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Torque Control

Anna McFarlane

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You are holding in your hands *Vector*'s music special issue, in which we explore the science fiction in music, and the music in science fiction. The idea for this issue was originally conceived, and in large part developed, by our features editor, Glyn Morgan, who has now left us for pastures new, heading to London for new opportunities that will hopefully include organising and chairing author events, something that he has done so well in his previous abode of Liverpool, and at the Hay Festival. Congratulations to Waterstones Gower Street, who have just acquired a science fiction aficionado; if you find yourself in that area on a regular basis then keep your eyes peeled for more sf-friendly events.

This issue also marks my farewell to the *Vector* team. Having worked on *Vector* for the past two years I will certainly miss reading the interesting submissions that we receive, articles that have sometimes given me a new perspective on sf, or a new book to add to my reading list, or a TV show to binge. I am moving on to Glasgow University, where I have a full-time post lined up for the next three years doing research into pregnancy and science fiction, so I just don't have time to give *Vector* the attention it deserves. Never fear though, before my departure I have lined up a strong team to take on the baton. Polina Levontin has a science background, but she has also studied literature and has a deep interest in science fiction; she has previously written about the Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat for *Vector* in Issue 284. She will be joined by Jo Churches Walton, a passionate and active member of the sf community whose endeavours include the development of the idiosyncratic Sputnik Awards. They've already been sharing with me some of their fantastic ideas for the future of *Vector*, which include more special issues and a more visible online presence, so you have all of that to look forward to. I wish them both the best of luck for the future.

But to get back to the topic at hand, our music special issue. In her article on sf in Welsh music, Miriam Jones asks how sf can be used as a means of expressing national identity in a country whose native language is increasingly marginalised and where the future can seem like a land colonised by the major world powers, leaving no part of space for Wales. We are also very lucky to have an interview with the hip-hop star Saul Williams in these pages. I was introduced to Saul when he supported Nine Inch Nails on their 2005 *With Teeth* tour, and it was spine-tingling to see his performance captivate the assortment of PVC-clad goths and punks. Richard Howard asks Williams about the influences of sf on his work, particularly that of Octavia Butler and Afrofuturist discourses, to uncover the inspiration behind such albums as *MartynLoserKing* (2016). Like Richard Howard's interview with Saul Williams, Lydia Kniaz takes on the Afrofuturist portrayal of dystopia by taking a look at two hip-hop music videos – Vince Staples' 'Señorita' and Deltron 3030's 'City Rising from the Ashes'. Kniaz wonders to what extent these works are dystopian and how this can be distinguished from the real-world conditions of urban decay to be found in some African cities and post-industrial cities in the USA.

Tony Keen draws attention to the possible origin of David Bowie's 'homo superior' from his track 'Oh! You Pretty Things' by exploring Bowie's sf influences and the history of the term 'homo superior' which has a long history in sf writing. Meanwhile,

J.K. Rooke turns to opera to show that it's not only literature and film that have something to offer speculative fiction. Looking primarily at the fantastic themes in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, she draws attention to the story points in the latter which are echoed so strongly in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Some of our regular columns are also music-flavoured in this edition. Paul Kincaid reads Gregory Benford's short story 'Doing Lennon', featuring a Lennon super-fan who cryogenically freezes himself so as to awake in a future that will accept him as the real John Lennon. The story is a reminder of some of science fiction's commentary on pop culture at its best, which transposes the question of the value of fame into the bigger questions of authenticity and truth, and what it means to lead an authentic life.

Andy Sawyer looks to folk music for his inspiration, analysing the song 'A Hundred Years From Now', from Randy Hales' album, *Songs From the Tall Grass* (2007). The song, originally published in 1899, expresses the desire to walk among and talk to the inhabitants of the singer's land a century from his time. Sawyer points out that the wonders imagined in the song's lyrics (including skyscraper-style buildings) had begun to appear in 1890s New York – perhaps a reminder that our society is not alone in feeling like we are 'living in the future'.

Inspired by Paul McAuley's forthcoming novel *Austral*, Stephen Baxter continues his exploration of unusual and alien habitations on earth with a description of the Antarctic's McMurdo station, a permanently-manned base that has to sustain its 250 inhabitants through the Antarctic winter. The logistics that go into such a feat and the extreme isolation of the Antarctic community bring to mind John Carpenter's *The Thing* and Adam Roberts' *The Thing Itself* as much as a story of space survival, such as *The Martian*, reminding us that there is much to be explored on Earth, as well as beyond its atmosphere.

I hope you enjoy this special issue; I had the pleasure of working with Glyn throughout my time at *Vector* and I am pleased to say that this issue successfully shows how fruitful that partnership has been so far. To him, and to all of you, I say – 'see you soon.'

Anna McFarlane (and Glyn Morgan)
Editors, Vector

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The Shared Futuristic Space of Welsh Music and Welsh-Language Science Fiction

Miriam Jones

Damian Walford Davies' 1996 article discussing music as poetry highlights a 'stubborn stigma of inferiority' often placed on the language and craft of a song, 'in spite of the conviction that the medium is undeniably a relevant part of our culture, and that pop music can display much musical and "literary" talent.'¹ Perhaps Bob Dylan's recent Nobel Prize for Literature highlights the literary merit of song lyrics, and here, in a brief study of futuristic Welsh music (not, as must be announced here from the offset, exclusively Welsh-language music) and Welsh-language science fiction literature, we further attempt to disprove music's perceived inferiority. Both music and literature often intertwine, using similar themes to question traditional Welsh identity. Welsh futuristic music especially combines influences from literature and other cultural references in order to display concerns of great importance to the Welsh nation.

Rhodri ap Dyfrig brings all art – visual, musical and literary – with futuristic elements together under the umbrella term of 'cambrofuturism' with the intention of creating a direct counterpart to Mark Dery's afrofuturism: 'speculative fiction that treats African-American themes [...] in the context of twentieth-century technoculture.'² Whilst the Welsh experience cannot be directly compared to the history of racism and injustice against ethnic minorities worldwide, ap Dyfrig sees expressing Welsh identity through an other-worldly or futuristic setting as a way of escaping and challenging past instances of oppression. Although considered – along with Scotland and Ireland – 'dominated' rather than colonial in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffins' *The Empire Writes Back* (2002),³ Cambro futurist expression offers freedom from the shackles of imperialism, as well as from the norms of Welsh culture.

1 Damian Walford Davies, "'Rewriting the Law-Books": The Poetry of Welsh Pop Music', *Welsh Music History*, 1 (1996), 206.

2 Mark Dery, 'Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose' in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery, (2nd ed.; Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 180.

It's a way of working within the system in order to offer commentary on the present of Wales and the Welsh language with some kind of distance. The kind of distance which is hard to find in Cymru Fach or 'small Wales'.³

Indeed, within Welsh culture, the traditional rather than the experimental is at the forefront of things. However, in Deian Richard Timms' study of Welsh psychedelic music, he notes: 'We are all products of history, and the historical experience of Wales has created fertile ground for the psychedelic to flourish [...] [expressing] the desire for freedom and a space in which Welsh identity is equal, not peripheral.'⁴ The main question by many is whether projecting music and literature into a science fictional situation is a reckless escape from pressing concerns or a healthy and necessary space to assess national identity?

Aspiring Astronauts

One of the first Welsh-language tracks with an SF inspired theme comes, rather surprisingly, from popular folk quintet, Y Pelydrau (The Rays). Their name appears to be a (perhaps political) nod to the nuclear power station just outside their hometown of Trawsfynydd. The presence of the now-defunct power station on their debut record hints at an interest in science, although it isn't an obvious theme in the majority of their songs. However, 'Roced Fach Ni' (Our Little Rocket) in particular is a product of its time, released at the pinnacle of the space age in 1969. Y Pelydrau sing of 'roced orau'r byd' (the best rocket in the world), decorated with multiple Welsh emblems, including a daffodil and dragon, and painted in the jaunty red, white and green colours of the Welsh-language youth organization, The Urdd, triumphantly landing on the moon.

3 Rhodri ap Dyfrig, 'Cambrofuturism: Welsh UFOs, alien and futurists', <https://medium.com/@nwdls/cambrofuturism-5df99c0999df#efggg3rue> [05 September 2016].

4 Deian Richard Timms, 'The Psyche of a Psychedelic Nation', *Planet*, 420 (2015), 70.

This optimistic portrayal of a small nation conquering the moon is a common idea in Welsh SF literature produced during the 1950s and 1960s. It seems almost an obsession, at the tail end of the space age, by Welsh authors Islwyn Ffowc Elis and W. J. Jones to see a Welshman seizing the desert-like landscape of the moon. Elis' *Wythnos yng Nghymru Fydd* (*A Week in Future Wales*), published in 1957, describes Ifan Powel's time travel adventure to two contrasting futures in 2033, and is the first intentional Welsh SF novel. (SF motifs predate it as far back as 1856, but none are intentionally marketed or labelled as SF.) In a utopian version of Wales, Ifan meets an astronaut who has captured the first video footage of the moon. Ifan, understandably, is in awe of the prosperous country that has produced Gwern Tywi, the astronaut. W. J. Jones, in the same way, portrays Nic Mellten (a name that literally translates as Nick Thunderbolt), in his two novels *Rhwng y Sêr* (*Between the Stars*) in 1957 and *Dinas y Lloer* (*Moon City*) in 1961, as a new hero, emphasising his role as the *first* Welshman to receive messages from space and save the world from invading Martians.

Returning to Elis' work, his second SF offering in 1968, *Y Blaned Dirion* (*The Meek Planet*), celebrates Welsh entrepreneurial spirit in the same way as his previous novel. Dr Teyrnnon Williams, a leading physicist, insists on keeping a log of his crew's journey to a planet in the furthest corner of the cosmos in Welsh, in the hope that the language will one day become a language of international merit. Welsh, ever since a particularly damning report on the state of education in Wales in 1847 (also referred to as the Treachery of the Blue Books), was labelled a 'vast drawback' and became unsuitable for discussing matters such as science. Teyrnnon's writing, therefore, is a deliberately political act, pushing the Welsh-language and with it its culture (as Elis often did as an author) to new territories. However, science and SF remain, even today, at the periphery of Welsh discourse.

Innovative electronic artist, Malcolm Neon released debut cassette *Chwilio am wyddoniaeth* (*Searching for Science*) in 1980 as an obvious expression of defiance against such cultural norms and expectations. Neon's track appears following the successful Apollo 11 mission in 1969, with the American flag planted on the moon, metaphorically claiming it in the imagination of SF fans. Later examples of Welsh futuristic music and SF literature move to portray the Welshman as lost in outer space, rather than as an imperial adventurer. Mari Williams' 1991 novel, *Y Trydydd Posibilrwydd* (*The Third Possibility*) portrays her triad of astronauts trapped in a limbo between past and future, their mission to explore the galaxy's furthest star unsuccessful. In the same way, Alun Gaffey's 'Jupiter Gravity', from his 2016 self-titled space-funk album, tells the tale of a missing spaceman, who laments:

Dwi mor bell o adra,
Dwi'n methu 'nheulu i.
Ma' ffawd 'di delio'r cardiau rong i fi.
Dwi'n methu'r gwair a'r blodau,
a'r mynyddoedd mawr.
Y blaned Iau sydd yn fy nhynnu lawr.
Nwy a chemegion, nwy a chemegion...

(I'm so far from home,
I miss my family,
Fate's dealt me the wrong cards,
I miss the grass and flowers
and the mighty mountains.
Planet Jupiter is pulling me down.
Gas and chemicals, gas and chemicals...)

There is a clear contrast between the natural greenery of Earth which the lost-in-orbit spaceman recollects and Jupiter's atmosphere. Both Gaffey and Williams' space travellers lament their past lives, however, Gaffey's song specifically echoes 19th century Welsh poet John Ceiriog Hughes' 'Nant y Mynydd':

Mab y Mynydd ydwyf innau
Oddi cartref yn gwneud cân
Ond mae 'nghalon yn y mynydd
Efo'r grug a'r adar mân.

(I'm the son of the mountains
Far from home writing a song
But my heart is in the mountain
With the heather and small birds.)

Ceiriog, who longs for the picturesque pastures of home, is also the surprising author of the first example of Welsh-language SF, the fictional letters of Sir Meurig Grynswth. Whilst the poet yearns for home, the prose-writer ventures to a new world to criticize his society from afar. Yet Gaffey, with 'Jupiter Gravity', draws upon Ceiriog's well-known poem, creating a 'Green, Green Grass of Home' scenario, with a romanticised image of his home, rather than undertaking the form of satirical prose for which Ceiriog was less known. Meanwhile, a sample clip in Gaffey's track portrays the missing astronaut's heartbroken child. The angry informant, who declares the harsh reality of the astronaut's disappearance, announces to the grieving family: 'And there's no Santa Claus either!' The dream of claiming the moon as Welsh territory in examples of song and prose predating the 1970s is well and truly over by the 1990s and the new millennium, with outer space now nothing but a metaphorical playground, rather than a hopeful desire.

The Feminist Frankenstein

Regarding space as a metaphorical playground, Llwybr Llaethog (The Milky Way) are a duo that have been active since the early 1980s, steadily producing dub and hip-hop albums. They stumbled across their name in the back of a dictionary, whilst both members, John Griffiths and Kevs Ford, were hoping to expand their Welsh vocabulary. Sarah King, interviewing them both, writes that, ‘they use the Welsh language as a political tool, an expression of identity, but refuse to be defined by it.’⁵ In a similar manner to Islwyn Ffowc Elis, they create anew and push the language into new spheres.

