Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction

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Editorial address (for submissions, correspondence, advertising):
Dr Paul March-Russell, journaleditor@sf-foundation.org
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Please send to Andy Sawyer, Science Fiction Foundation Collection, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, PO Box 123, Liverpool, L69 4DA, UK. Please clearly mark 'For Review'. Reviews (up to 1500 words in length) should be sent to A.P.Sawyer@liverpool.ac.uk

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The International Review of Science Fiction

Editor: Paul March-Russell
Book Reviews Editor: Andy Sawyer
Editorial Team: Cait Coker, Dean Conrad, Andrew Ferguson, Heather Osborne, Maureen Speller

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Editorial

Paul March-Russell

'April is the cruellest month', or so T.S. Eliot once intoned, and this April – when we began to compile and edit F117 – we learnt of the untimely death of Lucius Shepard. His novels, most notably *Life During Wartime* (1987), remain key examples of the innovations in American sf that followed the first wave of cyberpunk.

Without turning *Foundation* into an extended obituary column, we would like to honour authors and film-makers that have made a significant contribution to sf, and begin the process of evaluating their place within the multiple traditions and media that compose the genre. In F116, we paid respect to Iain Banks, and in this issue we feature Jude Roberts' reassessment of masculinity in Banks' fiction. We also assess two other major figures that departed in 2013: Richard Matheson and Frederik Pohl. Both Brian Baker and Dean Conrad attempt the difficult task of trying to place Pohl and Matheson, respectively, whilst Christopher McKitterick lends a touching reminiscence of Pohl.

2013 saw the loss of a number of notable creators from Gerry Anderson to Charles Chilton to Jack Vance but one other stands out, not least because she was a Nobel Prize-winner, and that is Doris Lessing. Obituaries tended to dwell on novels such as *The Grass is Singing* and *The Golden Notebook* with her sf as something on the side. Yet, without the sf novels being as central to her fiction as they were to Banks' *oeuvre*, they nevertheless retained an integral function. In truth, the fantastic was never far from Lessing's fiction – think, for example, of the shift into a post-nuclear environment in *The Four-Gated City*, the novel that prefigures the dystopian nightmare of *Memoirs of a Survivor*; or the explosion of domestic realism by the arrival of the throwback, Ben, in *The Fifth Child*. Later novels such as *Mara and Dann* and *The Cleft* were further reminders that, for Lessing, sf and the fantastic were instruments by which to re-think the possibilities of literary fiction, a necessary move for Lessing and her near-contemporaries, such as Anthony Burgess and Christine Brooke-Rose, working in the shadow of the modernist movement. Lessing's support of sf – she was a Guest of Honour at the 1987 Worldcon – prefigures the dissolution of genre boundaries in the work of more recent writers such as Maggie Gee and David Mitchell. Perhaps the time is not yet right for a full appreciation of Lessing's significance but, at *Foundation*, we will be more than interested in future invitations.

This current issue, though, is not all about looking backwards. We also include Christos Callow and Susan Gray's overview of sf and theatre, and their proposals

for its future development. Andrew Milner debates the origins of sf and firmly argues against histories that trace its roots back to classical sources such as Lucian. The inclusion of Milner's article is deliberately provocative since our next issue will be guest-edited by Tony Keen and will feature articles derived from last year's SF Foundation conference on sf, fantasy and the classical world. We very much hope that readers will join in the debate and send us your responses. Speaking of which…

David Ketterer writes: 'Reading Stephen Krueger's useful "Bibliography: Law in Science Fiction" (F115), I was reminded of John Wyndham's "Brief to Counsel" in the British *Argosy* (February 1959, pp. 28-30). It was read out on the BBC's general overseas channel on 18th March 1960. Wyndham, the son of a solicitor who became a barrister, thought at one stage about a law career. His sketch describes a trial in which the protagonist, convicted falsely of murder, correctly predicts the death of the prosecuting counsel within "about twelve minutes." After that death, he tells the judge he "has about two months" to live. "Brief to Counsel" belongs in Krueger's Part 3: "law stories which are not science fiction stories" but its exact generic category is arguable. Described in the head note as a murder story with an "uncanny angle", it could belong in any one of four locations in my apocalyptic/mimetic/hermetic Venn diagram ("Locating Slipstream", F111). It all depends on whether the reader views second sight as a mimetic reality, as sf-style pre-cognition, or as pure fantasy. Incidentally, an Italian translation of "Locating Slipstream" can now be found with the correctly shaded first Venn diagram in the online journal *Anarres*, number 2.'

Tony Keen writes: 'I am grateful for Jim Clarke's generous description of my paper at the State of the Culture conference (F116). However, somewhere along the line, my views have got distorted. I do not believe that *Inversions*, *Dune* or the Barsoom series are "fantasy novels encoded as sf". In fact, I believe the exact opposite, that these are science fiction encoded as fantasy.'

Please feel free to send further comments and corrections to the Editor or either join our Facebook group or follow us on Twitter. You can message the editorial team and engage in the online discussions.

Frederik Pohl: Mr Science Fiction (A Love Story)

By Christopher McKitterick (University of Kansas)

> There is no law, natural or divine, which demands that the world we live in become poorer, harsher and more dangerous. If it continues to become that way, it is only because we do it ourselves. (Asimov and Pohl 1991: 312)

This piece is subtitled 'Mister Science Fiction' because no one better serves to define the field by simply listing their name than Frederik Pohl. It is further subtitled 'A Love Story' for reasons that will become apparent.

When first asked to write this, I felt honored to share my enthusiasm about Fred and what he's meant to me. Nevertheless, I soon realized there remains little new to say about this science fiction demigod or his works. For this article to mean anything, I needed a fresh set of lenses to view the man who – along with James Gunn – has served as my literary role-model and hero, the man I've known as 'Fred' since 1993. I needed to share why Fred means so much to *me*.

Frederik Pohl 'was instrumental in shaping the field of science fiction' (Page forthcoming). Not only was he a respected and influential author; not only did he change the business through inventive editing and agenting; not only did he co-found sf fandom and serve it his whole life; but Pohl's every aspect exemplifies traits the sf community identifies with and holds dear. Often considered an 'ideas man', Pohl's rationality and intellectualism stemmed from a deep emotional investment in the betterment of the human species. His devotion to the field inspires the sf community to reach higher, grow deeper, and become ever more humane.

The Boy Who Would Live Forever

I first encountered Fred's stories in the magazines as a boy living in 1970s western Minnesota, as isolated from fandom as Fred had been in 1930s New York. Thereafter I hunted down his stories wherever they appeared. *Gateway* (1977) forever holds a central place in my soul; it and its sequels blew me away and shaped my approach to writing, because they proved sf could be literate, thoughtful, and exciting, while still possessing heart.

I first came to the University of Kansas in 1992 to take James Gunn's sf writing workshop, and was astounded to discover that we had the privilege of working not only with Gunn but also Frederik Pohl. Enjoying the serious attention of *two* literary heroes set me upon a path that could only lead to a career in sf.

Fred made an impression on everyone he met. Despite his clunky glasses,

non-athletic build, and despite smoking like a chimney (until his doctor told him to knock it off in his eighties), he was exceptionally charismatic. His deep, strong voice entranced listeners. He commanded audience attention and prompted thought. My notes from his talks over the years are filled with Fred's wisdom and insights.

I miss Fred a great deal.

He influenced my writing in countless ways. In a few words, Fred could pin down what was wrong with a story and what it needed to work. He treated workshop stories as if submitted to him as an editor for publication. One of Fred's most-memorable comments: 'If I were still editing *Galaxy* I'd buy it.' That was all. With such benediction, he provided a glimpse into what it must have felt like to be a Futurian, welcoming me into the community of Real Writers. One of my novellas owes its title to Fred: when he said, 'Your title isn't very memorable; I'd call it "The Recursive Man"', I knew he was right. We were in the midst of genius.

That workshop changed my life. I felt I had to do my best to become a *real* sf writer to deserve such access and attention. Fred returned to the Workshop and Campbell Conference most summers for the next two decades, sharing his time, intelligence, and gentle wisdom. Along with Jim, Fred is the reason I fell in love with the Center and dedicated my life to sf.

No one can be Fred, but he inspires our absolute best. I'm not the only one to feel this way. Author (and CSSF Associate Director) Kij Johnson shares this:

> I met Fred Pohl in the summer of 1994, when I received the Sturgeon Award at the Campbell Conference. My vividest [sic] memory of the event was him shaking my hand and telling me I had written a fine story. I still feel proud and warm every time I remember this. A couple of years later, I became part of the Sturgeon jury with him, and I relished his part in discussion of the finalists and his company at each year's Campbell Conference. He was a brilliant writer, a great editor, a good agent, an intelligent critic, a charming speaker, a humorous conversationalist – and a great fan. I will miss him, as so many will[1].

Author (and now Sturgeon Award juror) Andy Duncan:

> One of the highlights of my life was being handed my Sturgeon Award trophy by Frederik Pohl, at the 2002 ceremony, as he's been one of my heroes since I was a kid. His stories, novels, and nonfiction, and the magazines and anthologies he has edited, have not only shaped the field of science fiction for me and everyone else, but have shaped my conception of what it means to be a professional writer. On the Sturgeon jury, in particular, his firsthand knowledge of the science-fiction short story is simply irreplaceable; the jury will have a Fred-shaped hole in it forever.[2]

Yesterday's Tomorrows

> I had to quit school because it was interfering with my education. (Pohl 1978: 61)

Pohl began reading before school, and once there most of his reading was unrelated to coursework. Like sf fans today who started as kids reading comics, watching movies, and attending comicons – even local events number in the thousands – Pohl was first attracted to the adventure pulps. But unlike today's burgeoning fans, he grew up in a time devoid of conventions, the internet, or easy communication, in a nation burdened by the Great Depression.

Pohl's relationship with sf began at the age of ten: 'At some point in that year of 1930 I came across a magazine named *Science Wonder Stories Quarterly*, with a picture of a scaly green monster on the cover. I opened it up. The irremediable virus entered my veins' (Pohl 1978: 1). Over the next two years, he 'managed to read every scrap of science fiction I knew to exist [...] My head was populated with spaceships and winged girls and cloaks of invisibility, and I had no one to share it with' (7).

What was such a boy to do? Why, find others of like mind! Pohl met his friend Dirk Wylie, and they soon 'went looking for science-fiction fandom. The bad part of that was that fandom did not yet quite exist. The good part was that it was just about to be born' (3). Discovering the Science Fiction League (sponsored by Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories*), Pohl and Wylie joined Chapter 1 and attended the first meeting in 1934:

> In the winter of 1933, when I was just turned thirteen, I discovered three new truths. The first truth was that the world was in a hell of a mess. The second was that I really was not going to spend my life being a chemical engineer, no matter what I had told my guidance counselor at Brooklyn Technical High School. And the third was that in my conversion to science fiction as a way of life I Was Not Alone. (Pohl 1976: 2)

He fell in love: 'The thing about science-fiction conventions [...] is that they are made up of science-fiction writers and fans [...] This quality separates them from most of humanity in that, by and large, they are in the habit of using their brains for abstract thought' (Pohl 1978: 139). Then, 'one Sunday in 1936, half a dozen of us got on the train for Philadelphia and were met by half a dozen Philadelphia fans, and so the world's very first science-fiction convention took place' (47).

In fact, Pohl saw sf writers and fans as 'essentially the same people. Nearly every writer is an ex- or present fan, and I've seldom met a fan who didn't think of trying his luck as a writer' (139). Much is made of how Pohl co-founded the Futurians, perhaps the most influential fan group in sf history. Members included Isaac Asimov, Damon Knight, Cyril Kornbluth, Judith Merril, Donald Wollheim,

and others who went on to distinguished careers. They gathered not only to talk about this blossoming literature and its worldview, but also to support one another's careers.

The year after earning his first Hugo as editor, Pohl won the Edward E. Smith Memorial Award for Imaginative Fiction (the 'Skylark') in 1966 for his contributions to the genre. 'No award has ever pleased me more,' he said. In 1989 Pohl was recognized by First Fandom with their Hall of Fame Award, then in 1993 by SFWA with their Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award, and in 1998 he was inducted into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame. In 2009, the Eaton Science Fiction Conference gave him the Eaton Lifetime Achievement Award in Science Fiction.

But 'More than just a fan, he was a shrewd observer of human follies, so he didn't have any illusions about fandom.'[3] This multifaceted perspective – even on things he loved – defines Pohl. As a fitting bookend for a man who devoted eight decades to fandom, in 2010 Pohl won his final Hugo Award, in the Best Fan Writer category, for his sometimes acerbic, sometimes moving, but always witty and interesting *The Way the Future Blogs*. Launched in 2009, it 'is being continued with material he wrote before his death, plus contributions from his widow, Elizabeth Anne Hull; blogmaster Leah A. Zeldes and others of his friends and fans.' Pohl started the blog' 'for two reasons. One was that one of my editors has been coaxing me to do something of the sort [...] but the one that tipped the scales was that I've been for some time toying with the idea of publishing either an expanded and updated edition of my experiment in autobiography, *The Way the Future Was*, or a sequel.' [4]

For a man who lived in the future – and belonged to a group whose very name stemmed from the word! – it might be surprising to learn he didn't use computers until partway into this project. But nothing about Fred Pohl was simple.

Rogue Star

> There is a populist, anti-establishment tone to […] all science fiction everywhere. One of the reasons has to do with its flowering in an age in which anyone could plainly see that the Establishment had screwed up the world. (Pohl 1978: 13)

Growing up during the Depression played a major role in forming Pohl. His father earned and lost more than one fortune, so despite sometimes living in posh apartments young Fred grew up mostly poor. Not that this was unusual for the time. The social climate 'encouraged [...] thinking about the unthinkable which is one of the hallmarks of some kinds of science fiction: talk of social change' (13). A defining characteristic of both Pohl's writing and his life is his social criticism and activism.

Pohl joined the Young Communist League in 1936 because it was pro-union and anti-fascist and anti-racist. He remained an active member until he became disillusioned by what he saw as the organization's hypocrisy: 'Science-fiction fans, like science-fiction writers, are about the most obstinately individual people alive, and they do get into strange things' (55).

When the Soviet Union signed a pact with Nazi Germany – which the YCL endorsed – Pohl left the group in disgust: 'A man who is not a socialist at twenty has no heart. A man who is still a socialist at thirty has no head' (54). Despite this aphorism, for the rest of his life Pohl's politics leaned to the far-Left, which might explain his agenting and editing styles, even his collaborations with so many authors.

This is not to say his attitude was roses and optimism. Pohl was also stubborn and contrarian, and the postwar-US political shift to the Right spurred his cynicism:

> During the Senator Joe McCarthy era, there was not an awful lot of political free speech in America [...] at that time science fiction was saying all sorts of revolutionary, critical, socially penetrating things – to the extent that an old friend of mine who was then minister of a church in Los Angeles used to sell copies of *Galaxy* and the other science-fiction magazines outside the church after services, because he said it was the only free speech in America. [5]

It might seem ironic that a political Leftist built an empire in the sf biz, so let's examine that aspect of Pohl's work.

The Space Merchant

> There I was, nineteen years old, and the full-fledged editor of not one but two professional science-fiction magazines. (Pohl 1978: 82)

Between 1939–42, Pohl edited both *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories*. Starting in 1943, he put his editing career on hold to serve as a weatherman for the US Army Air Force in Italy. There Pohl began work on a novel about the evils of advertising (which he later burned, page by page, before resuming the project with Cyril Kornbluth). Exiting the war, Pohl spent years working in advertising, which he felt 'should be under constant surveillance by the narcs; it is addictive, and it rots the mind [...] Each sale is a conquest, and it is your silver tongue that has made them roll over and obey. If you do not end your day with a certain contempt for your fellow human beings, then you are just not paying attention to what it is that you do' (132).

Pohl soon realized he 'had managed to lose track of why it was that I had got into advertising in the first place – i.e., to research my novel' (137). So in 1947 he left the business and dove back into sf, co-forming the Hydra Club, which 'came

to include nearly every science-fiction writer in the New York area, plus a lot of others' (140), including his next wife, author Judith Merril. Pohl was once again a writer (and agent).

Pohl held editors in high esteem, those 'hewing out of the shapeless fat of the first draft a work of art. Then, years later, when the story is a classic, no one but the writer knows that it was the editor who made it so [...] The [...] editors who come instantly to my mind in this connection are John Campbell of *Astounding*, Horace Gold of *Galaxy*, and Gene Roddenberry of *Star Trek*' (93). For everyone else, Pohl also comes to mind: 'Editorial genius lies in taking a chance on what hasn't worked yet, but will when someone summons up the nerve to try' (93). Pohl invented the first original sf anthology series, *Star Science Fiction*, editing six volumes for Ballantine between 1953–59. This stroke of brilliance resonates today in a vibrant anthology market. His most famous editing roles were for two of the top magazines – *Galaxy* and *If* – throughout the 1960s. Pohl's magazines scored nine Hugo Awards (*If* won three years in a row) while all others, combined, earned two. He edited *Worlds of Tomorrow* during its run from 1963 to 1967, pitched and edited *International Science Fiction* during its two-year run from 1967–68, and edited four issues of *Perry Rhodan* (with Forrest J. Ackerman) in 1972. Pohl also edited the science fiction lines for Ace and Bantam Books, and had a hand in others.

Pohl also demonstrated his publishing-biz genius as an agent, inventing an arrangement where:

> I undertook to pay [...] an advance on every story [...] immediately upon receipt of manuscript. He could write whatever he liked. I would worry about where and how to sell it [...] Without the constraint of desperately needing to please some editor, he was able to write what he was good at [...] By and by I had twelve or fifteen writers doing their own things [...] If you look at the major sf magazines of the early 50s, you will find that around half of the stories in them came from my agency; and of those I think at least half, including many of the best ones, were written under that arrangement, and mostly *would not have been written without it.* (151).

In another move that changed the field, *Galaxy* and *Astounding* bowed to Pohl's advice to raise their rates from two cents per word to three, making a story-writing career more tenable. Major agenting and editing victories included novels such as Asimov's first, *Pebble in the Sky* (1950), Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren* and Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (both 1975).

Unfortunately, none of this was enough to cover Pohl's strategy of paying writers advances, as well as other literary-agency expenses: 'Fred was a better agent than a businessman, and the agency went broke' (Gunn, 2010: 166). By 1953 he 'was in hock for around thirty thousand dollars' (Pohl 1978: 169), which

he eventually paid, though it took another decade to do so. Even so, Pohl's work left a mark: 'The biggest markets in the field, *Galaxy* and *Analog* and Doubleday and Ballantine, all bought more from me than from all other agents and individual writers combined' (130).

Man Plus

> A writer is in the business of interpreting life to an audience, and the more he knows about living the better he will write. (Pohl 1978: 62).

Though hugely influential in sf fandom publishing, Pohl's writing also earned broader attention. His professional writing career spanned eight decades, starting in October 1937 (the poem 'Elegy for a Dead Satellite: Luna' appeared under the byline 'Elton Andrews' in *Amazing Stories*), through his final novel in the present decade, *All the Lives He Led* (2011). Even since his death on 2nd September 2013, new work by Pohl continues to appear: most recently, the foreword to *The Heritage of Heinlein* (2014) and on his blog. How many writers publish from beyond that event horizon?

Pohl's first novel (co-authored with fellow Futurian Cyril Kornbluth) arose from the idea he had begun exploring in wartime Italy. A brilliantly cynical satire on consumerism blossomed from the ashes of his discarded solo attempt. 'Gravy Planet' was serialized in three parts starting in June 1952 in Horace Gold's *Galaxy*, and was published in paperback the next year as *The Space Merchants*. This book has sold at least ten million copies, been translated into dozens of languages, and was considered 'the best science-fiction novel so far' (Amis 1960: 107). This was one of many collaborations, but 'Pohl and Kornbluth made one of the greatest combinations in the science fiction field, and the death of Kornbluth in his thirties was a minor disaster' (Aldiss 1973: 249).

In 1976 Pohl won his first Nebula, for *Man Plus*, also a finalist for the Campbell Memorial and Hugo Awards. This Cold War novel expressed Pohl's despair about our capacity for self-destruction while extrapolating about cybernetics, the environment, and personal isolation. Its dystopia betrayed Pohl's optimism – but only if our species finds its humanity. *Gateway*, about one 'lucky' man's loss and regret in a dystopian future, swept the Hugo, Campbell Memorial, Locus, and Nebula Awards. In 1980 his political novel *Jem* won the American (then called 'National') Book Award, the only year they gave it for sf. He was the first writer ever to win the Campbell Memorial Award twice, his second being for *The Years of the City* in 1985. All told, Pohl won over forty fiction awards.

But critics did not always appreciate his work. In an email from 23rd August 2013 to Michael Page, he responded:

> Thank you for the comments on the various books. I don't get nearly enough of that. Normal reviews usually touch more on the book I didn't write [...] making sometimes interesting reading, though not always responsive to the questions I'm always asking myself about how close I'm coming to leaving the reader asking himself the same questions that led me to write the book.

Pohl possessed sharp authorial chops, exercising them to dazzling effect. But just as important to those fortunate to study under him is how he shared his expertise and wisdom with the community of writers. During Gunn's annual SF Writers Workshop, someone inevitably asked Pohl about productivity: 'What I do is to set myself a daily quota of four pages [...] I write those pages every day, no matter where I am, no matter how long it takes, if I die for it' (Pohl 1978: 172). He then showed what he had written that morning. He believed 'that for a writer there is no such thing as good experience and bad experience; there's only experience and all was grist for his mill.'[6]

Fred knew this is a tough business, but one writers don't so much choose as are compelled to: 'Writing is the way I made my daily bread; but it is also my hobby, my vice, and my ongoing and most valued psychotherapy. Most writers would be straight up the wall if they didn't have the typewriter to fantasize through' (Pohl 1978: 156). This is apparent in *Gateway* whose structure follows Robinette Broadhead's psychotherapy with robo-doc Sigfrid von Shrink. In response to the question, 'Why do you write science fiction?', Pohl quoted Theodore Sturgeon: 'It gives me almost complete freedom of speech and absolute freedom of thought' (Pohl 1971).

Clearly the two were of like mind, and Pohl sought to support such motivations. Pohl's correspondence demonstrates empathy for writers and dedication to editing. In a letter to Sturgeon, from presumably the late 1970s, Pohl wrote: Writing is a process of finding my way out of dilemmas' and that the 'art of writing is the art of leaving out the parts you shouldn't say [...] but oh how hard it is to know what those parts are!'[7] This analysis of the story-writing process was part of an ongoing conversation, editor Pohl encouraging one of his finest writers. In another letter, Pohl wrote: 'If you have any ideas you want to discuss, or a manuscript you want to show, I am at your service, any hour of the day or night.'[8]

Chasing Science

> On the train home after that first visit, I realized I had fallen hopelessly in love [...] Science is still my favorite recreation [...] I am not in any sense a scientist myself [...] What I am is a fan of science. (Pohl 2000: 10–11)

In the early 1960s, Pohl was invited to MIT's computer labs, igniting a life-long passion: 'One thing that often impressed me about Fred was his interest

in science [...] and he always visited a research site if it was near a spot on his travels.'[9] Pohl was enthusiastic yet humble: 'I don't think of myself as a scholar [...] I have the same relation to knowledge that your brother-in-law has to the Los Angeles Rams. Learning – all kinds of learning, but especially history, politics, and above all, science – to me is the greatest of spectator sports' (Pohl 1978: 179). He went on to say:

> I don't think of myself as particularly timorous, but I don't consider myself outstandingly brave, either. That being so, why am I so courageous about both science and the future, the two subjects that scare so many? I think I know the answer: What makes me able to confront science and the future without panic is a lifetime of reading, and writing, science fiction. (Pohl 2004: 4)

Fred was a True Believer: if we spread the gospel of sf, if we engage 'that activity of the forebrain which distinguishes man from the other animals', our future might look less dystopian. But his cynical side knew 'the one organ of the human body that there is no money in exploiting is the brain. I don't mean to say that the average buyer of books and magazines is opposed to thought, but I think he prefers to have it done for him by experts [...] science fiction, at least at its best, is not like that' (Pohl 1971).

Beyond the Green Event Horizon

> Every writer is in some sense a preacher. (Why else would anyone write a book?) With or without intent, with or without awareness of what they were doing, science-fiction writers were preaching (Pohl 1978: 13–14).

Arthur C. Clarke called Pohl and Asimov's *Our Angry Earth* (1991) 'perhaps the most important book either of its authors has produced.'[10] Pohl's autodidactic approach toward science, combined with a passion for bettering our future, drove him to catalogue the human effects on our environment and to advocate activism:

> It is already too late to save our planet from harm. Too much has happened already: farms have turned into deserts, forests have been clear-cut to wasteland, lakes have been poisoned, the air is filled with harmful gases. It is even too late to save ourselves from the effects of other harmful processes, for they have already been set in motion, and will inevitably take their course. The global temperature will rise [...] Pollution will sicken and kill more and more living creatures. All those things have already gone so far that they must now inevitably get worse before they can get better. The only choice left to us is to decide how *much* worse we are willing to let things get. (Asimov and Pohl 1991: ix).

Appearing five years before Al Gore made 'climate change' a common term,

this impassioned book reveals the authors' frustration with our apathy toward spaceship Earth. Yet its prescriptions for fixing things reveal rational optimism that we can – when presented with facts and troubleshooting – change not only our world-view but the world itself. Upon seeing how we are making things worse, they reasoned, would we not then strive to correct our failings? Knowing we can reverse the damage, would we not then take action? Perhaps not for ourselves, who might never enjoy the benefits of reform, but for the sake of our grandchildren? 'There can be a happy ending to it all [...] if we have the wisdom and the willingness to make it happen' (Asimov and Pohl 1991: xii).

Though sf is not prediction, Pohl believed that its perspective could 'be fruitfully predictive, since it injects into the picture the emotional tone [...] thereby allowing us all to see whether or not we want to accept the futures that the planners posit for us' (Aldiss 1973: 245). In Pohl's words: 'It isn't so much that science fiction makes it possible to express ideas that cannot be said in any other form, as that the need to express such ideas is probably what led a few writers a long time ago to invent the kind of literature that we now call science fiction.' What compelled Pohl to write sf was his need to express his hopes and dreams – and fears and nightmares:

> *The Space Merchants* has survived rather well [despite] its central warning [...] against the deadening effects of advertising on society, has not actually come to pass but remains relevant as a danger to be guarded against, while its subsidiary themes [including ecological disaster] have at least in part shown themselves to be well-based by the developments of history. In exactly the same way, the survival value of *Gulliver's Travels* lies not so much in the parts that have come true, but in the parts which have not. The fulfillment of Swift's nightmare of the totalitarian state helps us accept the urgency of his warnings against treachery and hypocrisy (Pohl 1971).

The Last Theorem

> Is spending one's life writing science fiction rewarding? Why, sure [...] But that doesn't have much to do with it. You don't love a person just because she rewards you. The person is rewarding because you love her. So it is with me and science fiction. For the gifts she has given me I am truly grateful. But I loved her on sight, giftless, and it looks as if I'll go on doing it as long as I live (Pohl 1978: 253–254).

He did, and sf loved him back. Those are the final words of *The Way the Future Was*, a must-read for everyone in sf.

I fondly remember my last conversation with Fred, during the 2008 Campbell Conference, that year jointly hosted with SFRA. Fred had made the trek down to Lawrence, Kansas, ever since 1975 for James Gunn's annual Intensive English

Institute on Science Fiction and later Campbell Conference. Gunn had 'thought of getting some writers in to help teach the teachers, and in the second year, I brought in three visiting writers, Gordon Dickson, Ted Sturgeon, and Fred. They remained my dependable stalwarts until Gordy and Ted died [...] I proposed to Fred that we offer a one-week writers workshop, and that went well and the institute returned – and Fred became a late second week visiting writer for the two-week intensive writers workshop' (Gunn 2010: 167).

Pohl and Gunn had been friends for decades, so it was only natural Pohl would become involved with Gunn's Center. There Pohl presented talks, recorded a discussion about 'The Ideas in Science Fiction' for the *Literature of Science Fiction*, and taught at the institute and workshop. Starting in 1995, when the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award became juried, Pohl served with Gunn and Judith Merril, and then with others until retiring in 2013.

Between 1975 and 2008, Fred only missed three times. His first absence was in 1984, when he married Elizabeth Anne Hull. Thereafter, Gunn remarked, 'We gave Fred special permission to miss that year, as getting married was an adequate excuse':

> Fred maintained his belief in the power of intellectual curiosity and the ability of rational thought to ameliorate irrational human behavior. His [...] writing method [...] was an example of this, and his autobiography is filled with examples of boiling things down to essentials. His stories were often cautionary tales, particularly the early satirical ones, and his answers were often about how to survive in a difficult universe. His blog also is filled with examples of a rational mind dealing with life's problems, often associated with other people who weren't as rational.[11]

Frederik Pohl cannot be easily quantified. One could have spent a lifetime conversing with him at conventions, studying his work and personal reflections, yet still not glimpse every facet. Perhaps the person who knew him best was his fifth (and final) wife. Hull is an sf scholar, former President of SFRA, political activist, editor, and author. After their wedding, she also became involved with the Center, and in 1986 joined the jury for the Campbell Memorial Award, where she still serves. When asked about Fred, she described how she appreciated his 'freshness' even when treating common themes:

> He was interested in scientific possibilities and human interactions. He was attracted to peace and fascinated by war. As a person he was self-disciplined and self-indulgent. Fiercely loyal to his friends, and fickle in his tastes. He valued novelty. Complex, and yet sometimes very simple: he wanted us all to play nicely together. Malcolm Edwards once said the thing about Fred was that you never knew what to expect from him, other than sharp humor tempered by kindness. He was in awe of nature, but used to joke that he knew of only two kinds of flowers, roses and others.[12]

Pohl missed the 2005-6 Conferences due to health issues, and never made it back again after his 2007 and 2008 visits. During a lull in that 2008 Conference, I happened across Fred in the lobby of the Lawrence Holidome, and we spent an hour in one of the warmest conversations I ever enjoyed with the man. Had I known how open he was to even his lowliest science-fictional compatriots, I would have seized the opportunity more often.

No writer better exemplifies what a relationship with science fiction was, is, and can be. His writing advice was concise and brilliant, and those fortunate enough to be critiqued by him immediately sensed editorial greatness. His unabashed enthusiasm for science fiction and sf fandom serves as a lesson to those too proud to express their enthusiasms, or too intolerant to accept others'. He was extraordinary – also kind, thoughtful, patient, and good. He never stopped pursuing his passions, including perpetual learning, writing, and travel. His endless promotion of science was inspiring, and his biting but gentle criticism of our foolish way improves us all.

On the day following Pohl's death, James Gunn wrote:

> He was associated with almost everything good in science fiction that happened to me. I first met Fred 61 years ago, and he sold my stories, bought my stories, edited my books, shared precious moments at meetings here and abroad, answered my calls to help my fledgling science-fiction programs, and was always there for encouragement and advice. Having his words on the cover of my current novel and in the commemorative program of LoneStarCon is like a final blessing that I will always cherish.[13]

The loss of Frederik Pohl makes the world a little less bright, but he lives on through a lifetime of work that urges us to construct a better future: 'If misused technologies [and social failures] have brought us to the brink of disaster, there are other technologies which can make human life richer and better than any generation [...] if we can only keep our world intact long enough to reach them [...] We can get there. We can have it all.' (Asimov and Pohl 1991: 312).

Goodbye, Mr Science Fiction. Thank you for helping build a community that has swelled far beyond First Fandom. You Are Not Alone. Thank you for demonstrating how a rational, inquisitive attitude – combined with determination and hard work – can change the course of history. Thank you for giving us hope for the future. Thank you for the ideas, for the laughs and tears, for the entertainment and uncomfortable contemplation. Thank you for your support and advice. Most of all, thank you for sharing your life with the community you helped give birth to, and for raising us, and for being the finest parent any child could hope for.

Endnotes

[1]Kij Johnson, email exchange with the author, dated 3rd September 2013.
[2]Andy Duncan, email exchange with the author, dated 31st March 2013.
[3]James Gunn, email exchange with the author, dated 31st January 2014.
[4]Frederik Pohl, *The Way the Future Blogs*. URL, email exchange with the author, dated 3rd September 2013.: http://www.thewaythefutureblogs.com/about/ (accessed 1 February 2014).
[5]Pohl, *The Way the Future Blogs*. URL: http://www.thewaythefutureblogs.com/me-and-alfie/ (accessed 9th February 2014).
[6]Elizabeth Anne Hull, email exchange with the author, dated 18th March 2014.
[7]Pohl, 'A Journal of a Short Story: NOTICES' : letter to Theodore Sturgeon. (Date unknown but presumably late 1970s, as he mentions working on *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*.) University of Kansas Special Science Fiction Collection.
[8]Pohl, letter to Sturgeon, dated 4th October 1961. University of Kansas Science Fiction Collection.
[9]Gunn, op cit.
[10]Pohl, 'Biography', Frederikpohl.com URL: http://www.frederikpohl.com/index.htm (accessed 9 February 2014).
[11]Ibid.
[12]Hull, op cit.
[13]Gunn, email exchange with the author, dated 11th September 2013.

