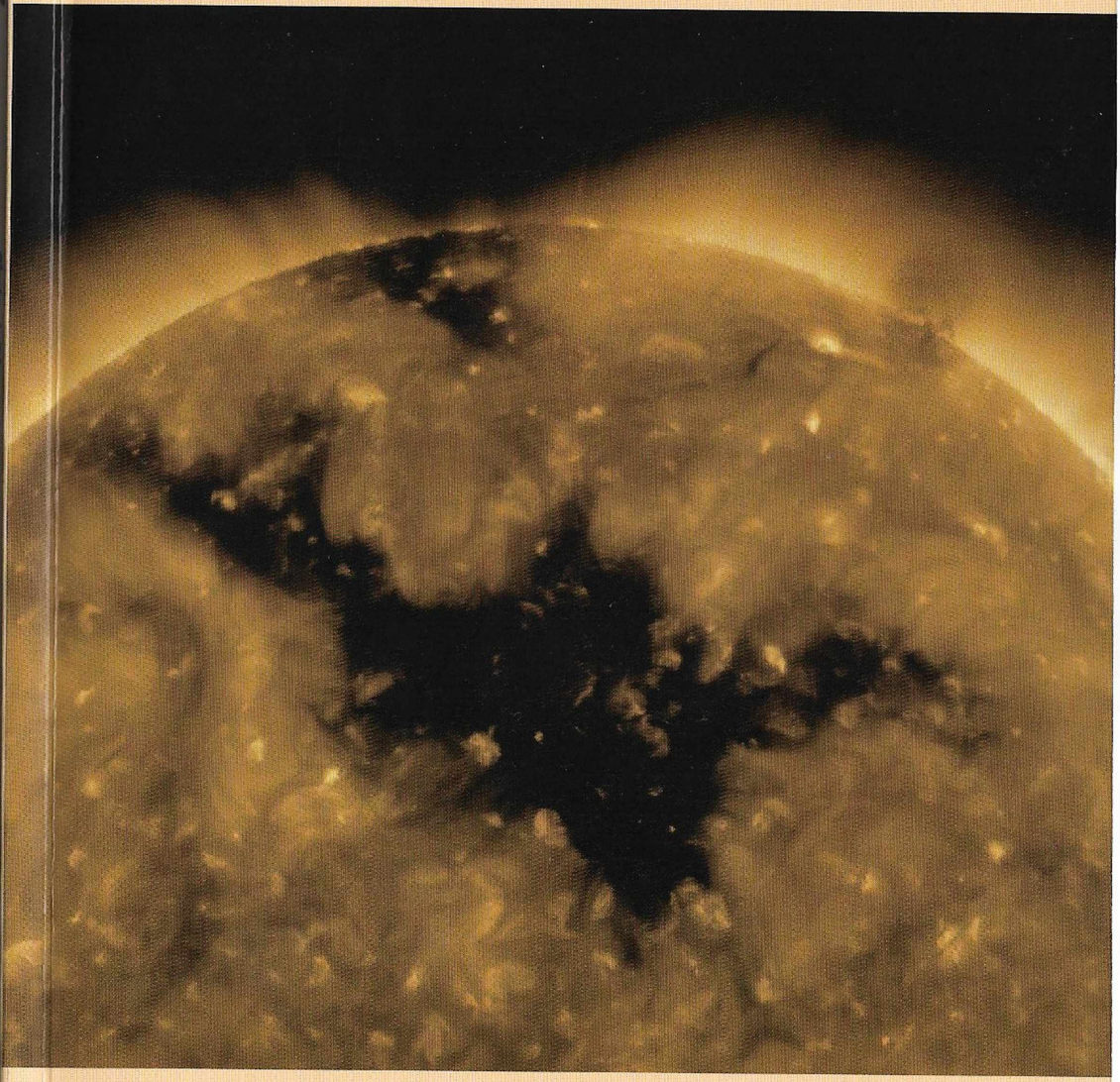
Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction



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Reviews

Editorial

Graham Sleight

I assume that most readers of *Foundation* will be aware that Frederik Pohl has a blog; if by chance you aren't, I urge you to visit it at http://www.thewaythefutureblogs.com/ . Pohl recently reprinted on the blog a piece he'd published in David Hartwell's *New York Review of Science Fiction* a few years ago – see http://www.thewaythefutureblogs.com/2010/09/mark-twain-and-the-law-of-the-raft/ . Much of the essay is devoted to the famously unsatisfactory ending of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The last fifth of the book, as Pohl says, has to jump through all sorts of hoops in order to achieve an ending. Pohl finishes his indictment as follows:

> What is wrong with the ending of *Huckleberry Finn,* at root, is that it is a "happy ending" and thus a fraud. Jim might be freed, but he was still black and penniless, and his wife and child were still in slavery. If any "mainstream" novel tackles the question of social morals, it can't have a happy ending that is not fraudulent.

And that, you might think, fits with Pohl's own approach as a writer. Books like Man Plus (1976) or the famous collaboration with C M Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (1953), are easy to view as cynical and downbeat. They certainly portray venality and selfishness as central human motivations, with very little prospect that technology will change that. Yet, immediately after the passage I just quoted, Pohl goes on to say:

> But science fiction can, because it is a literature of change. And wonderfully, now and then, it does.

That's an extraordinary contrast, and indeed it's how Pohl closes the essay. Given the strength of the terms he uses in the preceding paragraph – "fraudulent" in particular – it denotes a degree of faith in sf that seems unusual these days. Related to this is something Pohl says at the start of the essay:

> Most of us would argue that science fiction has some special merits denied to most kinds of literature – for instance, its didactic ability to

> educate, or at least to motivate the desire to be educated, in science, its prophylactic qualities against future shock (if you read enough science fiction hardly anything ever takes you by surprise); its capacity for objective insights into the human condition – what Harlow Shapley called "The View from a Distant Star" and so on. Arthur C. Clarke once put it very well when he was asked why he wrote science fiction; he said, "Because no other literature concerns itself with reality." I'm not sure what "reality" Arthur was talking about, but it is sure that the biggest reality confronting all of us today is change – rapid and widespread change – and science fiction is a literature of change.

So, Pohl is saying, happy endings might not be fraudulent in sf because of these particular considerations – what one might call utilitarian considerations. That's not to say, of course, that there isn't plenty of sf that's consolatory, escapist, *avoidant*. (And it raises the question of what kinds of sf Pohl might think of as "fraudulent".)

As critics of sf, we're necessarily concerned with the uses to which this kind of fiction is put, the kinds of readings that it can afford. I at least would be wary of a view of the field that saw it in narrowly or solely utilitarian terms – and I'm sure that's not what Pohl is suggesting. But there is undoubtedly a sense in which some sf affords readings that are of *use* in distinctive ways.

These thoughts found an echo in Deepa Dharmadhikari's paper on reading fantasy, one of our Viewpoint pieces this issue. Both this and John Clute's essay were commissioned for a forthcoming book on fantasy, but ended up not fitting into that book. Deepa's online piece "I Didn't Dream of Dragons" was one of the central contributions to the debate on race that took place in sf and fantasy over 2009; I'm especially delighted to be able to present this related essay.

Fantasy and the Metatext

John Clute

1.

It might be worthwhile suggesting at the start that metatext, which we must soon distinguish from the megatext it accesses and recuperates, can be poison. Metatext is a conversation between the tale told and the Cauldron of Story within that is dangerous to apply too narrowly (the more exact the claim of Origin, the more like allegory may be the material evoked) and can seem otiose when evoked as a generalized claim that everything counts (sometimes the end of a cigar is only smoke). Metatext devices – particularly but not uniquely in fantasy – can also poison the relationship between text and reader if there is any sense that its author has pretended to disinteredness: because metatext is also an assertion of interest. It cannot be other. The megatext is always with us – never more evidently so than in the saturated texts of fantasy – but it is the metatext that asserts and shapes our readerly access to the Cauldron within. Metatext is a prismatic filter through which shine those aspects of the megatext that the story believes in (see below for a definition of fantasy that focuses on belief).

(We should make it clear at this point that in using the terms megatext and metatext, we separate here for heuristic purposes two terms that are so thoroughly alloyed in a normal act of reading that they may seem one thing.)

Megatext. For our purposes, we can understand megatext to refer to any story which is in some sense Twice-Told (which is to say any story that we are aware of), but more particularly megatext refers to the whole body of fantastika: the whole range of the literatures of the fantastic as they evolved in the century after 1750 or so. These literatures include the supernatural gothic, the urbanized Marchen of Germany escaping Sturm und Drang, the antiquarianized ghost story, the fabulated national epic (like the Finnish *Kalevala*); and horror and science fiction and fantasy, the latter three genres themselves broken down by readers and critics into many adjacent (though sometimes incompossible) subcategories. For our purposes, megatext comprises the matter and manner, the substance and the shape of these realms of fantastika. Metatext is in short a conversation between a particular text and the circumambient megatext; indeed, an omnivorous dredging of the whole body of fantastika so marks contemporary

writing that it might almost seem tautological to identify any modern text as metatextual in particular: for none are not.

Metatext. Metatextuality governs any expression in a text of its relationship to megatext, trivial or transformational; in the early twenty-first century, it is time the overwhelming and destabilizing metatextuality chronic to the overarching Late Culture we inhabit may make it at times difficult to distinguish individually shaped stories from the infinite recursions of a Virtual world. Any fictional text composed over the past half century will therefore inevitably show – sometimes in the act of attempting to conceal – some form of megatext anxiety: an anxiety of influence evoked not only by the father but by the entirety of the perceived world. Non-fantastic forms of literature are less likely to foreground this circumambience; perhaps because, by virtue of a moral hygiene which excludes the fantastic, their authors are less likely to perceive the world. Authors of fantastika are far more predisposed – if for no other reason than the genres within which they operate are by definition built around conscious uses of precedent – to exercise in their texts a positive engagement in the conversation.

That engagement dates very early in the history of fantastika. An author like Mary Shelley could not have created the Monster created by her Baron Frankenstein without baring her knowledge that she was tweaking the strings of old stories. The full title of her novel – *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) – clearly triggered in the early nineteenth century a readerly expectation that her modern story would in some palpable sense relate to, controvert with, retell the Greek myth of Prometheus. A smaller cohort of her contemporary readers might have also detected other stories within, the most prominent of them being perhaps the medieval legend of the golem of Prague. In a way not entirely consonant with the main line of fantasy (as described below), Shelley's multiple use of metatext generates a potently multivalent problematic about the nature and destiny of her "monster": a problematic that so corrodes and bronzes its/his iconicity that no one creature stands fast in the mind's eye. This may not exactly sound like fantasy (but then Frankenstein is not only an early example of what would become modern fantasy: it is a fount of modern horror and modern science fiction); but it does exactly sound like a text irradiated by metatext. There is a richness of embeddedment here that prefigures almost any Late Culture text, certainly texts whose immersion in megatext extend beyond generalized citations of classical tags; but there is also a danger. Any awareness that our stories and indeed our lives are inherently Story-Shaped risks a just (but possibly fatal) perception of fundamental reality as being ultimately unnarratable: precisely because we have now gained some understanding of the artifactual – of the species-specific – nature of that Story Shape. Interrogation of megatext – even in as early a tale of fantastika as Frankenstein – may indeed seem corrosive. This understanding of the potential corrosiveness of metatext brings us back to the only adult genre of modern literature whose interrogations of megatext are warded.

Fantasy. There is no safe definition of any term with the diachronic and synchronic complexity of "fantasy", though most definitions will concur that the world as depicted in fantasy must not be possible; further than that – certainly as regards the dialectic between metatext and megatext that we have been focusing upon – any effective definition of the form needs – explicitly or tacitly – to enable some awareness of its formal oddity when it comes to that dialectic. Very briefly, fantasy may share with other forms of fantastika a tropism towards discovery and interrogation of the megatext; the oddity lies in the fact that in fantasy the megatext is discovered upon interrogation to be true.

This understanding of fantasy is inherent in a definition of the form adumbrated in the entry on FANTASY in The *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), edited by John Clute and John Grant – . This definition is articulated more fully in a later essay by Clute, "Notes on the Geography of Bad Art in Fantasy" in *Unearthly Visions: Approaches to Science Fiction and Fantasy Art* (2002), edited by Gary Westfahl with Kathleen George Plummer and George Slusser:

> Fantasy, as I suggested in one entry in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, is a way to tell stories about the fantastic. This may sound innocuous enough, but it concentrates a considerable amount of argument as to what regions of the fantastic could not adequately be incorporated into a definition of fantasy whose central texts were works by authors like E R Eddison or J R R Tolkien. To say that fantasy is a way to tell stories about the fantastic suggests that surrealism, magic realism, most poetry, much of the postmodernist disassembly project, dream tales, and various other categories circumambiate but do not much help to define fantasy itself. We [are] left with a definition of fantasy as being comprised of stories set in worlds which are impossible *but which the story believes*. (p.89)

This definition also excludes the first eighteenth century genre which might be thought of as a close ancestor of fantasy proper, the adult "fairy tales" (as they were often called) inspired by Antoine Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights* into French between 1704 and 1717; parts of this translation were already appearing in the English press before the end of 1704, and highly metatextual fantasies – usually couched as transparent satires on politics and mores – appeared throughout the eighteenth century, in both French and English. The most impressive early transmogrifier of the megatext Galland opened to view may be the Irish Count Anthony Hamilton (1644/45-1719), whose *Histoire de Fleur-d' pine: Conte* (he wrote in French) was read aloud long before its publication in 1730; the last work of genius in the mode may be *Vathek* (1786) by Willliam Beckford, a tale which (in French and English) represents, through its constant and explicit references to its models, a course that would not usually be taken by writers of fantasy over the next two centuries. This may be as well for fantasy. Superb as a solitary text, *Vathek* clearly demonstrates the inevitable cost of an

incessant metatextual interaction with the megatext: that the story ostensibly being told cannot survive when that conversation passes a certain density: when that which is Twice-Told is too heavily weighted with its paradigm.

This is not to suggest that *Vathek* itself struck a cautionary note that fantasy writers a century later heeded consciously; certainly the nineteenth century provides more than enough terrible examples of allegorizing and/or religiose fantasies whose "lessons" are all too clearly intended to "save" story from itself through metatextual bondage to the *real* story underneath. The definition of fantasy given above may reflect a twentieth-century aversion to these excesses of metatextuality on the part of twentieth century writers attempting to discover cleaner lines of story to tell (to discover/create genres with less hermeneutic baggage clogging the lines of story); it certainly reflects a *reticence* easy to detect in all but the most recent examples of fantasy, a patent caution about excessive evocations of the megatext within. An example to the contrary, like John Myers Myers's *Silverlock* (1949), demonstrates the case: its virtuoso contortuplicating of story types and resonantly-named narrative-shaping heroes and heroines proved to be a solo event in the history of fantasy, a haemorrage of metatexting that was never emulated by later writers.

The central lesson for the contemporary author of fantasy may be that, in the writing of tales which inherently invoke the chthonic, metatext is like catnip. Even a sophisticated author like Susan Cooper (see examples below) can drench her text in a chaos of connections which do not fruitfully connect; that muddy the waters the tale must ride. Fantasy as defined above marches moreover to a different drummer than sf or horror, or than most non-fantastic art forms. It is pretty clear that the categories of fantastika excluded by this definition – plus much horror and sf – are those that nowadays irradiate the megatext with problematic. This is precisely what most readers of fantastika in the early twenty-first century properly expect to encounter in any genre which does not refuse the world, that treats the interrogation of the world as a dance of deconstruction.

This is not to argue that distinctions drawn between fantasy and other forms of telling constitute an absolute demarcation (not even in theory); no toggle can distinguish the one from the other with any final clarity. Much contemporary fantasy is likely to show the affect of the problematizing of megatext typical perhaps of any Late Culture, and certainly typical of the culture of the West. Fantasy tales profitably exist – "literary fantasy" authors like Angela Carter or Jeanette Winterson or Paul Auster write little else – in which the artifices and engines of telling Story are subjected to recursions of disassembly, their texts metatextually transfigured into quotes from stories that can no longer be told, with tellers who cannot tell a lie: which is what they tell us. But the conventions of fantasy can enable a different story, if by fantasy we mean a genre whose twentieth-century masterpieces – from E R Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922) to J R R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) and beyond – refuse the planet for the sake of recovery; that we understand fantasy stories to be so

structured that they fulfill the longing of their protagonists to recover a world that has not turned away. In fantasy so described, the megatext can be understood as an hypostasis of the territory longed for, the Land of Heart's Desire; and the instrument of metatext in these texts can be seen as a kind compass, a direction home: something different from though clearly conjoined to the interrogative conversation at the heart of megatext in other contemporary genres, which may show us our home has become bricolage, or a cenotaph.

The megatext extends of course beyond the grasp of any single fantasy text, a primary reason for authors to engage in conscious metatextual discourse: in order to signpost the journey by quote and assonance and name-check and hypnopompic prolepsis (see below): thus to indicate where in the Cauldron of Story, where in the megatext, home may be found. It is in this sense that metatext in fantasy can be described as a prismatic filter, a sorting device, or a claim; it is for this reason that when metatext in fantasy renders the story problematical, it is in order to clear the brushwork that blocks it from being true.

2.

There is no room here to anatomize the catchments of metatext in fantasy over the past century or so, or to capture a full conspectus of devices authors have used to signal or instigate or install a metatextual signpost.

The five volumes of Susan Cooper's The Dark Is Rising sequence – *Over Sea, Under Stone* (1965), *The Dark Is Rising* (1973), *Greenwitch* (1974), *The Grey King* (1975) and *Silver on the Tree* (1977) – tell a long and complex story set in then-contemporary Britain, invoking a large cast, and employing no flashback passages or backstory segments to facilitate the telling. The sequence as a whole is a retelling of the Matter of Britain, and the metatextual webbing that sustains the entirety of the story works primarily to interweave characters and tropes out of that Matter, including in this instance a comprehensive sampling of Welsh mythology, plus various recensions of the Arthurian Cycle Her task here is enormously complex, if for no further reason than that the Matter of Britain – which might be better defined as the Matter of the Defense of Britain – is made more complex not only by the incoherence and mutual incompatibilities that muddy the inner tale, if there is indeed a single inner tale that can be told, but by the fact that the Matter has been traversed in poem and story by many tellers over many centuries. To tug upon a single string of metatext in this confused, multi-focus context is to risk evoking unintended strings, logjams of string blocking the flow of story.

There are many instances in the sequence of successful chymical marriages between the present of the story and the forms that ride within it; but metatext is a dangerous tool; and one of the negative aspects of an age in which everything

can be seen to signify is a certain derangement that can afflict even the finest tales. Before closing with some examples of the power of metatext for good, here is an example from *Greenwitch* of its power to disable the compass. Off the coast of Cornwall, young Susan has been enabled to go under the ocean and to speak to the chthonic entity called Greenwitch, a figure created annually in the form of a sort of Wicker Man and thrown into the sea; it comprises a kind of bricolage of material sundered from the world, and Cooper may have wished to convey something of this. The Greenwitch has found a treasure, which does not belong to it, and which Jane needs in order to help senior members of the cast stave off the Dark. But here is the passage; Greenwitch speaks:

> "I have a secret. I have a secret."
>
> "You are lucky," Jane said.
>
> The living tower of branches bent towards her, nearer. "I have a secret, it is mine. Mine, mine. But I will show you. If you promise not to tell, not to tell."
>
> "I promise," Jane said....
>
> As to a small child showing its toy, she said to the Greenwitch: "It's lovely."
>
> "My secret," said the Greenwitch. (p.51)

Few readers of Tolkien will miss the echo here of the Gollum, deep in his watery cave, hunkering over the One Ring, murmuring "My precious". But the metatextuality here is a form of deception, of bondage; it mispositions *Greenwitch* onto the wrong path, for the Greenwitch (who utters a heightened diction in later passages) returns its Precious before the end of the novel, which progresses elsewhere; and is in no other respect remotely Gollum-like. The reader is left in the maze of megatext, a consequence endemic to a literature surfeited with referentiality.

Far more successfully, on the other hand, a single passage taken from *The Dark Is Rising* may illustrate the vast rewards of an adroit use of metatextual signposts. It is Christmas Day (a marker for more than fantasy texts, of course) in Buckinghamshire, under an unnatural flood of snow. Three Old Ones – the boy Will Stanton and Old George and Merryman Lyon (his name a metatextual chaining to Merlin: for they are one) – have staved off an overwhelming assault of the Dark, which has shaken the hinges of this local habitation of men. Silence descends upon the Church. With Will and Merryman is Mr Beaumont, the Rector.

> The rector stood up, his smooth, plump face creased in an effort to make sense of the incomprehensible.... He looked at the Signs on Will's belt, smiling suddenly, an almost childish smile of relief and delight. "That did the work, didn't it? The cross. Not of the church, but a Christian cross, nevertheless."

"Very old, them crosses are, rector," said Old George unexpectedly, firm and clear. "Made a long time before Christianity. Long before Christ."

The rector beamed at him. "But not before God," he said simply.

The Old Ones looked at him. There was no answer that would not have offended him, so no one tried to give one. Except, after a moment, Will.

"There's not really any before and after, is there?" he said. "Everything that matters is outside Time. And comes from there and can go there."

Mr Beaumont turned to him in surprise. "You mean infinity, of course, my boy."

"Not altogether," said the Old One that was Will. "I mean the part of all of us, and of all the things we think and believe, that has nothing to do with yesterday or today or tomorrow because it belongs to a different kind of level.... And Gods are there, and all the things they have ever stood for. And," he added sadly, "the opposite, too."

"Will," said the rector, staring at him, "I am not sure whether you should be exorcised, or ordained. You and I must have some long talks, very soon."

"Yes, we must," Will said equably. (p.130)

This is a passage of very considerable complexity. Its ostensible task is to carry the contemporary narrative a minute or so further towards climax; but as metatext it accomplishes a very great deal. Among the understandings of the Matter of Britain, Christian readings – in which figures like Saint George tend to dominate – figure large; very effectively, this passage positions the whole of The Dark Is Rising sequence as being specifically non-Christian. While doing so, by sidelining the Cross and Christ – neither mentioned earlier in the text and never afterwards – the passage also positions the overall tale as adhering to a cyclical rather than linear version of the Matter and of deep time. Furthermore, the inner tale of the sequence sidesteps not only Johnny-Come-Lately Christianity, but also the God of Christianity, who is also seen as a kind of interloper, replacing these fundamentally unBritish beliefs with what vulgarly sounds like a polytheistic manicheanism. In all of these positionings, we are being told what threads of megatext we are to ignore, and what threads can be drawn tight.

We are told something else, as well. We are told that certain conventional parlances – common not only to fantasy, though prevalent in a genre where character shines through the disguises folk may wear – are not valid here; that we must position our understanding of human nature more deeply than normal. The Rector, "smiling suddenly, an almost childish smile of relief and delight", does not gain an almost supernatural wisdom through innocence; and his sudden awareness that he is beyond his depth does not position us into any anticipation that he will turn the story in some later passage, for Will responds "equably" – a utterly controlled, devastating, perfectly chosen adverb – to his attempt to exercise some Churchly authority over matters beyond his ken.

Finally (in this context) we are told that the protagonists of Cooper's version of the Matter of Britain inhabit a deep stream of story where mortals need not apply. There is no euhemerism here. Britain will be saved in the end, we are sure, but not by human beings who kiss the Cross. While we are given the gift of following the tale, that tale is in fact deeply remote. In this passage, and in several others, we are given the sense that we need to position *The Dark Is Rising* into a world significantly different from that of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, to which Cooper's sequence makes metatextual reference very frequently indeed. In Tolkien (as in Richard Wagner's Ring cycle) humans inherit the earth, leaving not a wrack of the numinous behind. In Cooper – who is unfettered by Christian doctrine – humanity is shepherded into safety by beings who return to their dwellings Under the Hill, where they await some further call: for the world is cyclical; it is not a story whose linear outcome spells the end of things. The tone of the quoted passage, and of several others, evokes the Scientific Romances of Arthur C Clarke rather more closely than it does the world of Tolkien.

As *The Dark Is Rising* reaches its climax (the dismissal of a Christian reading of the Matter of Britain occurs during a kind of rehearsal of the real battle), Will is told he must ride a white horse to the heart of the Wood, where the Hunter – who needs to be awoken – rests:

> There was a glimmer of silver, in the darkness that was not quite dark, and in a spray of wet snow the great white mare of the Light was standing before Will, her breath clouding round the streaks of rain....
>
> Will touched her, gently. "Will you carry me?" he said, in the Old Speech. "As you did before?" (p. 181)

After the shock of the final sentence – for the reader has not been told that Will is a figure whose deepest experiences are Twice-Told – a realization floods the senses. Cooper must, we feel, be making reference to the intense moment in *The Lord of the Rings* when the reborn Gandalf calls his white mare back to him, and mounts her. But this is not simply a name-check. We know that Gandalf will ride the white horse downwards into battle at Helm's Deep, at the head of an irresistable force; and Cooper's use of this quote positions us, in a moment of hypnopompic intensity, to understand that The Dark Is Rising is about to take its narrative shape from that proleptic metatextual signal, as indeed it does. At the head of an irresistable force, the white mare plunges into battle, and the Dark is defeated for the moment. And the inner grammars of the two tellings make a wedding.

It is in this sense that the heart of the metatext in fantasy is chymical marriage.

Surviving Fantasy through Post-Colonialism

By Deepa Dharmadhikari

When I was around thirteen years old, I tried to write a fantasy novel. It was going to be an epic adventure with a cross-dressing princess on the run, a snarky hero, and dragons. I got stuck when I had to figure out what they would do after they left the city. Logically, there would be a tavern with a barmaid.

But there were no barmaids in the India whose history I was setting my story in. 'Write what you know' wasn't a rule for me, it was a handicap. After having grown up reading English books with people named Peter who ate strange things called sardines and scones, I still couldn't write about England or America... a lifetime of foreign media consumption was not enough to give me to confidence to write about cultures so different from my own.

I wanted to write about the place I lived in, even if I didn't have a whole bookcase of Indian fantasy world-building to steal from. And I couldn't get past the lack of ale-serving taverns. Even as an adult, I have spent a number of years trying to figure out how cross-dressing disguise would work in a pre-Islamic India where the women went bare-breasted. When I considered including a dragon at the end of a story, I had to route my characters to the Himalayas, because while dragons fit within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, they were not a part of Hindu mythology. Princesses were kidnapped by ten-headed demon kings, and princes married the daughters of half-snake, half-men, but as our grandmother put us to sleep with stories of our mythic past, I did not dream of dragons.

One of the most important observations of post-colonial literary scholarship is how difficult it is to growing up reading books (and watching movies) about a culture alien to you, and how pernicious the influences thereof can be. I feel privileged because Indian culture is still more widely represented in Western media than many other colonised regions – when I talk about Bollywood in a Media Studies discussion, there are people who have some visual reference of colourful song-drenched melodramatic films. Bastardised definitions of 'pundit' and 'caste system' and 'karma' and 'reincarnation' are present in the English vocabulary. Yet my ability to connect imaginatively with people from different parts of the world is still mediated through the coloniser's language and representation. Enid Blyton – with her hideous caricatures of African tribal boys helping the intrepid British children – is read from Johannesburg to Jaipur; Iktomi stories are not.

These imbalances of power are often wilfully ignored in literary discussions regarding issues of representation and diversity in writing. In Science Fiction and Fantasy, especially, there is often a cultivated sense of naivety. All myths belong to the storyteller who wants them, is one argument of the people who dismiss concerns about cultural appropriation. Meanwhile another posits that a future landscape of the imagination has no responsibility to acknowledge the present world of the author's corporeality. Everyone's story is valid, goes the third common defence, as though storytelling were a democracy with one body, one vote. But reading novels is not a civic duty (though the world might be a better place if it was), and all voices are not equal. The rapist who lies about having got her consent is not a storyteller whose words should carry the same weight as the survivor who has to describe her bruises. While authors can certainly disavow any moral responsibility of writing, readers cannot ignore the moral effects of those words.

One of the most frustrating arguments I've encountered is – If you hate it so much, stop bitching and write your own. This naive position stems from the utopian capitalist belief that all markets are equal, and individuals are free to be whatever they can, driven only by their inner divine spark.

Yes, writers create from the richly populated inner world of the imagination, and writers have evolved said imagination in many diverse corporeal circumstances of hardship and difficulty. However, no writer is created from a vacuum. Almost the only universal characteristic I have seen in the biographical commonalities between writers across time and space has been their pleasure in reading (or accessing stories). Certainly the writers of the present era have grown up reading.

Now let me point out that I grew up speaking Marathi with my family, and Hindi with schoolmates and neighbours, but the only children's books I read were in English. Less than a handful were written by Indian authors about Indian characters. (There are some rare good children's books in Indian languages. You will not find them in the average Indian bookstore.)

I grew up with half a tongue.

Do not tell me, or the people like me who have grown up hearing Arabic around them, or singing in Swahili, or dreaming in Bengali – but reading only (or even mostly) in English (or French, or Dutch) – that this colonial rape of our language has not infected our ability to narrate, has not crippled our imagination. When I was in class 7, our English teacher gave us the rare creative writing assignment, and three of my classmates wrote adventure stories about characters named Julian and Peggy and Tom. Do not tell me that this cultural fracture does not affect the odds required to produce enough healthy imaginations that can chrysalize into writers. When we call ourselves Oreos or Coconuts or Bananas (Black/Brown/Yellow on the outside, White on the inside) – understand the

ruptures and bafflement that accompanies our consumption of Western media while we resent and critique it.

And also, do not imagine that making it to print is some idealistic winnowing of quality. Once, when I was telling an American friend how much smaller the publishing industry in India was as compared to the US's, they said that they supposed that what was published then, must be of the highest quality.

But it is not an equal playing field. This belief is like assuming that the one runner in India who perseveres in the face of poverty and institutional neglect and governmental lack-of-infrastructure will by virtue of her drive and passion be as good as the team of runners culled from the tens of thousands of children sent to athletic training camps in China for the express purpose of creating Olympic medallists.

The Western publishing industry has the luxury of being able to support the base camps of crappy first novels and cliché-ridden genre fiction hacks and niche-marketed speciality books that create the momentum for the breakout book, the genius author. If you grow up in a country where every child has held a crayon in nursery school, you start out with a literary advantage over the many countries like India where a majority of the child population never enter a schoolroom.[1]

And just to make it absolutely clear – the Western publishing advantage has been, and continues to be derived from the economic wealth these nations enjoy by virtue of stripping the resources and talents of other peoples. I do not consider it an accident of fate that it is in the US that the art of children's picture books evolved (something I consider one of America's most exquisite cultural gifts to the world). These books – printed in China on paper from Brazil – cost (when they are imported at all) more than a full length Penguin Classic in an Indian bookstore. The books available in one fourth grade classroom at a low-income Minneapolis charter school where I have worked outnumber the entirety of books my private primary school in Delhi made available to me (And in India, I was nothing but privileged). It can be easy to forget, when looking at the number of poor, underprivileged citizens who benefit from the extensive public library systems of the UK and the US, the third world disenfranchised people on whose backs those libraries were built.

Another argument that ignores economic realities is the one that says, 'Oh, its fine to write about a different culture as long as you research it properly'. This blitheness annoys me because the costs of research are skewed towards the First World economies. It's not just a question of Neil Gaiman blogging about being internet-deprived while being undercover in China or Naomi Novik going on a research safari to South Africa; even a mid-range, mass market writer of Harlequin romances can get an advance that can pay for a cruise to be able to write about a Latin lover.

There isn't even an Indian English speculative fiction genre publishing imprint--how many of us Indians, do you think, were we to be authors who

wished to world-build in an alternative universe-Brazilian setting, would be able to afford a plane ticket to visit there? And on a smaller level--try talking to the elite academic professors at Delhi University or the University of Ghana. Find out how long it takes for academic journals to reach them, or how the library at the British Museum is better stocked in South East Asian texts (many priceless originals stolen from a former colony and never returned) than any Indian library. Compare how many undergraduates in the US have free access to LexisNexis, with the number of elite Indian private school teachers who rely on Wikipedia because they can't afford subscriptions to academic article sites.

As SFF writers become aware both of the diversity around their multi-cultural home environments, and the potentially global reach of their markets, they are beginning to talk about how to incorporate this cultural and racial diversity into their writings responsibly and sensitively. These conversations are often very well-intentioned, but the lack of awareness about how hugely the writers' privilege clouds their perspectives leaves me saddened and upset.

One such well-intentioned but clueless writing suggestion that causes me to flinch reactively is the advice to write the Other just like you would write any character – with respect for their individuality and uniqueness.

You know why I flinch? It's because the assumptions flatten the problem. A poorly written book has cardboard cut-out characters, and a well-written book has thoughtful, nuanced characterisation. *But I have spent a lifetime reading well-written books with nuanced characters that hurt me by erasing or misrepresenting me.*

In one of my favourite childhood books, as I lay reading *A Little Princess* under a fan in the dusty, lazy Delhi of my summer holidays, I was told that the heroine – brave, dignified Sara Crewe – needed to be sent away from the place I called home, because it was proclaimed to have a bad climate for her to grow up in. In 2003, Texan Libba Bray can acknowledge people who helped her research Victorian corsets while writing about a British lesbian schoolgirl in *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, and yet begin her novel with a description of Indians selling snakes to eat in a Bombay marketplace. And the White characters in *Gone With the Wind*, and *Atlas Shrugged* – two books I idolised and reread voraciously as a teenager – are iconoclastic in their individuality, and compelling in their characterisation. This does not prevent the former from being riddled with disgusting caricatures of Southern Black slaves, and the latter from having no characters of colour at all. These are all well-written books in how they serve their main characters. These are terrible books in how they deal with characters of colour.

Asking an author to write the Other with respect and assuming it to be sufficient, is like telling a person that being polite to everyone is sufficient in their goal of being an anti-racist ally. This is crap. Your definition of individuality, just like your definition of politeness, is culture-specific. And just as I do not want to see yet another Indian princess or lascar stereotype, I do not want to

see a Disneyfied character that wisecracks like a White American with suburban values, nominally exoticised by brown skin and kohl and an elephant sidekick.

I distrust universalising statements proclaiming our inherent mutual humanity because they are uni-directional – they do not make everyone more like me, they make everyone more like you. And I do not want that. White people decrying their race and culture baffles me, because it is a lie. White alienation from their own mainstream does not equate with my differences with White culture. Even when we brown people feel or are called 'White' or 'Western', we cannot shrug off our identity; we become the vanguard of its complexity. And we are far, far more immersed in White culture, than most White people could ever be in ours.

What I resent in science fiction and fantasy that throws in a token Chinese pilot or a nominal Arab pirate just like a different species of tentacle alien, is the authorial implication of accessibility. That it is as easy to understand people of different ethnicities and cultures as it is to understand the diverse experiences within the identities you share with people. Yes, writing about Indian-Americans or Korean-Canadians or Sengalese-Britishers implies a certain shared national experience. But hyphenated identities are not the only manifestations of a culture, and as someone who identifies as Indian, I want to say--No. It is not that easy to understand me, or my experience, or to accurately represent it. You don't see Native Americans writers going around claiming familiarity with Australian aboriginals on the basis of some shared philosophies, or Chinua Achebe writing about Afro-Caribbeans like they are an extension of his own world.

It is pertinent to note that much of this well-intentioned championing of diversity in writing comes from countries that are trying to celebrate or rationalise their appropriation of other cultures. All this 'write the Other' talk – you never hear someone saying that to or within an Indian authorial context. Nobody seems to complain that Satyajit Ray or Jayant Narlikar or Sarnath Banerjee don't feature Black, East Asian or White characters. And I haven't heard anyone criticise Salman Rushdie or Vikram Seth for their inaccurate or stereotypical portrayal of the White characters they write. Because when they write about White people, it is not appropriative. No one that I know of has borrowed Arthur and Lancelot to turn them into part of the army that helps Rama defeat Ravan, and even if they were to do so, the sheer weight of the Arthuriana in existence would prevent such a borrowing from reading as co-opting.

On the other hand, there is a disturbing trend of Euro-centric mythology crossing the water to the US, and then appropriating the other cultures present in its service. For instance, Elizabeth Bear's *Blood and Iron* has three significant Black characters – one is an African-American woman coaxed and wooed into being the reluctant participant in an Arthurian war, one a dangerous, exotic seducer, and one a Celtic Kelpie whose human form is of a Black Caribbean man – a character who at first terrifies and attempts to capture one White woman and then is bridled and made a servant and unwilling sidekick of another. Holly

Black's urban fantasy books also have a multi-racial cast that play out a battle between Seelie and Unseelie Faerie courts. Like Whiteness, western fantasy assumes that its myths are the default, and when they travel to the New World along with the invading colonisers, these stories are the universal ones, to be garnished with bits and pieces from an appropriately colourful culture, like a sarong brought back from a tropical vacation.