Often inviting other artists to collaborate, ‘Planed Sonig’ (Sonic Planet) from 2009 album *Chwaneg* (a colloquial term for ‘more’) features rapping duo Y Diwygiad (The Revival) formed of Ed Holden and Aneirin Karadog. The lyrics share their experience, with Holden in his opening rap describing the escapism involved with discovering artists such as Llwybr Llaethog.

Ro’n i fel astronaut yn y gofod
yn arnofio i fyd newydd i ddarganfod
ar ben fy hun mewn bydysawd sonig
yn troelli a troi yn fy llong arbennig
ymysg y sêr wib yn gwibio heibio
llond lle, lle’r oedd y sain yn treiddio.

(I was like an astronaut in space,
floating to a new world to discover
on my own in a sonic universe
twirling and turning in my special ship
amongst the shooting stars shooting past
a jam-packed place, where the sound penetrates.)

In the song, Llwybr Llaethog, later described as ‘two cadets in blue’, are portrayed as saviours from another planet. They don’t belong to the Welsh world Y Diwygiad are familiar with. In a similar manner, rap artists Tystion (Witnesses) in ‘Y Byd Hip Hop vs Y Byd Cymraeg’ (‘The Hip Hop World vs The Welsh World’), released nine years previously in 2000 on album *Hen Gelwydd Prydain Newydd (New Britain’s Old Lie)*, compare their experiences as fans of the rap genre with belonging to another planet: ‘Dwi’n byw ar y blaned hip-hop.’ (I live on the hip-hop planet.) In order to express their personal viewpoint, both Y Diwygiad and Tystion must explain their experiences as otherworldly and alien, despite each member identifying as Welsh.

Llwybr Llaethog’s immense catalogue has inspired many artists along the way, one of which is Geraint Ffrancon, who openly admits: ‘Dyma un o’r bandiau [...]

wnaeth neud i fi sylweddoli fod cerddoriaeth Gymraeg ac yn yr iaith Gymraeg yn gallu bod yn cŵl.’ (They are one of the bands [...] that made me realise that Welsh music and music in the Welsh language can be cool.)⁶ Ffrancon emerged in the late 1990s and has actively contributed to the Welsh electronic scene, creating ‘High Quality Recordings’ (which evolved into ‘Recordiau’ in 2002) to promote his own work under various pseudonyms, giving the illusion of a real record company. One pseudonym is Blodyn Tatws (which translates literally as ‘Potato Flower’, but is a common term of endearment in Welsh), and it happens to also be the title of Eurig Wyn’s 1998 SF novel, in which Wang-Ho, a disillusioned heir to his grandfather’s profitable computer company, creates a robotic wife with the help of specialized computer, NESTA. He names his new wife Blodyn Tatws, and as well as echoing the Welsh mythical tale of Blodeuwedd (a wife created of flowers for the prince Lleu Llaw Gyffes), it is heavily influenced by the story of Frankenstein’s monster.

Amongst Ffrancon’s earliest tracks as Blodyn Tatws is ‘Hen Wlad fy Nghyfrifiaduron’ (‘The Land of My Computers’), a 47-second piece where the recognisable intro of the Welsh national anthem, ‘Hen Wlad fy Nhadau’ (‘Land of my Fathers’), morphs into a deep robotic voice. This playful track hints at the need for a new anthem and goes a step further than Anhrefn’s post-punk/post-house *Hen Wlad fy Mamau – The Land of my Mothers* album originally released in 1995, and subsequently rereleased in 2000. Although both artists crave an alternative, or an updated, national anthem, the first sentence opening Anhrefn’s album, with track ‘Breuddwydion’ (‘Dreams’), announces:

Nid yw’n amhosib
heddiw yn yr oes sydd ohoni
i ail ddarganfod ysbryd meddylfryd gwreiddiol
derwydd a derwyddes,
yn wir, mae’n hanfodol.

(It’s not impossible,
in this day and age
to rediscover the original natural spirit of druids and
druidesses
in truth, it is essential.)

Hen Wlad Fy Mamau – Land of my Mothers refers back to a traditional Welsh identity whilst attempting to define it in a present context, using a bizarre concoction of electronic remixes, thrashing guitars, bhangra music and traditional folk tunes. ‘Hen Wlad fy Nghyfrifiadur’ by Ffrancon, in contrast, purely expresses the need for Welsh involvement in the technological era.

5 Sarah King, ‘Dub Cymraeg’, *Wales Arts Review*, 27 February 2014. URL (accessed 8 September 2016): <http://www.walesartsreview.org/dub-cymraeg/>

6 ‘Cam o’r Tywyllwch 003’, Radio Cardiff, 07 March 2013.

However, music with futuristic elements – ranging from techno to psychedelia – has not always been well-received by Welsh-language reviewers. Derec Brown, for example, whilst reviewing compilation album *Tecno*, insists: ‘Byd gwyrddynedig ac amheronol yw byd techno.’ (The world of techno is a deformed and impersonal world.)⁷ The few examples of robot stories in Welsh appear to respond to this viewpoint. For example, *Blodyn Tatws* and *Y Dydd Olaf* play with the idea of a human-machine hybrid, hinting at their role as deformed and dangerous monsters. However, as Hefin Wyn emphasises whilst discussing that particular response to techno music, *people* press the buttons of said impersonal machines.⁸ Mihangel Morgan appears to be the only Welsh author to highlight this in 1993 short story ‘Pwy Fyth a Fyddai’n Fetel?’ (Who On Earth Would Be Metal?). In a panicked frenzy at a sudden attack from household commodity Keflusker X, adulterous Non phones her lover. He promptly dismisses her concerns: ‘Dim ond mewn storïau a ffilmiau gwydonias y mae peiriannau’n dod yn fyw ac yn meddwl drostyn nhw eu hunain.’ (It is only in sci-fi stories and films that machines come alive and think for themselves.) Challenging genre norms, it is revealed – as Keflusker X repeats Blodeuwedd’s famous monologue from Saunders Lewis’ play, *Blodeuwedd*: ‘You don’t know what it is to be lonely, and you – and no one – will understand my concerns...’ – that it is Non’s scorned husband, Jac, in charge of the machine’s actions.

Integral to *Blodyn Tatws*, *Y Dydd Olaf* and ‘Pwy Fyth a Fyddai’n Fetel’ is not only man’s relationship with science, but also man’s relationship with women, as is seen in examples of SF worldwide. Whilst Owain’s ‘dirywiad’ (translated as ‘neutral’) are sexless, Wyn’s NESTA computer and *Blodyn Tatws* are undoubtedly robotic *femme fatales*, echoing Lewis’ portrayal of Blodeuwedd in his play. Keflusker X seeks revenge on the seemingly dastardly Non, however, we learn nothing about the men in her life. Feminist themes in Welsh-language SF remain a relatively new concept, and women are mainly portrayed as innocent damsels in distress. However, the idea of an all-female planet is flirted with in ‘Gwalaxia’, a track from Dafydd Pierce’s *Gorsaf y Gofod M123* (Space Station M123) cassette. The prog-rock ensemble released in 1981 describes the journey of a new captain on his first space mission, leaving ‘the old path to the moon’ behind. Having previously bid goodbye to the Welsh dream of conquering the moon, the few who venture to space post-1969 must venture further afield. Whilst this captain discovers Gwalaxia, literary spacemen discover the aforementioned Planed Dirion (Meek Planet) and in SF-spoof novel, *Ar Blaned Arall* (*On Another Planet*) by Dafydd

Meirion, published in 2004, two rugby-playing lads from North Wales land on Delta Equinox.

Whilst the two main protagonists of *Ar Blaned Arall* attempt to run amok with the female servants, causing great mayhem, the captain in ‘Gwalaxia’ is more respectful to the all-female population of the newly-discovered planet. Feminist futures in Welsh-language SF still leave much to be desired, although the two most prominent examples are quite extraordinary. Women are the well-known scientists in Pennar Davies’ 1985 short story ‘Tabendra’. They conquer a new planet in a post-apocalyptic future, and gender roles are completely reversed, with emphasis on the man’s role as homemaker, due to a new technology that enables men to breast feed. Fflur Dafydd’s 2009 novel, *Y Llyfrgell* (*The Library*), sees the national archive library in Aberystwyth as the home to a feminist government’s plot to bring prominence to Wales’ female writers. Subtler feminist themes appear in Saunders’ *Y Dydd Olaf*, especially with the track ‘Partriar-chaeth’ (Patriarchy) describing ‘enaid tan warchae’ (soul under siege), and highlighting her role as one of the very few female Welsh-language electronic artists. Although wandering away from the initial theme of Owain’s novel of the same name, the idea of a restricted human being remains prominent in *Y Dydd Olaf*, and both the robot figure and the female figure in Welsh-language SF are portrayed as lonely and often tortured ‘Others’, intent on seeking revenge.

The Growing Influence of Technology

Adopting the title of Owain’s 1976 novel *Y Dydd Olaf* for her own album, Saunders closely links herself to the concerns discussed by the author. Worries about the increasing use of technology, indoctrination and the effects of a globalized society are relevant to both works, despite the original novel’s future setting of 1999, now decades in the past. Formed of a fictional archive of letters and diary extracts from various periods of protagonist Marc’s life, the novel’s future is frequented by human-robot hybrids and run by a mysterious Brotherhood, all in order to uphold the illusion of maintaining world peace. Marc is another character who makes a conscience decision to write in Welsh, for it is one of few languages the almighty Omega-Delta computer cannot decipher, and is what makes Marc distinguishable from anyone else. In an increasingly homogenised world, the Welsh language, culture and its fragile place in that very world, is a growing concern in Welsh-language SF.

The title-track to Saunders’ album also presents concerns of a world of shrinking horizons due to globalization. Contrasting images in the song present a certain confusion – the feeling of isolation is described as both intimate and contactless – and the chorus, ‘A’i hwn yw’r

7 Derec Brown, ‘Roc: Crai – Tecno’, *Barn*, 401 (1996), 41.

8 Hefin Wyn, *Ble wyt ti rhwng?: Hanes Canu Poblogaidd Cymraeg 1980-2000*, (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2006), 337.

dydd olaf sy'n d'atgoffa di o'r gyntaf?' (Is this the last day that reminds you of the first?) is a paradox echoed from the novel. At the beginning of Marc's last day in his 1999 diary, he notes twice: 'Diwedd y dydd cyntaf, o'r dyddiau olaf.' (The end of the first day of the last days.) It seems, in the album and novel, as well as reminiscing at what the world has become, that the brink of the apocalypse could also possess a glimmer of hope for a new beginning.

It is in that spirit that 'Fratolish Hiang Perpeshki' is described by Deian Richard Timms: 'The beautiful line "dawnsio yn y Machlud" is full of melancholic decadence, a frivolous, joyful moment when all is lost. Pessimists might say that Wales is doing exactly that – dancing in the setting sun.'⁹ The song's title borrows a phrase from the synthetic language created by the Godlike-computers of Owain's novel. Marc's mind, when loaded with treacherous thoughts, is promptly invaded by the 'soothing lullabies' of this language. Saunders, however, uses it as a call-to-arms, summoning listeners to dance in the setting sun. 'Der i ddawnsio yn y machlud, i donau dibwys a dychrynlyd.' (Come and dance in the sunset to songs which are trivial and alarming.) The verses describe a dystopian world:

'Mae'r peiriannau yn penderfynu
yn casglu data, amcangyfrif ein ffawd o fewn canrif.'

(The machines are deciding
collecting data, and estimating our fate within a
century.)

'Fratolish Hiang Perpeshki' is an apocalyptic disco, holding on to the glimmer of hope as we face the end of one world, emphasising local and community values, and the beginning of another globalized, highly technological world.

Gwenno Saunders is, like many of the musicians and writers mentioned here, aware of her role in an SF tradition discussing (then unlabelled) cambrofuturist ideas, as well as her role in a much wider, Welsh cultural context.

A Brand New Perspective

Despite the success of Saunders' *Y Dydd Olaf*, the recent futuristic music releases appear pessimistic in tone. Location Baked's *Cambrofuturism* EP (released to celebrate Cassette Store Day in 2015) includes echoes of a distant future, with its title track keeping 'cymrud-dyfodolaeth' still a faraway cry. In the same spirit, solo project, OLaG with 'Sŵn Sci Ffai Cymreik (Mourning Air)' (The Sound of Welsh Sci-Fi) and its soulful synths are indeed mournful and seem almost disappointed at the small amount of Welsh SF available. Although having

touched upon many examples of SF prose here, there is still much to be desired by Welsh-speaking SF fans.

It appears, as previously hinted, that the traditional aspects of Welsh culture have dominated Welsh and Welsh-language music and literature. As Dai Griffiths and Sarah Hill conclude: 'Nostalgia – *hiraeth* – has been the central *idée fixe* of Welsh expressive culture since time immemorial.'¹⁰ Futuristic music and SF literature contradicts that whole notion by presenting a futuristic viewpoint and escaping to faraway settings, yet somehow, despite being neither obviously political nor stereotypically Welsh, presenting the future or outer space through song or prose reveals a want and need to escape from a traditional Welsh setting, pushing the boundaries of Welsh-language discourse.