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Frederik Pohl: A Working Man's Science Fiction

Brian Baker (University of Lancaster)

The facts of Frederik Pohl's career are well-known. A teenage member of the Futurians that also included Isaac Asimov, Cyril Kornbluth and Donald Wollheim; a youthful political activist and member of the Young Communist League, who volunteered to fight in Spain but was refused; editor of professional sf magazines at nineteen; agent for friends and many other sf writers; copywriter for the advertising industry; critical and commercial success, in particular with Kornbluth and *The Space Merchants* (1953); assistant editor of *Galaxy*, where many of his stories appeared, and then editor of *Galaxy* and *If* from 1961 to 1969; *Man Plus* (1976), which won the Nebula, and *Gateway* (1977), which won the Hugo, Nebula and John W. Campbell Memorial Awards; a well-regarded autobiography, *The Way the Future Was* (1983); and productive thereafter right up to 2011, including a Hugo award-winning blog. Pohl was given the SFWA Grandmaster Award in 1993, elected to the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 1998, and 'Like Brian Aldiss, and for even longer, he served his chosen field as ambassador to the wider world; for half a century he and Aldiss were the central men-of-letters of sf' (Clute and Stableford). Pohl was active in the field of science fiction for over seventy years: an extraordinary career, at the heart of the genre for seven-eighths of its life.

And yet, in his introduction to *Gateway*, Alastair Reynolds writes: 'Frederik Pohl is a curiously underrated figure' (2006: vii). David Seed had already argued that 'the science fiction novels of Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth have never received the critical attention they deserve, partly perhaps because they appear to be constricted by Cold War themes' (1993: 42). If one looks at the critical work published in the major journals about Pohl, to consider him 'underrated' sounds about right. There is a steady stream of writing about Pohl (and Kornbluth) through the 1980s and the 1990s, in addition to mentions and extended analyses in longer works on the history of sf, but since the turn of the millennium, much less has been written about him. Has Pohl, and his mode of writing, dropped out of critical fashion? Does his longevity make Pohl difficult to place as a writer? Or is it, rather, as David Seed suggests, that Pohl is almost entirely associated with the 1950s, and with his collaboration with Kornbluth, a time increasingly distant from our own? By far, the text that is most referred to in histories of science fiction is *The Space Merchants*, his first major collaboration with Kornbluth; his first published novel, in fact. In part, the prominence of this work (at the expense of some others) is determined by its valuation by Kingsley Amis in *New Maps of Hell* (1961). Pohl, in particular, is given major significance by Amis, to the extent of declaring Pohl

'the most consistently able writer science fiction, in the modern sense, has yet produced' (1961: 102). This valuation, of course, reveals more about Amis's own personal tastes in what he considers successful sf than it does about Pohl's status even among his contemporaries. But, the status of the novel was cemented by Amis's praise, which concluded that '*The Space Merchants* [...] has many claims to being the best science-fiction novel so far' (102); 'no worthy successor to it has come along in the half-dozen years since it was published' (115). This high esteem is echoed by Brian Ash, who cites *The Space Merchants* as 'an example of the science fiction story at its best' (1975: 3), and in fact, chooses the novel to be the very first text discussed at length in his book; and by John P. Brennan who describes the text as 'a science fiction novel of seemingly unchallengeable status. It has been almost uniformly praised by reviewers, both on initial book publication and on retrospective occasions' (1984: 101).

And yet, this valuation hardly went uncontested, even at the time. A review of a Penguin reprint of *The Space Merchants* in *New Worlds* 156 cites Amis's book, but avers that 'Amis's tastes must be limited, for though this book is slickly written, fast-moving and fairly mature in its outlook, its main target – the advertising world – is an old, tired target and no really original shots are fired' (Colvin 1965: 120). While recommended as 'light-reading', the review rather downplays any satirical edge that the novel might suggest. Subsequent correspondence in *New Worlds* 159 suggests that '*The Space Merchants* [...] is, thanks to Amis, probably the most over-estimated sf novel ever' (Pilkington 1966: 120). A more positive reply elicited the following response from James Colvin (*New Worlds*' in-house pseudonym): 'Mr Amis overpraised Pohl and denigrated Kornbluth in his remarks on *The Space Merchants* [....] I would prefer a deeper sort of analysis [...] of the causes of society's ills rather than the symptoms' (1966: 124–5). In a sense, the 'slickly-written' form of the novel is its perceived weakness: its very professionalism blunts its critical edge, prevents it from cutting beneath the surface. This diagnosis anticipates that of David N. Samuelson, who is very critical of Pohl's failings, for example in his review of Thomas D. Clareson's monograph: 'Clareson finds him [Pohl] trying (with limited success) to break out of the trap(s) of pulp SF which he himself has long enforced as an editor and practiced in his own fiction' (1988: 364). Samuelson pinpoints an important aporia in Clareson's critical practice in asking, 'what about his consummate professionalism at least? What are the effects on Pohl's fiction of his buying and selling others' writing, serving as a roving ambassador for the "idea" of SF, daily producing at least four pages of publishable prose?' (365). These are excellent questions to ask, because Pohl's very conception of science fiction *writing* may well be central to how his fiction is perceived and may explain a slackening of critical attention to his work. If Pohl and Kornbluth's work is particularly located in time and space (the Cold War United States of the 1950s),

it is also the bearer of a particular style, a particular tone of voice, which is that of the American mid-century white male.

Before I discuss this, I would first like to consider Pohl's own conception of science fiction, what it does and how it should work. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Pohl's conception of sf is determinedly political. In a piece which has been published three times in pretty much the same form (as 'The Politics of Prophecy' in *Extrapolation* in 1993, reprinted in Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox's *Political Science Fiction* (1997), and as 'Political Science Fiction' in *Locus* in 1993), Pohl begins: 'To speak of "political science fiction" is almost to commit a tautology, for I would argue that there is very little science fiction, perhaps that there is no *good* science fiction at all, that is not to some degree political' (1993: 199). He continues:

> As I see it, science fiction writers do universally use a single method in devising their stories. First they look at the world around them in all its parts. Then they take some of the parts out and throw them away and replace them with new parts of their own imagining. Then they reassemble this changed world and start it going to see how it works; and that is the background to every science fiction story I know.
>
> And every time a writer creates one of these different worlds, he (or she) makes a political statement, for he offers – deliberately or inadvertently – the readers a chance to compare his or her invented world with the real one around them. (200)

This is very close to a Suvinian conception of sf as the literature of cognitive estrangement. Both Pohl's and Suvin's conceptions of what sf is and how it works are very similar, in that both offer a political/ideological analysis of sf writing and reading practice. In 'The Politics of Prophecy', Pohl connects the tradition of sf to Swift; or really, perhaps, the other way round, calling *Gulliver's Travels* 'one of the early masterpieces of the class' of satirical sf (200). In the transcript of a speech given by Pohl in the early 1970s entitled 'The Shape of Science Fiction to come', Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss take Pohl to task for this rather anachronistic approach, considering 'science fiction hadn't been invented at the time'. Pohl responds by arguing that 'literary satire is basically an SF technique [....] it simply came a little ahead of its time' (1974: 10). This is something of a Whig version of history: although Pohl accepts that sf writers take literary technique from (mainstream) experimental literature, he stands by a suggestion that satirical sf does not *derive* it techniques from Swift; the 'science fiction method' *precedes* Swift, making *Gulliver's Travels* a science fiction text.

Also in evidence in the responses to questions by other writers is his lack of patience with the New Wave. In response to a question put to him about J.G. Ballard by James Blish, Pohl replies: 'You have described to me, Jim, subtleties

in the work of JGB, so that I have gone back to look for them, and I have not found them' (1974: 10); and on Samuel R. Delany's work, he says that 'he is writing on such an advanced level that everything he says, in its best parts, trembles on the verge of being totally incomprehensible' (11). For a figure of left-liberal politics, and one with an explicitly *political* conception of sf practice, this failure to respond to a *formal* experimentalism or radicalism may seem strange. Indeed, although Pohl appears in Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* (1967), which might indicate his sympathy with the New Wave, his story, 'The Day After the Day the Martians Came', eschews any kind of formal experimentation, and is instead a *political* reading of race and human contact with alien species.

I think one certainly can explain what Samuelson diagnoses as Pohl's ongoing adherence to the tenets of 'pulp sf' as a product of his 'professionalism', his background as an agent, editor, and copywriter. In 'The Shape of Science Fiction to Come', Pohl stakes out his approach to the writing (and editing) of sf in an almost diagrammatic way:

> It seems to me that most kinds of writing, including science fiction, comes apart into four main parts. First of all there is what I call the 'Letter to the editor' – that is, the theme, the thesis, whatever it is you want to accomplish, what it is you want to convey. The second part is the cast of characters, the people in the story – and in SF not necessarily human people, and not necessarily even organic. The third part is the setting, the background, the milieu, what I call the 'Travelogue'. Finally there is that shape of word-use, coinage, idiosyncratic inflexion, or whatever else decorates the surface of the work and that concerns so many writers so much – the style, what I call the 'Package'. This is a Madison Avenue advertising term but it is one that I think appropriate. (1974: 7)

The order is in itself highly revealing, and perhaps help explains why, in Samuelson's words, Pohl's characters 'are by and large cartoons' (1988: 365): they are of lesser significance than the 'thesis', what the writer is trying to *say*. Perhaps the most alarming part of Pohl's speech is the idea of 'the Package' and its free appropriation from a Mad Ave lexicon, suggesting that Pohl thinks of sf as a commodity, perhaps like *The Space Merchants*' 'Coffiest': tasty, artificial, and addictive. This radical dislocation of form from content leads Pohl to aver some rather extraordinary things: that 'style is the last thing any serious writer should worry about' (1974: 8); 'the great stories that have made SF worth reading were pretty nearly styleless' (8); and that Robert Heinlein (and Ernest Hemingway) were 'essentially style-free' (8). For Pohl, 'style' *gets in the way* of what sf should be about, which is transmitting the 'thesis'; its political function.

The conception of sf as *a literature of transmission* is clear from statements Pohl makes elsewhere. In 'SF: the Game-Playing Literature', Pohl writes that 'Science fiction makes good propaganda literature, and there have been times

when the freedom to think and say unorthodox sentiments was severely repressed outside of science fiction' (1976: 191). In 'The Politics of Prophecy', Pohl represents sf as a transmission *in code*:

> I am talking about science fiction as political cryptogram, about the use of science fiction to say things in hint and metaphor that the writer dare not say in clear. [...] I don't know how many of you remember the chill on free speech that was imposed by the Joseph McCarthy period in the early 1950s. Tail-Gunner Joe terrified the media, the schools, the Pentagon, and even the White House, and few dared to speak freely [...] but science fiction writers went on saying just about whatever they chose. (1993: 202–4).

Pohl's conception of the *political or ideological work* that sf is able to do is explicitly typed as a response to the conditions of the 1950s. Science fiction is conceived of as a genre which allows critical freedom for the writer, a means by which to short-circuit systems of censorship and oppression. (One of the chapters in *The Way the Future Was* is called, revealingly, 'Science Fiction Samizdat'.) To write sf becomes a means of resistance. Little wonder, then, that Pohl and Kornbluth turned to dystopia, and in particular what Amis was to call the form of the 'comic inferno' in their 1950s novels, to critique the socio-political conditions of the post-war United States. The 'comic inferno' is described by Amis thus:

> A mode of writing that is clearly older than science fiction, but makes its own humble claim to originality here, in that the absurdities it envisages rest upon conceivable developments in technology; this is an invariable rule. Its moral value, if one must be contrived, is that it ridicules notions which various heavy pressures would have us take seriously: pride in a mounting material standard of living, the belief that such progress can be continued indefinitely and needs only horizontal extension to make the world perfect, the feeling that the accumulation of possessions is at once the prerogative and the evidence of merit. (1961: 105)

The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction, more pithily, describes it as 'sf which cheerfully extracts satire or outright black humour from a scenario rooted in dystopia' (Langford). The comic inferno is extrapolative; near-future; explicitly satirical or critical; and, in Amis's conception, is focused on *material* reality (if not outright materialism). Curiously, in the examples given by David Langford, the comic inferno itself seems specifically located in time and space: from the early 1950s to the early 1960s (the last practitioner cited is Richard Condon, whose 1974 novel *The Star-Spangled Crunch* seems to be a belated, and final, entry). Even in terms of satirical sf, the form of the comic inferno seems to be a forgotten pathway, a dried-up tributary. The reasons for this, I think, are to do with historical moment as much as to do with generic development (or fashion).

When Seed suggests that 'For each [of Pohl and Kornbluth] the formative

decade was the 1930s, a period characterized for Pohl not only by his own temporary allegiance to the Communist party but also by encountering sf with a "populist, anti-establishment tone"' (1993: 42), he pinpoints a crucial – but sometimes neglected – element in reading Pohl's (and Kornbluth's) fiction. While critics often note Pohl's leading role in the Futurians, the cultural formation of that group requires a little unpacking to make particular sense of Pohl's conception of sf, and the kind of satirical social sf (the comic inferno) that he writes. In *The Cultural Front* (1996), Michael Denning investigates what he calls the 'laboring of American culture' during the 1930s, the short-lived rise to prominence of 'Proletarian literature', and the cultural work done during the period of the Popular Front, the common cause against Fascism offered by Communists, Socialists, the social-democratic left and left-liberals. Denning investigates the rise of a 'mass culture' in the 1920s, located in the proliferation of 'the John Reed clubs [and] the "mushroom mags" that sprang up across the country in the early 1930s' (1996: 203) as well as the increased prominence of a varied 'proletarian literature' that Denning associates with Jack Conroy, Langston Hughes, Meridel Le Sueur and William Carlos Williams. It is into this cultural dynamic that Denning inserts the Futurians:

> Several left-wing writers groups brought together young black or ethnic writers from working-class backgrounds in the decades after the demise of the John Reed clubs, and they had a significant impact on post-war writing. The Futurians were formed in 1938 by radical young science-fiction writers, several of whom were members of the Young Communist League; over the next decade, the group, which included Isaac Asimov, Frederick Pohl [sic], Cy Kornbluth, Judith Merril, James Blish, and Damon Knight, wrote for and edited the pulp magazines and paperback originals that remade science fiction in the post-war period. (225–6)

Denning views the Futurians not as part of the (separate) historical development of genre sf in the pulps, in relation to their fan reception and writer communities, but as part of a wider movement in which working-class, black and ethnic Americans were involved in group and collaborative practices to produce writing that represented the experiences of working Americans, and their experiences of labour, Depression, racism and discrimination of all kinds, and a critical response to the imperatives of capitalism. Therefore, when Amis suggests that Pohl is 'some sort of writer of economic man' (1961: 102), he unknowingly articulates Pohl and Kornbluth's continuity with the representational strategies of 'proletarian literature' in its broadest and most various conception. In this sense, Pohl's antipathy to formal experimentation places him in a continuum with other political writers of the 1930s and 1940s who wished to communicate most directly with their readers; if, in Pohl's conception, sf is a literature of transmission, what

it should transmit are critical responses to the workings of capital (if not directly revolutionary calls to the barricades).

I would argue that one can see the particular form of the 'comic inferno' as in a political and textual continuum with forms of 'proletarian literature', and in particular a critical representation of the relationship between the worker, the product and the consumer. The cycle of production and consumption is the basic narrative engine in many of Pohl's texts, particularly *The Space Merchants* and such short stories as 'The Midas Plague' (1954), 'The Man Who Ate the World' (1956) and 'The Tunnel Under the World' (1954), part of what Samuelson calls Pohl's 'consumer cycle' of stories (1984: 107). I will here concentrate on the first two short stories, but common to all is a world in which products are manufactured and systems of advertising are constructed in order to create the demand for them to be sold; this consumption then promotes another round of production. The denizens of the various worlds Pohl imagines are locked into this productive cycle, either by a system of brain-wiping ('The Tunnel Under the World'), an inverted class hierarchy where to be poor is to consume more ('The Midas Plague') or consumption is itself figured as an addiction ('The Man Who Ate the World'). Throughout, the economic system has at its core the necessity to produce in order to maintain itself, for once a part of the cycle fails, the whole system fails.

In 'The Midas Plague', a system of mass consumption operates in an inverted manner to that of 1950s America: the 'poorer' one is, the more one has to consume; the 'wealthier' one is, the more Spartan life can be. Samuelson writes of the story: 'the point was to expose and skewer the naïveté (or duplicity) of the attitude (not limited to the 1950s) that affluence is a never-ending spiral, meanwhile softening the blow with comic exaggeration' (1984: 108). This scenario's dystopian ironies are then dependent on the imagination of an economic system which undergoes endless (and accelerating) growth:

> Limitless discovery, infinite power in the atom, tireless labor of humanity and robots, mechanization that drove jungle and swamp and ice off the earth, and put up office buildings and manufacturing centers and rocket ports in their place. (Pohl 1977: 116)

These are the images of a technological utopia, but the economic system finds no steady state. Production without limit becomes not a utopia of material plenty (or even a technological Cockaygne) but a *dystopia* of superabundance. Automated factories disburse a vast amount of commodities which must be consumed, and a global system of consumption is set in place to deal with the output. The goods may not be simply destroyed: they must be used and 'worn out' by the lower classes. The system of consumption is buttressed by a social code which abhors waste, and the lower classes are caught in the resulting

double-bind. Ironically, the system is dependent upon the *wasting* of resources and the commodities themselves: they are constructed only to be destroyed, and replaced. Morey Fry is the protagonist of the story, a lower-caste *apparatchik* who attempts (with little success) to successfully consume all he is 'rationed' (a bloated portion of goods, food, and drink). In this world, 'the most important anti-social phenomenon [...] [is] failure to consume' (Pohl 1977: 142). Recurring throughout the story is the word 'plenty'. In the system of overproduction and necessitated overconsumption, the worth of material goods becomes inverted: less is certainly more. To Fry, there is something repulsive and corrupt about the display: ostentation is the correlative of overproduction. The ostentation is also entirely ersatz:

> Uncle Piggoty's was a third-rate dive designed to look, in parts of it at least, like one of the exclusive upper-class country clubs. The bar, for instance, was treated to resemble the clean lines of nailed wood; but underneath the surface treatment, Morey could detect the intricate laminations of plastic. (133)

There is a rather uncomfortable stereotyping of working class taste as vulgarity in this section, one that finds its echo in Kornbluth's 'The Marching Morons' (1951), which Pohl and Kornbluth drew upon for the third section of their collaborative novel *Search the Sky* (1954). In that short story, whose relationship to the Wellsian technotopia is foregrounded by the device of a man from the past awakening into a streamlined 'utopian' future, the sharp-eyed visitor Barlow is taken to the megalopolis: 'The city loomed ahead, and it was just what it ought to be: towering skyscrapers, overhead ramps, landing platforms for helicopters' (Kornbluth 1968: 29). However, the space of the city hides its true operation: an elite intelligentsia runs the world for a degenerated and imbecilic mass.

The narrative of 'The Man Who Ate the World' is continuous with that of 'The Midas Plague'; the 'Man' of the title is Anderson Trumie, who grew up during the 'bad old days of the Age of Plenty, when the world was smothering under the endless, pounding flow of goods from the robot factories and the desperate race between consumption and production strained the human fabric' (Pohl 1960: 25). The world of 'The Midas Plague' is the past of this story: Trumie is a representative of that world (a *product* of that world) adrift in a new one, which cannot cope with his need to consume. Trumie restlessly attempts to gather everything unto himself: in fact, as the title of the story suggests, *into* himself. Trumie suffers from a disease, an all-consuming need to consume. The need to consume consists of an emptiness within, figured as physical hunger, which he seeks desperately and unsuccessfully to fill. The conflict between Trumie's order of consumption, and the post-'Age of Plenty' societal order of the protagonists, is figured as a competition for *space*, a connection to the colonizing imperatives Pohl satirizes in *The Space*

Merchants. Trumie's robots construct an artificial world which begins to encroach upon, and threaten to absorb, or consume, the space and order of the stable post-consumption world. Like Morey Fry, Trumie hates robots, but is trapped within a system where they are his only companions, where he is maintained by them, and protected by them. Like Fry, this is traceable to childhood trauma, and a too-early placing of the burden of consumption upon a child's shoulders. Trumie's trauma, however, can be cured by his regression. For Trumie, consumption is both an addiction and an illness, but one that can be escaped from, recovered from. The identity forged in his childhood is laid to sleep at the end of the story: 'even the razor-sharp mind-Trumie that lived in the sad, obedient hulk; it slept; and it had never slept before' (Pohl 1960: 37). Consumption is a form of self-punishment which corresponds to his lack of self-worth; a failure to fulfil his parents' expectations is internalized as a dominating superego, and a rage to consume. The words of a female operative, Kathryn Pender, disguised in a teddy bear suit, soothe him, offer a surrogate parenthood and a therapeutic replaying of childhood scenes, opposed to his obsessive compulsion to consume exposed in earlier scenes in the narrative. Consumption then becomes a disease from which Trumie – and hence the human race – can recover.

Samuelson writes that 'Every Pohl reader must be familiar with his wry if not mordant humor and razor-edged satire', and characterizes Clareson's response as 'finding in the early Pohl a "voice" [...] but no worthy subject matter' (1988: 364). Writing four years earlier, Samuelson goes further: 'his work seems to lack depth, density, an authentic personal voice, and a sense of style as anything more than a serviceable medium' (1984: 106). I suggest that there *is* a strong sense of 'voice' in Pohl's work, and will hope to demonstrate this by comparison with *The Space Merchants* and *Gateway*, but if we conflate 'voice' with 'style', then Samuelson's diagnosis is correct in that it corresponds to Pohl's own privileging of a 'style-free' mode of writing, one which presents itself as direct and free of formal mannerism. (That 'style-free' discourse is, of course, a style in itself, a mannerism.) Pohl's work is *deliberately* presented that way, because it is intended to transmit the 'thesis' or ideas or message. If, as Samuelson argues, Pohl is deficient as an sf *novelist*, because his characters are cartoonish, it may be because Pohl has little interest, in much of his work, in the concept of 'character' *tout court*; if his ends are the transmission of satirical or political messages, then the discourse of novelistic 'realism' is antithetical to his purposes. Pohl's 'deficiencies' as a novelist are, in part, deliberate, and are produced by his conception of science fiction itself.

John Clute, in 'Scholia, Seasoned With Crabs, Blish Is' (1973), draws upon Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) to suggest that while science fiction tends to fall into Frye's category of the 'romance' ('whose "stylized" protagonists "expand into psychological archetypes", and which "often radiates a glow of

subjective intensity that the novel lacks'), works such as Blish's could also be identified as a 'Menippean satire or anatomy', a form that diverts from the novel in its stylized characterization, its 'ability to handle abstract ideas and theories', its presentation of 'a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern' and 'violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative' (Clute 1983: 337). Clute, to comic and critical effect, suggests that Blish is a writer who aims at the romance but always manages to hit on the 'Menippean satire', meaning that the seeming deficiencies of Blish's works are in fact tonal and effective strategies that (unconsciously) work against the standard forms and modes of science fiction. Clute suggests that this tonality is *always already* present within the generic range of science fiction, but works as a kind of counter-discourse. If we understand Pohl's texts, like those of Blish, to be primarily *satires* rather than *novels*, the charges laid by Samuelson do not pertain; the effects Pohl aims at may well be achieved, but they are not those of psychological 'depth' (which Brennan argues is deliberately evacuated from *The Space Merchants*) or novelistic 'realism'.

Instead, we have in Pohl's texts what Frye characterized as the signal technique of the satire, the presentation of 'a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern', a vision which coalesces around the satirical *voice*. It is this voice, the cynical, blackly comic voice of the satirist, which is central to the mode of the 'comic inferno'. This 'voice' is not necessarily that of Pohl himself; rather, his own texts, and those in collaboration with Kornbluth, inhabit a particular mode of discourse, a voice that is intended to offer a simple, direct and 'transparent' means by which to address the reader. What I would like to suggest is that the 'voice' that Pohl's texts inhabit is an intensely masculine discourse, or rather one invested in a particular masculine sensibility, one that is also presumed in the reader. Just as Denning diagnoses a 'masculinist aesthetic' at work in some theorizations of proletarian literature (1996: 214), Pohl's work at once privileges *and* critiques hegemonic masculinity in his texts, a masculinity that embodies agency and (sexual) vitality, a cynical or humorous approach to the world, but also bears the markers of the 'regular guy', the working stiff, the 1950s everyman. Both *The Space Merchants* and *Gateway* have white, male, professionally-successful first-person narrators, the embodiments of these characteristics. Mitchell Courtenay, the young 'Star Class' ad-man in *The Space Merchants*, is a proto-typical aspirational and economically productive executive of the 1950s, whose preparations for the start of the day signify his own status as consumer *and product* of the system he works for:

> I rubbed depilatory soap over my face and rinsed it with the trickle from the fresh-water tap. Wasteful, of course, but I pay taxes and salt water always leaves my face itchy. Before the last of the greasy stubble was quite washed away the trickle stopped and didn't start again. I swore and finished rinsing with salt. [...]

> It looked as though I was going to be late again. Which certainly would not help mollify the Board.
>
> I saved five minutes by wearing yesterday's shirt instead of studding a clean one and by leaving my breakfast juice to grow warm and sticky on the table. But I lost the five minutes again by trying to call Kathy. She didn't answer the phone and I was late getting into the office. (Pohl 1953: 5)

The language is direct, clipped. Details are scant; the material nature of the world is to be imagined by the reader rather than described in the text. The narrator is a 'regular guy', prey to dissatisfactions (and cussing), rushing to be on time (again), heteronormative in orientation, relatively privileged but a worker, operating to the company's time. Courtenay's trajectory, his *fall* into socio-economic privation, compounds this sense of a worker-masculinity, his ordinariness. He might be 'Star Class', but once his eyes are opened, he works to overturn the system, to *do the right thing*. He only needs a push.

In *Gateway*, the protagonist Robinette Broadhead tells of his attempt to become part of the human experimentation with Heechee technology (gateways to other planets, stars, galaxies), and simultaneously his analysis with the robot psychiatrist Sigfrid, who attempts to cure him of his feelings of unhappiness. It is revealed that Rob Broadhead made a successful trip through the gateway, in that his journey demonstrated new knowledge about the Heechee technology and was richly remunerated upon his return; but that in returning, Rob was forced to sacrifice fellow crew-members (accidentally, believing he was sacrificing himself), including the woman he loved, when their craft became trapped in a singularity. From the first page of *Gateway*:

> He annoys me when he keeps bringing up what I keep bringing up. I look at the ceiling with its hanging mobiles and piñatas, then I look out the window. It isn't really a window. It's a moving holopic of surf coming in on Kaena Point; Sigfrid's programming is pretty eclectic. After a while I say, 'I can't help what my parents called me. I tried spelling it R-O-B-I-N-E-T, but then everybody pronounces it wrong.' [...] We play these games a lot and I don't like them. I think there's something wrong with his program. He says, 'You tell me, Robbie. Why don't you feel happy?' (Pohl 2006: 1)

Again, the first-person narration is informal, direct, clipped, the details sparse, the signs that this is sf scant (the holopic, Sigfrid's 'programming'). The 'style' is 'style-free': terse, without flourish or metaphor, and with no signs of writerly (or 'mannered') diction, although *Gateway* is mildly formally experimental, inserting reports and other documents within the textual fabric of the novel, and with a dual time-frame. The speaking subject, however, though traumatized and undergoing therapy, does not sound or feel significantly different to the one presented some twenty-five years before, the white American male Everyman. This 'character', this

humorous voice, is the vehicle through which Pohl articulates his satirical critique of consumerist capitalism and its deforming effects. In *Gateway*, this becomes the voice of the traumatized male, coming to terms with the past.

What I am suggesting here is not that Pohl became some kind of 'dinosaur', nor that his work was incapable of change. *Gateway*, even more than *Man Plus*, was a significant attempt to broaden the formal and thematic range of his writing; *Jem* (1979) and *The Merchants' War* (1984) seem self-conscious rewritings of Pohl's earlier texts with an eye to latter-day textual and political developments. His work as an editor and as a copywriter, and most importantly his training as a professional writer of science fiction at a certain point in its history, meant that the voice he developed to efficiently produce sf magazine fiction (and then paperback novels), the 'comic inferno' voice of the white male American Everyman, was continuously present in his earlier, mid-career and even later writings. Perhaps even more than this, though, it was his experience of the political changes in the United States, particularly between 1930 and 1960, when he came to maturity as a person and as a writer, which shaped his understanding of what science fiction should do, and what he himself should attempt to do with it.

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In Search of Richard Matheson: Science Fiction Screenwriter *

Dean Conrad

Richard Burton Matheson died on 23rd June 2013, aged 87. As the author of stories that have inspired a slew of notable science fiction films, including *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), *The Omega Man* (1971) and *I Am Legend* (2007), he was always likely to be remembered by *Foundation* in a retrospective tribute article such as this; simply put, a 'science fiction legend has passed' (Persons 2013). However, initial research for this piece quickly revealed that it is not quite as simple as that. This writer is a little harder to pin down. We might agree with Ray Bradbury's statement that Richard Matheson was 'one of the most important writers of the twentieth century' (quoted Matheson 2010: i), but a writer of what? Science fiction? Horror? Fantasy? We might safely agree that Matheson was a master of all three, but there seems to be little agreement over categorization of individual texts. In his introduction to *I Am Legend* (1954), Graham Sleight refers to it as 'one of the simplest of great SF novels' (2010: vii). The afterword for the same volume is written by Stephen King, who refers to the work as 'horror', adding that 'without Richard Matheson, I wouldn't be around' (King 2010: 162): praise indeed from a master of the horror genre.

This apparent category conflict is not confined to *I Am Legend*; it emerges regularly in connection with Matheson's work as he borrows, bends and melds genre tropes in the service of his fantasy narratives. Sleeve notes to a 2007 DVD copy of *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, for which Matheson wrote the screenplay, claim the film to be 'one of the best science-fiction films of the 50s'; podcaster, Dan Persons, calls it 'the archetypal 50's [sic.] horror film'; and Phil Hardy refers to it as 'one of the great anxiety movies of the fifties' (1991: 169). This reluctance to be categorized is reflected in *I Am Legend's* four distinct screen interpretations, and is further evident in its clear influence on films as diverse as George Romero's zombie classic, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and L.Q. Jones' post-apocalyptic satire, *A Boy and His Dog* (1975).

Before looking closer at Richard Matheson's screen work, consider this: he published more than a hundred short stories and almost thirty novels; two of the latter are considered seminal works of genre fiction. By most measures, that is a successful publishing career. In what might be seen as a secondary career as screenwriter, Matheson wrote over thirty TV episodes, a further thirty or so features for cinema and television, and is credited as the story inspiration for

many more projects. By most measures, that is a successful screenwriting career. The following pages examine Matheson's influence on television and cinema. As will become clear, it is impossible to avoid hoary old questions of genre definition as we go in search of Richard Matheson: science fiction screenwriter.

Very Richard Matheson

Late on in the period of research for this essay came a viewing of David Koepp's 1999 film *Stir of Echoes*, adapted from Matheson's 1958 novel, *A Stir of Echoes*. Kevin Bacon plays Tom Witzky, for whom a hypnotism session triggers a series of visions, which he shares with his son. These are ghostly echoes of past events that coalesce to create a current mystery. Witzky's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and frantic until he solves the mystery. It is a difficult film to pin down in terms of genre. What is notable is that this late screening gave rise to the research note, 'this story is *very* Richard Matheson'. It is a horror story, with resonances of *The Shining* (1980) and a ghost story with links to *The Sixth Sense* (1999). It is also framed partly as science fiction, not least through its use of hypnotism as a trigger for Witzky's visions and subsequent behaviour, not unlike the experience of Robert Neary in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

This melange of generic elements is typical of Matheson's own screenwriting, both original and adapted (usually from his own work). The use of hypnotism as an attempt to employ science of a sort in order to quantify the irrational is typical of Matheson's *oeuvre* – and central to the search for a label for his work. In his review of Matheson's source novel, Ray Wallace writes: '*A Stir of Echoes* is Richard Matheson's clinical look at psychic phenomenon [sic] as he tries on various occasions throughout the book to try and explain many of the events scientifically' (Wallace 2014). This scientific justification approach is already well established in the short novel that brought Matheson to prominence: *I Am Legend*.

I Am Legend: Quantifying the Irrational

The novel opens in January 1976. Robert Neville, the last survivor of the human race, has barricaded himself into his home in an attempt to avoid the rest of the population: a mixture of living-dead creatures and rabid, plague-ridden half-humans bent on drinking his blood. Matheson calls them 'vampires', referencing myths and legends that have built up over centuries:

> Something with no framework or credulity, something that had been consigned, fact and figure, to the pages of imaginative literature. Vampires were passé, Summers' idylls or Stoker's melodramatics or a brief inclusion in the Britannica or grist for the pulp writer's mill or raw material for the B-film factories. A tenuous

legend passed from century to century. (Matheson 2010: 17)

Having evoked these Gothic horror sensibilities early in his novel, Matheson uses much of the rest of his text to rationalize the myths. Through Neville, Matheson uses logic and empirical methodology to deconstruct the classic vampire legends and to return them to a 'framework' with 'credulity'. Neville, a non-scientist, learns to use a microscope. With this he discovers that the vampires are infected with a blood-borne bacillus, which first kills the host, then multiplies within it to a point where the body can be powered and animated – as the living dead. Neville assumes that the fear that some vampires have for the Christian Cross is a learned response by those who found God in their terror, after the plague had struck. He tests this hypothesis by scaring Muslim and Jewish vampires away with copies of the Koran and the Torah respectively. Mirrors hold fear for the vampires because they cannot bear the image of what they have become. Many infected people fall to their deaths because they believe that they can fly like bats; their delusion is fuelled by remembered myths and archetypes. Through Neville's other theories and discoveries Matheson deftly builds a case that 'the vampire was real. It was only that his true story had never been told' (78).

