *The Matrix* a 'rainbow coalition' of androgynous women, Hispanics and African-Americans formed against an explicitly white male enemy, spearheaded by a multi-ethnic star (Keanu Reeves), although his white skin tone is foregrounded in the films. The ultimate star of this chapter, however, is Will Smith. While Smith's ascent to the role of an action hero rivalling Tom Cruise is ostensibly a progressive development, Kac-Vergne finds that his

films are underscored by a consistent reinscription of Smith's blackness into the 'hegemonic capitalistic patriarchal mould'. Her reading of *Independence Day* is particularly incisive, demonstrating how the film's initial celebration of multiculturalism rapidly gives way to the film's real 'ideological project [which is] a new friendship between a Jew [Goldblum] and an African American [Smith] that will confirm the former's masculinity while sidelining women', and presents a WASP-ish president as the face of mankind. Kac-Vergne astutely observes that Smith 'seems very lonely at the top, without any female or African-American peers'.

The final chapter charts the development of new forms of masculinity, especially after 9/11, centred around fatherhood. The first half presents the feminized and passive male protagonists of *Dark City* (1998), *The Matrix*, *Johnny Mnemonic* (1996) and *Strange Days* (1995) as stark contrasts to the 'hard bodies' of 1980s sf cinema. The events of September, 2001 result in another sea change, of which *The War of the Worlds* (2005), *The Road* (2009), *Interstellar* and *Terminator: Genisys* (2015) are Kac-Vergne's exemplars. Kac-Vergne joins Hannah Hamad in identifying the trope of single/widowed fathers in these films, but rejects Hamad's assertion that this '*invariably* validates the recidivist gender discourse they must necessarily embody'. Most compelling in this case is Kac-Vergne's use of *Interstellar* and *Genisys*, in which the central relationship is between a father-figure and his daughter, presenting a form of masculinity which 'redefine[s] the hegemonic norm' and demonstrates 'the failure of patriarchal transmission'. However, these films also demonstrate their (patriarchal) lineage with saviours of humanity who are consistently white men: 'White males are thus still the representatives of humanity, even if they are dying out'.

Kac-Vergne's book ends on a sombre note, as her afterword acknowledges the present-day state of (toxic) masculinity manifested in events which presumably occurred too late to include in her reading: the resurrection of Reaganite gender politics under the Trump administration, for example, or the entitled response of chauvinistic *Star Wars* fans to *The Last Jedi* (2017). Nevertheless, the omission of these from the main body is to be lamented, as Kac-Vergne's book is uniformly engaging and often exhilarating as she exposes both the consistent shortcomings of Hollywood and the frequent efforts of filmmakers to subvert the hegemonic order.



Aimee Bahng, *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times* (Duke University Press, 2017, 240pp, £18.99)

Reviewed by Hugh Charles O'Connell (University of Massachusetts)

The world is still reeling from the aftershocks of the 2008 global financial crisis. Within this context, Aimee Bahng investigates the role of speculative fiction in relation to the arcane practices of financial speculation, thereby joining a number of recent works by, amongst others, Katy Shaw and Alison Shonkwiler allied to the financial turn in literary studies.

Drawing upon a multi-disciplinary approach, Bahng analyzes the way that speculative finance and Enlightenment rationality share in the 'god trick of seeing everything from nowhere', and provide world-building narratives that sustain this authority through their predation on futurity. One of the most important attributes of Bahng's work is how she argues that 'Financial speculation, extrapolation, and prediction rely on mathematical models and probabilistic logics to transform quantitative data into a narrative arc'. While we may not be used to thinking of finance as a world-building narrative, Bahng illustrates how '[f]inancial speculation produces a kind of speculative fiction, and despite its overtures to fact over fiction, it both contributes to and is affected by a broader cultural production of futurity'.

Yet, financial speculation and speculative fiction are not necessarily coextensive. This is especially the case for migrant, diasporic fictions that upset the determinism of Enlightenment thinking and finance. Indeed, while both speculative finance and speculative fiction foreground the performative aspect of bringing desired futures into being, Bahng sets the two in opposition and looks to 'the potential power of the literary imagination to call forth new political economies, ways of living, and alternative relational structures; and different sorts of subjects into the world'. From the point of view of contemporary sf studies, one of *Migrant Futures*' signal strengths is the way that it situates different forms of speculation alongside each other: from speculative finance to speculative genres, speculative politics to popular media speculations. As such, Bahng illustrates that speculation itself is a key concept under contestation within multiple and overlapping discourses, in which global, migrant sf is an important location for the counter-hegemonic labour 'to speculate otherwise'.

Rather than using literature as a way of understanding the ubiquitous yet seemingly invisible hyper-object of global finance, or revealing how finance

leaves its trace on speculative literary form, *Migrant Futures* focuses on the global underclass, and how their strategic practices offer modes of resistance and prospective glimpses of alternative futurities. Against the developmental logic of speculative capital, Bahng's work privileges practices of queer temporality and queer affiliation that emerge from 'transnational affiliations among communities of colour that extend networks of care beyond national narratives of 'risky subjects' and the calculations of global financialization'. Provinciality, possibility, openness and contingency replace determinism and closure as the main traits of these migrant futurities.

The chapters cover a rich array of topics related to the racialized logics of speculative political economy and securitization, which are then used to foreground the normative socio-political conditions that her close readings of particular speculative fictions intervene in and decolonize. The first chapter examines the Fordlándia project in Brazil during the 1920s/30s, in which Henry Ford attempted to build a utopian rubber plantation in the Amazon jungle. Bahng turns to Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) as a way to rethink the legacy of Fordism and the world-historical narrative of capitalism. The novel, in Bahng's reading, rethinks capitalist history as a dystopia, presenting 'Fordist ruin and failure rather than Fordist triumphalism' and thereby foretells our own dystopia of 'ecological disaster […] flexible citizenship, and neoliberal economic policy'. The chapter foregrounds the approach that much of the book will take, teasing out alternatives, what-ifs and practices that disrupt the triumphal narrative of capitalism, focusing instead on its disasters and the narratives of possibility occluded by hegemonic discourses.