Some may criticize futuristic music and SF literature as a form of foolish escapism, especially when, in a minority language culture, there are more pressing issues closer to home. However, George Lipsitz attests: 'Appearances of escape and appropriation can also provide protective cover for explorations of individual and collective identity [...] These detours may enable individuals to solve indirectly problems that they could not address directly.'¹¹ As seen here, art that fits into the cambrofuturist category must often take itself away – into a future location or to a faraway planet – in order to assess, and often to criticize, the state of the Welsh nation. For some, such as previously mentioned Y Diwygiad and Tystion, the SF setting is a direct comparison to their own position as outsiders within the culture, and for others, it is a safe distance in order to express personal feeling and experience. In track 'Stwff' (Stuff) Saunders admits: 'Pan fydda'i mhell o adref mae'r gwir i'w weld yn gliriach. Alla i ond ymd-diheuro am deimlo'r rhwystredigaeth.' (When I'm far from home I see the truth more clearly. I can only apologize for feeling the frustration.) Futuristic music and Welsh-language SF literature, in the face of adversity, pushes the boundaries of Welsh discourse, and despite various protests, is an integral part of Welsh identity in its own right.

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10 Dai Griffiths and Sarah Hill, 'Music in Postcolonial Wales' in *Postcolonial Wales*, ed. Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 229.

11 George Lipsitz, 'Crusing Around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles', *Cultural Critique*, 5 (1986-7), 160.

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Saul Williams in Conversation with Richard Howard

Saul Williams is a poet, hip-hop M.C., producer and actor who first came to prominence through his victory at the poetry Grand Slam at the Nuyorican Poets Café in 1996. This event kick-started Williams' acting career with the lead role in the feature film *Slam* in 1998, and a music career in which Williams began to blend his poetry with his love of hip-hop. What makes Williams' work interesting from a science fiction standpoint is the obvious affinity he has with the genre, evident in his lyrics and the soundscapes he chooses to rhyme over. From the outset, Williams wrote and produced with a speculative angle: in the song 'Ohm' from 1998's *Lyricist Lounge* compilation, Williams announced 'I am no Earthling, I drink moonshine on Mars/And mistake meteors for stars 'cause I can't hold my liquor/But I can hold my breath and ascend like wind to the black hole/And play galaxaphones on the fire escapes of your soul'. The glimmering production on 'Ohm' is no less science fictional, especially as it accelerates at around the three-minute mark.

From the hip-hop artists who Williams identifies as his lineage, it is clear that he is not so much bucking a trend in subject matter in hip-hop as tapping into a pre-existing vein. From Rammellzee to the Ultramagnetic M.C.s, Outkast to Big K.R.I.T., hip-hop has always been a forward-looking, future-oriented genre. This futurist attitude is embodied in the slang term 'the next shit', a phrase describing a new way of creating that seems to appear from out of nowhere, but points the way towards future developments in the form. The *novum*, then, is no less an organising principle in hip-hop as it is in science fiction.

Williams's newest project *Martyrloserking* is his fifth album and his most explicitly science fictional to date. The album imagines a near-future Burundi where the titular *Martyrloserking* (Williams came up with the name after hearing a French pronunciation of Martin Luther King) has set up a self-sufficient society on a dump for old computer parts. Williams intends to tell the story across many media, with plans for more music, a graphic novel and a feature film.

The following conversation, conducted between a sound check and a performance at Dublin's Sugar Club on 30/6/2016, attempts to hone in on Williams's engagement with science fiction, covering *Martyrloserking* in its musical, graphic and film forms, colonialism, the power of poetry, science fiction's influence on the hip-hop underground, Octavia Butler and Afrofuturism.

Richard Howard: First, could you explain the concept behind *Martyrloserking*?

Saul Williams: The concept behind *Martyrloserking* is quite simple. It's based in the most advanced tech hub on the continent of Africa. It's situated in a country named Burundi. So the story is pulling from reality and bleeding out from there. I chose Burundi primarily for its relationship to the Great Lakes region of Central or Eastern Africa where you have Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Sudan, Kenya. But in the first three mentioned you have essentially the same people who have been there for thousands of years and it's in many ways the cradle of civilisation, the source of the Nile is there and all that stuff, and imagination runs wild there, because you think about the fact that European colonisers entered that place last. They didn't arrive until like 1900. And what they found was a democracy. A democracy that they twisted, through colonisation, the will to power, capitalism, exploitation and religion. And so the Germans and Belgians came in and essentially set up the way they would do business, who they would talk to, who they wouldn't talk to, and beyond that, with the missionaries came the idea of some of the people there being related to what's written about in the Bible. The ancient Egyptians and ancient Semites and all this stuff. So they planted this story within an already existing story. And when then that story spun forward it brought about genocides and all this crazy shit. All brought about by people ingesting this biblical science fiction.

RH: So this is the context for your own version of the story?

SW: Yes. Martyrloserking is the screen name of a hacker who lives in Martyrloserkingdom, which is a tech hub built on a camp where old techware goes to die. Old monitors and motherboards and all this shit. This dude arrives there, having run away from the coltan mine that he was working in. We know that coltan is responsible for distributing power through all circulatory objects, so computers, smartphones right? And I love the idea of the distribution of power through virtual realms. So this guy flees from the mine and he arrives at the camp and it's the beginning of rainy season and just out of necessity,

RH: There's 3D printing technology as well isn't there?

SW: Yeah there's a guy there who builds a 3D printer, the utility of which is that what happens at these mines is that, when rebels want to make a statement against the powers, if they can't reach the powers they attack the miners. So, to make a statement to the powers they'll cut off the hands of some miners, or some arms. And so, this 3D printer is printing hands and arms and so there's a lot of cyber people there.



he builds a shelter out of computer waste products. So he inspires the building of this village, Martyrloserkingdom, which is a village built out of old computer parts. There are some tech people living there, engineers and what have you, who have figured out how to make a few things work. And not just computers. There's a generator that runs on urine for instance.

The mastermind of all this is Martyrloserking, who grew up on a hill where coltan was discovered. He believes his power comes from the fact that he grew up sleeping on coltan, and playing with it as a kid, running his hands in it. So, by the time he got to the stage of touching a computer he just understood it at its root. He is the root. Another thing he connects to is this old man he met as a kid who told him a story about the Dogon.

The Dogon are from Mali, West Africa. In their cosmology, they come from Sirius. They charted Sirius. Way before NASA or any telescopes saw it, they saw it. It was doubted for years until NASA scientists discovered it, and were like, wow they right, I don't know how they saw that. Also, the Dogon's numerological system is binary. Martyrloserking learned this as a kid. So that's another thing. He understood coding immediately, as well as how to see Sirius with the naked eye.

From there he connects with a person named Neptune-frost, who is from Uganda and is a modem. And that is where our story begins.

RH: You're also working on a graphic novel.

SW: Yeah. This whole story I'm telling you exists linearly as a graphic novel called *Martyrloserking* that will come out next year.

RH: Which artists are you working with for the graphic novel?

SW: I've worked with two artists: Ronald Wimberley and Morgan Sorne.

RH: What is it about the graphic form that attracted you?

SW: Well, I've written books of poetry before. I think of all the things you're allowed to do with a book of poetry. I think of all the worlds that are of interest to me. The thing about poetry is that sometimes it only speaks to people in the world of poetry. But in a book of poetry, if you look at the page as a stage, there's a lot that you can play with, in terms of phrasing and the way that words and thoughts appear on a page. It becomes experiential. It can be design. Poetry is design in many ways. So because of that there's an entry point for me into the graphic novel form. What I like about graphic novels are the tangents that you're allowed to go on. So if you and I having this conversation were a panel in a graphic novel, there could be graffiti on the wall and that graffiti could be the poem. And I could put an emblem on your sweater, or some words on the sleeve and that could also be poem. I realised how layered it could be in terms of presentation and images. Images within images. Words within images. It's more to play with.

And I'd gotten to that point through words. Mainly through science fiction. What I have enjoyed about science fiction from the time I dove in was how it opened my natural space. If I were reading *Hyperion* by Dan Simmons or whatever, as I'm walking down the street, I'm thinking of the shit that I just read and the world feels a little larger. I'd be thinking that there's more layers, parallel universes and so forth. It has enhanced my view of

possibilities. It's kind of like film in a way. Great writers leave space, and that gap in between is your understanding.

RH: That could also relate to the gap between science fiction and our world and thinking about the difference between them.

SW: Yeah. Murakami did it recently with his last book [*IQ84*]. I know he's not known as a science fiction writer. I think it's his last book, where the parallel universe is so close.

RH: There's also a link between the graphic novel and visual technology you use for your live show isn't there?

SW: I'm working with this designer. He's a hacker. I've never met him personally. But he's in the desert in Mexico, and he's built this software that he's still needing with and we can add text and images, glitch moving images and all this stuff. It's like a live journal that bleeds into the graphic novel.

But there's also a film. The graphic novel was the imagined endpoint, even though I was simultaneously working on it as a musical play. After talking to producers, the idea of a play was pushed into the idea of a film. The graphic novel acts as a kind of storyboard for the film. But they each follow a different character's perspectives of the same story. We'll be shooting the film in Ethiopia, Rwanda and we might also shoot some in Haiti.

RH: How close is our world to the Burundi you've written about? Is this a near future or far future?

SW: It's a near future. It's a parallel world that is commenting on the world that is parallel to them: our world. So, it's near future.

RH: What's your connection to Burundi? Have you travelled there?

SW: No. I do a lot of travelling and I'm trying to flex something and have my own excitement around seeing what I find there. It's fun to take something from some place and connect it to something from somewhere else. My wife is Rwandan and as a muse she has definitely served as an entry point. It's a process of not just sight but insight into something that may feel obvious, that you may feel like you already get and understand. But the actual mapping of the space brings new insight and new ideas and all that.

But, by happenstance, I can't go to Burundi right now because of what's going on there. So that's interesting that the process of writing about this stuff has brought on this parallel reality that is extremely real. I'd relate that to

“to live one’s life writing poetry is sci-fi in a capitalist society.”

poetry. Poetry has this alchemical relationship to reality. Anyone who involves themselves in any way with poetry knows that there’s something that it allows. A shifting perspective or emotion. There’s a manoeuvring in poetry. You realise you’re controlling something as you would VR. You realise you can do other things. You can fly. You don’t have to eat. There’s tonnes of stuff you can do with a poem and in a poem.

RH: As a hip-hop listener and science fiction reader, I’ve always heard a connection between your work and the genre. I think the first song I heard by you was ‘Ohm’ on the *Lyricist Lounge* compilation and there was something about, not only the lyrics, but also the production that made me sense that connection.

SW: It’s because I was reading a bunch of science fiction novels. That was the beginning of me getting really into science fiction. Literature-wise, before that I’d been more into fiction, I’d gone through a mystery phase, an autobiography phase. I also studied philosophy so I’d read a lot of that, and I was simultaneously getting into a lot of Eastern philosophy. At the same time I was getting into Eastern philosophy and meditation and what have you, I was reading a lot of science fiction. I probably started with Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

RH: Okay. That definitely has an element of mysticism to it as well.

SW: Yeah. And then I got really deep into Octavia Butler. But I was also reading a lot of the stuff I felt I had to read, like Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick or even Thomas Pynchon. Then trying out some of the new stuff. Even something like Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, but that’s more horror I suppose.

RH: But definitely relatable to what we talked about earlier regarding the placement of words on the pages.

SW: Yeah it was interesting in terms of structure.

RH: Okay, so as I said, I’ve always connected your music to science fiction, so when I heard the song ‘Grippe’ from your 2004 *Saul Williams* album it really grabbed my attention. In the song you say ‘I gave hip-hop to white boys when nobody was looking/they found it locked in a basement when they gentrified Brooklyn/left a list of instructions, M.P.C. and a mic/my sci-fi library and utensils to write’. It’s almost as if you’re saying science fiction is an integral part of hip-hop music, almost a disregarded element.

SW: Well if you look at mid-nineties hip-hop and the birth of the underground and labels like Rawkus and Def Jux, and artists like El-p and Aesop Rock. They all had science fictional elements. Of course, even before that there were so many people doing far-out spacy stuff from Divine Styler to Dark Feather Collective in LA. People that were going far out. But when I think of those guys from the mid-nineties, there was a lot of Philip K. Dick influence there. Especially in El-p and I liked it. In ‘Grippe’ I was kind of joking about that.

RH: I’ve heard you talk about the song ‘Grippe’ being your idea of what a future style of music would sound like.

SW: Yeah. It was on or just before a mushroom trip. We bought this indigo blue, brought it home from the store, tried it, and spent nine hours on this rug that felt like a magic carpet. It was winter in New York. We had gone to the record store beforehand. I had a friend with me and we’d bought some vinyl. I was expecting a kid at the time. My daughter was on her way, and we were talking about what kind of music our kids would listen to. One

of us said ‘Grippo’, and we started trying to describe it saying ‘it’s going to be really fast, electronic, like punk and it’s going to have all this energy’. Some years later, I’m working on a song. I’m living in LA, downtown in a loft at that time. My daughter is there, it’s a Saturday morning. She must be about five or six. I’m working on music with headphones on and my daughter is there watching cartoons. There’s a commercial break, so I turn on my speakers just to hear the beat and my daughter just gets up and starts dancing to it. So that’s how Grippo became ‘Grippo’.

RH: You mentioned Octavia Butler a moment ago. Where did you come across her work?

SW: What’s cool about that is I came across her more related to a path concerning African-American literature. I had gone through a deep exploration of reading Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Pearl Cleage. So that was the beginning of getting turned onto some highly interesting womanist perspectives in literature and *The Temple of my Familiar*, which is the sequel to Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple*, is science fiction. It’s subtle as fuck, but it’s beautiful. I read that when I was seventeen and that was the beginning for me. She poked a world and Octavia Butler did that with *Kindred*, although that’s not the first example of connecting slavery and other worlds. That happens a lot in what I call unimaginative science fiction. We imagine other worlds and we just project our world onto it, so we imagine they’re coming to colonise us, they want to make us slaves, they need our resources. But if it’s higher intelligence, maybe it wouldn’t involve so much violence.