The first screen version of *I Am Legend* was the 1964 Italian/American production, released in English as *The Last Man on Earth*. Of the four screen versions currently available, this is the only one to be scripted by Matheson and is the most faithful to the original text. The protagonist is a professional scientist, which enables a shortcut to the scientific exploration that underpins Matheson's original story. Boris Sagal's 1971 version, *The Omega Man*, misses the point of Matheson's book almost entirely, instead offering a melodramatic interpretation, described as an 'over-emphatically directed film' with an 'erratic plotline' (Hardy 1991: 301). Whilst the 2007 version, *I Am Legend* featuring Will Smith, does place emphasis on Neville's search for a cure for the plague, Matheson's aim to rationalize the myth of the vampire through scientific enquiry is largely missed in Akiva Goldsman's screenplay. The result has the feel of a zombie-horror movie, although not quite to the degree of Griff Furst's straight-to-video effort, *I Am Omega* (2007): a fairly mindless attempt to capitalize on the high profile of the Will Smith version.

Definitions of Science Fiction – With Science

With both novel and screenplay, Matheson was clearly aiming to combine the atmosphere of horror with the kind of science fiction whose definition hinges on the importance of science and logic. In this, he is supported by Vivian Sobchack's attempts to circumscribe the genre:

> The SF film is a film genre which emphasizes actual, extrapolative, or speculative science and the empirical method, interacting in a social context with the lesser emphasized, but still present, transcendentalism of magic and religion, in an attempt to reconcile man with the unknown. (Sobchack 1988: 63)

In contrast, John Baxter suggests a rather strict distinction between science fiction literature, as supporting 'logic and order', and science fiction film, as supporting 'illogic and chaos' (Baxter 1970: 10). Baxter divides film into a further two categories: 'the loss of individuality, and the 'threat of knowledge' (11). His comments on film feel remarkably prescient at a time when computer graphics have reduced many science-fiction film offerings to 'illogic and chaos', not least Alfonso Cuarón's Oscar-winning *Gravity* (2013); however, as with any strict definition, Baxter's is vulnerable to counter-examples. Matheson, for example, clearly aims to retain the 'logic and order' of his novel in his adaptation.

This logical approach can be seen in much of Matheson's early work as a screenwriter. For example, his single episode for the cult TV Western, *Have Gun – Will Travel*, 'The Lady on the Wall' (1960), departs from its usual dark, brooding style to require its protagonist to solve the mystery of a stolen painting. The Gothic melodrama of Edgar Allan Poe's story, and Vincent Price's performance in, *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961) is tempered by the investigations of a brother searching for clues as to why his sister has died. Another young male investigator in another Poe adaptation, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1960), is told that 'your mind is too logical to understand what is happening here'. In each, a ghost story is converted, through the application of logic, into an atmospheric crime thriller.

The Shrinking Man: Processes of Investigation

Matheson's fascination for the process of investigation is clear in his second novel and its resulting screenplay, filmed as *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957). Scott Carey is the protagonist who discovers that he is shrinking at the rate of a fraction of an inch each day. The novel intercuts Carey's final, precarious days in the cellar of his home, at the height of an inch or so, with the months that lead up to this finale. For the film version, Matheson brings a degree of order to the relative narrative chaos of the novel by imposing a linear time-line. To varying degrees, both film and novel explore the social, sexual and psychological effects of the protagonist's gradual shrinking. Carey's self-esteem is gradually eroded, creating a fragile state of mind, which is further undermined by the responses and actions of people around him. Order is restored at the end of both versions, when Carey accepts his fate and prepares to take his place among the infinitesimal:

> To nature there was no zero. Existence went on in endless cycles. It seemed

> so simple now. He would never disappear, because there was no point of non-existence in the universe. […] If nature existed on endless levels, so also might intelligence. (Matheson 2002: 200)

These psychological and philosophical approaches would appear to meet the requirements of Sobchack's definition, to 'reconcile man with the unknown'; however her definition, an all-encompassing list of what science fiction film *can* be, feels unwieldy. Baxter's definition, with its notions of 'order' and 'chaos', is tighter and more elegant, but is also insufficient. Whilst flawed, each attempt responds to a clear need, identified by Sobchack: 'the very act of definition is, indeed, an academic requirement as well as a personal cathartic' (Sobchack 1988: 17). Lucie Armitt disagrees, stating that 'to define something before one starts is immediately to constrain it, to imprison it within a label in relation to which all innovation becomes deviation' (1991: 11).

In a brave attempt at a definition that is elegant, rigorous and inclusive, Peter Nicholls looks beyond the content of science fiction texts, to the processes which serve to justify that content. Returning to 'the empirical method', Nicholls argues that whilst subject matter may be innovative and unconstrained, scientific justification remains a constant:

> [Science fiction] shares with fantasy the idea of a novum: some new element, something that distinguishes the fiction from reality as presently constituted. A novum could be a vampire or a colonised planet. The sub-set that is sf insists that the novum be explicable in terms that adhere to conventionally formulated natural law; the remainder, fantasy, has no such requirement. (Clute and Nicholls 1993: 408)

The novum in *The (Incredible) Shrinking Man* is clear. The trigger for the shrinking in both film and novel is a strange, glistening mist encountered by Carey at the opening of the story. To render this 'explicable', Carey is subjected to a number of medical tests and procedures. In the novel, Matheson uses these to make a socio-political statement about the debilitating and divisive cost of US health-care. It is the film which offers a more rigorous scientific explanation for Carey's shrinking. The mist is a radioactive cloud that triggers a germ spray to which Carey has previously been exposed. The explanation for the shrinking here is not as sophisticated as the reasoning behind the vampires in *I Am Legend*; however, Matheson is clearly, once again, attempting to employ science and logic to underpin his fantasy story.

Of course, the veracity of that science is another matter. In *The Biology of Science Fiction Cinema* (2001), professional biochemist and molecular immunologist Mark C. Glassy is by no means wholly negative about the science presented in *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. Glassy is more positive about the

gradual shrinking in this film than he is about the instant miniaturization in Richard Fleischer's *Fantastic Voyage* (1966). On balance, however, Carey's experience is considered unlikely to occur as depicted. This may seem an obvious, even banal, statement, but it does highlight the problem of using scientific veracity to measure any science fiction offering. John Brosnan highlights a further problem in his personal history of science fiction cinema:

> Strictly speaking, none of the films covered in this chapter are science fiction films. In retrospect, yes, they are, but at the time many of them were made the term 'science fiction' didn't exist. (1991: 1)

Add to this the fact that the science itself often did not exist. A shrinking man is arguably no more, or less, credible than the *Enterprise* transporter which generates the narrative drive for Matheson's classic *Star Trek* episode, 'The Enemy Within' (1966). Kirk is divided into good and bad selves by a transporter malfunction. In *The Physics of Star Trek* (1997), Lawrence Krauss examines the plausibility of the transporter technology and, perhaps unsurprisingly, finds it wanting. To Matheson, it is a MacGuffin, a narrative tool that affords him an opportunity to explore one of his favourite subjects: human psychology.

Definitions of Science Fiction – Sans Science

Krauss's and Glassy's books contribute to a publishing industry that has developed around the credibility of sf cinema's science and technology. A brief survey of its many, diverse subjects – from the biology of planet Pandora (Wilhelm and Matheson 2009) to the mechanics of the Millennium Falcon (Windham et al 2012) – give an indication of the varying degrees of seriousness with which this field is approached. Science, it would seem, is not always the driving force behind sf films. In fact, some 'depict social change without necessarily making much fuss over scientific development' (Clute and Nicholls 1993: 312). In her essay, 'The Imagination of Disaster' (1961), Susan Sontag largely dismisses the importance of science, arguing that 'science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster, which is one of the oldest subjects of art' (1966: 213). It is this notion of disaster that Glen Donnar draws out in his work on film versions of *I Am Legend*. He cites Mick Broderick's reformulation of Sontag's famous phrase, observing that 'post-apocalyptic SF cinema predominantly affords an "'imagination of survival"' (Donnar 2014).

I Am Legend's 'solitary and unwilling hero, fighting his tiny corner with grim determination' (Sleight 2010: vii) is the same individual who pervades much of the work of Matheson. Commenting on his short story 'Duel', which he adapted as the basis of Steve Spielberg's first film, Matheson remarks, 'the theme of my

stories is one man against insuperable odds. I had repeated it over and over and over again' (Matheson 2003: 00:08:24). Matheson removed his name from the credits of *The Last Man on Earth* after changes were made to his original script; he is listed instead as Logan Swanson. It is quite possible that Matheson objected to the ending which adds hope to the novella's stark finale by allowing Neville (renamed Morgan) to pass his vampire immunity on to Ruth. This alteration allows the production company to expand its potential audience with the tagline, 'Do you dare imagine what it would be like to be… the last man on Earth… or the last woman?' However, the change also dilutes the dark impact of the source material's final sequence. Ironically, this transfer of Neville's immunity becomes a keynote for later film versions. The bleak reality of Matheson's original ending is tempered by an albeit bleak optimism, as Neville is transformed into what Glen Donnar terms a 'Monstrous Saviour' (Donnar 2013: 164).

As he develops as a screenwriter, Matheson appears to soften his stance. Placing less emphasis on scientific veracity, he embraces Robert Heinlein's expansion into 'speculative fiction' and what Brian Aldiss calls 'extrapolative fiction'. Aldiss himself makes no direct reference to science at all when he adds: 'the greatest successes of science fiction are those which deal with man in relation to his changing surroundings and abilities: what might loosely be called "environmental fiction"' (1973: 12). Clearly, if science itself cannot be relied upon as a descriptor for science fiction, then any attempt at definition must be liberal in its inclusion. An exponent of this approach is Edward James. He warns that any definition must be a function of the 'myriad stances and points-of-view generated through both the genre's creation and reception': what he terms a 'bundle of perceptions' (James 1994: 1). This literary descriptor also offers insight into Matheson's developing screen work. This is no better articulated than in his most celebrated body of television work, namely the 14 episodes he wrote for the seminal US series *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64).

The Twilight Zone, Category 1: Science Fiction (Explicable Novums)

Matheson's first two contributions were short stories adapted by the show's creator and host, Rod Serling. 'Third from the Sun' (1960) takes the Cold War paranoia that permeated many American science fiction films of the 1950s and gives it a twist. In a nod to American domestic sitcoms of the period, the story is centred upon two family men, William and Jerry, who work in a top secret weapons factory at what Serling's narrative calls 'the eve of the end'. Armageddon is expected during the next few days, but the men have drawn up a plan to steal an experimental spaceship from the factory, in an attempt to escape the planet with their families before the impending holocaust. They succeed and, in the final

scene, plot their course to a safe-looking planet in a nearby galaxy. It is third from the sun: Earth.

This early episode uses trappings and techniques of science fiction cinema to present Matheson's ironic morality story with a twist in its tail. Matheson uses a similar narrative ploy in 'The Invaders' (1961). Here, an old woman is visited by miniature spacemen, who emerge from a flying saucer. The six-inch spacemen are framed as antagonists until the final sequence reveals the spaceship to be 'US Air Force Space Probe Number 1'. In his death throes, the commander of the ship transmits a message back to mission control, warning: 'race of giants … counter attack too much for us … Stay away.'

In many ways, 'The Invaders' is a weak episode, relying for it dramatic impact, like so many *Twilight Zone* episodes, on the final, witty reveal. By contrast, in the last of what might be regarded as Matheson's solid science fiction entries – those with an explicable novum – he introduces the science element early on. In 'Steel' (1963), Lee Marvin plays Sam 'Steel' Kelly, a former professional boxer. In this future society, prize fights between humans have been outlawed, so contests are fought between specially built robots. Matheson weaves his narrative around Kelly's defunct and dilapidated 'Battling Maxo' robot – his final hope of earning a living. 'Maxo' breaks down, forcing Kelly to take its place in the ring against the state-of-the-art B7 robot. Matheson's original short story, from which he adapted his teleplay, was the inspiration for the 2011 film, *Real Steel*. Similarities with the television episode are scant, but the essence of traditional but quirky science fiction is apparent in each.

The Twilight Zone, Category 2: Pseudo-Science Fiction

For 'Mute' (1963) and 'Little Girl Lost' (1962), Matheson flirts with less tangible or traditional sciences: telepathy and multi-dimensional space. In 'Mute', a tale which echoes Wolf Rilla's 1960 film, *Village of the Damned*, Matheson's teleplay explores the fortunes of a young girl who has been raised with telepathic powers, but no ability to speak. The story is rather too slight to fill the 51 minutes given to Season 4 episodes, but it is notable for its move away from an exploration of the science towards an exploration of the effects of the scientific phenomenon. For 'Little Girl Lost', Matheson employs a physicist, Bill, to explain to his friends, Chris and Ruth, the whereabouts of their missing daughter, Tina. Bill's explanation that a portal to the fourth dimension has opened in Tina's bedroom wall is slightly more credible than Chris' subsequent trip to retrieve his daughter; however, there is a notable *I Am Legend*-style, attempt here to describe and explain the scientific anomaly with a degree of rigour – one that Matheson increasingly eschews in his later writing.

The Twilight Zone, Category 3: Non-Science Fiction (Inexplicable Novums)

Along with the episodes which prefigure his later, fantasy work, Matheson flirts briefly with what is perhaps the most contentious of all science fiction subgenres. 'Once Upon a Time' (1961) sits firmly within a tradition that informs some of the most entertaining genre cross-over films: those using time travel as a narrative device, such as *Back to the Future* (1985), *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986) and *Groundhog Day* (1993). Buster Keaton, still displaying the comic timing that made him a star of the silent era, plays Woodrow Mulligan, who hates the noisy 1890 world that he lives in. He takes the opportunity presented by a time-travelling helmet to jump forward to 1960, where ironically he encounters even more noise. The eccentric character in a silly scenario is reminiscent of the bizarre 1930 science fiction musical, *Just Imagine*. It is the kind of person-out-of-place scenario that regularly occurs in Matheson's work.

There can be no explanation for the time-travel device in 'Once Upon a Time', but this is not the point here. Matheson is increasingly interested in the 'what if?' rather than the 'how?' His intellectual curiosity is bent towards the reactions of his characters in these scenarios: on the effect of the narrative device rather than its veracity. This is already apparent in *The (Incredible) Shrinking Man* and his first *Twilight Zone* time-travel episode, 'The Last Fight' (1960), in which Matheson once more uses a cloud to transport his protagonist into an uncanny scenario. In this teleplay, a World War I pilot emerges from a cloud into 1960, where he discovers that the compatriot whom he left to die in 1918 has survived. Realizing that he must return to the past to enact this reality, the pilot takes his biplane back through the cloud to his inevitable death. Even casual viewers will find holes in the logic of this episode but, again, this is not the point. Matheson, in this pre-echo of the 1980 film *Countdown*, is interested primarily in the psychological and moral dilemma that has been created for his character.

The psychological effects of time travel are later explored more deeply in the romantic drama, *Somewhere in Time* (1980), adapted by Matheson from his own novel, *Bid Time Return* (1975). The film stars Christopher Reeve as a playwright who transports himself into the past through the possible power of his imagination, thoughts, will or meditation: it is not entirely clear. By contrast, the means of escape from the here-and-now for the protagonist in *What Dreams May Come* (1998), adapted by Ronald Bass from Matheson's next novel, is clearer. Chris Neilsen, played by Robin Williams, dies and goes to Heaven. From there, he travels to Hell to rescue his wife, whose suicide has condemned her to eternal torment. Little traditional sf is on display in either of these stories; however, there is a clear link to some of the most memorable of Matheson's *Twilight Zone* episodes: those whose phenomena could have a rational explanation, but may

well also be generated in the mind of the protagonist.

The Twilight Zone, Category 4: Psychological Fantasy

'Death Ship' (1963) opens on a familiar science fiction scene: three human astronauts in Spaceship E-89, surveying the 13th planet of star-system 51. The men land and discover an identical ship containing their own dead doppelgangers. After a short investigation and some hallucinating, the astronauts flee the planet, only to be drawn back in a repeat of earlier events. This is another episode in which Matheson's characters are trapped in an altered reality, struggling to get back to their normality. What is notable here is Matheson's melange of science fiction and fantasy. One suggestion is that the protagonists are dead; unable to accept this, they are doomed to relive their deaths over and over. An alternative suggestion, raised in the piece, is that the planet has an alien presence that turns their dreams into reality, in much the same way as the planets in *Solaris* (1971) or *Forbidden Planet* (1956). Once more, Matheson draws on a number of genre elements to explore the psychological effects on his characters. He does not shy away from death and the afterlife as a trigger for his explorations. This theme is perhaps most prominent in 'Night Call' (1964), in which an elderly woman appears to be receiving phone calls from her dead husband.

It is, however, clearly psychological science and the workings of the mind that underpin two of Matheson's most celebrated *Twilight Zone* episodes. 'Nick of Time' (1960) and 'Nightmare at 20,000 Feet' (1963) both feature William Shatner as a protagonist who is forced to question his own sanity. 'Nick of Time' does this gently by means of a coin-operated device in a café: the 'Mystic Seer' appears to be able to predict the future. In this all-too-brief 25-minute episode, Matheson examines the psychology of a man who wants to believe that a thing is true. This dilemma is expanded upon in 'Nightmare at 20,000 feet', in which Shatner's character, Bob Wilson, recovering from a mental breakdown and already scared of flying, is placed on an aeroplane. Mid-flight, Wilson sees a creature on the wing – a 'Gremlin' trying to damage the plane. By not allowing any other character to see the creature, Matheson frames the piece as a struggle inside Wilson's head: a psychological battle with the demon, which drives Wilson increasingly frantic. Despite the final-scene reveal appearing to settle the matter, it is this psychological examination that most interests Matheson.

The Twilight Zone, Category 5: Realistic Fantasy

In a televised interview Matheson describes the show's stories as 'realistic fantasy'. He suggests that: 'Realistic fantasy will probably last longer in the mind

than crypts and tombs. I don't think we could have adapted H.P. Lovecraft to *The Twilight Zone*' (2012: 00:04:53). This notion of realistic fantasy is perhaps what makes *Twilight Zones* most troubling for the science fiction purist. Matheson is describing stories which invite the viewer to suspend her disbelief further than most; they require that we do not delve too deeply into the science of the device, MacGuffin or the narrative trigger. As a result, *The Twilight Zone* in general can be guilty of delivering less than it promises. Once the uncanny mystery has been set up, these tales often keep the viewer watching merely for the reveal, the resolution, or the explanation. Often these are unsatisfactory because they create more questions than they answer.

Matheson's first *Twilight Zone* story was scripted by Rod Serling. In 'And When the Sky was Opened' (1959) three pilots of an experimental space-plane are gradually erased from history after their return to Earth. References to the then-perceived dangers of manned space travel are clear: the phenomenon that affects these men serves to enhance the sense of space as an unknown entity just fourteen months before Yuri Gagarin made his momentous leap into the void. This episode could easily then be placed in *Twilight Zone* Categories 1 or 2, framed as speculative fiction (a warning about the future). However, there is no attempt to explain the phenomenon and the result is an uncanny mystery.

This is repeated in Matheson's second episode. In his script for 'A World of Difference' (1960), Matheson dispenses with even the slight explanation used to skew reality for his WWI pilot in 'The Last Flight'. Here, instead, actor Jerry cannot distinguish between himself and the role he has been playing: Arthur. The viewer is encouraged to assume that Jerry is experiencing a mental breakdown, imagining Arthur's fantasy world, until these imaginings encroach upon the apparently real world of the story. The dénouement, in which Jerry flies away with Arthur's wife, 'en route to the Twilight Zone', is initially unsatisfying from a science fiction perspective. It is instead an unsettling narrative that evokes the surreal scenario presented by Luigi Pirandello in his 1921 stage play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, in which unfinished characters from a play appear in the real world, demanding a playwright to finish their story.

The imagined world of the playwright is central to Matheson's next episode, 'A World of His Own' (1960), in which Gregory West brings his characters to life by describing them into a dictaphone. To destroy them, he merely burns the section of magnetic tape that contains their description; this he eventually does to his nagging wife. In a neat final twist, when Serling arrives for his customary episode summary, West reveals a piece of recorded tape in an envelope marked 'Serling'. He burns it and Serling disappears. Like Pirandello before him, Matheson takes his opportunity to draw comparisons between the surreal content of the play and the inherent surrealism of the medium and format – not least in mocking Serling's

fourth-wall-busting monologues as series host. For Matheson, nothing is as it seems.

The lines between reality, unreality and surreality are blurred even further in the somewhat disturbing 'Young Man's Fancy' (1962). The protagonist, Alex Walker, is having trouble coping with the memory of his dead mother, especially now that he and his new bride have returned to the family home. An apparition of old Mrs Walker appears, triggering a reversion in Alex: he follows his mental state by physically becoming his nine-year-old self. The boy tells the newly-wed Mrs Walker, 'Go away lady, we don't need you anymore', before heading off with his mother. It is a difficult episode to categorize. On the surface, it reads like a ghost story, but it is the psychological drive of the protagonist that triggers the apparition, bringing it closer, perhaps, to the psychological fantasies of Category 4.

> For his final *Twilight Zone* entry, 'Spur of the Moment' (1964), Matheson presents two parallel narratives, involving Anne-Marie Henderson as an eighteen-year-old and at the age of forty-three. The fantastical twist comes early in the story, when Anne-Marie's older self appears with a warning for her younger self: she chases her on a horse, but cannot catch her. The sequence is repeated at the end of the episode, once the viewer understands why the older Anne-Marie is trying to catch herself. Once again, the attempt fails. The temporal shift is not framed in terms of science fiction time travel; there is no trigger or MacGuffin. However, Serling's narrative summation does evoke notions of the temporal paradox, and counsels against travel through time:

Warnings from the future to the past must be taken in the past. Today may change tomorrow, but once today is gone, tomorrow can only look back in sorrow that the warning was ignored. Said warning, as of now, is stamped 'not accepted', and stored away in the dead file in the recording office of *The Twilight Zone*. (Silverstein 1964: 00:23:38)

This curious mix of science, psychology, philosophy and fantasy is typical of Matheson's *Twilight Zone* episodes. The first three elements combine with the fourth to conjure his notion of 'realistic fantasy'.

Definitions of Science Fiction: Insistence is Futile

The test for all fantasy stories is whether the realism is strong enough to carry the fantastical element. Some stories are more effective in this than others, but the ultimate measure is what the individual viewer is willing to accept. This personal preference is made with typical humour by John Brosnan: 'I'm sure some purists will complain about my not including *King Kong* in the volume […] it's a great movie but it's definitely fantasy, not sf (well, it is in *my* book)' (1991: xiii). At the

other end of the scale is Norman Spinrad's witty conclusion that 'science fiction is anything published as science fiction' (quoted Clute and Nicholls 1993: 314). Matheson's screen work suggests that he became less interested in attempting to work within the parameters set by any genre definition; instead, he became more interested in using all the narrative tools at his disposal to explore human nature through a series of 'what if?' scenarios. In this, Matheson is in concert with a general trend in 20th century science fiction. Moreover, there is a practical consideration, as Jim Hawkins – from his perspective as a screenwriter and science fiction author – has pointed out in conversation with the author: 'There are only a certain amount of science tricks you can pull before you have to diversify'.

However, Matheson's ability to diversify is impressive. The style of fantasy that it generates is reflected in the optimism of Michael Moorcock: 'My main hope is that human beings, aided by new technology and scientific theory, will develop a system of ethics and morals on which we can base any future democracy, future business practices, and future social programmes' (1993: 37). Matheson was a scientist and a philosopher, able to communicate complex ideas through his writing. His screen legacy is a body of work that displays what Moorcock calls a 'sophisticated ethic' needed to 'deal with the profound changes in our daily and political lives' (37). John Clute maintains that 'Matheson cannot be considered in any primary sense an sf writer' (Clute and Nicholls 1993: 787). He may be right, but it remains difficult to call him *anything* in a primary sense. When his films are at their most fantastical, they flirt with our disbelief in the way that Woody Allen does at his most whimsical in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) or *Midnight in Paris* (2011). But even then, Matheson seems to root his tales in something intangibly real, something un-quantifiably rational, something … *very* Richard Matheson.

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Iain M. Banks' Culture of Vulnerable Masculinities

Jude Roberts (Birkbeck College, London)

A recent review in the *London Review of Books* compared reading a book by Iain Banks to 'the pleasure to be had from watching an old episode of *Top Gear* on Dave: it's pure blokeology' (Sansom 2013). Banks' work, both with and without the 'M', seems often to be regarded as supportive of traditional (or what I will refer to here as hegemonic) masculinities. In contrast, I will argue for a more complex understanding of the ways in which Banks' work explores the constitution and lived experience of masculinity. Through an analysis of the relationships between the body and the subject, particularly the masculine body and the masculine subject, in the first three published Culture novels, *Consider Phlebas* (1987), *The Player of Games* (1988) and *Use of Weapons* (1990), I demonstrate the ways in which Banks' writing considers the vulnerability of the masculine body as the foundation of the masculine subject.

The relationships between the body and the subject are complex and multiform, by no means the simplistic mind/body split perpetuated in much of Western thought. It is precisely these relationships that make the body such a powerful means of enforcing and perpetuating restrictive conceptions of the subject, even as at the same moment the body is claimed to be inconsequential and/or natural. It is also possible, however, to use the vulnerability of the body to disrupt the subject's calling into being as a subject, its 'interpellation' to use Louis Althusser's term (2001: 155). This ideological hailing cannot be avoided, but it can, perhaps be subverted. As argued by Donna Haraway, 'the political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point' (1991: 154). The attempt to see from both perspectives at once is what underlies this article, as the shared interests of science fiction and critical theory make them well suited to engage with and challenge each other, while their different perspectives and focuses reveal precisely that which is missing. Linking Banks' discussion of the body to the theoretical work of Judith Butler, I argue that the Culture texts epitomize this multi-perspectivity in their engagement with the body.

The history of theorization about the body is marked most clearly by the ongoing impact of René Descartes' mind/body dualism: if I am my thoughts (or at least only exist in, by and through them) then my body, which is either external to my thoughts or dependent upon them, is not a fundamental part of who I am. However, it is also clear that even if I am not my body, I am dependent on it for my physical existence. The vulnerability of the body to physical harm and injury

makes this dependence a source of anxiety. In Banks' writing, the body exists both as a troubling vulnerability and a source of anxiety, but it also plays a far more fundamental role in the constitution of the subject as a subject. The body changes over time and can be changed intentionally, and it is in part through these changes that subjectivity is constituted. In this context, Elizabeth Grosz's reworking of Jacques Lacan's conception of the body/mind as a Möbius strip serves as a useful illustration. Grosz argues that 'bodies and minds are not distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives' (1994: xii). The Möbius strip comes then to illustrate the movement and inflection between body and mind with the one flowing into and becoming the other in a continuous loop. This conception of the relationship between mind and body radically alters how we conceptualize the constitution of subjects. The body is no longer an external vulnerable threat to the subject-as-mind, but rather the constant ebb and flow between body and mind, between 'bodymind' (Grosz 1994: xii) as the basis upon which the subject is founded. In this way, the conception of the subject as straight, white, male, and the site of disembodied rationality are all called into question in Banks' writing.

Vulnerability

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler argues that human beings are brought into being as subjects on the basis of a fundamental vulnerability. The powerlessness of the body of the infant constitutes the human as a vulnerable kind of being:

> There is a more general conception of the human at work here, one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself, and by virtue of our embodiment, given over to another: this makes us vulnerable to violence, but also to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives, at the other. (2004: 23)

While we cannot, and perhaps should not, ever surmount this vulnerability, one of the ways in which we attempt to do so is by rejecting the body as fundamental to the subject. By separating the mind-as-subject from the body-as-tool/vehicle/machine, we attempt to exclude all vulnerability from the subject. The body is abjected. What Butler argues for is a renewed focus on the body, and therefore on the subject, as vulnerable. Vulnerability, she suggests, may also be a basis upon which a new kind of community could be founded: 'Is there a way that we might […] consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world

of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another' (2004: 22). It is precisely this mutual dependence based on mutual vulnerability that Banks draws attention to as the necessary foundation of the space-faring community:

> The nature of life in space – that vulnerability, as mentioned above – would mean that while ships and habitats might more easily become independent from each other and from their legally progenitative hegemonies, their crew – or inhabitants – would always be aware of their reliance on each other, and on the technology which allowed them to live in space […] the mutuality of dependence involved in an environment which is inherently hostile would necessitate an internal social coherence. (Banks 1994)

Banks' texts return time and again to the vulnerability of the body. This focus on vulnerability comes through in many different ways: graphic depictions of violence against the body, posthuman manipulations of the body, the uses of particular claims about the body to support ideological positions or prejudices, and attempts to abandon the body in order to escape its vulnerability, but at each juncture the fundamental vulnerability of the subject as embodied is reinforced.

Consider Phlebas (1987) narrates the birth of a child: the Mind which is hidden away in the passages of Schar's World is newly born. The events of the novel take place during its second gestation inside the planet, culminating in its rebirth – in many senses its first real birth – into the universe outside the womb-like tunnels. The space between actual, physical birth and birth as a subject is extended here, such that the distinction between the two becomes clear. Until those who are searching for it arrive, the Mind can grow and develop its consciousness safe inside the planet, without the vulnerability attached to the early years of human development, but it is also trapped. Unable to escape its confines, the Mind's vulnerability, both physical and psychological, is enhanced once its would-be captors enter the tunnels. This vulnerability is the same as that experienced by the infant human, unable to control what is done to it, although neither is entirely without agency – the Mind attempts to make use of the few capabilities it does have and the infant human cries – the Mind cannot stop its attackers, any more than a baby's cries are able to determine the behaviour of its carers. This vulnerability is formative, as Butler argues:

> My infantile body has not only been touched, moved, arranged, but those impingements operated as "tactile signs" that registered in my formation. These signs communicate to me in ways that are not reducible to vocalization. They are signs of an other, but they are also the traces from which an 'I' will eventually emerge, an 'I' who will never be able, fully, to recover or read these signs, for whom these signs will remain in part overwhelming and unreadable, enigmatic

and formative. (2005: 70)

The vulnerability of the infant body is re-emphasized at the end of *Consider Phlebas* as, while one child is born – the Mind finally emerges from the tunnels – another dies in the womb. Yalson, the protagonist's lover, is shot and their unborn child dies with her. Also emphasized at the end of *Consider Phlebas* is the significance of the two-fold birth – the physical birth into vulnerability is followed by the linguistic birth into subjectivity. The narrative of *Consider Phlebas* is revealed to be the story of how the Mind chose its name. Names and naming are fundamental to subjectivity in Banks' writing, as for example, in the final revelation to *The Wasp Factory* (1984). It is important therefore that throughout the narrative, the Mind is nameless – it is trapped in the agency-less vulnerability of the infant. The story it tells of its choice of name is prompted by a question from a descendent of Balveda, the Special Circumstances agent who finally rescues the Mind and guides it out of the tunnels, midwife to its second birth. In this context, it is significant that the Mind chooses the name of its would-be capturer to make its own, rather than that of its rescuer. By picking Horza's name, rather than Balveda's, the Mind connects itself to its vulnerable pre-linguistic state, rather than to its triumphant escape.

In addition to this return to vulnerability, there is also a sense of the power of the body in Banks' writing. The body persists, intervenes, endures and continually disrupts attempts to escape it in Banks' work. In *Excitable Speech* (1997), Butler reads Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus alongside Jacques Derrida's notion of iterability to argue that the interpellation which produces the subject as a body is both social and linguistic, subject to a necessary repetition, but constrained by previous citations that are also necessarily both discursive and social. The potential infelicity of the speech act, which is its constitutive possibility, exists in the body that is produced by that speech, as it always in some way or another exceeds the language that has produced it. Agency and critical response lies in the bodily enaction of 'speaking with authority *without* being authorized to speak'. The possibilities for expropriating 'dominant "authorized" discourse' clearly exist in the necessity of their repetition (Butler 1997: 157). Repetition then is both the constitutive possibility of authoritative interpellating performatives in the sense that precedent and law must be 'cited' in order for authority to be established, and their constitutive impossibility in that they are always already open to expropriation and reiteration by those bodies that are constituted by them. In Banks' writing the continual focus on the subject as embodied disrupts narratives of the subject as disembodied. In focusing on the male body in particular, Banks disrupts the gendering of the mind/body split that has characterized Western thought since Descartes. The concept of man as disembodied free rationality cannot be sustained in the face of the vulnerable male body, exposed as it is so

clearly in Banks' writing.