Chapter 2 situates the US-Mexico border as a significant site driving the science-fictional imagination: 'where science fictional narratives proliferate from within a military-industrial complex to form a security-defense imaginary constructed through scenario-based exercises, video games, and surveillance scan projections'. The chapter juxtaposes the SIGMA group of right-wing sf writers and their guiding motto of 'Science Fiction in the National Interest' against Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997) and Alex Rivera's film *Sleep Dealer* (2008). If the SIGMA group, who were consulted by the US government on border defence strategies, represent an affirmative, neoliberal strain of sf, then Yamashita and Rivera 'reconfigure migrant futurity around a transnational commons rather than a securitized homeland' while simultaneously 'maintain[ing] a critical distance from techno-utopianism' for its complicity with 'a development discourse'.

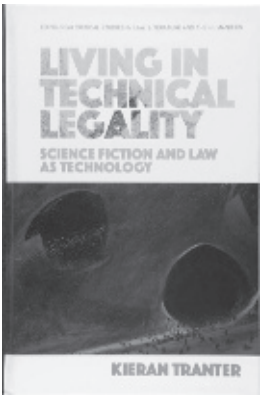
The third chapter tackles the global and racial dimensions underpinning surrogacy markets. From within this context, Bahng turns to Alfonso Cuaron's *Children of Men* (2006) and Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000),

elucidating how they challenge patriarchy and the 'category of the human' in relation to the dominant narrative of reproductive futurity. The fourth chapter pits the reparative strategies of Sonny Liew's graphic novel, *Malinky Robot* (2011), against the economic rhetoric and 'neoliberal fantasies' of the 'Asian century'. As Bahng argues, the various projections of an economic Asian century have long served as the backdrop of cyberpunk's 'techno-Orientalist' paranoid world-building. *Malinky Robot*, on the other hand, foregrounds 'a reparative form of speculation' that privileges optimistic chance over capitalist realist inevitability with its suffering of the many at the hands of the few.

The last chapter takes up the 'Occupied Pacific' as a site for thinking of 'futurity from below'. Focusing on the roots of the Human Genome Project in American imperialism and the after-effects of the nuclear campaigns in the Pacific, Bahng reveals how Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) disrupts this narrative 'from the perspective of [the] bio-ecological undercommons'. Bahng reads the novel's oscillating timeframes and locations 'through the queer analytics of "gender drag" and "temporal drag" as forms of anti-positivist speculations that unsettle the financialized future'. The novel's 'mutant assemblages' offer a countervailing narrative to the 'genetically modified future of corporate enclosures'.

Situated within contemporary speculative genre criticism, Bahng's theorizing of speculative fiction accords with more recent attempts to offer historical rather than formal definitions of sf, and similarly extends the field by focusing on the global interventions in and use of genre. In this light, however, some sf scholars may wish for a deeper engagement with the wider body of sf criticism. For example, the book's development of an unrestricted use of speculative fiction through its smart critique of Gregory Benford's critical – but relatively uninfluential – championing of hard sf perhaps sets up too easy an opposition, reintroducing a formal rigidity to the argument (what to make of Kim Stanley Robinson, for example?). Here, an engagement with the far more capacious and *sympatico* arguments of Sherryl Vint, Mark Bould and John Rieder might strike some specialists as a missed opportunity. Any such complaints, however, need to be immediately tempered by what's really at stake in the work and its own rigorous bridging of genre studies with multi-ethnic and transnational literary studies. *Migrant Futures*' focus on global diaspora and migrant labour alongside its use of genre fiction as an intervention into futurities, as a way of decolonizing speculation, is timely and noteworthy. As such, it is an important interlocutor for a number of recent salient trends within sf studies, including Afrofuturist, global, postcolonial, queer and indigenous sf studies. *Migrant Futures* is ultimately a radically utopian project and a welcome, necessary addition to sf studies. Its core argument is compelling and theoretically ambitious, and its literary archive eschews many of the more well-heeled authors, expanding sf's

global imaginary. It is a must-read for sf scholars, especially those interested in speculative finance, queer futurities, and postcolonial and global sf.



Kieran Tranter, *Living in Technical Legality: Science Fiction and Law as Technology* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 272pp, £90.73)

Reviewed by Tara B. Smith (University of Sydney)

In the introduction to *Living in Technical Legality*, Kieran Tranter describes his book as a monster, stitched together from multiple disciplines, that resembles a B-grade sf matinee, yet still retaining qualities of both humanity and purpose. At this monster's heart, Tranter investigates the binaries between humanity and technology, and questions the role of the lawyer as their natural mitigator. Tranter asks the reader not to despair of the technological world but to learn to live both with and within it. He divides his work into two parts. Part I introduces what technical legality is and how law responds to technology, while Part II examines how we should live well within technical legality, and how lawyers and legal scholars can act ethically within a world seemingly void of human ethics.

In Chapter 1, Tranter looks at how science fiction tropes were used in the rhetoric surrounding the controversy of the first genetically engineered animal, Dolly the sheep. He begins with works such as *Brave New World* (1932) and *The Boys from Brazil* (1978) where clones were seen as dehumanized cogs in an assembly line produced by an unethical science. Tranter then shows how this discourse began to circulate within political and legal networks, and to be used by unscrupulous lawyers and politicians so as to drive home their own agendas. In this sense, science fiction acts both as a source of inspiration and a cushion for understanding the rapidly changing world of future technologies. Tranter's thesis is grounded in the Frankenstein myth, in which humanity is perceived to be vulnerable and requires law to save it from a dark and monstrous technology. It is this binary opposition which Tranter sets out to dismantle.

In Chapter 2, Tranter looks at the themes of death and time in Frank Herbert's *Dune* cycle. Tranter examines the event of the Butlerian jihad, a past war between man and machine mentioned as part of the backstory. The war results in a law being passed that a machine cannot be made in the likeness of mankind, which foreshadows the main plotline of *Dune*. Tranter sees at the heart of the saga the idea of ultimate sovereignty, with the unity within *Dune* coming from the Atreides archaic and a tyrannical form of government, void of

humanity. For Tranter, *Dune* offers a way of understanding the instrumentality of law that, in the series, results in the dictatorship of Leto II. Tranter's focus, though, omits Herbert's ecological message which, in *Children of Dune* (1976), leads Leto II to not only fusing his body with the sandworm larvae and forming an alliance with the giant sandworms but also leading an attack on the terraforming technologies. Omitting this theme means that Tranter misses the opportunity to explore the importance of ecological balance and the safeguarding of wild spaces.

