Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction

Diversity in World SF

The Foundation Essay Prize 2016

We are pleased to announce the return of our essay competition. The award is open to all post-graduate research students and to all early career researchers (up to five years after the completion of your PhD) who have yet to find a full-time or tenured position. The prize is guaranteed publication in the next summer issue of *Foundation* (August 2016).

To be considered for the competition, please submit a 6000 word article on any topic, period, theme, author, film or other media within the field of science fiction and its academic study. All submitted articles should comply with the guidelines to contributors as set out on the SF Foundation website. Only one article per contributor is allowed to be submitted.

The deadline for submission is 2nd November 2015. All competition entries, with a short (50 word) biography, should be sent to the regular email address:
journaleditor@sf-foundation.org
The entries will be judged by the editorial team and the winner will be announced in the spring 2016 issue of *Foundation*.

Call for Papers
In More's Footsteps: Utopia and Science Fiction
Foundation #124 (summer 2016)

Next year marks the 500th anniversary of Sir Thomas More's seminal work, Utopia. Although the text has been of importance within Renaissance Studies and political philosophy, it has also occupied a special place within science fiction for helping to popularize the notion of 'the Great Good Place' to which society should strive to perfect. Whether directly or indirectly, More's text has been of huge significance for the utopian strand that runs through much science fiction.

We invite contributors to submit 6000-word articles on any aspect of More's text and its relationship to modern and contemporary science fiction. Topics might include (but are not limited to):

- *The political organisation of utopias*
- *Utopia and language*
- *Travel and exploration*
- *Economics and social organisation*
- *Utopia and religion*
- *Utopia and sexuality*
- *War*
- *The private versus the public*

All submissions should meet the guidelines to contributors as laid out on the SF Foundation website. The deadline for submissions is 4th December 2015 and should be sent (with a note on university affiliation if applicable) to the regular email address:
journaleditor@sf-foundation.org
We will confirm our choice of articles by March 2016.

Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction

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Paul March-Russell

Episode 9, series 3 of *Blake's 7*, broadcast in March 1980, remains a childhood favourite of mine. First, it was entitled 'Sarcophagus', a great word for a nine-year-old already interested in ancient and classical history, and who vaguely knew about Egyptian sarcophagai. Secondly, it was a curious story, with no mention of the Federation, much of the action confined to the *Liberator*, and the character of Cally pivotal to the plot. Perhaps the internalized Gothic setting was intended to invoke Ridley Scott's recent hit, *Alien* (1979), but in retrospect the narrative also evokes Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), although at the time my reference-point would have been the *Doctor Who* story, 'Planet of Evil' (1975). Thirdly, I was struck by the writer's credit: to Tanith Lee. There is the strong possibility that, other than Ursula Le Guin, Lee – who died in May at the age of 67 – was the first female writer I identified with science fiction, although her prolific output extended far beyond sf to fantasy, horror, children's fiction and reinvented fairy tales. (Reviewing the credits now, I note also that the director of 'Sarcophagus' was Fiona Cumming just as Lee's second story for *Blake's 7*, 'Sand' with its sexually ambiguous portrayal of Servalan, was directed by another woman, Vivienne Cozens.)

I can't say I was surprised or shocked by Lee's authorship (a female?! writing science fiction?!) since, growing-up in a single-parent family, I knew the strength and capabilities of women only too well. No, the surprise and the shock came later – as a History undergraduate studying Victorian Britain: how on earth could nineteenth-century men ever have thought of women as mentally, physically and intellectually frailer than themselves? Instead, my nine-year-old self was more pleased than surprised by Lee's credit – yes, why not? why shouldn't women be writing science fiction? And, anyway, by that point, the story had already started…

Without coming over all Wordsworthian, children are, I think, more accepting than adults. Certainly, my son and daughter (nine and six respectively) didn't bat an eyelid when, on an episode of the CBBC show, *Marrying Mum and Dad*, the lucky couple were actually Dad and Dad. Maybe they're just too young and naïve to know any better, but maybe they're also thinking: yes, why not?

Such openness calls into sharp relief the anachronistic values of the Sad/Rabid Puppies who, frankly, have by now received far too much publicity. Backs against the wall, faced with a polyglot culture and an argot they are unable or unwilling to learn, they have lashed out, in the process disgracing themselves and the genre they profess to love. The sad truth, though, is that the world has been a lot more diverse and for a lot longer than these men – these few men – have wanted to accept.

This issue takes its theme and much of its content from the academic strand at last year's Worldcon in London, as polyglot a city as one could

possibly find. I am delighted that guest editor, Emma England, has structured the theme of diversity around a selection of articles on world science fiction, the incontrovertible fact of which is already re-shaping the genre in directions that point to its future(s). These themes resurface elsewhere in the issue, in the conference reports, in the books reviewed (two of which are in translation) and in the review-essay of *Paradoxa* #25 on sf from and about Africa. To paraphrase not only a movie title but also an important work of postcolonial criticism, the Empire has struck back. Yes, and why not?

Note: In *Foundation* 120, an earlier version of Douglas W. Texter's review was published by accident. He would like to have his name and comments expressed in that review retracted; we would like to apologise for any upset caused.

Guest Editorial: Diversity in World Science Fiction
Emma England

We all know that the speculative fiction corpus is vastly, hugely, mindbogglingly big, but we rarely get the opportunity to experience its variety, let alone in one place. 'Diversity in Speculative Fiction' was a conference in the guise of an academic programme track at Loncon 3, the 72nd World Science Fiction Convention in London, 14–18 August 2014. It attempted to pull on the loose and interconnected threads of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and all forms of speculative fiction, focusing on London as a global city, and what is widely referred to as 'world sf': non Anglo-American speculative fiction. Scholars from forty countries discussed everything from pornography to children's books, comics to the Bible, television to musical theatre, and of course novels. Many of these presentations are being published in forthcoming issues of *Foundation* and elsewhere, but this special issue highlights different approaches to politics, particularly in novels. Questions of identity, memory, utopia and culture are all directly addressed while, as a whole, the articles demonstrate the significance of using different kinds of approaches to explore various aspects of world sf.

Lejla Kucukalic's 'Arabian Wonder: Contemporary Science Fiction Transforming the Gulf' discusses Arabic novels, especially Noura al Noman's *Ajwan*, but also films, video games, comics, fandom and art. Alongside a helpful introduction to the material, Kucukalic explores the shifting nature of boundaries and space within and around culture, language and text regarding gender, religion, buildings and history. Science fiction ultimately provides a way to explore changing notions of identity and relationships to each other and the world around us as well as towards oneself.

Identity is also a theme in Gillian Polack's 'Old Cultures, New Fictions: Four Indigenous Australian Writers of Speculative Fiction'. It focuses upon novels by three indigenous Australian writers – Ambelin Kwaymullina, Alexis Wright, and Melissa Lucashenko, and a short story collection by Yaritji Green. The latter was edited by Polack, who writes about the experience and the challenges faced in fairly and accurately representing the languages and culture of indigenous groups for those outside the community, especially for publication. The key question is cultural ownership – who owns the stories being told when they are not Eurocentric? Can they be edited effectively? Does the author have to ask permission from her culture to retell narratives or to borrow ideas, themes, languages, and characters? What happens to them when they are released into the wild, and when do these stories become publicly owned and move from being a narrative located within a specific cultural context to speculative fiction? Polack explores these ideas from a unique perspective, offering a rare opportunity to get some answers.

The following two articles are about South American novels and place the narratives within historical contexts as a means of reclaiming the past, one's

own culture and looking to the future. Christopher Kastensmidt's 'Simone Saueressig and the Indigenous Fantasy Epic' alludes to the relevance of Brazilian political situations for the author Simone Saueressig and her *Os Sóis da América* (*The Suns of America*). The focus remains, however, upon the presence of indigenous culture in Brazilian literature, with a close look at what indigenous stories and characters are included within Saueressig's series. By placing the narratives within a historical context and by looking at them in relation to Saueressig's own influences, particularly Tolkien, Kastendsmidt demonstrates the relevance of the novels to contemporary Brazilian readers as a means of reacquainting themselves with their own culture – a culture that is being trampled by the march of globalization.

Silvia G. Kurlat Ares' 'Marcelo Cohen and Science Fiction Narrative as Canonical Literature: The Case of *El Testamento de O'Jaral*' reflects upon utopia as a means of looking to the future, and connecting with and addressing narratives of memory in the turbulent political history of Argentina. The article uses the novel to explore revolution, anarchy, political activism, (political) consumerism and language through history, globalization, and the dominance of realist literature.

The final two articles are about an English language trilogy written by a Finnish author and a Spanish language trilogy written by a Spanish author. Both articles employ primarily theoretical perspectives, which in turn raise interesting questions about the politics of sf criticism. Garfield Benjamin in 'Rewriting Consciousness: Diversity, Post-humans and Utopia in Hannu Rajaniemi's Jean le Flambeur Trilogy' focuses on posthumanism through the lens of Fredric Jameson's conception of utopia and Gilles Deleuze's notions of difference and minor literature. This enables Benjamin the opportunity to look towards the future as a means of critiquing the present, thereby complementing Kurlat Ares' approach of remembering the past. Critically, Benjamin examines the posthuman as a means of exploring the diversity of human consciousness and the challenges to interpretation and understanding.

The least overtly political of the articles uses narratology to see how time travel works as a literary structure. Dale J. Pratt's '"Londons", Metafiction and Time Travel Narratology in Félix J. Palma's Victorian Trilogy' analyses the story, discourse, events and existents. Pratt thereby demonstrates that through carefully structured narrative the reader's imagination can be trained into following the path drawn out by the author no matter how complex, even if it, as with the Victorian Trilogy, reframes previous works such as those by H.G. Wells.

By effectively ignoring Rajaniemi and Palma's non-Anglo-American backgrounds, Pratt and Benjamin simultaneously subvert and sustain the status quo in sf literary criticism. The first four articles all treat world sf as different to Anglo-American sf, asking questions specifically relating to the culture, language and milieu of the country or countries of origin. This is important to do because, as the authors clearly demonstrate, there is a difference and global

society is not homogenous; different peoples and cultures require different responses. However, if all we do is look at world sf from the perspective of the other using an emic/etic approach, we are denying some of the fundamental shared aspects of humanity and reducing world sf to less than Anglo-American works, and predominantly Anglo-American sf criticism runs the risk of being a colonizing force. Embracing the full diversity of authors and scholars alike encourages a richer understanding of the material and, will perhaps, lead to a richer science-fictional world for us all.

Arabian Wonder: Contemporary Science Fiction Transforming the Gulf
Lejla Kucukalic (Khalifa University)

In the past few years, science fiction and fantasy narratives have emerged with increasing frequency in the Arabic world. This article will consider a variety of forms, spanning Arabic sf novels, film, comic books, video games and illustration, in order to examine the transformative potential of contemporary Arabic sf in the Middle East. The output has been particularly concentrated in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Both countries have seen the publication of bestselling sf novels: in the UAE, Noura Al Noman's *Ajwan* (2012) and in Saudi Arabia, Ibraheem Abbas and Yasser Bahjatt's *Hwjn* (2013). The first Middle East sf film, *The Sons of Two Suns* (2013), was well received in the UAE when it debuted at the 2013 Dubai International Film Festival, as well as at festivals in the UK and the US. In addition, there is a growing number of artworks, comics, and games by local artists: the super-hero images of Emirati Maryam Al-Zaabi, for example, and sf/fantasy video game productions such as *Tale of Yazan* by the Abu Dhabi-based company, After Work Games.

A shift toward fantastic and speculative forms of writing is also evident in the 2014 International Prize for Arabic Fiction going to Ahmed Sadaawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), a vivid reworking of the Frankenstein tale in the violent, explosive Iraq of 2005. Other shortlisted works included Youssef Fadel's *A Rare Blue Bird that Flies with Me* (2013), which features elements of magic realism and fantasy. Across the Atlantic, works including *The Throne of the Crescent Moon* (2012), an award-winning fantasy novel by Saladin Ahmed, and *Jinnrise* (2012), a comic series by Sohaib Awan, also directly involve Arabic culture through their themes and authors while staying within science fiction and fantasy genre conventions.

Current sf from the Gulf region operates within well-established sub-genres. *Ajwan* is a space-opera while *The Sons of Two Suns* and Ahmed Al Nazari's *Countdown: Dubai* (2014) are well-executed apocalyptic stories. Regional artists, including HRH Sheikha Wafa Bint Hasher Al Maktoum, presented new versions of Storm Troopers' helmets at the 2014 Dubai Comicon in an extension of the *Star Wars* inspired Art Wars project originally organized by the UK collective, Art Below. The helmet, designed by French-Tunisian 'calligraphiti' artist El Seed, is painted pink and covered in calligraphy. Its title 'I Will Never Be Your Son' re-focuses the saga's concern with the male familial struggle onto (Arabic) women, while opening women's moral universe to include the battle of good and evil. El Seed's work symbolizes the interest in transmedia narratives, where popular stories are produced and consumed across media without strict adherence to formal or generic boundaries. All these examples point toward a version of global science fiction that combines representative icons of Western sf with local and Arabic influences.

The publishing company of Saudis Abbas and Bahjatt is called Yatakhayaloon

(from the Arabic *yatakhayyalūn*, meaning 'they imagine'), to convey the sense of wonder and enthusiasm that the genre brings. In the Emirates, filmmakers Ali Zaidi and Ghanem Ghubash emphasize their allegiance to the making of 'pure' science fiction, whilst Al Noman is not only well versed in the Western sf canon but over the decades was also a pen-pal of authors such as Alan Dean Foster (Kucukalic 2014b). Creators of Arabic sf are fans themselves who recognize the potential of the current Gulf sf as a galvanizing force, a peripheral discourse in the Arabic culture that can nevertheless influence the centre, for example in the mainstream successes of Taiba Al Ibrahim and Ahmed Khaled Tauwfik.

The Gulf: A Space for Science Fiction

In its latest iteration, Arabic sf may be on the verge of escaping its cultural ghetto. The principal reason for this possibility is the Gulf's cultural diversity that serves as a breeding ground for hybrid narratives, including science fiction. Yuri Lotman's concept of a 'semiosphere', seen as a totality of signs in a particular cultural system, helps to more precisely locate Arabic sf in this context. The Gulf environment is heavily influenced by the strong expatriate presence, by the mixing of Arabic and English, as well as Filipino/Tagalog, Bengali and Hindi languages, by multiple entertainment and media outlets, as well as the logoed and branded presence of multinational companies from AIG (American International Group) to ZIC (Zurich Insurance Company). The multicultural, global setting wherein expats comprise 30% of the Saudi Arabian and as much as 80% of the UAE populations, creates a constant presence of foreignness and 'areas of multiple cultural meanings' that interact and compete with one another (Lotman 2005: 210).