In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler argues that the body is often neglected or assumed as a blank surface open to inscription. For Butler, the body is produced as a bounded entity by the discourses which dictate what does and does not count as a human body. The distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' is constituted by the expulsion of the 'abject', a term taken from Julia Kristeva, the process by which the body is constituted as a particular kind of body with a sex, gender, sexuality and race. If the concept of an 'inside' of the body, which represents the body's truth or essence, is a fiction mobilized in service of the 'naturalisation' of the norms of identity, then this inside can be refigured as yet another 'outside' that has been performatively repeated until it has the appearance of the necessary. Without this concept of an 'inside' gender, sex and sexuality must be seen to be produced through external, public acts. The performative repetition of the norms of gender, sex and sexuality give them the appearance of a necessary essence or reality, which has actually been produced by the very acts and gestures that are presented as effects of an inner truth or reality. As one is said to do a gender, rather than to be a gender, the actions by which one does gender must be repeated continuously in order to maintain its existence:

> The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a deformity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. (Butler 1999: 179)

The parodic performance of gender is one way in which the contingency and self-founding act of gender can be both exposed, and through that exposition destabilized. Similarly, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler argues that as this performative interpolation is never completely successful, it must be constantly reiterated. In this context Steven Cohan argues:

> From this perspective, 'masculinity' does not refer to a male nature but instead imitates a dominant regulatory fiction authorizing the continued representation of certain types of gender performances for men (like the breadwinner), marginalizing others (like the momma's boy), and forbidding still others (like the homosexual). (1995: 57)

Within the compulsion to reiterate particular kinds of identity is the possibility for citation against the intention. In the context of the sexed body, sex is portrayed as 'natural' and gender as 'cultural' precisely in order to disavow the performative production of sex. This regulatory fiction is one of the many ways in which the discourse of naturalism serves to mobilize bodies in support of ideologies or

cultural constructs. However, Butler argues that because the law is produced through citation it can be articulated against itself. By using parody to inhabit the same space, we can deploy it against itself. In this way it is the condition of its own disruption. It is the excess of interpellation, the continual and necessary repetition of our interpellation that both enable the law and its deconstruction. These interpellations exist within a network of power relations that uses norms like gender, race and class to compel bodies to conform. Rather than simply rejecting these normative concepts, Butler argues for their reiteration and citation in ways and contexts that subvert the performative interpolation that they are supposed to effect.

Masculine mind vs feminine body

Berthold Schoene-Harwood argues that men's inability to articulate their gender experience is based on the simultaneous conflation of the male gender with the universal subject and the need to constantly repeat and reiterate the performance of masculinity in order to maintain their position as male in relation to the dominant regulatory fiction of the masculine. He argues that one of the 'insidious imperatives' under which the male subject is compelled to perform his masculinity is silence and reticence with regard to his own gender position: 'for a man to speak about his gender in a critical, self-conscious manner already indicates that he has failed to live up to the patriarchal ideal and that, consequently, his masculinity is "in trouble"' (2000: viii). By speaking his gender, the male subject draws attention to his own specificity, thereby disrupting the illusion that he is the universal subject.

Drawing on Butler's argument that 'the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transparent personhood' (1999: 9), Schoene-Harwood calls for a Men's Studies that helps men to 're-equip themselves with the "lost language of emotion"' (2000: ix). He argues that this 'alone can form an enduringly successful basis for masculine emancipation from the fraudulent master trajectories of patriarchal emplotment' (ix). While this is clearly true, taking Butler's argument that men are extolled as 'the bearers of a body-transparent personhood', I want to add to this the need to articulate men's experience as a fundamentally embodied one. It is this embodying of the male subject that Banks' writing repeatedly enacts. Schoene-Harwood reads *The Wasp Factory* as an anticipation of Butler's theory of gender performativity. Arguing that Frank, the symbolically castrated protagonist, performs traditional masculinity to excess, Schoene-Harwood links Frank's ritualized grooming of his body to his ritualized killing of animals. Both activities are performative reiterations of the

dominant regulatory fiction of hegemonic masculinity. The maintenance of the body's appearance as appropriately male and the exhibition of an aggressive urge to do violence are both demonstrated to be means by which the masculine subject constitutes and maintains himself as masculine. This form of gender parody – demonstrating gender to be something we do, rather than something we are or have – 'reveals the imitative artifice of normative standards that compel individuals to fashion themselves in compliance with an imperative ideal that does not originate in biological nature but is in itself a derivative of social conditioning.' This leads him to assert that 'the chief objective of Banks' narrative is a deconstruction of traditional gender formations that present themselves as manifestations of a congenital inevitability' (Schoene-Harwood 2000: 104). That this disruption of gender norms is so clear in *The Wasp Factory* should lead us to consider the role of gender in Banks' other writing.

In the Culture texts there are several characters who exhibit a similar hyper-masculine excessive gender identity to Frank. The most notable of these is Zakalwe in *Use of Weapons* (1990). Zakalwe is framed as the lone male hero capable of acting out the revenge fantasies of those less physically capable. In his role as an agent for Special Circumstances, Zakalwe is called on to make use of the wide array of means at his disposal, many of which are violent, to alter the behaviour of those the Culture deems to be acting unacceptably. *Use of Weapons* is composed of two alternating narratives. The first begins with Special Circumstances concerned that their control over Zakalwe has been compromised as he has begun to take matters into his own hands and kill those who, in his eyes, do wrong, rather than restricting himself to dealing with those he is told to. This narrative then moves forward in time following Zakalwe trading doing Special Circumstances jobs for the chance to see an unnamed 'her'. The second narrative begins with Zakalwe appearing to do as his employers fear and, taking his role beyond its given parameters, assassinating a genocidal ruler, who in turn is closely linked to the Nazis in his intentions and methods:

> 'Yes,' the young man [Zakalwe] said. 'Must be rather awful, thinking you're about to die.' 'Not the most pleasant experience,' agreed the Ethnarch, putting one leg then another into his trousers. 'But such a relief, I imagine, when you get the reprieve.' 'Hmm.' The Ethnarch gave a small laugh. 'A bit like being rounded up in a village and thinking you're going to be shot…' the young man mused, facing the Ethnarch at the foot of his bed. '… and then being told your fate is nothing worse than resettlement.' He smiled. The Ethnarch hesitated. 'Resettled; by train,' the man said, taking the little black gun out of his pocket. 'By a train which contains your family; your street; your village…' The young man adjusted something on the small black gun. '… And then ends up containing nothing but engine fumes, and lots of dead people.' He smiled, thinly. 'What do you think, Ethnarch Kerian? Something like that?' (Banks 1992: 33–34)

Reminiscent of the action heroes of Ian Fleming and Alistair MacLean, whom Banks cites as influences, Zakalwe is strong, capable, fearless and violent. He, like Fleming's Bond, epitomizes the regulatory ideal of hegemonic masculinity. He is also shown to be schizophrenic, psychopathic and suffering from post-traumatic stress as a consequence of an earlier act of violence perpetrated by him: turning Darkense, the sister of his male enemy, into a chair. Crucially, this psychological pain is matched through the course of the narrative by physical injury. In the course of his duties for the Culture, Zakalwe is shown to have suffered an ever greater degree of injury, culminating in his entire body being regrown from just his head and spinal column. This regrowing is physically painless but it does not come without loss. When they were children, Darkense had her pelvis shattered by an explosion. Part of the bone flew out and got caught in Zakalwe (then called Elethiomel)'s collar bone. When his body is regrown, Zakalwe is distressed at the realization that this piece of bone is now gone. This is an explicit writing on the body, or rather a rewriting. By replacing his body, the Culture accidentally participates in the rewriting of his history that Zakalwe's traumatic break had begun. Zakalwe's excessive performance of traditional masculinity is shown to be founded on a fundamental vulnerability. The necessity to repeat his performance of masculinity causes it to become more and more excessive with each reiteration and so more unstable. Each repetition brings the protagonist closer to the realization that beneath his performance of Zakalwe, invincible action hero, lies Elethiomel: a vulnerable human being.

The male hard-body

The importance of the invulnerable male body to the regulatory fiction of hegemonic masculinity is also explored in *The Player of Games* (1988). The novel centres on Gurgeh, the foremost game-player of his age. Such is his position that when choosing his middle name, as all Culture citizens do, he takes the name Morat, meaning player of games. Ironically, Gurgeh is much more 'played upon' than 'player' (Banks 1990: 289). This begins when, having been persuaded, or perhaps manipulated, into cheating, Gurgeh is blackmailed by the drone who helped him. In a seemingly separate move, Special Circumstances approaches Gurgeh asking him to take a trip of several years to a distant civilization in order to play the game by which it is organized and maintained. The purpose of this trip and the Culture's intentions are kept from both the reader and the protagonist, but the details of the game itself are laid out in exceptional detail. Played across three boards – the board of origin, the board of forms and the board of becoming – Azad, both the name of the game and of the society, is complex and intriguing. This makes it the perfect bait for a character whose identity is predicated on his

dominance of game-playing.

The novel begins with the unidentified narrator informing the reader that the 'story starts with a battle that is not a battle, and ends with a game that is not a game' (Banks 1990: 3). By paralleling the two like this, Banks invokes the long-standing conception in politics and popular culture of war and game-playing as, if not absolutely the same, fundamentally the same type of activity. This activity has also been characterized as exclusively masculine. Carol Cohn and Lynda Boose both remark on the clear gendering of war as competitive activity. Cohn argues that the association between masculinity and war is simultaneously used, in the form of the binary man equals war/woman equals peace, to feminize and thereby exclude discussions of peace, and to make war into 'acts of boyish mischief' (1990: 37). Boose argues that the associations between competitive sports and war are often mobilized to encourage the public to support warring activity: 'It was through such a sports/game discourse, with its underlying dictum of "win", that the American public was connected to the Gulf War' (1993: 95). In the realm of popular culture, she also draws attention to the ways in which, post-Vietnam, technology was increasingly combined with the male body in Hollywood cinema to produce a kind of techno-muscularity enabling the heroes of films like the Rambo and Terminator series to go out and 'win it this time' (Boose 1993: 75). This techno-muscularity has particular force within the context of science fiction. American sf, in particular, made full use of techno-muscular masculinity to produce an image of the male body as invulnerable. Key to this conception of masculinity is the mechanized power suit. Brian Baker explains the suit as 'a form of exoskeleton, a mixture of spacesuit and weapon that entirely encases, and gives enormous power to, its wearer' (2006: 24). I would add to this definition the frequent use of such suits as vehicles for virtual reality experiences, both games and alternate realities. Secure inside the mechanized suit, Robocop or Juan Rico in Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959) epitomize the ideal of the male body as hard, strong and impenetrable. However, the 'male "hard body" or armoured body […] is an anxious body, its display of musculature paradoxically both disguising and revealing its fragility' (Baker 2006: 25). In Banks' writing of the male body, this fragility is brought to the fore.

The opening scene of *The Player of Games*, the 'battle that is not a battle', begins with Gurgeh wearing a mechanized VR suit. However, far from being a secure bastion of the male hard-body, the suit both accentuates his lack of skill at the game in question – a first-person shooter – and, when he is 'shot', traps him helpless on the floor until the game is declared over:

> 'You are dead,' a crisp little voice told him. He lay on the unseen desert floor. He could hear muffled voices, sense vibrations from the ground. He heard his own heart- beat, and the ebb and flow of his breath. He tried to hold his breathing

> and slow his heart, but he was paralyzed, imprisoned, without control. (Banks 1990: 4–5)

Banks' engagement with American sf, particularly space opera, makes this disruption of the role of the mechanized suit an important challenge to the techno-muscular conception of masculinity. He has described his motivation for creating the Culture in terms of a reaction to sf from the United States, framed as an attempt to combine the 'best of both' sf from the UK and the US: 'the thoughtfulness and sense of proportion of the UK's and the energy and optimism of the US brand' (personal communication). Near the end of *The Player of Games* there is another image of the mech suit which is similarly disruptive. The society that Gurgeh travels to is excessively violent and authoritarian. In this culture, the mech suit is used as a means of punishment, with the offender trapped within it, being subjected to continual painful jabs and shocks, unable to remove the suit, but still able to carry out his duties for the Emperor. The myth of the male hard-body is exposed as another iteration of the man as the disembodied universal subject, while the vulnerability of the male body is brought into sharp focus.

This vulnerability is combined with a critique of the violence at the heart of hegemonic masculinity. While Gurgeh does not excel at first-person shooter games, he does excel at strategy games. The trick by which he is recruited to Special Circumstances is based on an out-strategizing of him by manipulating his desire 'to win it this time'. As a leading figure in game-playing society, Gurgeh finds himself constantly defending his position from newer, younger challengers. This scenario is, of course, a staple of the Western, embodied in the figure of the gunslinger – see, for example, Robert Vaughan's Lee in *The Magnificent Seven* (1960). The game in which Gurgeh is induced to cheat in order to win spectacularly (he would have won the game regardless; this is all about image) is significantly also played against a younger woman. After losing his authority as game-player in the earlier (masculine) game of violent combat, Gurgeh fights to regain it by demonstrating his virtuosity of mind in a game of strategy:

> He remembered the missile shoot and the immobility the suit had imposed on him when it had been hit once too often. This was worse. This was paralysis. He could do nothing. (Banks 1990: 72)

While ultimately Gurgeh wins the game, the victory fails to restore his disrupted sense of masculinity because he knows it is not authentic. This search for an authentic articulation of hegemonic masculinity is ultimately what takes him to Azad. Before he goes, we discover that Gurgeh is considered odd by other Culture citizens, because he has never changed sex nor had a sexual relationship

with another man. The women he sleeps with invariably change sex afterwards. Yay, a woman who puzzles him by consistently refusing his sexual advances, explains:

> I feel you want to … take me […] like a piece, like an area. To be had; to be . . . possessed. […] There's something very … I don't know; primitive, perhaps, about you, Gurgeh. (Banks 1990: 31)

The claim of Gurgeh's 'primitive' attempts to articulate a dominant masculinity demonstrates the extent to which Gurgeh's conception of masculinity is outdated in the society in which he lives. This sense of gender-based dominance is, though, very current in the society of Azad, and in travelling there, Gurgeh is given a stark lesson as to where such dominance can lead.

Subversive reiteration

The society of Azad is rigidly hierarchical. This hierarchy is ostensibly decided by the results of the game of Azad (the "game that is not a game"), but in reality access to the game and treatment by the other players in based on other, more fundamental hierarchies. While travelling to Azad, Gurgeh is told that of the three genders on Azad of which apices are the dominant gender 'control[ing] the society and the empire. Generally, the males are used as soldiers and the females are possessions' (Banks 1990: 96). This hierarchical division affects who gets to play the game and how they are treated. As Sherryl Vint observes, 'The invitation to compare sexual power relations on Azad to sexual power relations in our world, in the context of the obvious constructed nature of sexual difference in Azad, encourages the reader to see the sex/gender system as an expression of culture rather than as one of nature' (2005: 100). It is also possible to see the Azadian tripartite gender structure as a literalization of part of the intersection between gender and class. The female is mostly excluded and considered a possession, the apex occupies the position of upper/middle class male and the male is the working class male. The position of the female is defined as irrelevant and unimportant, while the working class male is framed as dangerous, violent and in need of control. This means that while the game appears to allow any member of the society to progress to any position, in reality

> the game of Azad is used not so much to determine which person will rule, but which tendency within the ruling class will have the upper hand, which branch of economic theory will be followed, which creeds will be recognised within the religious apparat [sic], and which political policies will be followed. The game is also used as an exam for both entry into and promotion within the empire's

> religious, educational, civil administrational, judicial and military establishments. (Banks 1990: 98)

This system is somewhat similar to Plato's Academy which was intended to establish a meritocratic hierarchy led by Philosopher Kings. In Azad, those put out near the beginning occupy the lowest positions in society and the person (apex) who wins becomes Emperor. Significantly, however, this structure is underpinned by excessive systemic violence:

> A programme of eugenic manipulation has lowered the average male and female intelligence; selective birth-control, sterilisation, area starvation, mass deportation and racially-based taxation systems produced the equivalent of genocide, with the result that almost everybody on the home planet is the same colour and build. (Banks 1990: 103)

This is not to say that genocide is an essentially upper/middle class male activity, but rather that the association between hegemonic masculinity and violence is such that the enaction of violence performatively reinforces masculinity. Also significant is Gurgeh's darker skin colour to that of the remaining Azadians. On an unsanctioned trip outside his compound, Gurgeh is warned by his guide that he must not allow any of the Azadians to see his skin. This is a place in which any deviation from the norm is violently suppressed. That Gurgeh is able to play the game of Azad at the same level as the apices – based on their certainty that he will fail publicly and demonstrate the Empire's supremacy over the Culture – allows him to expropriate the hegemonic masculinity on which Azad is founded. As argued by Butler, the opportunity for critical response lies in the bodily enaction of 'speaking with authority *without* being authorized to speak' (1997: 157). The possibilities for expropriating dominant authorized discourses exist in the necessity of their repetition, in that those who are compelled to repeat them may be able to do so subversively.

The violence at the heart of Azad is characterized as being at the heart of the male subject. It is, however, performative – outside, underneath or behind the enaction of violence there is no ultra-violent core to male identity, just as there is no ultra-submissive core at the heart of femininity. Ultimately, Gurgeh wins the game of Azad at the moment that he realizes that the game, which we are told at the beginning is *not* just a game, is a performative enaction of the game of subjectivity. This is not to say that he, or any of us, can simply stop playing the game – it is, in its entirety, the whole of our identity – but that in recognizing the performative basis of identity we can work to change it. On the final board of the game, the Board of Becoming, Gurgeh subversively reiterates his, and the Culture's identity as decentred and networked Foucaultian power-as-resistance.

Rather than considering power to be something possessed by a sovereign, passed down through their rulership and exercised over those at the bottom of a pyramidal social structure who are completely without power, this model sees power as existing in the relationships between subjects. Gurgeh describes his play as the Culture as 'a net, a grid of forces and relationships, without any obvious hierarchy or entrenched leadership' (Banks 1990: 348). Where prior to the final board this arrangement had been 'initially quite profoundly peaceful', on the final board Gurgeh draws on 'the Culture militant' (351). This is based on the ways in which the decentred structure of the Culture can enable the use of power against itself, through embracing, rather than avoiding contradiction:

> He thought of mirrors and reverser fields, which gave the more technically artificial but perceivably more real impression; mirror-writing was what it said; reversed writing was ordinary writing. He saw the closed torus of Flere-Imsaho's unreal Reality, remembered Chamlis Amalk-ney and its warning about deviousness; things which meant nothing and something; harmonics of his thought. (350–1)

This 'slow move that was defeat and victory together' (356) undermines the sovereign juridical model relied upon by the Empire of Azad. By reiterating his identity as other than masculine within a system that can only accept, and is founded upon the supremacy of, hegemonic masculinity, Gurgeh fundamentally disrupts the heteronormative structure. This disruption cannot be excluded in the same violent manner that Azad (or our own society) excludes the disruption caused by femininity or homosexuality, as it is performed in the same way as the supremacy of the apices in established. By winning the game in the way that he does, Gurgeh makes it impossible to play anymore; he wins the game and destroys it in the same moment. This is precisely the subversive reiteration of identity that Butler defines as a 'parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction' (1999: 179). In the process, Gurgeh's relationship to hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally revised, allowing him to pursue an identity outside of the limits it imposes.

In embodying the subject and particularly the male subject, Banks' writing disrupts both the associative dichotomies of mind/body and male/female. Butler's claims of the vulnerability of the body are echoed in the Culture texts, particularly in Banks' exploration of excessive hypermasculinity. The position of the 'male hard body' in discourses surrounding gendered identity means that in demonstrating the masculine body as fundamentally vulnerable and subject to violence, Banks disrupts the binary division of bodies into male and female. This challenge to a dichotomized theory of the body necessarily encompasses the subject as a whole as, as argued by Butler, the body is at the heart of the subject. The vulnerability of the infant body forms the foundational experience of subjectivity. While Banks'

writing does not explore these concerns in relation to the position of women, and in this way perpetuates the exclusion of the feminine, any re-conceptualization of gender in its entirety necessarily requires the destabilization of enduring conceptions of masculinity. It is this, combined with an unflinching focus on the vulnerability of the body, which makes Banks' writing so valuable.

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Past and Future of Science Fiction Theatre

Susan Gray (Royal Holloway College, London) and Christos Callow Jr. (Birkbeck College, London)

I. What Science Fiction Theatre Has Been

Science fiction is notoriously hard to define, and science fiction theatre even more so. Part of the difficulty lies in the lack of a mutual agreement on a single definition of the former. Adam Roberts has argued that 'the term "science fiction" resists easy definition' and explains that:

> when it comes down to specifying in what way SF is distinctive, and in what ways it is different from other imaginative and fantastic literatures, there is disagreement. All of the many definitions offered by critics have been contradicted or modified by other critics, and it is always possible to point to texts consensually called SF that fall outside the usual definitions. (Roberts 2000: 1–2)

Of the many definitions that sf critics have offered, perhaps Dick Riley's is the most relevant here. He has argued: 'At its best, science fiction has no peer in creating another universe of experience, in showing us what we look like in the mirror of technological society or through the eyes of a non-human' (Riley 1978: viii). It follows that such science fiction has a similar purpose to theatre, if we accept the traditional notion of theatre as a mirror of society.

Although these two cultures might share a common objective, they might still seem incompatible, and those plays that explore sf themes might be taken as exceptions to this rule rather than as parts of a tradition. Joseph Krupnik writes that:

> It is widely assumed by readers that not many science fiction plays have been written; moreover, those few that have been published and perhaps eventually produced are thought to be mere curiosities, brief experiments by playwrights who will in time move on to 'serious' themes and formats. (Krupnik 1992: 197)

Contrary to such assumptions, there have been many sf plays, some quite important in theatre history. Ralph Willingham, for example, has catalogued 328 plays that deal with sf elements (Willingham 1994: 3). Their number is constantly growing, arguably with the same speed that technology evolves – as does the number of theatre companies that deal exclusively with science fiction on stage.

Furthermore, whilst science fiction in the theatre has not been as popular as in other media, science fiction plays have managed to make significant cultural impact even without always being labelled (or marketed) as science fiction.

The first sf play that comes to mind must be *R.U.R* (1920) by Karel Čapek, which introduced the term 'robot' to the lexicon. Gollancz has recently included *R.U.R* as part of their SF Masterworks series, which is indicative of the impact the play has had upon the genre. The play endures as a thought-experiment addressing concerns as relevant today as when it was written. The other classic sf play of the 1920s was George Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* (1922). Though not as obviously an sf playwright as Čapek, Shaw is one of the first key modern writers to produce an sf play; his influence upon the genre has been explored in Milton T. Wolf's essay collection, *Shaw and Science Fiction* (1997). To accept *Back to Methuselah* as a science fiction text, however, we need as broad a definition of science fiction as we would for Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930) or *Star Maker* (1937). In her comparative study of Shaw and Stapledon, Susan Stone-Blackburn writes that:

> *Back to Methuselah* and *Last and First Men*, however suspect to the minds of many academic science fiction critics for their departures from materialism, are major landmarks in the development of a theme that has always been strong in science fiction: speculation about powers of mind and its place in the workings of the universe. (Stone-Blackburn 1997: 197)

Perhaps the greatest of those playwrights who have written sf for the stage is Samuel Beckett, with his one-act tragedy *Endgame* (1957). Arguably the only sf element in the story is its post-apocalyptic setting but the play is also a great example of an sf drama that requires little to no science fictional imagery, let alone special effects. Carl Freedman observes:

> Beckett's play ranks as probably the most notable science-fiction drama since Capek's [sic] *R.U.R.* (1921), and ought to be understood in company with the other science-fictional extrapolations about life after nuclear holocaust that are roughly contemporary with it: works, that is, like Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959), Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), and […] Philip K. Dick's *Dr Bloodmoney* (1965). *Endgame* is probably a greater work than any of these novels. (Freedman 2000: 87)

The writers so far mentioned have been known primarily for their theatrical work and have, in addition, offered major contributions to sf theatre but the first author who was known for his science fiction prose, as a key figure of the so-called 'Golden Age', *and* as a writer of sf for the stage was Ray Bradbury. In 1964,

he founded the Pandemonium Theatre Company in Los Angeles and presented adaptations of his short stories 'The Pedestrian', 'The Veldt' and 'To the Chicago Abyss'. Willingham calls him 'the most experienced science fiction dramatist' (1994: 74) and writes:

> Determined to prove that science fiction deserved a place in the theatre, Bradbury put up his own money to remodel the interior of Los Angeles' Coronet Theatre. After a highly successful run under the direction of Charles Rome Smith, the production moved to New York. Bradbury's scripts received mixed reviews, but for the first time a recognized science fiction writer was challenging the myth that science fiction was unstageable. (54)

Besides Bradbury's, there have been other theatre companies that have brought sf to the stage. One of the earliest to do so was the Organic Theatre Company formed by Stuart Gordon with his wife Carolyn Purdy-Gordon in 1969. Their productions included adaptations of Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan* and Bradbury's 'The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit' (the latter also filmed by Gordon in 1998). Gordon adapted H.P. Lovecraft's *Re-Animator* as a musical in 2011. Other sf musicals have included *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1982) and *Return to the Forbidden Planet* (1989).

The history of sf theatre cannot ignore the legacy of Ken Campbell and the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool, which he founded with Chris Langham. Their productions included an adaptation in 1976 of the *Illuminatus!* trilogy by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, the twenty-two hour extravaganza, *The Warp* by Neil Oram, and the first stage adaptation of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (both 1979).

Contemporary dramatists who have engaged with sf material include Alyn Ayckbourn whose plays, *Henceforward…* (1987) and *Comic Potential* (1998), echo Čapek's *R.U.R.* in their description of robotic and cybernetic futures, as well as satirizing the mindless media landscape. (In *Comic Potential*, mechanical 'actoids' are interchangeable with today's flesh-and-blood soap stars.) Ayckbourn described his attraction to the medium of sf:

> I am interested in the allegorical properties of science fiction, the way one can use the medium to reflect the present day. It keeps cropping up in my work, although I never call it science fiction because people get a little jumpy about it. Theatre can do domestic sci-fi that doesn't require high technology. […] All the projections one could write about in theatre would probably not interest film and television, because it is less spectacular. But I think it is just as interesting. What will happen not to the planetary system, but to people? One has to boil it down to that ingredient that theatre deals with best. I enjoy the freedom it gives you to re-invent the world. That is often denied you if you're stuck in the present day. (quoted Fisher 1998)

Caryl Churchill is similarly attracted to sf in her play, *A Number* (2002), which deals with traditional sf topics such as the ethics of cloning and the age-old question of nature versus nurture. Michael Billington wrote in response:

> Churchill asks what the source is of the self, and suggests it has more to do with environment than genetics. The real drama, however, resides in the way ingrained lies are gradually exposed, and in the father's guilt: he tells his original son, whom he put into care, he was 'this disgusting thing', yet so perfect he wanted him artificially reproduced. (Billington 2010)

A more frequent sf dramatist is the African-American writer, academic and theatre director, Andrea Hairston. Her sf plays include *Lonely Stardust* (1998), *Hummingbird Flying Backward* (2000) and *Soul Repairs* (2002). She is the Artistic Director of the Chrysalis Theatre which Hairston describes as 'a cross-cultural performance ensemble' that 'has presented innovative and progressive cultural work in Western Massachusetts since 1978.' Her most recent play, *Archangels of Funk* (2003), is described on her website as:

> A Sci-Fi Theatre jam broadcast from the asteroid belt. A collection of dancing/singing, get up off the page, spoken word poems. Code sliding in the tradition of Rappers, African American Baptist Preachers, and West African Griots.

In 2010, African-American sf theatre was further enriched by Jay Scheib's multi-media adaptation of Samuel R. Delany's novel, *Dhalgren* (1975), as *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*. *New York Time Out* described the play as 'a passport to a thoroughly convincing alternate world – one that seems to weirdly overlay our vision even as we stumble outside onto the suddenly unfamiliar concrete of far west 19th Street' (Shaw 2010). Jen Gunnels observed:

> What carried the sense of Delany's original work was a combination of set and media. Peter Ksander's set combined two ambiguous, blank walls with a decaying, industrial building within which are several playing areas, some seen and some not. The sight lines were intentionally horrible in order to occlude the action on stage. This was made up for in the videography which was displayed on a long rectangular scrim hanging at stage left. A series of camera feeds from each room revealed the action – sometimes multiple feeds, sometimes just one – taking place within. This resulted in a live yet highly mediated experience illuminating the best of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. (Gunnels 2012)

Other notable contemporary sf plays include Mac Rogers' *Honeycomb Trilogy*

(2012), in which the encounter between humans and aliens is spun out through traditional themes, from Greek tragedy onwards, of the family, the individual and the state. August Schulenberg's *DEINDE* (also 2012) is about artificial intelligence and human identity in an evolving technological era. New theatrical groups include Boston's Science Fiction Theatre Company, which in 2013 staged Bella Poynton's *The Aurora Project*, and Chicago's Otherworld Theatre Company which, in the same year, put on a three-day festival in honour of Ray Bradbury.

II. Making a Case for SF Theatre

Science fiction theatre is a theatre of absolute freedom, hovering somewhere between the coherence of realism and the non-sense of absurdism. From plausible visions of future societies and the peoples that would inhabit them to fantastical visits involving alien civilizations, sf theatre is a goldmine for the imagination of both playwrights and audiences. Apart from a vast playground for the creative spirits of writers, directors, stage designers and actors, sf theatre might be the only kind of modern theatre that can compete with cinema, TV and prose fiction, by enriching the already prosperous tradition of sf thought and offering new pathways to imaginative exploration.

This theatre cannot hope to compete with cinema in the use of visual effects – not that it would necessarily want to. Willingham notes that 'dramatists have been most successful in bringing science fiction to the stage when they abandoned pictorial illusionism in favour of the tried-and-true conventions that serve other kinds of drama' (1994: 5). Sf should not be harder to stage than Shakespeare or Goethe, than any fantastical, mythological, or even realistic play. As we have shown, there is already a tradition of science fiction in the theatre.

However, as with every high-concept fiction, it is not only a matter of how sf should be staged but also why. Willingham reminds us that sf theatre has had more failures, commercially and artistically, than successes; most were adaptations of novels, such as the Frankenstein dramas. He explains:

> The majority of the 328 science fiction plays catalogued in this study […] are the work not of science fiction writers, but of independent dramatists schooled in the old playwriting formulas. They employ fantastic premises not to challenge the audience, but to entertain it; not to expand the boundaries of theatre, but to function safely within them. There is no avant-garde of science fiction drama. (1994: 3)

This last statement is particularly interesting, considering there has been no official movement of sf theatre. And yet, theatre can give new dimensions to characters that frequently inhabit sf stories such as the robot, the alien and other

non- or post-humans. Faithful to its original purpose as a sacred event rather than as mere entertainment, theatre can give the audience a different kind of science fiction that can work both as a theatrical experience and as philosophical speculation.

Science fiction theatre should not be considered, however, as a sub-genre of either sf literature or theatrical drama. It should be defined as the theatre of the 21st century since it is inevitable that all the arts the new century will produce will reflect its current hopes and agonies. Even if there had been no other forms of sf, theatre would still need to address the great scientific problems of our age and new responses to the eternal problems of life. Utopian and dystopian fiction can be read, in addition to being a cautionary warning, as a critique of present-day society while stories of alien races and our interactions with them are fundamentally about the conflict or co-existence of actual human cultures. Science fiction, like theatre, can be extremely powerful as a philosophical art-form; the results can be spectacular or shocking, but most of all, thought-provoking.

If we consider the source of such a theatre or rather, the origins of all theatre, we see a great shift from what was a realm of the fantastic. Within this transformative arena, gods would oversee – and participate in – scenes tragic, comedic and epic. Mythical beasts were made flesh and heroes rose up against the higher powers that controlled their fate. Such plots were both didactic and symbolic: an ambiguity that distanced the audience from the action. The gradual development of realism, in terms of plotting, characterization and staging, and then, in the late nineteenth century, of naturalistic drama meant that myth-making was displaced for a theatre that sought to stage ordinary life. In the second half of the twentieth century, kitchen sink dramas and family conflicts became the norm within the theatre, whilst the fantastic was envisaged in forms such as sf as part of a bourgeois visual culture to be found in cinema and on TV. Today, rather than replicate the unrivalled visual potential of cinema, sf theatre should play to its strengths, the power of the human performance and reaction, by this creating a context in which we can imagine the fantastic. As Schulenberg writes:

> With theatre, then, it is with the human body that our imaginations find their primary point of engagement. Sci-fi theatre that tries to conjure the imaginative ask of a book or the detailed tell of a film will fail: That is not where its fundamental strength lies. Great sci-fi theatre lives in the power of a real human body reacting in real time to the imaginative pressures of speculative fiction. (Schulenberg 2012)

Apart from that, what is also evident in much of sf is the distancing from the sense of self that other genres emphasize and highlight. We do not take what we see on the surface as literal, but as representational and, in some cases, ironic.

Space is not just what is outside of Earth, there is also psychological inner space (in J.G. Ballard's terms), and the social and political spaces between individuals, groups and societies. These divisions can often be used as a metaphor of remoteness: those who close themselves up and those who grasp for others. The sense of the alien can be a metaphor for the self and the other, and how we define ourselves as a species in relation to others. To portray species that rival us allows audiences to view humanity from a distance. Andrei Tarkovsky's film adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1971), for example, depicts the frustrations that humanity experiences when it seeks to anthropomorphize everything beyond its sphere; our filters of perception block out the fully realized idea of the world outside ours. The trope of robotics, as seen in *R.U.R.*, can also explore humanity's drive for power and efficiency to the ironic detriment to its own agency. Robots are our timesaving devices, in effect our slaves, but by that reason alone our dependence on them makes them our eventual masters.