In Chapter 3, Tranter focuses on the remake of *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–9) which, in its fourth season, climaxed on the impossible differentiation between humans and Cylons. Tranter argues that the moral is that there is little hope for a future which tries to separate technology from being. Instead, his envisaged future will supplant the Frankenstein myth, so that all that remains is a sentient, self-reliant technology. Part II proceeds to ask what type of legal framework would operate within this post-human environment.

Tranter first explores Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987–89). The characters are closely analysed to demonstrate ways of ethically navigating these new futures. Next, Tranter uses *Doctor Who* (1963–) to explore the role of the lawyer in this new realm of technical legality. Whether a lawyer is negotiating a contract, a prison sentence or a court decision, he is able to affect the future, a prospect that The Doctor constantly alerts his companions against. Similarly, Tranter warns against the all-consuming power of these responsibilities and advocates for lawyers to safeguard their ethical principles. Lastly, in drawing upon *Mad Max 2* (1981), Tranter argues that the legal scholar should avoid binary distinctions and retain both their curiosity and creative imagination. A legal scholarship, thus constituted, can better prepare society for the unexpected consequences of a new technological future.

The desert landscapes of both *Dune* and *Mad Max 2* resurface in the concluding chapter. The desert may appear to be desolate but, as in *Dune*, it can hide hidden treasures: whether they be sandworms or spice, we should not believe that this new technical world is simply a desert, devoid of life and humanity. This ultimately hopeful ending makes this book worthy of interest, especially for readers of fiction, sf, popular culture, law and film studies.

Emma Newman, *Before Mars* (Gollancz, 2018, 352pp, £13.99)

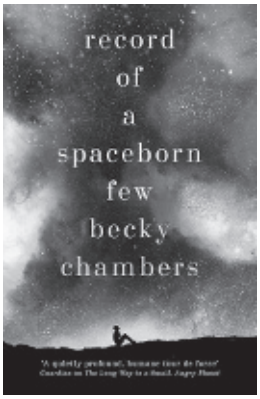
Reviewed by Jeremy Brett (Texas A&M University)

With the third novel in her intriguing and unpredictable Planetfall series, author and sf podcaster Emma Newman shifts gears once more. The overall series pivots around the exodus from a near-future Earth, crippled by war, pollution and corporate slavery, of a cult led by Lee Suh-Mi, the self-proclaimed Pathfinder. In *Before Mars*, the story (which takes place roughly in parallel with its predecessor, *After Atlas* [2016]) moves to Earth's closest planetary neighbour, the site of a small scientific mission joined by artist-and-geologist Anna Kubrin. Her presence, though, is questioned by her colleagues who regard her role as artist-in-residence as a mere publicity stunt by the base's corporate owners. Not only is Anna unsure of her professional status, she is also uncertain of her ability as a wife and mother; a virtual reality (a 'mersive') of herself, her husband and daughter on a beach, which Anna experiences *en route* to Mars, suggests a compensatory fantasy. The thin line between reality and illusion is further transgressed when, on her arrival, Anna discovers in her quarters a note (written in her own hand) warning her not to trust Dr Arnolfi, the base psychiatrist. Is Anna the victim of a conspiracy? Is she experiencing 'immersion psychosis'? Or is she becoming subject to the same insanity that engulfed her father? Anna's self-doubt and increasing paranoia are only amplified by her experience of the base AI, Principia, which has the ability to filter and manipulate the data received and interpreted by the personnel.

By contrast, Anna is looking for a simpler reality that will explain both herself and her relationship to those around her. Although the novel takes place almost entirely on Mars, Newman's title is significant; most of Anna's psychological struggles have begun before she ever sets foot upon the Red Planet. This process of seeking lends a layer of emotional complexity to Newman's series that places it above other tales of near-future intrigue or space exploration. Although the connection between *Before Mars* and the previous Planetfall novels is tenuous until the ending (at which point it becomes clear that the fallout from Atlas is nowhere close to being over), the novels are linked by this persistent theme of a quest, whether it be theological, secular or personal.

With *Before Mars*, Newman once again displays her felicity for describing with flair and accuracy the interpersonal relations within groups, so often fraught with tensions, hidden hatreds, and lies told to each other and to oneself.

Principia Base, supposedly a neutral scientific (albeit corporate-owned and operated) enterprise dedicated to planetary exploration, is a nest of secrets and masked motives, driven by the same problems that recur whenever a group of humans live in close quarters. Efficiency gives way to emotion, science to strife, and cooperation to conflict. Newman's multi-part saga dramatizes how the most treacherous place in the known universe is the human heart and its capacity for doing wrong.



Becky Chambers, *Record of a Spaceborn Few* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2018, 368pp, £8.99)
Kameron Hurley, *Apocalypse Nyx* (Tachyon Publications, 2018, 288pp, £11.99)

Reviewed by Rachel Hill (Goldsmiths College, London)

In recent years, Becky Chambers and Kameron Hurley have emerged as two of the clearest feminist voices in contemporary sf. Both write in a space-operatic tradition, both take an apocalypse as their starting point, and yet tonally, they are light-years apart.

Chambers asks: what would a space-faring humankind be like if, rather than traversing the stars with the pomp of *Star Trek*'s self-mastered crew, the remaining terrestrial populace staggered into space to flee a climate collapsing world? Such a post-Earth exodus is the origin story of interplanetary humankind, which undergirds the Hugo Award-winning Wayfarers series, a history of disaster and loss that comes into sharper focus throughout a *Record of a Spaceborn Few*.

Set predominantly at the tail end of Chambers' debut, *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* (2015), *Record* follows the community of homestead ship *Asteria*, one of the thirty-strong complement comprising the Exodan Fleet. Humankind, as the newest member of the multispecies Galactic Commons, is peripheral rather than central to the galactic order, and is now scattered across multiple extraterrestrial worlds, with a core of human culture retained within the Fleet. At the very beginning of the novel, the entire Fleet is devastated by the depressurization and subsequent loss of sister-ship *Oxomoco*, a catastrophe that becomes the locus of long-term trauma and underscores the precarity of spaceborn life. As one character states: 'we all lost family [...] whether we knew them or not.' Processing this trauma in various ways, *Record* is told through the shifting perspectives of an intergenerational cast of characters, with each representing a different form of maintenance, in a novel where maintenance is

conceptualised as care.