In the physical sense, cities such as Dubai and Doha are organized around inter-cultural semiosis created through curated architectural borrowings, Arabic and Western logos and brands, and cosmopolitan symbols, including: the sail-shaped Burj Al Arab (the Tower of Arabs) and the world's most expensive Christmas tree, valued at £7 million, in the Emirates Palace Hotel. This cultural hybridity is a seed-bed for the development of science fiction in the Gulf region. Works that include Ajwan, Hwjn and the visual art of young Arab artists exist within this signifying space – a dynamic semiotic system that Lotman describes as 'a specific sphere, possessing signs, which are assigned to the enclosed space' (Lotman 2005: 207). On the one hand, the standard texts in the Gulf are traditional, tending towards realism, nostalgia and sometimes folklore. On the other hand, sf texts, broadly conceived, seek to reconcile traditional and progressive views. The role of sf texts in the Gulf might be that of border texts that, according to Lotman, 'set cultural precedents and, in the long run, literally conquer the cultural sphere of the centre' (2005: 212). Through hybrid articulation of cultural, linguistic and experiential encounters, Arabic sf reflects the existence of these multi-variant models, functioning as a mediating narrative within the Gulf semiosphere.

An example of this negotiation between the traditional and the progressive in Arabic science fiction is found in the way that Gulf sf incorporates regional cultural norms that include, for example, national dress, Islamic dress codes and separate spaces reserved for women. The prescribed national dress in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the kandoora for men and abaya for women, is worn by characters in Al Nazari's Countdown: Dubai, in Ali Marashi's photographs of Arabs as Imperial Troopers, and in Hanna Habibi's images of The Wonder Woman (2010). This mixing of iconography from both Arabic culture and the sf canon incorporates the basic mechanisms of the genre, combining recognizable conventions with cognitive nova. By blending the scientific and imaginative forms of thinking, science fiction emerges as an ideal form of expression for the region dealing with its own version of future shock.

Science Fiction as a Mediating Narrative

The most famous representative of Gulf sf is Al Noman's *Ajwan*. A long time fan of Western sf writers from Frank Herbert to Anne McCaffrey, Al Noman created *Ajwan* to inspire her four teenage daughters and 'other young Arabs' to read (Ahmad 2012: 1). The apparent lack of an indigenous young adult fiction had bee part of a wider question relating to how the differences in written and spoken Arabic across the Arabic world operate within the complex geo-political rifts of the region. Her *Bildungsroman* about a young woman coping with the destruction of her entire planet and the loss of her family and child was a sensational success, leading to a sequel *Mandan* (2014), a TV deal and two more planned instalments. The novel's appeal is due in large part to Al Noman's successful creation of a wondrous science-fictional world, driven by action and surprises and filled with amazing encounters between individuals of different races with surprising abilities and fascinating mannerisms.

Although such diversity echoes the cantina scene from *Star Wars IV: A New Hope* (1977), or the many worlds of *Star Trek*, the sf convention of a variegated cosmos reflects the novel's global worldview as well as the cultural mix of the UAE. The narrative emphasizes the need for coexistence between different races aboard a military space station. In awe of the alien creatures, Ajwan at one point rushes toward an octopus-like organism in the transportable container, both concerned about the rules of appropriate behaviour and simply curious. Ajwan's empathic gift shows her that curiosity is mutual between the mollusk and herself. Despite occasional disagreements, these encounters between the native Havaiki and various alien beings are an important element of Ajwan's growth: 'I've followed the lead of my favourite authors,' states Al Noman, 'in predicting a world that celebrates diversity' (Holland 2014).

In her native Havaiki culture, Ajwan is not supposed to show emotions (also a behavioural cultural norm in the Gulf) and finds herself perplexed and burdened by her new life as a survivor/minority. She muses that 'she had to control herself; there simply was no other choice. She was alone now, one of a

kind. Her race was close to extinction' (Al Noman 2012: 11). In the context of the UAE, where the local population is smaller than the migrant one, such musings reflect the cultural reality. Ajwan also feels the need to expand her horizons: she chooses her university major in order to get 'away from stuffy Havaiki cities with their traditions and codes of conduct that stifled her personality and diluted her individuality' (Al Noman 2012: 11).

The cosmopolitanism that affects cultural production in the Gulf, of which Ajwan is one example, is well reflected in Homi Bhabha's concept of gathering. Although Bhabha focuses on émigrés, his concept describes both the host and alien cultures in the region and the position of borderline texts in such a semiosphere. As part of his expatriate experience, Bhabha writes:

> Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. (Bhabha 1994: 19)

In Abass and Bahjatt's *Hwjn*, the jinni Hawjan describes his visit to the city and the palace of the 'bad' Jinn, much like Bhabha's gathering, as a surprising motley assortment: the palace is filled with inscriptions in various languages, 'Marids and Efreets [gathered] from all over the planet, of all races and ethnicities and even all religions in one place', brought together by common interest (Abass and Bahjatt 2013: 93).

As with Lotman's concept of the semiosphere, Bhabha's notion of gathering relies on the dynamic interplay between the centre – of culture, language, text – and the margin within a nation. Although the nation is constructed in temporal and spatial permutations leading to 'the conceptual ambivalence', the 'representative vision of society' is nevertheless formed 'in a discourse that [is] obsessively fixed upon, and uncertain of, the boundaries of society, and the margins of the text' (Bhabha 1994: 145).

The focus on the transformative influence of the marginal is found in Lotman, too, where certain texts that form the boundaries can change the limits and restrictions of culture: 'The boundary [defined as text] has another function in the semiosphere: it is the area of accelerated semiotic processes, which always flow more actively on the periphery of cultural environments, seeking to affix them to the core structures, with a view to displacing them' (Lotman 2005: 208). Akin to Bhabha's 'national timespace', the semiosphere possesses a heterogeneous structure that implies a myriad of localized and temporal details, a diversity and hybridity evident in the Gulf and its science fiction. By

attempting to relate potentially hostile cultural spaces – science and technology with religion and custom, the communal with the individual, the global with the local – Gulf science fiction functions as a boundary mechanism. Arabic sf is therefore a series of texts that bring dynamically opposing forces into the centre of the symbolic exchanges in the Gulf's culture.

Science-Fictional Exchanges: Beyond the Gulf and Back

Aside from highlighting diversity and negotiating between the traditional and the science-fictional, Gulf sf features global textual exchanges. Theseoccur on a triangular axis between the West, the East and the Far East, in a specific model of techno-orientalism that emerges from the region. Young Arabic fans and producers of science fiction comics, images and games are heavily invested in the manga and anime culture of Japan. Emirati author Quais Sedki collaborated with Japanese illustrators to present his story about a boy and his falcon, *Siwari Al-Dhahab* (*The Gold Ring*) (2010), in this medium.Japanese-Arabic crossovers that arise from anime are the primary form of entertainment on TV for youngsters in the Arab world. Viewers tend to prefer the Japanese aesthetic in drawing and animation and Western production values in film. This is reflected also in the strong fan cultures evident at such annual events as the MEFCC (Middle East Film and Comic Con) and IGN Convention. At the same time, this cultural exchange is underpinned by the economic and scientific connections between the UEA and Japan, in particular, the export and import of goods and close cooperation on nuclear power projects. Historian Frauke Heard-Bey has argued that oil 'serves as a bridge for contacts with the rest of the world' (Heard-Bey 1982: 5), with Gulf states exporting roughly equal parts to Europe, USA and Japan. These cultural and economic interconnections create a context for the emergence of Arabic manga and anime artists such as Asma Saeed and author of the sf graphic novel *Nasser's Secrets* (2013), Khaled Bin Hamad.

Gulf fans and artists consume and produce the trans-oriental science fiction in the Gulf in part because of its nonconformist appeal: 'Japanese science fiction makers operate under the radar of cultural control exerted by American and European entertainment monopolies, and develop themes, stories and effects that synthesize the attitudes of their primary constituency: global youth culture' (Bolton et al 2007: vii). The images exchanged on youth-oriented sites like deviantart.com show an amalgamation of traditional Arab and manga features in the way characters and stories are constructed. A greeting for the Saudi National Day in 2013 by Saudi artist Yomiku displays traditional Arab clothing and national insignia combined with characteristic manga facial features, exaggerated emotion and suggestion of motion, with the character's hair an amalgam of typical manga 'spikes' and more natural representation.

The World Forever Ending: Apocalyptic Visions of Dubai

With the global vision of progress and cultural harmony also come the perils

of rampant modernity: 'Most Emiratis work hard to distance themselves from the poverty and the harshness of the past by creating physical barriers in the form of opulent villas, roads, and malls' (Bristol-Rhys 2010: 115). Dubai, with its spectacular architecture, artificial islands, indoor ski slopes and mega-projects, inspires a range of reactions in both reality and fiction. According to Mike Davis, the city exists as an 'improbable vision' in which 'out of the chrome forest of skyscrapers (nearly a dozen taller than 300 meters) soars a new Tower of Babel' (quoted Elsheshtawy 2010: 164). In sf narratives that focus on the city, the glitzy (over) achievement of Dubai appears as an object of both admiration and fear (cf. Ferreira 2012: 269–89).

Dubai-based filmmaking duo, S. Ali Zaidi and Ghanem Ghubash, in their short feature *The Sons of Two Suns*, subtly explore an apocalyptic future as the possible outcome of Dubai's seemingly endlessly progressive sequence of modernization. Although the specific cause of the disaster is environmental rather than technological (a second sun appearing), the film pointedly asks the question: what if the future is not that bright? In an interview with me, Zaidi and Ghubash discussed their choice of topic as both controversial and necessary. On the one hand, the end of the world theme belongs to a religious discourse. Whilst the duo emphasize their desire to not offend anyone with the apocalyptic theme, they are also adamant about keeping Arabic and Emirati roots visible in their work. On the other hand, 'we all should be thinking about the future' (Kucukalic 2014c). The pre-apocalyptic overtones in *Sons of Two Suns* express their concern about the direction that the proliferating growth of the city has taken as well as the potential lack of water and the heat-death of the region.

In another apocalyptic imagining focusing on the city's future, Al Nazari's comic *Countdown: Dubai*, a mysterious virus threatens impending disaster, leaving many citizens to attempt frantic last minute corrections to their lives – from those trying to pray and become better Muslims to those who want to have more fun in their remaining time. The moment of the total destruction is helpfully marked by a digital clock placed on the most iconic building in the Gulf, Dubai's Burj Khalifa. The destructive scenarios may be inspired by the fact that younger generations have 'no need [for futuristic] narrative[s] for they have no memory of poverty at all'; instead, 'they remember […] a constantly changing life' (Bristol-Rhys 2010: 115). In this context of dynamic living, science fiction becomes an expression of desire for the future-oriented vision for the older generations as well as its record for the younger generations. It displaces or modifies the traditional narratives of the past, following Lotman's claim that in a semiosphere 'new structures hide' in the 'old metastructures. The opposition of centre/periphery is replaced by the opposition of yesterday/today' (Lotman 2005: 212).

Apocalyptic sf's technological fears, therefore, are not so much directed toward the technology itself as toward the collective development of the region, the negotiation of national and cultural identity, and functionality of the state. As

traditionalists and progressives attempt to navigate the stratification of families and tribes, they also wonder where they might fit in a future powered by the foreigners and whether they have outstripped their ability to manage the world they have built (Bristol-Rhys 2010: 116-7). The apocalyptic narratives have an important function in the examination of fears regarding the future of the Arab nations. Syed Ali, writing about Dubai's opulence, alludes to Robert Heinlein to describe the UAE nationals as 'strangers in their own land' (Ali 2010: 164) who are, like immigrants, 'passive observers and beneficiaries of what Dubai has become' (Ali 2010: 165). Al-Maria, Zaidi, Ghubash, Al Nazari and others may be fulfilling the function of the science fiction creator as a forward-looking social critic.

The Gulf Mystique: Women and Science Fiction

Gulf sf writers and artists grapple explicitly with the present and the future, turning to science fiction as a concrete form through which to create their own space of openness and expressive communication. In *The Hijab Girl* (2014), a comic book created by Saudi author Sara Al Hazmi, the ambiguity often present in mainstream, non-sf, female Gulf writers is largely absent – the comic is an overt critique of the current conditions for women in Saudi Arabia. It is interesting to note that the publication of *The Hijab Girl* was funded through crowd sourcing, suggesting that there is a strong appetite for these debates and narratives. It tells the story of an ordinary Saudi girl who, after being hit by a car, starts believing that she is a superhero. Hijab Girl's superheroism comes from her strange behaviour caused by her amnesia: she walks around unaccompanied by a male, rejects a random offer of marriage as a fourth wife, and befriends a comic book-loving boy who helps her to find her family.

The socio-economic milieu that has nurtured science fiction in the Arab world also includes the re-positioning of gender, where women, by both participating in and creating various sf texts, are forging a new space for themselves. In a society where gender roles are emphatically defined, experiments in the representation of female identity, as well as masculinity, are successfully accommodated by science fiction. Models of femininity and womanhood range from stereotypical to androgynous, from prescriptive to innovative. Through the activities of fandom, they have also become enacted in the physical world.

The young woman below pictured uses 'Rana Chan' as her artistic name; in this photo, she is wearing an abaya underneath her costume. She belongs to a female art collective that has banded together around a shared interest in manga art and sf, and which also seems to understand that it is better represented in the world of commercial and fan art as a group of like-minded individuals. It is interesting that, while several go to the same university, the women of the collective have gathered from different backgrounds and countries. In Gulf sf, as in the cases of Rana Chan's collective, Noura Al Noman's writing and Sara Al Hazmi's visual art, women act as vital producers and subjects of this new Arabic

Rana Chan, Dubaicon 2014.

genre, providing new role models for gender politics.

In parallel with these real-life enactments of alternative femininity, we find in Al Noman's Ajwan an amalgam of strength, resilience and suffering in the midst of an escalating galactic war that transforms her from a shielded pacifist to a hardened, trained warrior. Facing the harsh conditions of nomadic life in wartime, Ajwan represents countless women dealing with the restless world of our ordinary reality: she is a refugee forced out of her native world, unable to return, without a family or the protection provided by a traditional father-husband structure. Instead, it is other strong and capable women who, along Ajwan's way, provide protection and empathy. In Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), the character of Aliya provides an example of possibilities for an extraordinary young woman in sf; the powerful female figure depicted in Ajwan is a more lifelike model. Lotman's claim that boundary texts seek to change 'the core structures, with a view to displacing them' (Lotman 2005: 212) seems particularly evident in this process of re-positioning of gender through Arabic science fiction.

Rewriting the Gulf

The potential transforming agency of the genre is evident in the hope of local creators that they can use their narratives to influence public beliefs and opinion towards a more scientific and critical way of thinking. Abbas and Bahjatt's *Hawjn* is a prime example of this proselytizing intent. Although almost banned in several Gulf countries, and unofficially but effectively banned from bookstores in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar on the suspicion of encouraging witchcraft, *Hawjn*'s aim is actually to criticize folk-beliefs in exorcism and possession and

the industry that surrounds them.

The fantasy novel is narrated by a jinni, Hwjn, who falls in love with a human girl, Sawsan. The authors make the jinni intentionally friendly toward humans to familiarize the myth of the bad jinni (Kucukalic 2014a). In the novel, when Hwjn attempts to possess the human Eyad in order to save Sawsan, the dialogue between the spirit and the human reveals the authors' intentions: Eyad and Hwjn first establish, tongue-in-cheek, that both the jinni's world and Saudi Arabia have no cinemas. Then, they watch some 'Western films' about possession and exorcism. Eyad comments: 'The same happens here. There is a huge exorcism business here.' The jinni, while not denying the existence of spirits and magic, concurs: people have 'imaginary problems. And there are those who make money off these people's ignorance' (Abbas and Bahjatt 2013: 128). As the jinni explains the customs and habits of its world, he is clear about the charlatan nature of possession: 'most of [possession] is illusion, fraud, or trickery for personal gain' (Abbas and Bahjatt 2013: 114). The situation addressed in Hwjn is mirrored in official attempts to maintain scientific viewpoints in the UAE. In an October 2014 meeting, the Cabinet of the UAE Ministries rejected a suggestion made on behalf of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs to study faith healing and to regulate it as part of medical practice. However, a former diplomat in Saudi Arabia, Mark Caudill, writes that 'magical thinking' abounds in that country, with 'serious consequences', and cases ranging from financial ruin to life-threatening situations due to bad medical advice (Caudill 2006: 76–7).