A fantasy world in which no characters of colour exist excludes me just as much as one which, like C.S. Lewis's Narnia, reduces people with my skin colour to cruel, false-God worshipping Calormene whose conquest over a White-ruled Narnia is enough to provoke the literal end of the world. The process of decolonising my mind is painful, but I cannot continue to escape into worlds of fantasy that treat people that look like me as orcs or savages or servants or invisible beings not worthy of including in a narrative.

Dragons are not universal, and fantasies are not homogenous. If I am defensive, it is because I have had to learn how to love Tolkien while trying to find myself in the unmapped lands in the East where the Green and Blue wizards disappeared to.

ENDNOTE

1 Usha Jayachandran, "Socio-Economic Determinants of School Attendance in India", Centre for Development Economics, Working Paper, 103, June 2003, p. 3.

Robots and Representation in Asimov's Detective-Science Fiction Novels

Emily E. Auger

Isaac Asimov's best selling Robot novels, *The Caves of Steel* (1954), *The Naked Sun* (1957), *The Robots of Dawn* (1983), *Robots and Empire* (1986), and other sequels are examples of detective-science fiction[1] that emphasize the "Frankenstein complex,"[2] or dystopian tendency in human responses to "humaniform" robots. The belief that technology in general will have dire consequences for humanity has given rise to an entire genre of film – tech-noir[3] – not to mention innumerable short stories and novels, many examples of which lend special attention to various modes of mimetic representation, such as the photograph, holograph, other types of digital projection and viewing devices, and, of course, androids. They also frequently have plot resolutions involving the destruction or humanizing of some delinquent manifestation of technology and show the purely "human" or whatever is identified as "natural" to be superior in its capacity for invention, interaction, and survival. Asimov's Robot novels share these tendencies: this paper shows how he resolves the "Frankenstein complex," as well as various murders and mysteries, by exploring the differences between organic and technological beings relative to the "superficialities" of language, accents, clothing, and cosmetics. Such differences may both fool the eye and become the focus for a wide array of prejudices, but in Asimov's world they are "non-essential" (*Robots and Empire* ch. 10, pp. 244-45); the fundamental essence underlying all outward aspects of the presentation and representation of both humans and machines being the "mind" and even the mind is a representation insofar as it is the product of genetic, behavioural, biochemical, and technological programming: with the right technology, it too may be replicated by the "positronic" brain. Nevertheless, the differences and variations of representation are shown to enrich the texture of life and, indeed, make this fictional evolutionary development of the superior human, as well as superior "humaniform," life possible. Asimov creates laudatory robot characters, but repeatedly affirms the value of human intuition relative to robotic reason and credits representations generated by the unconscious mind in creative problem solving.

Futuristic technology and other-than-earthly societies mark the *Robot* novels as examples of science fiction; but, since their plots involve one or more detectives

working to solve various murders, "roboticides," and other mysteries, they are also detective stories. Asimov's interest in science-based and sociological themes intersects at his three laws of robotics; these laws are essential to his theorizing about how robots might function and be received in human society relative to their bodily representations as humaniform or non-humaniform. The robotic laws were first summarized in the short story "Runaround," published in 1942 and included in the *I, Robot* collection in which two terraformers are placed in a life and death situation by a robot's apparent inability to either carry out an instruction or to completely abort it. The terraformers resolve the mystery of "Speedy's" behaviour by carefully analyzing it relative to the three laws of robotics:

> [. . .] a robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm [. . . .]
>
> a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law [. . . .]
>
> And three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws. (*I, Robot* 45)

The problem is that Speedy was sent to perform a task with only casual instructions when the situation called for an emphasis on the importance of accomplishing the task and alternative courses of action should it be impossible to complete it by the initial means implemented. Many pages in Asimov's later novels are devoted to explaining the art of robot management and solving mysteries of robot behaviour relative to the "psychology" defined by the three laws of robotics.

The human detective in the *Robot* novels is the middle-aged Earthman Elijah Baley who, through his successful unraveling of technology-related murder mysteries in relation to the laws of robotics, gains promotion from a C5 to a C6 and finally a C7 class rating with all of the accompanying improvements in standard of living and privileges. The robotic detective characters are R. (for robot) Daneel Olivaw, whose appearance frequently allows him to pass as human and who can "cerebroanalyze" humans or read their psychic profiles merely by "looking" at them; and the much older R. Giskard Reventlov, who possesses telepathic abilities but whose technological construction is readily apparent. As in many classics of the genre, the detectives Baley, Daneel, and Giskard all "come of age," regardless of their chronological age, as they come to understand and use their understanding of the three laws of robotics to successfully detect criminals.

Like many fictional detectives, Baley makes use of intuition as well as "scientific" logic and reasoning in the study and resolution of various mysteries and initially he makes much of the limitations of robot logic.[4] Asimov gives particular emphasis to these modes of thought by increasing the complexity of

his descriptive passages, particularly those involving vision and taste, to coincide with the increasing complexity of his characters' experience and understanding of representation. The detective is required to demonstrate the growth of his understanding of such matters because he is involved, as he is in all detective fiction, with the policing of social boundaries and the recognition and punishment of their transgressors. In this series, the detective is also involved with actively critiquing the social boundaries pertaining to technology and even working to alter them; indeed, human social laws are shown to possess considerable flexibility whenever the good of humankind is at stake and the robotic laws, while frequently asserted as fixed, are also shown to be mutable. This latter point is ultimately demonstrated by Daneel's discovery of the "Zeroth" law, according to which all Homo sapiens are human and "the prevention of harm to human beings in groups and to humanity as a whole comes before the prevention of harm to any specific individual" (*Robots and Empire* ch. 18, pp. 463).

Along with the actual character and social role of the detective and the investigation of the murder itself, Asimov employs two motifs familiar to detective fiction: the "locked trunk" and the "locked room," both of which contribute to the articulation of the differences between the human and humaniform body and their associated "minds" relative to consciousness and the unconscious, as well as notions of order, justice, and virtue and their perceived opposites. The "architecture" of detective fiction is, as S.E. Sweeney (1990) says, allegorical insofar as that architecture, specifically the locked room, imitates narrative structure. As in all fiction, the story begins with "a disruption in the social order," which in detective fiction often takes place inside the enclosed space of the locked room. This story is sometimes called the first story. The second story develops in the world around that room in accordance with the reader's desire for both entertainment and "closure". The story of detection is, in fact, the story of closing a "gap between a crime and its solution".[5]

The "first story" of each of the murders in the first three Robot novels occurs in a locked room and, because of the presence of robots at or near the scene of the crime, the second story – the identification of the murderer – requires considerable attention to their possible involvement. Where human beings are concerned, Baley and Daneel consider their motives for murder; where robots are concerned, they consider the ways in which they may have been manipulated into behaving against the robotic laws. In the first novel, a focused animosity against robots and a fear of "Spacers" leads to the accidental death of the human on whose appearance R. Daneel was modeled and who was the intended target of the assault; in the second, a human with the ability to obstruct another's plans to use robots to conquer the human race dies by violence: this victim is the husband of Gladia, a character who plays a major role in the third and fourth novels. In the third novel, a robot with the ability to telepathically manipulate human behaviour deliberately destroys R. Daneel's twin, who happens to be Gladia's second "husband," in order that the greater good of the human race not

be compromised; and in the fourth, it is the robots Daneel and Giskard, now in Gladia's possession, who take up the task of identifying those plotting against all Earthers. In each situation, one of the principal obstacles to the identification of the murderer is a failure to completely understand human and robot psychology in relation to the crime. Following Baley's identification of the murderer in the first three cases, "justice" is served, not by apprehension and incarceration, but by limiting public knowledge of what has happened as that is deemed to be in the best interests of the social order. At this point, those in-the-know presume a perfect understanding of not only human and robotic psychology, but of the best sociological response to the situation and what should be done to get it.

As Asimov reveals the mysteries of the "Frankenstein complex," he also reveals the motivation and means for the individual crimes. The detective's investigation invariably includes some discovery of the operation of the three laws relative to the robots involved and an "opening" of the robot trunk, so to speak, such that the internal space and workings of the robot's body may even be revealed. The locked trunk motif is also developed as part of Asimov's revelation of the working of human reasoning, logic, and intuition, particularly through the unconscious, in counterpoint to such unique robotic talents as cerebroanalysis and telepathy. This revelation is made in conjunction with various forays into the technology of mimetic representation – not only the humaniform robot and the less than humaniform robot, but filmic records, film novels, and photographs, as well as the gadgetry and practice of "viewing" – all of which, like his regulated and increasingly frequent applications of descriptors for all kinds of experience, tend to support his exploration of the constitution of difference, both essential and non-essential. Baley solves the first three mysteries through intuitive processes in his unconscious mind, which is shown to be less restricted than his conscious mind is, by surface reality and not so readily deflected from the truth by misleading representations. Giskard and Daneel solve the last mystery by emulating and cultivating the robotic equivalent of Baley's intuitive abilities.

The Caves of Steel

In *The Caves of Steel*, Earthers have, with the assistance of robots, long since settled fifty other worlds, including Aurora and Solaria. The populations of these colonies are considerably smaller than that of Earth, the life-span of their "Spacer" occupants considerably greater than that of Earthers, and Spacer technology considerably more sophisticated than that of Earthers. Earth is so over-populated that everyone lives in underground Cities, research on increased longevity is unthinkable, and robots, especially humaniform robots, are hated because they increase the already increasing unemployment. The general superiority of Spacers in longevity, technology, and apparent personal freedom and affluence, has led to their treatment of Earthers as inferior and a general desire to keep any more Earthers from coming into space. Earthers do not have any interest in leaving their planet, as most suffer, like Baley, from severe forms

of agoraphobia and wish primarily to be left alone by the Spacers.

There is a single Spacer town on Earth, called "Spacetown," and it is here that the murder of the Auroran Roj Nemennuh Sarton by the Earth Commissioner of the New York police, Julius Enderby, is committed. Enderby is a "medievalist" who opposes robots, especially humaniform robots, and indulges in such medievalist eccentricities as the wearing of spectacles rather than contact lenses and windows that allow him to see outside. To commit the murder, Enderby goes through the various security barriers required to enter Spacetown and meets R. Sammy, whom he has instructed to come to Spacetown through the agricultural land surrounding it, an area occupied only by robots, bringing the murder weapon with him. Enderby then goes to meet Sarton before their scheduled appointment, drops and breaks his spectacles in the door jam, mistakes Sarton for his intended target Daneel, and kills Sarton by mistake. He then returns the weapon to R. Sammy and goes to keep his scheduled appointment with Sarton, only to discover Sarton's body where he had expected to find Daneel's. Later, the unwitting R. Sammy is permanently "disorganized" in a photographic supply room so that he cannot produce evidence of Enderby's criminal actions and to further a possible frame of Baley, obviously a false representation of the truth, should he get too close to the identity of the murderer; the photographic supplies are all damaged by a weapon available only in power plants of the sort Baley took Daneel through while evading some medievalist trouble-makers. Fortunately for Baley, the film recording of the crime scene captures the fragments of Enderby's broken glasses, providing the evidence needed to prove Enderby was the murderer. True to the science-fiction genre the final solution is overtly political insofar as the revelation is not publicized because it would escalate Earther-Spacer hostilities; Enderby is not even incarcerated or otherwise punished. Indeed, the Spacers decide to evacuate Spacetown, much to the delight of all Earthers who do not realize that the Auroran Han Fastolfe brings the evacuation about because he is now satisfied that Earthers will now do what Sarton wanted – begin to colonize. After years of trying to encourage this result and failing, Sarton had proposed they reverse tactics such that the drive to colonize would seem to be of Earther invention and it worked (*Caves* ch. 17, pp.240-1).

Sarton was the designer and personal prototype for Daneel's humanoid appearance: the significance of the death of such a formidable master of representation at the very beginning of the first novel of the series should not be overlooked as an important indicator of Asimov's didactic message regarding non-essential differences. (This murder is also revisited in the third novel of the series when Daneel's duplicate is also murdered.) The individual who demands the murder be solved is Fastolfe, the engineer-scientist who created Daneel's "mind" or program. Enderby obliges by assigning Elijah Baley to the case, certain that their old-buddy relationship will protect him. Fastolfe believes that expansion is necessary to the survival of humanity, that the colonization

of new worlds by either or both Earthers and Spacers is the most viable type of expansion, and that colonization should be fostered by humans supported by robots. He also fears that the political repercussions of the murder might jeopardize his plans to further this colonization, so he assigns his robot, Daneel, to work with Baley.

Baley does not initially realize that Daneel is a robot and, even after Daneel's identity is revealed to him, makes a foolhardy attempt to prove that he is, in fact, Sarton, and that it was the robot who was killed. Baley is deceived by such misleading clues relating to R. Daneel's "humanity" as his articulating tongue, the pink flesh of his hands, and his apparent use of the "personal" during the night. Baley's false conclusion shows Asimov's further use of devices considered part of the detective-fiction formula; in this case, the initial accusation of an innocent person of the crime and the demonstration of the dangers of relying on circumstantial evidence. Here, that evidence also happens to include what Asimov treats as matters of mere representation. Asimov has Baley state this danger explicitly when he questions roboticist Dr. Gerrigel's assessment of Daneel as "fully equipped with the First Law" (*Caves* ch. 13, pp. 179). Baley responds:

> "But couldn't you be mistaken? [. . .] A blind man could read by using Braille or sound-scribing. Suppose you didn't know that Braille or sound-scribing existed. Couldn't you, in all honesty, say that a man had eyes because he knew the contents of a certain book-film, and be mistaken?" (*Caves* ch. 13, pp. 179)

Asimov, like other detective-fiction writers, emphasizes the role played by such "irrational" factors as intuition in the identification of criminals and also, through his continual development of the *Robot* novel series, an awareness that criminal activity is not a "closed" box, but rather a potentially unending chain of acts to which no complete closure may be possible.

Baley's initial difficulty in accepting Daneel as a partner is linked to his recognition that Daneel appears to be the fulfillment, not only of the expected physical representation of an ideal Spacer, but of the mythic dimension of Baley's own profession:

> The trouble was, of course, that he was not the plain-clothes man of popular myth. He was not incapable of surprise, imperturbable of appearance, infinite of adaptability, and lightning of mental grasp. He had never supposed he was, but he had never regretted the lack before.
>
> What made him regret it was that, to all appearances, R. Daneel Olivaw *was* that very myth, embodied.
>
> He had to be. He was a robot. (*Caves* ch. 2, pp. 26-7)

Baley, unlike Daneel, frequently "represents" or describes his developing solution to the mysteries he investigates as a kind of mental "picture" or as a "pattern". The word "picture" is first used in the novel to describe the "view" the medievalist Enderby shows Baley from his window. At this point, Baley, like all "modernists" regards windows as anachronistic; but by the beginning of the third novel, he has decided that humans ought to get even closer to nature. Obviously, the notion of anachronism is one that depends on point of view and its connotative value a matter of cultural representation. Enderby may have broken human social laws by committing a murder, but his interest in what lies beyond his window shows the value he places on the natural world – a value that the series ultimately validates and thus mitigates the fact that he is not punished for his crime.

Baley's frequent description of his efforts to understand the problem with which he is confronted as a matter of getting the "picture" indicates that he interprets that process as a matter of arriving at the correct representation of the facts. When he believes he has the solution, he says, "The pieces fit. The pattern was complete" (*Caves* ch. 6, pp. 79). Daneel, on the other hand, is an "information gathering machine" (*Caves* ch. 5, pp. 69), with brown eyes that are "really scanners" (*Caves* ch. 10, pp. 138), who draws the map (*Caves* ch. 5, pp. 65), not a picture, of Spacetown and its surrounds which contributes to Baley's understanding of how the crime was carried out. While the automated security devices that protect Spacetown can "sniff" out the presence of blasters and other weapons, Daneel is equipped with a special enhancement program that gives him extra sensitivity to matters of "justice," understood as the obedience to all of society's laws, and the ability to "cerebroanalyze" suspects for their potential ability to commit a crime. Daneel's assistance is essential to Baley's discovery of the murderer, but his cerebroanalysis of Enderby causes his erroneous elimination as a suspect: Enderby is, in fact, incapable of intentionally murdering a human being, but he is capable of murdering a robot.

The limitations of Baley's mind are indicated when he is biochemically encouraged (*Caves* ch. 9, p. 112, ch. 17, p. 242) to adopt a political position compatible with that of Fastolfe regarding the resumption of the colonization program. This biochemical is introduced, however, when Baley passes out at the sight of the inner workings of Daneel's mechanical arm (*Caves* ch. 8, p. 111) and the programming, the content of which is associated with Fastolfe's "vision" of the future, thus acquires a certain association with the truth as revealed by the visual proof of Daneel's robotic construction and with Baley's own method of solving crimes. Baley's ability to solve crimes is linked to his skill at deliberately allowing his unconscious to work over the patterns of evidence until he finds the solution. For example, it is when he is questioning Daneel about his understanding of curiosity as inefficiency, that Baley suddenly realizes the identity of Sarton's murderer:

> While R. Daneel spoke, Baley's mouth opened and stayed so.
>
> It could not all have burst full-grown into his mind. Things did not work so. Somewhere, deep inside his unconscious, he had built a case, built it carefully and in detail, but had been brought up short by a single inconsistency. One inconsistency that could be neither jumped over, burrowed under, nor shunted aside. While that inconsistency existed, the case remained buried below his thoughts, beyond the reach of his conscious probing.
>
> But the sentence had come; the inconsistency had vanished; the case was his. (*Caves* ch. 17, p. 247)

What Baley has realized, in a "glare of mental light" (*Caves* ch. 17, p. 247), is that he had assumed, without confirmation, that Enderby broke his glasses upon discovering Sarton's body; in fact, Enderby must have broken them before the murder and thus accidentally murdered a man instead of a robot – just as Baley initially mistook Daneel for a human, Enderby mistook Sarton for a robot. Baley subsequently uses the film footage of the crime scene as evidence and Enderby then obliges everyone with a confession.

The capacity of the unconscious mind to recognize truths before the conscious mind is ready to consider them is also indicated by Baley's dream, another form of representation generated by the unconscious, about his wife, Jessie:

> He dreamed Jessie was falling into the fission chamber of a nuclear power plant, falling and falling. She held out her arms to him, shrieking, but he could only stand frozenly just outside a scarlet line and watch her distorted figure turn as it fell, growing smaller until it was only a dot.
>
> He could only watch her, in the dream, knowing that it was he, himself, who had pushed her. (*Caves* ch. 11, p. 159)

After this dream, Baley is presented by evidence gathered by Daneel that Jessie is involved with a fringe Medievalist group and can therefore be used to frame him should the investigation not go as Enderby intends. (It also foreshadows the plan to destroy Earth with radioactivity developed in *Robots and Empire*.) After this dream, Daneel mentions to Baley that he talks in his sleep and asks for an explanation as he is familiar only with the dictionary definition of the dream: "It is an illusion of reality experienced during the temporary suspension of conscious thought which you call sleep" (*Caves* ch. 13, p. 190). Daneel does not have a mind capable of constructing this sort of representation, at least he does not at this point in the series, but it is Daneel who notices the discrepancy between truth and representation that appears when Jessie sends her son Bentley to check on Baley while she supposedly believes he is in a potentially dangerous situation. Daneel notes that Baley's instinct is to protect Bentley, and concludes that Jessie knew Bentley was not in any real danger, something Baley was not prepared to consider on his own. The truth is that had

Jessie gone to Baley, she might have been followed by her Medievalist friends who just might have harmed him; but they would probably not bother following Bentley. Asimov thus encourages his readers to respect Daneel's robotic talents as useful to Baley, even as they are presented as of secondary value.

Asimov's sparse use of descriptive adjectives in this novel also supports his discussion of genuine differences between beings and the methods by which the mind may break through the superficialities of representation. Where perceptual abilities are a specific issue, Asimov meticulously limits his description to match the world he is inventing: this is a world in which the rich possibilities of surface variance, of representation that is, seem to have been reduced to a survivalist's minimum. The food on Earth is bland and generally unpalatable, a fact that becomes more apparent to Baley when he has a chance to savour off-world cuisine in the second novel.[6] Colour adjectives are particularly rare: among the few such descriptors are those provided for a purse – pink – which is lost on the expressway; for faces, which turn red with embarrassment, white with rage, or gray with apprehension; and for Daneel's hand which, like the purse, is pink. Daneel's eyes are brown and his inner workings, beneath "a thin layer of fleshlike material," are "dull blue gray". The danger line in the power plant and in Baley's dream is red and, on a single occasion, Jessie uses cosmetic colours on her face. Pink and red obviously refer to the "outer" layer of things and are used as accurate markers of internal human states of being, as a "sign" of danger and, in Daneel's case, as proof at the "cosmetic" level of the falseness of appearances.

Asimov does, however, indicate the importance of differences, particularly those evident in body types, to human vitality when he notes Fastolfe's physical "ugliness," which completely contradicts the Earther image of the Spacer as tall, bronze, and invariably good looking – an image deliberately created and perpetuated by the Spacers themselves as part of their psychological domination of Earth. The existence of such ugliness in an era in which genetic engineering is a reality causes Baley to wonder at what point ugliness might be considered a deformity. Baley is quite aware, nevertheless, that it is "the ugly Spacer with the prominent ears [who] had filled his mind with queer imaginings" (*Caves* ch. 9, p. 125). It is just these queer imaginings, along with his alliance with Daneel, which later fire Baley's ambition to transform his life for the benefit of humanity. The perceptive reader will also ponder the implications of Baley's thoughts about Fastolfe's appearance relative to the general Earther prejudice against humaniform robots. Earthers find robots in human form "ugly" because of their intense awareness of the very real threat these "false" humans pose to them. Asimov thus poses numerous questions in relation to representation and the humaniform robot: Is aesthetic or functional mimeticism grounds for the elimination of the technologically "evolved" humaniform robot? Is this aspect of "representation," the humanlike form of robots, really a "non-essential"? Or is it, like Fastolfe's ugliness, a "sign" of some precious quality in robots, as it seems to be a sign of Fastolfe's intelligence, that ought to be preserved?

The Naked Sun

In this novel, Baley and Daneel are called by Fastolfe to Solaria to solve the murder of fetologist Rikaine Delmarre by Jothan Leebig and possibly some unwitting accomplices, Gladia, the wife of the victim, and another robot, now permanently disorganized. Solaria is a planet of twenty thousand humans and billions of robots. There is no crime, not only because so many robots are present to prevent it, but because humans rarely interact directly with each other. They are trained almost from birth to limit their social contact to the technologically mediated form of "viewing," such that actual "seeing" is a source of considerable anxiety. "Trimensional" viewing was introduced as a form of communication in *The Caves of Steel*, but Solarian visual technology far surpasses anything Baley has previously encountered in its sophistication and in its sociological effects, such that he is initially deceived, as he was by Daneel's appearance, into confusing the representation with "reality".

The murdered man's body was found with only his unconscious wife and a "disorganized" household robot at the scene. Other robots immediately cleared away all the evidence, leaving Baley not only without an opportunity to actually see the crime scene, but without such filmic evidence of that scene as he used to solve the murder of Dr. Sarton in the first novel. After the Solarian head of security Hannis Gruer is poisoned and Baley himself becomes the object of an assassination attempt, Baley eventually pins the murder on Leebig, whose plans to use robots to conquer all of the human occupied planets were about to be thwarted by Delmarre, who had extremely conservative political views, sought only to use robots to further increase the Solarian limits on direct human contact, and had also realized what Leebig was up to. Leebig commits suicide rather than be apprehended physically by Daneel, whom he mistakes for a human. In fact, Leebig either committed the murder by surprising Delmarre with an in-person visit or he committed the murder indirectly. He knew of Gladia's frequent arguments with her husband, which were fueled, as Baley understands it, by her violent internal rebellion against Solaria's "unnatural" taboo on physical contact, and simply had the robot perform the literal task of giving Gladia one of his detachable limbs when she needed a "hand" during one of those arguments. He is also evidently guilty of manipulating robots into poisoning Gruer by having one put the poison in a pitcher of water and another deliver the water to Gruer; presumably a similar assignment of separate tasks to robots was used when a child very nearly killed Baley with a poison arrow. Although Baley believes that Gladia probably killed her husband in a fit of rage, he also believes she would not have done so if not assisted by the robot Delmarre programmed. However, Gladia never does recover, or admit recovery, of her memory of the murder; neither does Baley chose to represent her as a murderer who should be accused and punished because he regards her actions as a natural response to life in an artificial society.

In this novel, the association of reason and the unconscious mind's capacity

to create pictures and patterns is restated, as is the value of the human ability to lose consciousness and, at such moments, resolve matters otherwise irresolvable by the conscious mind. The weakness that causes robots to lapse into permanent disorganization or to simply shut down until they can be reactivated when confronted by events and actions that contradict the three robotic laws seems to be a by-product of their inability to mimic the human response of fainting. The novel theme of nakedness is associated with Baley's awareness that the entire population of the planet lives above ground where it is exposed to the "naked sun" and its imposed alterations of day and night (*Sun* ch. 9, p. 127). Such uncontrolled alterations become a kind of metaphor for the Earther's tendency to collapse when overwhelmed by agoraphobia. The theme of artificially transmitted images, a specific type of representation, is also further developed in conjunction with a particular form of society, such that the viewed naked body is one thing while the seen naked body is quite another.

The descriptive adjectives are much more plentiful than in *Caves* and they continue to be used in a manner that points up differences perceivable by the senses as aspects of representation, but Asimov also concedes the importance of such representations in motivating individuals with a sense of the qualitative possibilities of life experience. The food is richer, the clothes are different, robot design is more variable, and Gladia is an expert in representation as she is a "field colorist," an artist who creates unique forms out of technologically-generated coloured lights. Baley is pleased with the colour field portrait she makes of him, until she encases it in a ball of dull gray, the colour of metal and technology and symbolic of the steel caves of Earth. Gladia specifically articulates the reasons for Asimov's emphatic limitation of colour references in *Caves* when she says "I always think of Earth as blue. All those people and seeing, seeing, seeing. Viewing is more rose [. . .]" (*Sun* ch. 15, p. 210). Baley is at a distinct disadvantage in this exchange; as he explains, "I can't picture things as colors" (*Sun* ch. 15, p. 210).

Baley puts himself through considerable discomfort in order to prove his ability to function out-of-doors, in spite of his Earth-bred agoraphobia, and to thereby convince her that the shell should be removed. Out-of-doors on Solaria he discovers the beauty and colourfulness of plant life, as well as his own shadow, which surprises him as he always "pictures" planetary surfaces beneath the blaze of noon sunlight (*Sun* ch. 15, p. 214-5). Baley has lived a shadow-life in Earth's steel caves; so, as the sun sets in a blaze of red and black, he collapses in a deep mental sensation of motion beyond anything his lifetime of hopping Earth's expressway strips has prepared him for:

> Baley had a vision. The sun was moving down to the horizon because the planet's surface was moving away from it, a thousand miles an hour, spinning under the naked sun, spinning with nothing to guard the microbes called men that scurried over its spinning surface, spinning

madly forever, spinning – spinning . . .

It was his head that was spinning and the stone bench that was slanting beneath him and the sky heaving, blue, dark blue, and the sun was gone, and the tops of the trees and the ground rushing up and Gladia screaming thinly and another sound . . . (*Sun* ch. 15, p. 219-20)

Likewise, Daneel who, in the first novel, was just a robot without "a sense of beauty or a sense of ethics or a sense of religion" with no hope of ever raising his "positronic brain one inch about the level of perfect materialism" (*Caves* ch. 16, p. 221), articulates another aspect of the importance of "non-essential" matters of "representation" when it comes to human motivation by noting the effect of Gladia's revealing of her nude body to Baley via the viewer. Her purpose, he "reasons," was to distract Baley from the task at hand. He arrives at this conclusion by using the information about human reactions to stimuli imprinted on his circuits to interpret Gladia's appearance as meeting "any reasonable standard of physical attractiveness" (*Sun* ch. 6, p. 77-8). Baley, frustrated by Daneel's over-protectiveness, subsequently forces Daneel to expose his inner robotic workings to some of the household robots so that he can convince them that they must obey him and not Daneel because he is a human and Daneel is not (*Sun* ch. 9, p. 121). Baley's action, however justified by the circumstances, alludes to both power hierarchies based on racism and class-based elitism and this particular scene is one in which these analogies are as apparent as they are when Baley refers to any given non-humaniform robot as "boy," with differences in skin colour and wealth or status displaced onto Daneel's usually invisible innards. Baley temporarily circumvents Daneel's overprotective restrictions by invoking the robot programming to obey only human "masters": these robots clearly identify the human with the biological body. This bit of programming, the identification of what constitutes "human" relative to essential and non-essential differences, is the object of direct manipulation in the series' third novel.

The Robots of Dawn

In the third novel, *The Robots of Dawn*, Baley is again called upon for aid by Fastolfe, this time to Aurora itself where he is aided by R. Daneel and R. Giskard in solving the roboticide of Daneel's twin, R. Jander Panell. Fastolfe himself is the initial suspect as he is considered the only individual with access to Jander and the ability to cause his "freeze out," as robot "disorganization" is now called. He also has the motive of ending what he regarded as the potential improper use of humaniform robots in the colonization of new worlds that he believes should be accomplished by humans. Baley finds that Gladia, who moved to Aurora after her first husband's murder, is again involved, as Jander was not only in her possession on loan from Fastolfe when he terminated, but she also regarded Jander as her husband. At the same time, Fastolfe's political competitor, Kelder Amadiro, was using covert means to try to learn how to duplicate the positronic

brain from Jander, since Fastolfe refused to share that information voluntarily.

This novel introduces a robot as the principal victim and another robot as a main character and as the murderer: Giskard was accidentally programmed with the ability to not only cerebroanalyze, as Daneel can, but to telepathically read and influence human emotions by Fastolfe's daughter Vasilia while she was just a child. As an adult, she describes her invention as the discovery of a beautiful pattern: "more elaborate, more pleasant, and more enticing than I had ever seen before or, in all truth, than I have ever seen since . . ." (*Robots and Empire* ch. 13, p. 315-6). When Baley enters Vasilia's presence for the first time, the room "burst into light" (*Dawn* ch. 9, p. 196), clearly referencing the role her actions years before play in the recent murder and foreshadowing their ongoing effects in the fourth novel. Immediately following his reprogramming, Giskard influenced both Vasilia and her father not to reprogram him any more and to make no more explorations that might bring about a rediscovery of the telepathic programming pattern. Giskard killed Jander not only to prevent Amadiro from discovering the secrets of the positronic brain from him, but because Amadiro's plans for that brain were in opposition to those of his owner Fastolfe.

Because Giskard is not entirely humaniform, Baley mistakenly believes he is less sophisticated than Daneel when, in fact, the pair are evenly matched, with Giskard having the advantage of telepathy and the ability to actually manipulate people's emotions: he can do telepathically what was done to Baley by Fastolfe in *Caves* with the aid of drugs. While Baley is experimenting with an "autostimulator" which allows him to view the stars outside the spaceship carrying him to Aurora, he experiences an agoraphobic collapse, one which he finds "worse than simple nakedness – he was an unaccompanied personality, the essence of identity totally uncovered, a living point, a singularity surrounded by an open and infinite world, and he was falling" (*Dawn* ch. 3, p. 58). Although Giskard is outside the room and Daneel right next to him, it is Giskard who comes to his aid first. Giskard, of course, manipulates his mind so that it is some time before he can recover this clue to the other's telepathic abilities and, in another demonstration of the power of the unconscious, he only recovers it after Gladia repeats some of his sleep talking to him. Not surprisingly, Baley solves the mystery of Giskard's deceptive bodily representation through the workings of his unconscious mind.

Much of this novel is dedicated to Baley's interrogation of the individuals who may have been involved in the crime; but, in addition, much is made of Baley's interest in artificially enhanced viewing experiences, as well as foreign cuisine, weather, interior decoration, and the manner in which Gladia's designs for robots affect the appearance of clothing (*Dawn* ch. 2, p. 28), which Baley recognizes as having similarities to those of the servant classes on earth in the past, at least as they are represented in novels. He is also frustrated by his inability to escape the assumptions people have about him based on the "hyperwave drama" about his adventures on Solaria. In other words, the theme of representation is continued,

expanded, and also lent more personal resonance for Baley; but that theme is also articulated and developed through the robot character of Giskard and thus it also acquires elements that are not of human invention.

Notably, it is here that the subject of psychohistory, prominent throughout the *Foundation* series, is introduced as the pet project of Fastolfe, though actually it is an idea given to him by Giskard (*Robots and Empire* ch. 16, p. 398). Fastolfe confesses that he created Daneel, with his positronic brain functioning in a humaniform body, in a poetic intuitive leap and in hopes that such a creation would bring him closer to an understanding of humanity: his real interest is not the robotic, but the human mind; just so, it is also Giskard's interest. On this occasion, Fastolfe points to Giskard as evidence of how necessary it is to have a humaniform brain in a humaniform body if you expect the resulting robot to "be" human (*Dawn* ch. 5, p. 108). Baley eventually realizes this may be an accurate but also misleading assumption as it is the other-than-human Giskard who, here and in *Robots and Empire*, shows an understanding of representation that far exceeds that of any "human" in the series – except perhaps R. Daneel.

Robots and Empire

A significant portion of the fourth novel, *Robots and Empire*, is told in flashbacks and memory sequences; thus readers learn of the deaths of Baley and Fastolfe in the course of events that take place long after. Most importantly, Daneel, who in keeping with the replacement of almost all of his parts except his brain as part of routine maintenance, now has blue eyes (*Robots and Empire* ch. 1, p. 5), and Giskard discover a plan orchestrated by the ambitious Spacers Levular Mandamus and Amadiro to destroy Earth by releasing dangerous levels of radioactivity from all the uranium and thorium in the planet's crust. Mandamus believes that Earthers without Earth will soon fall back under the domination of Spacers. Giskard eventually chooses to allow the plan to go ahead because he believes the destruction of Earth is the best way to ensure the survival of humanity as it will release them from an overly reverent dedication to their planet of origin. This decision, which includes erasing the perpetrators' memories of their actions, causes him to freeze, but not before he finishes programming Daneel with telepathic abilities. Daneel embarks in the *Foundation* novels on an extraordinary career as a kind of "overseer" of humanity, ever nurturing Giskard's dream of psychohistory.

Daneel and Giskard are able to move, first to Solaria, then Baleyworld, and finally to Earth, with Gladia, to whom Fastolfe bequeathed them, when she is conscripted into assisting a Settler Trader and distant descendant of Elijah Baley, D.G. (Daneel Giskard) Baley, with a job on Solaria. Gladia, like Daneel, lives on thanks to numerous replacements for her aging body parts and systems. Solaria has apparently been abandoned by its human inhabitants, but efforts to land on the world and appropriate its robots have ended with the deaths of the humans involved. D.G.'s landing party is met by a humaniform female robot

named Landaree who, upon hearing D.G. and then Daneel speak, declares them not human, violently assaults them, and orders nearby robots to kill them. She is slowed somewhat by the interference of Gladia's furious Solarian-accented speech, which she recognizes as human, but is only stopped when Giskard enforces an invisible telepathic "mental freeze-out". It is Giskard, not Daneel, who acts most quickly and with the fewest inhibitions in this situation because he perceives the pattern of Landaree's positronic brain and is thus not even briefly confused by her outward humanoid appearance. The party manages to confiscate a portable power source and goes back to Baleyworld.