We are first introduced to Tessa Santoso, who is both mired within the mechanics of nuts-and-bolts engineering and attempting to placate her demanding four-year-old, Aya. Tessa attempts to shepherd, reinvigorate and repurpose old technology, a role that is increasingly jeopardized by looming automation. Chambers elides, then, two forms of maintenance: the upkeep of environmental conditions onboard and the ongoing work of parental care. This braiding together of the ship systems and interpersonal relations aligns familial responsibility with societal and environmental care, which also manifests in the novel's expanded sense of kinship. Tessa, as a catalyst for these parallel forms of care, becomes charged with the task of making 'sure people remember that a closed system is a closed system even when you can't see the edges.'

The maintenance of remembering is emphasized throughout, as exemplified by archivist elder Isabel Itoh. Isabel's core role is not only to maintain the traditions and the history of the Exodus Fleet, but also to remember the ravages enacted upon the Earth by previous generations. During the *Oxomoco* disaster she directs her apprentice to 'keep recording [...] It's all we can do for them now,' thereby highlighting the ethical imperative to bear witness to the suffering of others. The ethical weight of not only maintaining but also integrating remembrance into the daily ritual is further performed through the oft-recited Exodan chorus:

> We left the oceans [...] we understood what we had lost. We understood what we needed to do to survive. We abandoned more than our ancestors' world. We abandoned our short sight. We abandoned our bloody ways. We made ourselves anew.

Remembering is coded as not only ethical action but also as stories that can become the basis for change. Isabel states: 'our species doesn't operate by reality. It operates by stories [...] once reality caught up with us and we started changing our stories to acknowledge it, it was too late.' Here she refers to the importance of narratives that must both endure and adapt so they inform rather than ossify the living. Furthermore, she emphasizes remembering is a source of beauty, as well as survival, a twinning that is needed for a society to flourish: remembering is thus both the bread and the roses.

Alongside Isabel, Eyas, as caretaker for the dead, is a custodian of 'ritual and renewal', and therefore equally responsible for maintaining forms of remembering and tradition. Eyas's dual role involves not only performing burial rites and emotional support for the mourning, but also the redistribution of decomposed bodies as fertilizer to sustain the ships' food chain. Eyas is named after a baby hawk, imparting an impression of being an unfinished fledgling;

hence, despite Eyas's role as the maintainer of traditions, she is assailed by a sense of malaise. She asks, 'what was better – a constant safeness that never grew and never changed, or a life of reaching, building, striving, even though you knew you'd never be completely satisfied?' Eyas finds the solution to this conundrum through the help of sex-worker Sunny, learning that tradition can only be preserved and maintained through change. Within the world of the Fleet, sex work is seen as a public service and catered for through Tryst Clubs. Eyas meets Sunny at such a club and draws parallels between their work, as they both have 'strangers' bodies placed in [their] care.'

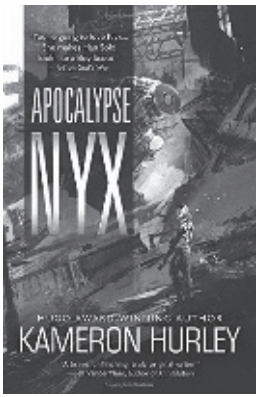
Perhaps the starkest demonstration of the necessity for adaptation is performed through the characters of Sawyer and Kip. Sawyer arriveson the *Asteria* as an outsider searching for camaraderie and connection, hoping to find meaning through fellowship. He is aware that in the Fleet 'everybody had a home, and nobody went hungry [...] there was compassion, too, a basic commitment to decency.' Kip, on the other hand, is frustrated and alienated from the Fleet, lured by the promise of outside adventure and longing to escape. Together, their diametrically opposed narratives embody the limitations of Exodan life. However, in a characteristic of Chambers' work, conflict finds its redemptive resolution through collective interrogation, where full accountability leads to ameliorative action.

The clearest incorporation of an outsider into Exodan society is represented by Ghuh'loloan Mok Chutp, of the Harmigan, a mollusc-like alien species that was previously a colonial superpower in the Wayfarers universe. Seeking in part to address her species' violent history, Ghuh'loloan is an ethnographic researcher specializing in the transitory and orbital communities Harmagians once ostracized. Her epistolary prefaces denote that her passages are translated from the Harmagian language, resulting in text that attempts interspecies communication whilst also signalling the necessary slippages in meaning and loss of nuance. In a similar act of translation, Ghuh'loloan finds parallels between the seemingly disparate cultures of Harmagians and Exodans, as 'a spaceborn people who baulk at abandoning an environment inspired by a planet that, to most, may as well be myth. Humans will never leave the forest, just as Harmagians will never leave the shore.'

As Isabel's guest, Ghuh'loloan fulfils the role of classic visitor on tour, a key trope of utopian fiction. Fundamentally, *Record* is a gentle but extensive exploration of the pitfalls, parameters and potentials of an egalitarian space-based utopia. Exodan life, where everyone is fed, sheltered and supported through an expansive notion of kin, is a cohesive representation of a progressive anti-capitalist utopia salvaged from the dystopia of an ecologically devastated Earth. Despite its cosmic and far-future setting, *Record* can be seen as engaging

with the existential perils of the Anthropocene. Rather than attempting to elude, deny or surrender in defeat to the mounting crisis of climate collapse, by imagining societies of radical acceptance and accountability, *Record* attempts to imagine how, in the words of anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, to 'learn to live on a damaged planet.'

Apocalypse Nyx is composed of five novellas set in and before the events of Hurley's Bel Dame Apocrypha (also known as The God's War) trilogy, on the desert world of Umayma. With its carcinogenic environment, organ trade and insect-based technology, Umayma has been ravaged by the ongoing theological war between the nations of Chenja and Nasheen. These stories follow the dubious escapades of former government assassin turned bounty-hunter Nyxnissa so Dasheem (Nyx) and her team of outcasts, including hired gun Anneke, mediocre magician and love/hate interest Rhys, shape-shifter Khos and comms hacker Taite. The looming apocalypse of the title references both the precarious position of Nyx and her crew, as they continuously and narrowly stave off disaster, and the vibrant but exhausted world of Umayma itself.