Writers such as Abbas and Bahjatt want to entertain but also to enlighten their audience, challenging their compatriots' levels of scientific education and superstitious thinking. As Al Noman comments: 'I believe we can not only turn this around through creating interesting SF worlds in Arabic; but we can also turn it around for a more scientifically oriented generation interested in studying science and majoring in research and development to turn ideas/dreams/SF into reality' (Ahmad 2012).

These initial efforts towards culture shifting are gaining momentum as the Gulf's iGeneration – invested in both the realities and narratives of techno-science – embraces the genre's innovations and rebelliousness, and recognizes its intrinsic ability to engage and galvanize cultural production. 'Society needs a new vocabulary to debate identity,' Justin Vela writes, summarizing the views of young Kuwaiti writer Nada Faris (Vela 2014). Members of this community are compelled to negotiate constantly between codes and languages on creative and political levels. Arabic speakers are forced to face the ravaging forces that are causing disunity in the Arab world. While science fiction may not be a lingua franca in the region, it contributes to the collective spirit that has the potential to provide a new ground for political and social change. The results and further developments of these creative processes remain to be seen, but we can talk of the attempt to create new cultural capital in the Gulf, also bridging the Middle East, Far East and the West. Like its Western and Far East counterparts, Arabic

science fiction retains the ability to shape and mobilize the experience of reality for marginalized groups and thinkers while at the same time providing a global, shared vision.

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Old Cultures, New Fictions: Four Indigenous Australian Writers of Speculative Fiction

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This study began when Yaritji Green told me in 2009 that she was tired because 'Whenever I wake up, I have to be political'. It is the penalty of being an Indigenous writer in Australia. In fact, it is the penalty of being an Indigenous person in Australia: it is not a choice that individuals can make or not make. Stories deriving from the traditional backgrounds of Indigenous Australians are frequently sought by non-Indigenous fiction writers (see Attebery 2005: 387 and 397ff for a discussion of this; also see Polack 2015). It is not a given, however, that non-Indigenous readers and critics will understand the identities and expressions of identity of most Indigenous writers. Indigenous Australian cultures are poorly understood by the broader community: therefore, writers who work from within their own culture have a quite different task to writers who write closer to the cultural norm, with the politicization of their everyday life adding a layer of complexity.

This article will examine the work of four writers, Ambelin Kwaymullina, Alexis Wright, Yaritji Green and Melissa Lucashenko, with the intent of questioning how Eurocentric approaches affect our understanding of Indigenous Australian science fiction. The three recent novels and the short story in question are marketed for general audiences, but do not involve white protagonists, and the narratives do not rest on Eurocentrism. In all instances, 'Eurocentrism' includes mainstream cultures from Europe and North America: the use does not refer solely to the culture of mainstream Australia.

The first work is Lucashenko's stand-alone novel *Mullumbimby* (2013), the second is Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* (the first of a series) (2012), the third is Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013), and the fourth is Green's short story in *Baggage* (2010), a collection I edited. My role as editor of that collection is critical to my understanding of the situation I describe, and will be explored in some depth.

I should note here that various terms and phrases are used in a specific Australian sense in this article, including 'a Palyku woman', 'living on country' and 'language'. They have precise meanings that do not quite equate with other regional uses of English. 'Language', for instance, can refer to a specific language (such as English) but it can also refer to the use of words from the first language of a particular Indigenous community. When Green was discussing the story for *Baggage* with me, before it was written, she asked 'How much language should I use?' She translated this for a wider readership in *Baggage* itself by explaining 'In this story, I'm using Yankunytjatjara words' (Polack 2014: 217). In the context of this essay the use of language is not as specific but refers to the Australian concept of an Indigenous language other than English; one that informs English usage, and one that is a repository of cultural ideas that do

not always correlate with those explained in English.

'Living on country' again covers concepts that are not fully enunciated using other dialects of English, or even through mainstream Australian English. It means living on the land of which one is a traditional owner. The other terms, such as 'a Palyku woman', have more obvious meanings, but, despite appearances, are not casual uses. I have, wherever possible, used the authors' own description of their ethnicity to establish this usage, as it differs from person to person. For instance, my description of Green comes from the words she used in the anthology.

I take this approach because the terms frequently used to describe race in the Western world may not apply to Indigenous Australians or may describe them in ways that do not match their own cultural understanding of themselves. A useful introduction to recent controversies concerning descriptions of Indigenous Australians by non-Indigenous Australians can be found in Anita Heiss' 2012 response to an attempt by a journalist to allocate race by skin colour.

Culture and Copyright: Green's story

Before I explore the nature of key works by the three novelists, I'd like to explore the issue of language and cultural copyright using Green's short story 'Kunmanara – Somebody Somebody' as a focus. In this, her first published short story, Green drew on her central Australian Yankunytjatjara background. When she was writing the story, she developed mechanisms to obtain cultural releases for the traditional aspects of the tale she told, developing a model for the potential use of Indigenous material in fiction without undermining Indigenous cultures.

'Kunmanara – Somebody Somebody' is about reactions to the death of a close family member and how ignoring the protocols for mourning in a community can cause spiritual as well as emotional disruption. It delicately examines the boundary between their beliefs and what mainstream Australia sees as folklore and superstition, and how an Indigenous community can experience the same event quite differently from mainstream Australia. The chief issues that needed consultation between the author and her community were those concerning the protocols relating to mourning and also the bringing of inner spiritual matters into a fictional reality.

The differences between Indigenous and mainstream Australian belief and attitudes towards these subjects are more often discussed as cultural property and as a legal issue than as literary ethics. For example, Jane Anderson examines the wider content in her 2005 article 'The Making of Indigenous Knowledge in Intellectual Property Law in Australia'. This focus is due to the cultural and historical context: land rights have been part of our cultural awareness for some years. Discussion on how to approach traditional knowledge for use in literature is solid for some genres, but not for science fiction. Anderson points out that

there is often slippage between the symbolic meaning of art and how it reaches the wider public (Anderson 2005: 362). This explains why careful mediating by the traditional owners of a culture can make a significant difference to the continuing strength of such a culture.

The measures that Green, her elders, peers and myself took during the editing of this piece enabled the traditional owners of the culture to remain in control. It also enabled their interpretation to be the dominant one. This permitted Green, as an Indigenous writer from that tradition, to preserve her culture and to write her short story, despite the limitations of current copyright law when faced with Indigenous culture.

Green's story is capable of being interpreted from several directions, depending on one's culture and genre of origin. It was written, however, using Yankunytjatjara culture. Green did not simply take the components of culture she needed for her story and impose them upon the story. She wrote a draft and consulted with elders and community peers about all cultural aspects of the story. This even included work on the punctuation to achieve a proper sense of language.

This parallels processes used in other types of consultation. In essence, it brings reflexivity into the editing process. Cherubini (2011) discusses how reflexive ethnography enables various types of study to respect the knowledge held by elders (in relation to Canada): this is a good scholarly illumination of what happened in the work that Green and I undertook. In the initial drafts, for instance, we discussed the possibility of her punctuation reflecting the dialect her characters spoke. This dialect is mainstream Australian English (grammatically and mostly syntactically) and is spoken by native speakers. It has, however, quite distinct underlying rhythms and emphases. Green had no model to fall back on, so she wrote what she thought reflected the speech patterns. Before it reached me as editor, she checked with cousins who also understand these speech patterns and adjusted her text. An edit to standardize punctuation would have destroyed this work.

This process was also applied to other elements of the work. For instance, the character Uncle Tomato was checked with community elders before he was incorporated into the story because (as I understand it) the character represented a person of power. Permissions were also sought for his role and his actions. This process did not happen just the once. It was consultative and ongoing, and the story was shaped gently and under supervision of the owners of the traditional culture it drew on. While the principles of reflexive ethnography hold for all storytelling of this kind, each negotiation for permissions to tell stories is unique, not only because of cultural differences and the specific knowledge of any given group, but also because of the story that is being told each time.

Before she wrote the story for *Baggage*, Green wrote a novel, about which she has said: 'I have written this doorstopper of a fantasy based on dreaming entities from the Yankunytjatjara side of the family' (Warren 2009). The

relationship of the fantasy novel with her heritage proved to be problematic and she did not submit the novel for publication. She explained: 'I came across this thing called copyright: a strange and wonderful thing which is good for the western world but does not fully protect the creative and intellectual rights of Indigenous Australians'. Publishing her novel would have brought the material she used for the 'doorstopper of a fantasy' into the fixed universe of Australian copyright law. Without the processes we established for her later short story, Green lacked the cultural permissions for this and was unwilling to compromise the cultural material she had drawn upon for her novel by publishing it. The conclusion she came to was 'I'm not prepared to sell out my community's heritage. With Australian copyright laws the way they are, the cost is too great; it takes too much from my people'. One of the reasons we approached the short story in such a particular way, with Green consulting with the appropriate culture-holders for different aspects of the material, was to avoid this problem.

At the more normative editing process I had to accept a slightly different sense of ownership. I could not suggest any changes for the story that went against culture. This particular limitation on the narrative led us into some interesting places. For instance, Eurocentric stories are usually wedded to the concept of tension followed by resolution. In Green's story we had to push the boundaries of culture in order to achieve the levels of tension that appear in the final story, but any further would have distorted culture unacceptably, so the tension levels are low compared with the other stories in *Baggage*.

When I edited Green's story, I was working, first, from the protocols and guidelines issued by the Australian Society for Authors and the Australia Council. These suggest paths to working with Indigenous writers and using Indigenous cultural material in one's own work. They are, however, general and are explorative rather than prescriptive. The remainder of the editing experience was a gentle, drawn-out interplay between the various parties.

From the editing angle, it was not only that I did not know what Green was allowed to tell in her story and what was not permitted, I was not permitted into the story. The boundaries of my learning about the culture from which the story came were and had to be quite strict: I remained an outsider. Jack Dann faced a similar problem with his poem 'Telescope' (set in an American sweat lodge) for the same anthology. He solved it through an immersive and very challenging experience. He explained the problem and how he faced it in the afterword he wrote for the poem and verbally to me during the editing. This type of immersive experience and that level of acceptance and permissions has to be rare. It was not available to me as an editor and it is not available to the vast majority of readers and writers. We are outsiders. We cannot become insiders without much care and many permissions.

In the process of editing, however, there was no sense that I needed to become an insider. What was needed from me was respect that I was not the holder of that understanding and that I was working with the story, not with the

culture that led to the story. I observed protocol and learned to work in a shared culture where I was ignorant and lacked power. I learned to moderate my demands to fit within the cultural needs and to consider the process of writing quite differently to usual. At the end of the writing and publishing is a finished work. Our relationship to the finished work as readers is quite different to the editorial relationship I had with Green's story.

Culture and genre

We use similar cultural standpoints to consider and to allocate genre and judgement Not everything marketed as speculative fiction is necessarily seen as speculative fiction by critics. Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* has been marketed as speculative fiction at times, due to the subtle introduction of what could be described as magic realism, or tradition, or simply magic. Lucashenko is from southern Queensland and describes herself as European and Murri. She is an award-winning writer whose novel, *Mullumbimby*, creates an inhabitable place that links western reality with a sense of the land. The liminality and the subtleness of the differences in how the world is presented are key. Farah Mendlesohn's reflection in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) simply underlines what Lucashenko intimates: that the immersive quality of a world based on a belief system may create a conflict between seeing the world of the novel as real and seeing it as fantastical. This implies that such a work may be difficult to assign to standard genre categories (Mendlesohn 2008: 105ff).

How then do we read *Mullumbimby*? The novel's lead character, Jo Breen, experiences the world through her own traditions and becomes aware of the world from that perspective. She is a fully-realized character, and her position and understanding are not static. As she moves through her life, she grows more aware of different parts of her background, learns about them and grows because of them: this learning is presented in the novel through Jo's relationship with the land. In the early parts of the novel she has bought her own farm in her country and is struggling to maintain it. Later, as her understanding grows, she develops a quite different relationship with the land to that of her lover, who is also of that country but would rather fight for government recognition and a different level of ownership. He does not live on country in the same way as Jo, and this differentiates their experience of the land. Jo experiences what, in speculative fiction terms could be described as the numinous, Two Boy does not. Lucashenko offers us a choice of readings of the landscape and the genre through the difference in her characters' perceptions of the world in which they live.

Kwaymullina points out that 'Eurocentric genre categories are difficult to apply to works that were not created out of a Eurocentric worldview, because the very notion of what is speculative and what is not relies on assumptions about the real' (2014b: 4). This numinous, or magic realism, or living in a universe that operates by different rules technically brings Lucashenko's work

into the genre of speculative fiction. Kwaymullina also says that 'The centre ground of "truth" is claimed by Eurocentric knowledge traditions, while ancient Indigenous understandings are labelled myth and legend, the stuff of metaphor rather than metaphysics' (2014a: 1). I like this distinction between metaphor and metaphysics, for the sophistication of Lucashenko's writing reinforces the use of metaphor in it.

Wright's *The Swan Book* obscures the metaphor and the metaphysics even more completely. The universe as presented by the characters is not framed straightforwardly and thus the guidance to readers on how to consider the narrative is significantly more ambiguous. Wright is from the Waanyi people of northern Australia. Her award-winning novels are strongly informed by her heritage and turn Eurocentric stories inside out by having the writing come from a clear and highly literary Indigenous point of view.

It is a novel about a future dystopia, where the first Indigenous leader of Australia is created and his bride is a girl whose universe is impossible to understand using a prism, that resembles our reality. It might be a Sleeping Beauty tale, or a metaphor, or it might be a world based on a profoundly different perception of reality to that of other novels. *The Swan Book* is so finely crafted that all three choices and more are possible. Despite it being marketed almost entirely as a literary novel, it contains fantasy tropes and science fiction tropes that mark it as speculative fiction. For instance, the world as we know it has been destroyed and something new is emerging; a perfect prince quests for his perfect bride. It both is and is not science fiction.

Lucashenko's novel, by contrast, is not rich in genre tropes. The tropes that appear are mainly literary: a woman returning to her land, rediscovering her roots, dealing with complex politics and even more complex people with no simple defined outcome. By describing *Mullumbimby* as literary fiction rather than speculative fiction, by thinking metaphor rather than metaphysics, the universe of the novel is real rather than imagined and the novel has a greater perceived cultural value in the literary world. But it is still potentially speculative fiction. It introduces concepts to readers and extends their sense of what is possible. As Kwaymullina says 'Indigenous narratives rarely fit neatly into Western genre divisions' (2014a: 3). This has implications for speculative fiction writers. We invent worlds. We set stories in them. Those worlds are not real; speculative fiction is the land of the 'what if?' *Mullumbimby* and *The Swan Book* give us the opportunity to consider what if at deeper levels, bringing our own assumptions and universe into question in profound ways. Using metaphor, using world views that are unfamiliar, these novels open doors.