The adjustment of robotic action relative to the first law by limiting the definition of human to those who speak with a particular accent supports the more positive direction of Daneel's subsequent self-programming to recognize that the first law might be interpreted as having priorities, such as the need to save humanity over the life of any individual human or group of humans. This train of thought was established much earlier by Baley who explained just such priorities to Daneel from his deathbed:

> The work of each individual contributes to a totality and so becomes an undying part of the totality. That totality of human lives – past and present and to come – forms a tapestry that has been in existence now for many tens of thousands of years and has been growing more elaborate and, on the whole, more beautiful in all that time. Even the Spacers are an offshoot of the tapestry and they, too, add to the elaborateness and beauty of the pattern. An individual life is one thread in the tapestry and what is one thread compared to the whole?" (*Robots and Empire* ch. 10, p. 228-9)

The tapestry metaphor, clearly an expansion of the theme of representation beyond visual mimeticism, carries over into and is strengthened by Giskard's attempts to describe his telepathic experience of crowds of Spacers and Earthers. On Baleyworld, Galdia is forced to respond to her sudden popularity with public appearances, which she manages extraordinarily well – with just a little help from Giskard. Giskard, in awe of his own discovery of the ease with which masses of people may be manipulated, describes his actions to Daneel as a matter of loosening "a very few strands" of Gladia's inhibition, of noting the colour of sympathy:

> I found, friend Daneel, that I had begun something that was autocatalytic. Each thread that I strengthened, strengthened a nearby thread of the same kind and the two together strengthened several others nearby. I had to do nothing further. Small stirs, small sounds, and small glances that seemed to approve of what Lady Gladia said encouraged still others. (*Robots and Empire* ch. 9, p. 220-1)

Gladia becomes the public human counterpart to Giskard and Daneel's more covert developments, revelations, and influences insofar as she becomes the spokesperson for the series' theme of unveiling and eliminating undo attention to what she specifically calls "nonessential distinctions," such as longevity and speech patterns (*Robots and Empire* ch. 10, p. 244), in favour of emphasis on the fact that all humans are descended from those born on Earth (*Robots and Empire* ch. 9, p. 202). She is thoroughly revitalized by a newly discovered ambition to devote her life to combating prejudice and to peace (*Robots and Empire* ch. 10, pp. 240, 244-5), as well as her new relationship with D.G. This relationship is based on mutual attraction, rather than the socially-mandated production of children that validated Gladia's previous marriages to humans; children that were irrelevant – non-essential – in fact, to her happiness or sense of personal validation.

The acceptance of robots as human, as Baley accepted Daneel, and as Daneel and Giskard come to identify each other, is left behind in Gladia's pro-human, pro-peace advocacy. Yet conversations between Daneel and Giskard make up a significant portion of this novel, with Daneel obviously inspired by Giskard's unique abilities and philosophical view point and the possibilities for serving humankind which they provide. Giskard first "senses" the coming catastrophe (*Robots and Empire* ch. 1, p. 18-19) and the pair lament the restrictions of the robotic laws and their limitation to "reason" and "memory" as means to discover and halt it (*Robots and Empire* ch. 3, p. 53-4). They also lament the lack of "psychohistory," or a set of laws of humanics approximating those of robotics, that would enable the prediction and hence the easier manipulation of human behaviour without fear of doing harm. Giskard notes on several occasions that he believes Daneel is thinking more and more like a human, although he never comments on Fastolfe's theory that the humaniform appearance might be necessary to enhance human-like thinking in robots. With this exception, the robots discuss the differences in their respective appearances openly and share an objective and tolerant recognition of each other's strengths and weaknesses and both even act toward each other in a manner suggesting that their own programming priorities require they treat each other as – or at least as almost – human. Thus Asimov's literary technique, which emphasizes measured increases in descriptions of sensational experience and detail, such as colour, motion, taste, seeing, and viewing, and all of the related technology, nature, and social customs, includes a shift from the main human character of the Earther detective Baley with Daneel as a prominent secondary character, to the "alien" Spacers, particularly Gladia, and finally to the point where the readers' attention is almost continuously fixed on the actions and interactions of two robots who become the heroes deemed most likely to do what is best for humanity because, between them, they can see through all the non-essentials to what is most necessary for the human race to not only survive, but thrive.

FICTION BY ISAAC ASIMOV

---. *I, Robot*. 1950. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1991.

The Robot Novels (in story order)

---. *The Caves of Steel*. 1954. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1991.

---. *The Naked Sun*. 1956. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1991.

---. *The Robots of Dawn*. 1983. New York: Ballantine Books, 1984.

---. *Robots and Empire*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1986.

The Foundation Novels (in story order)

---. *Prelude to Foundation*. 1988. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1989.

---. *Forward the Foundation*. 1993. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1994.

---. *The Foundation Trilogy* [Includes *Foundation* (1951), *Foundation and Empire* (1952) and *Second Foundation* (1953)]. New York: Equinox, 1974.

---. *Foundation's Edge*. 1982. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1991.

---. *Foundation and Earth*. 1987. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989.

(ENDNOTES)

1 2 Asimov refers to the "Frankenstein complex" as such in his novels. Gorman Beauchamp discusses Asimov's horrified reaction to the tradition established by Mary Shelley in 1818 and carried on by such writers as Karel Capek, who wrote the first "robot" story, the play *R.U.R.* (1920), of assuming that artificial life would necessarily bring disaster to humankind. Beauchamp, "The Frankenstein Complex and Asimov's Robots," *Mosaic* XIII.3-4 (Spring/Summer 1980), pp. 83-94

3 See Emily E. Auger, *Tech-Noir Film with A Theory of the Development of Popular Genres (Forthcoming)*.

4 Hassler claims in "Science Fiction and High Art" that Asimov, like other science fiction writers, is opposed to "the mimetic mysteries of revelation or intuition" which are among "the effects of high art" (190). Hassler, "Science Fiction and High Art", *Extrapolation* 28.2 (Summer 1987), pp. 187-95. Hassler also asserts Asimov's commitment to "enlightenment" rationalism in "Some Asimov Resonances from the Enlightenment". While Asimov clearly salutes the observation – – hypothesis – experiment – analysis scientific procedure first established during the eighteenth century, it is equally obvious that he understands the unconscious as the location of the most creative aspects of problem solving and intuition as an ability that establishes a significant difference between human and robotic intelligence. Hassler, "Some Asimov Resonances from the Enlightenment", *Science-Fiction Studies* 15, pt. 1 (1988), pp. 36-47.

5 S.E. Sweeney, "Locked Rooms: Detective Fiction, Narrative Theory, and Self-Reflexivity", *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and*

Contemporary Literary Theory (Macomb: Western Illinois UP, 1990), pp. 1-14, at pp. 3-4. On the locked trunk and locked room, see also Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1977); and W. M. Verhoeven, "Opening the Text: The Locked-Trunk Motif in Late Eighteenth-Century British and American Gothic Fiction", *Exhibited by Candlelight: Sources and Developments in the Gothic Tradition*, eds. Valeria Tinkler-Villani, Peter Davidson, and Jane Stevenson (Amsterdam – Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 205-19.

6 Asimov does seem to reverse this assessment in *Robots and Empire* when he has D.G. announce: "There's more color and variety on one floor in one building in one City on Earth than in a whole Settler town or in a whole Spacer world" (398). D.G., however, is a settler and all settlers live out an intense, nostalgic loyalty and adulation of Earth; the point remains, the value placed on "representation" lies in the "eye" or "mind" of the beholder.

Doris Lessing's Transitions: Post/Colonialism, Post/Modernism, and Racial Identity

Sharon DeGraw

The Big Picture

Nobel Prize winning author Doris Lessing has constructed an extraordinarily long and varied career. Currently in her 90s, she has published over 50 books, including novels, nonfiction, short stories, and poetry. Arguably Lessing's most famous work, *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is remarkable for its examination of gender roles and the fragmentation of modern subjectivity. In addition, Lessing has published two major fictional series – the realistic Children of Violence series (1952-1969) and the speculative Canopus in Argos: Archives series (1979-83). The five volumes of the Children of Violence series chronicle Lessing's alter-ego, Martha Quest from an African childhood to adulthood in England. In the last volume of the series, *The Four-Gated City* (1969), Lessing began her transition to speculative fiction. During the 1970s, Lessing used madness as a theme to blur the lines surrounding conventionally-constructed reality. From Linda Coleridge to Charles Watkins to the narrator of *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, 'mad' characters increasingly took center stage, challenging the societal norms of reality and the generic norms of realism. Lessing fully moved to speculative or 'space fiction' in 1979 with the publication of the first volume of the Canopus in Argos: Archives series (p.ix).[1] In this series, Lessing fully utilizes the freedom of science fiction to range throughout terrestrial time, as well as galactic space. Lessing has also published eleven nonfiction works of criticism and autobiography. She is still publishing frequently as well, with her most recent books coming out in 2007 and 2008.

This prodigious production and unusual artistic range create a historical oeuvre that is a treasure-trove for literary critics. Politics, gender, genre, and psychology have been central pillars of Lessing criticism. Lessing's early investigation of colonialism, her communist affiliation and subsequent repudiation, and her championing of women's rights engaged many readers of her realistic fiction. Later, her move from realism to speculative fiction challenged some of her followers. Lessing's psychological explorations and current promotion of Sufism have provided critical fodder as well. The *Doris Lessing Newsletter/Doris Lessing Studies*, for example, has been published by The Doris Lessing Society from 1977 to the present, and Lessing has her own sessions

at the annual Modern Language Association Convention. Numerous critical books have been published on Lessing's work as well. Lessing's phenomenal production, ideological and thematic interests, and generic variations are simultaneously challenging and rewarding to her readers. Furthermore, her life and career cover much of the 20th-century so that inclined readers can follow political and literary trends over time.

Lessing's consistent interest in subjectivity, politics, and genre combine to make her career a rich site for examining evolutions in racial identity and the contentious relationship between mainstream and sf literature. First, Lessing's early realistic works utilized an Anglo, colonial, primarily female point of view. Despite many novels and short stories taking place in Africa, native characters were generally minor characters and their interior subjectivity very rarely was explored. Lessing's liberal political sympathies made this discrepancy particularly remarkable. As Lessing continued to write, however, she began to explore multiple subjectivity on two levels – within a single individual and amongst a greater diversity of people. These explorations coincided with Lessing's transition to speculative fiction. As she expanded her speculative investment, the multiplicity and diversity of her subjective explorations followed suit. While these changes reflected contemporary literary and political trends, Lessing's established reader base, as a whole, did not react positively to her transition(s). Nor has Lessing received much acclaim within the sf community. Unfortunately, the volatile relationship between mainstream and speculative fiction has obscured the benefits of Lessing's generic transitions.

By the 1979 publication of the first volume of her Canopus series, *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta*, Doris Lessing's first textual transition was complete. She had moved from a personal, individual, private, and interior point of view to a detached, collective, public, and exterior point of view. Not coincidentally, this transition entailed a generic transition as well – from realistic fiction to speculative fiction. In 1988, Carey Kaplan attributed Lessing's move to speculative or "space" fiction and a more detached point of view to her increasing age and corresponding "resignation" and defeatism (p.155).[2] Certainly, Lessing's age is a contributing factor in her choice of textual topic and theme. However, Kaplan does not address Lessing's increasing use of Sufic ideas, widely labeled a 'third' stage in her writing.[3] Equally importantly, a "galactic" point of view is not simply "the perspective of old age", but a standard trope in the genre of science fiction.[4] Looking at Lessing's Canopus series within a sf context provides a more positive causation and, overall, a more positive evaluation of the role of Lessing's speculative fiction in her oeuvre. Rather than "resignation", Lessing's move from realism to speculative fiction is more accurately viewed as "anticipation (a sense present even as Lessing, nearing 87 writes, of aging)" (p.xi).[5] As Margaret Moan Rowe asserts, "even as [Lessing] looks back to the nineteenth century, [she] looks forward to the 'new man about to be born'" (ibid).[6]

Lessing's desire for a "larger scope" of writing, speculative fiction, becomes a necessary bridge between her focus on the perspective of the coloniser in her earlier fiction and her increasing focus on the colonised in her later fiction (p.ix).[7] The detached viewpoint becomes a way to bring both coloniser and colonised into a single text, in terms of characters, interests, and narratives; it can afford a less biased perspective as well. Similarly, the multiplicity of the Zones and the continual 'border crossing' between them illustrate Lessing's desire to break down boundaries between various groups of people. Furthermore, Lessing's utilization of reincarnation, combined with the sf trope of aliens, allows her to literally combine the coloniser and colonised in the same physical body. This affords a type of understanding and empathy, as the coloniser literally 'walks in the shoes of another,' and it breaks down the larger Self/Other dichotomy of Western culture. Using the greater narrative possibilities offered by speculative fiction, Lessing can break free from some of the potentially negative restraints of realism – namely the isolation of singular subjectivity or individuality, the historical reality of colonial hierarchies, and the habit of writing primarily from an author's personal background.

Nonetheless, Lessing walks an uneasy tightrope in her speculative fiction; in some ways she can be seen as straying too far from terrestrial reality and, in others, she does not stray far enough. On the one side, the 'galactic' focus, geographically and temporally, tends to elide the lived reality of minorities. Reincarnation becomes a type of negative 'body snatching' in this context; it denies the distinction of oppression and can be a threat to the maintenance of a positive, 'authentic' racial identity. On the other side of the speculative tightrope, Lessing revises the concept of colonialism, but does not completely reject it. While Lessing's 'galactic' perspective (p.155) makes it easier to critique specific historical manifestations of colonialism, like the British Empire, her simultaneous construction of the larger Canopean Empire reinforces the very colonial hierarchy she attempts to undermine on a terrestrial level (p.153).[8] Lessing's "cosmic evolution" (p.ix),[9] likewise, reveals the pettiness of much human conflict but displaces responsibility for human actions onto alien intervention and unfathomable cosmic forces.[10] Thus, Lessing effectively utilizes the cognitive estrangement of sf to illustrate the shortcomings of human history in the Canopus series.[11] However, a contradictory tension remains between her laudable goals of empathy, unity, and racial equality and the progressive evolutionism of her colonial heritage and Sufic idealism.

In her more recent speculative fiction, Lessing's greater focus on the future and return to her earlier focus on specifically-realized characters allow her largely to resolve these difficulties. Within the distant future of the *Mara and Dann* series, the dichotomy of colonialism is muted by the passage of time and the emergence of the environment as an abstract nemesis. This allows for a more politically neutral (and traditional) theme of wo/man against nature. Similarly, Lessing's earlier focus on her own personal perspective (as an Anglo,

female, British coloniser) is replaced by a female and a male native African perspective. Looking at Lessing's oeuvre as a whole, then, we can see how the distancing effect of the Canopus series allowed Lessing some freedom from the restraints of her own personal/political background, a freedom she was to achieve more fully in later speculative fiction. This process enabled Lessing to join the contemporary postcolonial movement in speculative fiction, with its greater focus on ethnic/native subject positions and their relevancy for the future. Ironically, however, Lessing's authorial position in postcolonial theory mirrors that of Anglos in *Mara and Dann*: she is now the minority figure, on the periphery.

The Power of Plurality

In her recent book, *Science Fiction and Empire*, Patricia Kerslake discusses the difficulty of breaking down the Self/Other dichotomy of Western culture. After a chapter focusing on Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos*, Kerslake summarizes her argument: "[i]t seems that no matter how desirable a human-alien *entente* might be, the human drive to secure the safety of the race at all costs is a notion not even the most liberal-minded of authors can successfully overcome" (p.42).[12] Certainly, this argument accurately describes the authors/texts on which Kerslake focuses. However, Kerslake's larger focus on empire limits the pool of authors and texts upon which this general statement is presumably based.[13] As Kerslake herself notes in the chapter focusing on Dick and Wyndham, the "cultural self-regard" of the two authors might be the cause of their qualification of an inverted British imperialism (p.38). Furthermore, Kerslake overlooks a major sf writer whose oeuvre has centered on colonialism for over 50 years; Doris Lessing has radically deconstructed this Self/Other dichotomy through textual, narrative, and subjective plurality in her science fiction. In her Canopus series, Lessing utilizes multiple physical spaces and narrators, subjective multiplicity, and re/incarnation to break down subjective boundaries and hierarchies. In this way, Lessing illustrates the potential of science fiction to offer alternatives to oppressive, divisive subjectivities and political ideologies. Thus, Lessing is an example of an author who more effectively utilizes the potential of speculative fiction to undermine colonialism.

Lessing's use of textual, narrative, and subjective plurality composes a larger literary transition to a postmodern perspective. It is in this context that Brian McHale's emphasis on the connections between postmodernism and science fiction becomes useful, suggesting that the sf genre is ideally suited to many postmodernist tenets/goals. Lessing's comments in the introduction of her first fully speculative work, *Shikasta*, lend support to this viewpoint. As she was writing *Shikasta*, Lessing "was invaded with [...] the exhilaration that comes from being set free into a larger scope, with more capacious possibilities and themes. It was clear [she] had made – or found – a new world for [her]self"

(p.ix).[14] While Lessing specifically refers to the "cosmic evolution" aspect of this "new world", the "larger scope" also more easily encompasses a multiplicity of spaces, narratives, and subjectivities (ibid). In this way, the "cosmic" "scope" of science fiction can support a multiplicity of spaces and viewpoints, while the 'speculative' aspect of speculative fiction encourages an author to question the status quo. Combining these two factors leads Lessing to include diverse, sometimes competing versions of terrestrial (and extraterrestrial) history in *Shikasta*. Similarly, the ability to construct a "new world" is a primary aspect of a "postmodernist poetics", according to McHale; the multiplicity and fragmentation of postmodernism takes the physical form of multiple worlds.[15]

The full title of *Shikasta* is an excellent place to begin a discussion of textual plurality: *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta: Personal, Psychological, Historical Documents Relating to Visit by Johor (George Sherban); Emissary (Grade 9) 87th of the Period of the Last Days*. Thus, Lessing will describe the singular unity of Shikasta (Earth) through "personal, psychological, [**and**] historical documents". In this way, Lessing combines her earlier literary emphasis on the personal and a singular subjectivity with a more collective, social, and impersonal viewpoint. Carrie Kaplan believes that the Canopus series and the Jane Somers series reflect the two sides of this dichotomy: "the political and transcendent inform the Canopus books while the now-despised personal is relegated to pseudonymous Jane Somers" (p.156). This reading over simplifies the diverse combination of narrative viewpoints in the Canopus texts alone.[16] While the impersonal, collective viewpoint of the "historical documents" is the new addition to Lessing's oeuvre, so potentially most striking, Lessing includes many explicitly personal narratives as well. In fact, Michael Nobel argues that the "equity" between such "[p]ersonal artifacts" and "official reports" signifies Lessing's larger postmodern agenda: "[s]uch equity results from the postmodern disbelief in narrative and in a blurring of the traditional discourses associated with these disciplines" (p.4).[17]

The end of the sub-title highlights the dual public/personal focus as well: *Visit by Johor (George Sherban); Emissary (Grade 9) 87th of the Period of the Last Days*. Our primary narrator has a dual identity; as a colonial "emissary," he is named Johor, but in his human incarnation, he is known as George Sherban. Looking first at Johor, this narrator overtly represents the more detached and "galactic" perspective Kaplan describes (p.155). Yet, even as Johor (i.e. colonial emissary), he sometimes struggles on a very personal level with his colonial role; he forms personal relationships with individual humans (and Giants) and feels their triumphs and failures on a personal, emotional level. Lessing emphasizes this side of Johor from the very beginning of the text. In an individual report, Johor places himself within the context of the "Colonial Service", but uses the first person and recalls his multiple visits over a long period of terrestrial history (p.3).[18] Lessing ends this first narrative perspective by having Johor assert, "I am deliberately reviving memories, recreating memories, and these

attempts will take their place in this record where they may be appropriate" (p.4). In emphasizing the importance of the personal to the public (and vice versa), Johor/Lessing champion the 'personal is political' tenant of the feminist movement. Immediately following Johor's individual report, an excerpt from the "NOTES on PLANET SHIKASTA for GUIDANCE of COLONIAL SERVANTS" clarifies Johor's personal perspective. The excerpt is from the collective, "we" perspective of the Canopean Colonial Service and provides a general contextual overview of the planet Shikasta (ibid). Within this textual framework, Johor becomes an intermediary between the detached, truly "transcendent" (p.156)[19] perspective of the "Canopean Colonial Rule" (p.2)[20] and the personal struggles of individual humans. His transformation into the human George Sherban, to be discussed shortly, will solidify this dual identity/textual focus.

Kaplan's reading of divided (dualistic) subjectivity in the Canopus series provides a useful context for Johor's subjective dualism. Beginning with Johor, Kaplan finds a primary character in each of the other four volumes of the Canopus series whom fits this dualistic subjective template (pp.150-51). Labeling this subjectivity generally an "Outsider," Kaplan focuses on the negative aspects of such a divided, peripheral position; she or he, wishes with the baser part of her or his nature for what is fleshly, personal, sensual, emotional, haphazard, irrational, spontaneous, and messy (in conventional iconography: female). Despite this yearning and in the midst of it, the Outsider rejects this sphere and fixes her or his sights on what is (often grudgingly and painfully) acknowledged as a higher ideal, from which the Outsider is equally estranged: that which is disembodied, impersonal, pure, reasonable, rational, unemotional, rigorous, stiff-upper-lipped, orderly, Right (and stereotypically male)[.] (p.151)

These dichotomous characteristics, and Lessing's general valorization of the later, are illuminated in an early scene in which Johor approaches Shikasta through Zone 6. In a personal "report" format, Johor explains his reluctance to spend time in Zone 6, due to the overwhelming "grief, mists of hungry longing, a sucking drag of all the emotions" he would experience there and the "temptations" he would undergo as a result (p.7).[21] Indeed, the denizens appeal to Johor to help them. A male named Ben and a female named Rilla are singled out of the crowd, as former acquaintances of Johor. While both characters are negatively associated with emotions, the man ultimately resumes his struggle towards transcendence, whereas the female does not (pp.8-11). She is "like a whirlpool of danger" and Johor is tempted towards her "locked violences" (p.11). Nonetheless, Johor resists, resolutely turning his back and walking away (ibid). Thus, while conflict regularly occurs within an "Outsider", Kaplan correctly identifies the overall valorization of the "impersonal", 'masculine' side of the dichotomy. Johor's male status, as well as his later male human incarnation as George Sherban, only reinforces this negative gender dichotomy and hierarchy.[22]

Linking Lessing's personal biography to the issue of a dualistic subjectivity

potentially reinforces racial hierarchies, while complicating gender dichotomies. Kaplan and others have connected the primacy of a dual subjectivity template in Lessing's oeuvre to her colonial background (p.150).[23] Within this context, Lessing's "Outsider" characters reflect Lessing's position as an Anglo expatriate of Africa, all "forced to divide themselves between two cultures and pay allegiance to both." [24] Kaplan believes that Lessing is a realistic example of this type of (colonial) "Outsider": "with the wise, omnipotent, unattainable, remote British Empire on one side, and the warm, human, emotional, impoverished, culturally inferior (in the eyes of the white settlers), ignorant, black population on the other" (p.152). In the context of race, the traditional hierarchies match that of Lessing's biography. Similarly, three of Kaplan's colonizer characteristics—a "stiff-upper-lip", "order", and "Right" (p.151)—have interesting parallels to a recent summary of Lessing's lifetime beliefs by John Leonard. According to Leonard, Lessing's general "approval list" includes "holding on, seeing it through, staying the stalwart course" (p.46).[25] Indeed, this aspect of British culture has been parodied in the recent sf film *Children of Men*; as the rest of the world "[c]ollapse[s]", the headline reads, "Only Britain Soldiers On".[26] Thus, Lessing, like Wyndham and Dick, may be valorizing an aspect of British culture due to her personal background, even as she attempts to undermine other traditional colonial concepts. As we will see, this type of tension will manifest itself in other areas of the text as well.

Unlike race, the gender hierarchies established in some areas of the text do not match Lessing's biography. The valorization of the 'masculine' perspective, especially as embodied in Johor, does not reflect Lessing's status as female. Compounding this difference is the similarity of Johor's colonial role of emissary to that of Lessing as an artistic emissary. Katherine Fishburn argues that Johor is the "novel's authorial voice" (p.77), that "the work of the Canopean agents [...] suggest[s Lessing's] own artistic intentions in writing these novels, as she too is bent on overcoming the compartmentalism that threatens to destroy us all" (p.75-76).[27] In sum, Johor would be a colonial embodiment of Lessing and a mouthpiece for many of her metaphysical beliefs. This positive association between a male character and female author deconstructs a simplistic gender hierarchy. John Leonard offers a possible explanation for this cross-gender association. Again, in his recent Lessing retrospective, he asserts that she is "harder on women than on men" (p.46).[28] Another explanation would be the traditional reciprocity or 'substitution' of various Others; the negative characteristics historically attached to women and persons of colour in Western culture are very similar.[29] As an alien, Johor represents an extraterrestrial Other, similar to Lessing's status as a female Other in traditional Western culture.

While we must acknowledge some internal tensions and potential hierarchies in Lessing's portrayal of colonial/racial and gender dichotomies, a divided subjectivity is nonetheless one step towards ending such divisive and artificial dualisms. Since these dualisms exist within a *single* person, the Self and the

Other are unified within a single subjectivity. Kaplan observes that "[t]he greatest yearning in the *Canopus* series and in earlier books is for unity to occur among the three entities, for a Lock, in the Canopean sense, to bind separateness into benign unity" (p.152). Kaplan identifies Lessing as a third "entity", in addition to the colonial and/or gender dichotomies between which she is torn. When Kaplan describes a duo as a trio, she overlooks the way in which the dichotomies are already united in the single entity of Lessing. If more than one specific dichotomy is taken into consideration, Lessing becomes a more general, single subjective entity encapsulating this type of Self/Other dichotomy as well. Lessing, for example, is both an oppressed Other as a woman and an oppressor of a racial Other as a British citizen in colonial Africa. The dichotomies (one or more) may not be reconciled or "benign", but they are united. The Other and the Self can even manifest themselves in the **same** aspect of an identity: Lessing embodies an Other as a woman in Western culture, while her personal Self would also be female. Perhaps this explains Lessing's greater receptivity to fictional Self/Other unifications, in contrast to Kerslake's portrayal of Dick and Wyndham.[30] These types of subjective tensions often underlie the types of gender tensions discussed above. Even if one side of a dualism is more highly valued (by the person him/herself or by society more broadly), the internal Other cannot be destroyed in the same manner as an external Other.

Johor fits a similar profile. Fishburn believes that Johor "manifests the oneness of life by embodying both familiar and alien qualities" (p.75).[31] In his connections to both Shikasta (earth) and Canopus (alien), he is both a terrestrial Self and extraterrestrial Other to the reader. When he becomes human in form, he is literally extraterrestrial Other on the interior/metaphysical level and terrestrial Self on the exterior/physical level. This converging of dualisms, Self and Other, into one subjectivity breaks down the artificial 'wall' supposedly definitively and universally dividing different sexes, cultures and/or races.

Furthermore, the older tradition of reading such divided positions as negative, like the 'tragic mulatto,' has given way to more positive connotations. In contrast to a lonely, detached "outsider", we can see liaisons and emissaries. Potentially serving as bridges between cultures and peoples, they offer communication and understanding. Lessing's role as an artist has functioned in this capacity – bringing together colonial Africa and Britain in real life (i.e. knowledge of Africa to a British audience) and gender in her texts. In an increasingly globalized community, there is more need for such liaisons. On a broader scale, the "galactic" scope in Shikasta can be seen as a way to bring disparate elements together, as Lessing has in her actual life. In this context, the genre of speculative or science fiction acts as a literary 'bridge,' one which can include both colonizer and colonized, on more neutral ground. For this reason, Lessing is not content to include only Johor's perspective in the text, even with its dual attributes. The Others, multiple, must be allowed to speak for themselves.

Thus, Johor's narrative duality is further divided by the inclusion of other narrators in the text. For example, Rachel Sherban offers a personal view of later terrestrial political events and of George Sherban (Johor). As an individual human, her more limited viewpoint more closely corresponds to that of a reader. Likewise, her specific viewpoint more closely corresponds with that of Lessing's early narrative focus on Anglo women. Katherine Fishburn discusses the importance of Rachel Sherban's perspective, as well as that of terrestrial Chen Liu, to the larger text. Fishburn believes that, "although [Lessing] stacks the deck in favor of" Johor's narrative perspective, she includes the other two "conflicting points of view in part two" in order to create "a reasonably open text through which she allows her readers the freedom to decide for themselves where they will stand on the issues she raises" (p.81).[32] Lessing's diversity of narration occurs on several levels. First, the traditional Anglo male perspective of sf is undermined by the inclusion of the perspectives of an Anglo female and a male ethnic Other (Chen Liu); this creates the "reasonably open" aspect Fishburn stresses. In particular, Chen Liu is a Chinese official from a futuristic Chinese empire, with control over large areas of Europe. In this way, Lessing utilizes the speculative aspect of the genre to reverse traditional Western colonialism. A traditional racial Other (from a Western Anglo perspective) becomes the privileged imperialist, while the traditional Anglo imperialist becomes the oppressed Other. Thus, the traditional ethnic Other not only speaks, but also speaks from a position of great power. In addition, while Johor's choice of human incarnation, George Sherban, is an Anglo male, in 'reality' he is an alien.[33] In this context, Lessing's valorization of Johor's perspective places the extraterrestrial Other in a positive light. Overall, the alien Other provides the primary narrative viewpoint of the text. Finally, in validating the alien view of terrestrial history, in contrast to that of Rachel Sherban, Lessing explicitly guides the reader to a critique of the "Self" most emphasized in her early works.

The division of individual subjectivity, as well as a plurality of texts and narratives, can all be accomplished via realistic fiction. Indeed, Lessing's earlier *The Golden Notebook* embodies these attributes. However, when the relatively confined, metaphysical space of a human mind becomes literal geographic space (on a galactic level no less), Lessing can enhance and accelerate the plurality.[34] Johor's singular subjectivity is not only divided into a metaphysical colonial dualism; his alien ability to literally incarnate into a human body/life takes this multiplicity to a potentially unlimited, physical level. Likewise, an alien Other is the most extreme form of Other possible. In addition, the 'world-making' ability of speculative fiction manifests into multiple terrestrial zones and multiple alien empires in the Canopus series. First, Lessing links the multiple zones to multiple individual human subjectivities, so that all humans become 'hybrids' in a positive sense. Acting as larger versions of the multiple individual narrators, the multiple alien empires offer competing historical narratives and political ideologies as well. The net effect of this pervasive multiplicity is the

destabilization of a single, integrated subjectivity and the decentralization of any single political perspective. Thus, one can see why Brian McHale offers science fiction as an ideal genre to explore postmodernism.

In *Constructing Postmodernism,* McHale identifies angels and aliens as central tropes in "postmodernist poetics" (p.202). They focus attention on the "ontological 'seams' or 'rifts' between adjacent or rival worlds which often fissure [postmodern] texts" and they act as "[a]mbassadors" between these worlds (ibid). Johor's role as an alien colonial emissary epitomizes this template. Indeed, throughout Lessing's terrestrial history, humans often believe the Canopean aliens to be divine spirits. Equally important, McHale asserts that "[a] boundary can be crossed in either direction", so that aliens "penetrat[e] our 'lower' world" and humans "penetrat[e] (or aspir[e] to penetrate) the 'higher' [...] world" (ibid). Thus, Johor and other aliens come 'down' to Shikasta and take part in terrestrial events, while humans aspire to move to higher zones.[35] More broadly, aliens motivate and/or support boundary crossings of all types and the corresponding metamorphoses of subjectivity: alien to human, humans from 'heaven' (Zone 6) to earth, intra-zonal human marriages, alien to alien, etc. Where the multiplicity of zones and worlds symbolize the boundaries between people, Lessing uses reincarnation, transcendence, and Sufic mysticism to break down these boundaries. It is for this reason that Margaret Moan Rowe labels Lessing herself "a boundary crosser" (p.xi).

Alien to human re/incarnation is most transgressive of the traditional Self/Other boundary. In his personal narration, Johor admits that he has come to Shikasta as a colonial representative on several occasions, usually taking human/'native' form (p.6).[36] This appears to be the preferred method of the Canopean empire. For example, Johor mentions his "brother" Taufiq and others who have also acted as emissaries in a similar manner (ibid). This type of colonial incarnation provides an alternative to the traditional ethnographic gaze. It "reject[s] as dishonest the subject-object, self-other, introspective-empiricistic segregations" of much "social science" (p.vii).[37] In *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction,* John Rieder specifically connects this ethnographic gaze to science fiction and colonialism. He describes the usual conflation of the colonial narrator with a "scientific observer" and labels the resulting "cognitive framework" "the 'colonial gaze'" (p.7).[38] According to Rieder, "[t]he colonial gaze distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at" (ibid). Rieder notes that some sf writers, like H.G. Wells, have reversed this traditional colonial gaze; however, he maintains that the "structure [...] remains strikingly present and effective in spite of the reversal of perspective in *The War of the Worlds*" (ibid). With incarnation, the coloniser/observer lives the physical and metaphysical experience of the colonised/observed; the two differentiated positions are collapsed. From a human point of view (i.e. the reader), this also reverses the usual projection of the Self onto an Other, with the Other literally

embodied in the (human) Self. To emphasize this non traditional imperial perspective, Lessing specifically contrasts the Canopean method of incarnation with that of their alien rivals, Sirius and Puttiora. Since Ambien II and the Sirians do not implement their imperialism via reincarnation, they maintain the traditional colonial Self/Other divide. As Lessing gradually constructs an imperial hierarchy, with Canopus on top, the Canopean incarnation method is valorized.

In this type of alien incarnation, as well as the human reincarnation discussed below, Lessing attempts the type of 'Lock' Kaplan discusses. Lessing brings together the coloniser and colonised on a physical/mental level, with a literal combination of both 'sides' of the dualism(s). A scene from *Shikasta* involving the human Rachel Sherban illustrates the differing possibilities Lessing envisions for humans and aliens. Rachel feels a strong connection to the traditional Indian women/community in which she and her family lives, and she has one Indian grandparent (p.215).[39] Yet, she is "of the West", cosmopolitan, and educated (p.238). One evening, several of her female friends clothe her in their native dress, and they pretend that she is 'one of them' (pp. 240-45). However, Rachel feels the falseness of this charade; she cries and would like to "rend her bosom with her nails" (p.245). Of her Indian friend's dress, she writes, "[i]t was as if I had put on her skin over mine" (p.244). This is as close to a unification of coloniser and colonised that is possible within the traditional physical limitations of humans. The scene is reminiscent of Lessing's earlier portrayal of an open-minded female coloniser in Africa, Martha Quest. Looking at a young black mother, Martha compares her favorably to two Anglo friends: "[t]his easy, comfortable black woman seemed extraordinarily attractive, compared with the hard gay anxiety of Stella and Alice. Martha felt her as something simple, accepting – whole. Then she understood that she was in the process of romanticizing poverty" (p.31).[40] The 'problem' for Martha, and Rachel, is the intersection of gender and sexuality with race and colonialism; as a 'modern woman,' Martha is torn between the 'natural' woman/motherhood of natives and her understanding of racism, poverty, and motherhood (and all their intersections). Within literary realism, Lessing cannot (or will not) reconcile these colonial divisions. However, Johor's alien ability to incarnate into a human, George Sherban, offers a speculative vehicle for such reconciliations. From Martha's metaphysical identification, to Rachel's cloth "skin", to Johor's human body, Lessing steadily narrows the gap between the colonizer and the colonized.

Lessing's usage of alien incarnation is supplemented by human reincarnation as well. Humans have access to a similar technique as the aliens; via reincarnation, they can physically experience many different human lives, presumably with a diversity of ethnic/racial, cultural, and political characteristics, etc. Reincarnation's ability to undermine subjective dualisms might be one factor in Lessing's move toward Sufism later in her life. It

'solves' the dualistic dilemma on a terrestrial level, as alien incarnation does on an extraterrestrial/sf level. For example, although Rachel Sherban cannot overcome her dualistic identity within her singular lifetime, we have access to her previous consciousness via Johor's narrative. She is none other than the Rilla described by Johor in his descent through Zone 6 to reach Shikasta. Human understanding of reincarnation is more limited than that of the aliens. George Sherban, for example, comes to a realization of his alien status, whereas Rachel has no comprehension of Rilla. Nonetheless, reincarnation amplifies subjective plurality to a potentially unlimited level. In reconciling the coloniser/colonised divide, reincarnation simultaneously complicates colonial responsibility and racial identity, however.