RH: So something like Octavia Butler’s Xenogenesis trilogy would be a more nuanced take on that relationship.

SW: Yeah. When she started saying shit like, in *Imago*, where she’s like describing how the human species, which is no longer human, had developed. With arms and tentacles and antennae and all this stuff growing out of us. She explains that we had been trying to adapt and evolve for ages, but we had gotten it wrong and it had turned into cancer. We had continually tried to burn the cancer out, with chemo or whatever. We always tried to burn it out, but we didn’t realise that it was our species trying to evolve until we began watering our cancers. She talks about the process of watering your cancer. From that point on I began looking for that in literature. So then it’s like going to sci-fi sections of stores or talking to friends and being like ‘yo, point me in the direction of stuff like that.’ But it also relates to poetry as well, because to live one’s life writing poetry is sci-fi in a capitalist society.

RH: You mention friends recommending books, which reminds me of something. I saw an interview with Pharaoh Monche where he said that Talib Kweli introduced him to Octavia Butler’s work.

SW: Well, I bought all those books from Talib. Talib worked in a bookstore called Nkiru Books in Brooklyn. I’d just moved into the neighbourhood and began seeking out a local bookstore and found Nkiru Books. Talib was working there and we would get into small discussions about literature. Why? Because it was rare for me to see a dude my age working in this small-ass bookstore that was basically a converted apartment in a brownstone building. And he was cool. He worked in a bookstore, he was nerdy, but he was cool. We were getting into African literature there, which is a whole other realm of science fiction. Like Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*, Kweli was really into Ayi Kwei Armah from Ghana and Octavia Butler. I met Octavia Butler in that bookstore in fact.

RH: Did you have a conversation with her?

SW: [Laughs] No. I just said ‘could you sign this for me?’ I didn’t take a picture.

RH: Would you align your own work with the term Afrofuturism at all?

SW: I wouldn’t, but I wouldn’t stop people from doing it. I mean, it happens. I would probably be upset if I weren’t included in whatever that is, because it speaks directly to me and I know exactly what’s happening there. So I’m part of the experience, I’m just dancing around terms. Also because, well, redundancy is necessary at times. With, you know, Afropunk or whatever. But I mean, you could just say punk, because we know Bad Brains, we know what they brought to the game. It’s the same thing with futurism. But what’s great about the term is the importance of the imagination in the oppressive environment, and the freedom of the imagination. What you can be pushed to when you’re pushed against.

RH: It always seemed to me quite an expansive, inclusive term. It covers everything from Bomb Squad productions to science fiction novels by Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler.

SW: Yeah it’s definitely the Bomb Squad as much as it’s Sun Ra. Like it’s Jimi Hendrix, Parliament-Funkadelic. But also, women like Betty Davis and just exploratory arts and the way that freedom is expressed when it is not realised except through song and art.

'Kabooooom!!! Guess That Must Spell Doom': Dystopia and the Post-Apocalypse in Hip-Hop Music Videos

Lidia Kniaz

The analysis of the most popular music channels, both on television and various online services, may suggest that contemporary American hip-hop music videos imbued with explicit imagery related to the opulent and excessive lifestyle of rap stars are little more than unwitting promotional tools of capitalist consumption. Even though the vast majority of these clips function as commercial products designed to attract predominantly teen and young adult audiences, music videos addressing current social and political concerns can be found on such channels and platforms as MTV, VH1, YouTube, and Vimeo. What is more, the supply of politically involved music among high-profile artists has recently been on the increase. For instance, only in the last twelve months the music videos for Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright' (dir. Colin Tilley, 2015), Run the Jewells' 'Close Your Eyes (And Count To F**k)' (dir. Andrés González Rojas, 2015), and Beyoncé's 'Formation' (dir. Melina Matsoukas, 2016) were released, garnering significant attention worldwide. Apart from politically-conscious Black artists, such as Public Enemy, KRS One, Tupac Shakur, and Talib Kweli, who strive for racial equality, there are several other hip-hop musicians who in their activism go beyond the issue of race.¹

For mainstream audiences unfamiliar with Afrofuturism, hip-hop music videos addressing political and social issues and employing the iconography associated with science fiction may seem unusual. However, there are a number of videos, including Janelle Monáe's 'Many Moons' (dir. Alan Ferguson, 2008) and Method Man's 'Judgement Day' (1998), in which current concerns become extrapolated into visions of tomorrow. As the visuals do not necessarily have to illustrate the lyrics, science fiction aesthetics may be employed to enhance the song with an extra metaphorical dimension.² In some, the visuals may suggest an entirely different interpretation of the song or function as a separate story, independent from the music track.

¹ For instance, Wu-Tang Clan in their track 'Rules' (2001) and Gorillaz featuring D12 & Terry Hall in the '911' (2002) refer to the attacks on World Trade Center.

In this article I propose to analyze the two interrelated science fiction tropes of dystopia and post-apocalypse as they intersect with the medium of music video. As case studies, I have chosen two hip-hop songs, namely Vince Staples' 'Señorita' (dir. Ian Pons Jewell, 2015) and Deltron 3030's 'City Rising from the Ashes' (dir. Eve Martin & Nicolas Bueno, 2013). I will discuss the elements of dystopian and post-apocalyptic aesthetics and analyze their use in the context of the current social and political situation in the United States. The components of a dystopian and post-apocalyptic reality in 'Señorita' include the littered and polluted 'ghetto-like' space as well as the presence of privatized law enforcement and instruments of terror controlled from the outside by the wealthiest and most influential individuals. Particular attention will be paid to the unexpected conclusion of the video, which foregrounds the pessimistic overtones of 'Señorita.' The Afrofuturistic clip for 'City Rising from the Ashes' employs the tropes of post-apocalypse to present the revival of nature after a human-caused environmental disaster. While condemning the short-sightedness of corporate mindsets and the resulting destruction of natural environment, Deltron 3030 focus, both lyrically and visually, on the future of the planet and the life of future generations. Using the guise of futuristic aesthetics, both texts comment on current problems and anxieties as accurately as explicitly political videos.

The video for 'Señorita' utilizes dystopian and post-apocalyptic aesthetics to reflect on tense racial relations in the contemporary U.S. In 'Señorita,' the apocalypse has already happened – social, political, economic, and ecological – but the world after the catastrophe does not look much different from the one of the first decades of the 21st century.² The black-and-white clip portrays life in a fictional ghetto-like American neighborhood whose

² According to Mark Sinker 'the central fact in Black Science Fiction – self-consciously so named or not – is an acknowledgement that Apocalypse already happened' (van Veen 68). In 'Señorita' there is no particular tragic even, yet one may say 'that (in Public Enemy's phrase) Armageddon been in effect' (van Veen 68).

residents are poor and, very likely, uneducated. Most of them belong to ethnic and racial minorities, among whom Black people are the dominant group. The video features a street procession led by a Latino man carrying a book resembling the Bible but with the letters ‘V’ and ‘S’ – the initials of the artist – encrypted on the cover. As the group proceeds down the street, they are shot down one by one from the guard towers. Still, the presence of the dead bodies does not stop the procession. Staples himself also appears on the screen – he wanders around the neighborhood and raps to the microphone guarded by a private security officer. Near the end of the second verse, the camera’s perspective changes dramatically. It turns out that what has been shown is a spectacle watched by a white upper-class family sitting in a futuristic museum room, although it is not entirely clear whether this is a live peek into how the other half lives or a recording looping on a gallery screen. As the white parents happily reassure their daughter, Staples’ music segues into a Joseph Haydn symphony, indicating the musical tastes of the viewers.

‘Señorita’ portrays a clearly dystopian space, half ghetto, half concentration camp. While the space is littered by the residents themselves, pollution results from environmentally unsustainable policies targeting nature as well as the community, the less privileged groups shown in the music video. Beyond the ghetto walls, tall chimneys are visible, producing thick smoke which blends with clouds creating an impervious layer covering the neighborhood. While the smoke blocks sunlight most of the time, the little greenery left seems to be dried, or even burnt. The dried flora may also indicate heavily-polluted air as well as the predicted climate change, accelerated by the exploitation of the natural environment. The damaged trees and lawns are the last remains of nature, which are superseded by artificial greenery.

Jewell’s video can be clearly viewed as a reflection of such dystopian parameters as social stratification, the ‘aesthetics of terror’ (Slome), and the privatization of law enforcement. What contributes to Staples’ pessimistic vision of the future is the treatment of the stuck-

in-the-hood people by the upper class. Interestingly, the authorities are not shown on the screen, except for a security-for-hire officer whose power is very limited, yet their presence is made evident in the gun turrets policing the borders of the neighborhood. The isolation and elimination of social groups regarded as less valuable or less useful in the process of boosting the economy is one of the key principles of contemporary policies the video critiques. In the video, the concrete wall is surrounded by chain link fencing and barbed wire, literally turning the ghetto into a concentration camp guarded by rotating gun turrets located on the towers outside the fence and symbolizing the overwhelming power of the system which eliminates

the marginalized citizens regarded as inferior due to their social class, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

As one of the most frequently recurring themes in dystopian fiction (Lavender 151), the privatization of law enforcement is also visible in Jewells’ clip. The order in the dystopian ghetto is maintained by a security officer. The guard is aware of his limited authority and looks anxious and uneasy. In the vision of the future, due to privatization of such services as the police or army, the uniformed services lack respect from the citizens. The ghetto presented in ‘Señorita’ may well be a private enterprise, like a private prison.

The visuals to ‘Señorita’ are predominantly dystopian as they incorporate images connected to such science fiction and ideological themes as the class system, oppression, abuse of power, lack of freedom, segregation, exclusion (Dalrymple), and manipulation (Jameson 263), or even the ‘fascist’ theme of inferior races (Jameson 133). However, the tropes related to apocalypse and post-apocalypse are also present, yet these terms should be understood more broadly than in traditional fiction, where apocalypse is usually associated with a particular tragic event such as a climatic, natural, or human-made catastrophe that causes the collapse of civilization. The word ‘apocalypse’ derives from Greek *ἀποκάλυψις* and means ‘uncovering’, which is not in line with the common understanding of the term as the end of world. Consequently, the post-apocalypse may not necessarily describe a new beginning but a life after some truth has become revealed. What is more, as Jacques Derrida suggested, this revelation does not have to be instantaneous and world-ending. In ‘Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,’ Derrida explains: ‘*Apokalupto*, I disclose, I uncover, I unveil, I reveal the thing that can be a part of the body, the head or the eyes, a secret part, the sex or whatever might be hidden, a secret thing, the thing to be dissembled, a thing that is neither shown or said, signified perhaps but that cannot or *must* not first be delivered up to self-evidence’ (4). It is possible to view ‘Señorita’ as disclosing social and political truths concerning the treatment towards certain unprivileged groups by the most affluent residents. More importantly, though, it shows the post-apocalyptic space of the neighborhood as a result of the slow and gradual erosion of justice and state governance.

Analyzing ‘Señorita’ as apocalyptic in the Derridean sense provides additional interpretative contexts to both the visual and lyrical layers of the song. Not only does it draw the audience’s attention to the still-relevant problem of abuse of non-White and underprivileged citizens, but also to the phenomenon of ‘entertainization’ of hip-hop music.³ An originally Black/Latino street culture, hip hop is often used as a product providing entertainment

to White audiences, who are unaware of its roots and message. Staples seems to suggest that real hip hop still lives in the ghettos but the struggle of non-White communities will never be properly understood by the upper classes who approach the music from behind the glass of their computer and television screens and will never visit working-class neighborhoods. Moreover, the apocalyptic policy of gradual exclusion and commodification of the hip-hop culture can be viewed as similar to the situation of another minority in the US, Native Americans living in ghetto-like reservations. Contemporary ghettos operate in a similar manner as reservations, where coercion is not political but economic and social as both groups are unable to abandon their ethnicity. Both groups constantly ‘hit the invisible barbed-wire fence of restrictive covenants’ (Drake and Cayton 382) and ‘wear the badge of color’ regardless of their respectability or affluence (Drake and Cayton 206). Thus, ghetto is not only a space created by ‘racist forces’ but rather ‘a phenomenon of ongoing external domination and neglect’ (Duneier 225).

The aesthetics of post-apocalypse in ‘Señorita’ is a tool of immediate critique of current social and political situation in the US seen from the perspective of a Black artist. The vision of the future presented in the clip is dystopian not only because of specific imagery but also due to the song’s pessimistic ending. Thanks to the use of post-apocalyptic and dystopian iconography, the video suggests that while its viewers may live in constant fear of dystopia, those less privileged already live in one and experience *Post-Apocalypse Now*.

While ‘Señorita’ may be interpreted as a vision of how non-White people see themselves in contemporary America, the music video to ‘City Rising from the Ashes’ reflects on more global issues, most centrally the corporate destruction of the environment. The multiracial underground hip-hop group Deltron 3030 consisting of ‘alt-rap all-stars,’ rapper Del the Funky Homosapien, DJ Kid Koala, and producer Dan the Automator, have been concerned with environmental issues from the beginning of their career and employ Afrofuturistic aesthetics as a means of conveying their political message.³

In contrast to ‘Señorita,’ whose lyrics do not suggest the use of dystopian aesthetics in the music video, the text and visuals in ‘City Rising from the Ashes’ are directly related both to the end of the civilization and the subsequent resurrection of the planet. The very title of the song, inspired by the Egyptian myth of Osiris, announces the new beginning after a catastrophe as the metaphor of phoenix used

in reference to the city symbolizes its cyclical renewal.⁴ The lyrics describe a world after an apocalypse caused by the government and corporations whose policies contributed to the environmental catastrophe. The lyricist is deeply concerned not only about the government’s short-sighted decision-making but also the manipulation of the citizens who simply ‘follow the commander.’ He also concentrates on the future of his children as they are to deal with the harmful consequences of other people’s actions.