Kwaymullina writes children's books and young-adult post-apocalyptic fantasy, all of which actively use her background as a Palyku woman from the far west of Australia. Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* is a post-apocalyptic novel written for young adults. It uses many standard genre indications and thus fits into the wider Australian expectations for a young

-adult post-apocalyptic novel. It was reviewed as such. It is the first of a series. The story is of a group of young people who have special talents and close affiliations with the lan,d and it is the story of how they survive despite a very antagonistic society. The story is not about survival, however, despite the battles and persecution, but is about creating a new society and about understanding relationships with people, with other beings, and with the land.

I have worded that plot summary carefully to highlight some of the concerns that I think Kwaymullina might have written into her book. This is my reading of it, however. This reading highlights the ambiguity of Kwaymullina's created world. Is it a fantasy world (for there are matters that can be interpreted as magic)? Is it a science-fictional world (for there is future science and it is post-apocalyptic)? Or is it based on a description of the universe that includes both of these elements as normative? Like Wright's work, it falls between genres, while clearly demonstrating that it belongs to speculative fiction.

Kwaymullina herself explains this latter side of her work when she says:

> I am often told that it is unusual to be both Indigenous and a speculative fiction writer. But many of the ideas which populate speculative fiction books – notions of time travel, astral projection, speaking the languages of animals or trees – are part of Indigenous cultures. One of the aspects of my own novels that is regularly interpreted as being pure fantasy, that of an ancient creation spirit who sung the world into being, is for me simply part of my reality. (Kwaymullina 2014a: 3)

This ambiguity and the need for criticism to deal with it is not a new part of Indigenous science fiction. Grace Dillon notes that that it is mainstream critical theory, not Indigenous cultures, which categorizes genres (Dillon 2012). Indigenous science fiction has the potential to reflect Indigenous cultural realities, as Kwaymullina explains. However, novels such as those by Lucashenko and Wright (while often categorized as literary) are capable of being seen as science fiction in the way that they extend thought, and extrapolate questions and responses to reality.

Who speaks for whom?

The common thread in all of this, whether it be interpretation of Indigenous Australian culture through the fiction written by Indigenous Australians, through establishing genre, down to editing processes, is that the locus of power is not where we necessarily expect it to be. The processes used to develop Green's story from its first draft to the final put the locus of responsibility for cultural integrity on the community that owns the culture, not on the author or the editor. The author has the responsibility for being true to the culture and for consulting properly. The editor must factor this in, especially if she (as in my case) has no claim to that culture whatsoever. The reader and critic are one stage further

removed.

This distance from Indigenous cultures means that any insights a reader has are their own: they cannot speak for the writers or discuss the intended cultural outcomes of the work. In the case of this essay, I have actively sought words the writers themselves have used that present this. Kwaymullina talks about her work and cultural background in public, the other writers, less so. The assumption that the reader (even the specialist reader) possesses privileged insight into the story is a critical one in relation to this article. Specialist knowledge has distinct boundaries and these boundaries are particularly important when examining work by an Indigenous Australian writer. To cross these boundaries is to abuse our privilege as readers and to place ourselves in a position we have no right to hold: as interpreters of Indigenous understanding.

Indigenous authors write using Indigenous concerns. This is part of a wider truth: we all write from a cultural background that is uniquely our own. Indigenous Australian cultures, however, often have quite specific needs concerning intellectual property, concerning who may read what, concerning who has the permission to talk about which subjects. This is linked to cultural boundaries. Culture is maintained by elders and the integrity of each cultural component is important to the whole. When these needs are not met through standard publishing practice, standard publishing practice has the potential to erode and even destroy elements of culture: printed storytelling becomes problematic.

Printed storytelling exposes aspects of culture to communities and individuals who do not understand their import and who take them out of context. This does not merely destroy the written component; it can damage the web of culture that surrounds it. Add to this a historical context of colonialism and appropriation, and it is not sufficient to say 'But all cultures have distinctive elements.' Indigenous Australian cultures are a special case due to the oral copyright that maintains cultural integrity and they are at risk because this oral copyright has no protection in copyright law.

This is closely linked to the position Indigenous peoples have in a given society and the ways in which mainstream society and academic study handles their culture and their cultural expressions. Kwaymullina talks about the role of scholars in interpreting Australian Indigenous literatures. She says, 'We have been written about as though non-Indigenous people are entitled to define our identities, our histories, and our ultimate destinies' (Kwaymullina 2014a: 4). The fundamental issue is how far our rights as interpreters of literature extend. Do they extend to the point of jeopardizing the right of interpretation of the traditional owners of the culture we are discussing? An approach that assumes that another culture has the privilege of defining one's own identity is essentially colonialist; therefore, I would argue, very strongly, that scholars have to be very aware of ethical and postcolonial issues when examining work by Indigenous writers.

Questions relating to this have been tackled by scholars in related

disciplines to science fiction studies. For instance, Niigonwedom James Sinclair and Renate Eigenbrod (2009) offer a brief retrospective of the status of studies in Indigenous literature from a mainly North American angle. They tackle such issues as understanding boundaries in order to establish dialogues and being aware of the complexities involved in literary criticism of Indigenous literature. In this regard, Kwaymullina remarks 'I am conscious, always, of the many ways in which the Indigenous peoples of this planet continue to be pushed to the edges, those dangerous places where it is easy to fall out of the world' (2014a: 2). This is the natural consequence of the definition of a culture by knowledgeable outsiders.

There is no simple line that demarcates Indigenous traditional culture from modern literary culture if the work is written by an Indigenous writer who explains that they draw upon their heritage: all four of these writers fit that category. These explanations can take many forms. Lucashenko refers to her heritage in the author biography for her novel, which describes her as a Palyku woman. Wright focuses on Indigenous characters and her narrative assumes a general knowledge of the history and treatment of those characters: she does not provide explanations of what may not be obvious to those who know nothing of Indigenous history in Australia. Green provides a clear identification of her background and her use of one of her ancestral cultures in the author's note to her story. In her articles and speeches Kwaymullina offers public explanations, such as those that are drawn on in this paper, references her background on her website and explores issues that it raises through the papers cited here. These four writers clearly identify that they use their traditional knowledge in their fiction. Not all of them self-identify as speculative fiction writers.

The second question is whether we know as much as we need to know in order to interpret from anything other than a Eurocentric viewpoint. I would argue that we do not, and I am not alone in this. There have been significant studies on Eurocentricism (which includes Anglo-American writing as a subset, in this instance) and how it influences the portrayal and analysis of work by various Aboriginal groups. Edward Hedican argues that this rests on work by anthropologists, which would explain why science fiction studies have not fully engaged with the concept as regards Indigenous Australian writers. It is not only that these analyses have not yet fully migrated to our discipline, however. There also exists the problem that, as Hedican says (writing about North American anthropology, but applicable to science fiction studies) that the 'Eurocentric perspective has failed to adequately portray the effects of the external changes forced upon Indigenous societies by Western industrialized nations' (Hedican 2014: 89).

A useful entry point into the discussion of non-Indigenous writers wishing to address issues related to Indigenous Australia is Terri Janke's *Writing Cultures: Protocols for Producing Indigenous Literature* (2007). For the more basic issue of how to define Eurocentrism, Lorenzo Cherubini (2008: 221–4) contains a useful

set of discussion tools, through raising issues such as mainstream dominance and whose views are represented and in what ways they are represented and what perspectives must be aware of. The bottom line, however, is that Indigenous Australians are the key cultural stakeholders on anything relating to matters of their identities and cultures, and that this can affect interpretations of their work.

Without an understanding of what has happened in this regard, it is very hard to evaluate critiques that writers present in speculative fiction, especially when the social criticism that is typical of some branches of the genre are in play. Attebery perhaps has this in mind when he talks about the difficulty of writing across cultural boundaries and the added complications when there is a history of abuse. He addresses Aboriginality in science fiction and discusses the role of the roles Aboriginal characters play in science fiction written by non-Indigenous authors, but many of the complexities he discusses apply also to those who read science fiction by Indigenous Australian writers. The tendency to assume that a character is symbolic, for instance, when 'Aboriginal characters stand variously for the intractability of the Australian environment, dangers to be overcome, quaint survival sf from prehistory, and a spiritual awareness that modern humanity has lost' (Attebery 2005: 387) can obscure the actual intentions of the author and even the words on the page.

The contact zone and the awareness of the interaction of cultures are integral to all the stories under consideration here: Lucashenko's characters' conflicting reactions to country, Wright's numinous swans and her handling of the post-apocalyptic world, Kwaymullina's quite different post-apocalyptic society and Green's conflict between traditional values and the values of Eurocentric Australia. These all fit into Attebery's description of 'negotiations among radically differing world-views and ways of life' (2005: 385).

Science fiction by Indigenous writers may choose to bring into play historical elements that Eurocentric science fiction does not. It also brings into account cultural elements. At the heart of this rests the need for a continuing awareness that work by Indigenous writers may contain content that works with material that Eurocentric writers can only access as outsiders. This has implications for criticism and also for editing.

Recognizing specific cultural references or, in the case of Wright and Lucashenko, references to land acquisition by the Australian government and local reactions to the displacement does not dislodge our Eurocentrism. An alert and educated Eurocentrism is still Eurocentrism. We are engaging with this fiction as cultural outsiders. Our engagement can still be solid, and it can still be valid, but we need to know what our limits are and how to work within them. Katharine Durnin (2011) talks about this as 'comparability': what is shared across cultures and how. While it is important to understand and interpret literary works, it is even more important not to abuse the power differential when the material to be analysed and the approaches are determined from an outsider

position that is privileged. An awareness of one's own cultural position and background is an important step in addressing the imbalance of power between critic and cultural owner in this case, but also an awareness that there is such a power imbalance and that it can have serious consequences.

None of this is ground-breaking. As noted elsewhere in this article, there is scholarship in this area. Hedican, for example, brings together key issues concerning the effects of Eurocentrism but also a bibliography. The implications for science fiction and its related genres, however, need more teasing out and require more awareness across the range of criticism now that Indigenous genre writers are more visible in their own countries.

The situation can be regarded as restrictive. 'Why can't we write about whatever we want, whenever we want?' or 'Why can't I edit this work the way I usually edit?' are questions I hear quite frequently when authors and editors get together and discuss Indigenous cultures and the possibilities they present for writing and reading. A related question is 'Why is my interpretation of this story as a critic problematic?' All of these questions come down to cultural ownership. The sense of the situation being restrictive comes from an invisible hierarchy, where the questioners are worried about loss of cultural privilege or lack basic knowledge on the subject.

If we look at it from a slightly different angle, however, and accept that the power to tell and control Indigenous Australian culture rests with Indigenous Australians, then instead of appearing restrictive, the situation is transformative. Kwaymullina, as ever, gives me words to explain this. She says 'when space is created for Indigenous people to speak, and the voices of other marginalized peoples to speak; when different perspectives are listened to respectfully and with understanding, we generate possibilities that did not exist before' (2014b: 5). Speculative fiction is all about possibilities: by listening to Australian Indigenous writers, we can explore universes that we couldn't even conceive of. We can understand our own reality differently.

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Simone Saueressig and the Indigenous Fantasy Epic

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Thomas M. Disch states that speculative fiction writers have the 'custodial work of keeping the inherited body of myths alive' (Disch 2005: 23). Brazilian author Simone Saueressig's *Os Sóis da América* (*The Suns of America*) (2013–4) exemplifies this statement. Inspired by the world-building of J.R.R. Tolkien, Saueressig's epic fantasy spans the Americas and weaves together many of its indigenous mythologies. This article begins by placing *The Suns of America* within the historical context of indigenous culture in Brazilian speculative fiction during the last century. It then discusses two of the author's earlier works, addressing their influence as predecessors to the epic. Finally, this article studies the work itself: content, inspiration and analysis. It explores both the journey of the protagonist and the journey of the author, who spent thirty years from inspiration until publication of the work. The author was consulted for verification of certain details, such as when the books were written and the influences of other works.

Indigenous culture in Brazilian speculative fiction

Historically, the integration of indigenous characters and culture in Brazilian speculative fiction has been rare. As early as the 1880s, the use of natives and their traditions in Brazilian literature had been cited as a form of 'national backwardness' and so actively repressed (De Sousa Causo 2010: 7; translation mine). De Sousa Causo points out the irony of arguing against the use of native cultures in Romantic literature despite the prevalence of the knight, a figure which could be seen as representing the medieval oppression of the peasant (2009: 18–9).

In a 1917 essay, Monteiro Lobato drew attention to the scarcity of elements from indigenous culture and mythology within the nation's fiction. In his essay, he suggested that the 'fauns, satyrs, and Maenads' of European fantasy so popular in the art and literature of the time could have easily been replaced by their national counterparts: Iaras, Caiporas and Boitatás (quoted De Azevado et al 1997: 36).

Shortly after, Lobato began to introduce Brazilian folkloric characters into his own works. In 1921, he published *O Saci*, presenting adaptations of folkloric characters like Saci-Pererê, Iara and Boitatá; the first a small black child with one leg and a red cap, the second a mermaid, and the last an immense serpent with flaming eyes. In the process, Lobato transformed Saci-Pererê from a demon reeking of sulphur into a children's companion and, at the same time, one of the most beloved characters in children's literature. The Saci-Pererê of his books forever redefined the character's image within the national identity, making it the most recognizable character in Brazilian folklore (cf. Fiuza 2012). Loboto's works – fantasy stories for children – gained huge success for a time.

Print runs of his books reached up to 100,000 copies (De Azevedo et al. 1997: 225; Radino 2003: 102). Other speculative fictions which featured indigenous characters in prominent roles also began to appear, such as Gastão Crulz's *Amazônia Misteriosa* (1925) and Menotti Del Picchia's *A República 3000* (1930) and *Kalum: o Mistério do Sertão* (1936). However, that trend did not last long.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Lobato's works were condemned by both the religious high schools and the government (Radino 2003: 104–5). Until the 1970s, the literal-minded education system distanced itself from the 'lies' contained in fairy tales and fantastic fiction (Radino 2003: 107). The condemnation of the fantastic in literature, coupled with a general prejudice against indigenous folklore, created a dearth of indigenous culture in speculative fiction during a large part of the twentieth century.

More than fifty years after the appearance of *Kalum: o Mistério do Sertão*, the publication of the 'Anthropophagic Manifest of Brazilian Science Fiction' by Ivan Carlos Regina reopened discussions around the lack of a national identity in works of fantastic literature (Haywood Ferreira 2011: 218–9). This paper was modelled after Oswald de Andrade's 'Anthropophagic Manifest', published in 1922, which pointed out Brazilian authors' tendencies to 'cannibalize' cultures from other parts of the world. Although the 'Anthropophagic Manifest of Brazilian Science Fiction' was originally written as something of a joke, it produced real debate within the community. This took the form of letters, rebuttals, and stories published within the pages of *Somnium*, the official publication of the Brazilian Science Fiction Reader's Club and later in *Megalon*, one of the most prominent Brazilian fanzines.