Plural Resistance and Racial Identity

Lessing's reconciliation of coloniser and colonised is not without tension. The negative portrayal of 'going native,' corporeal appropriation, and racial elision manifested in reincarnation signal a larger postcolonial/postmodern resistance in the text. First, one of the advantages of Rachel Sherban's narrative is the intimate perspective gained on her brother George and his resistance to terrestrial/colonized life. As he matures and begins to realize his alien sensibility, George sees the pain and violence of terrestrial life and mourns. Rachel records that he cries and tells her, "this is a terrible place, it is a terrible place, it is terrible" (p.213).[41] This inner turmoil is compounded by George/Johor's colonial mission. As mentioned earlier, Johor is expected to resist such emotional empathy in order to successfully complete his colonial mission. Acting as representatives of the Canopean empire, the Canopean archivists note, "[t]he long view of planetary maintenance and development does not need, nor can depend upon, the sympathies, the empathies of the near, the partial, view. Yet to find oneself on Shikasta [...] is to become affiliated with powerful emotions which have to be shed on leaving" (p.170). Some agents are not willing to 'shed' their emotions, however. Taufiq, for example, is described as "captured" while incarnate on Shikasta, and his colonial work must be done by other agents (p.6). Similarly, an agent of Shammat, Lessing's negative colonial example, is described as "a man of such compassion, such warmth of heart, such sensitivity to others' sufferings. This was the terrible Shammat!" (p.4).[42] Again, Kaplan's negative reading of Lessing's dualistic "Outsider" perspective is relevant; clearly the "impersonal", colonizer side of this coloniser/colonised dualism is valorized (p.151). Within a British colonial context, this parallels the negative connotations attached to 'going native.'[43]

Although Lessing valorizes the incarnation method of Canopean colonialism, the issues of authenticity and the integrity (inviolability) of an individual, physically and metaphysically, are also raised. Is the physical body and experience of a human (the colonized) enough to redeem a colonial role? Do good intentions outweigh an 'invasion of the body snatchers' idea? Octavia

Butler's portrayal of Doro in her Patternmaster series is a useful comparison here (1976-80).[44] While not an 'alien,' Doro has super-human abilities; he can take over the body of another person at will, occupying that body with his consciousness. Within Butler's fiction, Doro becomes the villain. Of course, Doro is 'killing' the consciousness of the human whose body he enters. Within Lessing's portrayal of incarnation, the aliens seem to be just one more consciousness 'in line' to receive a human body. This may delay the reception of a body for another human consciousness, but it does not entail the 'death' of such a consciousness. Lessing's portrayal of incarnation, alien and human, is positive and connects with Sufism.

Finally, Lessing is selective in her subjective plurality; gender remains constant in reincarnation, whereas race is not. For example, Rilla is reincarnated as Rachel, Ben as George Sherban's brother Benjamen, etc. Similar to Octavia Butler's general sexual essentialism in the Patternmaster series, Lessing's fluidity of identity seems to entail certain restrictions, regardless of the speculative freedom from a more limiting generic realism.[45] This sexual hesitation may be related to Lessing's personal background; as a woman in a patriarchal society, sex and gender become issues too important to give up. In contrast, as a privileged Anglo, perhaps race seems less important. Lessing's general de-emphasis of the importance of race to identity formation is compounded by her overall subjective goal.

Lessing does not fully commit to a postmodern plurality, and her literary techniques impede the construction of racial identity. Lessing places her plural subjectivities within the larger context of a "universal", "collective" identity (p.36).[46] This general identity obstructs the formation of specifically racialized identities. Similarly, postmodern plurality and metaphysics confuse racial singularity and corporeality. As a result, Lessing elides the racial specificity of historical colonialism. Thus, the post/modern plurality of the Canopus series is a transitional stage between Lessing's earlier realistic fiction based on the colonial perspective and her contemporaneous speculative fiction describing a postcolonial future.

Lessing does not fully promote a fluid and fragmented identity, whether human or alien; the postmodern characteristics remain grounded in an integrated, stable modernist identity. Lauren Lacey's discussion of "becoming" in the Canopus series is useful here. Placing Lessing's subjective theories in conjunction with those of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Claire Colebrook, Lacey argues that "in contrast with the radical model of becoming offered by Deleuze and Guattari, Lessing suggests that becoming is only a productive alternative when it is balanced with a more constant – yet still changeable – subjectivity" (p.21).[47] This "more constant" subjectivity is represented by Ben and Rilla for humans and Johor for the aliens. Lacey also offers a negative example in the Canopean agent Incent of *The Sentimental Agents*; like Taufiq, he loses touch with his "more constant", Canopean identity,

wholly succumbing to the emotional, 'native' rhetoric (p.21).[48] Thus, the 'lower' multiplicity must be safely contained, overseen, guided by a 'higher' unity; the 'partial' view of a native Other is dangerous without the 'big picture' offered by Canopus.

Within Lessing's realistic fiction, Martha Quest's negative view of her increasing 'fragmentation,' both physical and physic, mirrors this unity/multiplicity hierarchy. Martha dreams of a man to integrate the disparate elements of her life. While Lessing outgrows this particular unifying 'solution' in her later fiction, she does not give up the larger unification goal. As she clarifies in the preface to *The Golden Notebook*, the 'lesson' to be learned in that text is the value of "unity": "[i]n the inner Golden Notebook, things have come together, the divisions have broken down, there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation – the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity" (p.24).[49] Thus, Lessing's "boundary crossing" status has more realistic, interior subjective implications as well (p.xi).[50] While the speculative "boundary crossing" involved in the external, physical zones and incarnations promotes a positive, postmodern multiple subjectivity, the more realistic "boundary crossing" involved in the internal, psychology of an individual puts an end to multiple fragmentation and is more reminiscent of a modernist identity. With different portrayals of subjective multiplicity and post/modern identification, nonetheless, the common motivation for both types of "boundary crossing" is Lessing's larger, foundational desire for unification.

A larger version of this unity/multiplicity hierarchy takes place in *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*. Reversing the single consciousness occupying a multiplicity of bodies technique, Lessing creates a multiple consciousness without a traditional body. A singular, over-arching, meta-physical Representative is formed as multiple natives die and join one another, creating "one, but a conglomerate of individuals" (p.119).[51] In this way, the multiplicity of psyches, if not bodies, is maintained: "each with its little thoughts and feelings" (ibid). Thus, the Representative is closer to a postmodern subjectivity than the incarnation model. Yet, the Representative becomes a unity, from a multiplicity of individuals, in effect creating more of a group mind than a postmodern subjectivity. Furthermore, the creation of the Representative entails the death of the body.

Lessing's overall goal seems to be the creation of a "universal" or "collective" identity (p.36), as described by David Waterman, one which includes "all races, genders, generations, as well as animals, buildings and the stars" (p.39). Waterman emphasizes the positive side of such a universal identity, especially in the context of contemporary globalization (p.xii)[52]: "we must resist these ideologies of fracture [...] and ultimately we must adhere to a philosophy of 'us' in a truly universal sense" (p.xix). This correlates with Lessing's "SOWF – the substance-of-we-feeling," as described in *Shikasta* (p.73).[53] The general 'colour-blind' approach in the sf community corresponds with such a universal/

collective identity as well. Emphasis on the human race (singular), in contrast to aliens for example, tends to elide the specificity of human races (plural). Prominent critics like Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin have interpreted the general lack of racial specificity and development in sf as a positive sign; it implies that racism has ended in a racially utopic future (pp. 188-9).[54]

However, the context of Lessing's *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* reveals a negative side to such a collective or universal identity. First, it literally necessitates the physical death of all the native inhabitants. As Carey Kaplan writes, "the Canopean fictions seem to hinge on complicated tortures of colonized peoples for obscure imperialist ends [...A]ll the inhabitants of Planet 8 undergo ghastly rigors during their interminable Ice Age as a prelude to extinction" (p.154). Betsy Draine also highlights the negativity in the *Representative*; in contrast to Lessing's earlier *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, "*The Making* is (nearly) all dark, cold, and pessimism" (p.14).[55] More specifically, Draine notes the tension between the extensive native suffering throughout the text and Lessing's attempt at placing it in a positive evolutionary, colonial, and subjective context: "[m]oreover, one begins to feel bullied by the heavy insistence that this is the best of all possible worlds, in spite of murder and suffering, in spite of the annihilation of whole races and worlds" (ibid).

In addition, the mind/psyche over body hierarchy Lessing establishes takes part in a larger hierarchical dichotomy in Western culture. Feminist critics have noted that the elevation of the mind over the body in traditional Western culture is tied to the privileging of men and denigration of women. Likewise, people of colour have historically been placed in connection to the body and relegated to an inferior position. Katherine Fishburn's *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African American Narrative* illustrates the difficulties African Americans had in accepting the prevailing mind over body hierarchical dichotomy.[56] In the context of slavery and physical oppression (including whipping, lynching, rape, travel limitations, etc.), it was virtually impossible for African Americans to deny the importance of the physical body. Conversely, the denigration and elision of the body in Western discourse obscured/s the suffering and oppression of many native groups. Kaplan asserts that Lessing elides the suffering of "colonized people" not only in the *Representative*, but the entire Canopean series (p.154).

Diana Fuss highlights this historical legacy as a rationale for keeping race as a term in contemporary discourse; she does not want "the rich and colour-full history of 'race' in Afro-American culture" to be "e-race[d]" (p.93).[57] Fuss' "history", here, includes not only the negatives of slavery and oppression, but a positive interpretation of this history and the part African Americans played in it. Thus, we can see that a positive interpretation of race and racial identity is also obscured by an emphasis on a universal and/or collective identity. Fuss does not wish to "de-particularize the black subject" (p.92). Other prominent critics, like Houston A. Baker, Jr., join Fuss in emphasizing the importance of a

racial identity. In "Caliban's Triple Play", Baker specifically critiques postmodern theories of subjectivity and scientific theories undermining the physical basis of race, as they challenge a racialized, particularly corporeal identity.[58] Lessing's "universal definition of identity"[59] and Sufic reincarnation could be unappealing for similar reasons. More broadly, the (theoretically) 'colour-blind' strategy of much sf makes difficult the construction of a specific, corporeal racial identity, particularly for people of colour.

This elision of racial specificity, in both history and subjectivity, can be seen in Lessing's *Shikasta*. First, Lessing's alien and human reincarnation occurs in the past, present, and future. Thus, the destabilization of racial identity impacts the entire history of human evolution, not just a utopic future. An elision of racial specificity becomes problematic when referring to actual human history, even as viewed through the cognitive estrangement of speculative fiction.[60] Second, the relative disjuncture of the mind/ spirit from the body that occurs during reincarnation creates a (relative) psychic continuity in contrast to a multiplicity of bodies and physical environments. This psychic unity devalues the specificity of a body and a cultural context. Anyone is potentially everyone. Within this context, any type of racial identification becomes not only divisive but inaccurate.[61] Furthermore, it tends to alleviate individual and collective moral responsibility. For example, when the coloniser becomes the colonised, the colonised potentially becomes the coloniser. While the first transformation may by a form of justice which could build empathy for the oppressed, the second transformation conflates the reality of oppression and victimization with a false position of power and guilt. Certainly, there is little total innocence and total villainy in the world, but turning the legitimately oppressed into the oppressors seems hardly fair. At minimum, historical accuracy should necessitate a detailed investigation of the different facets of oppression relevant to a given individual and/or group.[62]

Late in the text, Lessing attempts such an analysis with several groups. The Arabs, for example, are placed in the context of the oppressed by Western forces (p.332), but also in the context of the oppressor as they "largely" "conducted" the African slave trade (p.338).[63] Similarly, after a long list of crimes against Indians by the colonial British (p.321), Lessing has George Sherban acknowledge the oppression of the Untouchables within Indian society, asserting that "'this unspeakably cruel treatment is matched for baseness by nothing the white races have ever done'" (p.337). This example, in particular, illustrates the negative consequences of such comparisons of oppression. First, the British used such arguments to legitimize and rationalize their rule of India; their beneficent rule would put an end to such 'savage' customs.[64] Second, the accuracy of such evaluations is questionable. Last, does it matter which action is worse? Shouldn't both be addressed?

Finally, placing such analysis in a speculative future tends to absolve the Anglo colonisers and imperialists from responsibility. The negative consequences

of Western colonialism/imperialism seem to be the distant past, something that cannot be remedied.[65] Furthermore, Lessing's speculative future replaces the Western colonisers with the Chinese, and replaces the historically oppressed people of colour with Europeans.[66] As the representative of Anglo Britain, John Brent-Oxford, notes, "'[w]e all know that at this time, now, there are nations, nonwhite nations, which dominate and subjugate by force other nations, some equally nonwhite, but other nations that are white'" (p.338).[67] Again, this may be a form of poetic justice for the Anglos, but it also tends to make them the sympathetic party in the context of the comparisons of oppression above. Lessing's final analysis of the historical legacy of the "white 'race'" reinforces this blurring of the oppressor/oppressed line (p.348). The Canopean agents write that "seeing themselves entirely as villains, the despoilers of the globe [...] was as narrow and self-centered as their previous view – when they saw themselves as God-given benefactors of the rest of Shikasta" (ibid). This type of blurring is historically accurate. Yet, with the largest portion of the world's wealth and (political and military) power still in the hands of 'developed' countries (Europe and the United States, in particular), one cannot help but note how such blurring undermines responsibility for contemporary inequities. Theresa Crater argues that Lessing promotes a focus on the present in *Mara and Dann*; such a 'lesson' would be better applied here, rather than in an imagined future where Anglos are no longer a viable force (p.17).[68]

Lessing's speculative "Trial" of the white races embodies these moral tensions (p.304).[69] During the mock trail of the white race by a collection of oppressed ethnic and racial Others, Lessing more than acknowledges the evils of Western (Anglo) imperialism and slavery (pp.304-340). Yet, as mentioned above, she also questions the racial divisions between victim and victimizer. Trials should include both a prosecution and a defense, and the historical context is complex. Thus, the central issue is the ultimate verdict. If Lessing acquits the whites, it makes the ethic/racial Others appear morally better than their former oppressors but she appears to absolve herself of responsibility for her own real-life connections to colonial oppression. If she doesn't acquit the whites, she takes a hard line on colonial oppression (and, by extension, herself), but suggests that historically oppressed ethnic/racial groups would practice a kind of 'eye-for-eye' justice that potentially puts them in a position of oppressor also. The futuristic Chinese government plays this role in the text, and Chen Liu reports, "[t]he decimation, if not destruction, of the peoples of Pan-Europe now being official policy on the part of the Emergent Nations" (p.303). In the Trial itself, however, Lessing avoids rendering a verdict, having the participants disperse instead. This textual ambiguity could represent Lessing's internal conflict regarding British imperialism and her own part in it. It could also represent a suggested course of action in a postcolonial era: a verbal airing of grievances by postcolonial peoples without reparations on the part of (former) colonial powers.

Lessing's choice of Chief Prosecutor in the Trial – George Sherban – further undermines a clear distinction between oppressor and oppressed and substitutes a problematic 'colour-blind' identity instead. As mentioned previously, George Sherban simultaneously embodies alien Otherness and gender essentialism. This radical/conservative tension is mirrored in his ethnicity. While Lessing interjects some racial diversity into the Sherban family, George largely mirrors the Anglo Western portrayal of his sister Rachel. The reader becomes most conscious of George's racial identity during the Trial, when he represents the oppressed people of colour. George problematizes his racial background by mentioning his Jewish grandfather and his "'mix'" of Irish and Scotch, "'both of them subject races'" (p.337).[70] Yet, there is acknowledgment and discussion of his "*visually*, white-skin" (p.311): "[f]rom the start there were jokes [...] that the Chief Prosecutor was in fact white" (p.308). There seems to be no narrative necessity for George's position as prosecutor, nor is any reasoning offered within the text. Rather, his position seems to be symbolic of the "universal definition of identity" Lessing valorizes (p.36).[71] Thus, the narrative discussion of George's ancestry and appearance illustrates a contemporary emphasis on race, but Lessing's larger purpose is to undermine such an emphasis.

Placing George as the highest representative of the collective "Dark-skinned Races", however, compromises Lessing's intentions (p.304).[72] Rather than de-emphasize race, it highlights race and its visual and historical matrix. First, George and his immediate family do not experience colonial oppression; in fact, in most of their social situations, they are relatively privileged. The lack of biological and experiential basis for George's representative position is clarified by his brother's position on the opposite side of the debate, the defense (p.305). How, then, is George representative of the group he heads? How, then, are the groups even divided? While Lessing's intention might be to highlight the arbitrary, non-racial nature of such divisions, again, historically racial divisions have been made, with very powerful implications. As a result, George's placement seems unrealistic and ridiculously arbitrary at best. At worst, Lessing participates in a racist historical and literary hierarchy.

In addition to the racial elision and conflation already mentioned, such racial 'substitutions' of a character take part in a long legacy of historical and fictional racial hierarchies. Throughout much of its history, for example, the sf genre has been dominated by an Anglo male hero/protagonist.[73] When people of colour were written about, it usually was as 'side-kicks' to the prominent Anglo male hero.[74] Equally disturbing, even when people of colour gain considerable power in the texts, the authors often have them voluntarily place a white male in their highest position of authority. For example, Edgar Rice Burroughs created a black Martian race which is so impressed by the Anglo male hero that they ask him to rule them.[75] This stems from the larger colonial discourse of benevolent white rule, the 'white man's burden,' and paternalism.[76] While Lessing's particular motivation in *Shikasta* may be the creation of a universal identity in which

colour is unimportant, the historical and narrative legacy places these intentions within the context of a long-standing negative racial hierarchy. Lessing's later focus on coloured protagonists (Mara and Dann) is an alternative to continuing this racial hierarchy and a welcome change from the awkward position of an "almost entirely white man" being "enthusiastically accepted by blacks as a representative" (p.307).[77] In a future dominated by people of colour, a coloured protagonist is more logical and accurate as well.

Evolutionary Hierarchies

Lessing's participation in a residual subjective racial hierarchy is compounded by the evolutionary focus in the Canopus series. The extensive subjective plurality is vertically structured, so that reincarnation intersects with evolution – both physical and metaphysical. Lessing's Sufic beliefs meld with Darwinian evolution. Like Lessing's multiple/unity hierarchy discussed earlier, this vertical evolutionary structuring has negative racial and colonial implications. The colonial aliens are placed in positions of highest subjective authority, in contrast to the lower subjective positions of various natives. As Carey Kaplan aptly notes, "Imperialism is the law of the galaxy. The inferiority of subject peoples is assumed and explained in Darwinian terms of greater and lesser evolutionary sophistication" (p.154). Like Charles Darwin himself, Lessing is torn between a more neutral and egalitarian approach and the privilege of their personal colonial background; random, natural evolution becomes intertwined with progressive, hierarchical colonialism.[78]

According to Lessing, "Sufism believes itself to be the substance of that current which can develop man to a higher stage in his evolution" (p.133).[79] Robert Shelton investigates Lessing's ties to Sufism, stressing the importance of evolution (pp. 4-6).[80] Within this context, Johor is a "Sufi Master" (p.6) preaching "the evolution of consciousness" (p.5) and the ties between humans and "the Heavens" (p.6).[81] "[T]he Sufi evolutionary mandate", then, involves both the mind and the body (p.5). Lessing's portrayal of the Zones in the Canopus series embodies this dual evolutionary focus. Appropriately numbered from 1 to 6, they are geographic representations of subjective stages. Thus, the physical body and/or consciousness of a person can pass from one physical zone to another and back again, and the geographical zone represents a particular stage of cultural and subjective development. While the exact relationship between the zones is vague, there does seem to be a positive progression intended. For example, Johor describes "Zones One to Five" as "lively and for the most part agreeable places, since their inhabitants are those who have worked their way out of and well past the Shikastan drag and pull, and are out of the reach of the miasmas of Zone Six" (p.7).[82] Likewise, in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, Queen Al•Ith is forced to go to Zone Four, but after her return to her native Zone Three, she eventually works her way up to Zone Two. Lessing promotes boundary crossings in both directions between zones.

However, traveling to a physically lower zone places that individual more in the role of a guide and model, like Al·Ith in Zone Four and Ben Ata in Zone Five. The personal development of an individual may be assisted by such contact, but the ultimate goal seems to be moving up a subjective/geographic level, rather than down.

Johor's description as a "Sufi Master", mentoring less-evolved humans, accurately signifies his representative role in the text. He, and his fellow Canopeans, are evolutionarily superior to humans, as are many other alien groups. The aliens first illustrate their advancement over humans in the ease of their travel throughout the zones. Al·Ith's travels to the two zones are meta/physically traumatic events, and travel to two different zones is the greatest number by a human described in the text. In contrast, Johor has knowledge of all the levels, travels widely and frequently, and does not seem to be significantly impacted meta/physically. In addition, the Canopeans experience practically unlimited life spans, with or without reincarnation; their 'integrated' Canopean subjectivities afford them knowledge of all their previous reincarnated lives as well. In terms of technology, all three competing alien civilizations can travel widely throughout the galaxy. As a result, Johor has access to a potentially unlimited number of 'native' subjectivities, in contrast to the relatively limited human-human reincarnation. Thus, we see his metaphysical and physical superiority; in particular, the physical entails both geographic and corporeal advancement.

Other alien groups act as an intermediary bridge between the less developed humans and the most advanced alien groups, like the Canopeans. The race of giants that the Canopeans transplant to Rohanda/Shikasta (Earth), for example, are physically and metaphysically more advanced than the 'native' humans; the giants are to fulfill the role of mentors. The Canopeans have a consciously-coordinated evolutionary plan for Rohanda/Shikasta. Likewise, the Sirians use Rohanda as a type of laboratory in which to perform various scientific experiments involving sentient beings. Basically, Lessing takes the existing scientific theory of evolution and joins it to alien intervention (similar to her historical technique). In this way, Lessing's evolution loses Darwin's emphasis on random mutation and environmental suitability, moving closer to the conscious manipulation and (positive) progress of Social Darwinism and eugenics. The basic horizontal and relatively egalitarian nature of early Darwinian evolutionary theory becomes vertical and hierarchical.

However, even the most advanced Canopeans cannot fully control the natural world. Their well-laid plans for Rohanda are counteracted by cosmic events; the substance-of-we-feeling available to the planet becomes restricted by unforeseen planetary realignments. The Edenic Rohanda transforms into its alter-image of Shikasta, and the inhabitants of Rohanda undergo a physical and mental deterioration or 'fall.' In this way, we can see the random and natural resurfacing as important elements of evolutionary theory. Likewise,

the native population of Planet 8 cannot physically evolve quickly enough to survive the environmental changes taking place. The Representative narrates the population's increasingly critical attitude regarding reproduction and ties this to Spencerian (positive) evolutionary theory: "If we are not channels for the future, and if this future is not to be better than we are, better than the present, then what are we?" (p.39).[83]

As a whole, Lessing's fictional evolution contains elements of both Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionary theory. In *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, the natives of Planet 8 eventually give up their corporeal existence in order to transform metaphysically into the multiple Representative of the ending. Even at her darkest, Lessing will not relinquish a connection to larger evolutionary progress. Like the colonial portrayal in the series, evolution changes depending on the viewpoint. On the local/specific and 'realistic' (i.e. coordinating with actual human history) level, it is devastating to the natives. Lessing accurately portrays the negative effects of natural events, as well as human ideology and actions. However, Lessing simultaneously creates a galactic/abstract and speculative level in which evolution is portrayed positively. She seems torn between a grim and disheartening reality and a need to salvage meaning, order, and (positive) progress. Jane Mooney asserts that, in contrast to the "individual"-orchestrated order of Lessing's earlier texts, "[o]rder is now created by the absolute Canopean historical perspective, made relative by that which it seeks to order, the complexity of the Shikastan experience" (p.13).[84] Mooney is right to place this need for "Order" in the context of "nineteenth-century humanist realism" (ibid). However, she believes that "[i]t is by incarnation that the narrative form of *Shikasta* is justified; the Canopean overview is lost when Canopus incarnates itself on Shikasta" (p.14). Mooney overlooks here the larger hierarchy favoring the Canopeans. The humanist, colonial, 'order' of the Canopeans is undermined, surely, but not negated. When Mooney asserts that "[t]he cosmology of the novel insists on human responsibility for actions," she overlooks this hierarchy, as well as Lessing's speculative creation of SOWF and evolutionary portrayal (p.13).

Lessing's portrayal of evolution and natural events also impacts the moral responsibility of humans. In utilizing speculation, Lessing takes a metaphysical phenomenon, like caring and responsibility for people, and transforms it into a literal, physical manifestation, SOWF (substance-of-we-feeling). This physical manifestation is then tied to evolution and cosmic change. As previously mentioned, when the SOWF is diminished by planetary changes beyond the control of humans or aliens, Rohanda deteriorates. The humans and aliens cannot stop the change, and there is little they can do to even slow it down. In this context, responsibility for individual and collective thoughts and actions becomes lost. It is not humans who choose to act violently, for example; there is just not enough SWOF to go around. As John Leonard aptly summarizes, "[i]f 'I' am not to blame for the failures of character of the individual and the culture

and the species in this time and this place, and the family is not to blame, and neither is history, then nobody needs to feel guilty" (p.35).[85]

As a result, the colonial oppression, violence, and destruction portrayed negatively on the terrestrial level of the text become naturalized and inevitable. This is similar to Charles Darwin's approach in *The Descent of Man*. While Darwin mentions the imperialist intervention of the British (warfare, spreading of disease) in native areas like Tasmania, he places such specific actions in the larger naturalistic context of evolution.[86] In doing so, the British **decision** to act on imperialist, capitalistic ideology is elided. The 'extinction' of the Tasmanians is simply natural, inevitable evolution at work. In describing the historical tradition of a 'fall' from perfection, Lessing's choice of speculative techniques backfires. The speculative intervention of aliens and physical manifestation of empathy (SOWF) combine with the Sufic and naturalistic evolutionary theme to take human choice out of the equation. The temptation of Eve and Adam is transformed into deterministic, fatalistic destiny. In this case, the move from religious allegory to scientific theory (and the Sufic combination of the two), from the metaphysical to the physical, has the negative effect of undermining moral responsibility and human agency. This textual conflict may be related to Lessing's colonial background, similar to that of Darwin; as suggested earlier, she too may embody conflicting attitudes towards colonialism. Lessing's relatively new utilization of speculative techniques could also be a factor; her imaginative leaps had unforeseen consequences. Other critics attribute the lack of moral responsibility in the Canopean series to "despair"[87] and "ageist" "resignation".[88] More than likely, each of these factors plays a role in Lessing's transition from individual moral responsibility to galactic, naturalistic destiny.[89]

Placing Lessing's speculative fiction within the larger context of the sf genre, highlights the factor of personal colonial connections. Lessing takes part in a larger colonial "paradox" at the heart of science fiction: a continued, relatively positive portrayal of colonialism/imperialism which contradicts contemporary anti-colonial ideology (p.28).[90] In *Science Fiction and Empire*, Patricia Kerslake argues that "[t]he ongoing SF fascination with empire and imperialism more accurately reflects the perception that humanity has not resolved its historical nationalistic guilts and responsibilities" (p.29). Lessing's trial of Anglo colonialism in *Shikasta*, for example, reflects this guilt. According to Kerslake, "SF narratives may be viewed as the 'new traditional' form of anti-establishment dialogue that simultaneously points out cultural and political errors while positing a more liberal neo-imperialism" (ibid). This contradictory context fits Lessing's overall colonial portrayal in the Canopus series, if not her specific subjective Self/Other explorations. We must acknowledge Lessing's similarity with a larger, retrogressive imperialist trend in sf. Her similarity in personal background with these Anglo Western writers should be acknowledged as well; the later surely must be one causal factor in the former. Roger Luckhurst's analysis of specifically British sf supports this. In his dual approach to the 1970's, Luckhurst highlights

both the "'post-imperial melancholy'" of the British New Wave and the more positive reformulations of feminist British writers (p.172).[91] While Luckhurst does not specifically utilize Lessing as a bridge between the two segments, he does acknowledge the influence of the more politically reactionary British New Wave on the British feminist writers; colonialism and race could be added to the narrative influence Luckhurst mentions (p.183).

More broadly, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. argues "that sf is a genre of empire," (p.241) that "the cognitive attraction of sf is closely linked to the imaginary world-model of Empire" (p.242).[92] Within this context, the creative potential of science fiction is specifically grounded in imperialist ideology. Nonetheless, he does not believe "sf artists seek to serve the empire" (p.241). Thus, it is not simply Lessing personally, nor "nationalistic guilts",[93] but also the larger technoscientific characteristics of contemporary global culture which promote imperialism. Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. believes that acknowledging the connections(s) between sf and empire "may, by showing us the extent to which we imagine the world in imperial terms, begin to challenge us also to see the world differently" (p.243). This, not personal critiques, should be the goal of post/colonial studies. Lessing begins the necessary enterprise of "seeing the world differently" in her deconstructions of the traditional Western Self/Other dichotomy. In the Canopus series, however, she simultaneously remains invested in (galactic) colonialism. Ironically, the galactic distance/detachment afforded by science fiction both allows Lessing to distance herself from her personal subject position, and its attendant historical colonialism, and reclaim colonialism through larger galactic and evolutionary hierarchies. As Lessing continues her exploration of the sf genre, however, she finds alternate models of speculative fiction which amplify her ability to "see the world differently". Lessing's earlier speculative excursions, in the last installment of the Children of Violence series and the Canopus series, were necessary steps in order for her to reach the fully postcolonial ideology of the subsequent *Mara and Dann* series. Like the Trial itself, *Shikasta* is a formal, collective judgment of the past so that the participants are free to move on to the future.

A Postcolonial Future

Due to the physical and subjective distance afforded by the galactic aliens of *Shikasta*, Lessing could return to terrestrial history in the *Mara and Dann* series from a subjective viewpoint biographically opposed to her own. Jane Mooney attests, "it is the imagination which breaks the confines of the individual life" (p.12). While Elizabeth Maslen applies this to Lessing's readers, it equally applies to Lessing herself:

> By moving into space fiction in her later works, and by maintaining extraterrestrial points of views, Lessing is deliberately risking her reputation in less "respectable" areas of fiction to confront her readers

with the potential for defining their own dilemmas less narcissistically than [...] works of traditional "realism" all too often encourage them to do. (p.8)[94]

Untethered from her own biographical perspective, Lessing creates a postcolonial future in which Western imperialism and Anglo identity are archaic, superseded by native African protagonists. Lessing's latest speculative 'transition' places her works in the context of the recently emerging sub-genre of postcolonial speculative fiction. She bridges the Anglo-envisioned postcolonialism described by Kerslake at the end of her book and the postcolonial future envisioned by people of colour in the recent anthology *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*.

Lessing's early works largely focused on an Anglo, female, colonial British perspective very similar demographically to her own. The Children of Violence series, with its protagonist Martha Quest, is the prime example of this. Even in her more diverse short stories, focused on Africa, a native African perspective is largely absent. *African Stories* contains 32 short stories, only two of which include native African perspectives, "The Pig" and "Hunger."[95] In "The Pig," Lessing creates a dual focus on a male white settler and his native male worker (pp. 32-38). "Hunger" is an extended look at the move of a young native man from a rural to an urban life and the process of politicization he undergoes as a result (pp. 404-519). While numerically a small percentage of the overall stories, "Hunger" takes up approximately one/fifth of the overall volume of the text, due to its extended length; it is longer than any other story in the anthology as well. Lessing, however, calls it a "failure" in the preface: "I tried, but it failed. It wasn't true. Sometimes one writes things that don't come off [...]" (p.7). Considering Dickens was a literary model for the story, perhaps its "failure" is not surprising; Lessing was attempting to write "a story of simple good and bad, with clear-cut choices, set in Africa" (ibid). I doubt Lessing would have tried to write Martha Quest's story so dualistically. Complexity, nuances, and depth were lacking even in those stories where Lessing tried to focus on the native African perspective; it was precisely this complexity and depth of characterization which made her Anglo characters famous.

In *Mara and Dann* (1999), Lessing inverts the traditional Western narrative, including most of her own oeuvre, through her critique, marginalization, and general elision of Anglos. In the near future of terrestrial history, an ice age ends the human habitation of Europe/Yerrup and Africa/Ifrik experiences a massive drought. On a placard, the main character reads: "[t]here are many historians who believe that these ancients richly deserved the punishment of the Ice" (p.381).[96] Mara and Dann, the main characters, are native Africans of Mahondi descent. During the vast majority of Mara's travels across Ifrik, she encounters no specifically-identified Anglo characters. A little over half way through the book, however, she encounters a man named Chombi; Mara "found

him frightening. He was tall, thin and his skin was of an ugly white colour she had never seen before. His hair was like Mahondi hair, but there was this unhealthy white skin – repulsive" (p.220). Chombi turns out to be as unsavory in character as he is in appearance; however, he plays a very minor role in the text. Anglos are primarily represented by one woman, Leta, whose fairness (of skin and hair) has made her an exotic freak: "Mara had never seen anything like her, and was repulsed" (p.318). Unlike Chombi, Leta is a sympathetic secondary character, but she is marginalized and oppressed within the text because she is an Anglo or "Alb" prostitute. Furthermore, she isn't introduced until late in the text. Two small Anglo colonies are revealed at the end of the text as well. Located on the northern tip of Ifrik, these colonies are obsessed with Yerrup and dream of their eventual return from 'exile.' As a result, they are characterized as "'small-minded people'" (p.387) and "'[p]oor fools'" (p.388). In a 400-page book, with literally hundreds of characters, these few examples of Anglo characters play a very small role.

Lessing's rejection of Anglos is joined by a rejection of Western geography, history, and knowledge. First, all of Europe is literally under ice; a few ruins remain, pushed into the Mediterranean Sea by the ice flow. Lessing utilizes the time gap to largely negate the importance of historical Western imperialism as well. Western history is reduced to some mysterious relics, a distant myth, a puzzle occasionally contemplated by a few curious human survivors. The marginal, dilapidated Centre, and its two old, ineffectual caretakers, represent the antiquated nature of all Western knowledge. Located at the tip of Northern Africa, the Centre is a museum of the now defunct Western civilization. While the main characters, Mara and Dann, are interested in the Centre's displays, Lessing pointedly emphasizes how much of the technology can no longer be utilized due to the changed context. What little that has been salvaged from the Centre and integrated into contemporaneous societies is largely weaponry, which supports widespread warfare, death, and destruction. In this way, Lessing links Western knowledge to technological warfare; as Mara notes during her tour of the Centre, "at the end of the story in every building was war, and the ways of war became crueler and more terrible" (p.381).[97] Again, Western civilization seems to have deserved its destruction. The West, overall, has become an unfortunate footnote to the present history of Africa/Ifrik.

Lessing's emphasis on natural events, like ice ages and droughts, compounds the irrelevance of Anglos and Western colonialism. They have largely become extinct and nature has become a more important 'enemy' of human survival. Through a futuristic time leap, Lessing ironically returns humans to a 'man' against nature theme more common before the massive technological development of the twentieth century. Ruins from past civilizations, for example, are sometimes used as defenses against predators, like large lizards. With basic human survival at stake, global imperialism is not possible and smaller-scale, nationalistic empires are undermined.

Lessing utilizes two common speculative techniques to build a distance, a detachment from Anglo identity and Western imperialism. In the Canopus series, she utilizes the estrangement technique of galactic space and, to a lesser extent, historical time. In the Mara and Dann series, she utilizes futuristic time. This cognitive estrangement functions on the level of the reader as well as the author. According to Kerslake, "to remain objective in relation to all social development [...] is an impossible task" (p.188). Agreeing with Lessing's privileging of "galactic scope" in the Canopus series, Kerslake argues that "[w]e are too close to the picture and can see only details, when what we really need to examine are the more general design and frame of the image" (ibid). 'Space fiction' affords distance and, thus, greater objectivity in scrutinizing Anglo identity and Western imperialism. This can be seen in Lessing's general turn from personal to public, from interior to exterior, or more precisely, the combination of the two perspectives. The more detached viewpoint of the sf grants a different perspective on the personal. It is the "inverse telescope" which enlarges the personal so that the 'bigger picture' can be seen (ibid). For Lessing, specifically, it becomes a tool with which to distance herself from an Anglo British, colonial perspective. Kerslake believes that "[f]or those [sf] texts that engage and experiment with internalized aspects of human relationships, with past and future anxieties, there is a freedom of expression unparalleled by any other mode of writing" (p.62).This is the freedom Lessing experienced as she began utilizing the genre, and which she described in the preface to *Shikasta*. One of the "more capacious possibilities" she gained was the native focus in the later Mara and Dann series (p.ix).[98]

In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing creates complex, believable African characters. Lessing focuses on Mara and Dann, two native Africans of Mahondi descent; they are tall, thin, brown-skinned people with straight black hair. Mara and Dann represent the People, the former African ruling elite. Mara, in particular, is the center of the narrative and the plot revolves around her thoughts and travels. As they travel up the African continent, south to north, Mara and Dann meet many native African groups, of varying visual tones (hair, eyes, skin). In this way, the 'natives' become the normative protagonists, as well as the vast majority of the minor characters. In addition, Lessing returns to a focus on the personal, an interior point of view, even as she creates a speculative physical and political environment which shapes the characters. This combination of speculation and personal focus undermines Carey Kaplan's theory of a division in Lessing's work between the "political and transcendent" in the Canopus series and "the now-despised personal [...] relegated to pseudonymous Jane Somers" (p.156).[99] In fact, by the 2005 publication of *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog*, Lessing can be accused of over-emphasis on characterization, with little attempt at a cohesive plot. As Virginia Tiger notes, the title alone, with its list of protagonists, is longer than any other title in Lessing's current oeuvre (p.23).[100]

Similar to the distance and detachment from Anglo identity, however, Lessing ultimately insists that her native African characters deny their specific ethnic identity as Mahondi royalty. As Theresa Crater notes, "[i]nstead of ruling Africa, Mara and Dann decide on a communal farm, a life sitting around the large kitchen table" (p.19). Lessing emphasizes a denial of past subjective alliances by having Dann ask on the last page of the text, "Could we just stop talking about the past?" (p.407).[101] Crater argues that Lessing's intended lesson in *Mara and Dann* is to focus on the present (p.17). However, in order to do so, Lessing must transport her native characters to an imagined future. Again, in a future no longer dominated by Anglos and the legacy of Western imperialism, such sentiments are more plausible than the actual 'present' of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Furthermore, those whose historical past has been denied and distorted by colonial discourse are less likely to find appealing such rejections of the past. Similar to Diana Fuss and her position on race, for example, Linda Rice Johnson believes that the past of African Americans is of greater interest to them precisely because of its erasure and negation via the slave trade and American slavery.[102] Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) is an early example of a focus on American slavery in speculative fiction. Charles Saunders's Imaro series, published in the early 1980s, represents an interest in historical Africa; Saunders imaginatively reconstructs historical Africa and its civilizations for the set of his (black) hero's adventures. More recent examples include Stephen Barnes' *Blood Brothers* (1996) and *Lion's Blood* (2002), the former incorporating historical American slavery and the later an alternate slave system in the South. Given the historically small number of African American speculative writers, these examples reveal a significant trend.