Genre, therefore, can be exacted in a multiplicity of ways. Science fiction can be about the visual, the furnished tropes of spaceships, time machines and aliens. Science fiction can also be either a reactionary or a progressive measure towards the changes in our world or, more specifically, a transformed worldview: how it has come to be this way, and how we can overcome the problems that will occur. Theatre can be a powerful agent within this response. Roberts, for example, observes:

> Writers have made whole careers finding ways of delivering weirder and gnarlier monsters to their readership; and producers evidently believe that the way to make *Wrath of the Titans* (in cinemas soon!) even better than its big-budget predecessor *Clash of the Titans* is to make the monsters bigger, toothier and more photo-realistic. The problem is: it's not true. Our response to such SFX is one of disinterested curiosity, not primal terror. (Roberts 2012)

For us to empathize with these fantastical depictions, there must be an emphatic link between us and what we experience when engaging with the medium. The world must resonate with our understanding, regardless of how oblique the set-up is. The way in which this can be achieved is by reaction. Irene Eyat-Confino explains:

> The use of the fantastic in theatre denotes a conscious attempt to apprehend complexity in all its perplexing contradictions. By dissolving the commonly accepted boundaries between the possible and the impossible, the natural and the supernatural, as between the human and the nonhuman, the fantastic offers an apprehension of experiential reality that has been pared down by reigning ideologies. (Eyat-Confino 2008: 150)

Where theatre thrives is the focus on the individual, the voice contextualized against the world created from dialogue. The site between actor and audience is a singular one: we take our cues from the actors as to what is happening. It is, as it were, a special form of data download. Although cinema is an ideal outlet for spectacle and entertainment, with the ability to imaginatively leap into any realm, theatre can more effectively engage with ideas about our present and what could be our future. The unique relationship between actor and audience emotionally connects us and holds on to the idea of transformation and reaction more readily than cinema: human reactions in real time. If we consider sf to be a literature of ideas, then theatre is an ideal medium to tackle such issues.

Mac Rogers has declared that 'science fiction theater isn't fighting to be born, to be recognized. We're already here. We're already doing this. This is already a tradition' (Rogers 2012). We have mentioned only a portion of the many ways in which science fiction has contributed to the dramatic arts (and vice versa). From science fiction writers who also wrote for the stage and famous playwrights who included science fiction in their plays to theatre companies entirely devoted to staging science fiction, there is little doubt that science fiction theatre is here to stay. We have examined some of the many themes and definitions and concepts, and we have briefly studied what has been achieved and how. Our research brings us to some common conclusions:

1) It is inevitable that theatre starts asking the same questions as literature and cinema; it already has but never to the same extent, never in its entirety, never as a movement. Science fiction theatre is the next step in theatre's evolution and can arguably be the key to its survival in the future; we therefore believe that sf theatre must be the major theatrical movement of 21st century theatre.

2) Science fiction theatre is not something new. It has existed, unofficially and often without marketing itself as science fiction, since the 19th century. There is more science fiction theatre now than ever before, and there will be more in the coming years, as long as there is such a thing as theatre. If we define it as a theatre concerned with the impact of technology on our lives, a theatre that tries to imagine both the future of our society and alternative pasts, we can conclude it is as old as the mythmaking function of theatre itself.

3) Science fiction theatre, as a movement, is in the extremely fortunate position of being relatively new. In all the other arts, and especially in literature, science fiction has already had its golden age, and sf theatre has only to learn from that. Science fiction theatre is therefore a blessing both to the theatre – as its best hope of revival – and to science fiction as a genre, since theatre is an ideal playground

for the more human-focused and philosophical ideas of science fiction.

4) This blessing of time, however, can also be a burden. Many sf plays have in the past triumphantly failed because they either tried to imitate cinematic science fiction, or attempted to be science fiction without having previously studied the genre. So much has been achieved in sf that sf theatre cannot simply experiment with science fictional ideas without being aware of what the much more established sf literature and sf cinema have accomplished. We cannot at this point in history simply start talking about what is consciousness, what is the non-human or what is our relationship to the universe, without studying what has already been produced. Science fiction theatre must therefore be informed not only of other science fictions but also of philosophy, if it is truly to be a bridge to the future.

5) We believe that so-called 'hard science fiction' is not sf theatre's best strength; non-sf plays such as Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* (1998) or Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* (1993) have already explored scientific concepts, characters and events as their primary focus. Science fiction theatre must be concerned instead with emotions rather than images; alien voices and movements rather than alien machines. It would not be wise if sf theatre invested in things that prose fiction or cinema could do better. Theatre is undoubtedly capable of giving new life to itself through science fiction and to the science fictional culture through itself.

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Time Travelling: or, How (Not) to Periodize a Genre

Andrew Milner (Monash University)

In 2011, the British Library held a major public exhibition on science fiction under the rubric, *Out of This World: Science Fiction But Not as You Know It*. Both the exhibition and its companion book were insistent that the genre had an ancient pedigree, 'dating back […] at least as far as the ancient Greeks' (Ashley 2011: 7). Both placed particular emphasis on Lucian of Samosata's *The True History* which dates from the second century CE. So, too, do a range of well-known academic texts, from Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), still commonly regarded as the foundational text for academic science fiction studies, through to David Seed's *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (2011). Yet the vast majority of sf readers have nonetheless almost certainly never heard of Lucian. There seems to be a certain disjuncture, then, between institutional and lay perceptions of the genre.

1. Long Histories of SF: Darko Suvin and Adam Roberts

Suvin is best known for his influential definitions of sf as a literary genre '*whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition*' (Suvin 1979: 7–8) and which is distinguished by '*the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional "novum" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*' (63). An important effect of these definitions was to expand the genre so as to incorporate into it a substantial part of the western literary and philosophical canon. There were thus, according to Suvin, six main instances of sf in the 'Euro-Mediterranean tradition': the Hellenic, the Hellenic-cum-Roman, the Renaissance-Baroque, the democratic revolution, the fin-de-siècle, and the modern. Adam Roberts' *The History of Science Fiction* (2005) takes a similarly long view, tracing the genre back, first, to the ancient Greek novel and, second, to Reformation Protestantism, the two beginnings separated by an interlude between 400 and 1600 C.E., during which fantasy prevailed over sf. Unlike Suvin, Roberts insisted on the specifically religious context of the genre's seventeenth century re-emergence, through what he termed 'a cultural dialectic between "Protestant" rationalist post-Copernican science on the one hand, and "Catholic" theology, magic and mysticism, on the other' (Roberts 2005: 3).

For Suvin, the science in sf was essentially a matter of cognitive rationality. It follows, then, that the genre has no necessary connection with any specifically modern understandings of science and technology. Indeed, he was at pains

to insist that sf embraces a whole range of subgenres 'from Greek and earlier times […] the Islands of the Blessed, utopias, fabulous voyages, planetary novels, *Staatsromane*, anticipations, and dystopias' (Suvin 1979: 12). The core of the genre, however, lies in its connection with utopia. Hence, his stress on Thomas More: 'More's *Utopia*" subsumes all the SF forms of its epoch' (92), and H.G. Wells: 'He collected […] all the main influences of earlier writers […] and transformed them in his own image, whence they entered the treasury of subsequent SF' (219–20). Roberts' notion of science is similarly disconnected from contemporary, post-industrial understandings of the relation between science and technology. Sf is not so much about science, he argues, as about *technē*, in the Heideggerian sense, not as an instrument, but as a way of knowing the world by 'enframing' it (Roberts 2005: 11–12). This is a 'fundamentally philosophical outlook', he adds, closer to soft than hard sf and it suggests a version of the genre 'many readers […] will not recognise' (18). Roberts' overall sense of the genre is similar to Suvin's in outline, except that *voyages extraordinaires* displace utopia at its centre: 'Travels "upwards" through space, or sometimes "downwards" […] are the trunk […] from which the various other modes of SF branch off' (vii). Utopias do figure in this account – just as voyages had in Suvin's – but only insofar as they deal with 'lands that might actually be reached by a voyager, strange but *material* new forms of human life and society' (54).

Despite their different theorizations, these two long histories are devoted to a similar range of pre-modern subgenres. Both also see sf as fundamentally incompatible with totalizing versions of religious idealism (Suvin 1979: 7, 26–7; Roberts 2005: xiii). Both cite the burning at the stake of Giordano Bruno the Nolan by the Inquisition in 1600 as a crucial turning point in the development of the genre (Suvin 98; Roberts 36). Despite differences in emphasis, both are directed at a similar range of pre-modern writers: Aristophanes, Antonius Diogenes, Lucian, More, Bacon, Campanella, Cyrano, Swift. Interestingly, both draw attention to Lucian as, respectively, providing the 'paradigm for the whole "prehistory" of SF' (Suvin 98) and the 'father of science fiction' (Roberts 27). There is no doubting the connections Suvin and Roberts establish between particular classical texts and their seventeenth or twentieth century counterparts: Aristophanes' *The Birds* (414 B.C.E.), Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) are indeed all utopias; just as Lucian's *True History*, Cyrano de Bergerac's *The Other World or the States and Empires of the Moon* (1657), and the voyages of the starship *Enterprise* are all *voyages extraordinaires*. It remains open to doubt, however, whether either or both lineages yield any adequate sense of the early twenty-first century functioning of the sf 'selective tradition' (Williams 1977: 115).

2. Science and SF: Lucian or Shelley?

When Suvin treats science as cognition and Roberts as philosophical outlook both overlook the fundamental historical difference between contemporary understandings of science and those of antiquity and early modernity: that the Industrial Revolution decisively and definitively redefined science into an intensely practical activity inextricably productive of new technologies, in the everyday rather than the Heideggerian sense. This is clearly how sf continues to understand science: Le Guin's Hainish Ekumen is made possible by the ansible eventually produced from Shevek's science; Gene Roddenberry's United Federation of Planets by the science that produced Star Fleet's warp drive; nothing even vaguely similar exists in Aristophanes or Lucian, Campanella or Cyrano. Samuel R. Delany famously described 'genealogies, with Mary Shelley for our grandmother or Lucian of Samosata as our great-great grandfather' as 'preposterous and historically insensitive' (Delany 1994: 26). He was quite right about the second, but nonetheless mistaken about the first.

For the novelty of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) was precisely that it imagined biological science as practically applicable to medical technology. As the preface to the first edition insisted: 'The event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed, by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence' (Shelley 1980: 13). Which is why Brian Aldiss was surely right to trace the origin of sf to Shelley (Aldiss and Wingrove 1986: 25–52). It is also why *Frankenstein*, like Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869), remains actively present in contemporary sf, continuously available as an intertextual reference point in literature, film, radio and television. To take only one recent example, William Gibson's *Zero History* (2011) can have its Hollis Henry refer to her boyfriend Gareth's seriously damaged and reconstructed leg as 'Frank' only because it knows that sf readers always-already know about Frankensteinian science, in a way they simply do not about Lucian's King Endymion.

Lucian's *True History* is claimed for sf primarily as an early example of a *voyage extraordinaire* to the moon. The narrator tells of how, sailing west from the Pillars of Hercules, his ship and crew were swept into the sky by a waterspout, which carried them, after a week, to an island in the air we soon learn to be the moon:

> But about midday, when we were out of sight of the island, a waterspout suddenly came upon us, which swept the ship round and up to a height of some three hundred and fifty miles above the earth. She did not fall back into the sea, but was suspended aloft, and at the same time carried along by a wind which struck and filled the sails (Lucian 1905: 139).

They are taken prisoner by Endymion, the Selenite king, whose side they join in

war against Phaethon, the king of the Sun. The Solites are victorious, however, after which articles of peace are concluded and the voyagers left free to explore the Moon: 'I am now to put on record the novelties and singularities which attracted my notice during our stay on the Moon' (145). These novelties include a universal diet of the fumes from roast flying frogs, mucus made of honey and sweat made of milk, glass clothing for the rich and brass for the poor, removable eyes and a capacity to overhear and see everything on Earth. The voyagers take their leave of Endymion and journey on through the skies, to Lucifer the Morning Star, the Zodiac and the Sun, swept along by the wind:

> We passed on our way many countries, and actually landed on Lucifer, now in process of settlement, to water. We then entered the Zodiac and passed the Sun on the left, coasting close by it. My crew were very desirous of landing, but the wind would not allow of this. We had a good view of the country, however, and found it covered with vegetation, rich, well-watered, and full of all good things. (147)

They sail to Lamptown, which is inhabited entirely by lamps, and then to Aristophanes' Cloud-cuckoo-land, where they are prevented from landing by the direction of the wind. Eventually, however, the wind drops and their vessel is returned to the ocean from which it had been plucked. All this occurs in the first twenty-nine of forty-two sections in Book I, with a further forty-seven to follow in Book II. In the remainder, there are a series of subsequent Terrestrial adventures, which include being swallowed by a two-hundred mile long whale and living inside it for many months; a visit to the Island of the Blessed, the home of the dead heroes; and to the Isle of Dreams, the inhabitants of which are, quite literally, dreams and nightmares.

All this is good fun, to be sure, and Suvin is quite right to describe it as 'a string of model parodies', but less obviously so to add that each parody translates 'a whole literary form into a critical, that is, cognitive, context' (Suvin 1979: 97). That parody is critical is indisputable; that it is cognitive seems open to question if cognition is non-identical with ethical or aesthetic judgement; that it is scientific, as the use of the term cognitive seems to connote, seems simply wrong. Roberts is similarly effusive about *The True History*: 'outrageous, inventive, bizarre and very funny […] The ironic title indicates the way in which the book explores the playful exuberance of lies and lying' (Roberts 2005: 28). This, too, seems fair comment. Nonetheless, it is not at all obvious that these particular qualities have any necessary connection with anything we today regard as sf. Lucian's adventures in the skies are essentially of a piece with those on the Earth and both are part of the wider world of classical myth.

Antiquity made extraordinary scientific advances, especially in mathematics, but there is little or no trace of any of these in Lucian. Still less is there any evidence

of our modern sense of science as technology: Lucian is simply uninterested in how a ship designed to sail the seas might be adapted to sail the skies; rather, it is all left to a waterspout and the winds. Roberts eventually has the good grace to admit that 'Lucian's sympathy is […] with the mythic, not the scientific, mode' and that the work is 'anti-SF rather than proto-SF', but spoils the effect by adding that 'anti-SF nevertheless involves an engagement in the terms of SF' (29). Not necessarily, especially not if the terms of sf were defined in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, rather than in the second and seventeenth.

Neither Lucian nor any other classical author would have imagined science as productive of technologies. Their societies were slave economies, in which labour was both debased and cheapened, and labour-saving therefore a matter of indifference. As Perry Anderson observed of what he called 'slave relations of production': 'no major cluster of inventions ever occurred to propel the Ancient economy forward […] Nothing is more striking […] than the overall technological stagnation of Antiquity' (Anderson 1974: 25–6). Imperial Rome, the society for which Lucian wrote, 'possessed very little objective impetus for technological advance' (Anderson 26). Hence, its inability to apply and develop the two most important inventions actually made within its boundaries during the 1st century CE, the water-mill and the reaping machine (Anderson 79–80). The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are a different matter, but remained so distracted by the ideological warfare between Protestantism and Catholicism that science figured primarily as world view, rather than potentially productive technique.

3. Reformation or Enlightenment?

Periodization is a notoriously tricky business, as much for literary history as for historiography more generally. But I take my cue here from Kim Stanley Robinson, who observes that:

> there do seem to be differences in human life between, for instance, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, or the Enlightenment and the Postmodern; and whether these differences were caused by changes in modes of production, structures of feeling, scientific paradigms, dynastic succession, technological progress, or cultural metamorphosis, it almost doesn't matter. The shapes invoked make a pattern, they tell a story that people can follow. (Robinson 2012: 244)

Antiquity is one such term, the Reformation another, the Enlightenment yet another. When Roberts writes that sf 'still bears the imprint of the cultural crisis that gave it birth' (Roberts 2005: 3), he is absolutely right, but when he adds that the crisis 'happened to be a European religious one' (3), he misrecognizes the relevant cultural crisis. For, in the sense that we now understand the terms, both science and

sf emerge, not from the culture wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but from those of the eighteenth and nineteenth. The genre's foundational dialectic is therefore not that between Catholicism and Protestantism, but that between Enlightenment and Romanticism (cf. Roberts and Murphy 2004). Both native Londoners and tourists are familiar with the Latin inscription, describing the course of the Great Fire of London of 1666, on the North face of Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke's Monument. Few, however, recall the line, blaming the Fire on Popish frenzy, added to the Monument in 1681 but removed in 1830. The addition marks the dialectic between Protestantism and Catholicism, the removal that between Enlightenment and Romanticism.

The novelty of the Enlightenment's version of science was, in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's phrase, that it 'behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 9). This kind of science had been anticipated by Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, but was only made practicable by the key developments of the Industrial Revolution: Edmund Cartwright's invention of the power operated loom in 1785, James Watt's of the rotary steam engine in 1782, the construction of a national canal network across Britain between 1790 and 1794. All this, in turn, gave force to the Romantic counter-critique, for example, in the addendum to William Wordsworth's 'The Ruined Cottage' (1798):

> For was it meant
> That we should pore, and dwindle as we pore,
> For ever dimly pore on things minute,
> On solitary objects, still beheld
> In disconnection dead and spiritless,
> And still dividing and dividing still,
> Break down all grandeur. (Wordsworth 1949: 402)

As Kate Rigby observes, Wordsworth here represents the objects of scientific study as doubly dead, literally because killed and metaphorically because isolated 'in disconnection' (Rigby 2004: 18). The Creature forged by Shelley's Victor Frankenstein from the disconnected parts of dead bodies would be the fictional product of exactly this kind of alienated science, applied as medical technology.

From the late eighteenth century, the experience of industrialization progressively displaced the dialectic between Catholicism and Protestantism with that between Enlightenment and Romanticism. This displacement is registered in the emergence of what Raymond Williams called a new 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1965: 64–5). A crucial element in the emergent structure of feeling of the nineteenth century was the new industrial science and its new technologies:

> Again and again even by critics of the society, the excitement of this extraordinary release of man's powers was acknowledged and shared […] 'These are our poems', Carlyle said in 1842, looking at one of the new locomotives, and this element […] is central to the whole culture. (Williams 1965: 88)

This is the element that most clearly distinguishes the new worlds of sf from the alternative islands of older utopian fictions. The nineteenth century sf novel was, then, a literary form radically different from those that preceded it. What is more, insofar as it was an adaptation of any pre-existing form, this might well be, not so much the utopia – or, indeed, the fantasy – as the historical novel.

4. SF and the Historical Novel

Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) was arguably the most important critical intervention in academic sf studies since Suvin's *Metamorphoses*. It was avowedly Suvinian in its declared focus on the connections between utopia and sf: hence the subtitle, *The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Nonetheless, Jameson traces the genre's history back only so far as More and devotes most of his analysis to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, he also toys with an alternative understanding of sf as a development from the historical novel rather than the utopia. So he stresses that the historical novel ceased to be 'functional' roughly contemporaneously with the beginnings of sf, in the simultaneous historical moment of Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862) and Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1863) (Jameson 2005: 285). This is empirically astute, for, just as French publishing in the early decades of the nineteenth century had been dominated, in terms of both sales and translations, by the historical novels of Alexandre Dumas, so in the later decades it would be by Verne's *voyages extraordinaires*. (We might add that Verne was a protégé of Dumas.)

The 'new genre', Jameson writes, is 'a form which […] registers some nascent sense of the future […] in the space on which a sense of the past had once been inscribed' (2005: 286). The connection between sf and the historical novel arises, he argues, because each is 'the symptom of a mutation in our relationship to historical time' (284). Both the emergence of sf and the decline of the historical novel into 'archaeology' are functions of a growing collective inability to understand the present as history. The new genre's sense of the future cannot therefore entail the imaginary representation of any real future, but must rather work primarily 'to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*' (286). It does so, furthermore, primarily by 'transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come'. Science fiction thereby 'enacts and enables a structurally unique "method" for apprehending the present as history', a method

which operates irrespectively 'of the "pessimism" or "optimism" of the imaginary future world which is the pretext for that defamiliarization' (288).

Jameson repeats this argument in *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) but with a slightly revised periodization. The 'invention of Science Fiction', he writes, 'was […] a modification of our historicity to which a genuine historical cause can be assigned with some precision: the emergence of imperialism on a world scale in the Berlin conference of 1885' (Jameson 2013: 298). So the key foundational sf writer becomes Wells rather than Verne, the key text *The War of the Worlds* (1898) which, as Jameson notes, was inspired by the annihilation of the Tasmanian people: 'The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants' (Wells 2005: 9). But it is not clear what exactly connects the Berlin conference either to Wells' novel or to Governor George Arthur's genocidal 'Black War' of 1828–32. Jameson's more general thesis is, however, more persuasive than the periodization itself: the 'historical novel of the future […] will necessarily be Science-Fictional inasmuch as it will have to include questions about the fate of our social system […] we are fortunate to have at least one recent novel which […] gives us an idea of what that might look like' (Jameson 2013: 298). Interestingly, the novel in question is David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), the pessimism of which might well be read as antithetical to Jameson's larger utopian concerns.

For Jameson, however, 'the most valuable works are those that make their points by way of form rather than content' (2013: 311) and, in these terms, he judges both the novel and the 2012 film adaptation by Lana Wachowski, Tom Tykwer and Andy Wachowski to be successes. There are problems with Jameson's attempts at periodization, not least their internal inconsistency. But the notion that sf and the historical novel are cognate genres, insofar as, at the most fundamental of levels, both take human historicity as their central subject matter, seems a more productive starting point than the post-Suvinian preoccupation with utopia which directs much of *Archaeologies*. For, the typical subject matter of contemporary sf is indeed future history, euchronia and dyschronia rather than eutopia and dystopia, its precursors therefore more plausibly Scott and Dumas than More and Bacon.

The Antinomies of Realism is dedicated to Kim Stanley Robinson, whose PhD thesis, on Philip K. Dick, Jameson supervised. The dedication is entirely warranted, for the book's conclusions clearly echo Robinson's own. In a 1987 essay he specifically argued that sf 'is an historical literature', in which there is always 'an explicit or implicit fictional history that connects the period depicted to our present moment'. 'The two genres are not the same', he continued, but 'more alike […] than either is like the literary mainstream'. 'They share some methods and concerns', he concluded:

> in that both must describe cultures that cannot be physically visited by the

> reader; thus both are concerned with alien cultures, and with estrangement. And both genres share a view of history which says that times not our own are yet vitally important to us. (Robinson 1987: 54–5)

There is much truth in this. And yet, sf is not necessarily co-extensive with future history: *Shelley's Frankenstein* was set in her historical past rather than the future (the Walton frame narrative clearly locates the story in the eighteenth century); Verne's *voyages extraordinaires* mainly in his present (the only future history, *Paris in the Twentieth Century* was left unpublished until 1994); even some of Wells – *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) for example – is set in his present.

5. Conclusion

We can take the connection between sf and the historical novel to be established at least tentatively, far more so than that between sf and utopia. This conclusion needs, however, to be reconciled with an understanding of sf as the product of the dialectic of Enlightenment and Romanticism, that is, as a genre focused above all on the practical capacity of sciences to become technologies. If the historical novel is, as Georg Lukács argued, a product of the mass experience of the present as history occasioned by the French Revolution (Lukács 1969: 20), then the sf novel is, in the first instance, a product of the related but different experience of the present as history occasioned by the Industrial Revolution. If sf displaces the historical novel later in the nineteenth century, as Jameson argues, then it does so by fusing the fading cultural memory of these two experiences. This is, at one level, merely to repeat the truism that the European variant of capitalist modernity is at its core a combined effect of French political revolution and British economic revolution, the twin faces of the Enlightenment; and to add that sf is the literature par excellence of this modernity. No doubt, there are newer versions of sf, some of which we might wish to call postmodern, in which Shelley's Creature is progressively reworked as robot and android, cyborg and simulacrum, artificial intelligence and clone warrior. But they all remain irretrievably bound to the quintessentially modern founding assumption that their fictional sciences can and will produce technologies sufficiently effective as to shape human being itself. And there is nothing at all like it in Lucian.

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An Adventure in Space and Time, dir. Terry McDonough; writer Mark Gatiss

Reviewed by Victoria Byard (University of Leicester)

> This is the BBC. The following programme is based on actual events. It is important to remember, however, that you can't rewrite history, not one line, except perhaps when you embark on an adventure in space and time.

An Adventure in Space and Time opens with the above disclaimer, the announcer's voice playing over footage of the BBC globe from 1963. From the outset, the docudrama marks out the complex folding together of fiction and reality, past and present, inherent in Mark Gatiss's historical drama about the origins, production and troubled birth of *Doctor Who*. The disclaimer's incorporation of one of the key tenets of *Doctor Who,* that the Doctor cannot rewrite history, is taken directly from the story,*The Aztecs* (1964), and suggests that the play is as much a part of the mythos of *Doctor Who* as a docudrama 'based on actual events'. The disclaimer also suggests the redemptive and reconciliatory power of the television drama, embedded at the level of both narrative and discourse. The precarious balance between fact and fiction, past and present, established in the disclaimer sets the tone for Gatiss's careful, multifaceted and above all affectionate drama. Where John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado once described *Doctor Who* as an 'unfolding text', Gatiss's script folds *inwards* to reincorporate key moments in production and canon and also, perhaps more importantly, to reconcile contemporary anxieties about the text, media and gender.

An Adventure in Space and Time uncovers and contextualizes the brief but vital period between 1963 and 1966 during which William Hartnell was the First Doctor, dramatizing the 'creation myth' of *Doctor Who*, and establishing the importance of those early years to the continuing success and longevity of the franchise. However, the play has its own long history. Gatiss first approached the BBC about the project in 2003. He was told at that time that there was no money or slot available for such a project but by the time of the 50th anniversary, Gatiss's proposal had become more interesting to the BBC. Since 2005, *Doctor Who* has become a global phenomenon, and now has an appeal beyond the committed fandom that kept *Who* alive during its long hiatus. Equally importantly, the BBC had generated a popular and critically acclaimed docudrama format and scheduling slot into which such a project could fit.

The disclaimer also serves as a hailing signal to a different, less partisan audience. The identification of the BBC as authority and authenticator of these

docudramas, based on actual events but fictionalized for dramatic purposes, locates *An Adventure in Space and Time* not just as part of the *Who* franchise but as one of the BBC's series of biographical docudramas. Biopics such as *Fantabulosa: The Kenneth Williams Story*, *Eric and Ernie* and *The Road to Coronation Street* were first produced for BBC 4 before moving over to BBC2, on which *An Adventure in Space and Time* was shown, and were popular with critics, audiences and institutions. As *Variety* suggested in 2009: 'What all these films share are strong scripts [...] and the opportunity for actors to engage at a deep level with the main character's personality. Lavish sets, crowd scenes and special effects are conspicuous by their absence.'[1] Ben Stephenson, Controller of BBC Drama Commissioning, was quoted as saying, 'They are all low-cost films that extract a huge creative dividend. […] The focus is on a single, central performance and the script, which makes them incredibly attractive from an actor's perspective. The main actor or actress is on screen for pretty much every scene.' These biographical dramas also benefited from their 'retro' framing, most often set in the mid-twentieth century, about well-known British actors, and with a narrative focus derived from reality and celebrity, creating a discourse of nostalgia, revelation, and the tensions between public and private spaces. In both form and narrative, *An Adventure in Space and Time* creates a modular, multi-layered text that appeals to multiple audiences with differing levels of investment.

This dialectic of viewer engagement consequently informs *An Adventure in Space and Time*. The drama is replete with textual and extra-textual allusions to classic *Who*, including cameo appearances by actors who had appeared in the programme between 1963 and 1989. This centripetal approach is unsurprising given Gatiss' background within *Who* fandom and subsequent involvement with new *Who* as one of the raft of fan-writer/producers, such as Stephen Moffat, Russell T. Davies and Paul Cornell. His canon-dense script signals to fans of *Doctor Who*, interested in the history of its production as much as its diegesis, and the narrative appeals to the committed fan by rewarding careful watching. In her examination of franchising and adaptation, Clare Parody states that 'reading franchise adaptations through the lens of fidelity provides a useful opportunity to display fannish expertise and assert precedence' (2011: 216). It also suggests the authenticity of the text, as well as of the fan-producer and extant links with fan practices and loyalties. This was a discourse which failed in the 1996 T.V. movie, which could not sustain either the fundamental British character of *Who* or its perceived, and contested, canonicity (Wright 2011: 142).

As well as suturing the *Who* franchise to the BBC biopic, *An Adventure in Space and Time* also sutures classic *Who* to new *Who* to appeal to the more recently acquired fan-base and to reconcile the two. At one point, Hartnell (David Bradley), facing forced retirement, breaks down and sobs, 'I don't want to go';

echoing the last words of Tenth Doctor, David Tennant. This extends a generic reconciliation already at work in new *Who*, identified by Matt Hills, of sf with soap drama, facilitating a narrative focus upon emotional relationships. While Gatiss's script uses classic continuity to anchor the drama within the *Who* canon and appeal to long-standing fans, it also establishes how pivotal the personalities and emotional relationships of those involved in the early production were to its success. The play documents Hartnell's anxiety about his thwarted career as 'a legitimate character actor of the stage and film', and the place of the Doctor within it, as well as his relationships with the women in his life: his wife, granddaughter, and the original producer of *Doctor Who*, Verity Lambert (Jessica Raine). While this emphasis upon personal relationships as the crux of the drama brings it into line with the soap drama conventions at work in new *Who*, it also orientates the play more firmly towards the genre of biographical drama. Even the sf trope of time travel is redirected to an approach more familiar to the genres of soap and biopic: the text's framing flashback takes place within the production space of the TARDIS standing set, while the drama's focalization through Hartnell's failing and fragmented memory creates a particularly emotional and subjective form of temporal displacement.

The focus on emotional relationships generated by the structure and aesthetic of the biographical drama and the discourse of new *Who* allows Gatiss to re-orientate *Doctor Who*'s past, and potentially to address contemporary anxieties about its future. By destabilizing the boundaries between production and text, he re-articulates the relationship between Lambert and Hartnell as an analogue for the Doctor and his (generally female) companions, inverting the traditional dynamics of authority and knowledge. This re-situation of women and authority within *An Adventure in Space and Time* responds to historical and current tensions about the place of women within *Doctor Who*. Recent interviews with current and previous show-runners and *Who* scholars have made plain the discomfort with which some fans, producers, and academics regard the prospect of a female Doctor. In an interview with *The Telegraph*, Russell T. Davies was 'adamant that *Doctor Who* could never be played by a woman' (quoted Simpson 2008). When Peter Capaldi was revealed as the new Doctor, Stephen Moffat declared that while it was 'absolutely narratively possible' for the Twelfth Doctor to have been a woman, he 'didn't feel enough people wanted it' (quoted Silverman 2013). Academic James Chapman concurred, stating that a female Doctor 'would too radically alter the Doctor/companion relationship – the Doctor has to be the dominant role and the companion is there to ask questions. I can't think of any examples in popular fiction where this has worked with a woman in the lead role' (Chapman 2013).

An Adventure in Space and Time, however, convincingly re-situates women

not only at the heart of *Doctor Who* but also in the dominant and authoritative role of producer. After Lambert vigorously defends the quality and ground-breaking potential of *Doctor Who* to Sydney Newman (Brian Cox) as it faces cancellation, she is validated in her faith by popular response to the programme. The presence of women as producers and authority figures is reinforced by the appearance of Delia Derbyshire (Sarah Winter), who realized the *Doctor Who* theme, as well as diegetic references to Valentina Tereshkova, the first female cosmonaut, and *Compact*, the 1960s BBC soap co-created by Hazel Adair. While unafraid of showing historical gender discrimination, Gatiss's script nevertheless re-situates women in *Doctor Who*, in the BBC, and in the 1960s as producers, performers, pioneers, and even fans. Hartnell's conflation with the role of the Doctor is particularly affective for his own granddaughter, Judy (Cara Jenkins), for whom Hartnell is the only Doctor. Judy believes that 'the TARDIS will go on and on forever because it's special and magic, like my Sanpa [sic].' The faith and love which Judy invests in her Doctor, the celebratory affect Hills identifies in fandom (2010: 64), seems to become synecdochic for every fan and every Doctor to follow: in the mini-episode, 'Time Crash' (2007), David Tennant declares to Peter Davison, 'You were *my* Doctor.' Judy likewise is both fan and producer, re-articulating one of her grandfather's onscreen errors into her own reading, developing a discourse of fan response to and from the narrative.