Shortly after this dispute, speculative fiction rooted in indigenous culture once again began to appear in the marketplace. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Simone Saueressig published *A Noite da Grande Magia Branca* (*Night of the Great White Magic*, 1988) and *A Fortaleza de Cristal* (*The Crystal Fortress*, 1993), two fantasy works with indigenous protagonists. In 1990, Ivanir Calado published *A mãe do Sonho* (*Mother of the Dream*), a dark fantasy set during Brazil's military dictatorship (1964 to 1985) in which the spirits of natives rise up to protect the last survivor of their tribe. In the mid-90s, Roberto de Sousa Causo published the first of his *Saga do Tajarê* stories, a fantasy series set in pre-Columbian Brazil that features a native protagonist. De Sousa Causo refers to these sword and sorcery-inspired works as 'borduna and sorcery' (2010: 70), where 'borduna' is a reference to the ceremonial maces used by many Brazilian natives.

The works by Saueressig and De Sousa Causo were followed by another gap of over a decade with no major works of Brazilian speculative fiction featuring indigenous protagonists. However, that tendency changed at the start of the twenty-first century, coinciding with a boom in Brazilian speculative fiction. The number of titles recorded in the *Brazilian Fantastic Literature Yearbook* leapt from 163 published in 2005 to 889 books published in 2010, a growth of over

500% in five years (Silva and Branco 2012: 8). During this period of growth, titles featuring indigenous folklore and characters underwent a resurgence.

De Sousa Causo's *Tajarê* stories were published in book format in 2004. In 2007, Saueressig's works from the 1990s received new editions. From 2008 onward, at least one original work of speculative fiction featuring characters from Brazilian folklore has been published every year. J. Modesto's *Anhangá: A Fúria do Demônio* (*Anhanga: The Demon's Fury*, 2008) features a native shaman and native warrior as two of the protagonists, as well as an innovative use of indigenous mythology. As I have stated elsewhere:

> By raising the characters of folklore to the status of gods, by placing Tupã, creator of thunder as a supreme god above them, by giving him an eternal enemy in the form of Anhangá, the author has invented his own pantheon of Brazilian gods. Thus, the role of these beings in the story, besides the obvious addition of action and magic to the adventure, can be considered the creation of a Brazilian pantheon to match those encountered in other parts of the world. (Kastensmidt 2013)

In 2009, the anthology *Dimensões.BR*, edited by Helena Gomes, collected fifty-five original speculative fiction stories situated in Brazil, many of which featured characters from Brazilian folklore. Several works can be cited for the period 2010 to 2012, including Walter Tierno's *Cira e o Velho* (*Cira and the Old Man*, 2010), Marcus Achiles' *Danação* (*Damnation*, 2011), Felipe Castilho's *Ouro, Fogo & Megabytes* (*Gold, Fire, and Megabytes*, 2012), and Tânia Souza and Marcelo Amado's anthology *Quando o Saci Encontra os Mestres do Terror* (*When Saci Meets the Masters of Terror*, 2012). The series of novelettes entitled *Duplo Fantasia Heroica* (2010–2) featured new stories in Causo's *Tajarê's Saga* and stories from *The Elephant and Macaw Banner* universe, a fantasy series featuring prominent use of indigenous characters and folklore.

2013 saw the launch of Brasil Fantástico, an anthology organized by the Science Fiction Reader's Club (CLFC), Brazil's largest and oldest speculative fiction organization. Upon announcing the anthology, the organizers revealed that they had been inspired by the success of recent folklore-themed works, which had received 'recognition from the public and critics even outside Brazil' (Davisson and Sama 2012). However, despite its growth in popularity and acclaim, Brazilian speculative fiction with heavy influence from indigenous culture still makes up a small percentage of the hundreds of titles published each year.

Predecessors of Saueressig's *Night of the Great White Magic* and *The Crystal Fortress* were two of the first major speculative fiction works with indigenous protagonists published after the 'Anthropophagic Manifest of Brazilian Science Fiction'. They are relevant to this study both in terms of their historical significance regarding indigenous culture in Brazilian speculative

fiction, and for their influence on the later epic, *The Suns of America.*

While *The Suns of America* is epic in scope, traversing an entire continent, *Night of the Great White Magic* and *The Crystal Fortress* are more contained. Both of the books are shorter than 112 pages, smaller than any single volume of *The Suns of America* (the smallest of those being *The Condor Flute*, at 152 pages). However, their brevity does not diminish their importance. As Diana Maria Marchi writes, *Night of the Great White Magic* can be seen as a 'redemption' of the folklore, myths, and legends of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, specifically the regional indigenous culture (2000: 187).

Night of the Great White Magic and *The Crystal Fortress* can be viewed as precursors *The Suns of America*. All three books feature pre-adolescent indigenous protagonists, magic, and characters from indigenous mythology. The protagonist of *Night of the Great White Magic* is Teçaya, a pre-adolescent native witch. During her adventure, she meets Brazilian folkloric creatures like Caapora and Mãe-do-Ouro; the former is a protector of the forest, often described riding a boar, and the latter is a protector of gold mines, often represented as a beautiful woman or as a ball of fire. Real places, such as the Itaimbezinho Canyon in southern Brazil, are mentioned in this work.

In that aspect, however, *The Crystal Fortress* differs, as it occurs in a land called A Terra da Magia (The Land of Magic). The protagonists are two young natives, Saíra and Batuíra. As in The Suns of America, the world is firmly based in indigenous culture and mythology, but not tied to any specific historical period. De Sousa Causo draws parallels with Tolkien, calling *The Crystal Fortress* a battle against the 'Sauron of the Pampas' (2008) and stating in another text that:

> [The two books] are inspired by Tolkien, but occur in a parallel version of the Pampas, with natives and natural entities as the protagonists. [Simone] includes horses in her fantasy, without mentioning the Europeans who introduced them to America – just as Tolkien has horses in his Middle Earth, without dealing with the Romans who introduced them to the British Isles. (De Sousa Causo 2010: 8)

He also notes: 'Beyond the parallels with Tolkien's work, the magical creatures from the national folklore and their protean and evocative qualities provide an efficient and interesting counterpoint' (2008).

Much as Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) inspired *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5), *Night of the Great White Magic* and *The Crystal Fortress* can be seen as precursors to Saueressig's own epic, which also came to be published twenty years after the those earlier works. They differ from *The Hobbit* in that they do not specifically share the same characters or same world as *The Suns of America*, but the fact that they all have adolescent indigenous protagonists and all use the same cultural base to establish their worlds provides them a feeling of unity.

Pelume's journey

The Suns of America is a tetralogy composed of *O Nalladígua* (*The Nalladigua*, 2013), *A Flauta Condor* (*The Condor Flute*, 2013), *O Coração de Jade* (*The Jade Heart*, 2014), and *A Pedra da História* (*The History Stone*, 2014). They contain between 152 and 184 pages each, and are intended primarily for a middle-grade audience, 11 to 14 years old. To date, these works have only been published in Portuguese.

The Suns of America follows the story of Pelume, a native child from a cave-dwelling tribe in the continent's southernmost island. From the map provided with the book, which is the same shape as the Americas, we can see that Pelume's island is a counterpart of Tierra del Fuego in the real world. In this version, however, his island is firmly within the Antarctic, as evidenced by the nights that go on for months.

At the end of each long night, the tribe's storyteller is responsible for telling 'the story of the Sun', which will bring back the day. At the start of *The Nalladigua*, however, the tribe's ancient storyteller perishes, and no one can remember the story to end the long Antarctic night. The tribe becomes confused and begins to forget its own identity. As the tribe's fire dims, individual faces become unrecognizable. People confuse each other's names, and in some cases, forget even their own names. Pelume volunteers to find someone who can teach him the story of the sun, and sets off north. During the course of the four books, he crosses a fantasy version of the Americas all the way from the Antarctic to the Arctic.

In each land, Pelume interacts with tribes and creatures inspired by the myths and legends of the corresponding locales. He visits parallel versions of Patagonia, Colonia del Sacramento, Potosi, Paititi, Marcahuasi, Tiwanaku, Tenochtitlan, a Hopi village, Niagra Falls, and the Arctic Circle. Pelume takes with him a walking stick that he finds on the beach; this turns out to be a magical branch from the Nalladigua Tree of Mocoví legend, in which souls climb the tree to reach the Mocoví version of heaven. Each time Pelume encounters a new culture, he asks the people to tell their story of the Sun. Each culture has its own version of the story, but none of them is the one he seeks. However, each encounter leaves him with some object with which to remember that place's story. Pelume attaches these talismans to his branch. The power of the Nalladigua branch becomes greater with each new talisman added to it.

Pelume makes many friends during his journeys, two of whom – Misqui and Nimbó – accompany him to the very end. He must also face Machi, a wizard of Chilote legend, who desires the powerful Nalladigua for himself. Machi chases Pelume across the continent, and through all four books.

At the end of his journey, after travelling all the way to the Arctic, Pelume defeats Machi and meets Sedna, the Inuit sea goddess. Ignoring his protests, she sends him home on a whale. After arriving back at the southern end of the world, Pelume spends days recounting his adventure to the tribe; as a

result, the sun once again appears on the horizon. When this occurs, Pelume discovers that the story he has sought all along is his own story. Sun and fire return, and the tribe can once again recognize themselves; they have regained their identity.

Inspiration and creation of – an author's journey

The series of events which led to the creation and publication of *The Suns of America* spanned three decades. The author relates how she read the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* after acquiring it at a school book fair, then took four more years to track down the other two. During that period, she invented countless endings of her own to the tale (Silva and Branco 2013: 118–9). When she finally did read the ending, in 1982, she felt a great loss at having no more stories left to read from that world. The next day, she began her first attempt at writing her own epic story (Silva and Branco 2013: 120).

At the time, Saueressig was eighteen years old. Her first attempt, which she quickly discarded, told a story of enchanted castles and a wandering swordswoman. She relates how she quickly came to the conclusion that 'If I wanted to write my own *The Lord of the Rings*, I needed to study Brazilian folklore, because Tolkien began with the folklore of his country' (Silva and Branco 2013: 120–1).

In 1983, after some research of indigenous legends, she began work on what would become *Night of the Great White Magic* and, later, on *The Crystal Fortress*. Neither of these individual works was the epic she had originally set out to produce, but they provided a basis for *The Suns of America*. In 1992 came the final seed of inspiration from which grew Saueressig's epic. Working as a journalist at the time, she was asked to write an article about the sun. After interviewing a professor about how ancient people (such as Egyptians, Mayans, and Aztecs) viewed the sun, and speaking to children about how they felt about the sun, she produced, along with the article, a 350-word story about a child who dreams of turning into different birds and flying across the Americas. This turned out to be the final inspiration for the story of Pelume and his journey, and she began taking notes on what would become The Suns of America. The actual writing of the books took place over a decade later from 2005 to 2009 (Saueressig 2014).

During the three decades from conception to publication, Saueressig published twenty-four other volumes – spanning children's books to adult literature – with twelve publishers; the most successful of these works was A *Máquina Fantabulástica* (*The Fantabulastic Machine*, 1997), which has sold more than 50,000 copies. Despite her success with traditional publishing, Saueressig chose to self-publish *The Suns of America*. She states that she did approach some major publishers, but they turned down the first book for being part of a series. Their principal buyers for books aimed at schoolchildren are government educational departments, which are not allowed to buy books

from series, as such works are considered ‘incomplete’ when purchased alone (Saueressig 2014). For smaller publishers, publishing a series represented a significant investment. Some agreed to publish the first volume, but Simone was looking for a partner who would sign on for the entire series (Saueressig 2014).

After years of submissions, Simone grew tired of the process and decided to publish the books herself. It was not her first self-published project, she had already self-published some books in print and online. It was, however, by far her most ambitious self-publishing project to date. The author states that the series has done well and points out that, ironically, *The Suns of America* has made the majority of its sales direct to schools. (Silva and Branco 2013: 133).

The Suns of America as an indigenous epic

Although the map presented in *The Suns of America* has the same shape as the Americas, the story is set in a parallel version of the continent, not tied to any specific historical period. For example, in *The Nalladigua*, Pelume visits Colonia del Sacramento. Historically, this city was founded by Portugal in 1680; the name of the city itself implies influence of the Catholic Church. In *The Suns of America* version, however, we find no Europeans there, but instead Guarani natives. These Guarani ride horses and use terms like ‘bagual’ and ‘tche’, which are common to the gauchos of southern Brazil, and characteristics acquired in the real world long after the arrival of Europeans in the region. Thus, the reader with a knowledge of South American history is expected to understand this to be a fantasy world. The reader without this knowledge can take all of it for granted. Cesar Silva compares this phenomenon to Tolkien when he says, ‘Most people who read *The Lord of the Rings* don’t perceive its influence from Celtic and British mythology’ (Silva and Branco 2013: 121).

It is interesting to note differences in this regard between *The Suns of America* and its two predecessors. *Night of the Great White Magic* references true locations and, although it is a fantasy book, appears to be set in the real world. The *Crystal Fortress*, although based on Brazilian indigenous culture, uses a fictitious setting with invented names. *In The Suns of America*, Simone takes a middle ground. Although the map presents the same form as the Americas, and many places retain their original names, it is clearly not set in any period of history in the real world.

The author intertwines indigenous mythologies and cultures as she molds her world. Furufuré, the wind in birdform from the mythologies of Southern Chile and Argentina, is a recurring character in all four books; however, this wind-bird changes in both name and form as Pelume travels north. Furufuré becomes the Mapuche ‘Tathla’ when Pelume reaches Patagonia; the Urubu-rei (King Vulture) over the land of the Kamayura; Wayra Tata and Chuquichinchay in the Andes; Ehecatl in Mexico; and, finally, in the Arctic Circle, he becomes Kauna, the South Wind. Thus, this symbolic bird both unifies the peoples of the Americas,

connecting them by the common mythology of a ‘great bird’, while at the same time giving each region its own identity.

In another example, Pelume visits the Wandering City of Patagonia: Elelín. The people and stories of this city mix names from Mapuche, such as ‘Tathla’ and ‘Misqui’, and references from Tehuelche, such as Kóoch, their creator myth. In this legendary city, Saueressig gives the people light skin and golden-coloured hair, characteristics non-existent in the region before the arrival of Europeans. Misqui, a golden-haired girl from this city, accompanies Pelume from that point forward, and attracts attention wherever she goes. This gives the city a magical, legendary quality, which fits well with its mythology as an enchanted city, nearly impossible to locate, and filled with gold.

The books are filled with fantastical creatures inspired by indigenous mythology. In most cases, the author uses the historical names for the creatures found in the story, making it easy for the curious reader to research them and their source mythologies. Table 1 gives examples from the many mythologies from which the author took inspiration for the entities and legends found within *The Suns of America*:

Mythology	References
Chilote and Mapuche	Camahueto, Fiura, Invunche, Machi, Piguchen
Tehuelche	Kóoch
Mocoví	Nalladígua
Guarani	Ao Ao, Nhanderiquei, Karai Pyhare, Jasy Jatere
Tupi	Anhangá, Curupira, Ipupiara,
Kichwa and Inca	Coquena, Pachamama, Chuquichinchay, Viracocha
Amazonian tribes	Cobra-grande
Aztec	Xocoyole, Ehecatl, Tzitzimitl, Cipactli
Ioway	Ictinike
Hopi	Hahi Wugti
Cherokee	Uktena
Lakota	Unktehila, Canotila
Algonquian	Windigo
Abenaki	Glooskap, Malsum

Inuit	Adlet. Akhlut, Tupilaq, Ahkiyyini, Sedna
Native American (diverse)	Coyote, Thunderbird
European origin	Headless Mule

Table 1: Some examples of the mythologies in *The Suns of America*

Taking her inspiration from various pre-Colombian American cultures, Saueressig has created a truly indigenous world. Out of the dozens of people who appear in the four books, only one (the mysterious Abapera, who appears in four chapters of the first book) shows any sign of coming from a non-indigenous culture. In fact, his very appearance turns on its head the all-too-familiar 'token minority' concept. In the same way, the Headless Mule is the only myth of European (rather than indigenous) origin, although it is now one of the best-known characters in Brazilian folklore.