The opening story, 'The Body Project' begins in Hurley's characteristic abrasive style: 'The man's rugged visage – hanging from the upper window of the tenement building – was captivating. The rest of him was less so, as it was a mangled wreck of shattered limbs and shredded torso strewn all over the street at Nyx's feet.' The discovery of this freshly murdered associate prompts Nyx to mount an impromptu investigation, involving masquerading as a Bel Dame (a government assassin), capture by a First Family (the world's ruling elite), escape and retribution. Solving the murder of Jahar provides Hurley with a narrative shorthand through which Nyx's history as a rebuilt war veteran and Anneke's backstory for joining the team can be established. Scenes of mutilation, decomposition and mutation are the norm. The cobbling together of body parts, so that soldiers can be returned to the frontline, is a grotesque and profane parody of resurrection. Readers should therefore be prepared for gory scenes involving viscera, hybridity, augmentation and bodies in flux as an elemental sensibility for the world of Umayma. Nyx's own struggle for control of her body and identity is addressed at the end of 'The Body Project': 'Why couldn't she unmake it again? [...] Every dawn was a chance to start over. Rebuild. Every day was another body.'

The second story, 'The Heart is Eaten Last', starts with a poisonous gas cloud released from an exploded chemical plant before looping back to the events

that preceded it. Nyx, enticed by a mysterious woman, takes a commission to bring down some saboteurs. Events result in Nyx making the onerous choice between either rescuing Khos, or saving a number of munitions factories crucial to the Nasheenian war effort. Nyx's choice is a frequent dilemma, in which her desire to protect is often in direct conflict with her more expedient and mercenary impulses. Nyx's depiction as hyper-masculine, with her excessive drinking, womanizing, wisecracking and inability to maintain meaningful relationships, becomes a method through which Hurley interrogates the precepts undergirding the intersection of heroism and gender. Nyx highlights not only the importance of female monstrosity as a means of survival within the brutal conditions of Nasheen society but also the re-inscription of the historically erased female warrior.

Throughout the collection, we see the magnetic effect of Nyx's monstrousness, as many clients want to harness, use and deploy her violent, dysfunctional tendencies. Conversely, Rhys in particular criticizes Nyx's behaviour whilst simultaneously wanting to be shielded by her, a form of hypocrisy through which Rhys (and others) can remain ostensibly innocent whilst benefiting from the amoral destruction Nyx has wrought. As readers, however, we are privy to Nyx's self-loathing and war trauma, and so better understand the origin of her destructiveness. By contrast, as seen in the middle story, 'Soulbound', for all of Nyx's moral ambiguity, self-interest and monstrous actions, she has her own moral code: thus, she repeatedly baulks at the wanton, sadistic and ultimately pointless acts of others that far surpass her own.

Apocalypse Nyx excels in catapulting its readers into the viscera and grime of Nasheen culture. For those new to the world of Umayma, expect reading to be a process of submersion rather than exposition, filled with world-specific nomenclature gradually understood through osmosis, rather than always clearly defined. For those returning to Umayma, these prequels provide further backstory, adding complexity to the interpersonal relationships of Nyx and her crew, as well as foreshadowing and lending greater poignancy to the events which transpire in the trilogy. One criticism: as these novellas were culled from Hurley's Patreon and released separately, each story reintroduces characters and concepts that can quickly become tedious. That said, the stories have simple but effective plots with punchy pacing. It is a must for established Nyx fans and a handy introduction for the curious.

Ana Simo, *Heartland* (Restless Books, 2018, 240pp, £12.99)

Reviewed by Katie Stone (Birkbeck College, London)

Heartland is marketed as a work of 'pre-apocalyptic […] dystopian satire'. Certainly, the world in which Simo's novel unfolds is bleak. From the structure of its narrative, in which the unnamed narrator seeks to kill a former love rival in increasingly horrible ways, to the sparsely populated US 'heartland', the novel has many of the dystopian credentials which fans of the genre have become accustomed to. A graphic depiction of cannibalism is far from the most shocking element of a novel in which 'the Great Hunger' has killed or displaced half of the country's population. Not only does the ensuing mass starvation evoke the desperate conditions of, for example, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), the Hunger is also described as 'erupt[ing]' in that most dystopian of years, 1984.

However, it is not until Chapter 27 that Simo provides substantial details of the dystopian nature of the world she has created and the apocalyptic event, which the marketing implies the novel is leading up to, never occurs. Moreover, despite the eventual revelation of 'DNA harvesting centres', political corruption and assassination attempts, the novel's narrator lives a life largely untouched by these events. She spends most of her adulthood living off a government grant for Latinx writers; her plan to murder her rival McCabe revolves around convincing her target to rent a house in her hometown and then proceeding to educate her in classical music and haute cuisine; her main interest in what she perceives to be a science-fictional event comes in the form of McCabe's extreme weight loss and subsequent spiritual transformation.

Heartland is not so much a dystopia as a novel which plays with dystopian tropes. In this regard *Heartland* could be compared to such works as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), where the focus is upon the characters' interpersonal relationships. However, where Ishiguro's use of dystopianism serves to highlight the squandered potential for normalcy in his characters' personal lives, Simo's characters, though distanced from the dystopian nature of their world, are far from normal. Indeed, Simo appears to be exploring the ways in which literary realism can be made to match or even surpass the more familiar trappings of dystopianism in terms of its strangeness. For example, the discovery of government plans for genetic manipulation in the Middle East provides a perverse kind of relief after a very lengthy and gruesome description

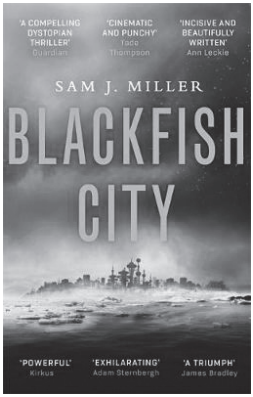
of the narrator's frostbite-induced injuries, and her gruelling progress towards recovery. After such graphic descriptions of body horror any political intrigue does seem like the sanitary 'B-movie medley' which the narrator dismisses it as.