In identifying the structure and discourse of new *Who*, Hills suggests that the programme's increasingly 'dispersible text' creates a series of drama 'moments' which work affectively for audiences and institutionally for producers (2008: 29). These drama moments also shape *An Adventure in Space and Time* not only in the recreation of 'lost' episodes like *Marco Polo* (1964) or the spectacular sight of Daleks on London Bridge, but also key moments in *Who* production. Nowhere was the concept of the moment more pivotal to *Doctor Who* than in the imagining of the Doctor's regeneration. Not only does this moment mark the turning-point of Gatiss's play, and Hartnell's reluctant departure from a role he had grown to love, it also articulates the tension between change and continuity within the series. The impact and brutal irony of this moment is reinforced by repetition and reversal within the script. William Russell (Jamie Glover) expresses doubt about the programme's longevity, commenting 'No one's irreplaceable', but Hartnell, showing off a *Doctor Who* annual with his face on the cover, crows, 'No one's irreplaceable, eh?' Later, Hartnell states, 'You can't have *Doctor Who* without Doctor Who, can you?'; a line subsequently echoed by associate producer Mervyn Pinfield (Jeff Rawle) which would fatefully suggest the idea of regeneration to Newman. Gatiss establishes the centrality of this moment in the DVD special features: 'the funny thing to think of is up to the point that Patrick Troughton took over there was only *a* Doctor.' More important than moments of

visual spectacle, no matter how vital to the representation of the fantastic, was the moment when the text itself *became* dispersible, when Newman realized that the Doctor himself could, and would have to, be 'renewed'. As Chapman points out, 'this was originally a short-term solution to the deteriorating health of the first Doctor Who […] but it developed into part of the series' mythos and became a strategy for renewal' (2006, 3). This realization which could regenerate the whole series from television programme to phenomenon is the real dispersible moment, and is reinforced textually at the play's conclusion when Hartnell, on-set for the last time, looks across the console and into the camera. The subsequent reverse shot reveals that he is not just looking at the audience but at Matt Smith as the Eleventh Doctor looking back across the console, the future and, at the time of writing, also the past of *Doctor Who*.

It has been suggested that 'the key to the longevity of Doctor Who has been its format, which has proved malleable enough to respond flexibly both to changing broadcasting ecologies and to cultural determinants from inside and outside the BBC' (Chapman, 2006: 3). *An Adventure in Space and Time* follows this dynamic model by suturing the popular *Who* franchise and its canon, both diegetic and extra-diegetic, to the more realistic but still flexible biographical drama form which allows the BBC to reassert its own authority and the authenticity of the narrative. However, underpinning the drama is Gatiss's labour of love as a fan/producer, and the continuity and change inherent within the regeneration which changed *Doctor Who* forever, folding it into new incarnations, new genres, and new audiences.

Endnote

[1]http://variety.com/2009/film/news/bbc4-wins-with-biopics-1118013171/ (accessed 04/03/14)

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Breakfast in the Ruins

Richard Deacon, Tate Britain, 5th February – 27th April 2014
Ruin Lust, Tate Britain, 4th March – 18th May 2014

Reviewed by Paul March-Russell (University of Kent)

By happy coincidence, two exhibitions of sf-related interest recently appeared alongside one another at Tate Britain. The first, a wondrous retrospective of the Turner Prize-winning sculptor Richard Deacon, may at first glance have little to concern the sf aficionado. Yet, Deacon has long had an interest in higher mathematics, see for example, his collaboration with physicists from CERN as part of the *Signatures of the Invisible* exhibition (The Atlantis Gallery, 2001). Deacon has also taken inspiration from classic sf. Speaking of his strangely globular piece, *Not Yet Beautiful* (1994), Deacon compares it to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955): 'that cocoon-like science-fiction thing that was about to become something.' He also appreciates the 'Frankensteinian effort to try and create something complete by stitching together parts and finding it falling short' (quoted Curtis 2014: 77).

In practice, though, Deacon's art succeeds magnificently. Its dizzying geometry holds the viewer spellbound: perhaps more than any other contemporary sculptor, Deacon embodies the dictum of Samuel Beckett: 'Total object, complete with missing parts' (1965: 101). Deacon's characteristic materials are wood, steel, aluminium and ceramic. In twisting and looping these seemingly impregnable elements, he has made a thorough investigation of them. Yet, in bending their substance to improbable perspectives, Deacon hints at something more than the sum of their parts. Pieces such as *After* (1998), *Blind, Deaf and Dumb A* (1985) and *Out of Order* (2003), which dwarf or uncoil themselves before the spectator, nevertheless invite inspection. Their airiness adds to the vertiginous spectacle: how can objects so massively worked upon be so light and open? The undulating, serpentine form of *After* resembles nothing so much as an exercise in basket-weaving gone horribly wrong: the hypertrophic wooden segments, combined to create odd swerves in angle and direction, are held taut by the stainless steel strap that bisects the sculpture. The result is that, as viewers follow the endless curvature of the work, so they are invited to explore both inner and outer forms, to contemplate space and volume. We can imagine how these pieces were assembled – the massive steel bolts of an object like *Lock* (1990) draw attention

to the physicality of its construction – but still we wonder just how the effect was achieved.

Deacon's preferred self-description is as a fabricator, not a sculptor. *Homo faber* is often the hero, or if not the hero then the catalyst, of so much sf. Yet, fabrication also implies untruth, and it is in this deceptive sense of the term that Deacon's work holds most interest for science fiction. His abiding theme is the slipperiness of perspective, and the manifold possibilities that emerge as points of view shift in relation to the object under study. *Two By Two* (2010), for example, is composed of irregular, polygonal shapes that expand, jut and protrude into their surroundings. The very parts seem to want to break free from their three-dimensional bonds and explore higher or multi-dimensional spaces. Such a desire associates the piece with mathematical conundrums such as Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland* (1884), Christopher Priest's *Inverted World* (1974) or Adam Roberts' *On* (2001). The nine tightly clustered towers that constitute *Fold* (2012) take this principle further. Appearing at first to be a disjointed series of folding screens, this impression is transformed as the spectator moves around it: the screens fold into one another, becoming a single tower. Moving further around the sculpture, the screens reappear, expanding outwards like a coruscated fan. It is a brilliant, disorientating effect that gestures to what we really mean in sf when we mouth the much-used term, multiverse.

Following the example of Martin Heidegger, Deacon's 'aim is not to re-establish a realm that transcends language, but to establish one that is immanent within it' (Wallis 2014: 28). Such an aim has echoes with the anti-escapist tendencies of an sf/f writer like M. John Harrison. But, Deacon's debt to Heidegger is not only to his concept of *Dasein* (Being-in-itself) but also to his notion of *techne*: the imposition of a scientific world-view in which living creatures and vital processes are reduced to the level of objects and techniques. Although Deacon's sculptures are technically accomplished, their dynamic structures – sometimes resembling the most fundamental of organic forms, for example the DNA double-helix invoked in pieces such as *Venice Twist* (2007) – resist their instrumental usage by an unenlightened scientism. The totality of Deacon's incompleteness – the artwork's inherent ruination – marks an appropriate scepticism, to be found also within post-New Wave sf, towards servile scientific logic.

Such ruination chimes with the more aesthetically delirious objects to be found in *Ruin Lust*. As John Clute and David Langford opine, sf has long had a fascination with ruins but, contrary to the melancholic picturesque of the 18th century, as portals into futurity. In its own way, the exhibition proposes a similar argument. By beginning with Giovanni Piranesi as the first theorist of the ruin, the curators ask what lessons, messages or moral truths post-Enlightenment men and women have discerned from the remains of their predecessors. As Brian

Dillon's accompanying essay puts it: 'one had to have sliced the past into discrete periods and imagined one's own past was advancing half blind into the future, in order to think that history was speaking from the stones' (Dillon 2014: 5). The exhibition is premised upon a rupture – what Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) terms a 'punctum' – in the understanding of history, following which history is treated taxonomically, empirically and (most important of all) progressively. By contrast, the obsession with the ruin contests this knowable, forward-movement: its a-temporality captivating successive artistic imaginations.

Before entering the first room, a collection of books and quotations set the scene, two of which from an sf point of view seize the attention: a quotation from Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and a copy of Richard Jefferies' *After London* (1885). The twin tropes of apocalypse – death and revelation – are portrayed in the first exhibit, John Martin's beautifully restored *Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1822). Martin, Shelley and Jefferies form part of an apocalyptic strand that intertwines the Romantic Gothic with late Victorian depictions of last or future men, for example, Gustave Doré's engraving of 'The New Zealander' (1872) observing the ruins of London. It is in these texts, rather than the famous renderings of Tintern Abbey by William Gilpin and J.M.W. Turner, that the ruin acts as a portal into past, present *and* future.

Such an idea underlines one of the exhibition's key pieces, Joseph Gandy's *A Bird's Eye View of the Bank of England* (1830). Commissioned by the architect Sir John Soane, Gandy imagines the building as a vast future ruin where one day sightseers might come and bask within its grandeur. The complex is presented as a cutaway, revealing the internal design of the building, so that these same visitors could puzzle over and decipher its mechanism. In retrospect, there are overtones here with sf when human travellers attempt to decode the remains of an alien civilisation, for example, in *Forbidden Planet* (1956). Yet, Gandy's painting also prefigures Robert Smithson's notion of 'ruins in reverse', where buildings do not decline but ascend to their true destiny as ruins. In this state, the ruin acts as a provocation to the imagination.

Practically the final works within Rooms 2 and 3 are by the contemporary artist, Laura Oldfield Ford. In one, she views the ruin from the inside, perhaps a dilapidated one-bedroom flat turned squat, where on the bed two women sit, their legs retracted; one caught in the act of reading, the other in the act of writing. They stare guardedly, but unashamedly, at the spectator. In contrast to so-called 'ruin porn', the reflection throws the voyeuristic gaze back upon itself. Far from derelict, Ford's ruins are busy planting the seeds of revolutionary change. Her zine, *Savage Messiah* (2005-9), echoing not only the psychogeographical methods of J.G. Ballard's close friend, Iain Sinclair, but also the bleak dystopianism of post-punk bands like Throbbing Gristle, is a further extension of this critique.

As the exhibition moves into the twentieth century, so Ballard becomes a significant presence. A neat triangulation is performed by hanging Jane and Louise Wilson's photographs of the Nazis' defensive Atlantic Wall alongside observations by Ballard and the philosopher Paul Virilio (whose thesis on bunker architecture largely underwrote Jonathan Meades' recent BBC4 series on brutalism). Room 4 is given over to the work of Tacita Dean, sadly not to the film, *J.G.* (2013), which would have squared the circle between herself, Ballard and Smithson, but to a series of melancholic photographs, *The Russian Ending* (2001), and the film, *Kodak* (2006), a requiem to the medium itself filmed at the Kodak factory in Chalon-sur-Saône, France. For those interested in the British surrealist precursors to Ballard and Eduardo Paolozzi, whose *Michaelangelo's 'David'?* (1987) is also on show, the early land art of Eileen Agar and Paul Nash dominates Room 7. But Ballard's presence is most keenly felt in Room 6, which takes its title from Smithson, and contains the exhibit of most interest to sf readers.

Gerard Byrne's *1984 and Beyond* (2005-7) is a film in which a group of Dutch actors, in somewhat stilted English, perform the text of a 1963 roundtable discussion on the future that appeared in *Playboy*, and which involved Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Ray Bradbury, Algis Budrys, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein, Frederik Pohl and Theodore Sturgeon. The actors sit, stand and stroll, discoursing upon the future, against the backdrop of a modernist building that would not have looked out of place in Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965). Their characters appear to be academics or archivists or part of some government-backed think-tank; Stanislaw Lem's *The Futurological Congress* (1971) could be an appropriate paratext. It would be easy to ridicule the content of their discussion, beginning with the confident assertion that there will be thriving colonies on Mars by 1980, or to dismiss it as a future that never happened (*pace* William Gibson's 'The Gernsback Continuum' (1981)). But, Byrne's distancing techniques – a kind of cognitive estrangement in reverse, in that we are asked to recall that *this* is what professional writers believed to be the future of society – effect sympathy for these now flawed predictions. What is not being ridiculed is the capacity for prediction – from the ruinous future histories of 1963 can come the stimulus for a new imagining of the future. The film is counterpointed by the surrounding sequence of photographs in which Byrne reminds us of the continuing persistence of artefacts from the 1960s.

For the sf reader, the content of the dialogue is interesting in another way. The authors are remarkably relaxed about the future of pharmaceuticals, in particular, the everyday use of drugs as stimulants (although the emphasis is upon utilitarian value rather than hedonistic pleasure). A post-Darwinian rhetoric underscores their discussion: they are not so much interested in the future of individuals as the future of the species, and the extent to which individual behaviour will adapt to

technological change so as to further the species, or be left behind. This rhetoric, allied to the venue in which the discussion first appeared, allows them to talk quite openly about sexual relations and, in particular, areas such as homosexuality that would have been taboo in the pulps. The viewer, though, is aware that the participants are all white, middle-aged men: the liberation of both women and racial minorities as a driver for social change is not discussed. Yet, at the same time, the supposed radicalism of *New Worlds* and the counter-culture resembles less of a break from the recent past.

Of the two exhibitions, the Richard Deacon is, almost inevitably, the more consistent. Yet, in puncturing its own argument by juxtaposing works of different periods or by riffing on the theme of ruins, *Ruin Lust* embeds the very process of ruination. In declining from the expected conventions of an art exhibition, it ascends into a series of provocations for the future.

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The Weird: Fugitive Fictions/Hybrid Genres, Senate House, London, 7-8 November 2013

Reviewed by Timothy Jarvis and James Machin (Birkbeck College, London)

Although a mode in the Gothic lineage, cognate with horror, weird fiction is to some a separate form. In *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009), China Miéville notes the particular association of weird fiction with the early twentieth-century pulp writing of H.P. Lovecraft and others for *Weird Tales*, but also acknowledges the plausibility of S.T. Joshi's argument that this was only the conclusion to a 'high phase' of such writing that began in the 1880s. Recent years have seen the increasingly wide application of the term: the coining of the phrase 'New Weird' in 2003 to describe genre fiction that avoids easy or neat categorization; the publication of anthologies such as *The New Weird* (2008) and *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2011); and *The Guardian*'s online genre fiction column 'Weird Things'.

There is certainly a desire, explicitly expressed, to put clear blue water between, for example, the comfortably familiar and reassuringly human undead of the *Twilight* series, and the notion of weird fiction promoted by WeirdFictionReview.com and self-identifying publishers of weird fiction such as Kraken Press. In its 'Dogme 2011 for Weird Fiction', the former explicitly forbids use of 'stock anthropomorphic monsters: no vampires, no zombies, no werewolves, no mummies, no ghouls'. In their submission guidelines, Kraken Press caution that they are 'not likely to publish anything with vampires, werewolves, or zombies'. One implication here is that weird fiction is a more literary mode, which values originality and subtlety; that engages with otherness in a more complex way; deforms tropes and places genres in disconcerting tension; and avoids the easy resolutions that characterize much contemporary paranormal romance.

Despite this revival of interest in weird fiction, the mode has received little sustained critical attention. But, though this two-part conference was organized in an attempt to address this lacuna, it quickly became apparent that a wealth of scholarship was already being undertaken covering a variety of media — including fiction, television, art, and computer gaming — looking at both the development of the weird and its variegated manifestations in contemporary culture.

On the evening of 7th November, at the appropriately subterranean and atmospheric Horse Hospital in Bloomsbury, an evening of weird readings

saw creative contributions from some of the most exciting and progressive contemporary writers in the weird mode, with M. John Harrison, K.J. Bishop, Hal Duncan, Helen Marshall, and Lisa L. Hannett, all reading from their work . In addition, Robert Kingham started things off with a talk on Bloomsbury's strange past and present. The event ended with a Q&A session, with all readers taking questions from the floor. The resulting discussion threw up some really interesting facets of weird literature and its composition, notably M. John Harrison's claim that the mode allowed writers to ambush themselves with strangeness, push their writing into unanticipated places.

The academic symposium on 8th November opened with a keynote from pre-eminent Lovecraft scholar, biographer, and editor S.T. Joshi, who gave the audience an overview of two paradigm shifts in weird fiction, each initiated by the mode's pre-eminent innovators — or 'revolutionaries' — Edgar Allan Poe and Lovecraft. The first panels of the day saw discussions on weird occultations, genre weirding, and also the birth of a new literary adjective, 'Harrisonian', appropriate considering Harrison's increasing reputation as the UK's premier exponent of the weird. After lunch, there were panels on the pre-modernist weird, weird landscapes and other weird media: topics included the monstrous and the human in William Hope Hodgson, the imaginative space provided by the Antarctic in weird fiction, and weird manifestations in online roleplaying games. In the second keynote of the day, Roger Luckhurst traced the evolution of a key contemporary weird trope, the corridor, from its origins in Rudyard Kipling's tale 'At The End of the Passage', through a number of key instances including, memorably, a discussion of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. This insightful analysis argued the weird is defined by a 'corridic episteme', and teased out some of the ways weird fiction is liminal and disconcerting. The final panels of the afternoon saw discussions of the weird crossover with musical subgenres in heavy metal culture, the posthuman weird, and also a bold and perhaps mischievous attempt to reposition Arthur Machen as a Modernist before Modernism. Victoria Nelson, the final keynote speaker of the day, highlighted the international reach of the weirdness, discussing the ways in which Vladimir Sorokin's *Ice* trilogy breaks free of conventional genre constraints and is imbued with the oddness of what she termed 'New Expressionism'.

The plenary panel's task of attempting to corral the bewildering diversity of discussions generated by the event was always going to be a difficult one: one of the weird's notable valences is its mercurial slipperiness and the mode perhaps simply doesn't take reductive, neatening readings where, like the butterfly collector, we kill the subject when pinning it to the board. While Joshi and John Clute expressed enthusiasm for the term's qualities as a liberating catalyst enabling both writers and critics to look beyond genre strictures, Nelson expressed dissatisfaction that the word's historical associations possibly inhibit

the same, although happily owned up to being at a loss to provide a superior alternative. The prominence given to Lovecraft also created some anxiety, although the attention he received during the conference certainly didn't preclude far more attention being paid elsewhere. The weird in translation was identified as an unfortunate lacuna in the programme and Clute's summation of proceedings suggested that although no conclusion could be reached on what it *is*, the weird is definitely *something* and that this *something* deserves ongoing attention and interrogation.

The organizers would like to thank: Jon Millington and the Institute of English Studies at Senate House, Professor Roger Luckhurst, the Modern Humanities Research Association, Birkbeck School of Arts, and Birkbeck Centre for Contemporary Literature, and all the speakers and participants.

Book Reviews

Paul Williams, *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War: Representations of Nuclear Weapons and Post-Apocalyptic Worlds* (Liverpool University Press, 2011, 278 pp, £65)

Reviewed by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay
(University of Oslo)

Taking as his epigraph Arundhati Roy's comment that nuclear weapons are the 'very heart of whiteness', Paul Williams' book explores the relations between race, ethnicity and the representation of nuclear weapons in sf and other texts. The work is a significant advance upon recent analyses of race in sf: by combining the perspectives of sf criticism, race theory, postcolonial theory and nuclear criticism, it shows the extent to which the sf imaginary is implicated in social capital and ideologies of white supremacy.

The first chapter details the prevalence of racism and racial stereotypes (most of which have previously been studied in sf criticism) in future war fictions, very few of them nuclear. In spite of these shortcomings, the chapter lays the groundwork for the two major themes that Williams traces through to contemporary times: race and war. Moreover, Williams shows how ideas of ghettoization, fears of miscegenation and nineteenth-century eugenics have merged with policies made possible by new technological terrors in the twentieth century. Williams contends that nuclear weapons in sf represent an advance on earlier future war fictions, because they are the ultimate weapons, around which fantasies of destruction and reconstruction, fear of invasion and cultural rebirth may be constructed. For Williams, 'nuclear war decenters white privilege around the world' (128), and his work is an analysis of the ways in which sf texts deal with such decentring. The rest of the book explores, through the image of nuclear war, the continuity of such racial antipathy in sf, and also the adoption and internalization of such stereotypes in texts produced outside the Anglo-American world.

The first chapter looks at three post-apocalyptic American stories: William Tenn's 'Eastward Ho!' (1958), Michael Swanwick's 'The Feast of Saint Janis' (1980), and Whitley Strieber and James W. Kunetka's *Warday* (1984). Williams contends

that these narratives perform a function similar to that of the frontier myth found in the Western. By exploring the theme of survival in a harsh landscape, they also channel the social Darwinist myths of an earlier age, including that of Aryan supremacy. Williams suggests these narratives appear to be functionally similar to the Empire narratives of British scientific romance at its heyday, where white supremacy is threatened. Tenn contextualizes American 1950s racism through the presentation of a future where white populations suffer similar racism at the hands of dominant Native Americans who, using the Darwinian motif, have adapted more quickly to the post-apocalyptic scenario. It is the whites who have to return to the ocean, to the mythic Europe of white origins. *Warday* explores the theme using Hispanic Americans and Native Americans for its inversion, while 'The Feast of Saint Janis' uses a prosperous New Africa as its point of critique. As Williams argues, these narratives apply the stereotypes more often reserved for others to white Americans, underlined by an economic and neo-colonial logic. The world of American consumerism becomes the target: satirical in the case of the short stories; nostalgic in the case of *Warday*.

Some of the later chapters of the book extend this argument in different directions. 'Fear of a Black Planet' describes the concern that a nuclear war might render racial purity a thing of the past. The spectre of miscegenation becomes particularly controversial when dwindling populations in a post-apocalyptic landscape adopt survival as a primary goal. In tracing this narrative from the 1950s onwards, Williams notes the changing pattern of interracial relations in American sf. Philip Wylie's *Tomorrow!* (1954) and Pat Frank's *Alas Babylon* (1959), ostensibly critical of racism against African Americans, end up utilizing nuclear war and the destruction of American cities as a way of restoring the US to its white racial homogeneity. The best section of this chapter, however, is the study of Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1987). Exploring Butler's complex usage of interspecies reproduction, Williams shows that in Butler's work, nuclear weapons are produced by the same fundamental drive as racism, the belief that one group is better than another. Nuclear weapons enable the construction, almost always masculine, of a power hierarchy. In presenting Lilith's and Joseph's relationship in the novel as the transcendence of psychical xenophobia and racist fear of the other, Butler explores the possibility that perhaps the end of the species through human-alien interbreeding (and, by extension, through interracial breeding) is desirable.

Williams' discussion of anti-Semitism in the Manhattan Project is well argued, but brief. Through a reading of two novels, Dexter Masters' *The Accident* (1955) and Joseph Kanon's *Los Alamos* (1997), Williams shows that the same anti-Semitism that led to the exodus of Jewish scientists to America also structured the way in which they were publicly perceived at the time. Williams also looks at Martin Cruz Smith's *Stallion Gate* (1986), in which anti-Semitism and institutional

racism against Native Americans merge in the figure of Joe Peña. In all three novels, the rhetoric of American civilization and cultural pluralism ssurrounding the success of the Manhattan Project is challenged by the internal racial fissures in American society: the 'othering' characteristic of civilizational superiority that makes possible any use of the Bomb is endemic to the logic that makes the construction of the Bomb necessary in the first place.

One of the book's key contributions is its incorporation of literature from newer nuclear nations such as India, as well as sf produced in places such as Australia. The second chapter notes that Australia has been the setting for post-apocalyptic fictions, both before and since Neville Shute's classic *On the Beach* (1957) and Williams argues that these representations are 'determined by a specific image of the Outback emerging from a colonial tradition of representation, an image of recalcitrant emptiness foreshadowing the ordering of cartography' (85). Williams borrows the term 'soft place' from Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, to identify those places that are 'desirable to colonizing nations as *ideas* and *locations* in the world that are unmapped and thus unclaimed in European eyes' (87). Australia occupies such a space in the sf imaginary Williams suggests, and shows how the *Mad Max* trilogy depicts a relation between place and people that revitalizes readings of the Australian Outback for international consumers at precisely the moment in which the relationship was becoming less significant for Australian audiences. Arguing for a more complex reading of the narrative than a simple justification of white supremacy and eventual triumph over the native/black, Williams shows that the narrative borrows features from the Western genre, where ultimately the hero must always be an exile from civilization himself. Mad Max's triumph over Aunty Entity restores to the Outback its status as an empty land; his success is at the cost of civilization itself. The image of the post-nuclear war landscape is integrated with the presumed featurelessness of Australia itself as a 'soft place' and the narrative thus depicts an internalization of the image of Australia as wilderness. Williams' nuanced study of *Mad Max* suffers however from brevity. While Williams tries to relate the third film to the trilogy as a whole, the discussion of *Beyond Thunderdome* is not given due space.

The two finest chapters of the book are those where Williams discusses Black Atlantic texts and the idea of the 'Hindu Bomb'. In the former, Williams draws upon a wide range of texts, including fiction and poetry, by writers such as Langston Hughes and E.K. Brathwaite (Hughes' Simple stories) in a reading that might be ignored by sf critics. Williams notes that the use of the Bomb against the Japanese, and not against the white Germans, was immediately read in Black Atlantic texts as an instance of racial antagonism. It is also here that Williams' epigraph begins to make sense. Williams reads the Black Atlantic as a counterculture of modernity, constitutive of but forever distanced from the notion

of Western civilization. This very position allows writers such as Derek Walcott to launch powerful critiques of Western progress. Williams reads the resistance to nuclear weapons throughout the course of the civil rights movements, drawing upon the anti-nuclear and anti-racist stance in the work of W.E.B. DuBois and James Baldwin, and highlighting the important role played by black women activists such as June Jordan and Alice Walker.

The logic of Roy's epigraph is more firmly explored in Williams' reading of Ruchir Joshi's *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* (2001) as well as texts such as Romesh Gunesekera's *The Sandglass* (1998) and Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2006) in a chapter that investigates the underlying rhetoric of Hindu nationalism in the wake of nuclear weapon tests conducted by India and Pakistan in the 1990s. In an otherwise long-standing tradition, originating in the colonial period itself, of India as the birthplace and cradle of the Aryans, the assertion of nuclear dominance was invoked as a civilizational motif and a strategy of decolonization. Race, ethnicity and civilization mingle in the complex response to the 'Hindu Bomb' that managed to bring the Hindu centre-right party to power. Joshi's novel is set in two different times, the 1998 of nuclear tests and a 2017 nuclear war in which India emerges victorious against its enemies, wherein ideals such as the non-violence of the Indian independence movement are replaced by their exact opposite. As Williams argues, the assertion of nuclear power that gives credence to the rise of India to its rightful place in the world is the consequence of the marginalization faced by Indians and other non-whites in the Western world.

Almost all of Williams' chapters are very well argued. The only disagreement one might raise is that the chapters seem like discrete entities when seen in relation to the thesis as a whole. Part of the reason is the brevity of some sections and over-elaboration in others. An entire chapter is devoted to the study of Joshi's novel, while other chapters discuss several texts, thus diluting the force of the argument through either over-generalization or through excess and over-determinism. In spite of such quibbles, however, Williams manages to significantly extend readings of race and ethnicity in relation to the representation of nuclear war, and he treads new ground in his reading of some works, particularly contemporary ones. His combination of theoretical approaches and literary analysis also makes this an invaluable resource for those seeking to understand the logic of postcolonial science fiction. This is a must-read book.

Andrew Blum, *Tubes: Behind the Scenes at the Internet* (Penguin, 2013, 304pp, £9.99)

Reviewed by Grace Halden (Birkbeck College, London)

In *The Matrix* (1999), Morpheus says to the saviour Neo: 'Unfortunately, no one can be told what the matrix is. You have to see it for yourself.' Andrew Blum boldly sets out on a pilgrimage to 'the centre of the internet' in order to see the geography and architecture of the matrix for himself. Blum journeys across continents, digging in dirt and in basements for wires and lights – for the fossils of online life. Feeling detached and disembodied from the internet, Blum becomes an explorer for the digital world adventuring over land and sea to discover exactly what the internet is and how it tangibly exists: 'I was connected, yes; but connected to what?' *Tubes* acts to break down the binary between the virtual and real, and the physical and metaphysical through the exploration of the corporeal internet. Blum is our Morpheus – leading the reader to the heart of the internet and revealing the hidden reality of its condition.

When the average British household now has more than one device connected to the internet, Blum's text is relevant to the modern online user, the technological scholar and the science fiction fan. Many of us, even the most technologically savvy science fiction reader, confess to uncertainty over what exactly the internet *is*. This is astonishing considering, as Blum explains, 'the Internet is the single biggest technological construction of our daily existence.' Blum admits, 'I may have been plugged in, but the tangible realities of the plug were a mystery to me.' Most of us understand that the internet is a network and that despite claims of wireless connections there are in fact wires … *somewhere*. But what is the internet? Where does it come from and how does it work? Where does our data go? Where do the cables lead?

As Blum explains, visualizing the physical structure of the internet is hard for many people due to the immaterial experiences of it in everyday life. Thus, the internet, unlike many technologies, can be expertly used and yet be not entirely comprehended. This could explain a degree of ambiguity often experienced towards this technology for it is hard to establish whether a technology is potentially apocalyptic or entirely benevolent if it cannot be fully conceptualized or experienced.

In science fiction the numerous ramifications of the internet (whether described as cyberspace, matrix, virtual worlds, grid, net or web) have been subject for debate since William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). However, often the physicality of the internet is overlooked in favour of focusing on the metaphysical. Blum describes the paradoxical nature of the internet as being physical and metaphysical: 'The Internet is everywhere; the Internet is nowhere. But indubitably, as invisible as the logical might seem, its physical counterpart is always there.' Blum describes how he 'walked between the cages filled with boxes glittering with blinking green lights', being both separated from the technology and yet completely immersed in it through his transcendent connection to the network. Standing in a data hub surrounded by wires and tubes and flashing lights he is entombed in physical technology and also connected technologically and metaphysically to the global network. Unlike Neo, in the climactic moment of the text Blum doesn't see the matrix as neon green streams of data; rather, he sees physical tubing. And yet he is just as connected as Neo – just as jacked in as *Neuromancer*'s Case.

There is also room to link Blum's text to the considerations within science fiction to the personification of technology and even the presence of artificial intelligence. Often Blum speaks of the internet with a high level of personification and even describes the internet's physicality as almost being organic: 'At the logical level, the Internet is self-healing. Routers automatically seek out the best routes among themselves.' The reader may be reminded of networked artificial intelligences such as *Neuromancer*'s Wintermute, Proteus from Dean Koontz's *Demon Seed* (1973), VIKI from Alex Proyas' *I Robot* (2004) and even entities such as the evolved noocytes in Greg Bear's *Blood Music* (1985).

All of these are fairly dystopic examples. However, Blum's quest is not a neutral descent into the basement of the internet – into the belly of inert and uninteresting tubes and flashing lights. When Blum encounters the large hubs (such as Facebook's data centre) he experiences moments of detachment from his otherwise obvious affection for the internet as he is faced with its 'cold' and unsettling physicality: 'It all seemed so mechanical.' The disappointment Blum experiences here made me think of the disappointment fans of Simone from *S1m0ne* (2001) may have experienced if they had truly realized that the woman was a hologram and that behind the projected warmth and humanity was a very clever and physical machine. Both are perhaps a commentary on the illusion of reality and the reliance upon artificiality.

In many ways, Blum's journey to the source of the internet can be rearticulated as a quest to locate his place within this larger networked system and indeed within the new world itself. His questions, 'Where did the cable go from here? How did my piece of the Internet connect to the rest?', are rehashes of the questions which have plagued humanity since early thought: 'Where do we come from?',

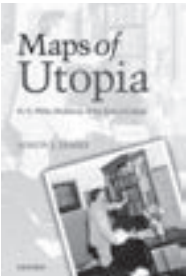
'Where are we going?', 'Where do I fit into this world?', 'What is my purpose' and 'How do I connect with others?' The difference is that Blum is talking about himself and data as one amalgamated entity: the human user. In reality he is asking, 'Where do I, the human user, fit into this map and what does it look like?' In his concluding paragraph, Blum implies as much:

> What I understood when I arrived home was that the Internet wasn't a physical world or a virtual world, but a human world. The Internet's physical infrastructure has many centres, but from a certain vantage point there is really only one: You. Me. The lowercase i. Wherever I am, and wherever you are.

As Blum illustrates in his exploration, the cohabitation between the human and the internet encouraged evolved thoughts regarding 'what' and 'where' the human is in regards to technological development. This is precisely the same philosophy many science fiction texts explore – whether through cyberspace or entities such as androids, aliens and biotechnologies. Blum describes himself as being surrounded by this technology through an invisible embrace and by the physical tubing which runs through many natural and man-made structures on the planet.

The Matrix suggests that humanity as a whole is under the control of the net – silently controlled and oppressed. Following the philosophy of Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard, individuals may consider themselves completely severed from any sort of genuine experience through their mere presence in a technologically dominated world. We need not fear Terminators being sent from the future by Skynet to eradicate us, but rather 360 framing by technology. When Blum imagines 'the red lights sticking out of the concrete decking' and the networked systems intangibly running through the air, there is a similar sublime sense of incredible technological encompassment: 'The networked systems are everywhere: cell phones, streetlights, parking meters, ovens, hearing aids, light switches. But all invisible.'

In *The Matrix*, Morpheus offers Neo a red pill which will reveal to him the truth of the matrix. Blum attempts a similar awakening. Unfortunately, Blum's little red pill is more like a sedative than a stimulant. Blum's realization that the internet has physicality and consists of a series of tubing, wires and data hubs is less than revolutionary. However, it does remind the science fiction reader, so consumed by the metaphysical essence of cyberspace, that there is a very important corporeal component to virtual existence. Thus, when Blum reaches the heart of the internet in all its tubes and physical glory I was reminded of Morpheus' words to Neo upon awakening: 'Welcome to the real world.'



Simon J. James, *Maps of Utopia: H.G. Wells, Modernity, and the End of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2012, 230pp, £53)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

In 1910, George Bernard Shaw designed a stained glass window for the Fabian Society. It shows Shaw, Sidney Webb and Edward Pease industriously building the new world while other society members kneel reverently. Except, at the back, H.G. Wells is rising from his knees and thumbing his nose at the assembly. It is an image that says a great deal about Wells: he was a gadfly, an irritant, perpetually discontented with any society that would have him as a member.