On the other hand, in *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia* (2001), Ralph Pordzik provides a more positive, postcolonial context for Lessing's qualified ethnic portrayal. Pordzik begins the text by asserting that "[o]ne of the most enduring projects in the study of postcolonial literatures in recent years has been the move beyond earlier, at times obsessive, preoccupations with national identity and national culture" (p.1).[103] Within this context, Lessing becomes part of an emerging trend in postcolonial literature, one which incorporates a more cosmopolitan, hybrid identity and a "'cross-cultural poetics'" (p.18).[104] Pordzik attributes this hybridization to the continued legacy of colonial hegemony (including its manifestations in global capitalism and popular culture) (p.21), as well as the Western education, "relative privilege", and cosmopolitan experiences of many postcolonial writers (p.19). In addition, Pordzik broadly defines post/colonialism so that countries like Canada, Australia, Ireland, and Scotland play a prominent in the postcolonial movement (pp. 21-3). As a result, many of his postcolonial texts are by Anglo authors. While Pordzik does not directly address Lessing, his open, amorphous definition of post/colonialism correlates with Lessing's complex personal background as a female, dissenting,

Anglo colonist on the periphery of the Empire, as well as her portrayal of the complex interconnections between coloniser and colonised.

Lessing fits the profile of Pordzik's postcolonial writer as well. On one side of the colonised/coloniser dichotomy, she rejects colonialism and the "'imperial centre'" (p.15)[105] in favor of the periphery, the "local and the particular" (p.20).[106] Lessing replaces Martha Quest and London with very specific and fully developed African characterization and setting. Mara stops in many different communities throughout her travels, and readers become acquainted with many diverse environs, people, and traditions. Within Africa, Lessing also creates a literal "Centre" to which her protagonists travel from one of the most distant spots on the continent (their home on the periphery), only to reject their place at the "Centre" for a small farm. Thus, she re-enacts the historical journey of many postcolonial peoples from periphery to center, native country to imperial city. In this case, however, the imperial Centre is ultimately critiqued and an alternative location is chosen for the "utopian locus" (p.16) – a specifically "local" and "particular" site (p.20).[107] Mara and Dann's rejection of the Centre highlights the imperial ambitions of the African Mahondi, whereas the farm represents personal equality.

Conversely, Lessing also rejects simplistic Nationalism, native identity, and functional literature (p.23).[108] Lessing doesn't replace Western imperialism with an African dynasty. For example, Mara's ethnocentric viewpoint as a privileged Mahondi is challenged as she travels to new locations. In each new social context, she realizes that hierarchies change, the historically privileged and the Other can be reversed, and the past is constructed differently. As Mahondi, for example, Mara and Dann begin life in Rustam as royalty, members of the People, and they look down upon the lowly Rock People. They learn how quickly their Mahondi status can change from privilege to oppression, however, as they become the ostracized Others in the Rock People village and later slaves in Chelops. In order to survive, Mara and her brother are stripped of their identity (represented by their familial names), family, and culture. This works so well that ultimately Mara cannot even remember her 'real' name and, when it is revealed to her at the end of the text, she rejects this culturally-grounded name for her new name: "She did not want Shahana, nor Princess. They were for someone else. She was Mara. That was her name" (p.370).[109] Through her experiences, Mara has become a different person. She chooses to embrace the attributes and experiences of 'Mara,' as well as the open-ended future she can create under such an identity. She and Dann also choose to allow Leta, the Alb, to be an intimate part of this new future. Whereas Mara and Dann are not welcome in the Alb colonies, Leta is not welcome at the Centre; the farm is constructed as a more inclusive, 'hybrid' site. In *Mara and Dann*, Lessing joins other postcolonial writers in their desire "to evade the binaries" and, instead, construct a "mixed cultural identity" (p.23).[110]

Pordzik also stresses the connections between postcolonialism and

postmodernism. Pordzik admits that "[m]any critics object to the dominance of postmodernist theoretical frameworks in the study of postcolonial literatures on the grounds of the Euro-American biased assumptions inherent in their deconstructive reading practices" (p.11). He counters critics with the cross-cultural connections mentioned above, however. While fairly traditional in narrative form, *Mara and Dann* embodies the postmodern, postcolonial ideology Pordzik describes. Pordzik first addresses how postcolonial postmodernism blurs the boundaries between utopia and dystopia (p.4). The single, static, totalitarian utopia of sf history has been transformed into ambiguous, "open-ended" heterotopias (pp. 5, 16). Thus, Lessing explores multiple societies through the course of *Mara and Dann*, each with its unique features, both good and bad: the Rustam Mahondi, the Rock Village, Chelops, Charad, Bilma, etc. Unlike the Canopeans in *Shikasta*, no single culture is ultimately valorized.

In addition, Pordzik raises Frederic Jameson's distinction between a temporal focus in modernism, as opposed to a spatial focus in postmodernism (p.4). This can be seen in the geographic focus of *Mara and Dann*; Mara's physical movements, from South to North, propel the narrative. In contrast, time hardly seems to pass during certain periods, like her years with the Rock People and her journey on the river. Lessing revises the larger historical basis for *Shikasta* in *Mara and Dann* as well; the latter text "thwarts all efforts on the side of the reader to create a coherent illusion of history" (p.5).[111] While Mara expresses consistent interest in the relics of the past, she is unable to place all the historical 'pieces' she finds into a coherent text. The ancient animal bones, the mysterious 'copper' society and its indestructible clothing, pots, and homes – these are intriguing, but even the relatively knowledgeable Mahondi no longer have the resources to integrate this information. In contrast, the Chelops Mahondi possess a large map of Africa/Ifrik, symbolic of the greater importance of space in the text. Finally, the Centre represents an earlier, modernist emphasis on history; despite the destruction of Western civilization, a tremendous museum is constructed to embody this historical past (including a replica of a Western museum). Yet, many of the buildings are falling down, inaccessible and Mara and Dann are given a partial, fragmented portrait of history. They "began wandering about, lost, among this wilderness of buildings" and Mara becomes "angry because of the futility of it all, a senselessness" (p.379).[112] Without the geographic space of Yerrup/Europe, this history has little meaning or purpose.

In a 2002 review of Pordzik's book, David N. Samuelson questions several elements of the text. Two queries merit discussion here. First, Samuelson asks, "Why these authors [...] and not others? [...Pordzik] does not mention Doris Lessing, Derek Walcott, or Wole Soyinka".[113] Of course, no author can be expected to include every example of a phenomenon, as Samuelson notes. However, Samuelson's query highlights the importance of Lessing's speculative texts to postcolonial studies and, conversely, the importance of Lessing's postcolonial texts to speculative criticism. Unfortunately, neither Pordzik nor Kerslake

include Lessing in their critical discussions. Nor is Lessing included in the anthology *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy* (2004), to be discussed shortly. Samuelson also questions how popular speculative fiction is in postcolonial lands; are the texts discussed "simply outriders"? While I cannot comment on Pordzik's claim that a "great deal" of recent utopian fiction written in English "has been written and published in countries other than England", I can affirm "[t]he active participation of postcolonial writers in the transformation of the utopian genre". Lessing's postcolonial speculative texts take part in a larger literary trend of ethnic speculative fiction, and other authors should be added to the critical discussion.

The turn of the century has been an increasingly productive period for ethnic speculative fiction. In her emphasis on native protagonists, particularly those of African descent, Lessing joins other Anglo writers of speculative fiction like Neal Stephenson and Mike Resnick. In *Snow Crash* (1992), Stephenson constructs a bi-racial protagonist (of Asian and African American descent) to battle a deadly virus. Hiro Protagonist's arch rival is an Aleut, a native Alaskan, as well.[114] Resnick investigates the resurgence of interest in ethnic identity and group formation in his 1998 novel, *Kirinyaga: A Fable of Utopia*. Like Lessing, he raises the issue of a specifically native, tribal identity, only to negate it. Both their futures ultimately question the relevancy of the past. Nonetheless, in an ironic inversion from the early history of the science fiction genre, coloured protagonists are part of a hot new branch of speculative fiction. In fact, Resnick's *Kirinyaga* short stories have been more highly honored than any others in science fiction.[115] Critical attention has followed suit as well. For example, Elizabeth Anne Leonard edited *Into Darkness Peering: Race and Colour in the Fantastic* in 1997 and, more recently, the 2010 International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts focused specifically on race.

Furthermore, an increasing number of speculative writers of colour have contributed to the genre. In addition to the texts mentioned above by Stephen Barnes, two major anthologies have been published. *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (Thomas 2000) and *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory* (Barr 2008) contain both diverse short stories and criticism dealing with race. As the latter title suggests, Black female speculative writers, as well as characters, can be seen as a particularly vital and growing trend in the larger genre. In terms of longer fiction, two postcolonial writers, Tobias S. Buckell and Nalo Hopkinson, have dominated the recent scene in the United States. Buckell has produced three novels within three years: *Crystal Rain* (2006), *Ragamuffin* (2007), and *Sly Mongoose* (2008). In addition, he has been labeled one of the "Writers of the Future" and has been "nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer".[116] In striking contrast to the earlier tradition within the sf field, all three of the coloured protagonists of Buckell's recent novels are even prominently displayed on the covers.[117]

The career of Nalo Hopkinson is the highlight of postcolonial speculative fiction. Her novels and short stories focus on the African diaspora, she creates primarily female protagonists of African descent, and she heavily relies on Caribbean dialect.[118] While often marketed as science fiction, especially early on, her texts include substantial elements of magical realism. In this way, she embodies Pordzik's description of postcolonial speculative fiction:

> ideas, perceptions, and meanings derived from the literature and culture of postcolonial societies – such as mythic and folkloric narratives, cautionary tales, ballads and proverbs, and other 'deviations' from the prevailing protocol of standard realist representation – are interwoven in the textual fabric of the novel in ways often incompatible with western notions of structure, regularity, and logical consistency[.] (p.14)

In her first book, for example, Hopkinson integrates African deities as secondary characters and she heavily utilizes obeah throughout. The publisher of *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) capitalized on Hopkinson's postcolonial hybridity. The back cover of the text advertises Hopkinson as "a novelist whose life ranges over a hemisphere, whose experience encompasses enduring traditions of word and story, whose voice authentically reaches to those who are aliens in their own lands, and whose vision touches the essence of history, society, science fiction, and myth." The company's emphasis on oral tradition, authenticity, and alien status (with both senses of Otherness invoked – terrestrial and extraterrestrial) highlights the ethnic/racial/native characteristics of Hopkinson's work. However, the text's status as science fiction is simultaneously upheld. In fact, Hopkinson was chosen from "nearly 1,000 entries from around the world" to represent "science fiction's voices of the future" (ibid). Inside the back cover, the author bio, written by Hopkinson, affirms this dual characterization:

> I was born in the Caribbean and moved to Canada when I was a teenager. In this novel, I use Afro-Caribbean spirituality, culture, and language, but placed my characters within the idioms and settings of contemporary speculative fiction. I saw it as subverting the genre, which speaks so much about the experience of being alienated, but contains so little written by alienated peoples themselves.

Hopkinson's words here reflect Pordzik's hybrid status for postcolonial literatures and peoples. Furthermore, Hopkinson stresses the addition of elided "voices"; this mirrors the postcolonial "ambition to recuperate a multitude of voices, identities and possible alternatives muted or suppressed in the colonial process and afford them their due in a cross-cultural imaginative universe" (p.29).[119] Pordzik's critical template; the commercial, generic search; and

Hopkinson's personal, authorial testimony represent different manifestations of the same phenomenon, and these cosmopolitan, postcolonial 'voices' have repeatedly been heralded as the "future" of science fiction.

Hopkinson, indeed, has helped construct the future of the speculative genre. Like Buckell, for example, Hopkinson, her texts, and the postcolonial hybridity they represent, have been well-received by the science fiction community. *Brown Girl in the Ring* was "a finalist for the Philip K. Dick Award, and garnered Hopkinson the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. Her second novel (2000) [...was] a finalist for the Hugo and Nebula awards."[120] Furthermore, Hopkinson has continued to build on her early authorial success through major editorial work. She has edited several anthologies of magical realism and speculative fiction, [121] and in 2004 she co-edited, with Uppinder Mehan, *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*. The later is described on the back cover as "an anthology of stories by leading African, Asian, south Asian, and Aboriginal authors, as well as North American and British writers of colour"; the stories "are centred in the worlds of the 'developing' nations".[122] Lessing's native African protagonists and African locale in the Mara and Dann series match the emphasis of this emerging sub-genre. In fact, the series could be included under the label of "postcolonial science fiction & fantasy". However, Lessing could not have been included in Hopkinson's anthology because only authors of colour were selected. Hopkinson explains,

If I were to edit such an anthology on my own, I would likely have chosen to include white writers, since I feel that a dialogue about the effects of colonialism is one that white folks need to have with the rest of us, but I also understand and believe in the importance of creating defended spaces where marginalized groups of people can discuss their own marginalization. (p.8)

The later sentiment conflicts with the inclusive, "universal" identity Lessing attempts to create in the Canopus series. Yet, we can see how her focus on African identity in the Mara and Dann series reflects a key element of this "postcolonial vision": "an attempt to represent the complexities of identity that terms such as 'native' and 'colonized' tend to simplify" (p.270).[123]

Mehan and Hopkinson's racial criterion raises two salient issues. First, it suggests a greater level of empowerment within the sub-genre of postcolonial speculative fiction. In a 1986 interview, Octavia Butler recalls her attempt to create an anthology "by and about black people" (p.18).[124] She ended up with primarily white-authored stories focusing on racial problems, and the text never materialized (ibid). In the 21st century, more coloured writers of speculative fiction exist, enough to specialize by authorial race and postcolonialism. The racial focus also highlights the tension(s) involved in postcolonial identity, the very "complexities of identity" Mehan describes. Buckell, for example, is included in the anthology as a writer of "colour". Unlike Hopkinson's authorial picture, however, Buckell is not visually categorized as a person of colour. On his web site, Buckell admits being "one white looking dude", despite his "multi-

racial" background.[125] In fact, Buckell attributes his Otherness in the Caribbean to his **white** skin colour: "my obvious skin colour meant I was the one who was not normal" (ibid). Buckell asserts that people in the Caribbean were more accepting of his self-identification as "mixed", unlike more recent subjective challenges in the United States (ibid). Editorial criterion involving race has the potential to exacerbate such challenges.

In another ironic inversion, some people believe that there is a contemporary advantage to colour and/or an ethnic background. As Buckell notes, his critics "challeng[ed him] to prove that [he] was actually multi-racial and not just a 'poser' who wanted the 'advantages' of being hip and multi-racial."[126] This premise holds little weight, at heart. However, in the contexts discussed above, being "multi-racial" would be an advantage to being solely Anglo. Most concretely, Buckell could be published in the anthology, whereas Lessing could not, regardless of the actual content of their texts. More generally, the 'future' of science fiction is being constructed with racial overtones. If racial and/or postcolonial writing is inextricably linked to the author's descent, this generic future belongs to a racially select group of authors.

Buckell himself fruitfully addresses both of these issues on his website. First, he argues that science fiction is not diverse (past or present), by looking at the number of prominent speculative writers of colour; he offers no racial 'advantage' in this context.[127] Furthermore, he promotes "trans-racial" writing within speculative fiction; in particular, he spends a considerable amount of time refuting a prospective (white) author's arguments for not including coloured characters.[128] From Buckell's perspective, then, there is no 'reverse racism' occurring in the sf community. The relative paucity of speculative writers of colour is the grounds for a type of 'affirmative action' which can manifest in racial criteria in publication. Conversely, Anglo authors are encouraged to include racial diversity in their texts as well. These two initiatives, combined, are key factors in the growing production and specialization of ethnic speculative fiction. Globalization, and its connection to postcolonialism, is another. As speculative fiction increasingly reflects the actual U.S. and global population, and their concerns, the sf community benefits. Fresh material, contemporary relevancy, and new readers are just some of the boons offered by postcolonial and/or ethnic speculative fiction. Lessing's postcolonial texts aid in these positive generic transformations.

Lessing's oeuvre is a bridge between the past and the future. Chronologically, her career literally spans the distance from the British Empire to contemporary postcolonialism. Generically, Lessing's roots in 19th-century realism ground limbs and leaves of 21st-century speculative fiction. Lessing's speculative texts also serve as a bridge between the neo/colonial, Anglo-inspired texts of Kerslake's *Science Fiction and Empire* and the new postcolonialism of *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*. Kerslake ends with postcolonial fiction but it is a relatively small portion of her text and, again,

she only includes mainstream Anglo authors (Kim Stanley Robinson and Iain M. Banks).[129] Lessing's Self/Other deconstructions go beyond the most "liberal" imaginings of the Kerslake authors, yet she promotes an idealized form of imperialism in the Canopus series. *So Long Been Dreaming* acts as a sequel to *Science Fiction and Empire*. Lessing's native protagonists and locale in the Mara and Dann series embody the trends of the *So Long Been Dreaming* texts, yet Hopkinson's co-editor, Uppinder Mehan, suggests this might be a type of colonial appropriation. He warns that "[i]f we do not imagine our futures, postcolonial peoples risk being condemned to be spoken about and for again" (p.270).[130] Always a "boundary crosser", Lessing and her works could be fruitfully included in both anthologies (p.xi).[131] She questions the division(s) between Kerslake's mainstream Anglo writers and their neo/imperialism, the older tradition in sf, and the new, trendy, postcolonial fiction written by persons-of-colour contained in *So Long Been Dreaming*.

The genre of speculative fiction aides in Lessing's transitions. Because "'[r]eality' is more complicated than the form of the conventional novel will allow", speculative fiction is the next logical generic step (p.12).[132] It affords the space and creativity necessary to grapple with the complexities of modern life. In addition, speculative fiction encourages a future focus. Mehan asserts that postcolonial literature has "focused on examining contemporary reality as a legacy of a crippling colonial past", particularly the "realities of conqueror and conquered" (p.270).[133] In contrast, he suggests it is time for a future focus, so that a more positive future can be envisioned: "[v]isions of the future imagine how life might be otherwise (ibid).[134] Speculative fiction is the vehicle for this future imagining. Kerslake concludes her text by acknowledging that science fiction "is tied to the ideology and time of writing (of nineteenth-century imperialism, of scientific diaspora), yet, because of its orientation towards imagined futures and experimentation with those futures, it is not completely determined by the ideology and culture of the time of writing. It is both connected and free" (p.192). These are the two competing impulses embodied within Lessing's texts. As she moves from the Canopus series to the Mara and Dann series, the latter characteristic expands. Lessing identifies the challenge: "we [must] force ourselves into the effort of imagination necessary to become what we are capable of being" (p.9).[135] Lessing herself has come very far along this path. Her speculative, postmodern, postcolonial explorations illustrate her continued drive and effort to grow and progress. Not resigned to the past, she seeks to be relevant for today and future generations. Looking as her speculative fiction as a primary tool for this endeavor, reverses a disturbing trend in Lessing criticism. Her speculative fiction is not a negative digression from a more 'authentic,' literary realism, and it does not signal a resignation common to old age[136]; it is a tool of metamorphosis, re-energy, and future insight. We should join the authors of *So Long Been Dreaming* in their "love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things" (p.9).[137]

(ENDNOTES)

1 Doris Lessing, *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta: Personal, Psychological, Historical Documents Relating to Visit by Johor (George Sherban); Emissary (Grade 9) 87th of the Period of the Last Days*, Canopus in Argos: 1 (New York: Knopf, 1979).

2 "Britain's Imperialist Past in Doris Lessing's Futurist Fiction", in Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose, eds., *Doris Lessing: The Alchemy of Survival* (Ohio UP, 1988), pp. 149-58.

3 John Leonard is one such critic. In particular, he notes the usefulness of Lessing's critical volume, *Time Bites: Views and Reviews*, in explaining her conversion to "Sufi mysticism in the late 1960s" (p.42). "The Adventures of Doris Lessing", Rev. of *Time Bites: Views and Reviews* and *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog*, by Doris Lessing, *New York Times Book Review* (20 Nov. 2006), pp. 42-46. See also Paul Schlueter's "Lessing and Sufism," a compiled bibliography, *Doris Lessing Newsletter* 6.1 (Summer 1982), p. 12 and Müge Galin's *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1997).

4 Kaplan, op. cit., p. 155.

5 Margaret Moan Rowe, Foreword, in David Waterman, *Identity in Doris Lessing's Space Fiction* (Youngstown: Cambria P, 2006), pp. ix-xii.

6 Rowe is quoting from Lessing's essay "The Small Personal Voice" here. In Paul Schlueter, ed., *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews* (New York: Vintage, 1975), p. 8.

7 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

8 Kaplan, op. cit.

9 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

10 John Leonard ends his review of *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, the 4th novel in the *Canopus* series, by lamenting this moral vacuum. "The Spacing Out of Doris Lessing", Rev. of *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, by Doris Lessing, *New York Times Book Review* (7 Feb. 1982), pp. 1+.

11 See Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* for a discussion of cognitive estrangement in sf (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

12 Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies (Liverpool UP, 2007).

13 Kerslake's major sf authors are all of Anglo-European and Anglo-American descent, and only one of the twelve is a woman (Ursula K. Le Guin). Therefore, while Kerslake discusses mainstream, influential writers, her pool of "the most liberal-minded of authors" is lacking in important areas of diversity. A notable exception to Kerslake's generalized Self/Other dichotomy would be American writer, Octavia Butler. In her Xenogenesis trilogy, for example, Butler creates "functional [, polyvalent]" human/alien hybrids, contrasting with Wyndham's ultimate destruction of the Other (Kerslake pp. 41-2).

14 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

15 Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

16 While I focus on the first volume of the series here, Lessing herself also notes the more "traditional" aspects of the second volume in the series, *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* (*Re: Colonised* p. ix). *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, Canopus in Argos: 2 (New York: Knopf, 1980). Roberta Rubenstein discusses the "condensed and highly allegorical narrative" of *Marriages*, in which "the principal characters of the story, Al·Ith and Ben Ata, literally become the 'representatives, embodiments of their respective countries'" (p.201; citing Lessing's *Marriages* p. 45). "*The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*: Doris Lessing's Alchemical Allegory", *Extrapolation* 24.3 (Fall 1983), pp. 201-15.

17 "'This tale is our answer': Science and Narrative in Doris Lessing's *Canopus*," *Doris Lessing Newsletter* 18.2 (Winter 1997), pp. 4+.

18 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

19 Kaplan, op. cit.

20 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

21 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

22 Roberta Rubenstein addresses the "polarization of 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities" in the second volume of the Canopus series, *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, and their embodiment within a representative male and female character (Ben Ata and Al·Ith) (p.205). She notes that a "modern reader" might be "irritat[ed]" by such "stereotypical oversimplifications" (ibid). However, she believes that the larger message of the allegory is that both sides of the dichotomy should be integrated within a single subjectivity, ultimately promoting the "larger capacities of the unified soul" (ibid).

23 Kaplan, op. cit. Kaplan specifically mentions Rebecca O'Rourke and Nicole Ward Jouve.

24 Lessing, Prologue, *Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives*; cited in Kaplan p. 150.

25 "Adventures".

26 Dir. Alfonso Cuarón, based on the book by P. D. James (Universal, 2006).

27 *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing: A Study in Narrative Technique*, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy 17 (Westport: Greenwood P, 1985).

28 "Adventures".

29 See Stephen J. Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* for an in-depth explanation/illustration of this phenomenon. (1981), (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996).

30 Octavia Butler also fits this template; perhaps her personal embodiment of a gender and racial Other is a factor in her fictional focus on human/alien relationships and the resulting hybrid offspring in her Xenogenesis series.

31 *Unexpected.*

32 *Unexpected.*

33 While visible Anglo, George has one Indian grandparent (whom he resembles, according to his sister) and one Jewish grandparent (*Re: Colonised* pp. 211, 215).

34 In addition, the traditional negativity of 'madness' and the insubstantial nature of any 'delusions' it inspires are transformed into physically-embodied aliens whom humans misconstrue as divine beings.The modernist madness of Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, for example, is transformed into literal aliens in the sf of *Shikasta*. (1971), (New York: Bantam Books, 1977).

35 Lessing actually has Johor use similar words in one of his reports concerning the Canopean emissaries: "[w]hen one of us is chosen to 'go down' to Shikasta or any other planet..." (*Re: Colonised* pp. 6-7).

36 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

37 Manda Cesara, *Reflections of a Woman Anthropologist: No Hiding Place*, Studies in Anthropology Series (New York: Academic P, 1982).

38 (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2008).

39 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

40 Lessing, *A Proper Marriage*, (1954), (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

41 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

42 Lessing, *Documents Relating to the Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire*, Canopus in Argos: 5 (New York: Knopf, 1983).

43 A key difference with incarnation, however, is the fact that the coloniser physically becomes the colonised. Like Jesus Christ, this voluntary 'sacrifice' assists in transforming the 'higher' being into a role model, whose values are absolutely right and should not be questioned but accepted on 'faith.' Also, the alien/divine coloniser works through terrestrial means, eschewing superhuman powers. This tips the balance of power closer to the colonised, and 'faith' becomes (theoretically) voluntary. From a more postcolonial perspective, *Avatar* utilizes a form of incarnation as well. Unlike Lessing, James Cameron chooses to have his protagonist completely repudiate his colonial background and join the colonised permanently. (Twentieth Century Fox, 2009).

44 The Patternmaster series consists of *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Patternmaster* (1976), and *Wild Seed* (1980). In the 1995 republication of *Patternmaster*, Butler is specifically compared to Lessing on the back cover: "Butler is the creator of extraordinary novels that combine the cultural vision of Alice Walker and Terry McMillan with the cosmic scope of Ursula K. Le Guin and Doris Lessing." (New York: Aspect).

45 See *The Subject of Race in American Science Fiction*, pages 177-8, for further development of this issue in Butler. Sharon DeGraw Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory series, William E. Cain, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

46 David Waterman, *Identity in Doris Lessing's Space Fiction* (Youngstown: Cambria P, 2006).

47 "Genealogy and Becoming in the *Canopus in Argos: Archives* Series", *Doris Lessing Studies* 25.2 (Winter 2006), pp. 18-23.

48 Lacey, op. cit.

49 Lessing, *Small.*

50 Rowe, op. cit.

51 Lessing, Canopus in Argos: 4 (New York: Knopf, 1982).

52 Rowe, op. cit.

53 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

54 *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977). See pages 110-112 in *The Subject of Race in American Science Fiction* for this particular discussion.

55 Rev. of *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, by Doris Lessing, *Doris Lessing Newsletter* 6.1 (Summer 1982), pp. 13-15.

56 Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies 183 (Westport: Greenwood P, 1997).

57 *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

58 In Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *"Race," Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), pp. 381-95.

59 Waterman, op. cit., p. 36.

60 Again, see Darko Suvin for a full development of the technique of cognitive estrangement.

61 It would be inaccurate because of the multiplicity of bodies involved in reincarnation, not because of biological/scientific evidence undermining the physical concept of human race(s).

62 For example, an Anglo female may be oppressed in a patriarchal society, but oppress others via race. Conversely, a black male may be oppressed in a racist society, but oppress others via sex/gender.

63 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

64 Widow-burning would be another such 'savage' custom which could be highlighted.

65 This is similar to Lessing's use of time in the *Mara and Dann* series.

66 Lessing is not the first author to revise historical racial hierarchies using a speculative format. The historical conflation of oppression can lead to such speculative futures as that envisioned by Robert A. Heinlein in *Farnham's Freehold*: when blacks come to power, they not only oppress whites through a form of slavery, they practice cannibalism, eating young white girls. (1964), (Riverdale: Baen, 1998).Certainly, Lessing is not this gratuitously negative in

her racial reversal, but her portrayal of the futuristic Chinese is hardly flattering. In the short story, "Way in the Middle of the Air", Ray Bradbury also creates a futuristic racial context with people of colour in positions of power over whites. He, like Lessing, chooses to have the racial Other (African-Americans) ultimately forgive their former Anglo oppressors. However, he does not substitute a new oppressor, like the Chinese, nor does he attempt to undermine the victimization of the blacks, nor the guilt of the Anglos. In this way, he avoids Lessing's negative portrayal of a racial Other(s) and a historical moral relativity in terms of oppression. (1950), reprinted in *Human and Other Beings*, Allen DeGraeff, ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 61-76.

67 *Re: colonised.*

68 "Temporal Temptations in Lessing's *Mara and Dann*: Arriving at the Present Moment", *Doris Lessing Studies* 23.2 (Winter 2004), pp. 17-20.

69 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

70 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

71 Waterman, op. cit.

72 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

73 See Chapter 1 of *The Subject of Race in American Science Fiction* for detailed analysis of this phenomenon in the genre as a whole. DeGraw, op. cit.

74 This is a common literary phenomenon in American literature more broadly. The western genre is perhaps best known popularly for this fictional model, from Natie Bumppo and Chingachgook to the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

75 See *The Gods of Mars* (1913) and, specifically, *The Warlord of Mars*: "[a] lmost unanimous was the request that I ascend the ancient throne of the black men, even the First Born themselves concurring in it" (p.7). Four-part serial, *All-Story Magazine*, (Dec. 1913-Mar. 1914), (New York: Ballantine Books/Del Rey, 1979).

76 John Rieder defines the "'white man's burden'" as "the belief that non-whites are childlike innocents in need of white men's protection" (p.30).

77 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

78 I refer here to Darwin's focus on random mutation and environmental niches as found in *The Origins of Species*, particularly the first edition, in contrast to the progressive social and racial hierarchies of *The Descent of Man*. Ironically, the extinction of "savages" and further development of "civilized man" become natural and inevitable in the later Social Darwinian context. Like Lessing, Darwin's larger, more abstract context elides responsibility on the part of the author's particular historical group – the British – for the oppression and extermination of many native groups.

79 *Small.*

80 "Naming Where, What, When, and Who: Onomastics in Doris Lessing's *Canopus in Argos*, Unpublished MLA Conference Paper (Dec. 1983), pp. 1-8.

81 Shelton cites Rumi in the last quotation.

82 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

83 Lessing, *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, Canopus in Argos: 4 (New York: Knopf, 1982). Betsy Draine touches on the theme of progressive (Spencerian) evolution in her review of *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*.

84 "*Shikasta*: Vision or Reality?", *Doris Lessing Newsletter* 8.1 (Spring 1984), pp. 12-14.

85 "Spacing".

86 See "On the Extinction of the Races of Man" for a detailed description of this process, including the specific "extinction" of the Tasmanians described on pages 213-14 (p.211-22). (1879), (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

87 Leonard, "Spacing", p. 35; Kaplan, op. cit., p. 155.

88 Kaplan, op. cit., p. 155.

89 Kaplan, op. cit., pp. 155-6. Kaplan quotes Susan Kress on this issue as well, from "Lessing's Responsibility", *Salmagundi* 47-8 (Winter-Spring 1980), p. 131.

90 Kerslake, op. cit.

91 *Science Fiction* (Malden: Polity P, 2005).

92 "Science Fiction and Empire", *Science Fiction Studies* 30.2 (July 2003), pp. 231-45.

93 Kerslake, op. cit., p. 29.

94 "Doris Lessing: The Way to Space Fiction", *Doris Lessing Newsletter* 8:1 (Spring 1984), pp. 7+.

95 *African Stories* has a publication date of 1981 for the Touchstone edition. However, other copyright dates include 1951, 1953, 1954, 1957, 1958, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, and 1972. Lessing says that the idea for "Hunger" originated in a trip to Moscow in 1952 (Preface p. 7). (New York: Touchstone Books, 1981).

96 *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2000).

97 *Mara.*

98 *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta.*

99 Of course, *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* also undermine this theory; Lessing herself notes the return to a more "traditional", "realistic" (and personal, characterization) focus in the second volume of the Canopus series (*Re: Colonised* ix).

100 "'Our Chroniclers tell us': Lessing's Sequel to *Mara and Dann*", Rev. of *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog*, by Doris Lessing, *Doris Lessing Studies* 25.2 (Winter 2006), pp. 23-5.

101 *Mara.*

102 *African American Lives 2: Episode 4*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., PBS Home Video (New York: Kunhardt Productions, 2008).

103 *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures*, Studies of World Literature in English 10 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

104 Pordzik quotes from Graham Huggan here.

105 Pordzik is quoting Bill Ashcroft's use of "imperial centre" here.

106 Pordzik, op. cit.

107 Pordzik, op. cit.

108 Pordzik, op. cit.

109 Lessing, *Mara.*

110 Pordzik, op. cit.

111 Pordzik, op. cit.

112 *Mara.*

113 Rev. of *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures*, by Ralph Pordzik (10 Jan. 2002).

114 Hiro Protagonist and Raven pysicaslly confront each other at the end of the text. However, Protagonist declines to actually kill Raven. Please note this correction to an earlier assertion of mine in *The Subject of Race in American Science Fiction* (p.182).

115 Resnick, "Biography", Mike Resnick's Website, www.fortunecity.com (24 Apr. 2010. Web. 26 July 2010).

116 *Ragamuffin,* dust jacket (New York: TOR, 2007).

117 The cover of Octavia Butler's *Dawn* is a notorious example of the elision of colour; the protagonist on the cover is visualized as Anglo, in contrast to Butler's textual protagonist, who is described as of African descent. (New York: Warner, 1987).

118 Her first novel was *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), followed by *Midnight Robber* (2000). *Skin Folk* is a collection of short stories (2001). *The Salt Roads* (2003) and *The New Moon's Arms* (2007) are her most recent novels.

119 Pordzik, op. cit.

120 Hopkinson, *Skin*, back cover (New York: Warner, 2001).

121 These include *Whispers From the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* (2000), *Mojo Conjure Stories* (2003), and *Tesseracts Nine: New Canadian Speculative Fiction* co-edited by Geoff Ryman (2005).

122 Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, eds., *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp P, 2004).

123 Hopkinson and Mehan, op. cit.

124 "Black Scholar Interview with Octavia Butler: Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre", *Black Scholar* (Mar./Apr. 1986), pp. 14-18.

125 "What Does in Mean to be a Caribbean Writer?", *Tobias S. Buckell* (1 Aug. 2007. Web. 7 July 2010), <www.tobiasbuckell.com>.

126 "What", op. cit.

127 "Diversity in Science Fiction Markets", *Tobias S. Buckell* (8 May 2007. Web. 7 July 2010), <www.tobiasbuckell.com>.

128 "Douglas Blaine on 'Shame'", *Tobias S. Buckell* (12 Jan. 2006. Web. 7 July 1010), <www.tobiasbuckell.com>.

129 The last two chapters focus on postcolonialism, two of nine total chapters.

130 Hopkinson and Mehan, op. cit.

131 Rowe, op. cit.

132 Mooney, op. cit.

133 Hopkinson and Mehan, op. cit.

134 Pordzik similarly believes so many postcolonial writers engage in the utopian genre because "the imaginative exploration of the future of their societies has a distinct meaning and value" (p.2).