Symbolism in *The Suns of America*

Saueressig finds unification in these many cultures by way of their stories. At its core, *The Suns of America* is about the power of stories and those who tell them. The author has hinted that cultural globalization has influenced her writing (Saueressig 2014). We can see that the Nalladigua branch becomes stronger with every story that Pelume collects. This seems to say that the author does not see cultural globalization as a problem in itself; it can provide a different perspective and enrich our life experience.

At the same time, she also presents another side of the story: namely, that cultural globalization can overpower local culture and make one lose one's own identity. When the tribe forgets its stories, not only is the tribe's identity lost, but so are the identities of all its individuals. In this way, the author appears to say that knowledge of one's cultural past is necessary for knowing oneself.

Pelume must discover those stories which have been lost. He represents the cultural custodians: those who retain a society's culture and pass it on to future generations. In the story, a teller of tales is the only one who can bring back the sun and lead the people from darkness. During their adventures, Misqui states: 'Everything that has a heart, has a story. Every flower, every fruit, every creature. And when we know the story, that fruit, animal, or river becomes closer, more beautiful. It is as if it becomes a part of us' (Saueressig 2013). We can understand the tribe's story as synonymous with its culture.

We are our stories

As shown in this article, Saueressig's *The Suns of America* falls well within Disch's 'custodial work of keeping the inherited body of myths alive'. While, historically, Brazilian authors have been accused of cannibalizing other cultures, Saueressig has taken a different route by cultivating those of her

native Brazil and all the Americas. Just as her protagonist, Pelume, saves his people's culture through storytelling, Simone uses her epic fantasy to preserve the cultural identity of her country and her continent.

From Table 1, we find no less than fifteen indigenous mythologies represented in the four books. The author builds a binding connection among these mythologies by way of their stories, weaving them together into one coherent world. The protagonist, upon nearing the end of his journey, after having met many peoples and learned their stories, remarks how the land appears to be endless. This comment harkens to the vast amount of indigenous culture throughout the Americas, which is ours to protect or to lose.

The creation of *The Suns of America*, from the first spark of inspiration, spanned thirty years, two preliminary novels, and a wealth of research into indigenous cultures, which spread from the top to the bottom of the globe. Along the way, Saueressig trod her own hero's journey. The result of her work, an indigenous epic fantasy, provides an opportunity for the next generation of readers to discover some of the stories from peoples whose voices are ever fainter against the backdrop of globalized mass culture.

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Marcelo Cohen and Science Fiction Narrative as Canonical Literature: The Case of *El Testamento de O'Jaral*

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Marcelo Cohen in the Argentine cultural field

Although he is only now starting to receive some recognition in English, Marcelo Cohen is viewed by many, such as the writer and critic Ricardo Piglia, as among the best living Argentine writers, whilst others hold him as Borges' heir. Cohen is a translator, editor, literary critic and prolific author, with more than ten novels, seven short story volumes and three book-length essays under his belt. His work has earned him several prestigious awards, including the Konex Prize (2004) and the Premio de la Crítica de la Fundación del Libro (2012). One of his books (*El fin de lo mismo* (1992); *The End of of the Same*) was recently translated into English thanks to a 2012 PEN Translation Fund Grant and is awaiting publication.

Cohen's aesthetics owe much to a very original take on Argentine literature and cultural traditions as well as to careful readings of authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Paul Auster and especially J.G. Ballard. This is because of his interest in the relationship between space and memory, his exploration of the psychological responses individuals give to highly technologized environments, and his preoccupation with the nature of language. Cohen's narrative is particularly focused on what he has called in several interviews and conferences the 'propriety of language' (Cohen 2010): its cadence, its rhythms, the use of local traditions, lexicons and jargon. Language, for Cohen, is a material universe. Such materiality is the scaffolding of literature, particularly when literature explores how politics and ideology impact on everyday life. Story and storytelling are relevant because they organize our perception of the real, which in turn form our understanding of the deep relationship between fact and becoming. In an interview with Walter Lezcano, Cohen stated:

> La literatura está para ampliar las vivencias, que el pensamiento se expanda y la imaginación pueda ser mayor y podamos sentir más. Y, además, para darnos maneras de decir que nos permitan liberarnos de un régimen del decir. (Lezcano 2013)
> [Literature's purpose is to expand experiences, to enlarge thinking, and to let imagination grow so we can feel more. And also to give us ways of telling that allow us to free ourselves from a system of saying.]

For Cohen, as for other science fiction writers from Argentina, the brand of highly historicized, explanatory realism practised by the majority of the country's canonical writers is a constraining genre that tries to impose its rules over narrative. In particular, the rise of the historical novel since Argentina's return to democracy in the 1980s can be seen as an attempt to give narrative coherence

to the recent violent past by contextualizing it historically and by reflecting critically on the political sphere (as, for example, in the work of Manuel Puig or David Viñas).

Paradoxically, in Cohen's view, the attempt at mimesis dilutes the sense of our experience (whether that be social, psychological, historical) as the chain of events unfold. For Cohen realism cannot fully grasp the real, it can only chronicle facts in an attempt at stability. But the real is not stable, therefore we need other narrative forms in order to grab hold of meaning when all forms of perception are forever changing and transforming themselves (Cohen 2003: 144–7). Hence, Cohen has turned to a distinctive personal spin on science fiction as a way to narrate how our perception of history, politics, and ideology transform not only our environment but our inner selves.

Argentine science fiction dates back to the early 19th century. The modality was never properly understood nor studied in the country and it continues to be considered a minor genre. By contrast, the major literary confrontation of the 1960s and 1970s was between the traditional Argentine preference for realism, when narrating political issues (cf. Gramuglio 2002), and the prestige conferred upon more activist authors by their use of the fantastic. In this context, it is not surprising that the choice to write sf risks both commercial and artistic neglect. In a way, Cohen has acknowledged the danger by calling his narrative everything from fantastic to anticipatory, dystopian, prospective, and even 'insecure realism'. To say that he has a fairly tense relationship with the classic narratives of science fiction is an understatement.

Despite such apparent mistrust, Cohen is very clear about where he stands. In several interviews, including the one mentioned above, when asked directly about science fiction and its narrative potential, he points out that the modality offers tools to process and organize how we experience reality. In, for example, *¡Realmente Fantástico!* (2003) Cohen has argued that only science fiction is able to hang on to the utopian impulse of an ever-changing future that allows for an understanding of the complexity of reality. So, when Cohen talks about reality, particularly about Argentine reality, he does so from an oblique perspective by locating his stories in an imaginary universe, the Panoramic Delta, which is the locus of most of his novels and short stories.

Although the Panoramic Delta echoes a sort of post-apocalyptic Argentina, it is above all the space for a complex exercise in ideological estrangement. Within Cohen's narrative the Panoramic Delta allows for an exploration of the political and ideological programmes designed, discussed, and/or carried out by Argentina's intelligentsia since at least the mid-1960s, as well as a reflection on the modernization process that took place at the end of the 19th century. Science fiction narrative offers Cohen the ability to test their disengagement from utopian will. In *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009), Fredric Jameson roots this alienation in the utopian projects' anchorage in state-centred master narratives. The Panoramic Delta gives a glimpse of what utopia 'cannot (yet) think, what

lies beyond the very limits of its own social system and of the empirical being it seeks to transcend' (Jameson 2009: 361).

If language is Cohen's primary material concern and science fiction his main avenue for deconstructing ideology, complexity has evolved into one of his most important philosophical concerns. Literature and science are an ever-present creative unit in Cohen's narrative. Cohen's novels work on the experience of the political by using Ilya Prigogine's description of dissipative structures as metaphors for the social experience. When describing his 'insecure realism', Cohen quotes Prigogine and then goes on to say:

> En los sistemas alejados del equilibrio hay una desintegración continua de la que continuamente surgen sistemas nuevos. (Como los relatos, estos procesos son irreversibles: trazan la flecha del tiempo)
>
> El nombre de estructura disipativa expresa una paradoja central en la visión de Prigogine. La disipación sugiere caos y disolución: lo opuesto de la estructura. Pero se define como estructura disipativa al sistema capaz de mantenerse estable a condición de abrirse permanentemente a los flujos del medio; se autoorganiza, se re-alimenta en contacto con agentes aleatorios y se transforma por bifurcación, amplificación y acoplamiento. Cada turbulencia genera nuevos órdenes. [...] La novela agónica que se obstina en acompañar las abulias del público es el universo tibio de la entropía. Las narraciones de lo real incierto son estructuras caóticas alejadas del equilibrio. Son incendios, son oleajes. (Cohen 2003: 146)
>
> [In systems that are far from equilibrium, there is a continuous disintegration from which new systems continually arise. (Like stories, these processes are irreversible: they trace the arrow of time)
>
> The idea of the dissipative structure expresses a central paradox in Prigogine. The dissipation suggests chaos and dissolution; the opposite of structure. But we define as a dissipative structure one capable of stability, provided that it it is permanently open to the flow of a medium. So it organizes itself; it self-feeds when in contact with random agents, and it transforms itself by bifurcation, by amplification, and by coupling. Each turbulence generates new orders. [...] The dying novel that insists on accompanying the public´s boredom is the lukewarm universe of entropy. The stories of the real uncertain are chaotic structures far from equilibrium. They are fire; they are waves]

One of the novels where all the issues discussed (i.e., Cohen's concern about the nature of language, his quest into the relationship between ideology and everyday life, the testing of political programs through science fiction, etc.) come together with great clarity is *El testamento de O'Jaral* (1995; *O'Jaral's Will*). The novel analyzes the relationship between political collusion, guerrilla warfare, dissent and a memory that distorts and begs for understanding when

understanding is no longer possible. This was not an easy meditation in the Argentina of the 1990s. At this time debates about human rights lawsuits against the military junta and their henchmen were at their height, the political legacy of the 1970s was being evaluated against the reality of the implementation of the neoliberal project, and literature seemed to have lost its conjuring ideological appeal. *El testamento de O'Jaral* works with this period's anxiety and considers the symbolic legacy of political activism by attempting to establish a dialogue with the narratives of memory from multiple points of view, but also, by taking into account its divergent outcomes. In the pages that follow, I will analyze the terms of such dialogue and I will explore how the vocabularies and concerns of science fiction offer a way to return to a concept of utopia that looks towards a future.

O'Jaral's Will: all that is solid melts into air

El testamento de O'Jaral is both a political and an existentialist novel written at a time when political discourse had reached an impasse and when the engaged intellectual model that was paramount in Argentina for over fifty years had already vanished. However, this is neither a nostalgic nor a melancholic reading about the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead it presents a ferocious meditation on the impossibility of making utopia a fixed, preconceived objective. The novel renounces historical teleology and its ideologies. In this way, the book operates against the grain of the Argentine cultural field's doxa.

Constructed as a cross between detective story, adult bildungsroman, and philosophical meditation, the story follows Luis Carlos O'Jaral, a reclusive pirate translator of pulp books for an itinerant pirate press as he searches for, finds, and ultimately saves his brother from media and political conglomerates. As the novel opens, O'Jaral lives a solitary life, away from his peers. He seeks a 'revelation' which will allow him to become the intellectual warrior who finds a 'new political clarity' able to 'lift humanity from an interregnum of sourness' (Cohen 1995: 77–8). In isolation and training, O'Jaral refines his identity with the remaindered ideals of the elitist intellectual political avant-garde and a vague reminiscence of Nietzsche's superman. He has a sense of moral and physical superiority that is completely shattered throughout the novel and replaced with a more intimate and personal experience of the political. Whatever remains of the ideal 1970s revolutionary quickly fades away.

In the very first scene of the novel, O'Jaral is unpleasantly shaken from his stable, organized life by a visit from two men: his former psychologist and a former political associate of his stepbrother, Galgo Ravinkel. The two characters blackmail O'Jaral into finding Galgo and his political organization for they fear the political campaigns Galgo is orchestrating in the midst of a major geopolitical vote. Their fictitious country has to decide whether or not to join the Panatlantic System, the major political and economic international organization within the Panoramic Delta. O'Jaral is asked to betray his stepbrother (who protected and

educated him in his youth) to those in power, and to reveal his plans so that the government can neutralize them.

As O'Jaral makes decisions on the nature of his search and on the relationships he establishes with the characters he meets, he discovers that the private, secluded world that he created for himself was not as stable as he imagined it to be. Moreover, once he is pushed back into the public sphere, chaos and randomness take over his life. In this sense, the novel provides sets of unstable bifurcations, ever more random, where it is possible to read chains of events that re-organize our sense of the real into a sense of something lived. In his essays, Cohen has described such an effect as a resonance (Cohen 2003: 149–55). In the novel, this effect is described in terms of chaos theory, for the present determines the future despite our inability to predict it. O'Jaral says:

> Había corroborado que todo encuentro fortuito encerraba una celada, aproximadamente, y que él debía confiarse a su radar privado. En un mundo holístico y no lineal, todo acontecimiento tenía que ser significativo, esta podía ser la rudimentaria idea del caos de un zoquete como el Galgo, y no había mejor manera de encontrarlo que entregarse a su lógica. (Cohen 1995: 76)
> [He had confirmed that any unforeseen encounters contained at least one ambush, and that he should trust his private radar. In a holistic and nonlinear world, every event had to be significant; this could be the rudimentary idea of chaos held by a chump like Galgo, and there was no better way to find out than indulge his logic].

Later on in the novel, O'Jaral adds:

> No todos los acontecimientos *inscritos* eran del mismo orden, algunos incluso eran contradictorios, pero algo empezaba dilucidar, y era que bajo la gaseosa acumulación de fenómenos había una fluidez clandestina hacia donde distintos agentes los estaban guiando con guiños y señuelos (Cohen 1995: 93; emphasis in original)
> [Not all registered events were of the same order, some were even contradictory, but he began to elucidate something, and it was that under the gaseous accumulation of phenomena, there was a clandestine flow to where the different agents were leading him with winks and lures]

Events self-organize into history even if we cannot make head nor tail of them at the time. The form of order that arises from the selectivity is not what we choose or predict, as O'Jaral finds out through multiple experiences and discussions. This apparent chaos follows Prigogine´s dissipative estructuration. In the novel, this concept is built around the multiple bifurcations (either possible or actual)

that take place as O'Jaral makes choices and the narration advances. Every event hinges on and echoes another one that can be traced through multiple encounters which sometimes seem banal and turn out to be crucial. By the same token, the narrative lacks demarcation lines between the real, the media's version of events, and the drug-induced experiences of the characters. Literary, historical and/or political references criss-cross the text without differentiation between the intra- and the extradiegetic materials (i.e. references to books not yet written by Cohen that would be published later are heavily hinted here, even when the final product would turn out to be quite different). Joanna Page summarizes the effect as follows:

> The confusion produced in O'Jaral by the complex codes and messages with which he is constantly bombarded is mirrored in the challenges the novel presents to its readers. A sense prevails in the novel in which nothing is a coincidence, and no meeting is a chance encounter, but that everything may be predestined according to some grand scheme of which we and the characters have little understanding. (Page 2014: 83)

As O'Jaral sees no choice but to acquiesce so he can be free to continue his own studies, the novel follows him to Talecuona, the capital city of the make-believe island-country where he lives and one of the many within the Panoramic Delta. Talecuona, in turn, is a dystopian version of Buenos Aires at its worst realized potential. The city itself operates in direct dialogue with several Argentine novels that also trace the imaginary Buenos Aires as a form of hell. Although the city's phantasmatic blueprint is designed in concentric circles that imitate Dante's inferno, O'Jaral does not become a new version of Virgil but rather a new version of Schultze, the astrologer that guides the characters through the monstrous underground city of Cacodelphia, a humorous and grotesque description of Buenos Aires created by writer Leopoldo Marechal for his novel *Adán Buenosayres* (1948). As in the case of Marechal's novel, O'Jaral encounters all sorts of intellectual, political and social characters that try to showcase or sell him their own agendas for the making of a desired utopia. However, there is something askew in all their grand plans, something akin to the hallucinations produced by the drugs that most of Talecuona's population consume, either for recreational or for political resistance purposes. O'Jaral's travels allow the novel to trace both the story of his refusal to betray Galgo and his moral free-fall in a world where no utopian desire or dream is left unsoiled.