Wells as contrarian was prone to making sweeping statements guaranteed to startle. In a letter to Shaw, for instance, he once proclaimed that 'Culture is merely the ownership of stale piddle' (18). And when his friend Henry James reproved Wells in an essay he wrote for the inaugural issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*, Wells responded with a savage attack upon James in his novel *Boon* (1915). This literary *battle royale* arose from their very different notions of culture. Simon James expresses it thus: language, '[t]he window, which for [Henry] James marks the detachment of the artist from the world, is for Wells a nexus between the controlled interior of work, duty, responsibility, idealism, and reading, and the uncontrollable exterior of Nature, sexual drive, and play' (92).

In other words, for Henry James Culture is a detached, distanced view of the messy confusions of everyday life, and therefore is something eternal and unchanging, while for Wells it is a direct engagement with that mess, and must therefore be susceptible to the ever-changing nature of the world. These differences had been rehearsed many times throughout their acquaintance, but *Boon* ended their friendship forever, and is often cited as the point at which Wells became *persona non grata* for the modernist critical establishment. But such postures were not merely intended to irritate the bourgeoisie, those representatives of high culture with whom Wells so often came into contact. Rather, as Simon James demonstrates in this fascinating book, they arise from a considered and consistent intellectual position, a position that underlined and increasingly came to dominate all of Wells' writing.

At first, and if we limit our attention to the brilliant scientific romances he wrote between 1895 and 1901, Wells' position may seem defensive. Ever since

he had won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science, and came under the influence of Thomas Huxley, Wells had been an enthusiast for science, and for the science of evolution in particular. When he wrote his scientific romances there was an underlying sense that his scientific worldview was under siege, that literary culture was based on a damaging and wilful ignorance of science. The Jamesian view of culture as unchanging and fully knowable closed the world, fixed it in place; but the scientist in Wells could not close things off in this way. That there is always more to know implies that there is always much that is unknown; our ignorance is part of the picture, and this is incorporated into the novels.

Repeatedly in Wells' scientific romances, the fantastic makes perception relative: that which the implied reader or narratee believes to be objectively true proves to be only partial or even inaccurate. This relativity is often shown by reference to books or newspapers (for instance, in *The War of the Worlds*) or the use of narrators reporting what they have been told rather than what they have seen (a consistent device from *The Time Machine* right up to *Star Begotten*). In part at least, as Simon James shows, this stems from the common Victorian notion of Nature as an incomplete or imperfectly understood book, a metaphor used by both Thomas Carlyle and Charles Darwin, the two great intellectual influences on Wells' thought.

If we do think of this anti-cultural stance as defensive, however, we need to rethink our ideas when we come to consider Wells' other writings. One of the things that is especially good about this book is that it does not concentrate on any one facet of Wells' work, but rather takes the story from his scientific romances, his realist novels, his utopian writing, and a variety of fictions and non-fictions dealing with subjects such as war and education. It is interesting that James pays attention to some of the less highly regarded works (*The Sea Lady, Joan and Peter*) while mentioning only briefly, if at all, some of the books that normally get a great deal of attention (*A Modern Utopia*; *Ann Veronica*; *The New Machiavelli*), though with an author as prolific as Wells having to make choices is inevitable and those choices are often very revealing. *Joan and Peter*, for instance, says a great deal about Wells' approach to education that feeds through to his whole approach to culture. And that, of course, is the entire thrust of this book.

Without suggesting anything rigid, monumental or unchanging about Wellsian thought (for Wells was the most changeable of writers), Simon James does tease out a continuing thread in the development of his ideas about literature. This thread stems from Wells' commitment to evolution, and takes form in his arguments with Jamesian notions of culture; it is perhaps most apparent in those works that do not consciously play with ideas of science. The scientific romances may open up the vistas, bold and unsettling, that science might reveal to us, but it is in the contemporary realist fictions that we most clearly see Wells undermining

static, backward-looking notions of culture.

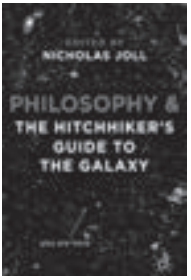
The idea that the book of Nature is incomplete is transformed into an underlying theme that all books are, of necessity, no more than part of the story. In the realist novels, Wells' characters often seek advancement or improvement through reading, only to be disappointed. Thus we get the images of torn or crumpled paper that proliferate throughout *Love and Mr Lewisham*; while Kipps' redemption comes not through reading books but by selling them; and 'Polly's enthusiasm for reading […] hinders – rather than assists – his development' (122). This distrust of the purely literary extends into the utopian fictions also. In *In the Days of the Comet*, Leadford's 'early literary ambitions are not a route out of his suffering, but a compensation for it' (154).

The thinking behind all of this, as James shows, is evolutionary: 'Evolutionary theory teaches Wells that his utopia cannot remain static, or it will become extinct' (128). For evolution to work, things must be in a constant state of change and development, and the necessity of change lies behind everything Wells wrote. Hence his gadfly character, for he is determined that things must always be under pressure to become new. Although James does not make this connection, we can see this impulse towards the new at work in every aspect of Wells' life, from his disruptive interventions in the Fabian Society to his various sexual adventures, and his often brief espousals of numerous causes, from women's rights to eugenics. In all of Wells' great fictions, written during the first twenty years of his career, we see this urge to newness at play. His characters are time and again required to turn away from the knowledge of the past and forge a new route, one that isn't to be found in old books. The rotted and unreadable library that the Time Traveller discovers in the Palace of Green Porcelain depicts this notion perfectly.

However, around 1909, Wells came to the conclusion that literature should not describe society but actively seek to improve it. James considers that the 'novels of the 1910s onwards are documents of dissent' (157). I would be inclined to be a little harsher. There were exceptions (*Mr Britling Sees It Through* was apparently the most commercially successful novel he had written to that point), but his novels from this time onwards are often little more than tracts that have been fictionalized with no great conviction. Which is no doubt why his finest books after that point have tended to be non-fiction, notably the massively successful *The Outline of History*, though even this was written with the intention of upsetting the applecart. Wells wanted schools to introduce a curriculum that gave greater emphasis to scientific thinking, and viewed history as a long and ongoing process in which the petty affairs of humanity played only an incidental part, so that politics and literature and other culturally defined subjects would be demoted in favour of ideas that reached into an ever-changing future. This set him completely at odds with the modernist aesthetic, which requires 'a strenuous

level of knowledge of the culture that is anathema to Wells's iconoclastic dismissal of the residuum' (190). In other words, Wells could only ever be at odds with modernism because modernism resides in a deep, critical appreciation of the moment while Wells must always restlessly move on to the next development. So we see that Wells' under-appreciation by the modernist literary establishment is an effect not just of his catastrophic quarrel with Henry James, but is actually inherent in the underlying causes of that quarrel, an enthusiasm for evolution that is expressed in a constant hunger for the future and for change.

Given all of this, and Wells' belief that 'high literary culture would become ossified rather than dynamic, not a practice but a relic' (19), the appearance of a book like this is contradictory. Certainly a study of Wells' aesthetic goes directly against everything that Wells himself stood for: the very best literature speaks to the moment and helps to guide it into the future, but once that moment is passed, then the literature belongs to the past and should be left behind. But I suspect that any such argument, much as Wells himself would have espoused it, has long been lost. Our shelves now groan under an increasing number of books about the man and his work. Still, Wells' evolutionary views seem to have a relevance today, and if that is the case then it is well that the books about him should be as clear, as well-argued and as comprehensive as this excellent example by Simon James.



Nicholas Joll, ed. *Philosophy and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 324p, £12.99)

Reviewed by Anna McFarlane (University of St Andrews)

Philosophy and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy is a friendly and accessible book in which most of the essays use Douglas Adams' trilogy in five parts to introduce and explore philosophical concepts, such as the ethics of vegetarianism or the metaphysical implications of artificial intelligence. Nicholas Joll puts readers at ease in his introduction which he writes in a light-hearted and colloquial style, including in-jokes that would serve to welcome fans to the collection. Joll explains that some essays in the collection aim to philosophize 'with' the *Hitchhiker's* novels while others philosophize 'from', as is the case in many collections of this kind. The essays philosophizing 'from' Adams' novels

suffer from a sense that the novels are being used as a springboard in order to aid the reader's understanding of the philosophy, rather than the philosophy working with the novels to arrive at new revelations. While this is a useful style when it comes to introducing younger readers to philosophical concepts and terminology, it is frustrating for the experienced reader who may be looking for more development, analysis and argument. Also, this approach means that some essays feel the need to shoehorn in references to the *Hitchhiker's* novels at arbitrary points in order to maintain the illusion that the essay is still engaging with them directly and in depth. This is at best distracting and, at worst, serves to trivialize important philosophical points while undermining the skill and complexity of Adams' prose. For example, in Ben Saunders and Eloise Harding's essay on the ethics of vegetarianism, they write, 'Factory-farmed animals are often kept in crowded, dark, dirty and generally inhumane conditions. It comes as no surprise that many caged animals seem as depressed as Marvin, given their miserable living conditions' (34). This brief mention of Marvin the paranoid android feels flippant when set alongside the real-life conditions of factory-farmed animals and serves to break the tone of an otherwise thoughtful overview of the philosophical arguments for vegetarianism.

However, not all chapters fall into this trap: the majority take the novels and their philosophical implications seriously. In 'From Deep Thought to Digital Metaphysics', Barry Dainton asks whether Arthur Dent's discovery that the Earth is an organic computer paid for and controlled by white mice could be a possibility. In doing so he takes the reader through the basics of digital metaphysics, a fascinating and relatively recent branch of philosophy in an essay which is highly informative while, at the same time, fully engaged with the novels both in tone and content. Amy Kind's chapter also stands out: she successfully and entertainingly intertwines Adams' writing with that of Albert Camus, giving the reader a greater understanding of philosophical debates pertaining to absurdity while lovingly engaging with the novels at all times. Joll and Alexander Pawlak also maintain an effective engagement with the novels in their concluding essay. They successfully put the *Hitchhiker's* novels in their context with respect to sf literature as a whole and produce an interesting reading of the novels set alongside Voltaire's *Candide*. The essay does suffer from brevity as it attempts to remain introductory; there seem to be more interesting conclusions for the writers to draw had they had more space and a more developed register, but the essay as it stands develops some of the themes mentioned in the collection's introduction.

One of these themes is Adams' love of the natural sciences. In the introduction, Joll raises the question of whether Adams can be considered philosophical when he places his ultimate faith in science. Joll describes Adams' position as 'scientism' and this sets up an interesting tension as the philosophical ideas in *Hitchhiker's*

are placed up against the possible anti-philosophy of their creator. This intriguing juxtaposition is never explicitly theorized in the remainder of the collection: while the chapter Joll co-authors with Pawlak could be considered an intervention as it suggests that through the medium of satire Adams can be described as an anti-philosophy philosopher, it does not explicitly engage with the questions asked in the introduction. Such an engagement would have helped to give the collection a sense of completion, perhaps as a conclusion. One feels that this omission is a missed opportunity, but perhaps one that readers may wish to address later in their own work.

As an introduction to key philosophical concepts for Adams' fans, *Philosophy and the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is very successful. The book is also served well by a glossary of philosophical terms so that the writers can use more specialized language when necessary but without boring more advanced readers with repeated exposition. Each chapter is thoughtfully supplemented with a reading list 'For Deeper Thought'. These suggestions for further reading give philosophical novices good guidance for acquiring a better understanding of the concepts introduced in each chapter. The chapters also benefit from detailed endnotes which often suggest interesting and alternate readings of the philosophical texts without making the chapters themselves over-complicated for novices through their inclusion in the main body of the text. There are even some points in the book where Joll explains which paragraphs are pitched at a higher level of difficulty and advises newcomers to philosophy to skip more complicated topics if they become overwhelmed with the subject matter. It would be particularly useful as a teaching tool for engaging students with philosophical material. However, for students who are interested primarily in *Hitchhiker's* itself, the collection may feel incomplete. While it may be of interest to students of Adams' work in beginning to look at the novels from a philosophical perspective, a student who has already begun such a project may find the book lacking in developed arguments to challenge their own. That being said, students will find the collection useful in that it raises some questions that could lead to interesting results when analysed as part of a more detailed and focused project.

Brian Attebery and Veronica Hollinger, eds. *Parabolas of Science Fiction* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013, 312p + xvp, £16.46)

Reviewed by Chris Pak
(University of Birmingham)

Formal and historical definitions of science fiction have accumulated into a bewildering range of complementary and competing positions and theories. As the boundaries of sf expanded, this attention to genre became increasingly refined, and sf criticism refocused attention away from theories that would artificially circumscribe the field. *Parabolas of Science Fiction* engages with this debate, offering up the metaphor of the sf parabola in an attempt to synthesize a range of approaches into a grand unifying theory that loosely describes the structure of the sf narrative. The essays collected in this volume consider how these parabolas function in specific works and in a range of sf storytelling traditions, aiming to broaden the appeal of this framework for understanding the discursive structure of sf.

Attebery's formulation of the sf parabola first appeared as 'Science Fiction, Parable, and Parabolas' in *Foundation* 34. Expanded in the introductory part of *Parabolas of Science Fiction*, Attebery explores the attributes of the narrative sf parabola, which he contends 'is distinctive among popular genres in that no degree of mode stretching is enough to throw a work out of category' (23). This claim points toward the heterogeneity of sf and the difficulty involved in formulating a theory that would take into account the full range of works that belong to its various traditions. Attebery addresses these differences by incorporating under the umbrella of the parabola theories that can accommodate the discursive variety of sf. Samuel R. Delany's reading protocols, Gary K. Wolfe's icons of sf, Phillipe Hamon's megatext, Bakhtinian dialogism and Robert Scholes' ways of reading: these approaches are united under the geometric image of the parabola. Narratological in its association with the notion of a story's trajectory, intertextual in its propensity to involve readers in a game of sf world building, and moral or pragmatic when understood in terms of the parable, the sf parabola is 'an open-ended curve and a vehicle for significance' (15).

So how do these essays take on the exploration of the sf parabola? Attebery's essay is joined by Terry Dowling's 'Dancing with Scheherazade: Some Reflections in the Djinni's Glass' and Graham Sleight's 'Breaking the Frame'. Dowling reflects on Jack Vance, Cordwainer Smith and Frank Herbert's influence on his writing, and on the borrowings from the *Arabian Nights* that his own Tom Rynosseros stories are built on. He outlines three techniques which he mobilizes to construct his post-apocalyptic futures: the 'medieval reset', the 'sea change', and the 'evocative evasion'. The medieval reset, legitimized in sf by an apocalyptic past, allows the narrative to arc toward the sea change, in which writers offer up wonders in a manner recalling the Todorovian marvellous. The evocative evasion refers to the narrative's linguistic dimension which, capitalizing on the rich allusiveness of invented terms, points toward the storyteller's use of language to tap into 'sound parabolic traditions to spin their yarns afresh' and create 'the dreamsongs and

vital touchstones of the new millennium' (35). Sleight explores works that playfully and often uncomfortably draw attention to their deliberate break away from the expected parabolas established by the sf tradition. Sleight points out that these sf parabolas involve both writers and readers in constructing the world of the text, and he explores three ways in which sf has played with the expected arcs of narrative. Works of the 'gradual break' variety progressively disassemble their parabolas as their narrative develops. One group of works of the 'abrupt break' variety affects a code-switch somewhere within the narrative, allowing them to develop along unexpected lines. Another 'abrupt break' variety ends their stories with the breakdown of the initial trajectory.

Three sections that home in on specific parabolas or sf 'parables' follow this introductory section, exploring issues of geopolitics, science and nature, gender and genre. Part two contains essays exploring science and genetic manipulation, sf from outside of the UK and US, and the synthesis of the family drama and sf. Jane Donawerth argues that Katherine MacLean's contribution as a writer of sf since the late 1940s, and her command of science as a novum, paved the way for female writers such as Joan Slonczewski, Vonda N. McIntyre and Octavia Butler. Donawerth considers MacLean's use of genetic engineering and cell-science in three of her short stories, which engage a parabola that critiques science conducted by men who do not fully take account of women's interests. Rachel Haywood Ferreira outlines a taxonomy for Latin American sf that reformulates the parabolas of Anglo-American first contact narratives. Ferreira shows how these writers adapt the first contact narrative to reflect their Latin American experience and their foregrounded history of colonial occupation. Amy J. Ransom explores the dominant Canadian sf parabola of the divided society and the linked uprising of the oppressed. Lisa Yaszek traces the blend of domestic fiction and sf in feminist technological-utopias by Mary E. Bradley Lane and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, through to the broadening of the domestic sf form in post-war works by Judith Merril and Kit Reed, and on to the ecological fiction of Kim Stanley Robinson. Yaszek argues that domestic fiction and sf are connected by disaster, and that this blend allows feminist writers to address issues of gender assymetric techo-scientific education and labour, patriarchy and capitalism.

Part three explores works that engage in an often explicit dialogue with the motifs of their predecessors. The writers grouped in this section analyse the trajectories of specific parabolas in works of adaptation. L. Timmel Duchamp addresses issues of species hybridity and the human-animal relationship. Duchamp, like Donawerth, explores challenges to the notion of the human, in this case by examining the way in which hybridity in works such as H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* and Franz Kafka's 'A Report to an Academy' highlight how animals who adopt human culture perform being human, thus challenging

the separation between the human and animal. Duchamp argues that language, a classic attribute separating humans from animals, would cease to be such in the event that animals came to possess a capacity for language. David M. Higgins' 'Coded Transmissions: Gender and Genre Reception in *The Matrix*' is an important essay in that it explores ways in which, despite the discursive openness of the sf parabola, some texts may remain ideologically closed. Higgins explores the 'awakening-from-simulation' parabola in the first *Matrix* film, along with its spin-off fictions – authorized and otherwise. Higgins argues that while the sf parabola may remain open, other generic influences such as action and romance (in the restricted sense of love-relationships) may redirect this swing into the unknown and effectively reproduce uneven gender politics. Sf, as a multi-discursive genre, is never automatically open – an important notion that helps regulate overly optimistic readings of the sf parabola.

John Rieder explores the parabola instituted by Mary Shelley: that of the failed experiment as a 'countermyth and a countercosmos, [that] cast[s] the universe itself as a (to date, failed) experiment' (170-1). Analysing in detail Olaf Stapledon's adaptation of *Frankenstein*, Rieder outlines how *Sirius* (1944) reformulates the motif of 'the queer family of man' to highlight the problems involved in living in close proximity with non-human others. Nicholas Ruddick continues this exploration of the parabolas springing from Shelley's seminal work, this time in the context of various film adaptations that profess faithfulness to the original. Ruddick's focus is pedagogical, and he aims to show how the megatextual cloud that is the contemporary reception of *Frankenstein* inextricably links the original with the parabolas traced by its adaptations in other formats.

The final section explores three critical approaches and three parabolas that point the way for new and exciting research. Paweł Frelik makes distinctions between 'retro', which 'recycles elements of the past and, functionally or superficially, restores them as a norm' (208), and 'retrofuturism', 'a practice that specifically exploits the tensions between ideas about the future from our historical past' (207), and as such can operate as a critique of techno-science and ideals of progress. Reading retrofuturism in specific works is contingent, however, as Frelik demonstrates in his analysis of the reception of *Blade Runner* and *Equilibrium*, and crucially, *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* and *Alien Trespass*. Gary K. Wolfe explores the Babylon parabola in the context of 'alternative cosmology' in the work of a writer (Ted Chiang) who certainly deserves wider critical attention. Wolfe contrasts the alternate history with that of the alternative cosmology to illustrate the sf expectation that stories be set either in this universe, on worlds that diverge historically from the current timeline, or in parallel universes. Wolfe argues that Chiang, in his development of several alternate cosmologies, manages to liberate himself from these restrictive sf conventions. Finally, Veronica Hollinger

explores Jacques Derrida's notion of the archive, a concept that has not infiltrated sf criticism to any considerable degree, but which promises many fruitful avenues for investigation. Hollinger considers the archive and archiving in the context of motifs related to the state of a future repository, such as the Palace of Green Porcelain in *The Time Machine*. Offering a route for considering the work of time in sf in the statement 'science fiction historicises the present' (243), Hollinger's analysis illustrates the ways in which sf exhibits an 'archive anxiety', a fear that the trajectory from past to future is tenuous and that present knowledge will be irretrievably lost (244). Archiving is propelled by an archive fever that has as its underside a death drive, which works as a counterforce that holds the possibility of the destruction of the archive open – a possibility entertained by much sf.

Parabolas of Science Fiction offers an approach to conceptualizing sf that is compatible with a number of theoretical conceptions of genre. Taken together, the essays explore how the parabola works in sometimes significantly disparate examples of sf, in novels, short stories and film. Rather than delineating the operation of the parabola, these writers avoid taxonomies and a fully adumbrated theoretical structure that would circumscribe the effectiveness of this concept for this multi-discursive and polymorphous mode. It explores several important critical theories and thematic interests that dominate the contemporary field and so is especially useful for the student looking for an introduction to the vast range of parabolas that constitute what we call sf. The attention to human-animal studies in several of these essays is especially welcome, since sf's interest in biology and the non-human suggests that the question of the animal and its relationship to the human are central to the mode. *Parabolas of Science Fiction* eschews formula, preferring instead to signpost routes through a territory for others to explore the linguistic and formal features and strategies that underpin the dialogical nature of sf. The metaphor of the parabola offers a convenient handle that encapsulates the idea of the borrowings conducted by sf, along with the parable-like connection of sf to the contemporary world. As such, it is a valuable consolidation of several orientations to sf, and perhaps other genre fictions.

Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, eds. *1950s Rocketman TV Series and Their Fans* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 270 pp, £55)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer (University of Liverpool)

During the 1950s a generation of children in the USA became attuned to the inevitable arrival of space travel through the adventures of the wholesome heroes of the spaceways who appeared on their T.V. channels. Often (extremely) low-budget, and preaching a morality in which purchasing the products of the shows' sponsors was sometimes as important as buying into the simplistic good-guy/bad-guy conflicts shown to viewers, these adventures were escapist fantasy for younger viewers deriving (as Roy Kinneard argues in his prologue) from the *Flash Gordon* serials of the pre-war years. The contributors to Miller and Van Riper's fine collection argue that these shows were firmly linked to Cold War anxieties and that their tone was often as much didactic as aspirational, training their young viewers to become good citizens of the capitalist consumer utopia. While the adventures of Flash Gordon were endlessly re-shown during this period, and 'that Buck Rogers stuff' (Buck was one of the earliest heroes to be televised in the 1950s) served to disparage science fiction of all kinds, the later series were rooted in two aspects of the post-War consensus. First, the military use of space (through satellites, weapons and surrogate warfare between humanity and thinly disguised totalitarian aliens) was an inevitable development. Second, the good life of the economic boom and the consumer culture was worth fighting for. Flash and Buck had set the tone but the gloriously ramshackle space shows of the 1950s were snapshots of the future and, despite the disdain with which they were held by older sf fans desperate to put aside childish things, arguably the last hurrah of what William Gibson was to dub the 'Gernsback Continuum'.

Henry Jenkins' foreword establishes an overall context for these shows. In particular, he notes interesting uses of these 'space-cadet' programmes in other (mainstream) shows like *The Honeymooners* and *Dennis the Menace* as signifiers of modernity, superseding the 'cowboy' myth as 'a re-reading of America's manifest destiny' (xix). He also hints at the development of the sense of an audience and 'the promises of television as an immersive and interactive media […] now more fully realized through contemporary computer games' (xxi-xxii). If the implications of Jenkins' suggestions are not always followed through by each essay, what comes from the collection is a definite feel for the position of these programmes as representing the heart of US (and more importantly, Western) culture) as well as their importance in the history of science fiction. The collection does not always escape a sense of gosh-wow nostalgia, but this is a demerit only if thought to be. In fact, the closing essay by Gary Hughes is a fine piece of evidence that the sense of wonder instilled by watching the serials as a child developed, for many, into a deep playful creativity in adulthood. Elsewhere, the essays provide useful introductions to the culture of 1950s television, and the use of science fiction as both entertainment and didactic tool. The whole certainly explores areas most histories of sf barely touch on, and is to be welcomed.

John C. Tibbets draws parallels between the escapist spaces of these programmes and J.M. Barrie's Neverland, arguing that both *Peter Pan* and *Tom Corbett* are 'modern-day fairy tales' (34). Both share a collective origin with fairy tale. Although we can point to Barrie as the author of *Peter Pan*, its status as a play, with extensive revisions over many years before a definitive version was published, is unstable, while the status of *Tom Corbett* as a television programme with multiple inputs makes the idea of authorship a fuzzy one even before one enters the realm of genre. (Tibbets explains the partial origin of the story in Robert Heinlein's *Space Cadet* (1948), but also interestingly locates the appeal of both Barrie's work and the 'Rocket' programmes in the utopian exhilaration of the idea of flight, which spawned numerous series of aerial adventures in the 1920s and '30s.) Space was the obvious next step after powered flight, but the symbolic liberating feel of the experience was what mattered to young audiences identifying with what they could see on stage or screen.

Robert Jacobs describes how these series constructed ideas of masculinity, focusing upon the heroes' teenage assistants and juvenile sidekicks. These sometimes flawed but enthusiastic figures offered spaces for young viewers to insert themselves into the narrative, but their relationships with the authority-figures also argued the case for teamwork and discipline. Jacobs argues that the boy-heroes served to internalize group values, unquestioningly accepting their organizations' values rather than questioning or criticizing them. Along with other contributors, Jacobs emphasizes the way young viewers were 'recruited' into junior 'arms' of the organizations portrayed in screen, such as the 'Video Rangers' of *Captain Video* whose viewers were encouraged to sign up to racial tolerance, defence of the Flag, support for the individual and resistance to 'aggression and tyranny wherever they appear on Earth' (61). The new breed of Cold War warriors were, however, 'men who fought with their minds rather than their muscles' (62).

Amy Foster writes about how the shows' female characters were portrayed and how female viewers were affected. While female characters were frequently consistent with '50s ideals about the role of women in society, some, like *Space Angel*'s Crystal Mace and *Flash Gordon*'s Dale Arden were particularly strong, independent models. Images of women scientists and engineers were shown positively. While she points out laughably stereotypical instances, Foster compares the 'space programmes' favourably with popular mainstream series such as *I Love Lucy* in which, she says, women who attempt to move into the masculine world of work fail comically. With all their faults, these programmes may have provided the background for the young generation of viewers to overcome their conditioning. Like Jacobs, Foster brings cold war rhetoric into the discussion, suggesting that the shows aimed to 'influence and inspire children of both sexes' (75).

The second section explores more fully the way these series tapped into

fantasies of the future. Howard E. McCurdy describes the dialectic between fantasy and reality in 'Space Fever': much of the science in these shows was comically inaccurate and realistic attempts at presenting space travel often unsuccessful (the 1955 *Conquest of Space* was a disastrous flop). As Ray Bradbury is quoted as saying, it was the 'staying power' of fantasy which appealed (88). Realistic forecasts were often pedestrian, and certainly provisional, and for the television shows in question budgets rarely allowed believable sets and special effects. However, the art of Chesley Bonestell, whose images in *Colliers* (1952) gave a high-quality contrast to $25-a-week spending on 'Cosmic Ray Vibrators' (93), and Disney's mid-50s realistic animations, with voiceover narrations by Willy Ley and Wernher von Braun, offered alternatives. Patrick Lucanio and Gary Coville add to their exploration of the American space programme as rooted in aspirations and values presented in shows like *Captain Video*, themselves drawing upon the earlier visions of people like Robert Goddard, 'the father of American rocketry' (97), the post-war missile programme, and the flying saucer craze which tapped into fears that *others* may be spying upon *us*. They describe the organized fandom of *Captain Video*'s Video Rangers and other associated loyalty groups with their membership cards, pledges, contests, and special offers, as part of television's insistence on developing a sense of inclusion within the viewers which would feed back into support for the shows' sponsors. This is explored in three further essays by Lawrence R. Samuel, S. Mark Young and Jean-Noel Bassior. These focus less upon the plots and space-travel aspirations of the shows themselves and more upon the toys, memorabilia, membership paraphernalia and other ephemera generated for the delight of the young audiences. The associated images, especially those for Young's essay, evoked pangs of unashamed desire in this reader. Samuel on advertising is particularly interesting, showing how Ovaltine becomes the official drink of *Captain Midnight*'s 'Secret Squadron' and demonstrating how 'A typical television show of the 1950s was thus an integrated package of entertainment and salesmanship' (135). Eating a bowl of American cereal was as patriotic an act as defeating a despot (138).

As fascinating, though, is J.P. Telotte's earlier essay which, though situated together with the two essays exploring 'Reaching for Tomorrow', is not about the *science fictional* future but the potential of the very technology with which these shows were presented: television. Telotte reveals how television itself changed the way its viewers saw the world, creating 'good television viewers' (127) and how shows like the aptly-titled *Captain Video* spoke directly to this change: metaphorically by imagining future worlds in which video screens, eavesdropping devices, 'Ultraplanetary Transmitters' and other such props were what the viewers saw upon *their* screens, and literally by addressing their young viewers directly to encourage them to consume sponsoring products, or to draw attention to cliff-

hangers and dramatic moments in the narrative.

Three further essays return to the political messages within the shows. Wheeler Winston Dixon shows how *Rocky Jones, Space Ranger*, a comparatively high-budget production, promoted hopeful messages about a democratic future. Mick Broderick describes the actual contacts between George Bilson, producer of *Captain Midnight*, and the Pentagon, in which Bilson emphasized the propaganda elements within his show. The editors look at the long-running *Captain Z-Ro* series to remind us that there were other didactic elements to children's television. *Captain Z-Ro* emphasized the benefits of knowledge, especially (through time travel and fantastic observational devices) the value of understanding history and safeguarding its proper outcomes. British readers will think of *Doctor Who* in this context, with its similar concern with educational values and lesser focus upon military conflict.

For many sf fans, the literary and dramatic values of these shows were negligible, their messages pernicious, and their place in the construction of sf as a literature of ideas an almost wholly negative one. Their difference from more recent examples of children's product-based science fiction (the *Transformers* series springs to mind) may simply be a matter of generational nostalgia. Yet this collection of essays seems to argue not only for a more nuanced approach to the *Rocketman* series but also for a sense that they presented the hopes and fears of the decade just as effectively as the fare offered to older consumers of sf in magazines and books. Their low-budget approach stripped these hopes and fears back to the bone. Charming trash they may be to modern eyes, but in the context of the Cold War, Sputnik, and the emerging new communications technologies based upon images upon a screen, they loom large. Despite references to, for example, Bradbury, Heinlein and Bonestell, the value of this book for students of film and T.V. might have been enhanced by more sustained contextualizing in terms of the magazine culture which our viewers' older siblings (or parents!) would have been consuming at the time. Nevertheless, it is a significant contribution to our understanding of sf in the 1950s.

Andrew M. Butler, *Solar Flares: Science Fiction in the 1970s* (Liverpool University Press, 2012, 288p, £70)

Reviewed by Alvaro Zinos-Amaro

Andrew M. Butler's exploration of 1970s sf is a must for anyone interested in the history of the field and the myriad ways it has been shaped by, and has recorded, that decade's major social and political upheavals. As Butler points out in the prologue, the motivation for such a book is straightforward enough. Most histories of the genre tend to associate the 1960s with the New Wave and the 1980s with cyberpunk, thus omitting specific commentary on the 1970s. The middle of this sandwich tends to be seen as mostly filler, and is typically lumped in with the end of the 1960s, as though it represents little more than the waning and eventual decline of the New Wave. Butler's book makes a strong case for reevaluating this attitude and proves the usefulness of considering the 1970s in its own right. The decade was rife with shifts in the perception and politics of ethnicity, gender, sexual identity and orientation, class, environmentalism and imperialism, and these shifts influenced sf in complex, sometimes contradictory, ways. They deserve our full attention.

As Butler is quick to point out, his approach consists of breaking down the decade into 'various clusters of events, and a series of micronarratives' (7). What this means is that each of his sixteen chapters begins with a brief statement of the socio-cultural phenomenon under consideration, a list of the key representative works selected, and then proceeds with detailed discussions of each. The chapters may therefore be read out of order without significant loss to the reader. There are some obvious advantages to such a strategy. It helps unravel key tangles in the skein of 1970s forces. For example, by studying feminism and gay liberation separately, Butler can illustrate how some feminist texts are problematic from an LGBT perspective, and some LGBT texts problematic from a feminist perspective, a task whose difficulty would be compounded by examining both simultaneously. Another benefit is that some works are afforded more than one reading. The original *Star Wars* film trilogy, for example, is discussed in detail both in the chapter on Vietnam and in the chapter on blockbusters.

Needless to say, there are some drawbacks to Butler's attempt at parsing. One is that, particularly during the second half of the book, it becomes easy to lose a sense of the staggering accretion of the decade's changes, and the multiple directions in which they pushed sf. One tends, instead, to become absorbed with nuanced interpretations of individual works. One also suspects a certain level of arbitrariness in the organizing schema that may undermine their enduring academic value. Who is to say, for example, that architecture deserves its own section while Cold War tensions (they crop up regularly throughout the text) don't?