The music video for ‘City Rising from the Ashes’ presents a post-apocalyptic world inhabited by a group of three children who are exploring a ruined city.⁵ Wearing gas masks and dirty, recycled clothes, the children wander around hoping to discover any kind of life after the catastrophe. They encounter destroyed buildings and rubble and experience earthquakes along their way. The children feed on canned food and insects found on the landfill site and build campfires at night. The only entertainment they have, apart from exploring the destroyed city, is watching images of birds using a futuristic projector. At some point, the group discovers a dried lake and a boat, which is where they find the much sought-after trace of life in the form of undrinkable fluid on the boat’s deck, an unusual tree with enormous purple berries, and a rat-like rodent. Outside the town, the girl notices a green forest, terrain untouched by civilization. The music video ends with a kaleidoscope of post-apocalyptic shots from earlier in the video contrasted with the images of nature and blends seamlessly with a series of VHS-tape type of visuals presenting images of nature.

The clip features various elements of post-apocalyptic aesthetics, one of which is the destroyed landscape covered with dust. The postindustrial wasteland is illuminated by the brownish sun emerging from a thick layer of pollution and clouds of dust. The derelict urban landscape, where the only traces of nature are the remaining rodents and insects, looks monochromatic, tinted with all possible shades of dusty brown. The video encompasses everything postindustrial and post-apocalyptic: from dirty tires and dusty bricks to garbage dumps and gas

3 The group’s lyricist in the interview for Durig and Fry mentions that ‘everything’s political, everything depends on something else.’ He claims that rap music is very political ‘even on basic, street level’ (Durig and Fry).

4 Because of the cultural and, obviously, temporal autonomy in relation to Western techno-modernity, often held accountable for racism and exploitation, the ancient Egyptian mythology and religion have long been a source of inspiration and icons for various Afrofuturist artists from Sun-Ra to Erykah Badu.

5 Interestingly, two music videos to this song were released. The version analyzed in this article appeared in September 2013. The second one shows a corporate business employee who is ‘haunted’ by the moving and speaking graffiti tags in the parking lot; the message to the man is shown via graffiti captions; he goes into the building but the elevator takes him to the future; the elevator becomes the time travel machine, now everything is covered with graffiti – after the apocalypse.

masks. The new, post-apocalyptic environment seems hostile, yet the group manages to adapt as they build campfires, eat insects, and their clothing is made of items found on the dump.

The plastic bag floating in the air is undoubtedly worth noticing as it resembles a leaf or even a bird, similar to those projected at some point by the girl. The leaf-like green bag contrasted with the illusionary image of a bird has an emotional overtone as neither of them is organic. The fact that natural landscapes are missing from the new world and the children's mission is to find their last remnants or watch their illusion, as is the case with the futuristic projector, is not of minor importance. It appears that some form of contact with the natural environment is necessary, even for people inhabiting urban spaces.

Another theme associated with post-apocalypse is the revival of nature after the catastrophe and the beginning of a new civilization. It appears that nature is far more powerful than humanity, as it has recreated itself shortly after the catastrophe, while the human-made city remains in ashes. The fact that some people have survived gives hope for humankind but also suggests the arrival of another group of oppressors who may destroy the planet eventually, unless nature is respected and preserved. The coming of new settlers who are young may also announce a new world order. The manner in which the children are exploring the post-apocalyptic world can be compared to the expansion of the American Frontier as the border between the wasteland and the wilderness will soon be moved forward, or rather westward. The process of re-inhabiting the land after the catastrophe may be thus seen as symbolic as child-rearing will influence their way of recreating civilization.

Finally, 'City Rising from the Ashes' may be interpreted as a critique of corporate governance. In itself hardly exaggerated, the metaphor of the post-apocalyptic world constitutes a warning for both corporations and their employees who 'pledge allegiance' to the corporate flag of America. The fact that the vision of the seemingly distant future is shown in juxtaposition with the familiar imagery of VHS-quality clips compels the audience to compare both worlds and identify them with reality, both before and now. Deltron 3030 condemns Americans for the 'plague of allegiance' to the corporations and the government as the citizens are obedient to their policy even though it can negatively influence the lives of future generations.

The video for 'City Rising from the Ashes' may be read as Afrofuturistic not only because it employs the elements of Egyptian mythology mentioned earlier but also due to the fact that it projects the vision of the world according to Black people. Afrofuturism defined as 'the inter-

section between black culture, technology, liberation, and the imagination' (Womack) is a way in which Black people redefine their past as well as identify themselves in the future and alternate universes. However, African futurology focuses also on current times and presents life in the ruins as seen from the perspective of a Black person. When the landscape from 'City Rising from the Ashes' is analyzed as a possible place on Earth today, and not as the prophetic scenery of tomorrow, much of its representation is reminiscent of African cities, or indeed some post-industrial American cities, inhabited by the marginalized poor. In other words, what may be regarded as Afrofuturistic by some White audiences is, in many ways, 'Afrorealist'. Visual media are particularly useful in conveying such realities. In recent years, a number of projects informed by Afrofuturistic aesthetics have appeared, including a series of 'Shanty Megastructures' by Nigerian artist Olalekan Jeyifous (Gbadamosi) and photographs of Senegal's debris-based haute couture by Fabrice Monteiro (Frank). The African constructions and garments might also have been part of the imagined 'ruinscape' by Deltron. While in the case of African art projects the use of Afrofuturism is 'serving as warning to future generations' (Frank), Deltron's post-apocalypse gives hope for the future resurrection of the planet.

Through futuristic aesthetics, the videos for 'Señorita' and 'City Rising from the Ashes' provoke discussion concerning social, economic, and political issues that Black Americans face today. In both cases, the criticism is addressed not to the corporate directors, as their policies are unlikely to be changed, but rather to the 'ordinary' viewers whose awareness is far more important. While the matters touched upon in 'Señorita' are typically American, Deltron's post-apocalyptic world is more 'anonymous' as there are no particular signs of a concrete nation that might have inhabited the city before the catastrophe. Corporatization, alienation and excessive consumption are problems for the majority of highly developed countries, thus the overtone of 'City Rising from the Ashes' is slightly more universal.

Literary science fiction has a long history of addressing current issues and anxieties. While there are many Black science fiction writers, many Black communities have sought alternative media and channels of expression. Music video is one of them, and contemporary hip-hop videos particularly so. Unlike the classic 1990s and early 2000s hip-hop clips, which relied on typically futuristic and cosmic imagery a number of videos from the last decade present visions that are in some way more likely to happen than it is generally assumed.⁶ Even though the

6 There are a number of such music clips including Missy Elliot's 'Sock It 2 Me' (dir. Hype Williams, 1997), 2Pac's 'California Love' (dir. Hype Williams, 1996) and RZA's self-directed 'You Can't Stop Me' (2008).

theme of a world rising from the downfall of humanity present in the videos for ‘Señorita’ and ‘City Rising from the Ashes’ is rather exceptional in hip hop, one can still provide other examples which address similar issues by means of futuristic aesthetics such as Quasimoto’s ‘Catching the Vibe’ (dir. Tuomas Vauhkonen & Jeremias Nieminen, 2013) and Goodbye Tomorrow’s video-gamish ‘The Way’ (dir. R. Wayne, 2015). The analyzed music videos under the guise of science fiction visuals extrapolate elements of contemporary society, thus, they can be read as political warnings. Unfortunately, even though the world undeniably ‘goes to waste for future generations (persons we can only apprehend in the imagined world of the post-apocalyptic film), we distract ourselves from disaster by watching it as entertainment’ on our lit computer screens (Schmidt).

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'Gotta Make Way for the Homo Superior': Finding Philip K. Dick in David Bowie's 'Oh! You Pretty Things!'

Tony Keen

When David Bowie died in January 2016, I was asked by the Open University's OpenLearn website to write something about Bowie's relationship with science fiction, part of a series of articles published to mark Bowie's death.¹ Truth to tell, I didn't much like what I wrote – it was rushed, and my word limit was so low that I was barely able to get my teeth into the subject before I had to stop. I got to mention the obvious texts, the 1969 single 'Space Oddity' and the 1972 album *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, but had hardly any time to get into what Bowie's actual influences might have been. There is a better article on the same subject by Jason Heller, which has more space, and posits, as I did, a link between Bowie's music and the output of the *New Worlds* writers in the 1960s (though there is frustratingly little actual evidence that Bowie had read Moorcock – though he evidently had read Ballard at some point – and one has to fall back on arguing that they employed similar transgressive aesthetics).² But all this did set me thinking about what will be the topic of this article.

Bowie's fourth album, *Hunky Dory*, was released in 1971. It is a significant milestone in Bowie's career, as it brought together for the first time the musicians – Bowie, guitarist Mick Ronson, bassist Trevor Bolder and drummer Woody Woodmansey – who would form the Spiders from Mars, to be named early in 1972.³ It is also notable for having more SF-influenced tracks than any previous Bowie album. Bowie had been moving in that direction, with songs such as 'Space Oddity' and 'The Man Who Sold the World' and 'The Supermen' on *The Man Who Sold The World* (1970), but *Hunky Dory* undoubtedly sees an increase in SF influence, if not yet the full SF-themed concept album that *Ziggy Stardust* would be.⁴ SF concepts are inherent in the title of 'Life on Mars?' (though, as Heller points out, the song is actually about the alienation inherent in a vicarious existence in which one's experience of the world is filtered through the cinema, a theme Woody Allen would later explore in his 1985 movie *The Purple Rose of Cairo*).

One of the most interesting tracks in this respect is 'Oh! You Pretty Things', the second track on the album.⁵ It forms a conceptual pair with the opening number 'Changes' – both describe personal evolution, 'Changes' from an internal perspective, and 'Oh! You Pretty Things' from an external one. The Nietzschean theme of the *Übermensch* had already been addressed by Bowie in 'The Supermen', and is picked up again later in the album on 'Quicksand', the last track on Side One.

Bowie said himself that there was a science fiction element to the lyrics, and the influence on this track of many SF texts has been advanced. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1871 novel *The Coming Race* is one, perhaps signalled by the line in the third verse, 'They're the start of a coming race'; Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953) is another.⁶ One aspect that is intriguing, and not generally fully investigated, is the reference at the end of the chorus to *homo superior*. Where did this come from? This term for the future species of humanity is first attested, according to *Brave New Words*, in Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John* (1935); Jeff Prucher further cites its use by John W. Campbell in an editorial in *Astrounding Science Fiction* in August 1943, and by Francis Donovan in his 1955 story 'The Short Life'.⁷ In 1963 it was adopted for the mutants in the Marvel Universe, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.⁸ Perhaps influenced by Bowie, from 1973 onwards the term was being used on British television in *The Tomorrow People*, Thames Television's children's series about humans with superior powers (teleportation, telekinesis, telepathy, etc.).

Where Bowie got the term from is, however, difficult to say. That Bowie read science fiction is obvious, but what science fiction he read, and importantly *when*, is a lot less clear. He was obviously familiar with *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as his single 'Space Oddity' parodies its title, and he had Arthur C. Clarke as a dinner guest around 1973. It is known that he read George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), as he based his 1974 album *Diamond Dogs* on it. He had certainly read Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) by 1974, and that he

read the same author's *Starman Jones* (1953) may perhaps be inferred from the *Ziggy Stardust* track 'Starman'. Among the hundred books he chose as his favourites in 2013 one can find Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1967). In the later 1970s his reading to his son Duncan Jones was centred around SF, and included Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), John Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids* (1951) and *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), and work by J.G. Ballard. But beyond that one is forced to fall back on supposition based on resonances, and the assumption that Bowie followed the pattern of most science fiction readers of the 1960s and 1970s, when, with a more limited pool of available books and magazines, most sf readers read most stories that were out there.

In the case of 'Oh! You Pretty Things' that speculation may lead to another use of the term '*homo superior*' in another work. This is Philip K. Dick's 1954 story 'The Golden Man'. In this tale a government agency is eliminating mutants to prevent the emergence of *homo superior*. The reference in Bowie's lyrics to 'the golden ones' is possibly a reference to Dick's title. Dick was another of the authors to whom Bowie introduced his son, and Ridley Scott's Dick-based *Blade Runner* (1982) was one of Bowie's favourite movies.⁹ Moreover, it has been suggested that another line in the song, 'A crack in the sky and a hand reaching down to me', is a Dick reference,¹⁰ though the imagery of a hand reaching from the sky goes back much further – it is found in medieval manuscripts.

Of course, suggesting that Bowie took the term *homo superior* from Philip K. Dick does not necessarily mean that he was not also familiar with the term from Stapledon,¹¹ or from *X-Men*. What we know about Bowie is that he was a voracious reader, and a magpie when it came to distilling a wide variety of influences into his music. Performing a full investigation into his sources is probably impossible, especially as the man himself is no longer around to tell us.