135 *Small*, op. cit.

136 See Mooney for a discussion of this trend: "while Lessing's early works are accepted as classic literary realism, the mature works are likely to be dismissed or demeaned as 'fantasy'" (p.12).

137 Hopkinson and Mehan, op. cit.

Reviews

Dark Blood

By John Meaney (Gollancz, 2008, 345p, £12.99)
Reviewed by David McWilliam

Dark Blood is the sequel to *Bone Song* (2007), in an ongoing series that combines elements from the fantasy, sf, horror, detective, and spy thriller genres to, sometimes striking, but overall uneven effect. The narrative begins shortly after the events at the end of the first novel as the main character Lieutenant Donal Riordan, member of an elite federal task force, laments the death of his zombie lover and leader, Commander Laura Steele, shot in the head by Senator Blanz, a senior member of a group known as the Black Circle, as they arrested him for his involvement in the murder and subsequent bodysnatching of famous performance artists. Donal was also gunned down, receiving a bullet in his chest. However, this did not prove fatal as he was brought into unlife by paramedic mages who installed Laura's black zombie heart; part organic pump, part mechanical device requiring regular recharges in order to sustain him. Taking place primarily in the dark city of Tristopolis, the action spans continents as the conspiracy of the Black Circle is uncovered in distant Illurium. *Dark Blood* opens with a melancholy scene in which Donal is driven to the execution of Alderman Kinley Finross, a member of the Black Circle that he was able to arrest and bring to trial. The novel moves away from the somewhat flippant tone that pervaded *Bone Song* by presenting the reader with the harshness of the Tristopolitan criminal justice system, as they are informed that 'Anything less than two hours dying was considered "easy and unusual kindness", prohibited by law' (p. 4). Before Laura's demise at the end of the first novel, a female officer's leave due to physical and psychological trauma incurred when she was exposed by a criminal gang as an undercover agent provided the only real suffering experienced by a member of the task force; *Dark Blood* goes some way to add balance, and thus raise the stakes of the action, but ultimately fails to convince that the team is ever truly threatened with extinction.

Bone Song introduced a world in which the barrier between life and death is permeable, with wraiths, zombies, and the rarer revenants dwelling alongside the living in an uneasy peace. Not all the undead enjoy the rights of living citizens, with the majority of wraiths bound to places or objects in order to serve menial functions for their human masters. The city of Tristopolis is the wonderfully baroque home of these disparate groups, joined by other non-standard humans who possess psychic powers or altered physiologies. Rather than using electricity, the metropolis is powered by the energy released from tortured bones in necrofusion piles; the Energy Authority is intimately linked to the threat faced by the protagonist and his team in both novels. *Dark Blood* continues to expand and develop the setting, which should be applauded for its imaginative integration of the undead and the living in a world dominated by technology powered by the dead that I would describe as necropunk. Over the course of the two novels the reader develops an awareness of the world's nature through the actions and interactions of the characters, weaving exposition neatly into the fabric of the story without breaking its flow. *Dark Blood* picks up the tensions between the living and the undead, introduced but not explored in the first novel, as the Unity Party, modelled on the Nazis, seeks to classify the non-living as nonpersons, with plans for the state to repossess their property and for them to lose their jobs under the proposed Vital Renewal Bill. Rather than creating a new threat, the Unity Party is linked to the Black Circle, and so Donal must seek to bring down both powerful groups in order to save the day.

Whilst the living Donal was always careful to treat all undead, including the bound wraiths, with a courtesy that acknowledged them as equals, we are shown a far more turbulent Tristopolis in *Dark Blood* as he walks its mean streets in the body of a zombie. As with all prejudice, none are more attuned to the seething menace bubbling beneath the surface of an allegedly civilized society than those who are the subjects of such hatred. Meaney is thus able to shift the tone into a darker, more noir tinged territory as Donal notices the difference in the way he is treated, as well as investigating hate crimes committed against non-standard humans within an increasingly disobedient police force led by Captain Craigsen, an officer who subscribes to the Unity Party's program of disenfranchisement for the undead.

After Laura's second death the task force is left in a suspended state, undergoing review by the federal authority, and placed under the caretaker leadership of Commander Bowman. They are each assigned differing missions, which are brought together as the novel progresses into the rough approximation of a puzzle. Ex-marine Harald Hammersen is tasked with investigating a new telephone network that is being installed by a company with Illurian links, Central Resonator Systems. CRS's spread through Tristopolis is marked by the replacement of the standard black telephones with their indigo handset. Alexa Ceerling is requested to join the newly formed Customer Relationship Bureau in order to reveal how the phones affect their users, but falls under their sway

with disastrous consequences. Those who use the phones experience increased tranquillity and wellbeing, with the side effect of murderous rage whenever anyone tries to uncover their true nature, discovered when Alexa rends her doctor's body into bloody segments. Eventually it is revealed that the phones are a form of mind control that will be used to assist the Unity Party as they make a bid for power by any means necessary. The material used in the construction of this network is particularly unpleasant, offering a much needed dose of horror as the novel shifts from detection to thriller.

Unfortunately, the tight plotting of the earlier part of the novel gives way to an overly convoluted series of subplots and red herrings, as the narrative shifts to the viewpoint of numerous supporting characters, with less emphasis on atmosphere and more on action. Furthermore, the pacing becomes rather ill-judged towards the end, with the final section introducing a new element to the conspiracy only to resolve it almost immediately. There are increasingly regular horrific revelations as to the nature of the biotechnology used by the Illurians in the latter part of the novel that serve to maintain a semblance of menace when events start to unfold at a rapid pace, but they do not offset the damage to the novel's atmosphere. The villains in *Dark Blood* fall foul on two occasions through indulging in gloating, lowering their guard in order to provide an opening for the team to bring them down. Quite why they feel the need to explain the intricate complexities of their plots to someone they intend to kill remains as baffling in this novel as it does in many another thriller.

As with the first book, there is no ambiguity as to whether characters are good or bad, with Donal and his team presented as defenders of the vulnerable and the Black Circle/ Unity Party seen as wholly selfish and negative. As the protagonist, Donal is rather too perfect, excelling at his job, in great shape, always polite to those who deserve his respect and implacable foe to his enemies. He protects the weak and several female characters fall for him. In fact, he has pretty much no weaknesses as either an officer or a person, which means that, whilst he is extremely likeable, Donal lacks depth. Despite this, he remains an engaging and heroic protagonist, suited to this pulpy adventure. The various antagonists are given no space in which to develop, seemingly motivated entirely by malevolence and greed. Whereas Donal was still compelling in spite of his rather two dimensional character, I found the plotters to be completely flat, caricature villains who were more effective when kept as a sinister orchestrating power than when they made appearances in person. Combined with the fast-paced, action-oriented plot this means that the narrative remains rather superficial, albeit entertaining in the manner of a summer blockbuster. Meaney has a background in martial arts, which is deployed to great effect when describing close-quarter fighting and skirmishes between the factions. These tend to be short, frenetic affairs that are decided by bold attacks by highly trained officers following well-constructed plans; the cinematic qualities of the novel provide its strengths as well as weaknesses.

Whilst the world-building is undoubtedly admirable in its inventive scope, I was never quite sure as to the rules governing the necropunk magic that underpins what is and is not possible within this secondary world; one of the downsides to its limited exposition. For example, when characters appear to be thoroughly dead, they are returned to life, but not uniformly; some remain deceased. We are told that one cannot be resurrected if one's brain is destroyed, and yet key characters die from wounds elsewhere and are left to moulder. This could be explained by a shortage of zombie hearts or the difficulty of successfully completing the procedure, but it is not. When considered in relation to the frequent last minute rescues throughout the series it is very hard to assess the levels of jeopardy faced by the characters and thus to care about their struggles. This is not helped by the repetition of the climactic battles of both novels being won by Donal's side through the use of a 'hexzooka', deployed by one of his teammates just as he looks likely to be defeated. Again, the free wraith Xalia, another member of the task force, appears to be fatally wounded but is magically healed by another wraith. Meaney takes a few too many shortcuts to build tension very quickly, without allowing genuine peril to dent the team's heroic status. Only when 'ensorcelled' do the characters behave in a manner that is morally dubious, and then later are absolved from guilt as they were acting under the influence of powerful dark mages.

Despite *Dark Blood*'s numerous flaws, I enjoyed Meaney's inventive world-building, the tense atmosphere of a city being overturned by fascists riding a wave of prejudice as they attempt to seize power but ultimately failing due to the efforts of Donal's team, and the gruesome biotechnologies explored in the last quarter of the book. It is just a pity that these elements were not matched by the plot or characters, which remained rather two dimensional throughout and ultimately, held the novel back from fulfilling its early promise. There is a cliffhanger ending that once again reverses a seeming tragedy, but by this stage my interest had waned too greatly for me to want to follow these characters through any further adventures.

Avilion

By Robert Holdstock (Gollancz, 2009, 344pp, £12.99)
Reviewed by Ben Jeapes

Avilion is by sad default the last novel in Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* series. It is also possibly the first 'true' sequel to the original novel, being the further adventures of some of *Mythago Wood*'s primary characters as well as introducing new ones. Other books and stories in the series have focused on new characters, or told parallel stories, or popped across the Channel to a similar wood in Brittany (*Merlin's Wood*), or told a prequel story instead (*Gate of Ivory, Gate of Horn*). It would be interesting to know if Holdstock planned further volumes before his untimely death or if this was always intended to be the end because it is noticeable that the series has moved far beyond its origins and, perhaps, what made it so beguiling in the first place.

To recap, the proper name of the titular wood is Ryhope Wood, which appears from the outside as a small spinney no more than a few square miles in area. In fact it is one of the few remaining areas of primal woodland in Britain with trees that date back to the end of the last Ice Age. It shelters, and gives physical form to, myth-images from the subconscious race memories of all the peoples who have lived in these islands, starting with the first hunter-gatherers who followed the ice northwards and all through the centuries to the present day. In *Mythago Wood* these myth-images were labelled 'mythagos' by George Huxley, the first scientist to observe and record the phenomenon. Within the wood the myths that create the mythagos loop through time, and characters who are or who are to become mythagos may find themselves caught up in the aftermath of mythical adventures they have not yet had.

Ryhope is considerably larger inside than out and penetrating through the trees brings the careless wanderer to mythago landscapes – realms of ice and fire; castles; and warring, nameless tribes. In Ryhope, characters cannot just travel between A and B, as both locations themselves are mythagos and by the time they have got to B it might have changed because of something they haven't done yet – something that is scheduled to become legend.

As fiction, Ryhope builds on foundations laid down by the English woodland tales of Kenneth Grahame and 'B.B.', and Holdstock takes great care to populate it with mythagos from English folk memory: for example, Herne the Hunter, Arthur and Robin Hood may all appear as individuals but they are also all mythagos of the same original mythical hero. Where our prehistoric culture is unknown, Holdstock simply makes it up, extending the line of known myth back in time to create a plausible ur-myth to give it form. He blends these prehistoric mythagos seamlessly with those from the more familiar stories of our childhoods. Thus the simple logic of mythago creation leads to a complex juggling act of story-telling, and Holdstock pulls it off extremely well. To write these stories he

must also create the ur-myths, give them a timeline, front-load them into the novel and then decide where on the timeline to insert his characters.

But it is because *Avilion* follows this simple logic so successfully that fans of the original novel might find it a letdown.

George Huxley had two sons, Christian and Steven. In previous books, both of these went into the wood for their own reasons. Christian is now chief of Legion, a mythago army of mercenaries introduced in *Gate of Ivory, Gate of Horn* that travels between mythical battles to offer its services to one side or another. Steven has long settled in the wood with his beloved Guiwenneth, who is just one manifestation of the group of mythagos that includes the Earth goddess and Guinevere: she died earlier, but that is no handicap when you are a mythago attached to a resurrection myth. Between them Steven and Guiwenneth have two children, Jack and Yssobel, half human and half mythago. They think of their two halves, human and mythago, as 'red' and 'green'. Jack is dominated by his 'red' side: it is always his ambition to head out of the wood and explore as much as he can of his father's world. Yssobel is fundamentally 'green', with an urge to go ever deeper, both into the wood and into the heart of myth.

Newcomers to the wood bring the potential for their own mythagos with them and the classically educated Steven has some choice examples. Wanting somewhere to live, he deliberately *didn't* think of castles with their concomitant histories of war and armies but instead mythagoed up a Roman villa from the golden age of the Pax Romana: terracotta roof, whitewashed walls, each room bright and happy. (To add dramatic spice, there is always a random unknown element to mythago creation. A Roman villa grows from Steven's imagination but it is at first bleak and mouldering, requiring work to become the happy family home he wanted; and a mythago attached to a resurrection myth might return, but whose version of the myth is it that comes back?)

Ruined or habitable, villas like Steven's used to dot our landscape: so far, so English. But Steven brings other influences with him and they sit awkwardly in the world that Holdstock has created. Playing a key role in the story, including having a relationship with Yssobel, is a pre-Iliad Odysseus, who to his credit is shocked to learn of what he will be getting up to when Troy falls. (Mythagos may have their fate pre-ordained by their creator myth, but as individuals they look and feel human, with human loves and fears and consciences. The death of a mythago is just as tragic as the death of a human: at least, from the mythago's point of view.) Meanwhile, Steven's favourite novel in the outside world is *The Time Machine* and that novel's Palace of Green Porcelain is here too. It is lacking in Eloi and Morlocks, who you would have thought would come as part of the mythago package and who even get a mention in passing, but it still has the function given to it by H.G. Wells as a future museum of ancient civilisations. It is the first hint of any technology later than the Bronze Age to appear in the wood and the effect is jarring.

A building from a mythical, pastoral future, and a young Greek lad from the

land of sun and sand and olive groves – we are a long way from the archetypal English landscape that *Mythago Wood* was all about. The reader is also left wondering why Holdstock chose those two and not any others from the depths of Steven's imagination. Why is Odysseus at the stage of his life where he is still conveniently a lone operator, not accompanied by a shipload of discontented Greek sailors – other than that the plot required it and the sailors would get in the way? And supposing Steven had preferred something else by H.G. Wells: *The War of the Worlds*? *The Invisible Man*? *The History of Mr Polly*? Supposing instead of H.G. Wells he was into musical theatre? The potential for farce is suddenly only a few short steps away, and a fantasy series as important as this deserves better.

Thus, even though *Avilion* follows on logically from the world created by the earlier book, it also leaves that world behind. So English was the earlier series that Ralph Vaughan Williams – the actual man, not a mythago – could appear in an earlier novel and not seem out of place, but there would be no place for him here. The setting has become more fantasy-generic: a world of warped time and space that could see an appearance by Silverberg's Gilgamesh. Much was made in the first novel – with a brief mention here, too, via George Huxley's notes – of the vortices of energy within secluded glades of oak and ash that create the mythagos. It is a beautiful image that takes the reader straight into the mystery of the wood. In *Avilion*, seeing mythagos effectively running their own time-warped civilisation in a variety of non-arborial landscapes just emphasises the divide.

The narrative jumps between present and past, as befits the novel's theme of the simultaneous creation and re-enaction of legend. Yssobel has vanished from the villa, we know not where: Jack has made the perilous, year-long journey back to Oak Lodge, his ancestral home on the edge of the woods, to summon up his grandfather George as a mythago and gather clues as to where she has gone. She is seeking her mother, who in keeping with her own legend has also done a disappearing act and Yssobel has worked out that she has gone to Avilion, a variant spelling of Avalon brought to us by Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur'. I laughed out loud at the ingenuity with which Yssobel finds her way there. Who else do we know who according to legend quite famously went to Avalon? And how did he get there? So, why not hitch a lift? Ingenious – but again, a few treacherous thoughts take us perilously close to farce as a disconsolate Arthur finds himself stranded on the shore of the lake, inconveniently alive contrary to what the myth says he should be, and (rather ungratefully) swears a vendetta against the woman who stole his death.

The story satisfies when one looks back at what it has accomplished but the actual telling of the story, at least in the uncorrected proof copy that I was able to read, had some unsatisfactory glitches along the way. At one point we get to see the wood actually warping – characters travel down a gorge which physically closes behind them as they move from one myth-zone to another – and yet we

are simply told this, without any feeling or emotion attached to it. The wonder of Ryhope Wood is on an intellectual plane: we are just told what the wood can do, take it or leave it. And there are the points mentioned earlier: this may be a Mythago Wood story but it is no longer a story about the wood. Using 'green' to describe the character of a mythago conjures up wood resonances that do not really pay off.

But the novel is, at heart, Jack and Yssobel's two stories and thus the story of children growing up and leaving home. Any young person who sets out into the world for the first time has a moment of fumbling for their true identity, seeking a meaning to their life apart from the forces that have guided them so far. The problem is magnified for these two by being half mythago: a large part of their existence is already quite literally mapped out for them. They can follow it, they can kick back against it, or they can learn to live with it whilst retaining their own character and independence. The latter option is ultimately the path that they take, each in their own ways.

The characters have grown, and the world with it: they have formed themselves into something new that breaks away from the myths that bound them. It is a good note for the *Mythago Wood* series to end on.

Galileo's Dream

By Kim Stanley Robinson (Harper Voyager, 2009, 584pp, £18.99)
Reviewed by Dan Hartland

> And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
> The element of fire is quite put out;
> The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him where to look for it.

John Donne's "An Anatomy of the World" (1611) famously expresses the early modern anxiety about that period's growing awareness of the true cosmos. For Donne, those who "seek so many new" worlds in the now observable skies were admitting "that this world's spent"; "all coherence" had been drained from the world, leaving it in individualised pieces with old models abandoned but not replaced. The pursuit of knowledge was for Donne a corrosive force. What is most interesting about Kim Stanley Robinson's latest novel, *Galileo's Dream* (2009), is that it in many ways shares this ambivalence – it is too shrewd a novel to allow itself to become hagiography, and nor is it any argument for the pure virtue of unfettered inquiry.

Nevertheless, Robinson's novel is a rejection of at least one of Donne's contentions – that no man's wit was equal to the task of finding a given orb in the firmament. His Galileo is a brilliant mind, one of intuitive and observational genius. We are told repeatedly that Galileo is "the first modern scientist" (pg.137 et al), a claim based on his methods of percipient measurement. This fascination with reality – with how it works, and the ways in which it is possible to discern those mechanisms – is Galileo's defining achievement, and also his defining characteristic. It is what makes him, "*I primi al mondo*! The first man to see Jupiter's four moons, which had been circling it since the creation." (pg.42) Robinson's Galileo is brave enough to look for the truth in things, despite the implications his discoveries might have for the systems of his world. Contrary to Donne, Galileo believes that "Change could be growth. (...) It was intrinsic to life." (pg.106)

Robinson has, then, a profound admiration for his subject. But his protagonist is no paragon, and Robinson allows him not just to fail but to exhibit great flaws. For one, this great transformer is unable, of course, to divorce himself entirely from contemporary assumptions, even using his great powers of observation to support positions that are in fact false: "Galen was the first he knew of to describe the humours, one of the few aspects of ancient medical knowledge that would certainly endure, for one saw evidence of them everywhere". (pg.206) This is part of that ambivalence towards science – it is not to be fully trusted, is as likely, moreso, to be wrong as it is to be right – but it also emphasises this Galileo's principal weakness: his hubris. "He wanted to kill every critic he had" we are told at one point (pg.73), and the great man's self-confidence, his insistence

upon his own way of doing things, makes him pugnacious and conceited. He dismisses Aristotle contemptuously – "He had no mathematics" (pg.29) – and betrays routinely in his dealings with women a chauvinistic certainty of his own supremacy.

From the very first page of the novel, in short, Galileo is thoroughly alive as a complex, believable character. This is the novel's great achievement, and it is not one to be underestimated. To breathe such rude life into an historical figure is a difficult balancing act. In recent years, Neal Stephenson's *Baroque Cycle* (2003-2004) at times resembled historical fan fiction, with cameo walk-ons for a wide selection of paper thin caricatures (Ben Franklin, Charles II, Isaac Newton); on the other hand, Mary Gentle's deliberately provocative historical fantasies take huge liberties, rendering their historical protagonists so different from their original models that practically all they share is a name (her Robert Cecil from *1610: A Sundial In A Grave* (2003) is a prime example of this tendency). To craft a character both redolent of their period and sympathetic to a modern reader is an achievement often left to the better writers of historical fiction – most recently, Hilary Mantel's Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall* (2009) has been widely praised as striking that proper balance.

The unusual success of the characterisation in *Galileo's Dream* is fortunate, since the picture of imperfection it allows is key to the novel's project. Robinson's is a story of time travel not just for the reader, exposed to Galileo's alien but putatively modern mindset, but for Galileo himself. He is visited on the first page by a stranger who is revealed to be a man named Ganymede, who hails from the 31st century – or even later in the timeline – and is seeking to influence Galileo's role in history. A third of the novel takes place in this 31st century, in which human beings live unrecognisable lives on the moons of Jupiter, surviving in these harsh environments only by the gift of science. (In this regard, the reviewer was reminded at times of Paul McAuley's recent work in *The Quiet War* (2008) and *Gardens of the Sun* (2009).) The agendas of the humans Galileo meets in this time period remain perceptible only with great effort, and never fully, much in the way of the seventeenth-century reality Galileo works to describe in the novel's remaining two thirds. There are, though, moments of wonderful synchronicity in which human beings are shown ever to be squabbling children with an incomplete knowledge of each other and their worlds: the delegates of a sort of interplanetary parliament behave to Galileo's eyes "like rival gangs in a piazza" (pg.55); "perhaps they were possessed by the same things that possessed the Italian nobility of his time – honour, pride of place, patronage or the loss of patronage." (pg.278)

Robinson's 31st century is, then, no utopian future – the birth of modern science, to which his Galileo is midwife, is no great victory. Indeed, Galileo comes quickly to understand that, for all the brilliance of his scientific inquiry, his beloved observation has in fact made reality less clear: "the world hasn't made sense since 1927", he is told (pg.277). He comes to realize that: "For

anyone who had experienced *just once* the understanding of *one single thing*, thus truly tasting how knowledge is accomplished, would then recognize that of the infinity of other truths, he understands *nothing*." (pg.391). Quantum mechanics, of course, is the great result of the observational method which in turn renders the method impossible: "The particles they sought were so small that if one of them were expanded to the size of the Earth, to stay proportional the nucleus of an atom would have expanded to ten times the size of the universe." (pg.229). Galileo is astounded by the shortcuts 31st century humans have found around this problem – and which make possible their travel through time, one of a full 10 dimensions they have identified – but he is also terrified by Ganymede's ambitions for him. Galileo must, Ganymede believes, burn at the stake to ensure, in the great reaction against his martyrdom, the early victory of science over religion.

And so we realize that the 31st century of this tricksy novel – in which narrator, narrative and purpose is never quite certain – is a parallel timeline to ours, that the new history that is created by the muddled meddling of the time travellers – in which Galileo is not burned, but survives to old age – is our own unlikely history. There is much debate amongst Ganymede and his contemporaries about the virtue of his early victory of science, about whether or not it did, does or will prevent centuries of destruction – war, holocaust and climate change (the subject of Robinson's own *Science In The Capital* trilogy (2004-2007)). The confusion of the waveform is not observable prior to collapse. Another of the great virtues of *Galileo's Dream* is the way in which it in this way holds its elements in tension, denying the reader a Theory of Everything for the narrative. It can at times be frustrating – and admittedly opens up the sections of the novel set in the future to criticisms of superficiality or incompleteness – but it is thematically satisfying and Robinson's only coherent option. It is a kind of vagueness, but one bravely executed.

In *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (2008), Csicsery-Ronay Jr. reflects on the theoretical possibility, but practical impossibility, of time travel: such "imaginary novums in the real world cannot as yet be plausibly transposed from the microcosm of quantum physics to the mesocosmic physics of gross human bodies." (pg.61) It is true that Robinson, his story set in a future which has bridged this gap, must therefore engage in hand-waving, and benefit from some curious conveniences built in to 31st century time travel:

> "Could you execute a prolepsis," Galileo asked Hera in a low voice, "and see if his fears are confirmed?"
>
> "No," Hera said. "In theory prolepsis is possible, but the energy required is more than we can muster. Sending the entanglers (temporal devices) back analeptically cost us entire planets, and prolepsis apparently requires far more energy than that." (pg.280)

In a novel which spends a lot of time talking about the fluidity – the simultaneity – of time, such fortuitous constraints on an imaginative science, playfully authorised with terms from narrative theory such as prolepsis and analepsis, enable Robinson's linear tale. These are moments in which the rigour of the novel falters, and yet the reader can forgive Robinson this cheat, if only because, as Csicsery-Ronay's observation suggests, it, too, is based in the complexities of observable reality with which *Galileo's Dream* deals.

Indeed, it is this incompleteness of science which leads to Robinson's – and Galileo's – perhaps surprising ambivalence towards it. At odds with Ganymede's fanaticism – after all, he desires Galileo's burning as much as any orthodox cardinal – Galileo is given an eloquent rebuttal:

> "You have misunderstood why things went awry. (...) Science needed more religion, not less. And religion needed more science. The two needed to become one. Science is a form of devotion, a kind of worship. You made a fundamental mistake, both in my time and your own." (pg.419)

Ganymede, too, is given persuasive counter-arguments – he comes from the "end times", he says, in which humans are driven to extinction because of the inexact adoption of science. But his eschatological language only increases his similarity to Galileo's Jesuitical tormenters. *Galileo's Dream* is a novel of balance – between history and future, character and incident, literary and genre fiction, science and religion. Galileo's own instinct, too, is towards synthesis. "Together," goes the novel's last line, "we may crab sideways towards good." (pg.584).

For all that wholeness of vision, *Galileo's Dream* is not a perfect book: those handwaves are at times great distracting gestures; its historical sections try to have it both ways, making use of their alien mindsets but at times sounding oddly demotic ("Shit shit *shit*. Those pricks!" (pg.33)); the coolness of Robinson's future makes it difficult truly to care about, though here Galileo proves a reliable focus of interest. But there is a beautiful passage early on in which Galileo looks through a telescope given to him by Ganymede, sees a moon of Jupiter, and then find himself on its surface. It is a grand, sly metaphor for the transformative, transporting power of mere observation. Science does not do away with systems as Donne feared; it takes us forward to the next. In this richly written, wholly composed novel, Kim Stanley Robinson asks us what all that might mean. *Galileo's Dream* is an important, entertaining and wise science fictional statement. This review skims across its surface.

A shorter version of this review was published in *Strange Horizons* 28 April 2010 www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2010/04/the_arthur_c_cl.shtml

Interfictions 2: An Anthology of Interstitial Writing

Ed. Delia Sherman and Christopher Barzak. (Interstitial Arts Foundation, 2009., 302+xvi p, $16.
Reviewed by Sandor Klapscik

The title indicates that this is the second volume in a series of genre-bending anthologies by the Interstitial Arts Foundation, a group which also creates online literature, music collections, and organizes auctions. The first anthology, *Interfictions* started with Heinz Insu Fenkl's theoretically intense, but lucid introduction, in which Fenkl refers to Victor Turner's liminality, Homi Bhabha's hybridity, Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow's anthologies of fairy tale rewritings, and highly self-conscious fantasy fiction, such as that of John Crowley. The Interstitial writers intend to place themselves in the interstices of high culture and pop-culture, fantasy and postmodern fairy tales, horror and science fiction. Thus, they try to embody the age-old dreams of many writers, in a way similar to recent movements such as the Slipstream, New Weird, and the New Wave Fabulists.

The editors of the first volume were daring to include three translated texts, two from French and one from Hungarian, and – besides a few long term veterans and rising stars – relatively unknown contributors, some of whom are still clearly learning the ropes. *Interfictions 2* introduces us to another group of less known authors. Only the editors form a bridge between the two volumes: Sherman is an editor in both books, Barzak is a contributor in the first volume, while Theodore Goss is the editor of the previous, and a contributor in the later anthology. In both anthologies, but especially in the former, the feminine voice is strong: at least half of the authors, narrators and protagonists are female. The new volume includes only one translated story, although remains highly transnational, containing entries from Australia and Norway.

One of the most well-known names in *Interfictions 2* is that of Henry Jenkins, the media and fan culture scholar, who emphasizes in his introduction that Interstitial Writing is not a movement, not an existing community, nor simply an idea (p. v). Jenkins dates back genre crossings to the era of the Studio System in Hollywood (from the 1920s to the 1950s). His theoretical arguments hypothesize an even more overarching tradition behind genre crossings when he refers covertly to Brian Attebery's fuzzy-set genre theory, and overtly to Tzvetan Todorov's fantasy theory, who emphasizes the reader's generic *hesitation* in his analysis of mainly 18th and 19th century texts.

Further, Jenkins argues that "this is the best of times and the worst of times for the interstitial arts" (p. xvi): on the one hand, there are ever-increasing examples of widely influential, genre-bending cultural phenomena, such as Bollywood films and popular American television series. On the other hand, due to the specification of the pop-culture industry, "[s]ubcultures break down into smaller subcultures, niches become smaller niches": extremely diverse and

specified subgenres influence the audience, resulting in growing apprehension on the side of the producers, "an anxiety that is being met by more aggressive policing of boundaries" (p. xii).

So, in this contradictory situation, how does the anthology achieve the goals and principles of the Interstitial Writers?

First, in several stories, not only the conventions of fantasy, but also the traditions of canonical literature, and those of myth are foregrounded. The diverse and longstanding thematic manifestations of divine war, embedded visions, and flashbacks characterize Jeffrey Ford's brief, and yet complex '"The War Between Heaven and Hell Wallpaper", which evokes Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classical piece "The Yellow Wallpaper". The conventions of Arthurian legend, and postmodern, intertextual, self-reflexive (albeit somewhat hackneyed) parody permeate Lionel Davoust's "L'Ile Close". A Buddhist tale, a Vietnam war story, the Greek myth of the Lotus Eaters, and the short description of a Dickian psychedelic trip are interwoven in M. Rickert's "Beautiful Feast". Melanesian myth, and lyrical descriptions of nostalgic memories of living in nature saturate Lavie Tidhar's "Shoes", slightly evoking Hemingwayesque motifs, such as war, passion, fishing, the sea, and so on. The influence of Latin American magic realism is tangible in Brian Francis Slattery's touching, humanist story, which tells the story of an entrepreneur's gigantic parties, a fantastically talented local musician, and the clash between Western investment and a Third World country, somewhere in South America or perhaps The Philippines, a country whose capital is named "San Marcos".

Second, certain stories go back to the Gothic tradition, and the oeuvre of Edgar Allan Poe and Conan Doyle, in which psychological horror, and detective fiction are inseparably interwoven. This is what happens in Will Ludwigsen's "Remembrance is Something like a House". The poetic story is a mixture of an Andersen-like fairy tale and, as its author says, "a crime tale with a supernatural element" (p. 27). The story utilizes an estranged narrative perspective, as it is narrated from the focal point of a sentient object, a haunting and haunted house enabled with consciousness but limited capability of speech and communication. Its lack of communication is partly due to a trauma from the past, a murder, an experience that it intends to pacify by re-visiting its former dwellers. Elements of a ghost story and metaphysical detective fiction – a "frustrating" whodunit without a final denouement, a "story about not knowing" (p. 194) – are intermingled in William Alexander's "After Verona". Psychological horror is also tangible in Peter M. Ball's "Black Dog: A Biography".

Third, the conventions of detective stories, fantasy and supernatural tales are supplemented by scientific and sf discourse in several texts. Thus, Carlos Hernandez's funny and masterly written story features ghostly visitations, which are explained both by principles of quantum physics and Santeria magic. Dystopian visions, ghostly visitations, scientific and pseudo-scientific discourse, as well as conspiracy theories and a murder enigma saturate Alaya Dawn

Johnson's anti-war story "The Score". Cecil Castelucci's "The Long and Short of Long-Term Memory" is equally grounded in sf tropes (such as moon travel), the philosophical-ethical problematics of remembrance, the psychological understanding of trauma, and neuroscientific lecture notes about memory. The story overtly refers to HM, one of the most famous patients in the history of neuroscience. HM, due to surgery, lost his ability to form new long-term memories and knowledge, but could still remember his early experiences, in a way similar to well-known fictional characters, such as the protagonist in Christopher Nolan's celebrated film *Memento*. Sf, high fantasy, fairy tale and self-reflexive fantasy parody are intermingled in Goss's "Child-Empress of Mars", while the physiological descriptions of childbirth, and hyperrealistic prose of domesticity are permeated by Farah Mendlesohn's liminal fantasy in Stephanie Shaw's skillfully written "Afterbirth".

Fourth, the authors occasionally utilize (seemingly) unusual, striking narrative means to shape their plot. Johnson evokes the form of blog, and flame wars, Slattery uses interviews, oral history, Castellucci draws on lecture notes and scientific illustrations of the nervous system, Ball on autobiography and metafiction, and Alan DeNiro's story displays an unpronounceable title. Ludwigsen, Camilla Bruce, Amelia Beamer and David J. Schwartz utilize an estranged narrative point-of-view. In Bruce's story, the unhappy end of a romantic relationship is explained from the perspective of the writer's muse. In Beamer's metafictional "Morton Goes to the Hospital", the focalizer-narrator is a spectral being, whose invisible presence – in addition to that of another ghost, Marie – subtly influences the lives of human characters, in a way similar to the angels in Wim Wenders's visual masterpiece *Wings of Desire*. In Schwartz's story, which strikingly blends Judeo-Christian myth, Hollywood conventions and Muslim history, the narrator is a sentient explosion, haunting in a post-apocalyptic, dystopian, fragmented US.

A few questions to sum up. Does the anthology consist of entertaining and well-written stories, despite the lack of widely celebrated contributors? Although I found certain stories in the first Interstitial anthology fascinating, and some of them even poetic, the artistic level of those texts occasionally left me disappointed. The second anthology, in my opinion, has managed to raise the level, and comprises more skillfully written, highly enjoyable texts.

Do the stories exemplify convincingly the principles of Interstitial Arts Foundation, the erosion of genre boundaries? Most of them, yes. Yet, in a few cases the genre crossings are not dramatically noticeable: the manifestations of metafiction, irony and autobiography, for example, do not necessarily make a story interstitial, since such features can be detected by an apt or deconstructive critic in almost every literary text. As T. S. Miller argues in *Strange Horizons* discussing Ball's "Black Dog", "[t]his conception of interstitiality doesn't do much for me, perhaps because that's how I understand all fiction to be generated: from a combination of the author's perceptions, experiences, and speculations". [1]

I would also question the interstitiality of a few other stories: Nin Andrews's brief, feminist fairy tale adaptation, "The Marriage", and Ray Vukcevich's "The Two of Me", which translates the problematics of sister-brother relationship into a fantasy tale, or the parody of it, and mainly the author's intention verifies its place in the anthology. The text "isn't particularly unconventional in the wider context of contemporary fantasy, but the author also argues for its interstitiality based on the fact that he wrote it in response to a work of visual art". [2] Shira Lipkin's "Valentines" describes altered consciousness, alienated perception and remembrance, which is of course an often used motif in sf and horror – yet, it does not make the story liminal, since those speculative genres are hardly manifested in the story. Elizabeth Ziemska's tragicomical "Count Poniatowski and the Beautiful Chicken" and DeNiro's story seem pure sf to me. The former discusses the irreversible nature of history, and the problematics of time travel, while the latter is a dense, superb dystopia, which shifts unobtrusively between several focalizers, and outlines a reversed world order in which current developing countries become the leading economic and political powers, and package couriers have ultimate control in a devastated New York, in the enclave of "Lord Manhattan". In the afterword, Barzak claims that it is the unruly structure and experimental style that makes the story interstitial. Of course, it would be hard to dispute that "shifts in point of view", disrupted chronology, metafiction, embedded tales, and other narrative tricks characterize interstitial fiction.[3] But would a considerable part of the New Wave, and postmodern sf be interstitial then, "outside of its own genre expectations" (p. 295)? Perhaps such texts were unclassifiable a few decades ago, but by now they have quite certainly created their own trend, tradition, or sub-genre in sf, horror and fantasy. Experimental narration does not necessarily make a text interstitial, for me at least.

Of course, since genre boundaries are fuzzy, the limits of generic liminality also become extremely fuzzy, if they exist at all. Anything may be conceived interstitial, and so the decision turns into a judgment call: Miller, for example, questions the liminality of Slattery's "Interviews After the Revolution", which is flawlessly positioned in the volume for me, by manifesting certain traits of magic realism.