It is tempting to ascribe this kind of sidelining of the science-fictional elements of the text to Simo's position as a newcomer to the genre. Dystopian texts do, in fact, often have a peripheral position in the broader field of sf. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of the writing of Ishiguro, Cormac McCarthy and George Orwell lies outside genre fiction, and Simo is no exception to this rule. Although she is a prolific playwright and the author of a collection of short stories, *Heartland* is both her first novel and her first venture into sf. In this context, Simo's investment in high culture – her narrator spends much of the novel reading the works of Ivan Turgenev and listening to César Franck – seems to indicate a reluctance to commit fully to the trappings of sf; trappings which at least historically have excluded genre fiction from the realm of high art. However, this perspective underestimates Simo's delight in strangeness. While she relegates the more traditional apparatus of dystopian fiction to *Heartland*'s background, the endless peculiarities of her narrator's inner life, such as a violent allergy to different parts of speech, are continually highlighted. By engaging in the potential sfnality of language itself, Simo is in no way distancing herself from sf. On the contrary, she is actively tapping into a rich vein of interest in linguistics within the genre, as seen in texts as diverse as Ted Chiang's 'Story of Your Life' (1998), Samuel R. Delany's *Babel-17* (1966) and China Miéville's *Embassytown* (2012). *Heartland* may not be the sf of alien contact and space opera but neither is it hesitant about engaging with some of the genre's strangest aspects. Simo is an unembarrassed entrant into the world of sf.

Another frame of reference which serves to situate *Heartland* within sf is that provided by Simo's role as an LGBT+ activist. Indeed, it is significant to note that Simo, now seventy-five, was a queer activist during the 1970s, much like prominent feminist sf authors Joanna Russ and Sally Miller Gearhart. However, even without reference to Simo's biography, *Heartland* demands to be read in this context. Simply to write an sf text in which the narrator is a queer Hispanic woman is necessarily to situate oneself outside of the genre's mainstream. By refusing to make the narrator's childhood friend and National Security Adviser, Rafael, into a replacement lead, Simo rejects the tendency within sf to focus solely upon those who have access to both power and a hard-scientific knowledge, which is often gendered as masculine. Instead, Simo's narrator, who is neither a wealthy nor a powerful figure and who has no ambitions to save the world, retains her position as the novel's protagonist; dismissing Rafael's tales of political intrigue as egotistical delusion. By writing off Rafael's plans as madness, Simo reverses the more usual dismissal of women's strange imaginings as signs of hysteria.

Following the example provided by Marge Piercy in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Simo highlights the gendered bias in discussions of both mental illness and sf. By describing incidents such as the narrator's allergy, which could either be a sign of mental illness or the science-fictional world she inhabits, Simo interrogates the kinds of strangeness which are traditionally permitted to reside in sf, in contrast to those which provoke the silencing of women in general, and queer women of colour in particular.

Reading *Heartland* is an uncomfortable and disturbing experience. Unlike the feminist sf texts with which it otherwise seems connected, Simo's novel is filled with racial slurs, graphic depictions of sexual violence, and a tone of bitter contempt for everyone in general and fat women in particular. To some readers this will no doubt rob the text of any potential radicalism and, indeed, although she reserves her most biting polemic for the white citizens of the heartland, much of the narrator's invective is targeted at those who are habitually exposed to just such ignorant hatred. Offered not as a defence but rather as a suggestion of the need for further exploration of this issue is the fact that Simo takes language so seriously. Her narrator is reduced to a state of physical collapse through the loss of language. She describes a potential book as a physical presence in her body 'like an organ' and McCabe as speaking in 'animal sounds […] with her intestines'. Whether the fact that these fantastic linguistic lacunae are made to mirror the horribly realistic, socially determined speech of the white inhabitants will justify Simo's use of those unmentionable words to her readers remains undecided. What does seem certain is the fact that reading *Heartland*, in all its horrifying strangeness, as an sf text, puts pressure on the genre's boundaries and demands an interrogation of what kind of strangeness sf writers and critics allow for, and what they relegate to the hysterical ramblings of mad women.



Sam J. Miller, *Blackfish City* (Orbit, 2018, 336pp, £ 12.99)

Reviewed by Sean Weaver (Louisiana State University)

Winner of this year's John W. Campbell Memorial Award, *Blackfish City* imagines a post-apocalyptic world following a phenomenon aptly named 'the Climate Wars.' Little is known concerning this conflict except its cause: tech and pharmaceutical industries leave the Earth scorched by fires and subsequently flooded with water; the only city that remains is Bangkok which serves as the world capital. A floating city, Qaanaaq, is built by a Thai-Chinese-

Swedish alliance on the vestiges of the Arctic Circle to survive the drowned Earth. Qaanaaq functions as a hub for refuges from all over the world, and possesses sustainable technologies and energies for the people who find refuge there. There is no ruling agency; instead, 'software calls most of the day to day shots, sets the protocols that humans working for city agencies follow'. While Qaanaaq is seemingly a utopia for the disenfranchised, it is deeply divided between the rich, who live in luxurious pods above the city, and the poor who are forced to occupy cramped, single boxes in seedy lower pockets of the city. The rich and able-bodied fear the floods of refugees whom they label as disease-infested minorities, criminals and gangsters. At the same time, a disease called the 'breaks', a clear metaphor for the AIDS epidemic as well as a nod to Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren* (1975), which does not discriminate against any one community begins to spread throughout the city.

The overarching story follows the interactions and experiences of four marginalized people from Qaanaaq society, whose narratives both intersect, bump up against and disconnect as the novel unfolds. In this manner, *Blackfish City* is not a novel about any one person but a social cross-section. As the omniscient narrator, whose subplot permeates the individual stories, states: 'Stories are where we find ourselves, where we find the others who are like us. Gather enough stories and soon you're not alone; you are an army'. Echoing a key theme from Indigenous decolonization narratives such as Thomas King's *The Truth about Stories* (2003), *Blackfish City* uses stories as the uniting factor within the greater narrative. For example, amidst the conflicts of the city, a stranger out of myth appears, a person with the ability to 'nanobond' with animals, on the back of an Orca killer whale. As the story progresses, the reader finds out that this stranger is an indigenous person from the old world. Her name is Massaaraq and her indigenous society was eradicated during the Climate Wars because their ability to nanobond was seen as deviant and a threat to humanity.