As the novel advances, readers get glimpses of the stepbrothers' relationship as well as their past political activities and beliefs. Narrated from O'Jaral's perspective, the novel recounts Ravinkel's revolutionary past and utopian aspirations as well as O'Jaral's childhood and political education, which, as we know from the start, has driven him off the grid. If Ravinkel is a revolutionary

man compelled into increasing degrees of nihilism (literally, his organization is completely autopoietic, with no other message than the disruption of the system, and no other objective than to create ever-vanishing action-networks), O'Jaral is both a suffering witness and a passive-resistant observer of events. Neither stepbrother is an idealized figure: they have both betrayed others at the personal and the political levels, changed their ideologies, exploited others for their aims, and killed. The question here is not about the purity of ideals, but rather what is at stake within the discourse of political utopia and who pays a price for its materialization and why.

From that perspective, in the novel we can trace the economic and political developments of Argentina under what has become known as the neo-liberal cycle over the last thirty years. This perspective is hidden by a process of estrangement whose aesthetic reconstructs the experience of ideological disarticulation that gave way to the populist policies of the present day. As a matter of fact, many critics (cf. Logie 2001) have hailed this novel for its prophetic view of the 2001 economic crisis that led to the resignation of President de la Rúa. However, I would like to point out that for all its clarity, such a perspective is still rathert narrow: the crisis came and went and the novel still reads fresh and still addresses issues that are beyond the scope of that particular event.

The novel is narrated in the dystopian key that characterizes the vast majority of Cohen's fictitious universe. Cohen's novels deal with the individual's ability to project or imagine what is to come even under the most harrowing circumstances. Usually, the backdrop for such situations is provided in the depiction of a future or imagined society which lays in ruins (as is the case of the city and society presented to us in *El Testamento de O'Jaral*). This is because all institutional organizations have lost legitimacy and because individuals must fight their way towards rebuilding or preserving their individual sense of ethics. In this novel, the search for a form of ethics attached to the memory of what was at stake within the political past of the main characters (as opposed to their militant actions) becomes, to paraphrase Tom Moylan, the counter-narrative that is able to speak back to hegemonic power (Moylan 2000: 148–9). As Moylan clearly analyzes in other works that return to Ernst Bloch, the utopian vision is not to be found within the dystopian narrative but as a displaced hope outside its pages (cf. Moylan 1990; Daniel and Moylan 1997). This is precisely the best way to approach the analysis of Cohen's work, for his texts are and are not in the future, in the same way that the Delta Panorámico is and is not Argentina.

The novel builds its locus by shifting the reader's sense of historical and political perception into a narrative where he or she can vaguely recognize what is already known or already learned about the country's political past. The distortion is further amplified by the choosing of a delta as location for the stories, since the choice runs against the Argentine master narratives' ideological grain, whose locus is usually the pampas or Patagonia. The Delta is still part of those narratives, albeit not one that has crystallized as a foundational

myth. The displacement anchors the text firmly in the present: the past is a rather vague memory that cannot be fully recovered or quoted, and no bet on the future can secure its outcome. Here, history becomes disengaged from destiny by all possible means.

In Cohen's universe, politics and power corrupt absolutely, ideology betrays us, and the worst scourges of capitalism reign supreme. For individuals to survive, their only choice is to consistently differentiate their actions at the micro-level as they search for a communal space of mutual recognition and respect. In reading the novel, readers are presented with all possible avenues for this search. Hence, they are forced to meditate on unsuccessful and successful ideological and ethical choices: as readers we are forced to think about how the political operates and about its failures. For this reason, in Cohen's narrative, ethics becomes the backbone of any possible effectual political praxis, even when such effects may have a very short range. By the same token, any and all activities constitute a process towards utopia. Hope is everything, but in order to find it we must first lose any residual faith we may have in the organization of change, in programmes either revolutionary or social that create the illusion of control. This position is very far from anarchistic. However, it speaks about distrust in the absolute ability and aims of political agendas to institute radical change: historical and ideological teleology which was paramount in the 1960s and 1970s revolutionary programmes implodes in this novel (cf. Kurlat Ares 2006).

The arrow of time will not bring the revolution

When O'Jaral finally encounters Ravinkel after eighteen years apart, their discussion centres on the issue of the arrow of time and its relationship with historical change. O'Jaral argues that humans have no control over major historical processes, that we can only create a sense of society by accepting human frailty, renouncing all forms of myth (religious, ideological, political), and embracing the complexity of experience:

> ... el tiempo tiene dirección. Los procesos se bifurcan, se hacen cada vez más complejos , se aceleran porque todos, en todo momento, estamos trabajando para cambiar las condiciones, y como todos los elementos de un sistema son relevantes, la totalidad es lógicamente imprevisible. Pero esto no quiere decir que no haya una dirección. (Cohen 1995: 156)
>
> [... time has direction. There are branching processes, which become increasingly complex, and are accelerated because everyone, at all times, is working to change conditions, and because all the elements of a system are relevant, the sum total is logically unpredictable. But this does not mean that there is no direction.]

Ravinkel answers that he has no interest in the individual or the community. He does not believe in any of his past political ideals nor does he want to fight for a future that does not exist any more, and so he is only searching for forms of constant opposition, of empty otherness that is not destined to build anything. His actions are grounded in a form of realpolitik that is only interested in an ephemeral now:

> Soy el oponente fantasma, el corsario virtual. Soy el que está del otro lado. Ellos me fabrican, o al menos, me mantienen para para seguir teniendo un adversario, y con el tiempo cuajé en lo que soy. No puedo dejar de ser lo que soy. Yo lo acepto, pero soy un fantasma. (Cohen 1995: 169)
> [I am the ghost opponent, the virtual corsair. I'm the one on the other side. They make me, or at least, keep me so they can continue to have an opponent, and eventually I curdle in what I am. I cannot help being what I am. I accept it, but I'm a ghost.]

The conversation summarizes two of the main issues of the novel, which is built as a triangular system of oppositions. These tensions are the contrast between the search for a new form of ethics, the oppositional politics of populism, and the increasing power of multinational conglomerates. Still, utopia exists, even if it is not a fixed programme nor an unavoidable teleology, for results of human action can be somewhat surprising or unexpected. As his characters explore a very intimate relationship with politics and ideology, events become the driving force of the narrative because choices and actions proliferate and create the narration (Cohen 2003: 152). The multitude of actions create passageways both for our sense of political experience and for the material build-up of a universe in flux: chaos gives birth to a new understanding of the real.

In the novel, the political and economic power seated in the globalized market that overtakes all forms of social and cultural life is opposed by frayed, disorganized political and social forces. Although the novel points out that the powers-that-be both at the state and at the international level are not necessarily homogeneous, it also shows that they can, for practical reasons, establish alliances in order to reach their goals. Early on, the up-and-coming politician Badaraco, an old associate of Ravinkel who coerces O'Jaral out of his self-imposed ostracism, says:

> Hay un consorcio que yo vengo a representar y que impulsa ciertas actividades positivas: tenemos prensa escrita, espectáculos, arte [...] A mí me importa un pito lo que vos opinés O'Jaral. Consumo, pensamos nosotros, significa estabilidad; estabilidad sin estancamiento significa armonía [...] Los individuos satisfechos por el consumo o aspirantes al consumo se mueven en una sola dirección, y muchas veces se

> quedan quietos, quietos, claro que sí. Por eso nuestro consorcio acepta con entusiasmo a los resistentes, a los opositores; son un fermento necesario [...] Alentamos la crítica y a veces la financiamos (Cohen 1995: 18-9).
>
> [There is a consortium that I come to represent and that drives certain positive activities: we have presses, shows, art [...] I do not give a damn about what you think, O'Jaral. Consumption, we think, means stability; stability without stagnation means harmony [...] Individuals satisfied by consumerism or aspiring consumers move in one direction only, and often stand still, still, of course. So our consortium accepts enthusiastically resistant, opponents; they are a necessary ferment [...] We encourage criticism and sometimes finance it.]

In this way, all political activism becomes trivialized and co-opted by the loose state apparatus that has now re-incarnated into the business structure of multinational organizations. Consumerism, even political consumerism, is the soul of the neo-liberal project. It provides what critic Beatriz Sarlo, echoing Zygmunt Bauman, describes as 'programmed individualism' (Sarlo 1994: 9). As Sarlo explains, western societies exploit the contradiction between a belief in unlimited choice and what the market provides. This contradiction is the true nature of the postmodern condition, for the different forms of individuality can only exist in a system of reproduction. In the novel, such contradiction becomes evident when the state-propaganda system appropriates diverse political ideologies as if they were part of its discourse to better neutralize and control opposition. As Badaraco says, by allowing a co-opted diversity to flourish, the state is able to redirect the political aspirations of the opposition to its own aims. The novel shows that neo-liberal ideology works at its best when politics are stripped of utopian will and become just another set of cultural goods in a diversified market of sanitized options.

One of the reading axes of *El testamento de O'Jaral* supposes a mise-en-scène of how such programmes unfold and slowly take over the political and social environment by a process of fragmentation and alienation. The novel tells us resistance is possible when articulated as a form of non-prescriptive ethics. This dimension would evolve into the cornerstone of O'Jaral's search and it is the main reason why realism does not work whereas science fiction does. As the story unfolds it provides what Ruth Levitas, discussing Bloch and William Morris, describes as a process, the education of (political and social) desire, where 'the reader is both brought to experience an alternative and called to judgement on it' (Levitas 2011: 55–6). Such a nuanced take is no small feat in Argentine literature. The novel breaks up an overwhelming realist tradition whose discourse organized a didactic teleology when meditating about history, testimony, or political narratives. Here, we do not know where, how, or why we are going: characters, readers, and narrators are learning from the events as they unfold. There is no set ending but there is a process of critical thinking.

Contrary to other novels written during this period, here the existential free-falls offers both social criticism and hope for political change.

As communitarian and representative forms have been eroded, corrupted, or erased, true resistance could now only be constructed as a form of anarchic behaviour that echoes the gestures and aims of the 1970s radical movements. Probing Gilles Deleuze's idea that communication is at the core of any ideological project, and therefore individuals need to hijack speech, Cohen conceives the entire resistance movement in this novel as a two-fold operation. This operation involves the transformation of culture and literature on the one hand, and a re-semantization of political language on the other. As O'Jaral searches for his stepbrother, he is guided by graffiti painted on the decaying walls of the poor and run-down neighbourhoods of Talecuona.

The graffiti O'Jaral usually reads refers to the ideology of May 1968, not only because of their sense of humour, but also because they bring forward the role of imagination and fantasy as foundational for social dreaming and for building political utopia. Here, such roles have taken a dark turn, for graffiti talk about the collapse of these aspirations and the impossibility of escape from tainted political and economic environment. Graffiti such as 'El mejor drogadicto es el drogadicto drogado' (The best junkie is the one who is high), 'Alejo y los raquíticos aman a Melody Mong' (Alejo and the rickety ones love Melody Mong), or 'En el infierno solamente arde el yo' (In hell only the I burns) (Cohen 1995: 60) speak of a miserable social universe that has lost all hope and is only able to look inwards and howl in agony. Nevertheless, graffiti provides O'Jaral with clues both to the whereabouts of Ravinkel and his allies and also to the state of his projects. Ravinkel's graffiti is decisively political: one message that keeps reappearing throughout the novel says 'La política es la lucha por la existencia' (Politics is the fight for existence) (Cohen 1995: 60). However, this too is as empty as the slogans pasted everywhere by the state authority (or their opposition) addressing the issue of the annexation. Reference without grounding is, the novel tells us, nothing but another empty political gesture not so different from the neo-liberal project.

This perception of political discourse is deeply rooted in Cohen's understanding of language as a material object. Talking about issues of translation at a recent conference, Cohen said that Argentine Spanish is now 'a collection of samples taken from advertising, political shows, code psychology, and the remains of a street argot smoothed out by the middle classes with Spanish translation subtitles and Central American ravings of television series' (Cohen 2010). This description addresses both the emptiness of speech and the uses of a hijacked language devoid of locus. Despite its emptiness, language thus released from anchorage in fixed ideologies can now be used freely by anyone who dares to delve into political dreaming. It is not difficult to understand why all personal searches will, in the end, fail when conceived as part of grand historical schemes. The personal, when articulated as a life project,

offers the satisfaction of an invisible, but perdurable triumph. The versions of O'Jaral and other characters that fade or die are the ones that try for grandiose political feats. The ones that survive are those who go for the little gestures of resistance, for constant work, for feasible projects. This is not a novel about the individual or the subject, but about the personal and inner choice. This is not a novel about what has to be but about utopia as a method for understanding social transformation.

Endnote

[1]Although it not always the case in Cohen's work, there is something rather blatant about this name, and some of the characters seem to recognize this. 'Luis Carlos' refers to Luis Carlos Prestes, the mastermind of the Prestes Column, one of the first armed movements in South America. The last name O'Jaral, for all its Irish background, plays with the meanings of the Spanish word 'jaral', signifying both something very intricate or complex, and a thicket. The overlapping meanings hint at the encoding of the novel: it is the confluence of the name of the leftist political tradition of a leader that took up arms and then became weary of the experience particularly as others became radicalized in the 1960s, plus the idea of the thorny and complicated Argentinean political history. The legacy that is the novel is what needs to be deciphered.

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Rewriting Consciousness: Diversity, Post-Humans and Utopia in Hannu Rajaniemi's Jean le Flambeur Trilogy

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Since humanity is already diverse, we can reasonably assume that any post-humanity would also be diverse. Cory Doctorow writes that 'ten thousand years ago, the state-of-the-art was a goat. You really think you're going to be anything recognizably human in a hundred centuries?' (Doctorow 2003: loc. 91–2). This summary of the estrangement of post-humanity highlights the inevitable difference of a future human society from our own thanks to the inexorable march of evolution. It also broaches the problematic task of imagining the fundamentally different nature of humans in the future. Such subjects are not merely post-human in terms of appearance, biological and technological enhancements, constructed identity or culture, but in the very definitions of consciousness that enable and define the conditions of humanity. Science fiction allows us to stage alternative viewpoints on society, technology and consciousness that can inform our relation not only to potential futures but also the limits of humanity in our own present.