Endnotes

1 Tony Keen, 'David Bowie and Science Fiction', OpenLearn, 12 January 2016. URL (accessed 18 August 2016): <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/david-bowie-and-science-fiction>

2 Jason Heller, 'Anthems for the Moon: David Bowie's Sci-Fi Explorations', *Pitchfork*, 13 January 2016. URL (accessed 18 August 2016): <http://pitchfork.com/features/article/9787-anthems-for-the-moon-david-bowies-sci-fi-explorations/> The definitive academic article on science fiction influences in Bowie's early work is Maureen King, 'Future Legends: David Bowie and Science

Fiction', in Michael A. Morrison (ed.), *Trajectories of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Fourteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), 129-137. King writes, in a paper originally presented in 1994, as if SF was something that Bowie had left behind, but, as Adam Roberts notes in the entry on Bowie in the *Science Fiction Encyclopaedia*, Bowie returned to SF in 1993 in the video for 'Jump They Say', and in 1995 with the *Outside* album.

3 Ronson and Woodmansey had begun working with Bowie on the 1970 single 'Memory of a Free Festival', and then played on the album *The Man Who Sold The World*. The line-up for *Hunky Dory* was completed by keyboard player Rick Wakeman, who then chose to join prog-rock group Yes rather than be part of the main band on *Ziggy Stardust*.

4 For the *Ziggy Stardust* concept, see Bowie's explanation to William Burroughs, in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs, 1960–1997* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001), 231.

5 Though written for Bowie's album, the first released version of 'Oh! You Pretty Things' was recorded by former Herman's Hermits singer Peter Noone. This may have simply been Bowie attempting to earn some royalties and recognition through a pop hit, but the fact that he played piano and sang backing vocals on the recording may suggest that he was experimenting with the concept of making a David Bowie record on which he did not sing vocals, as he did in 1972 with Mott The Hoople's 'All The Young Dudes', and in 1975 with Lulu's version of 'The Man Who Sold The World'. With Noone's record, however, Bowie did not have full control, as he did with the others, as the record was produced by Mickie Most.

6 King, pp. 131-132; Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie* (London: Titan Books, new edn., 2011).

7 Jeff Prucher (ed.), *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 92.

8 First being found in *X-Men* #1 (September 1963).

9 Dick returned the interest, expressing his fascination with Bowie in the 1981 novel *VALIS*.

10 Laurie Frost, 'Philip K. Dick's *VALIS* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and Duncan Jones', *Bowiesattva*, 2 February 2012. URL (accessed 18 September 2016): <https://bowiesattva.wordpress.com/2012/02/02/philip-k-dicks-valis-and-the-man-who-fell-to-earth-and-duncan-jones/>

11 Indeed Chris Williams, who commissioned the OpenLearn piece from me, finds many resonances from *Last and First Men* (1930) in *Hunky Dory*. Personal communication.

Speculative Fiction in Opera

J. K. Rooke

I will say a short word about ballet to start with, but I think everyone knows that most classical ballets are on fantasy themes, particularly fairy stories from around the world. The only ballet I can think of that could be called science fiction is *Coppelia*, by Léo Delibes, which involves a young man falling in love with an automaton. There is also an opera, *The Tales of Hoffman* by Jacques Offenbach, in which an inventor presents the hero with a pair of special glasses which make him believe that the automaton he is introduced to at a ball is a real woman.

Modern ballet follows a trend which was started in opera, towards depicting real life situations rather than fantasy, with the help of increasingly innovative choreography. Sadly, from my point of view as a lover of fantasy, this seems to be in response to a change in public taste. If you were to ask the man in the street to name five operas, they would most likely be *Carmen*, *Madame Butterfly*, *La Bohème*, *La Traviata* and *The Marriage of Figaro*.

All these are ‘slice of life’ stories, and many such operas were considered scandalous or subversive at the time of performance. *The Marriage of Figaro* is based on a play by Pierre Beaumarchais that was actually banned, and *Madame Butterfly* was an extreme embarrassment to American politics. There are many operas depicting historical kings and legendary heroes such as William Tell, with stories that highlight the shortcomings of the current regime by comparison to an historical one. Perhaps fêted composers thought they could get away with it more than writers or playwrights: because it was slightly disguised by the music, because opera was so popular, and because closing down a season of performances is far more disruptive than banning the sale of a book. And it seemed to work well. Opera has been, and hopefully still is, a powerful force for social reform.

The fame that political furores leant to this genre in opera rather overshadows the very many operas that are pure fantasies. I am going to concentrate on two (more accurately five). Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, and Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*. These are the most contrasting operas that I could think of, and they are my favourites.

The Magic Flute is hardly an opera at all. It is more a burlesque or musical comedy because it uses speech rather than the recitative which was, and still largely is, the convention in all opera. The speech in *The Magic Flute* is mostly played for laughs. It is impossible to say how much of the story was Mozart’s idea and how much Schikaneders or even Von Gebler’s. The dialogue would probably have been written by Schikaneder, and he would have supervised the dramatic effects but it would be nice to think that Mozart put his own words to the beautiful music. He obviously empathized strongly with the characters.

Mind you, having said that, the hero Tamino, a foreign prince does seem a bit of a wimp at the start. Less than a minute after his first entrance he faints away. Well, alright, he’s just come face to face with a dragon. He is rescued by the Queen of the Night’s three ladies who kill the dragon, admire the fainted man, and toddle off. Enter Papageno the bird catcher, who is traditionally dressed in feathers. He has forty fits when he sees the dead dragon, but as he is calming down Tamino wakes up, and Papageno sees an opportunity to boast, and claims to have killed it. The queen’s ladies wander in again, overhear the boast and put a lock on Papageno’s lips. They then show Tamino a portrait of Pamina the daughter of their Queen, and he falls instantly in love.

Tamino then sings one of the most beautiful love songs in all opera suddenly, and so unexpectedly; lifting this extremely light entertainment onto an infinitely higher plain. It is this enormous contrast between what is on the face of it, a burlesque of the priesthood, and the great depth of feeling, truth and meaning in the music, which makes this opera totally unique. The music throughout is some of the greatest that Mozart has written. It pulls the characters up out of the silly story and makes them epic. It is beautifully tailored to the characters and actually draws them for you while at the same time ramming home their emotions. When Tamino sings you can forget that a moment ago he fainted at the sight of a dragon, and believe that he could easily vanquish a thousand dragons to rescue his love. Papageno’s song is as innocent, soaring, and melodious as the songs of the birds he catches. The

Queen of the Night's aria is replete with incoherent rage. Pamina's song reveals a lost and frightened child who has just had her heart further broken by her lover's apparent rejection. The slow, tragic, falling cadences are punctuated by peaks of total despair. It is obvious that she is contemplating suicide.

She is saved by three boys. These are perhaps the most enigmatic characters in the opera. What do they represent? Nobody knows. They are depicted as arriving mysteriously, often descending from the proscenium, and their music is just as enigmatic. Their words are stunted and hesitant as if they aren't used to speaking (singing) to mortals, and while the phrases are very simple, the harmonies are heavenly.

Of all the characters, Sarastro is the most controversial. I wish I knew to what extent Mozart believed in him, or in the message of the opera. Sarastro is the villain of the piece for most of the opera, with a twist at the end showing him to be all-wise, compassionate, and deeply spiritual. Even the apparently gratuitous torture of Pamina at the start was carefully calculated to strengthen her character and make her strong enough to endure the later ordeals which would make her a fully spiritual being.

But just how much of this would the audience of the day have accepted? I imagine that many of them would have seen the opera as a send-up of the priesthood and would have been rather puzzled by the ending. Sarastro's music could appear lugubrious and very pompous to an audience primed to expect Pamina to be rescued. Would the spiritual depth of it have reversed their expectations?

I think it was a chance Mozart had to take because if he had presented the piece as a serious grand opera in an opera house he might have been in all sorts of trouble. These holy priests are not Catholics or Protestants; they have a more finely carved philosophy.

Wagner's Ring Cycle

This is arguably the grandest of all grand operas, and has an original plot written entirely by Wagner himself, loosely drawing on legends of the Nordic Pantheon which he studied extensively. It is, as far as I know, the only composite opera, rather like a fantasy trilogy, or in this case a tetragy. The four operas, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Valküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, are all full-length and are normally staged consecutively in an opera season. The full experience could last for weeks therefore, rather like reading *The Lord of the Rings*, only with all the extra impact of the music. The operas themselves collectively last for fifteen hours.

In Wagner's *Ring*, the God Wotan is torn by a very human dilemma. He wants to be a family man and make his wife Fricka happy, but he has this irresistible urge to wander the Earth and dabble in the fates of mortals. In an attempt to keep him at home, Fricka suggests that he do some DIY on their domicile. Wotan decides that if she has a magnificent pile she mightn't notice when he sneaks away, so he goes the whole hog and commissions two giants, Fasolt and Fafner, to build a huge palace; Walhall. The trouble is he doesn't have the money to pay them, so he makes a stupid bargain that they can have the Goddess Freia in exchange. (Who says opera is old hat and has no relevance to today's dealings?) He sort of thinks that the giants will realize that this bargain can't be serious and that out of the goodness of their hearts they will wait until he has somehow collected the money. After all, Freia is the only one who can tend the magical golden apples which keep the Gods alive. The giants surely know that if they take her the Gods will die?

Meanwhile, Alberich the Nibelung steals the Rhinegold from the Rhinemaidens and fashions some of it into the magical Tarnhelm and the eponymous Ring to rule the world. Loke suggests that the giants might be persuaded to take this gold instead of Freia, and he and Wotan go down to Nibelheim, overpower Alberich, and steal the stolen gold, including the Tarnhelm and the ring. As they leave, Alberich curses the ring.

With difficulty, the Gods manage to persuade the giants, who were really keen on having Freia to live with them, to take the gold instead. However, the giants drive a very hard bargain, insisting that the gold be piled up until it has hidden every inch of Freia, and this necessitates adding even the ring. As they are departing they start arguing with each other about how to divide the gold, the Tarnhelm, and the ring, and Fafner kills Fasolt, the curse starting to show itself. The Gods are jubilant that they have Freia back, and all seems well, until Erde, the Earth Goddess wakes up and tells them that the problems they have created by their dishonesty are by no means over.

Wotan will find throughout the rest of the cycle that the lives of the people he most loves in the world will have to be sacrificed to put right the wrongs he has created, and that he, the greatest of the Gods, will be powerless to help them.

The music is as huge and as subtle as the storyline with superlative orchestration making much use of brass which, by Wagner's day, could do a lot more than it could in Mozart's, but it is subservient to the action. Wagner preferred to call his operas 'music dramas' and dramatically improved the stagecraft, the music underpinning and elevating the action and the nuances of emotion, with perhaps more skill than in any earlier opera. Gone is the

obvious split between recitative and aria. The one moves seamlessly into the other.

One thing that Wagner gave us that has been a feature of so much program music ever since, is the leitmotif, a short phrase that is associated with, and often introduces, a character or object, and raises the audience's anticipation. If you are wondering if you have ever heard one there is an example that everyone knows; the two-note repetition that heralds the arrival of the shark in *Jaws*.

Wagner's influence on the staging of all film music is enormous, and John Williams is a past master of his techniques. Apart from giving us leitmotifs, Wagner also introduced the idea that music enlarges the action or emotions, but must be finely tailored to them. In any really good film that I have found riveting I am always astonished when they list the music played at the end, because I don't remember hearing half of it. This is as it should be. Correctly chosen and tailored music often lifts the action subliminally, without any intrusion. I'll give two contrasting examples here. I cannot watch *The Lord of the Rings* because I find the continuous noise of quasi-angelic voices, which seems to be on a loop, bearing little if any relation to the action, so intensely irritating. On the other hand, I think the wonderful experience of watching a *Harry Potter* movie is vastly enhanced by the beautiful and perfectly tailored music.

I suppose everyone knows Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1955). The similarities with Wagner's *Ring* first performed on the 13th August 1876 are quite striking. Siegfried the hero may not be small or have hairy feet but he is a noble innocent, and Wotan on Earth looks uncannily like Gandalf, complete with staff and floppy hat.

Bilbo stole the ring from Golum, and other artefacts from a dragon. Siegfried steals from Fafner who has turned himself into a dragon to guard the rheingold. There is a prime mover wise lady overseeing and tweaking the action in both works, and most importantly both works end with superhuman races and the element of magic withdrawing from the Earth. Wagner in particular forcefully drives home the message that the creation of a superhuman race is wrong, This is very ironic of course, given the later associations of his work, but it is unmistakably the message of the operas.

So, I hope I have managed to encourage you, with just a couple of examples, to explore the wealth of powerful speculative fiction that is found in opera.

THE BSFA REVIEW



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recurrent:

KINCAID IN SHORT

Paul Kincaid

Doing Lennon

by Gregory Benford

On the evening of December 8 1980, a fan, Mark Chapman, approached John Lennon and got him to sign a copy of the album *Double Fantasy*. Later that same night, at the entrance to the Dakota apartment building where Lennon and Yoko Ono lived, Chapman shot Lennon four times in the back.

Re-reading it now, perhaps the most disturbing thing about Gregory Benford's 'Doing Lennon', published a full five years before Lennon's actual death, is that he also has Lennon murdered by a fan. But in this case Lennon lives a few years longer, and the reason for the murder is slightly different. But only slightly: Chapman killed Lennon in order to become famous as the man who killed a celebrity. Fielding kills Lennon in order to become Lennon. Both real life and fiction, therefore, are stories about the fatal allure of celebrity.