Massaaraq comes to Qaanaaq to find her family and kill those responsible for the destruction of her community. Massaraq's family survives the genocide because her partner Ora escapes and hides their children amid Qaanaaq. The four narratives centre on Massaraq's family. Her son Kaev is a seasoned gladiator, who is forced to throw fights, so that his benefactors can win the massive bets they place on his failures. Ankit, Massaraq's daughter, is a reformed thief turned aide to the politician Fyodorovna, who refuses to acknowledge the suffering of the refugees. Both Kaev and Ankit possess memories they cannot understand without their mother's intervention. Once the family is reunited, they begin the work of overthrowing the political powers at work in Qaanaaq, culminating in a rescue mission that leaves the city forever changed.

The central plot explores the social, political and economic divisions that both separate and unite people, as well as survival in the face of global catastrophe. As such, Miller explores two distinct themes within his novel while advancing new narratives in sf. The themes Miller pays most attention to deal with decolonization and queerness. For example, Miller's novel pushes at the boundaries inherent in sexual binaries and their subsequent discourses in fully realized trans characters such as Soq. Miller's use of non-binary pronouns is both nuanced and thoughtful. Most, if not all, of the denizens of Qaanaaq are sexually fluid – even the main indigenous characters. Besides being exceptionally well written, the sexually diverse characters are an important addition to the representation of LGBTQ+ peoples within sf. Each character advances key subplots within the novel. Furthermore, the queerness of each of the characters is not seen as a threat but presented as normal. Overall, *Blackfish City* is a timely read that entreats the reader to question the boundaries that divide us as well as the effects of human interaction on the environment.

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Moon* (Orbit, 2018, 480pp, 18.99)

Reviewed by Brian Willems (University of Split, Croatia)

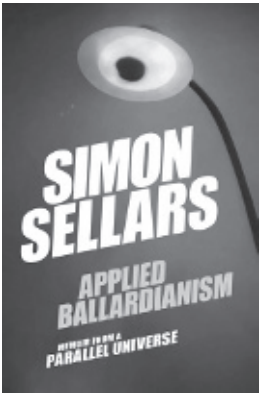
You read a Kim Stanley Robinson novel to learn about the nuts and bolts of political, social and economic revolutions. Meetings, debates and constitutional amendments are all part of the fun. Set in the same universe as many of his other novels, the title of *Red Moon* explicitly refers to the technique of slicing off a piece of an asteroid put into lunar orbit and smashing it onto the surface of the moon. The purpose of the collision is to collect the 'crimson metallic sheens' of carbon that scatter from the impact, momentarily turning the otherwise 'bone-white ball of rubble' into the eponymous red moon. 'Red' also refers to China which has taken over virtually taken all of the south pole of the moon. The book takes place about thirty years into the future, just after the expiry of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which reintegrates Hong Kong into the People's Republic. Fred Fredericks has been sent to the moon to set up a quantum telephone. On the way up, he sits next to the geomancer Ta Shu, whom seasoned readers will remember from Robinson's *Antarctica* (1997), and a friendship forms. Shortly after, Fred is implicated in the murder of a Chinese politician, and Ta Shu is roped into helping Fred escape the people who are framing him by sneaking him back to Earth. However, there is someone

else, Qi, who also needs to leave. She has broken a fundamental law of the moon by getting pregnant, yet her more serious crime is being the face of a grassroots rebellion in China.

One of the main reasons for the protests is the *hukou* system, a vestige of the Han dynasty, which assigns each citizen a household registration in their birthplace. The only way to officially change one's assigned location is by getting a registered job or enrolling in school. This means the creation of hundreds of millions of undocumented internal migrants, who lack legal and political representation. A proposed solution is that of the 'documented anarchy' of 'blockchain governance': people can do whatever they want but their actions are recorded and made available for everyone to see. However, this innovation rapidly turns into a means of repression.

Another major disruptive concept is the other side of the blockchain, cryptocurrencies. Two are introduced. Carboncoin is 'created or validated by taking carbon out of the air […] It's a credit system, and its coins can only buy sustainable necessities'. The other is a virtual US Dollar which is guaranteed to be convertible to real US dollars one-to-one. These new currencies, combined with fiscal noncompliance and the large-scale withdrawal of money from banks to be deposited into Household credit unions, are not explicitly fleshed out. However, their aim seems to be the same as documented anarchy: increasing feelings of trust by taking some control away from the Party and giving it to the people.

It may seem strange that in a book which is titled after the moon, most of this change takes place on Earth. Much of Robinson's work is about the messy difficulty of starting over, of all the baggage we bring with us to a new place, and how to struggle against the past in order to create a new future. There are two potentially emancipatory locations on the moon, although neither hold much water. The free crater is a space in which no laws apply. It is funded by charging a fee to cool a large bank of quantum computers with underground ice. Although the free crater is described as 'a new kind of commons, a new way of living', it is compared to 'an IKEA store'. Another possibly utopian space, China Dream, has been created by the ultra-wealthy Fang Fei that serves to expound the values of prosperity and the work ethic. Neither enclave is described in detail and Robinson turns his attention instead to events on Earth. Instead, despite the tentatively optimistic ending of the novel, Robinson mostly describes failed attempts at emancipation. This alone makes the novel an interesting corrective to earlier depictions of utopia.



Simon Sellars, *Applied Ballardianism: Memoir from a Parallel Universe* (Urbanomic, 2018, 392pp, £18.99)

Reviewed by D. Harlan Wilson (Wright State University)

It is no surprise that scholarship on J.G. Ballard has been on the rise in recent years. Many of his twentieth-century novels and stories demonstrate a prescience that has come to fruition in the first two decades of this century, especially themes such as media pathology and the assertion of identity through meaningless violence. Unlike more standard academic studies though, such as those by Florian Cord, Samuel Francis, David Ian Paddy and myself, Simon Sellars' *Applied Ballardianism* scrutinises Ballard through the filter of Sellars' own fictional autobiography.