Further, the question arises: do we need to confirm the overall presence of genre-bending in contemporary speculative fiction, and literature as such? After all, formal experimentations and genre crossings could hardly be interpreted as recent, or rare, unique phenomena. Andrew M. Butler and John Clute take such literary techniques for granted.[4] Carl Freedman also says in his *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* that (sub-)genres always function only as stylistic marks that authors and readers consciously use: "a genre is not a classification but an element or, better still, a tendency that . . . is active to a greater or lesser degree within a literary text that is itself understood as a complexly structured totality".[5] Analogous arguments by critics of "mainstream" literature could be brought up endlessly, from German Romanticism to Russian Formalism and

Deconstruction, as David Duff candidly explains in his *Modern Genre Theory*. [6]

Thus, perhaps the most complex question that the volume raises is how recent, postmodern fantasy, horror and sf, such as the fiction of Kelly Link, Neil Gaiman, Interstitial Arts, Slipstream, New Weird, and the New Wave Fabulists, correlates with more traditional literature. How are contemporary, postmodern fantasy, and earlier, but unconventional fantasy interrelated? How does the erosion of genre boundaries help us reinterpret former, well-known works of speculative fiction? How is such a phenomenon interpreted by at least a century old, "mainstream" criticism? Why do we consider genre overlapping a current technique, while it most probably just indicates the recurrence of previous artistic principles and literary methods? The two volumes of *Interfictions* form another, perhaps crucial step towards answering such questions – and they are, hopefully, far from being the final step. We are eager to read further thought provoking texts concerning these fascinating problematics – *Interfictions 3*, I think, is already highly awaited by a wide audience.

ENDNOTES

1 Miller, Review of Interfictions 2. *Strange Horizons* 11 November 2009. http://strangehorizons.com/reviews/2009/11/interfictions_2.shtml; accessed 05 March 2010.

2 Miller, Review of Interfictions 2

3 See Gary K. Wolfe and Amelia Beamer's "21st Century Stories", a summary of narrative methods and themes in the fiction of current movements, *Foundation. The International Review of Science Fiction* 37.103 (2008): pp.16-37 at pp.26-32.

4 Andrew M. Butler, "Between the 'Deaths' of Science Fiction: A Skeptical View of the Possibility for Anti-Genres", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 15.3 (2005), pp.208-16 at p.208; John Clute, "Canary Fever", Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts 15.3 (2005), pp.217-27 at p.226.

5 Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), at p.20.

6 David Duff, "Introduction", in David Duff, ed, *Modern Genre Theory.* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp.1-23 at pp.4-17.

Science Fiction Secrets: From Government Files and the Paranormal

By Nick Redfern (Anomalist Books, 2009, 255 pp. £9.95)
Reviewed by David Seed

The launch of *The X-Files* in 1993 coincided with the revelation through declassified documents of a whole series of covert programmes, mainly from the Cold War. The TV series' exploitation of the familiar pattern of individual investigators (Mulder and Scully) pitting themselves against a secretive and possibly corrupt establishment, which probably had been suppressing information about intelligent extra-terrestrials. Their antagonist emerged as the Smoking Man, the personification of secrecy and concealment. This is the broad context of Nick Redfern's *Science Fiction Secrets.* Secrecy depends on a specific kind of state apparatus, like that established in the USA. after the Second World War, but Redfern has noted the notorious case of Stalin's attempts to create a super-worker or soldier by cross-breeding humans and apes. Stalin is said to have told Ilya Ivanov, his main biological experimenter, "I want a new invincible human being, insensitive to pain, resistant and indifferent about the quality of food they eat." Whether or not Stalin was inspired by Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* or the muscular heroes of Edgar Rice Burroughs remains speculative, though he was a keen reader of both writers. Redfern could also have included the extrapolations from the Nazi experiments with twins and artificial insemination in John Wyndham's *Plan for Chaos*, written between 1948 and 1951 but not published until 2009, and more famously Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil* (1976), concerning a plan by Joseph Mengele, during the 1960s living in Brazil, to resurrect Nazi fortunes through multiple clones of Hitler. Later reports in the press suggested that Mengele had indeed been experimenting on twins in the Brazilian town of Candido Goi, whose numbers had so strikingly increased that the matter came to the attention of the authorities[1].

The most famous example of a science fiction author being accused of publicizing secrets remains that of Cleve Cartmill, whose 1944 story "Deadline" presented such accurate information on the construction of an atomic bomb that the author was interrogated in some depth by Military Intelligence. Despite the statement from a censorship officer that they had "always been reluctant to interfere with fictional material because of the impossibility of fettering the mind of man," the investigation gives us a clear sign of the security state which was coming into being through wartime emergency and which would subsequently develop into an institutionalized system of secrecy throughout the Cold War[2]. Indeed, Redfern describes a case similar to that of Cleve Cartmill, namely that of Mikel Conrad's film *The Flying Saucer* (1950), which revolves around attempts to discover how Soviet agents are investigating reports of flying saucers in Alaska. Evidently to promote the film, Conrad circulated reports that his film contained

actual footage of such vessels without realizing that the American government was in the process of investigating such reports. For his pains he fell under the scrutiny of US Air Force agents to whom he subsequently admitted that his subject was completely invented. In a bizarre mirroring, investigation off-screen repeated the fictional investigation within the film.

The best-known example of UFOs and extra-terrestrial beings is the supposed landing at Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. The subjects was explored in Whitley Strieber's 1989 docu-novel *Majestic*, which frames its narrative through the activities of a journalist and which presents as its protagonist a fervent UFOlogist. The tension between the investigative impulse of the first and the gullibility of the second is what gives Strieber's novel its interest. Despite the fact that he seems to have invented some of the documents he cites and took another from David Langford's *Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another World 1871* (1979), Strieber captures the ambiguities of investigation and the impossibility of verification of such an event. His title refers to Operation Majestic Twelve, a secret group of scientists, army officers and government officials supposedly set up by Truman in 1947. The surviving documents relating to this group have been described as fakes or government disinformation . As Redfern points out, the Roswell subject has been picked up in a 1998 SF novel, *Alien Rapture – The Chosen*, co-written by the paranormal specialist Brad Steiger and Edgar Rothschild Fouche, who has worked on secret projects for the US Air Force. The book was promoted as a revelation of a new aerospace vehicle, i.e. as a narrative used to express a non-fictional subject. When interviewed about UFOs in 1999, Fouche spoke knowledgably about the American government experimenting with new technologies, but when pressed about alien invasion, he answered cautiously: "we are under threat."[3]

UFO and alien abduction stories make up the major part of *Science Fiction Secrets*, and which have generated a huge literature of their own. One of the most professional researchers into this area has been Timothy Good, who has argued at length for the existence of both UFOs and extra-terrestrials but who has actually demonstrated without a doubt that intelligence agencies took the subject so seriously that they suppressed information about them at every point. Good in effect displaces the alien from ambiguous SF-style images on to "men dressed in Air Force uniform or bearing impressive credentials from government agencies, who intimidate witnesses and sometimes confiscate evidence from them".[4] One such official who has stepped out of the shadows has been the British investigator and novelist Nick Pope, a UFO investigator for the Ministry of Defence from 1985 to 2006, and therefore well placed to register the unusual willingness of the MoD to assist the BBC TV series *Invasion Earth* (1998). The strangest case of supposed human-ET contact concerns reports by a former US government employee of Operation Crystal Knight aka Project Serpo, concerning an exchange programme with aliens in the 1960s and 1970s. The report, probably a hoax, was put forward allegedly to counter the KGB rumour

that some US cities were mined with nuclear bombs, but the strangest twist of all came with the suggestion that the documents were written by former CIA employee Alice Sheldon, the SF writer James Tiptree, Jr. Ridiculous as it sounds, this suggestion exemplifies one of Redfern's main themes, namely connection, specifically between SF writers and secret projects. In 1976 William Burroughs published an article entitled "Black Magic Mind War" where he recommends the launch volume of John F. Rossman's *The Mind Masters* series because it "may well contain some real inside information"[5]. Summarizing the novel, Burroughs notes that the protagonist is a disillusioned agent who has been working at an American psychic training centre on Project Pandora. Probably unbeknown to Burroughs, there was indeed a Project Pandora which had been started in 1962 in response to Soviet microwave radio beams being directed against the US embassy.

What happens if a Science Fiction writer is also a member of an intelligence organization? This is the question posed by the mysterious case of "Kirk Allen", a physicist who underwent extended therapy with the psychiatrist Robert Lindner (of *Rebel Without A Cause* fame), apparently convinced that he had been reading SF novels about himself on other planets. Largely on the authority of the anthropologist and SF scholar Leon Stover, the possibility emerged that Allen was Cordwainer Smith/Paul Linebarger. The latter's son admitted that he frankly didn't know[6]. However, after painstaking research, the Linebarger scholar Alan C. Elms picked his way through the complex layers of disguise in this story – pathological in the patient's case, professional in the case of Lindner – and concluded more definitely than Redfern suggests that the two figures were probably one and the same[7]. A third source of complication here lay in the fact that, apart from being a sinologist and writing SF, Linebarger was also working for the CIA and other agencies on psychological warfare. In other words, he was a professional expert on the manipulation of information. Regardless of whether Linebarger was Allen or not, his SF writing presents the fascinating case of narratives coloured and structured by the intelligence practices he was promoting elsewhere. Alan Elms has shown, for instance, how his "Underpeople" are a coded version of the Chinese and a concordance to Linebarger's fiction reveals the complex multi-lingual word-play embedded in his narratives. In a similar way, Julie Phillips has argued that working for the CIA confirmed James Tiptree/Alice B. Sheldon's "habits of self-concealment."[8] Here intelligence experience seems to have helped her to create different writing personas for herself.

Science Fiction Secrets unconsciously pays testimony to how much previously secret information is now accessible on the web. For instance, on the origins of Dianetics and the Scientology movement, L. Ron Hubbard belongs in that very small group of citizens who enthusiastically started their own F.B.I. file by informing on his own wife and friends in the early 1950s. These documents were posted on the web as the "H-files" and pay sad testimony to Hubbard's

paranoid conviction that he was at the centre of a number of conspiracies, a conviction that found expression in his enormous *Mission Earth* series. Here he describes at great length the revelations of a CIA agent that Earth is in the grips of a conspiracy mounted by the Rockecenter [Rockefeller] corporation. Redfern shows how at the end of the Second World War, as he was formulating his notion of Dianetics, Hubbard became involved with the rocket technician and occultist Jack Parsons. The latter had probably come across Hubbard through his early SF stories and was to go down to SF posterity when his name was borrowed by Philip K. Dick for the protagonist of *Dr. Futurity* (1960). Drawing on a range of web-pages, Redfern documents different mysteries like the deaths of Parsons and Hubbard, the removal of Parson's files by the FBI, and the possibility that he was engaged in secret government projects[9].

Dick's creation in part of his own FBI file is a well-known story and one which is usually taken as evidence of his slide into paranoia, especially when he informed the bureau in 1972 that he had been invited by a member of a neo-Nazi group to put evidence in his fiction of an ongoing conspiracy[10]. Although Redfern doesn't put it like this, the letter could be taken as a nexus point where a number of different issues intersect. The notion of encoded messages within published texts was applied two years later by James Grady in *Six Days of the Condor*, his novel about renegade drugs smugglers within the CIA. In his letter Dick cites Thomas M. Disch's *Camp Concentration* (1968), which he was told contained the "vital material" for such encoding[11]. Writing against the background of the Vietnam War which both he and Dick opposed, Disch describes a secret government facility where inmates are infected with syphilis with the aim of enhancing their mental capacities. Such secret installations had been in existence since the 1930s, experiments had been conducted on syphilitics, Disch may have modelled his setting on Camp (later Fort) Detrick, the most notorious of these centres. The experiments were conducted by the Special Operations Division of the army Biological Warfare laboratories, including one on prison inmates in Philadelphia who in 1965 were exposed to a toxin in Agent Orange, widely used in Vietnam. Fort Detrick was even alleged to have been a centre for producing the HIV virus, probably a KGB disinformation strategy based on SF novels[12]. Dick's whole oeuvre reads partly like a serial encyclopedia of conspiracies, especially late novels dating from this period like *A Scanner Darkly* (1977)

Fredric Jameson has loftily described paranoia as the "poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age".[13] But paranoia can also be a working hypothesis for anyone reading the kind of material Nick Redfern is putting forward. We have to leave behind stark contrasts between fact and fiction, and instead consider relative possibilities. The potential use of psychic research for espionage sounds fantastic but the possibility was institutionalized by intelligence services on both sides during the Cold War and it thereby took on a bizarre life of its own. Although some of the stories Redfern puts forward in *Science Fiction Secrets* are

known, others aren't, and he gives us glimpses of connections which expand startlingly into very strange areas indeed.

(ENDNOTES)

1 Nick Evans, "Nazi angel of death Josef Mengele 'created twin town in Brazil'" *The Telegraph* (21 January 2009) at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/brazil/4307262/Nazi-angel-of-death-Josef-Mengele-created-twin-town-in-Brazil.html

2 Robert Silverberg, "Reflections: The Cleve Cartmill Affair: Two", *Asimov's Science Fiction,* at http://www.asimovs.com/_issue_0311/ref2.shtml

3 "Ed Fouche Telephone Interview" in "Extraterrestrial Technology and Edgar Rothschild Fouche" at http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/ciencia/ciencia_extraterrestrialtech06.htm

4 Timothy Good, *Above Top Secret: The Worldwide UFO Cover-Up* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1987), p. 291.

5 William S. Burroughs, *The Adding Machine: Collected Essays* (London: John Calder, 1985), p. 150.

6 "Was Paul Linebarger Also Kirk Allen?" at http://www.cordwainer-smith.com/was-paul-linebarger-kirk-allen-.htm

7 Alan C. Elms, "Behind the Jet-Propelled Couch: Cordwainer Smith & Kirk Allen," at http://www.ulmus.net/ace/csmith/behindjetcouch.html

8 Julie Phillips, James Tiptree, Jr. The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006, p. 163. Alan Elms discusses her experience in psychological research in "The Psychologist Who Empathized with Rats: James Tiptree, Jr. as Alice B. Sheldon, PhD," in *Science Fiction Studies,* (March 2004, vol. 31), pp. 81-96.

9 V. Colin Bennett, "Jack Parsons: King of the Rocket Men" at http://www.bob-wonderland.supanet.com/Jack.htm/

10 Dick's FBI file is discussed by Robert M. Philmus in his article "The Two Faces of Philip K. Dick," in R.D. Mullen et al, eds. On Philip K. Dick: *40 Articles from "Science-Fiction Studies"* (Terre Haut: SF-TH Inc., 1992), pp. 246-256.

11 Dick's letter was dated 28 October 1972. Gregg Rickman has argued that most of Dick's letters to the FBI were never actually sent: *"The Nature of Dick's Fantasies,"* in Mullen, On Philip K. Dick, pp. 275-8.

12 Redfern cites an unpublished manuscript by a KGB agent confirming that agents sought out plague scenarios from SF novels (p. 158).

13 Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" at http://www.rainer-rilling.de/gs-villa07-Dateien/JamesonF86a_CognitiveMapping.pdf

Spirit: or, The Princess of Bois Dormant

by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz, 2008, 480pp, £14.99)
Reviewed by Abigail Nussbaum

Gwyneth Jones's *Spirit: or, The Princess of Bois Dormant* has what is quite possibly the most bulletproof one-line pitch I've ever encountered: a space opera, gender-swapped retelling of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Space opera and swashbuckling historical adventures of the kind penned by Alexandre Dumas share much of their DNA to begin with--the grand settings, the operatic plots, the magnificent set pieces with never anything less than the fate of the world at stake--and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, whose plot beats and themes have thoroughly permeated our culture, is as essential a story as one can imagine, easily transferrable from one genre to another. So promising is this premise, in fact, that its allure survives even *Spirit*'s failure to live up to it.

Taking place in the same universe as Jones's Aleutian trilogy (*White Queen*, 1991; *North Wind*, 1994; *Phoenix Cafe*, 1997), *Spirit* is allegedly a standalone story and even begins some time after the trilogy's end. Nevertheless, there is a weight of history bearing down on the novel that Jones finds herself constantly having to explain: the events of the trilogy, of the takeover of Earth by the alien Aleutians and Earth's rebellion; the internal politics of earth before and after the Aleutian invasion; the ideological split between Reformers and Traditionalists, whose names refer mainly to their takes on the definition and fluidity of gender roles and gender identity; the physical and philosophical underpinnings of the Buonarotti process, which allows instantaneous travel between distant points by "unencoding" a person at one of them and "recoding" them into the fabric of the universe at the other; the intricate social and political milieu in which the novel takes place. This weight makes for a rather jerky progression of plot – for every few lines of dialogue, Jones will frequently halt the novel's action in order to deliver several paragraphs of explanations. Despite, or perhaps even because, of these paragraphs (which eventually become so wearying that it's hard to keep them all in mind), *Spirit* is an opaque novel. There was constantly a sense, while I was reading it, of a wider world of which I was only gaining brief glimpses. This is perhaps deliberate – the novel's protagonist is young, socially inferior person with only a limited understanding of her world, whose troubles are rooted in that lack of understanding, and Jones may be trying to elicit that same confusion and bewilderment in her readers--or it could be an indication that despite being a self-contained story, *Spirit* doesn't stand alone from the Aleutian trilogy, and that readers like myself who approach it without a grounding in those books will quickly find themselves at sea.

The beats of the *Count of Monte Cristo* story are simple and well-known: in the first part of the story, the naive protagonist has their picture-perfect life snatched away from them by an act of betrayal; in the second, they spend the

decades of their imprisonment being unmade and then becoming someone more powerful and more dangerous than their enemies could ever have imagined; in the third, the protagonist returns, in disguise, to the society from which they were ejected and exacts their revenge. *Spirit* follows these beats broadly but introduces its own variations on the story, the first and most interesting of which comes in the novel's very first page. Our protagonist, Gwibiwr (called Bibi), is given more reason to seek revenge before the novel even starts than any sane person would need, when her entire people are slaughtered before her eyes by the forces of General Yu for rebelling against the Young Emperor. Discovered hiding in her people's caves after the massacre, Bibi, then only a child, is offered the chance to either join Yu's harem or become the servant of his wife, Lady Nef, and chooses the latter. She grows up, therefore, among her destroyers, her closest friends the soldiers whom she first saw killing her family. "She accepted the paradox with a child's resignation" we're told (p.16), and grows up not only obedient but orthodox in her adherence to Lady Nef's beliefs. Grown up and inducted into the ranks of the civil service, Bibi calmly denounces her own family in her first job interview.

> "Rebels are just attention-seekers," answered Bibi. "Their aim is self-aggrandizement through destructive tactics; they are parasites on the system, offering no genuine opposition." (p.38)

There's a lot of potential in this addition to Bibi's history. Unlike the blandly apolitical Edmond Dantès, who is happy to ignore the events of state unfurling around him while his own life proceeds apace, Bibi is constantly aware of the political tensions that affect her life – the threats to General Yu and Lady Nef's position in court, the tensions between them, the ongoing struggle between Reformers and Traditionalists. Perhaps more importantly, she is aware of the precariousness of her position in Lady Nef's household, of her relative helplessness and, within it, her ability to maintain her sense of self. In one of the earliest scenes in the novel, she's brought before a rapacious General Yu, and climbs a roof beam to escape his advances – a pointless, doomed effort, which only succeeds because the General is distracted from pursuing her more seriously. In a way, this makes Bibi the type of character who is spectacularly unsuited to being the protagonist of a *Count of Monte Cristo*-type story. Edmond Dantès's rage is fuelled by his naive belief that, having committed no wrong, no wrong should have been done to him. Bibi was not only disabused of this belief in early childhood, but has grown up in a setting to which the notions of justice and equality before the law that come so naturally to Dantès (and to us) are entirely foreign. It may very well be this difference between these two characters that makes the *Spirit*'s climax so much of a let-down (about which more shortly). That aside, there is hardly any reference to Bibi's history once this first, introductory part of the novel concludes, no consideration of the fact that

she might have other reasons to seek vengeance than the ones the unfold in the novel's second part.

It's in this second part that *Spirit* really grinds into gear and gives some indication of the rollicking space opera it might have been. Recruited to a diplomatic mission to the alien planet Sigurt's World, led by General Yu and Lady Nef, Bibi and the rest of the expedition members soon find themselves completely cut off. Allegedly honoured guests, they are in reality confined by the Sigurtians to a remote location, besieged by both their hosts and the inhospitable cold, as the diplomatic situation worsens around them. The novel comes to life in these chapters, as the isolated characters' incomprehension of their situation aligns with the readers', and as the complexity of the political upheaval back home fades away in light of the stark need to survive what ultimately becomes a siege. When the dust settles, Bibi is captured by the Sigurtians and abandoned by General Yu, and there follows a magnificently trippy interlude in which she becomes the concubine of a Sigurtian prince, bears him a child, and, once the child is weaned, is locked away in the Sigurtian prison-moon Fenmu, where she is raped and bears another child. This is Jones's second major variation on Dumas's story. Men can be and are raped in prison (though there's no mention of this in *The Count of Monte Cristo*) but as a woman Bibi is subject to an even greater horror as a result of this abuse. The chapters following her incarceration, which describe her lapse into a barely human state, are among the rawest and most affecting in the novel. Bibi's world narrows to the confines of her cell, her mind narrows to the most basic acts of survival – eating, using a chamber pot, feeding her child. The distance imposed by the constant info-dumps in previous chapters, and by Bibi's own self-control, is erased.

Finally, as the *Monte Cristo* plot demands, Bibi escapes her cell only to find herself in another, containing Lady Nef, who takes the dehumanized young woman in hand and re-educates her. And, like Edmond Dantès, Bibi escapes by taking advantage of Lady Nef's death, but this time there is an additional cost – the child she bore in prison dies during the attempt. Again, this is something that should have informed the remainder of the novel, and most particularly the intensity of Bibi's rage and the depth of her need for revenge, but instead the dead child is mentioned only once in the novel's third part, in which Bibi, now in possession of Lady Nef's access codes and fortune, reinvents herself as The Princess of Bois Dormant and seeks out those responsible for betraying Lady Nef and herself.

It's in this third part of the novel that the promise of Jones's premise is truly undone. On the one hand, Jones is almost slavish in following the shape of Dumas's original novel, replicating many of the plots that the Count involves himself in when he returns to society. Like the Count, Bibi takes the son of her betrayer (who, in this version of the story, is also her son) under her wing, helps a young woman who is being poisoned by her stepmother, and meets her unwitting and much-diminished former fiancé. On the other hand, she leaves

out just those elements that make the final segment of *The Count of Monte Cristo* such a fun melodrama. What's great about these chapters in Dumas's original is that they allow the reader to have their cake and eat it – to revel in the Count's intricately plotted vendettas while still shaking their heads over his all-consuming need for revenge. In *Spirit*, Bibi seems to neither eat her cake, nor desire it. Her thirst for vengeance is never particularly noticeable. She seems to be pursuing Lady Nef's betrayers more out of a sense of duty than out of primal rage, and her actions seem more focused on helping the young people (some of them the children of the children of friends who were also caught up in General Yu's plot) around her live a better life. Which is very healthy and enlightened, of course, but when we've seen so little of this journey towards enlightenment – when, on the contrary, the closest we've come to Bibi's soul was in those moments of howling, incoherent rage during her imprisonment on Fenmu – it comes to feel unearned, a moral rather than meaningful character development. Worse than that, it makes the novel's final segment rather a dull slog. If, in its earlier parts, the uncomprehending Bibi was our window to the convoluted politics of the high and mighty, in *Spirit*'s final chapters the Princess of Bois Dormant is one of these high and mighty, and just incomprehensible to us as General Yu and Lady Nef once were to Bibi. The novel, which except in the Fenmu chapters was always a chilly affair, becomes icy.

There is, undeniably, a great deal of wanting *Spirit* to have been a different novel than Jones wanted it to be in my criticisms of it, but given its still-alluring single-sentence pitch I'm not sure how unfair it was of me to have expected *Spirit* to be a rollicking, convoluted, decadent, Dumas-esque romp rather than the more philosophically-inclined novel it turned out to be. In the end, Bibi's purpose turns out to have been not avenging Lady Nef's death or positioning herself at the centre of Earth's matrix of power, but undoing a wrong from the distant past of humanity's exploration of space. This may resonate with readers who are familiar with the Aleutian trilogy, but to someone who approaches the novel cold, it makes the entire exercise seem like a missed opportunity.

The Stranger (The Labyrinths of Echo: Book One)

By Max Frei [Svetlana Martynchik] (Orion, 2009, 544p, £18.99)
Reviewed by Andrew Ferguson

The basic recipe for *The Stranger* seems simple enough: Take one offbeat fantasy world. Blend in equal parts horror, mystery, and utopian tale. Suspend in this mixture one disaffected loser. Bake for 500 pages. Yet the book is anything but predictable. Not that the plotting is particularly intricate – even without knowing that the book is the first of ten in the series, there is never any doubt as to whether the protagonist will triumph in the end. Rather, the surprises in *The Stranger* spring from two sources: first, Frei's self-reflexive approach to developing his dreamlike storyworld; and second, an unrelenting carnivalesque spirit, often shading into outright grotesquerie.

The latter is immediately noticeable. The disaffected loser (also named Max, or Sir Max with honorific) is introduced to his new world by way of a café called the Glutton Bumba, and there is scarcely a page without trays of pastries or gallons of the coffee-substitute *kamra*. Unlike many fantasies where banquets serve primarily to move the plot forward via intrigues, assassinations, or rendezvous, here the feasts are their own end: the cases Max takes up as "Nocturnal Representative of the Most Venerable Head of the Minor Secret Investigative Force of the City of Echo" often feel like momentary digressions from the more central concerns of feeding and guzzling.

There is thus a strong whiff in *The Stranger* of Rabelais, or at least the Rabelais of Bakhtin, who may as well have been writing of Echo's gustatory reveries when noting that "This is a popular feast, a 'banquet for all the world.' The mighty aspiration to abundance and to a universal spirit is evident in each of these images [i.e., food, drink, swallowing, the open mouth]. It determines their forms, their positive hyperbolism, their gay and triumphant tone" (278). The book is suffused with a spirit of overabundance, usually in the service of food. While there are at least 240 degrees each of both white and black magic, ordinary citizens are only permitted up to the second degree, and that mostly because it's required for the making of the ubiquitous *kamra*. Yet when Echo-dwellers do give in to temptation and use forbidden higher-level magic, drawing the attention of the Minor Secret Investigative Force, as often as not it's to cook up some delicacy of decades past. And when the novel veers from the comic into the horrific, it usually gets there by way of grotesque parodies of banqueting, with poisoning, disembowelment, and cannibalism all on offer.

Of course, this inversion of the banquet image can only be temporary; as per Bakhtin, "Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself" (281); Max will always live to eat another day. For him, and for the other denizens of Echo – bar a few dead yet meddlesome dark warlocks – world

and banquet are one; the book's philosophical musings are only possible because of this setting. "[T]he banquet is even more important as the occasion for wise discourse ... free and frank truth can be said only in the atmosphere of the banquet, only in table talk" (283, 285).

As for self-reflexivity, *The Stranger* dines on genre convention almost as constantly as the characters do at the Glutton Bumba. Max dreams himself into the city of Echo and, like so many alternate-world protagonists before him, finds he has escaped the disappointment and disillusionment of quotidian life to a world precisely tailored to his peculiar temperament and talents. (Which is to say that Max is a stereotypical reader of "escapist" fantasy.) Though the process of crossing worlds is gradual, Frei delays the retelling of that oneiric journey, instead tossing Max and reader alike straight onto the streets of Echo with no map, no backstory, and only the briefest of etiquette lessons.

That bit of protocol – introducing oneself by holding the left hand in front of the eyes and saying, "I see you as though in a waking dream" – is meant for readers as well, and *The Stranger* is structured so as to reinforce that hypnogogic impression, with plots and settings developing in accordance with the book's own idiosyncratic logic, with episodes trafficking in such classic subconscious fare as the confrontation with the shadow and the return of the repressed. Chapters are leisurely, expansive (only seven of them in a 544-page tome), and more or less self-contained, almost a series of novellas. Or, alternately, like a detective serial – a genre which, interestingly, never came about in Echo, as Max discovers: a devoted consumer of noir fiction back in our world, he is dismayed to find that "In the literature of the Unified Kingdom, the detective novel does not seem to exist at all" (39) – until, of course, Max Frei comes along and writes ten of them.

This play of authorship originates, of course, with Svetlana Martynchik, whose success with the *Labyrinths of Echo* series has been as unlikely yet as overwhelming in Russia as J.K. Rowling's has been in England and America. But the chatty first-person narration of *The Stranger* feels much more characteristic than the chatty third-person narration of Harry Potter's tale; Max Frei is a role for Martynchik to perform – her own personal dream, perhaps. One of the few aspects of the carnivalesque image that this book rejects is that of the cross-dresser: in Echo, it simply is not considered funny when Max dresses up as a female for an undercover assignment, and selects for himself the unusual name "Marilyn Monroe". Is this an indication that Martynchik views her own literary transvestism as unimportant? Or is it rather a doubly burlesque take, spoofing the original spoof?

(There is a caveat attached to this review which may also be compounding this difficulty: translation is dangerous ground even for those fluent in both languages, and as a non-reader of Russian, I cannot gauge the quality of Gannon's translation. I suspect that the sometimes charming, sometimes maddening chattiness of the prose is present in the original, but still there are some oddly obscure cultural references and idioms that feel like stilted attempts

at approximating similarly archaic Russian figures of speech. What effect a more literal rendering would have produced – if indeed these phrases are not in the original – is an intriguing but, for me, sadly unanswerable question.)

It is an odd enterprise attempting to interpret a book which does not so much resist analysis as let it slip away, as when one is roused out of an absorbing dream. But the finest passages in the book are the ones which suggest that such interpretive attempts are misguided, especially in the seventh and final chapter when Max subcreates within Echo his own, further, dream world – one ideal, not for the self he is at present, but for a later and more refined self, for a fully individuated Max. It is this vision, as much as anything, which lends a retrospective unity to the chapters of *The Stranger* – it prompts Max to question the entire narrative impulse, to ask "why we need to create new Worlds at all". The answer, from a wise old mentor stand-in: " 'Why' isn't the right way of putting the question when you're talking about creating a new World. Everything that's truly interesting and worthwhile exists somewhere beyond the realm of cause and effect" (499).

On the whole, *The Stranger* is a decidedly different read, worth picking up at least for the first and last chapters. It will not be to everyone's taste – but those who take to it will find laid before them a feast unlike any other.

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The Lord of the Sands of Time

By Issui Ogawa (Haikasoru, 2009, 196p, £8.99)
Review by Alvaro Zinos-Amaro

In one possible future (not "the" future, since this novel invokes hundreds of alternate timestreams resulting) an implacable, inscrutable enemy, possibly hive-minded, strikes against humanity. These bad guys decide to launch a temporal incursion into the past, where it may be easier to stamp out the human race. No, it is isn't the Borg from *Star Trek: First Contact*; these are the ETs (Extra Terrestrials = Enemies of Terra = Evil Things, take your pick) in Issui Ogawa's *The Lord of the Sands of Time*, originally published in 2007 and translated into English by Jim Hubbert in 2009. As it turns out, it isn't the only familiar concept invoked by Ogawa's narrative: in fact, little original or surprising emerges from this slim, episodic, action-focused story.

To combat the time-travelling aliens, future humans invent cyborgs that can also "upstream" and thus combat the insect plague (oftentimes through old-fashioned limb-hacking). The mission of these cyborgs is to preserve humanity's existence while trying to alter history as little as possible. When not engaged in hand-to-hand combat they spread a message of unification and warning, attempting to prepare humans of various centuries and geographies for the great enemy. One such Messenger is the novel's hero, Orville, who shortly upon being "awakened" on Triton as an active unit of the Sandrocottos AI falls in love with Defence Force Supply Section worker Sayaka. We know that this romance, covered in the second chapter, is doomed by Orville's responsibility as a soldier, and by the end of said chapter O (as he becomes known) indeed assumes his duty and parts ways with Sayaka. We don't despair at this, however, or even feel much of a tugging at the heart-strings, because in the opening chapter we've met Lady Miyo, shaman queen Himiko from the Land of Wa in Japan 248 AD, and we know Miyo and the Messenger are to meet (or have already met, depending on your chronological vantage point). In between upstreaming to various colorful periods and intermittently returning to Miyo's Japan (or multiple versions of it), Ogawa's adherence to expectations ensures that sparks will fly between these two, and indeed by the seventh chapter we learn that "From that night on, Miyo and Orville shared the same bed." Other players orbit around this central pair; antagonist Takahikone, Lord Ikima of Yamatai and "administrative" ruler of affairs, his errand boy Mimaso, Miyo's helper boy Kan, Orville's fellow Messenger Alexandr, and Cutty Sark, Orville's Mission AI. The characterization of Miyo and Kan, and the subtleties of their relationship, is handled with skill, but the rest of the cast never amount to much more than expository mouthpieces and links between the action. In this sense, Cutty may be the worst offender; her voice is projected through the Messenger's sword:

> "The blade was huge, gently curved. The spine was milky white, but the edge was transparent and shone with a blinding radiance. This was nothing like Kan's sword, neither in make or material. And it spoke!" (p. 13)

Speak it does, delivering instructions, plans, or requests at crucial moments ("Throw me, woman!"). At one point, "The sword cut in, 'This is no time for idle chatter'" and we wonder whether the pun is intentional or an infelicity resulting from the translation process. As readers may glean from the somewhat cynical tone of my recapitulation, I didn't find any of this particularly convincing. The elements of Ogawa's narrative become clear early on: a combination of dizzying speculative conceits erected in seemingly haphazard fashion, violent action, and reflective and quasi-melancholic musings in the interludes in between. The first decapitation occurs on page 13, rendering all ensuing reflections on love and destiny not so much melodramatic as a bit beside the point.

The novel's earliest chapters work best, establishing as they do the central characters, setting up the main conceptual premise, and teasing us with genre-defying possibilities. Things progressively careen out of control after the midway mark. This is largely related to the time-travel abilities Ogawa lets lose in his world. He imposes too few restrictions, and as a result ends up having to inject increasingly elaborate and contrived explanations into the text to keep it from buckling under the weight of its own illogic. Novels dealing with time-travel and its cadre of progeny paradoxes represent a delicate balancing of forces; they should be constructed in a way that "plays fair" with the reader, if they are to even remotely hope for a suspension of disbelief and emotional investment on the reader's behalf, but they must still develop fresh motifs and perspectives. Successful examples include Robert Silverberg's *Up the Line* (1969), Michael Swanwick's *Bones of the Earth* (2003), and Paul Levinson's *The Plot to Save Socrates* (2006). These works illustrate the range of subject matters and philosophical positions that may be investigated via time-travel at the novel length while still achieving originality, force of vision and dealing with all the pesky paradoxes. In all three, the authors are firmly in control of their material. Ogawa's novel, by comparison, suffers from a tendency to play unfairly, revealing key information too late to be of use in creating dramatic tension or even to be helpful in understanding what exactly we should expect to happen next. As a result, it is difficult to perceive the continuity from one chapter to the next, which in turn tends to deflate any sense of suspense. Consider, for instance, the introduction of the time-travel trope itself:

> "'Several years ago, the ETs deployed a portion of their total energy to execute a time jump. Based on measurements of the radiant energy liberated in this maneuver, we estimate they reached a point roughly 480 years in the past. There appears to be no purpose to this move other than to change the course of history. ... " (p. 51)

There hasn't been enough foreshadowing to make this somewhat joylessly related information of much significance. We absorb the download inertly and move on. The same applies throughout whenever new data is imparted. By the time we arrive at the disclosure of the ET's true motivation for their time-spanning attack, we hardly care, and realize that even if we did it wouldn't make much sense.

Martin Lewis, reviewing this novel for *Strange Horizons*, notes that this is "a contemporary book that feels substantially older – it could have comfortably been published fifty years ago," an assessment I think most readers will have difficulty refuting (whether one thinks of that as a good thing or not, of course, depends on one's particular disposition). Other than Ogawa's on-the-fly elucidation of ideas, character's abilities and motivations, there are several stylistic reasons for this "old-fashioned" feel.

One such reason is the narrative's insistence on numerical accuracy. Consider a few randomly chosen examples. In chapter four, Cutty declares that "Completion rate of negotiations with major corporations is now 45 percent of target." It's difficult, though not impossible, to imagine how a negotiation rate can be quantified so precisely. Still, we can overlook it by remembering that it is attributed to an AI. But later in the same chapter, when describing an asteroid confrontation, we find out that the "fleet's all-out attack was 99.586 percent successful." That's enough decimals to raise at least one eyebrow. By the time Cutty greets O in chapter 8 with "Welcome, Orville. Your return raises our combat strength to 97 percent of its 1943 level..." and he replies "Four hundred and six timestreams, 370 defeats. Combat strength, 4 percent" the specificity has lost all credibility and we tend to react to the figures as what they are, fabrications. The underlying assumption that the universe may be so readily measured belies a metaphysical naivete and optimism that directly informs the "old-fashioned" feel identified above.