The story begins in 2108 or 2180 or 2018 (Benford is deliberately vague about the date) when a man emerges from cryogenic sleep. The records identify him as a man named Fielding, but he claims to be John Lennon. We are told not to trust him right at the moment he emerges from the cocoon, as he 'listens to a hollow *pock-pocketa*' (17), a sound that instantly reminds us of the recurring sound that marks the fantasies of Walter Mitty – 'ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa' (James Thurber, 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty', 69). In fact, the reference to Walter Mitty suggests an even deeper level of fantasising, though that will only become clear late in the story.

Not that we ever trust Fielding's story. When he speaks with a Liverpool accent he congratulates himself: 'He has got it just right, the rising pitch at the end and the nasal tones' (17), which is the result of a 'vacation spent wandering around Liverpool, picking up the accent' (19). This is Lennon performed by an impressionist, rather than someone inhabiting that personality. The shallowness of

the impersonation is part of the point, of course. Fielding is an American who made his fortune as a broker, but who 'lived increasingly in those golden days of the sixties, imagined himself playing side man along with Paul or George or John' (19). He's a wannabe Beatle, dreaming of being up there in the spotlight of their celebrity like millions of other fans did at the time. The only difference with Fielding is that his money has allowed him to travel into the future where he can pretend to actually be John.

He has a cover story worked out – 'I was fleeing political persecution, y'dig' (18) – which is every bit as thin as his impersonation. He gets away with it, because in this 'antiseptic Stanley Kubrick future' (19) nobody really knows or cares about the real long ago Lennon. 'After all, the late twentieth was a turbulent time, crammed with gaudy events, lurid people. Fielding makes it seem reasonable that an aging rock star, seeing his public slip away and the government closing in, would corpsicle himself' (18). All he has to be is one of the lurid people and no one will look too closely at the details. This is, after all, celebrity, or perhaps more accurately the afterlife of celebrity; though we might wonder if all celebrity is a form of afterlife. And as we all know, when you are big enough and gaudy enough and you say something often enough, nobody will pause to ask if it is true, particularly if the lurid celebrity has erupted into an everyday world that is (as it most always is) dull and characterless. Thus, when Fielding sees a picture of the founders of the cryogenic programme, he sees a bunch of identikit men with the same close-cropped hair, the same white shirts, the same ball-point pens clipped in the pockets: 'They wear glasses and smile weakly at the camera, as though they have just been shaken awake' (18). There is no individuality, no colour here.

This is what he has counted on, moving into a future where, for whatever reason, his skimpy pretence will pass

for the real thing. His fake accent is all it takes to fool the ‘Society for Dissipative Anachronisms’; after all, their interview with him is ‘before many remember who John Lennon was’ (19). When they ask how he finds the future he responds with a secondhand line – ‘Turn right at Greenland’ (19) – because he doesn’t have the original’s caustic wit and he just has to hope that they don’t recognise that it comes from *A Hard Day’s Night*. Even when they do recognise the name, their questions are the sort of bland stuff that Lennon would have faced every day in press conferences: they ask about ‘the breakup with Paul, whether Ringo’s death was suicide [...] did he like Dylan?’ Lennon’s replies would have been acerbic, bitterly comic; Fielding just parries them. He is not inhabiting the personality of John Lennon; he is simply putting on the name and celebrity of Lennon as a way of living out a rather sad dream. As the story’s title acutely makes clear: he is not being Lennon, just doing Lennon.

The thing is that while the future may be mildly interested in having a celebrity from the past among them, that supposed celebrity isn’t at all interested in the future. All the future provides is a platform upon which he can act out his dreams of the past. The joke about Greenland is the most he actually engages with the future, and when details of the world in which he now finds himself are being explained to him, he interrupts, rather rudely, to ask where he can get a guitar. Lennon’s time, the life he has always wanted to live, was in the 1960s, that’s where he wants to be. So why should he have any interest in the 2180s? He doesn’t even like this new world. There’s a fascination with violence that disturbs him, and scars are displayed as though they were sexually alluring, which alienates him. As for the food, when he asks for a hamburger they think he means a citizen of Hamburg and accuse him of cannibalism. Time and again we see that he is not suited to this world, nor is the world suited to him.

All that the world offers is the chance to perform the role of John Lennon, to savour something of the celebrity he craves. And the only way that he can do that is by being Lennon the performer. So he gets a guitar, practices the chords, arranges a concert. Hermann, his guide to this future world, is dubious about the idea – “‘But your songs, they are old’” (21) – and sniffy about the audience – ‘the rank-scented many’ (22) he calls them. But for Fielding, the concert works. Playing Lennon’s music, and particularly the applause he receives, brings him closer than ever to being Lennon: ‘He is right, he is on, he is John Lennon just as he always wanted to be. The music picks him up and carries him along... It feels exactly the way he always thought it would.’ (22)

Usually, in science fiction, music works as a metaphor, or perhaps as a way of setting a scene or fixing a date. Of the 38 stories collected in *The Best of Gregory Benford*,

for instance, in addition to ‘Doing Lennon’ no fewer than four include reference to music or musicians in their title. But ‘Slow Symphonies of Mass and Time’ or ‘The Sigma Structure Symphony’, for example, indicate that music here serves as a way of talking about something else. But this brief scene, no more than seven fairly short paragraphs between Fielding stepping onto the stage and being carried off the stage having experienced ‘the happiest moment he has ever known’ (23), is actually about the music as something visceral, emotional, psychologically revealing. This is music being itself, and Fielding, for a moment, being someone else. Lennon’s celebrity did not stem from his looks or his accent or his caustic tongue; they burnished the celebrity but they did not create it. So Fielding’s plastic surgery, practised accent and learned lines do not make him John Lennon. Lennon’s celebrity was a direct consequence of the music he wrote and performed; and if Fielding cannot actually write a John Lennon song, he can at least play them, and in doing so share something of Lennon’s experience, though in a sense this also displays the distance between them. ‘Fielding is euphoric. He dances as though someone is firing pistols at his feet.’ (22) Watch old film of the Beatles performing, from the early days when they all wore suits to the final shaggy rooftop concert, and you’ll see Lennon bouncing on the spot, but not dancing, his feet were always squarely and firmly placed. The thrill of live performance, the thing that brings him emotionally closest to his hero, also makes Fielding behave differently, underlining the fact that he is not John Lennon.

(Parenthetically, we might guess that Gregory Benford is rather less of a Beatles obsessive than his character. In the set-listing for Fielding’s concert he includes tracks (Benford uses the Americanism ‘cuts’) from ‘*Beatles ’65, Help!, Rubber Soul, Let It Be*’ (22), but *Beatles ’65* was an American album consisting mostly of songs taken from *Beatles for Sale*. Lennon certainly would have thought in terms of the British LPs, and in his efforts to get inside Lennon’s mind, Fielding would probably have done so too, despite being an American who would most likely have encountered *Beatles ’65* before *Beatles for Sale*.)

If the concert and the world tour that follows bring Fielding closer to experiencing what it was like to be John Lennon, the acclaim, the groupies, the adrenaline rush of performance, they also mark a growing split between the person he is and the person he wants to be. In ‘what is left of India’ (23) he is taken to a museum and, in character, has to pretend a greater disdain for the exhibits than he actually feels. At a news conference he stops using remembered lines from Lennon and quotes H.L. Mencken instead, and later comes up with a sharp line all of his own, feeling a ‘heady rush of joy’ (24) at the spontaneity of it. When he says, ‘Anybody with energy and drive can make it in this world. And I come

from a time that was dynamic' (23), he could be talking about himself as much as himself-as-Lennon. So it is significant that it is here, at the point of separation, that we learn that 'he had the original Lennon killed' (24) in 1988, by which time 'Lennon was no loss ... anyway' (24). Lennon had, in effect, ceased to be Lennon so he could be safely removed from the scene to allow Fielding to become Lennon instead. Celebrity is a form of ego: the acclaim he has experienced is for him, not for the person he is pretending to be; the dynamic new Fielding has rightly taken over from that old has-been Lennon.

But just as the recreation of Lennon turns into the creation of Fielding, so the fragile basis of his new identity starts to fall apart. The cryogenically preserved body of Paul McCartney has been found and revived: 'the greatest pop star of all time – or at least the biggest money-maker. "Same thing," Fielding mutters to himself' (25). An astute remark by Benford; this can hardly have been as obvious in 1975 as it is now. The appearance of McCartney is a double threat to Fielding: the unmasking of his false identity and also a brush with the genuine celebrity he had worshipped from afar just at a point when he was experiencing fame of his own.

At first, Fielding tries to avoid a meeting: 'It's not as though we were ever reconciled, y'know. We got a *divorce*' (25). Then, when a meeting becomes inevitable, he treats it jokily, greeting McCartney by asking, 'You want to join me band?' (25), which is what the real Lennon said to the real McCartney at their actual first meeting. And the meeting does seem to go well, even though Fielding is increasingly bedazzled by his encounter with actual celebrity: he feels 'an awe he had not expected... He starts to ask something and realizes that it is a dumb, out-of-character, fan-type question. He is being betrayed by his instincts' (26). Just as he began to experience a celebrity of his own, he meets the real thing and recognises that he will only ever be a fan-boy trying to live out a ridiculous dream. Still they joke about trying to revive George and Ringo and reforming the band. Until, at the end, McCartney drops his bombshell, "'C'mon, you're not John'" (26), and Fielding's dream future collapses, literally: 'the pine trees wither, colors drain away' (27).

This is the great disconnect in the story, the abrupt shift in focus that reveals the depth of the Walter Mitty fantasizing, the reason for the deliberate uncertainty over the date. There is no future, he never was a corpsicle, he is

no more Fielding than he was John Lennon. He takes to calling himself Fielding Prime, he is a computer simulation devised and operated by the real Fielding, 'a soured man in his middle fifties' (27). The real Fielding had made his simulation younger than himself, a hint that the egoistical hunger for celebrity we have already witnessed in Fielding is more pronounced, more bitter, in the real thing. The simulation, the latest in what seems to have been a long line, is part of the real Fielding's preparations for his lunatic scheme to become John Lennon in some distant future. Fielding Prime asks: "'You really care that much about being John Lennon?'" *Why sure.* Fielding Real's voice carried a note of surprise. *Don't you feel it too?*' (28) The real Fielding's Walter Mittyesque detachment from reality means he is unable to conceive of not wishing to be Lennon. But Fielding Prime, who has actually been Lennon even if only in a simulation, knows that the impersonation was no more than a lark, but 'What came through was the music, doing it out. It sweeps up and takes hold of you' (28). The emotional impact of the music was more real, more vital, than the pretence of celebrity.

Fielding Real, of course, won't, or can't, listen, and in that monomania, Fielding Prime sees a chance for his own survival. He is, after all, a model of the other man's mind, and therefore, 'It is easy to manipulate him, to play the game of ice and steel' (29). Fielding Prime persuades his maker to keep the simulation going while he is a corpsicle, so the simulation can monitor news, take care of the money, make sure Fielding Real has the support he needs when he is revived as Lennon. Fielding Real believes he can trust the simulation because they are the same person, but they are not; pretending to be Lennon had made Fielding Prime into someone other than Fielding, because he had 'played the chords, smelled the future, lived a vivid life of his own' (29). And so, 'Fielding Prime spins him a tale' (30), and in so doing becomes more nearly Lennon. Pretending to be a celebrity has given Fielding prime the urge to become someone real.

Quotations taken from 'Doing Lennon' by Gregory Benford in *The Best of Gregory Benford*, Burton, MI, Subterranean Press, 2015: 17-30.

'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty' by James Thurber in *The Thurber Carnival*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965: 69-74.

recurrent:

FOUNDATION FAVOURITES

Andy Sawyer

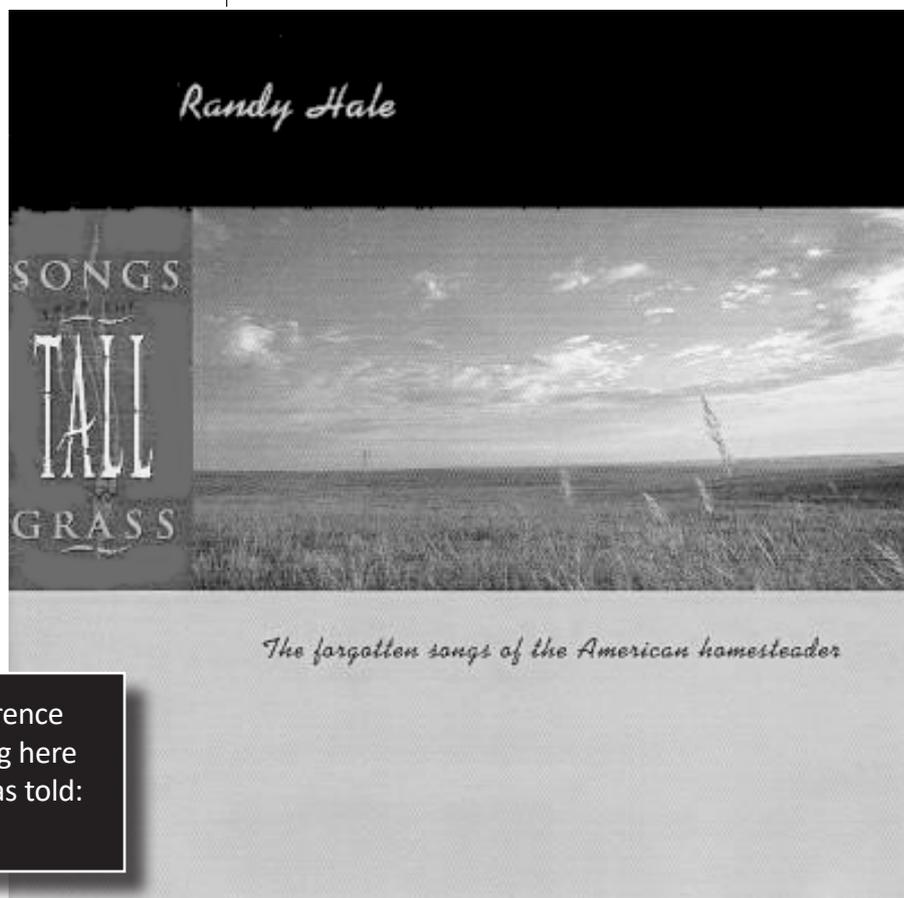
“A Hundred Years From Now”

from Randy Hale’s *Songs From The Tall Grass*

S*ongs From The Tall Grass* probably wouldn’t be the first place to look for songs about science fiction. It was, we read from the notes that come with the CD, a project which came out first from Randy Hale and Emily Corey’s attempts to unearth forgotten songs of the Mid-West (Hale is a descendant of generations of Oklahoma homesteaders), and consider how, in the 19th century, farmers gathered around and sang. It became a travelling revue telling the story of homesteaders, their songs, and the stories they told. *Songs From The Tall Grass* as we now have it is a double CD subtitled ‘the forgotten songs of the American Homesteader’, and contains a few songs which are now part of the folk tradition, such as ‘Home on the Range’, but many ‘composed’ songs which were passed around and sung. Much of it is rather too sweet and sentimental for my taste – think parlour songs rather than Woody Guthrie – but that is by no means a demerit: the lives of many of these farmers were tough enough. Who would begrudge them an opportunity to sit down and relax and spread a little sentiment? Some of it certainly crosses the line from the sentimental to the beautiful, and one such song is the one which was brought to my attention.