In novels like *Empire of the Sun* (1984), *The Kindness of Women* (1991) and *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979), Ballard fictionalised his experience as a child of war and a resident (or *residue*) of suburban London, foregrounding the cultural and technological pathologies that construct his protagonists' subjectivities. Most of Ballard's protagonists are cut from the same cloth, however, recycled and extrapolated from a deeply personal, traumatized prototype. Sellars plays on this dynamic and projects his own imagined identity onto the Ballardian register. The result is a work of theory-fiction that tells a compelling story while critically engaging with Ballard, particularly his last four novels, *Cocaine Nights* (1996), *Super-Cannes* (1996), *Millennium People* (2003) and *Kingdom Come* (2006), a loose tetralogy of dystopian, post-capitalist narratives about the roles of violence, desire and agency in near-future Europe.

For years, Sellars has maintained Ballardian.com, the premier website of the 'Ballardosphere', which he describes as 'a loose agglomeration of people who had begun to contextualize Ballard's work beyond the stifling constraints of the literary sphere and into the more expansive realms of music, film, visual art, fashion, cultural theory and architecture'. The term 'Ballardian' indicates a distinct style of writing as well as somebody who reveres and studies the author. The latter tends to be obsessive about the ideology and world-view promulgated by Ballard's fiction. Sellars is no exception, as far as he portrays himself in his book. Although there are similarities between his first-person narrator and what I know about Sellars, the barrier that separates the two becomes problematic and increasingly disturbed as his memoir unfolds. Appropriately, Ballard's own narrators often straddle the same barrier, subverting preconceived notions of

authorship, and commenting on how contemporary media technologies produce schizoid identities.

Broadly speaking, *Applied Ballardianism* is a bildungsroman about the nameless Australian narrator's quest to find himself and establish a sense of identity. A product of 1980s/90s cyberculture, he initially describes himself as a 'degenerate slacker' with little direction or purpose. One day he discovers an 'incendiary' interview with Ballard in the back of a fashion magazine, 'showcasing [Ballard's] deadly ability to pinpoint the moment when technology strafes the uncanny valley.' Hooked, the narrator suddenly has something to believe in and pursue, and after reading *Crash* (1973), he declares: 'I became a Ballardian'. What that technically means for him is unclear, and throughout the rest of the book, we witness a process of becoming-Ballard that the narrator undergoes psychologically, metaphorically and actually.

One thing is clear for certain: the narrator thrives on self-loathing and self-effacement, going to great efforts to write himself out even as he attempts to mark the spot of his evolving selfhood with the X of 'applied Ballardianism'. Plagued by deep traumatic kernels, his insecurities are cosmic, as he asserts constantly and chronically. Ultimately, 'like a soft, flabby middle-class type in a Ballard novel', he yearns 'to strip everything away and start anew', but he can't figure out how to do it, as if preprogrammed to fail in every context. In the end, it is suggested that he might be a preprogrammed simulacrum in a sharp turn of events that ventures into the narrative terrain of Philip K. Dick more than Ballard. Like the dénouements in much of their sf, however, we cannot be sure what is real and what is fantasy in Sellars' either.

Overlaid by a generalized misanthropy and solipsism, two of the most distressing preoccupations for the narrator are his lapsed relationship with girlfriend Catherine and his years-long inability to complete his Ph.D. so that he can obtain a job as a university professor. Not coincidentally, there are characters named Catherine in Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), *Crash* and *Concrete Island* (1974); all of them are the wives of the protagonists, and they all problematize the flows of their husbands' desires. More harrowing is the unfinished thesis, which lingers over him like a dark cloud, reminding him that he is 'a wasted and defeated creature'. Nothing the narrator does fulfils him. For some time, he works as a travel writer, scouring the world and immersing himself in different cultures. He becomes 'thoroughly disillusioned' with the profession, 'a confidence trick in which reviewer and proprietor colluded'. Despite himself, he is convinced that, in the words of Ballard, 'deep assignments run through all our lives'. He continues to search for the fibres of those assignments in the swaddling cloth of his own dejection and melancholy.

Metafictional allusions pervade *Applied Ballardianism.* Most conspicuously,

the book is itself a piece of travel writing, not just describing the places that the narrator visits, but the inner spatial realms of Ballard and himself, which gradually intersect and conflate with one another. Furthermore, the book is a hybrid of theoretical, fictional and autobiographical material and dips into multiple genres; hence it eludes categorization, erasing itself with the same gusto as its narrator. In this respect, he once again connects himself to Ballard, whose 'work is like that. It cannot be categorized, captured or explained and is so nebulous, so unstable and so undecidable it becomes everything and nothing'.

Interspersed throughout the narrator's account of 'the war inside me' are readings of Ballard's fiction. Additionally, he measures other, related texts, such as *Mad Max* (1979) and the films of Paul Verhoeven. Periodically he invokes Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio, whose ideas inform and vitalize the Ballardosphere. There is a kind of internal *quid pro quo* at work here. Elements of memoir propel Sellars' critical schizosophy, and vice versa. He pays the most attention to Ballard's later novels but, to varying degrees, he also discusses a handful of stories along with *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Atrocity Exhibition*, *Concrete Island*, *High-Rise* (1975), *The Unlimited Dream Company* and *The Kindness of Women*. He focuses concertedly on *Empire of the Sun*, the semi-autobiographical novel that, galvanized by Steven Spielberg's film adaptation, made Ballard a mainstream author, although the autoerotic *Crash* takes precedence over any other text. Like the Pied Piper, this formative novel attracts the narrator to Ballard, then mesmerises him and, as the story progresses, the diegesis of *Applied Ballardianism* blurs into *Crash*, with the narrator becoming a passive viewfinder, stalking the streets of Melbourne alongside a character reminiscent of the 'hoodlum scientist' Vaughan. He admits it as the story comes to a close: 'I was returning, albeit unwittingly, to my initial attraction to *Crash* and the fascination I'd always felt at the novel's pro-to-posthuman thesis'.

Applied Ballardianism is a refreshingly idiosyncratic, innovative line of flight from run-of-the-mill literature and the slow-death of creativity in the book world. Non-Ballardians who enjoy literary fiction will appreciate Sellars' prose and insight, but this is predominantly for readers (if not fetishists) of Ballard, full of nods towards, engagements with and riffs on the recurrent but indefinable selves that pervade his oeuvre.