The second stylistic trait contributing to this characteristic is the repetition of descriptive phrases. The first such repetition that I detected appears barely six pages in, when we are told that "To Miyo, the Laws were little more than stale platitudes" and on the next page encounter "For Miyo, the Laws were platitudes." Fine, I suppose, if this were an isolated case; one can argue that a novel should receive more leeway in its ability to emphasize certain points than, say, a short story, and emphasis through reiteration is permissible. But on the next page, during the first encounter with a "mononoké" (the historically ancient ascribed term for an ET), Ogawa analogizes that "The creature stood on two legs, like the bears that roamed the eastern lands" and then in the next paragraph remarks that "The creature was built like a bear." From O's first encounter with Sayaka: "Even stranger was behavior" and in the next paragraph "This was somewhat unusual behavior for a clerk in a military installation." In chapter nine "Takahikoné gave an unearthly shriek" and then "Takahikoné gave a howl of anguish and rage that was almost inhuman." This short-attention-span tick seems to be symptomatic

of the novel's preoccupation with the thrill of immediate circumstances rather than macro-level consistency or aesthetic.

On the level of extrapolation, the world-building is a mess of the conservative and the fantastic, painting all of it in an unreal patina. An "onboard molecular printer" sounds like a near-future gadget, but the tapping of antimatter to travel hundreds of thousands of years into the past and the ability to download conscious AI's memories from one body to the next, not so much. The mononoké's ability to "see heat itself" instantly conjures up *Predator*, and scenes using World War II technology to fight the ETs bring to mind other more convincing alternate histories. The Messengers choose various paths to understanding the humanity they fight to defend, such as delving into religion, seeking to "understand art in its widest sense" or even focusing on "the development of a single creative field such as literature or music." This raises the question of when, precisely, the Messengers actually have time to *defend* humanity if their investigations into its nature are so in-depth. Alexandr writes a story, one that grows into a vast and complex epic, and we are treated to some of his observations on the creative process. From chapter eight: "I was pretty proud of that chapter myself. I got goose bumps writing it. I'm the author, but I couldn't wait to find out what was going to happen next." It would be facile to project this same sentiment on Ogawa during his writing of the novel, but it may nevertheless be an accurate summation of why certain events which should feel dramatic, if not climactic, come off as perfunctory instead. The visible manipulation of the plot, on the other hand, does reach a climax in that same unfortunate chapter (which unfolds in 98,579 BC), when we learn of the importance of rain:

> "[...] Look at the sky, it's sure to rain. The trees from which the ET harvest the sealant resin they use on their hides do not grow in these islands. The enemy will brave water a few inches deep, if they must, but they will not face us in the rain. We'll be able to rest at least till the weather clears." (p. 169)

Huh? I'm reminded of the title of the comic poem by Asimov, "I Just Make Them Up, See!"

I've conveyed the reasons why the Messenger's story doesn't deliver the kind of speculative experience I enjoy. Some praise is in order. Ogawa can write action sequences with panache, and when he takes the time to describe settings in detail his imagery can be elegant and beautiful (as in, for instance, the depiction of Miyo in the Great Hall in chapter three). Some of the smaller-scale ideas, such as a library ship, are intriguing, and though Ogawa's reach in the construction of alternate timelines exceeds his grasp (consider, for example, pages 156-157) his ambition generates tantalizing suggestions of other stories, ones that could be more fully realized as standalone works.

Instead of reading this book continuously as a novel, I'd like to suggest that

one might derive more enjoyment by dipping into it and imagining that each chapter is a loosely connected story in a grander milieu. I don't have a point of comparison for this Japanese sf story against other Japanese sf, but it's below the standards of the best contemporary original English-language sf. I admit that I could be missing a cultural component that enhances the story, but Alexandr's comment about "The Galactic Hero. Pure Retrofuture" makes me think Ogawa's treatment of his material as pulp is knowing rather than accidental. I don't favor pulp, but neither am I a pulp-o-phobe ("Not that there's anything wrong with that"). And there is that talking sword.

The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction

Edited by Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint
(Routledge, 2009, 554p. £90.00)
Reviewed by Pawel Frelik

If the mainstream acceptance of literary practices is signalled by the publication of extended reference works or histories by major academic publishers, science fiction is finally coming into its own. While Brian Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (Doubleday 1973) and its revised version *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (Gollancz 1986) co-written with David Wingrove have been around for a while, it is only the 2000s that have seen the appearance of a number of titles that were targeted not only at sf aficionados but also at wider literary audiences. Very comprehensive and approachable for uninformed readers despite its small size, Roberts' *Science Fiction* (Routledge 2000) in New Critical Idiom series may have been one of the first among such works but it seems to have opened the floodgates. Edited by Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* is the most recent in a series of major reference volumes after Edward James's and Farah Mendlesohn's *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003) and David Seed's *A Companion to Science Fiction* (Blackwell 2008). Of the three, it is not the largest, the title belonging to the Blackwell companion, which is some 90 pages and 70,000 words longer, but it is definitely the most extensive and varied in its scope.

Among books for review, companion volumes are particularly difficult to evaluate and those undertaking the task need to negotiate constantly between the scales of micro and macro – in other words, between the merit of individual essays and their arrangement as a whole. While the editors have assembled an almost formidable team of sf scholars and researchers, arguably some of the most crucial decisions they had to make concerned not so much the quantity and quality of text but its selection and distribution. And this is precisely where *The Routledge Companion*, to my mind, excels spectacularly.

The companion is divided into four parts – History, Theory, Issues and Challenges, and Subgenres – each of which is further subdivided into chapters. Although most of the latter seem shorter (around 10 pages including short bibliography or even shorter) than chapters in the other two companions, their number (56) and, consequently, their scope more than make up for the brevity. The four headers may seem fairly standard but the distribution of material within them constitutes the first difference from the earlier similar works. This becomes perfectly obvious in the opening History section. Instead of longer encompassing chapters, the sf histories of literature, film and television, and comics have been broken up into discrete chapters, each dealing with shorter periods in the timeline of the medium, which makes them more focused. For example, screen sf is divided into "Film, 1895-1950," "Film and television, the

1950s," "Film and television, 1960-1980," partly "Manga and anime," "Film since 1980" and "Television since 1980." This may seem a simple enough trick but practically it does affect the manageability of the wealth of material that any companion strives to offer.

The Theory section is probably the most similar to its counterparts in the other companions, even if it mixes formalized critical paradigms with loose thematic areas specific to sf, which can be problematized from more than a single critical perspective. Consequently, this part features a number of usual suspects: race theory, postcolonialism, feminisms, linguistic, Marxism or postmodernism, to mention a few. Simultaneously, several new approaches make their appearance, too. These include separate essays on fan studies, nuclear criticism, utopian studies or, exemplifying thematic areas, virtuality.

Part III focuses on "Issues and challenges," which again includes some emergent (or firmly established elsewhere but relatively new in the study of sf) disciplines and thematic concerns, or even media. The first group comprises, among others, animal studies or science studies while the second is represented by empire, environmentalism, or ethics and alterity. The chapter on sf digital games has also been parked in this section.

The last, fourth part is devoted to subgenres – some, such as hard sf or alternate history, widely accepted while others – not always conceptualized as separate entities (future history or apocalyptic sf). Interestingly, dystopia and eutopia each have a separate chapter. Here, the new arrivals include, among others, slipstream or weird fiction.

The chapter titles mentioned above are merely representative – enumerating all fifty six of them would be pointless, but even this cursory overview gives a sense of extensive ambitions of *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. Many of its sections naturally overlap with the two previous companions. It also, inevitably and despite its scope, lacks some interesting vantage points such as the chapter devoted to sf editors and their influence on the emergence and generic identity of sf, which can be found the volume edited by James and Mendlesohn, or essays on religion and international sf that can be found in the one supervised by Seed.

However, where *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* outdistances its predecessors is the editorial recognition of the fact that science fiction, from its very beginning, has been a mode of expression that has transcended fiction or, rather, a mode of awareness of the world within which fiction has since the very beginning constituted only a fraction of manifestations and expressions. As mentioned before, the volume has multiple chapters on film and television (the Cambridge volume devotes one and the Blackwell – two and a half chapters to them) as well as several on comics and one on videogames. Even more importantly, it showcases essays devoted to sf's cultural history and contexts. In fact, the very first chapter in the volume is Adam Roberts's "The Copernican Revolution," which discusses the sixteenth-century shift of paradigms as a

cornerstone necessary to the emergence of the genre. Other such context-setting chapters concern pseudoscience, sf tourism, music, screen design, and two separate chapters on arthouse and blockbuster sf film – a distinction obvious to most viewers but rarely made in general overviews. In addition, in the introduction the editors note that they have not been able to include "chapters on the longer history of sf, automata, radio, military planning, fashion, toys and games, UFOs and abduction narratives, futurology, the history of science, or sf art" (xx) – again a range of topics usually left out in most histories of the genre. To my mind, even these admitted absences are as meaningful as presences as both demonstrate the editors's acute awareness of the polyvocality and polymodality of science fiction.

This last characteristic combined with the modularity of approach and the relative shortness of individual chapters make *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* a resource valuable not only to sf scholars and researchers but also to more general audiences with intellectual ambitions but not necessarily much background. Of course, some material, such as literary chapters will prove familiar to the former group but, on the other hand, even experienced scholars may learn some new things from, for example, the chapter on videogames, which largely dispenses with name-checking and summaries and concentrates on the issues of the medium.

The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction is not a perfect enterprise although, given the character of the volume, it would probably be very hard to imagine what such perfection would entail in the first place. Individual chapters, whose authors include many leading sf scholars and researchers, are almost uniformly of high quality and manage to balance informativeness and accessibility. My personal minor disappointments, such as, for example, the absence of any reference to a contemporary body of slipstream works and the excessive focus on Sterling's essay in "Slipstream" are probably more due to my particular interests and expectations than to the failure to address important angles.

This leaves only two really noticeable shortcomings. The first of these is the overwhelming sense of science fiction as an Anglo-American phenomenon that emerges from the companion. While Nalo Hopkinson, Greg Egan, Stanislaw Lem, the Strugatsky brothers and Jules Verne are mentioned in various contexts, the companion makes do with only a page-plus section in "Postcolonialism" on international science fictions (which, of course, cannot even briefly address many European sf traditions) and does not devote a single chapter to the questions of various understandings and positioning of sf in countries other than the UK or the USA. The editors do note this problem in the introduction but the absence abides.

The other deficiency concerns the distribution of chapters between the four parts. The first historical cluster is without fault here but the distinctions begin to blur between Parts II, III and IV and the editorial decisions appear

to have been rather arbitrary. Why are "Digital games" and "Music" located in the part devoted to issues and challenges, especially when their authors mostly historicize these media, showing how well established sf presence has been in them? Wouldn't "Virtuality" fit better next to "Space" and not split between two different parts? Why is "Young adult sf" anchored in Issues and challenges, and not in Subgenres?

Several more similar reservations could probably be raised. Simultaneously, given the highly modular composition of the volume, these re-shuffles do not really detract from the informativeness of the whole book. In fact, they may be symptoms of the very diversity and inter-permeability of various forms and shapes of sf that the editors have so hard – and largely successfully – strove to convey. Both where it succeeds brilliantly and where it elicits remarks concerning its deficits, the Routledge companion projects a clear sense of how vast and interwoven with multiple fields and practices contemporary science fiction has become.

In the course of this review I have repeatedly compared *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* to the Cambridge and Blackwell companions. While I do think that in some ways the Routledge offering is the best of all three, this is not meant to disparage the other two in any way. In fact, given the areas they do not share, all three are best used together – not only as instructive reflections on various ways of thinking about and defining sf but as mutually complementary resources giving justice to the astounding complexity, maturity and uniqueness of an erstwhile whipping boy of literature.

NOTE ON THE CONTRIBUTOR

Pawel Frelik teaches contemporary American literature, science fiction and unpopular culture at Maria Curie-Sklodowska University, Lublin, Poland. He has co-edited Playing the Universe. Games and Gaming in Science Fiction (2007) and is working on a book on dispersed narratives.

Urbis Morpheos

By Stephen Palmer (PS Publishing, 2010, 309pp, £20)
Reviewed by Chris Pak

Urbis Morpheos is an ambitious work of experimental science fantasy that explores ecological themes in its depiction of a world divided between manufacturing and natural ecosystems. The manufacturing ecosystem is an area of land dominated by artificial intelligences and mechanical creatures that reconstruct the biological ecosystem into a wasteland of artificial land forms and narcoleptic snow and fog. The natural ecosystem is a Gaian landscape that is threatened by the encroaching artificial ecosystem. *Urbis Morpheos* is Stephen Palmer's sixth novel and comes with an introduction by Gwyneth Jones. The "Urbis" of its title is latin for "city" and could also refer, by virtue of its position as the centre of Roman civilisation, to "Rome". In the construction "sub-urbis" or "suburban", it also designates an area of land surrounding a city. "Morpheos" signifies both "metamorphosis", which reflects the ever shifting landscape of Urbis Morpheos, and Morpheus, the Greek god of dreams.

Dream and hallucination are central to the themes and structure of the text. The novel's chapters alternate between two narrators, Psolilai and psolilai, who dream of each other. As with the mystification of the world's history the relationship between these two characters is uncertain. However, their names indicate that they are reflections of each other and it is implied that psolilai is Psolilai's dream. Doubt is cast on this initial impression as the narrative explores inversions to the status of the dreamer and dreamt. *Urbis Morpheos* is divided into three uneven parts that reflect the process of awakening: part one is called "Rapid Eye Movement", part two "Wakening" and part three "Awake". The two narrators are separated in space, with much of Psolilai's narrative taking place in Theeremere, the city of Urbis Morpheos, and psolilai's in and around Mahandriana, one of the few havens of the natural ecosystem. These cities are the spatial centres around which the journeys of both characters revolve: they both journey toward their respective cities at the beginning of their adventures and any excursions away from the city involve a return. Furthermore, their narratives reflect each other, as various events are mirrored in the other's experience and several characters appear in both.

Mushrooms occupy a central place in the natural ecosystem of this far future. Their presence is an indicator that the manufacturing ecosystem has not overturned the biological ecology of a given area. Palmer's focus on only the hallucinogenic properties of mushrooms and not on their vital role in processes of decomposition, nor their status as a type of biological life distinct from flora and fauna, misses a potential line of development that could have been productively explored in relation to Psolilai's search for the mysterious artefact known as the Transmuter, as well as for the portrayal of the evolutionary development of life in

this far future. Nevertheless, This motif offers a device that allow the characters to obtain non-human knowledge that surpasses the temporal boundaries of a normal human lifespan. These hallucinations provide both geographical and ecological information on the landscape that allow Psolilai, psolilai and Gulharven to obtain vital knowledge of the natural ecosystem. Because the mushrooms only provide information of the landscape that it grows upon such knowledge is limited to local and sometimes to regional space. This necessitates travel to other regions, a condition that partially governs the logic of the unfolding events of the two plotlines.

The narrative begins promisingly with Psolilai's incarceration and escape from Tall Steel Cliff. Her escape is enabled by an unknown benefactor and, while travelling through the narcoleptic wasteland of Urbis Morpheos, she is rescued from the dangerous environment by Gulharven and his steed Hoss. Gulharven is a peripatetic mycologist, an itinerant student of fungi, who aids both Psolilai and psolilai in their quest for knowledge. Hoss is a horse-like creature with six voiceboxes which "enable him to create polyphonic music when the occasion demands" (p.14). Gulharven explains to Psolilai that "fung[i] contained a vast suite of chemical complexes relating to different types of knowledge. To a certain degree, Hoss can select for specific types, maximising the efficacy of the mushroom" (p.14). Palmer draws on the narrative potential of hallucinogenic mushrooms and connects this to both dreams and knowledge to establish mycology as the central science and organising metaphor of the text.

One of the problems of the text is the way in which this knowledge gathering, along with Psolilai and psolilai's proleptic dreams, sits in an uncomfortable relationship to the development of other aspects of the plot: for example, Psolilai's familial relations and their connection to the political dimension of the text, more of which I will discuss in a moment. Furthermore, while the dialogue is self-consciously parodic and mythic by turns, the interaction between characters is more often implausible. This is compounded by the text's structure as a dream narrative, in which the insertion of hallucinogenic and dream sequences, as well as its episodic plotting, does indeed contribute to the surreal quality of the text but downplays authentic character interaction. Characters operate more like archetypes, or occupy a symbolic role as a representative of ideological and philosophical positions. Additionally, the fact that knowledge need only be imbibed implicitly downplays the importance of events themselves in developing a character's experience and, according to this reading, partly accounts for the way in which the plot unfolds in an almost arbitrary seeming fashion. *Urbis Morpheos* subordinates character development to the narrative's focus on the landscapes and characters as psychological or archetypal figures, the central motif of which are the hallucinogenic mushrooms.

After Psolilai arrives at Gulharven's residence at the Church of the Parasol Cap in Theeremere (in Urbis Morpheos) she attends the funeral of her uncle Illuvineya at the Field of Gaia. The funeral ritual involves the exposure of the

corpse to birds who consume it; 'what remained was seeping back to Gaia' (p.19). This would have been an opportune moment to link this society's rituals to the motif of mushrooms, decomposition and renewal, which plays a vital role in the text's conclusion. It is at this funeral that the reader is first introduced to Psolilai's family, her aunt Sukhtaya and sister Ryoursh, and is made aware of the political implications of her presence in Theeremere as an escapee from Tall Steel Cliff. Theeremere is divided into three regions, Thee, Rem and Ere, which correspond to the three analytical tendencies. These analytical tendencies are ancient devices that provide both knowledge from a non-human, non-natural source, and advice. Theeremere is governed by the repressive Analytical Council, led by the Steward Lord Amargoidara, whose rule is legitimised by their control and dissemination of the knowledge supplied by the analytical tendencies. They were 'anti-nature all of them, anti-mushroom and pro-manufacturing' (p.80). Psolilai was imprisoned for arguing against the council's dogma in favour of a Gaian vision that completely rejects the manufacturing ecosystem. Soon after the funeral Psolilai meets Karakushna, a cousin she was unaware of, who tells her that Amargoidara is 'a plebeian compared to my mother', Psolilai's Aunt Sukhtaya. This aspect of the narrative is central but, other than this general outline, the political relations between Sukhtaya and the Council are not sufficiently developed. Psolilai's quick trust in Karakushna and her relations with her sister and aunt are also unconvincing. Sukhtaya herself has dealings with the sentient agens and malleads of the manufacturing ecosystem, although the nature and motives behind their connection remain largely a mystery. Instead, Palmer attempts to string together a series of scenes in order to create a symbology for the text in which images are mirrored between the two narratives and are united in various ways throughout the latter part of the text.

Psolilai's interlinking story is based around a different, although closely related, set of political and social relations. It occurs in Mahandriana, which is itself a giant mushroom some thirty three thousand years old (p.156). The political centre here is 3Machines, a mysterious entity who has sole control of the analytical tendencies and has isolated them and herself in the Owl Palace at the near-inaccessible peak of the haven. There is evidence that psolilai's story takes place at an unspecified time in Psolilai's distant past. Gulharven and several of the other characters connect them by appearing in both, but there are others relationships central to the text's denouement. psolilai passes through Teeweemeer on her way to Mahandriana and encounters a structure related to the moontoo, a satellite orbiting the planet. The peculiar spatial distortions of this structure relate to a tale that psolilai and Gulharven are told. The tale of Yamajatha's desire is the story of the founder of Teeweemeer's failed attempt to reach the moon and thereby obtain 'the light of goodness' (p.41). Gulharven, too, tells a story which mirrors events in Psolilai's narrative and sheds light on the archetypal relations established between Gulharven himself, and Psolilai and psolilai. The tale of the lost haven of Vallevaess concern the agens's violent and successful attempt to

obtain human knowledge, and of their war against the haven. Two characters corresponding to Gulharven, and Psolilai, feature in the tale: Ancient Advisor (Gulharven) smuggles Sunset Hair (Psolilai) from the city and hides her from the agens. Both these stories are specifically mirrored in the plotlines relating to both psolilai and Psolilai and contribute to the dream structure of the text.

The text moves toward an exploration of the possibility of establishing reciprocal relationships between the manufacturing and natural ecosystems. psolilai herself argues throughout much of the text that "'[t]he two ecosystems are forever sundered'" (p.176). Dizisserine, an unusual agen, disagrees, and attempts to prove his point by using psolilai to demonstrate that humans can obtain machine knowledge by ingesting the chemicals derived from wrealities, computers that are constructed by the manufacturing ecosystem and that are the artificial equivalent of mushrooms. The difference between mushrooms and wrealities, however, is that wrealities are addictive and offer only "a rush of meaningless visions" (p.223). They are clearly analogues of synthetic drugs and are therefore arrayed against mushrooms as an unnatural and dangerous source of knowledge. Conveniently supporting this dichotomy is Gulharven's remark that "'[t]he era of poisonous fungi is long departed'" (p.169), which allows Palmer to sidestep any analogous problems relating to the dangers of the natural ecosystem. Perhaps, one might argue, the symbolic nature of the dream narrative invites such stark opposition, and the text certainly works toward an abstract resolution of them. Supporting this reading is the way in which this development reflects the tale of the lost haven of Vallevaess, as Dizisserine takes on the role of the agen searching for a method of obtaining and controlling human knowledge. Other characters argue that, "'[g]iven the opportunity to use sustainable resources, we could live with nature and still retain our required level of technology'" (p.48). As with the political and social aspect of the text, however, the exploration of how the two worlds could achieve such a unification is stated, symbolised, but not explored.

Urbis Morpheos is a fascinating concept for a world. It imaginatively depicts a range of fungal ecologies of differing habitats, including metafungi, which grow on other fungi and "'provide knowledge of the knowledge system itself'" (p.168). It is no less imaginative in its portrayal of the manufacturing ecosystem, with its wrealities, bad snow and plastic forests. It is less successful in its plotting of the surreal dream narrative and in its integration of this with scenes belonging to a more straightforward adventure narrative. Furthermore, the terms of its ecological debate between ecosystems, when abstracted and dramatized as a literal debate between characters, seems superficial in light of the vast tracts of time and space encapsulated in the knowledge system imparted by the mushrooms, which in turn undermines the central climax of the text. Despite its weaknesses *Urbis Morpheos* merits attention for its representation of a landscape in conflict and as an experiment with narrative. Nevertheless, these weaknesses significantly undermine the text and make this experiment unsuccessful.

When it Changed: Science into Fiction

Edited by Geoff Ryman (Comma Press, 2009, 276pp, £7.99)
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

"Storytelling is a way of running multiple, relatively cost-free experiments with life in order to see, in the imagination, where courses of action may lead." (Denis Dutton, quoted in Dan Gardner, *RISK* p.110). The classic form of the SF short story is a thought-experiment: "What would happen if..?" So in theory at least, some of science and some of SF share some aims and methodology. However, we no longer live in a world where a well-educated person can be expected to understand, or at least to have heard of, everything that's going on. Many of us expect scientists to be obsessed super-specialists, speaking languages of their own, unable to communicate with the rest of us. We have evolved to desire, expect and need causality in our narratives; experimental attempts to reflect in fiction those scientific disciplines that challenge our assumptions about causality have not caught on.

So, we have evidently been working hard to take the science out of science fiction, to turn the thought-experiments back into hero tales, travel guides, amusing or amazing wonder-stories, and manuals of behavioural and moral instruction. The aim of this anthology of original short stories is to put the science back into fiction while creating strong links between fantasy and reality, "To see if fiction based in part on the real research being done now by real scientists, could capture the thrill of reality." (p.ix).

The experiment has produced some interesting results. It starts, of course, by asking some interesting questions. What if a bryophyte were a person? How do I know I'm really me, and not a virtual construct? How can I get my would-be girlfriend to take me seriously? What is it really like to do research? The answers are intriguing and various.

But before I jump to the results, I should look at the method. Authors from all over the UK and scientists from the North West were recruited with the help of the Manchester Beacon for public engagement, and the University of Manchester. Authors and scientists were introduced to each other, visits and conversations took place, fictional short stories were written by the authors, and each scientist wrote an afterword about the science in their story. Science, and fiction, are often much more collaborative processes than we imagine: rather than our over-simplified picture of The Author or The Scientist working alone to discover or invent A Marvel (we're back to the hero-tale again here), new stories or scientific papers are rooted in conversations with colleagues and strangers, reading relevant and irrelevant material, internal dialogue if there's no-one else to argue with, data collection through mass-participation "citizen science", data processing shared across a network of volunteered PCs. I am hugely cheered by a set of results that makes explicit the need for

communication, co-operation and community in both fields.

The stories themselves, as one might expect, are a very mixed bunch. I find some of them more successful than others *as stories*, and some of them more successful than others in communicating interesting and useful stuff about a specific scientific field, or about Science – and these two groups of stories have some overlap but are not identical. A few highlights: Geoff Ryman's story "You" grabs my attention more through its technological take on reincarnation (which raises a whole set of interesting questions about identity, experience and reality) than through its ostensible basis in archaeological materials research (although the latter is plausible and fascinating). Adam Marek's memorable and horrid "Without a Shell" is a study in emotional extremism, which clearly needed its specific research reference as a take-off point, but in which the story ends up not really needing the science. Sarah Maitland's "Moss Witch" is both a very careful account of a particular ecological niche and its inhabitants, and an incantation of names, a celebration of the richness and diversity of one particular area of scientific terminology. Liz Williams' precise and chilling "Enigma" is like the Tardis, bigger on the inside than on the outside; I end up wondering whether it's a little black box that will turn out to contain Life, the Universe, and Everything that is the case. And Justina Robson's split story "Carbon", which both opens and closes the collection, is a masterpiece of multiple scaling, zooming in to examine the thoughts of an individual, and out to consider the widest possible implications, desirable and un-, of that individual's focus, their task, the science they are doing.

This is how anthologies should be. It's a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, it makes me think about what is being done and why, and it couldn't have been done any other way. Furthermore, it's going to be a "come back and reread" book for me. I've already read the whole collection twice, and got far more out of it second time round, and I look forward to future rereadings.

Wireless: The Essential Collection

By Charles Stross (Orbit Books, 2009, 336p, £14.99)
Reviewed by D. Harlan Wilson

Since the publication of his Hugo-nominated first novel, *Singularity Sky* (2003), Charles Stross has consistently gained momentum and acclaim with sf narratives that combine elements of humor, hard science, political angst, and futureshock. *Wireless* is his third fiction collection. It includes nine stories that range in length from flash fiction to novellas. All but one are older and have been published before, either in Stross's collection *Toast: And Other Rusted Futures* (2002) or in *The Year's Best Science Fiction* (2001), *Spectrum SF* (2000), and *Asimov's* (2007), among other venues. The previously unpublished piece, "Palimpsest", is the longest and possibly the finest given the depth and complexity of its philosophical (and eschatological) scope. But every story is strong in its own right. *Wireless* showcases the very best of Stross's short works to date.

In addition to "Palimpsest", the book offers readers two things they won't find elsewhere: an introduction by Stross, and short Afterwards for most of the stories in which Stross discusses their conception, his authorial intent, and/or the constraints of the publishing industry. Overall I was disappointed with the Afterwards. They are more or less disposable – too short (one is only a sentence long) and they seemed to have been written in haste, or at least against the author's will (I suspect the publisher made him do it). The introduction is longer and more substantive. Stross talks about the evolution of short story and novel publishing in general and vis-à-vis his own career. Still, I was offset by the way he romanticizes the clichéd neurotic condition of the Author, viz., "I'm an obsessive fiction writer. I write because I've got a cloud of really neat ideas buzzing around my brain, and I need to let them out lest my head explode" (xi). Moreover, he writes in a simple effort "to reach out and touch someone . . . to publish or be damned, communicate or die" (ix). True enough, but how many *artistes* have said the same thing, in different ways, on incalculable occasions, with variable shares of melodrama? I'm probably being too prickly about the introduction. Stross is light-hearted and sincere and his fans will generally like it. But I wanted more critical engagement, here and in the Afterwards. Rather than compliment (or enhance) the stories in *Wireless*, they mostly serve as foam packaging. This is unfortunate considering the excellence of the stories themselves.

In this book alone, Stross distinguishes himself as among the greatest genre sf authors of the last decade. In terms of content and style, he writes squarely within the tradition of the cyberpunks, thematizing the pathologies that result from the technological mediation of the mind/body apparatus. Cyberpunk has lapsed, of course, its topoi and novums bleeding not only into the sf genre at large, but into mainstream and contemporary fiction, as we continue to witness the ongoing actualization of ideas that were once sheer extrapolation. Given the longstanding appeal of 1980s cyberpunk and some of its original practitioners

(e.g. Gibson, Sterling, Rucker, Shirley, Cadigan, etc.), publishers still want to capitalize on the "movement" (or whatever it was), milking it to the bone. Hence the proliferation in recent years of various "post-cyberpunk" anthologies and novels, which, like postmodernism to modernism, both emulates and extends the (marketing) project of its forerunner. A representative post-cyberpunk anthology is *Rewired* (2007), edited by James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel. It contains short stories and novelettes by cyberpunk oldsters as well as a would-be new breed, including Cory Doctorow, Jonathan Lethem, Paolo Bacigalupi, Elizabeth Bear and Stross himself, all award-winning authors who have made names for themselves in the sf genre. In their introduction, Kelly and Kessel compile a short list of post-cyberpunk "signature obsessions", all of which inform Stross's work. Two stand out: "a gleefully subversive attitude that challenges traditional values and received wisdom" and "a crammed prose style that takes an often playful stance toward traditional science fiction tropes" (ix). While not without use-value, categories of this nature are usually created for the sake of selling books. Nonetheless, within this context, Stross emerges as a definitive post-cyberpunk writer.

Virtually all of the fictions in *Wireless* combine subversive logic and attitudes with playful, dynamic, and often humorous prose. "Rogue Farm" is a seminal example. Originally published in another post-cyberpunk anthology, *Live without a Net* (2003), the story takes place in post-apocalyptic Scotland and concerns a pair of farmers who must protect their land from a wise-cracking agro-beast – or, as it refers to itself, a "nine-legged semiautomatic groove machine" (76). When the agro-beast first accosts the farmers, it delivers a series of "sales pitches", e.g.: " 'Brains, fresh brains for baby Jesus', crooned the farm in a warm contralto, startling Joe half out of his skin. 'Buy my brains!' Half a dozen disturbing cauliflower shapes poked suggestively out of the farm's back, then retracted, coyly" (76). The agro-beast does not understand why the farmers threaten to blow its "brains" out – "Nobody wants to buy my fresh fruit and brains. What's wrong with you people?" (77) – and it reluctantly leaves. The exchange is funny, but it's deadly serious for the human protagonists, who know the creature will be back. In the end, "Rogue Farm" accomplishes several modes of cognitive estrangement by way of language, atmosphere and characterization. The farmers are dispossessed by the "farm", and vice versa. Likewise are readers dispossessed by the behavior of both parties as well as the weird, wasted future that they inhabit. This is the stuff of good sf, and Stross is a masterful stylist and storyteller in this respect.

Adapted into an animated film in 2004, "Rogue Farm" may be Stross's most well-known short story. Other stories in *Wireless* will be familiar to sf fans and critics, among them "Unwirer", co-written with Cory Doctorow, with whom Stross frequently collaborates, and "Missile Gap", originally written for Gardner Dozois's far-future anthology *One Million A.D.* (2005). Both depict alternate histories, a favorite theme, and "Missile Gap" engages what is perhaps Stross's

most extrapolated topic: the Cold War. Writing within the subgenres of science fantasy, space opera and posthuman sf, Stross exercises a marked political agenda, critiquing the wiles of power structures gone awry. This is certainly the case in *Wireless*'s keynote work, "Palimpsest", a time-travel narrative about an organization called "Stasis" that is responsible for preventing the extinction of humanity, despite an epidemic of trans-temporal apocalyptic events. Run by advanced bureaucrats from the distant future, Stasis is a veritable panopticon capable of "remember[ing] the time line of every human life that ever happened" and thus supervising history and its vicissitudes (p. 276). Here the term palimpsest, a manuscript page with text that has been effaced and overwritten, refers to the human community, to the various layers of civilization that have been inscribed upon one another; Stasis, then, attempts to micromanage the continued inscription of the human palimpsest. Ultimately Stross aligns himself with Thomas De Quincey's originary theorization of the palimpsest as memory in "The Palimpsest of the Human Brain" (1845). The main plot tracks the career of a Stasis agent named Pierce, who faces a series of personally and politically charged dilemmas, as with many of Stross's characters. Pierce's story is interrupted by "brief alternate histories" of the solar system. Through these expository passages as well as the development of his protagonist, Stross problematizes the remaking of history in the story as well as in the real world. Every movement into the future prompts us to revise the past, if only by way of perception; however, according to "Palimpsest", the harder we try to "see" and inevitably "remake" the past, the more it evades us.

At once reminiscent of Heinlein's "All You Zombies," Stapledon's "Star Maker" and All Things Phildickean, "Palimpsest" is a sf tour de force and reason enough to buy *Wireless*. But, again, every story in the collection has significant merit. Despite the weakness of the supplementary material, *Wireless* is an important book. Stross is an important author, too, with a voice and technique that is infallibly unique, vibrant and provocative.

Foundation Essay Competition

Deadline for Submission: Jan 31 2011

Judges for 2011:

Mark Bould (University of the West of England)
Sherryl Vint (Brock University)
Liz Williams (Author, Critic)

Essay submissions are invited for the annual Foundation Essay Prize. Authors must be postgraduate students at the time of submission (e.g. MA, PhD).

The essay, which must be in English, should be between 5000 and 8000 words long (including notes). Essays substantially over this limit will not be considered.

The essay may be on any aspect of science fiction.

Please send your submissions to Dr David Clements in .doc or .rtf format, at d.clements@imperial.ac.uk

The winning essay will receive £250 and be published in Foundation; all submissions to the prize will be regarded as submissions to the journal, and will be considered for publication.

Science Fiction Foundation
SF Criticism Masterclass for 2011

Class Leaders:
Paul McAuley
Claire Brialey
Mark Bould

The Science Fiction Foundation (SFF) will be holding the fifth annual Masterclass in sf criticism in 2011.

Paul McAuley is the author of eighteen novels, many of which have been nominated for the Campbell, BSFA and Clarke Awards, including the Arthur C. Clarke Award winning Fairyland. His most recent books such as The Quiet War and Gardens of the Sun.

Claire Brialey is co-editor of the Nova award-winning and Hugo-nominated Banana Wings, has been a Clarke judge, and contributed critical articles to Vector and other fanzines.

Mark Bould is the co-editor of Science Fiction Film and Television and author of The Cinema of John Sayles: Lone Star and Film Noir: From Berlin to Sin City. He has co-edited, The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction, Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction and Red Planets:Marxists and Science Fiction among other projects, including several issues of Science Fiction Studies.

Dates: 1st to 3rd July 2011

Location: Middlesex University, London (the Hendon Campus, nearest underground, Hendon Central).

Delegate costs will be £180 per person, excluding accommodation.

Accommodation: students are asked to find their own accommodation, but help is Golders Green Hotel, and the King Solomon Hotel, both in Golders Green, a short bus ride from the University.

Applicants should write to Farah Mendlesohn at farah.sf@gmail.com.

Applicants will be asked to provide a CV and writing sample; these will be assessed by an Applications Committee consisting of Farah Mendlesohn, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. and Andy Sawyer.

Completed applications must be received by 28th February 2011.

Foundation

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Deepa Dharmadhikari on Fantasy and Post-Colonialism
Emily Auger on Isaac Asimov's Detectives
Sharon DeGraw on Doris Lessing's Transitions

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David McWilliam, Ben Jeapes, Dan Hartland, Sandor Klapscik, David Seed, Abigail Nussbaum, Andrew Ferguson, Alvaro Zinos-Amaro, Pawel Frelik, Chris Pak, Sue Thomason, and D Harlan Wilson.

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John Meaney, Robert Holdstock, Kim Stanley Robinson, Delia Sherman and Christopher Barzak, Nick Redfern, Gwyneth Jones, Max Frei, Issui Ogawa, Mark Bould et al, Stephen Palmer, Geoff Ryman, and Charles Stross

Cover image: Coronal hole

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