‘A Hundred Years From Now’ was composed by E. Spencer and R. H. Randall around 1899, and was found

in a songbook called *Sharps and Flats* put out by Randall. It’s a slow, melancholy, sweet song with (in this arrangement) a stately piano accompaniment, in which the singer wishes to ‘see this Earth again a hundred years from now/ And walk and talk with living men/A hundred years from now.’ It’s marked by curiosity and a hope for prosperity – a world of skyscrapers and big stores ‘where all the world could buy’ and affluence: a dream-ticket for the poor farmer. The third verse moves more firmly into the future. ‘There’ll be machines to shuck the corn,’ he sings, but also machines to ‘nurse the babe that’s born,’ but also ‘machines that fly and walk by day . . . perhaps machines to preach and pray.’



I was given this at a conference in the USA: “There’s a song here that’s science fiction,” I was told: “Look at the words.”

Given the date of the song's composition, it's not unlikely that it was influenced by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* in which the hero, Julian West, wakes up in a future Boston in the year 2000. The country is by then a socialist utopia with managed, directed labour, nationalised industries, and working hours sharply reduced to give time for creative leisure. There are big stores where goods can be bought using a kind of universal credit. Music and broadcasts of live concerts are available on subscription via telephone networks – a technology which is often described as part of the novel's 'science fiction prophecies' but which in fact was becoming widely available in parts of Europe (the French *Compagnie du Théâtrophone* operated until 1932). There are even sermons broadcast – truly 'machines to preach and pray'. Bellamy's book had sold well over 400,000 copies by the end of the 19th century, and sparked off numerous clubs, discussion societies, and political networks. But this was a time of political ferment and technological development. L Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which was published in 1900, begins on a Kansas farm not unlike those worked on by the homesteaders Randy Hale is commemorating. Our image of it comes from the 1939 film, but both book and film suggest the hardship of the homesteaders and their dreams of a different, better life. The sentimental 'there's no place like home' of the film has always seemed, to me at least, to undercut the aching utopian desire of the song 'Over the Rainbow', but on the other hand, people like Dorothy were cut off from home by *economic* tornados (please excuse the strained metaphors!). Skyscrapers were certainly soaring over the skylines of American cities in the 1890s, and Thomas Alva Edison was already famous for his inventions. Although Henry Ford's Detroit Automobile Company of 1899 was a failure, it was the precursor of greater things. The world was changing, and the song is about that change. Our singer can only imagine what life might be like, and wonder how the change would pan out.

The song is not, precisely, science fiction. Despite the vaguely robotic 'machines', what the yearning is for is the kind of labour-saving devices that were just coming in rather than anything we could be gosh-wow about. But the desire to imagine the future through its technology is just what was going to form the brand-new literary form of 'scientifiction'. The children of these homesteaders, or perhaps they themselves, may well have been reading the Frank Reade, Jr. dime-novels published in the 1880s and 90s with their 'electric air canoes' and 'steam horses' and marvelling at the ingenuity of the young inventor. The song is perhaps even something of a pastoral lament for innocence lost in the sophisticated future, but all these elements were waiting for someone like Hugo Gernsback to pick up and amalgamate. And new technologies were waiting for their bards: very soon songwriters were celebrating the Wright Brothers and other pioneers

of flight with ditties like 'In My Aeroplane For Two (A Honeymoon in the Sky)', recorded in December 1907 by Herbert Payne (a pseudonym of the tenor Ernest Pike) and which, according to the sheet music, was 'sung with great success by Miss May Mars'. The songwriters (Tom Mellor, Alf Lawrance and Harry Gifford), even promised that 'folks very soon will take trips to the moon'.

'I'd like to walk this Earth again, a hundred years from now,' is the closing line of Spencer and Randall's song, and it's hard not to think of a touch of anxiety there. Would the farmer singing the song approve of the way, in today's world 'votes are cast and office won'? We rapidly change the subject here . . .

A Hundred Years From Now

Written by E. Spencer and R.H. Randall, circa 1899

Music by Randy Hale

We found this song in a small archive in Wellington, Kansas. It is from Ranson H. Randall's songbook, Sharps and Flats. One can only imagine what the writers would think of the world today.

I'd like to see this earth again, a hundred years from now,
And walk and talk with living men, a hundred years from now,
I'd like to see how farming's done, how business is and how it's run,
How votes are cast and office won, a hundred years from now.

Of course they'll be no wood to burn,
A hundred years from now,
They'll be some tricks in trade to learn,
A hundred years from now,
They'll be big towns with steeples high,
And buildings that will scrape the sky,
And stores where all the world could buy,
A hundred years from now.

A hundred years, a hundred years, a hundred years from now,
I'd like to see this earth again, a hundred years from now.

They'll be machines to shuck the corn,
A hundred years from now,
Machines to nurse the babe that's born,
A hundred years from now,

recurrent: RESONANCES Stephen Baxter

McMurdo Station, Antarctica

'McMurdo, the place to which you are confined by the strictest of company regulations, resembles an island of service stations clustered around the off-ramp of a freeway long abandoned . . .'

(Kim Stanley Robinson, *Antarctica*, 1)

My last column touched on Biosphere 2, a vast greenhouse habitat deep in Arizona, where volunteer 'closure' experiments, meant in part as precursors to space colony designs, were run in the 1990s.

October 2017 sees the publication of Paul McAuley's astonishing *Austral* (Gollancz), a saga of the beginning of the human development of a new Antarctica, a landscape uncovered by the melting of the ice. But of course there are already colonies on Antarctica, which like Biosphere 2 are teaching us lessons regarding the future colonisation of still more harsh environments in space.

The American McMurdo Station and Britain's Halley VI Research Station are permanently manned Antarctic bases. For space-buff comparison purposes, McMurdo, Antarctica's largest community, is particularly interesting as it sustains a comparatively large population (about 250) on artificial life support systems through the Antarctic winter.

McMurdo Station [1] [2] is situated at the ice-free southern tip of the Hut Point peninsula on Ross Island, a volcanic island on the shore of McMurdo Sound. It is a location with spectacular views of Mount Erebus, and a protected natural seaport, the world's southernmost port. These natural features have made the location a useful base to support the exploration and research of Antarctica since Scott's expedition of 1902. In fact Scott's hut is a short walk from McMurdo. The main purpose of the station is science. Operating under the National Science Foundation (NSF), McMurdo has

its own science facility, and provides logistics support for activities across the continent; every US visitor to Antarctica comes through McMurdo. However most McMurdo residents are not scientists; they provide support services including operations, logistics, construction, and maintenance.

The NSF also supports visits by writers and artists. Travel writer Gretchen Legler [3] documented her impressions of a visit in the 1990s. Kim Stanley Robinson came here, in part to research his Mars trilogy. Robinson's *Antarctica* (1997) [4] is a near-future eco-thriller about a conflict over resources, triggered by the collapse of the Antarctic Treaty. Werner Herzog's documentary *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007) [5] features McMurdo heavily.

And some of these accounts might foreshadow, in their human details, a vision of mature space colonies of the future.

McMurdo Station was founded in 1955, essentially as a Cold War military base, and has evolved with time. No women were allowed to stay at McMurdo over winter until 1974, before which it was still under Navy jurisdiction. Now 40% of the residents are women.

Today McMurdo is an industrial place of noise and diesel fumes, with the big power generator continually humming and buzzing. The town is only a few hundred metres across, its buildings separated by unpaved lava-rubble tracks. Having grown with the years, project by project, under differing legal and political control, it has become an 'ad hoc itecture' ([4] p73). The building stock is a jumble of generations, much of it seeming quite unsuited to Antarctic conditions: walls of wood or cinder-blocks, metal roofs, Quonset huts.

In Antarctic summer the station can host over 1000 residents; it endures a winter 'closure' from February to August, when the 250 (or less) 'winter-over' inhabitants



must survive without resupply. The purpose of the winter-over crew is essentially maintenance.

The sustenance of the station is a huge and unending operation. At McMurdo, only the water (and the air) are locally sourced; a distillation plant extracts fresh water from salt ocean water. But food and power must be (mostly) imported. The Antarctic spring is a key time for the station, when much of the available labour is devoted to clearing runways on the sea ice to receive supply flights. In the summer a weekly delivery, mostly by sea, provides five pounds of fresh food per week per inhabitant.

The major delivery of supplies for the winter-over residents is made by ship in early February. This delivers 26 million pounds of goods, which requires four days' unloading. In the winter the staff live off frozen and dried food, save for the produce of a hydroponic greenhouse, which produces enough for one meal per person per week. The input of stores also includes, annually, 42 million litres of diesel fuel. Any space colony, unless the environmental and life support systems are perfectly closed, is likely to see a similar flow of resources.

Once McMurdo was a source of considerable waste and pollution – it even hosted a small nuclear reactor from 1962-72 – but, following inspections by Greenpeace in the 1980s, and since the conclusion of the Protocol on

Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty which came into force in 1998, not only is McMurdo cleaning up its own waste, it has actually become a centre for receiving and processing waste from other stations across Antarctica. These days in Antarctica, even sled-pulling dogs are banned because of their faeces.

As far as governance is concerned, the 'Operations Manager' is a key functional role. This is a company town but the laws of the US are enforced. Authority is vested in a US Marshal, who is also the local NSF representative. The Marshal is able to deputise, and is the only citizen allowed to carry a gun. Maybe space colonies will be run this way: think Sean Connery in *Outland*, a mining camp on Io . . .

McMurdo, 'MacTown', is a working community with all the complexity that implies. 'McMurdo Station . . . has the rough stuck-together feel of an old military installation, a remote oil company drilling site, a frontier mining camp, and a college campus blended into one' ([3] 4). Legler ([3] 106) lists occupations at McMurdo including 'carpenters, plumbers, electricians, administrators, secretaries, janitors, cooks, pilots, firefighters, doctors, dentists, nurses, mountaineers, heavy equipment operators, recreation specialists'. All this in addition to the scientists and lab technicians who do the productive work.

So what kind of people come to work here? According to Herzog, McMurdo is ‘filled with professional dreamers’, a magnet for people who want to escape, full time travellers. While there are highly trained and highly qualified specialists, most people are doing jobs in ways that are in essence indistinguishable from the way they would be doing them back home: teachers, nurses, plumbers. The difference is that at McMurdo, the plumbers are plumbers with a certain restlessness, a desire to travel, to experience new places. People will even take jobs for which they are over-qualified for the chance to live here. They have PhDs doing the washing-up, Herzog was told. Maybe it will be that way in the space colonies too.

Whatever its value as a model for future space colonisation, McMurdo clearly has a character, history, future of its own – and its own people. Scientists, dreamers, that one cop – and, some day, citizens? McAuley mentions Emilio Palma, an Argentine citizen who, on January 7 1978, became (as far as the *Guinness Book of Records* knows) the first person to be born on Antarctica. I wonder when was the last time this happened, the first human birth on a continent – on North or South America, perhaps, more than 10,000 years ago? And Palma’s is the last such birth possible on Earth. The next comparably momentous birth, I suppose, will be the first birth in orbit, or the first on the moon, the first on Mars...

The loss of the ice will be a global disaster for human civilisation, as well as an ecological catastrophe for the life forms on modern Antarctica. But, as McAuley’s novel hints, what an extraordinary thing it will be to have a new continent unveiled on this old planet - as if Mars were suddenly accessible by sailing ship or aeroplane. Antarctic colonisation is more than a mere precursor to space. It is, and will be, a profound human adventure in its own right.

References

[1] ‘McMurdo Station’, *Wikipedia*, URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McMurdo_Station accessed 27/9/16.

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[3] G. Legler, *On Ice*, Milkweed Editions, 2005.

[4] K.S. Robinson, *Antarctica*, HarperCollins, 1997.

[5] W. Herzog, *Encounters at the End of the World*, Discovery Films, 2007.

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