It may be unfair to Butler to focus so much on his chapter criteria which are, after all, simply pragmatic separating categories. His book *is* woven together with a sort of through-line, comprised of fundamentally two ideas: one, that the prevalent

mode of 1970s fiction is ambiguity (and more specifically, amphicatastrophe, which avoids the happy endings typical of eucatastrophes and the failure-cum-catharses of dyscatastrophes), and two, the recurring notion of 'invisible enemies', normative assumptions like 'heterosexuality, patriarchy, capitalism' (237) and so on. Said less technically, 1970s narratives are deeply conflicted, and offer no easy answers to the question of what to substitute for the familiar.

The testing search for these answers is fascinating to read about. In some cases it led artists to innovative approaches and visionary techniques such as fragmentation, self-parody, or meta-fiction. The record of key 1970s works that 'pushed the envelope' is quite an astonishing one. Every time I remember that Samuel R. Delany's massive *Dhalgren* (1975) was not only well-received but also became a bestseller (!), I shake my head in disbelief. Many writers, such as John Brunner, Thomas M. Disch, Barry N. Malzberg, Joe Haldeman, Ursula Le Guin, Kate Wilhelm, Joanna Russ, Kit Reed, James Tiptree Jr., Pamela Sargent and Angela Carter, arguably produced their finest works during this decade.

On the other hand, the decade's profound instability and exhaustion sent other creators (and audiences) flocking back towards comfort and escapism at unprecedented rates: witness the rise of sword-and-planetary romances, Tolkien imitators, fantasy role-playing games, the aforementioned *Star Wars* films, the first two *Superman* movies, or series like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Flash Gordon*. Finally, poised somewhere between those trying to break the mould and those seeking solace within its confines, were veteran 'first sf' writers like Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Clifford D. Simak and Leigh Brackett, from whose 1970s works one cannot easily infer heightened artistic ambitions, but who nevertheless reaped many of the decade's top awards.

One of the things I enjoyed most about Butler's study was the cross-media range of works discussed (albeit with an acknowledged Anglophone bent), and the inclusion of authors whose works have been neglected, for example, D.G. Compton, Michael Coney, Richard Cowper and Sue Payer. (Some of these authors will shortly be made available by a series of Gollancz omnibus reprints.) This is both exhilarating and a trifle daunting. I also found much value in individual discussions and comparisons, for example the concept of 'surplus repression' in horror works or some of the less obvious differences between *Star Trek* and *Blake's 7*. Butler also adds his own speculation in places. He wonders, for example, whether Payer, author of *Second Body* (1979), wasn't really the pseudonym of a male writer. (At the time of writing this review I have contacted Carrie O'Maley Voliva, who in a *Goodreads* review of Payer's novel identifies herself as the author's granddaughter, but have not yet received confirmation one way or another.)

On the flipside, I did discover a few omissions which, in a book otherwise systematically thorough and generously broad, ought to be noted. Poul Anderson

is named only twice, although *Tau Zero* was a Hugo nominee in 1971, and he won Hugos for 'The Queen of Air and Darkness' (1971), 'Goat Song' (1972) and 'Hunter's Moon' (1978). Though at least four of Robert Silverberg's novels are discussed, there is no mention of *Son of Man* (1971), *A Time of Changes* (1971), *Dying Inside* (1972) or *The Book of Skulls* (1972). George Alec Effinger is referenced, but his Nebula-nominated novel *What Entropy Means to Me* (1972), and his strong body of short fiction is elided. Michael Bishop, who was repeatedly a Hugo and Nebula nominee, is absent from this history. Perhaps more egregious is the surface treatment of Norman Spinrad, who is name-checked three times, but none of whose works – ground-breaking novels like *The Iron Dream* (1972) or major collections such as *The Last Hurrah of the Golden Horde* (1970) and *No Direction Home* (1975) – are even referenced.

Then, too, in the case of works such as J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973), I occasionally found that some of Butler's observations gave me pause. Consider: 'With Ballard, it is never quite clear whether he is critiquing or celebrating the excessive behaviour of his characters' (212). Why, I wonder, must he be doing one or the other? Can the 'excessive behaviour' not exist for its own aesthetic reasons without requiring the author's judgment? In an earlier discussion of Ballard's work, Butler astutely points out that 'homosexual acts are another form of paraphilia alongside many behaviours' (164), suggesting that we should not read much into them. A similar case, I think, can be made for the above character behaviour. That said, I did find Butler's take of *Crash* as a work of Swiftian satire intriguing.

Another item on my wish-list would be Butler's engagement with previous works of scholarship that directly overlap or anticipate some of his schema. Gary K. Wolfe's *The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction* (1979), for example, contains lengthy analyses of 'The City' and 'The Wasteland' as prevalent icons in sf, which would be relevant to Butler's treatments of sf in terms of architecture and environment. Still, I would not want the reader to glean from these comments that I found the work lacking in any serious way. As a one-stop record of 1970s sf in print, film, television, music and games, *Solar Flares* is indispensable and remedies a long-standing gap in historical scholarship. At times Butler's descriptions and summaries may feel a tad familiar, but his knack for even-handed synthesis, and the enormous specificity of cultural and historical detail that he provides as context for his discussions, are to be heartily applauded.

Eric Frank Russell, *Wasp* (Gollancz, 2013, 180 pp, £8.99)

Reviewed by Jacob Edwards

Earthman James Mowry is something of a nonconformist, and has very little interest in the ongoing conflict between Earth and the Sirian Combine, although he grew up on the Sirian home planet. He is quick-thinking, can speak the Sirians' language, and is perverse enough to appreciate the sly gumption of fighting a war by non-conventional means. The Terran Secret Service wants Mowry to become a wasp: a lone operative whose mission it is to pose as something greater and to stir up trouble behind enemy lines. Just as a real wasp, by its very presence within, can cause a car to crash so too might one man bring mayhem to the Sirian war effort. Pinning his ears back and dyeing his face purple, Mowry resigns himself to buzzing bold and bow-legged into the breach.

Known primarily as a master of magazine-length fiction – he chalked up more than a hundred short stories and novelettes – Liverpudlian libertarian writer, Eric Frank Russell, was not as prolific a novel-writer as many of his contemporaries. What he lacked in quantity of output, however, he more than made up for in quality. His first novel, *Sinister Barrier* (1939), is darkly Fortean and often credited (albeit apocryphally) with having galvanized John W. Campbell into launching the pulp magazine *Unknown*. Russell's last novel, *With a Strange Device* (1964) is similarly disquieting, while those in-between tend more towards conventional science fiction. All of Russell's full-length pieces were serialized or expanded from stories he wrote for pulp magazines, yet his prose carries an odd flair, his authorial voice is distinct, and if his work shares one characteristic with pulp fiction then it is the narrative pull that sweeps readers up and carries them along. Russell's novels were not churned out but were the carefully refined product of his best ideas, elevated and given pride of place. From the hardboiled alien possession tale *Three to Conquer* (1956) to the award-winning irreverence of *The Great Explosion* (1962), Russell spurned slapdashery and instead purveyed some of the most compelling concepts in genre sf.

Wasp (1957) has now appeared in the SF Masterworks, bearing the same cover quote by Terry Pratchett as did the Collectors' Edition of 2000: 'I'd have given anything to have written *Wasp*. I can't imagine a funnier terrorists' handbook.' And therein lies the rub. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001,

Russell's plot, which in the context of World War Two and the Allied stand against Germany and Japan had appeared unimpeachably laudable, was turned on its head. Neil Gaiman, who had optioned the film rights to *Wasp*, abandoned his screenplay. 'It would be a very long time', writes Lisa Tuttle in her introduction, 'before anyone, especially in America, was ready for a terrorist hero […] Russell was surely well aware of the moral ambiguity of this tale.'

The invocation of 'terrorist' brings with it connotations that misrepresent Russell's story. Mowry remains an agent of one military power locked in open and declared mutual conflict with another. He is, at very worst, a wartime saboteur masquerading as a fifth columnist. Consequently, any moral ambiguity that might exist will come not from some tenuous link between wasps and Boeing 767s but rather from an objective assessment of the Terran and Sirian Empires' respective culpability in initiating and sustaining hostilities. As there is no mention of this in the book – merely a gently pushed allusion to the Sirians being not unlike the Japanese of WWII – there is no reason to view Russell's protagonist as anything more or less than what Russell himself intended; that is, as a rather unzealous patriot who grumblingly responds to the call of a government he could just about take or leave. Mowry is phlegmatic, not fanatical. Both he and his opponents are depicted as long-suffering sheep (in Mowry's case, more aptly a black sheep), rained on by life and herded about the place under the auspice of crooked shepherds. *Wasp* is playfully derisive of those who refuse to think for themselves, or who submit wilfully to the blinkers thrust upon them by bureaucratic dogma.

Tuttle, though, is no fool. In her introduction she remains discerning of context and makes no censure of Russell for his measly depiction of women. (In deference to Mowry's need to run rings around his foe, the male preponderance does not seem out of place.) Clearly, Tuttle recognizes *Wasp* for the droll action/adventure romp that it is, yet still she plays to the terrorism angle, not debunking the fallacy but instead merely fortifying skittish readers against the possible taint of engaging with – or even finding humour in – a tale that endorses contract killings and letter bombs. This slant does something of a disservice to Russell, and is reinforced both by the wording of Pratchett's commendation and by an incendiary cover illustration that for all its hazy evocativeness shares precious little in common with the text. Worse still, Gollancz has, for the third consecutive time, issued *Wasp* in its original but poorly abridged form.

Russell's first port of call when submitting manuscripts was to *Astounding*, but Campbell rejected *Wasp* on the grounds of its being too much like Russell's recently accepted novelette, 'Nuisance Value', and so *Wasp* passed to US publisher Avalon, whose editor (Robert A.W. Lowndes) cropped the story by some 2800 words. Not only was *Wasp* cut, it was done in a quite barbarous fashion, and when Dennis Dobson published the first UK edition, Russell insisted that

his unadulterated manuscript be restored. Several imprints (Panther, Ballantine, NESFA) have subsequently run with the Dobson text, but others (Perma, Bantam, Methuen) have clung to the Avalon version. Sadly, Gollancz have re-released a printing of *Wasp* that in substance remains inferior to half the crease-worn volumes that can be found in second-hand bookshops.

To give credit where it is due, Gollancz continues to make readily available a novel that has not always received the recognition it deserves. Russell takes a simple idea and transplants it to a wartime setting. A perennial critic of all narrow-minded, top brass mentalities, Russell wrote many stories where individualists run rings around clodhopping armed forces. Substituting a police state for the army, *Wasp* is a masterful work within this sub-genre. Russell extrapolates thoughtfully, elegantly, and humorously from his premise, and such is the draw of his narrative that Mowry's exploits do take on a romantic appeal akin to James Bond. (Jack L. Chalker, in his introductions to the 1986 Del Rey and 2001 NESFA editions of the book, had no compunction in claiming that Russell had worked for the British secret service during World War Two alongside Ian Fleming, no less. Sadly, this assertion is apocryphal.)

Nearly sixty years after its first publication, *Wasp* retains a vitality and imminence, the lustre of which many contemporaneous novels have lost over time. Mowry shows no great antipathy towards the Sirians in general – nor pleasure at their suffering – and when he targets individuals, for the most part these are unconscionable sadists whom Russell shades *ipso facto* as having met some degree of natural (not merely Terran) justice. Mowry is depicted as the shrugging product of necessity, motivated more by fatalism than by blind faith or fervour. In historical context he deserves to be viewed as neither villain nor antihero, but rather a Golden Age sf embodiment of the cocksure British Tommy, downtrodden but indomitable of spirit. Mowry represents the aspect of human nature that is irrepressible while the Sirians for their part stand as both the oppressed masses of society and – embodied in fat-cat officials and Kaitempi thugs – the oppressors who grind them underfoot. It is the universality of such character types that has kept *Wasp* relevant throughout the years. The final, bittersweet twist is that its hero remains unsung. Russell wryly thwarts us in our appreciation of his protagonist, for if Mowry should prevail, then neither glory nor triumph awaits, not even recognition. Divorced from its sting, the wasp reverts to its natural state, becoming inconsequential; a non-entity. Although he may be bottled up and released time and again to wreak havoc upon new worlds, on each occasion Mowry will be forgotten … at least, until another new reader discovers Eric Frank Russell and his incomparable *Wasp*.

Cherie Priest, *Boneshaker* (2012, Tor, 416 pp, £7.99) and *Dreadnought* (2012, Tor, 400pp, pb, £7.99)

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Most prominently associated with James Blaylock, Tim Powers and K.W. Jeter, steampunk has emerged not only as a literary but also as an artistic and sub-cultural form. Taking its cue from Henry Mayhew's account of the London poor, the sub-genre has explored sf's Victorian roots and riffed off them. Similar to Gail Carriger's *Parasol Protectorate* books, Cherie Priest's *Clockwork Century* novels feature strong women who are busy understanding and making their own worlds despite the paucity of material available to them. Priest's women determine their own lives and histories, changing the world in spite of the men around them. Like cyberpunk's hacker culture, steampunk draws upon William Gibson's observation that 'the street finds its own uses for things' ('Burning Chrome', 1982); finding new uses for equipment or home-brewing a problem-solving piece of kit. In this respect, however, steampunk evokes the Victorian imagination and desire for technological craftsmanship. By retrofitting the cyberpunk aesthetic to sf's nineteenth-century origins, steampunk emphasizes that the need for innovation is not just a fashion statement (cf. Cory Doctorow's *Makers*) but explores the most viable ways of remaking an otherwise broken, post-industrial world.

Given that the world Priest creates has failed governance on many levels and is war-torn, it would be tempting to describe her politics as libertarian. Instead, the broken society is seen as an opportunity or a challenge to live in. As with the cyberpunks, Priest draws on the Gernsbackian notion of extrapolating from the present to look to the future but, unlike in genre sf, she does not need to define or explain her ideas whilst she envisions a society in development; it just works. Yet this is a deeply physical world, tied to its own hacking and making. Priest's inventions imply a real sense of ethics, in that her imaginary technology has ethical consequences, leading to at least one tragedy, and to one that may yet unfold. It is an acceptance (though not an uncontested one) of the industrial roots of steampunk, which Blaylock and Powers viewed as a purely formal or iconic source of inspiration.

Drawing upon her own historical context, Priest uses the American Civil War and American urbanism as backdrops for her invented world. The history, as noted in each book, is rethought and refitted; in particular, she contemplates

the place of the city in US genre fiction. As with the mad-scientist figure, these settings become different frontiers with their own challenges. In an echo of the nineteenth century American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, the frontier is portrayed as ever-moving, going from Seattle to New Orleans, across Texas, forcing the characters to adapt to new circumstances. There is a central mystery underpinning the first two novels that has not yet been explained but which hints at a downfall to come. The appearance of zombies and gas warfare are harbingers of some marvellous portent.

Priest uses the ideas of kinship and wide, open spaces to reinvent her own, inherited US mythology. Extrapolating from the idea of the railway, she brings in airships as the major mode of transport. She builds on and develops steampunk archetypes: the goggles on the hat, the airship as mode of transport, and the excessive, industrialized city. Clockwork replaces the cyber but we might regard the hacker as the mad inventor, chafing against constraint and rules. Priest's *Clockwork Century* rethinks steampunk and begins answering some of the challenges (e.g. tacit support for imperialism) made against it. By combining twin figures – the steampunk inventor and the cyberpunk hacker – she gives her novels a new depth, and mixes in a core of science fiction in a way that Blaylock, for example, never quite achieves. There is a sepia tinge to the fiction that fiercely questions the idea that this world is all we have. There is no future gazing but an exploration of the present time, exploring anxieties and lending them a voice.

Neil Gaiman, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (Headline, 2013, 256p, £16.99)

Reviewed by Leimar Garcia-Siino (University of Liverpool)

When discussing the appeal and merits of Gaiman's novels, critics, reviewers, and Gaiman himself, have tended to make the caveat that readers who like one of Gaiman's works will not necessarily (and quite probably not) like some of his other works. This is because Gaiman does not want to write the same novel or story twice; a curious trait, considering his penchant for retellings and pastiches. However, despite the noticeable patterns and themes that can be identified as connecting his various narratives, it is clear Gaiman wants to explore a new story

avenue each time. On the one hand, he pursues 'what ifs' and, on the other hand, he writes primarily for his own enjoyment; these are stories he wants to read. On the contrary, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, while undoubtedly a story he would have liked to read, can be more accurately described as a story he had to write because 'the story made him do it'.

Out of all of Gaiman's novels, *Lane* is the first one written in first-person narration. As a result, the main character's name is never disclosed and, as with most first-person narrators, he is largely unreliable. This is compounded by the fact that the flashback structure of the narrative is particularly emphatic about the mutability of memory. Nonetheless, the perspective effectively brings the story much closer to the reader than any of Gaiman's previous works, creating a much more intimate bond both with the character and with Gaiman. Indeed, the writing process of this novel was much more involved and personal than with some of his other works, as the author has explained during various interviews and talks; originally intended as a short story for his wife, the word count grew to the size of a short novel. Because of this, while still a novel, it is unmistakably the most autobiographical-like of Gaiman's narratives. Fuelled by the author's memories of his childhood, the novel draws from real instances and events such as climbing down the side of the house using the piping, his father's failed attempts at cooking, and most significantly, the titular lane itself. This means that, although the events in *Lane* – those that are fantastical and magically impossible – are pure imaginative constructs, the protagonist and the setting reflect something very akin to reality, and it is this that makes the novel so compelling.

The novel centres on an unnamed protagonist who is returning to his childhood town for a funeral. After the funeral, on the way to his sister's house, he stops by to contemplate his childhood home and the strange way in which it is no longer his house. From the start, Gaiman makes it clear he is concerned with the dynamics of memory, its evanescence and unreliability. The protagonist, compelled by his emerging memories, then decides to drive to the end of the lane where he used to live, to the house of a childhood friend – a girl who had an ocean. This first scene, along with the final scenes of the adult protagonist leaving, serves as a bookend for the primary story. Told retrospectively, the main plot describes both the everyday and the supernatural events of the protagonist's life from his seventh birthday party, his meeting of Lettie Hempstock, her unusual family and their incursions into the pond Lettie calls her ocean, to the terrifying housekeeper Ursula Monkton, the hardships she causes in the boy's life and their shockingly dark conclusion. The fact that it is told in flashback means that the narrator's voice is that of an adult. As such, although the majority of the novel is about a child, the story cannot strictly be said to be for children.

Contradictorily, it also has to be acknowledged that the novel shares plenty

in common with Gaiman's children's literature, specifically *Coraline* (2002) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008). The flashback narrative follows what could be described as very simple YA fantasy narrative formats: a lonely but bright child gets a (supernatural) friend, his peaceful life is interrupted and invaded by an evil creature that must be vanquished through combined efforts and bravery, and in the end the lonely child learns about the value of family and true friendship. Moreover, *Lane* lacks Gaiman's characteristic metafictive pastiching, referencing, and overall hodge-podging of the fantastic. In addition, the main character of *Lane* is unwillingly made to forget the fantastic in both the inner and outer narratives. However, where Coraline has to renounce ruling a world of her own and Nobody Owens has to renounce his ghostly family, the protagonist in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* has to give up more – the fantastic and the part of his identity that is tied to it. The bittersweet ending is closely related to the concept of growing up, but from the perspective of an adult as opposed to that of a child. In essence, the narrative is concerned with telling the story, not with being overtly prescriptive or nostalgically evocative; Gaiman is not concerned with 'who the story is for'.

Fantasy trope subversions and intended readers aside, Gaiman is a master storyteller. *Lane* is magically gripping, and though that may sound absurdly sentimental, it accurately explains the charm of Gaiman's fantasy. His writing style is one that instils a sense of constant expectancy of the wondrous and marvellous, as though the author is privy to mystical truths to which the reader, by being in confabulatory league with the author, is granted access. The opening lines in the epigraph exemplify this:

> It was only a duck pond, out at the back of the farm. It wasn't very big.
> Lettie Hempstock said it was an ocean, but I knew that was silly.
> She said they'd come here across the ocean from the old country.

The first sentence establishes the narrator's need to be convinced of the mundane reality of the setting, accentuated by the reiteration of 'It wasn't very big'. The 'only' implies a doubtful reassurance – an attempt to dispel something unbelievable. Then Lettie Hempstock appears: her name conjures images of ancient times and, more importantly, witches. ('Hempstock' also appears in *The Graveyard Book* as Liza's last name and in *Stardust* as the maiden name of Dunstan Thorn's wife, Daisy.) Finally, 'the old country' instantly speaks to all fantasy readers and awakens images of olden days, mystical origins, fundamental magics and primordial creatures from the beginning of time. It is a familiar language, and Gaiman proves he can speak it with ease, which establishes a sense of security and comfort to the fantasy reader and enables Gaiman to subsequently divert

and subvert expectations.

To conclude, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* might disappoint or perplex some readers who are looking for echoes of previous Gaiman novels. Although there are common themes, it lacks the complex planned-out style many might have come to expect; the fact that it is a story that just happened is strongly felt through the narrative. Gaiman fans, however, will undoubtedly derive pleasure from this little gem of a book. Critics, academics and scholars will also have field days with this book for years to come, from socio/psychological explorations about memory and growing up, to its particular approach to the fantastic and how it can be applied to literary genre studies. On the whole, it is a novel about imagination, reality and memory, and the ways these 'fade and blend and smudge together' into a vast ocean that may or may not be only a pond.

Al Ewing, *The Fictional Man* (Solaris, 2013, 308pp, £7.99)

Reviewed by Richard Howard (Trinity College, Dublin)

Fictional depictions of the results of reproduction without gestation would appear to be as old as modern sf itself. But whereas Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* focuses more on the creator than the Creature, Al Ewing's *The Fictional Man* gives as much weight to Bob Benton, a Fictional – a lab-grown version of fictional characters used to star in film and television, and given full autonomy when their contractual obligations have expired – as to Niles Golan, a successful novelist looking to break into the movie business, and thus the potential producer of a Fictional.

Hollywood, home to the industry that even had Ronald Reagan complaining about feeling like a 'semi-automaton' acting out a character that another had written for him, is the perfect place to set a modern take on the Prometheus tale. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), Walter Benjamin suggests that the star system surrounding the film industry attempts to recapture the lost aura of painting and theatre, but instead produces 'the phoney spell of a commodity'. Ewing's novel takes place in a world where characters themselves become mechanically reproduced commodities: the film industry simultaneously

produces the spell of personality and an entity that feels something akin to human experience. The phenomenon Ewing describes resembles Flann O'Brien's idea of 'aestho-autogamy' in *At Swim Two Birds* (1939), the means by which the writer Desmond Trellis gives reality to the imaginary character, John Furriskey, born with a memory but devoid of experience.

Ewing's novel shows minimal concern for accurately rendered scientific or technological processes. Rather, *The Fictional Man* concerns itself more with the *being* of any potential technologically rendered entities. As Niles says of his argument with Bob: 'we had a falling out […] ontological reasons, you could say' (299). The ontology of Fictionals is contested terrain in the world of Ewing's fiction, echoing debates within Science and Technology Studies (STS) in the 1980s and 1990s around the issue of constructivism and realism. For the branch of STS associated with the work of Bruno Latour, Annemarie Mol and John Law, scientific facts are both constructed *and* real. Latour suggests the term 'factish' to describe this midway point between subject and object. But the uncanniness of Ewing's Fictionals forces the issue, these subject-objects themselves insisting upon an ontological status equal to their human progenitors. Bob was created in a laboratory to play the superhero The Black Terror, a thinly-veiled swipe at Christopher Nolan's reworking of *Batman*. On the question of whether he is real or not, Bob protests that he is made of exactly the same kind of material as Niles. But even the tools of argument that Bob utilizes against Niles serve as a reminder of his status as a Fictional. Ewing writes:

> Bob had that steely tone to his voice that he got when he was angry. Usually it was reserved for really diabolical masterminds, like Colonel Von Claw – Tom Baker, in a guest role – or The Chuckler, and Niles found being on the receiving end of it very uncomfortable indeed. Not to mention irritating. Bob had come out of a *tube* for God's sake. He was *imaginary*. (120)

Fictionals are factish entities that are real precisely because they are constructed, a position that Niles struggles with throughout the novel. Ewing addresses the question of whether existence precedes essence through Bob, who forges an individual identity when freed from the constraints of the television show he was created for, eschewing the convention circuit that so many Fictionals opt for. At the close of the novel, Bob declares, "if you can change […] that's what makes you real' (264).

Ewing also writes for *2000AD*, and his comfort at expressing himself within a pulp sensibility, matched with a predilection for critiquing and picking at the boundaries of the form is what makes his work so interesting. Having bent the form to breaking point in the conclusion to his El Sombra trilogy, *Pax Omega*, *The Fictional Man* cannot help but feel slightly earthbound in comparison. The most

interesting parts of the novel are those that explore the ontology of technologically created entities, but the emphasis is on Fictionals being just like us, rather than an instance of reaching towards something tantalizingly post-human. In some ways the novel could be read as another exercise in postmodern self-reflexivity that has been traversed before in novels such as Barry Malzberg's *Galaxies* (1975) and Steve Aylett's *Lint* (2005). In fairness, Ewing acknowledges his forebears with numerous nods to Thomas Pynchon, and the fact that Ewing is embedded in the industry he is writing about makes the novel more than just hollow pastiche.

J.-H. Rosny aîné, *Three Science Fiction Novellas: From Prehistory to the End of Mankind* ed. and trans. by Danièle Chatelain and George Slusser (Wesleyan University Press, 2012, lxxxiii + 148 pp, $35)

Reviewed by Patrick Parrinder (University of Reading)

First, a confession: I had long been aware of J.-H. Rosny aîné as a classic of early science fiction, but had never actually read him. I knew, from Nicholas Ruddick's *The Fire in the Stone* (2009) and from Jean-Jacques Annaud's 1980s film adaptation *Quest for Fire*, that Rosny was also a significant name in prehistoric fiction. I had even written on Wells for the 1986 Wells/Rosny special issue of the French literary monthly *Europe*. But English translations of Rosny (there were a few, by Damon Knight and by George Slusser himself) had never come my way. The Belgian-born novelist had been an intimate of the Parisian intellectual scene who also wrote naturalistic fiction and volumes of literary reminiscences, but interest in him in the Francophone world seemed fitful at best. The last collected edition of his *Récits de science-fiction* by a major publishing house came out in 1975.

Now Rosny is, at the very least, undergoing one of his periodic revivals. In France in the last ten years there have been two collections of essays and one major conference devoted to his work. No less than seven volumes of Rosny's sf and fantasy are now included in the California-based Black Coat Press' ambitious series of French science fiction classics. These volumes are translated and abridged by Brian Stableford. By contrast, the Wesleyan edition of *Three Science*

Fiction Novellas offers unexpurgated and scrupulously accurate translations by Danièle Chatelain and George Slusser plus a full scholarly apparatus. Together with Black Coat's *The Navigators of Space and Other Alien Encounters* (2010), which contains the same three novellas and three other stories, this is a landmark achievement.

Chatelain and Slusser begin with a 75-page 'Introduction' (in reality, an independent critical essay) on 'Rosny's Evolutionary Ecology', of which I shall say more below. Readers in search of a brief overview of Rosny's sf output and its reception will need to turn to the 'Translators' Note' and 'Annotated Bibliography' of this edition. And what of the author himself? We are told early in the introduction that 'Rosny' was the pen-name of one Joseph Boëx, who came from Brussels to London in his late teens for an eleven-year stint at the General Post Office. The fact, however, that 'aîné' was added to 'Rosny' because of a collaboration with his younger brother is buried in an endnote on page 127. (There is a similar problem with the brothers Čapek: do we, or do we not, regard the collaboration as a significant element in their sf works?)

'The Xipéhuz' (1888), the first of the three tales in this edition and one of those originally credited to both brothers, is a story of the early Bronze Age. Purists would say this is not really prehistoric, it includes long excerpts from the pre-cuneiform 'Book of Bakhoun', an account of mankind's battles with a rival intelligent species written by the victorious commander-in-chief. Written at least a thousand years before the perhaps equally mythical siege of Troy, the tale of Bakhoun is much bloodthirstier than the *Iliad*, as well as being entirely lacking in Homer's epic scene-setting and his dramatic interplay of strongly individualized warriors. Not only is Bakhoun a coldly intellectual, matter-of-fact historian (no divine intercessions here), but the Rosny style, as Chatelain and Slusser note, is frequently sparse, crabbed and awkward. The interest of the tale is all in the conception of Rosny's aliens, the Xipéhuz: translucent geometric shapes clustered together in small groups, who viciously attack anyone encroaching upon their territory. (Are they aliens in the strict sense of being intruders on Planet Earth? Chatelain and Slusser think not, but Ruddick, in his brief remarks on this story, gives evidence that Rosny himself thought of them as extraterrestrials.) The human tribes, behaving pretty much like nineteenth-century imperialists, set out to exterminate this rival species at terrible cost. When it is all over and the 'earth belongs to Mankind' once again, Bakhoun's triumph is mixed with a portion of guilt. All that is left of the Xipéhuz themselves is a crystalline substance preserved in the 'Kensington Museum in London' which chemists are unable to analyse. We cannot help being reminded of the body of the dead Martian which, according to H.G. Wells in *The War of the Worlds*, found its last resting-place in the same South Kensington museum.

'Another World' (1898) is the autobiography of a 'Different Child', Karel Ondereet, growing up in a remote Dutch province. Even in infancy Karel rejects normal food but thrives mightily on beer and schnapps, a detail that leads us to expect a satirical tale on the lines of Edgar Allan Poe or Washington Irving. At seventeen, having vowed to dedicate his mind and body to science, he leaves his ignorant countrymen and goes to the big city. Soon he finds himself in a hospital waiting-room in Amsterdam surrounded by 'monsters preserved in alcohol: fetuses, children with bestial shapes, colossal batrachians, saurians that were vaguely anthropomorphic'. This is not, however, a prelude to Gothic horrors at the hands of a Frankenstein or a Dr Moreau. Instead, he begins a lifelong collaboration with Dr Van den Heuvel, a scientist of spotless integrity who patiently studies Karel's strange perceptions of the world, centring on the mysterious 'Moedigen' and 'Vuren' who share our physical space although their presence is undetectable by normal human beings. Finally Dr Van den Heuvel looks on benignly while our narrator marries another, apparently similar, mutant and prepares to bring up a family. One foresees an endless stream of scientific papers from the good doctor and also, sooner or later, a steadily increasing demand for the products of the Amsterdam breweries.

Perhaps these two tales are not much more than late nineteenth-century period pieces, most notable for their deliberate thwarting of the melodramatic expectations of readers then and now. Certainly they lack the storytelling gusto of an authentic rival to Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. Things are very different, however, with 'The Death of the Earth' (1910), a gripping and moving story of the far future which is, without exception, the most depressing 'Last Man' narrative I have ever read. On an arid, seismically eruptive Earth where the last water-sources are drying up, what is left of the doomed human species seems resigned to its fate and prepared to go quietly in a final act of mass euthanasia. The exception is the 'watchman' Targ, a throwback to more vital times who defiantly traverses the planet seeking out undiscovered water supplies. This story has some of the melodrama that was so austerely missing from 'The Xipéhuz' and 'Another World'. At one point, the pot-holing Targ falls into a bottomless abyss only to be saved from certain death when his haversack snags on a spar of rock, leaving him hanging from the straps. No sooner has he freed himself than he finds a hidden cavity in the rock-face leading to an underground aquifer. Targ, however, is increasingly isolated in a biologically dead world where sinister ferromagnetic life-forms are emerging to become humanity's successor. The ferromagnetics are a product of post-industrial human society – they do not grow on natural iron deposits – and physical contact with them saps the red blood corpuscles, though when they are cleaned from the skin the victim revives. When Targ becomes the Last Man he recognizes their position as Earth's inheritors, choosing to lie down

to die among them rather than swallowing his euthanasia pill.

For Chatelain and Slusser, Rosny is 'the father of hard science fiction': sf in which natural laws are scrupulously respected and there is no miraculous get-out clause for human beings faced with a hostile ecology. The editors compare Rosny to Olaf Stapledon as pioneers of an 'objective, ecologically sound treatment […] of the passage from humans to new forms of life'. This comparison, though left undeveloped here, is certainly suggestive. Rosny is Stapledonian in his austerity, his relative unpopularity, his refusal of conventional narrative expectations – and also in his stark poetry. But while Stapledon's visionary conceptions are much grander, he is also demonstrably more anthropocentric than the French writer. Chatelain and Slusser find in Rosny a 'powerful antidote to the humanocentric sentimentality' of much supposedly scientific sf, though it is also true that the editors' critique of anthropocentricity is double-edged, leading them to sometimes fall into the trap they are so anxious for us to avoid. The Rosny of their introductory essay is a necessarily idealized figure, depending heavily on readers' sympathetic exploration of possibilities that, in the tales themselves, are only hinted at. Thus Chatelain and Slusser repeatedly underline the 'sudden shift in evolutionary perspective' located in the final paragraph of each of these novellas. This is both the strength and weakness of their editorial approach, since Chatelain and Slusser are attempting much more than the academic canonization of a worthy but half-forgotten figure. Their case is that Rosny aîné offers a profound challenge to all sf writing today, and, beyond that, to all forms of contemporary ecological thinking.

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Cover: Frederik Pohl (c. 1968) and Richard Matheson
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