This article will use an analysis of the nature and function of post-human consciousness in Hannu Rajaniemi's Jean le Flambeur trilogy to assess the critical potential for staging a diverse range of (im)possible modes of post-humanity to criticize the formation and diversity of humanity in the present and near future. This will use an extension of Fredric Jameson's conception of utopia to posit the role of science fiction in criticizing the present through our desire for staging alternative future perspectives. Gilles Deleuze's notions of difference and minor literature will negotiate such a literary staging's relation to current society and the problem of writing the post-human.

Rajaniemi's first trilogy of novels – *The Quantum Thief* (2010), *The Fractal Prince* (2012), *The Causal Angel* (2014) – immediately plunges the reader into a radically different far future that appears both bizarre and bewildering to current conceptions of science, society and humanity. This post-human society spans the solar system, with a range of factions and enclaves displaying a range of diverse extensions of humanity's possible futures. The setting of the series is a universe in which diverse conceptions of post-humanity have emerged from the development of technologies that enable uploaded consciousness. Human memories and minds can thus be transferred from a brain to a computer or indeed to a host of other simulated and real objects. This includes virtual 'Realms' as real as the physical universe, or the fractal architecture of the protagonist's literal memory palace. Consciousness can be displaced into a variety of embodiments, from enhanced human forms to mechanical constructs, and even the vast diamond computers of planet-sized 'guberniyas'. The control over the godlike powers that have become a reality rests with those at the leading edge of the new technologies. The social effects of the technological developments are staged with a host of attendant problems. The fictional setting thus has a

dark history of forced uploads, 'gogol' consciousness as computational slave, pirates stealing minds, and the interplanetary 'Protocol War' over the precise rules and applications of post-human consciousness.

This history is revealed gradually through the series, while the setting as a whole is presented as a complete entity in the present of the main narrative, including elaborate scientific concepts from information science and, in particular, quantum mechanics, blending current ideas with a fictional staging of their application. This is not the depiction of concepts at the expense of detailed world-building, but rather the world-building is itself conceptual (the series does not lack detail, merely explanation, thanks to the absence of 'info dumps'). As the series opens, the protagonist is caught in a physical manifestation of a game theory thought experiment, the 'prisoner's dilemma', in orbit around Neptune. The physical expression of concepts such as this echoes the spatial representation of memory in the technologies available to embody ideas. This in turn reflects the atemporal form of memory in the narrative that appears, like Jean le Flambeur's own personal history and personality, almost fractal. Flashback interludes of the protagonist's memories merge the fictional world with the fast-paced narrative winding between elaborate hard science and far-flung fiction.

Against this complex backdrop of diverse post-human forms and experiences, humanity and myth meet amidst the remnants of civilization on Earth. The ravages of technological progress, and rampant nanotech that can infect both matter and minds, separate our current situation from the world of the novels. Described as 'rotten: it makes monsters to survive and feed on souls…live in dirt when others in the System build diamond castles and live for ever' (Rajaniemi 2012: 238), Earth's economic, technological and cognitive collapse asserts the post-human perspective of the writing. By contrast, the mobile city on Mars , 'a place of forgetting' (Rajaniemi 2012: 20) with its strictly controlled exomemory, provides a closer link to the present, inviting comparisons with contemporary issues surrounding privacy laws, cloud storage and Digital Rights Management. The eternal cycle between living as a human and a 'Quiet' machinic slave, however, removes the mortality that often defines and drives human endeavour while positioning the original human form as a privilege to be earned.

Along with the inhabitants of Earth and Mars, another group appearing ostensibly human are the Oort: enhanced with wings, adapted to live on comets, but still representing a unique consciousness in a singular biological body. The more direct relation of these groups to present humanity, and their expression of diversity, is seen in the character of Mieli. This Oortian warrior, whose name means 'mind' in Rajaniemi's native language of Finnish, demonstrates the full gamut of current conventional diversity (her gender, skin colour, sexuality and even, at various points, disability relate to present-day issues concerning 'protected minorities'). Yet in this future these categories produce no problems

in themselves, and it is rather her emotional connections, the human desires of honour, duty and love, that provide a link between our current perspective and the godlike beings that rule Rajaniemi's universe.

Post-Humans and Humanity

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari delineate a triple impossibility of the literary process: not writing; writing in a major language; writing otherwise (1986: 16). For Rajaniemi this impossibility is of not writing, of writing within the human perspective and of writing the post-human perspective (the human otherwise). The emergence of such a new collective consciousness 'necessarily exists by means of literature' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 16), that is, if it is to be thought, it must be written, for thought occurs through human language. Thus, staging alternative modes of thought requires an alternative literature. Yet writing from a post-human position outside of present humanity is impossible. This requires a minor literature, an act of writing outside from inside in such a way as to deterritorialize the process of writing (and thinking) itself. In science fiction this utopic process that Fredric Jameson describes as 'shifts in the context of the description' (2005: 262) is the desire to write the post-human from a human perspective. The undermining of the position of writing in this process critiques both human and post-human positions in the irresolvable gap created through their mutual estrangement. This is the paradoxical challenge of writing an imaginary position outside of contemporary thought, to criticize the coordinates of contemporary thinking from within the literary processes of contemporary thought itself. This is an insertion of internal difference to (re)thinking humanity: the impossibility of post-human consciousness.

The forms of post-humanity that Rajaniemi creates in his series are defined not only by their diversity in relation to one another but by their difference to contemporary humanity. Our present perspective is what remains for his characters as a limit and evolutionary memory labelled the 'baseline' human form. The utopian function in science fiction refers to estrangement from the present, and the post-human refers to the estrangement of consciousness from the present-day human. Humanity thus forms the limit against which the conflicting societies and conceptions of utopia are spawned. This limit is primarily one of temporality in the far future with a critical distance from our own situation. While the precise date of Rajaniemi's story remains unclear, the far-future setting suggests the potential for evolution, particularly under rapid conditions of technologically guided advancement.

Yet Rajaniemi's characters remain in many ways all too human, and it is their relation to the fragmentary identity that we label human that instigates their diversity and their conflict. The measure of difference is thus also a mark of possibility in the utopian function of Rajaniemi's work. To Jameson the utopian form is 'a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness (2005: xii), and in the Jean le Flambeur trilogy this difference occurs in relation

to humanity as a label and construct. The impact of diversity at this level of our understanding of consciousness is extrapolated to cataclysmic proportions in Rajaniemi's series in the ongoing conflict between the Sobornost and Zoku, both seeking to rule the solar system by imposing their version of post-humanity.

Conflicting Conceptions of the Post-Human

The Sobornost are based around godlike 'Founders' whose personality and will is imprinted upon vast copy clans with rigid hierarchies of protocols and control. They exist in Guberniyas, planet-sized computers for each Founder in which the prime, and its highest-level copies can enter heightened states of thought in spaces of pure abstraction. This is epitomized in the most powerful Founder, the ruthless Matjek Chen, the 'god-emperor of the Solar System' (Rajaniemi 2014: 21) who exerts an iron grip on his underlings and even the other Founders, in his rage against those who oppose his conception of consciousness. Yet his own virtual spaces exist 'like a zen painting, ink strokes on white paper, brushstrokes becoming words becoming objects' (Rajaniemi 2012: 138), an expression of his vision of consciousness and the fluid, abstract, creative potential of the post-human mind.

Unlike the Sobornost, the Zoku represent computer gaming clans, moving across virtual 'realms' as a collective in which consciousness is entangled at the quantum level for greater cooperation. They appear to bind themselves together in equality and mutual gain, yet form an internal paradox by which 'the more you achieve, the more entanglement you have, and thus more power to impose your will upon the zoku's collective reality. But at the same time, as you advance, you are sculpted by the zoku jewel into a perfect member of the collective' (Rajaniemi 2014: 122). The Zoku's rupture with the present closely follows Jameson's conception of enclaves, particularly in their representation of online communities and gaming culture. Jameson writes that 'cyberspace is indeed an enclave of a new sort…does away with the "centered subject" and proliferates in new, post-individualistic ways' (2005: 21). This challenges the individualist and hierarchical structures we currently live within, and which the Sobornost embody to a totalitarian extreme. We are offered here two radically divergent systems demonstrating the persistence of ideology based on our conceptions and limits of consciousness.

The conflict between these two powers rests on the uniqueness (Zoku) or the independence (Sobornost) of consciousness. The Sobornost see entanglement as an affront to their identity, even as they force their will upon millions of slave minds. The Zoku are equally appalled at the ability to be copied, using backed-up memories only upon death to maintain the singular existence of their minds. The protagonist comments at one point that 'the Sobornost clings to immortality that turns souls into cogs in a machine. The zoku get lost in silly games and Realms that lead nowhere' (Rajaniemi 2014: 214), highlighting a futility to the debate that has escalated to full-scale war.

In opposition to the separation of two forms of ideal society, Jean le Flambeur embodies Deleuze and Guattari's conception of utopian desire as 'revolutionary action and passion' (2004: 71) as he insists that 'we don't have to accept the way things are' (Rajaniemi 2014: 214). The narrative follows the protagonist's position between factions, using the characteristics and locations of each to suit the direction of the plot, the character's own desires, and the author's process of gradually revealing his universe to the reader. The more fluid protagonist uses and assesses the limitations and antagonistic relation of both conceptions of post-humanity. In the debate over the fundamental meaning of humanity itself an outsider perspective is thus constructed as a point of critical contact. This outsider perspective, within the more general estrangement from the present, turns the question onto our own situation and what aspects of ourselves we might seek to maintain at the core of an increasingly diverse species.

Diversity and Difference

The process of writing from a post-human perspective in a distant future is an estrangement at the level of the initial conditions of human consciousness. This provokes a shift from diversity in humanity's branching evolution towards a fundamental difference within the nature of post-human consciousness itself. Deleuze insists that 'difference in general is distinguished from diversity or otherness. For two terms differ when they are other, not in themselves, but in something else' (Deleuze 2004: 38). Here then is the move from a diverse range of possible futures to a fundamental difference from the present form of consciousness that imagines and reads such futures.

In Rajaniemi's trilogy, the difference which Deleuze describes is seen in the relation of post-humanity to humanity, an internal difference in our nature and future that causes a rupture in the terms under which we conceive identity, society and even existence. The Zoku and Sobornost are not merely divergent branches of humanity in simple opposition and mutual otherness. Their difference is in relation to the process of defining the future as a single conception of humanity and the resulting imposition of limits on consciousness. In the scientific framework of the novels this limit not only maintains social order, but secures the constraints of reality that are at stake when godlike consciousnesses overstep their own conditions. It is in relation to such conditions that 'difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse' (Deleuze 2004: 280).

In the literary staging of a post-human society, we can define diversity as the examples of the varying paths the evolution of our species might take. Difference, however, is a schism in the relation of post-human consciousness to its own conditions as separate from human consciousness. This is the fissure of speculative fiction across which the utopic critique is constructed, an attempt to write an alternative world from a perspective inside such a world, inaccessible to the human mind outside of approximations in and extensions of

the contemporary imagination. The diversity of the socio-cultural effects of this underlying difference creates a series of parallel perspectives. These provide an insight into the antagonisms of the literary utopia and a new mode of thinking human consciousness emerging through its estrangement from the present.

The situation in which Rajaniemi stages these post-human expressions of difference in relation to consciousness lies across the abyss of a post-singularity future, an event creating a fundamental shift in humanity's relation to its own nature and the universe. His characters exist in a fictional version of the solar system set after a technological singularity has occurred with the development of the capability to upload, store and copy consciousness. This control over and subsequent splintering of consciousness has led to the diversification of new forms of humanity. This singularity has led to the fulfilment of idealist aims for a post-humanity in which the mind can be re-embodied, copied or enhanced to an almost unimaginable degree, thereby enabling immortality, immateriality and new levels of freedom over reality. New forms of social organization created by such technologies have emerged and crumbled into an economic crash, war, and a literal singularity destroying Jupiter.

In the timescale of the main narrative in the series the singularity technologies still exist but the utopian potential has been disrupted. The characters can still perform godlike acts, yet the major rift between the Sobornost and Zoku, with its attendant conflict, oppression and manipulation, has given the situation a distinctly dystopian flavour. Diversity is the cause of the problem, not only at the social level upon which Jameson focuses his analysis but at the level of the very nature of consciousness and humanity itself.

The Nature of Utopia

Jameson describes utopian space as 'an imaginary enclave within real social space' (2005: 15). This is an opening of radical difference within the current situation through science fiction as what Darko Suvin labels 'the *literature of cognitive estrangement'* (1979: 4). Utopia is the combination of a potential and desire for change, a radical difference from the current situation, yet its nature remains open to debate. The separation of both the utopian enclave from pre-utopian society and of parallel enclaves manifesting different forms of utopia, constructs an impression of ideal islands, a 'utopia of structural relationality' (Jameson 2005: 221). The separation of the enclave from the outside world can be read through Deleuze's conception of the desert island, which 'would be only the dream of humans, and humans the pure consciousness of the island' (2002: 10). In juxtaposition to Jameson's socio-historical agenda, this cognitive function of physical or political separation reinserts the conditions of humanity as a defining mode of viewing utopia. The placement of human consciousness as the starting-point for utopian thought ties more closely with science fiction as a literary practice. For Deleuze, writing and thinking are intertwined in creating and recreating our collective consciousness and therefore our world.

The impossibility, and subsequent minor nature, of science fiction as a literary practice refers to the problem of positioning thought beyond its own limits, which in science fiction such as the Jean le Flambeur trilogy is writing from the other side of the singularity. Jo Walton highlights the increasing prominence of those attempting this mode of writing, complaining that 'most SF being written now has to call itself "post-Singularity" and try to write about people who are by definition beyond our comprehension' (Walton 2008). While writing characters who would necessarily exist outside of the limits of our thought is problematic, it becomes critically useful and indeed possible through the shifting of the territory in which the writing and thinking occurs. What Walton criticizes as a literary paradigm is in fact a literary process that succeeds in its very failure, a necessary estrangement from the present that derives its value as much from forcing the reader to evaluate the fictional universe and its relation to our own as it does from establishing a detailed description of a specific otherness outside of our contemporary perspective. Criticisms of the difference and depth of Rajaniemi's series at the expense of accessibility (cf. Alexander 2012; Holojacob 2013; Weimar 2013) only show the extreme lengths required for the post-singularity estrangement of writing beyond a utopian perspective.

There is obviously more to Rajaniemi's setting than utopia. The diversity in utopian societies derived from differences in the definition of post-humanity leads to major catastrophes which necessitate an alternative mode of viewing the utopian framework. Jameson identifies in traditional conceptions of the ideal and utopic a 'commitment to identity coming to seem rather dystopian to us today' (2005: 167). Amidst the changing context of identity as difference and relativity rather than positively asserted absolute, there is a shift from the pursuit of happiness to the pursuit of freedom in evolving manifestations of utopian desire. The tension between happiness and freedom appears in the multiplicity of utopian enclaves. Each one is internally free, yet hegemonic in its necessary isolation from alternative (and therefore undesirable) modes of organization.

The Limits of Utopia

While utopian enclaves are internally consistent models of ideal social spaces, the mere possibility of the existence of other enclaves with divergent natures highlights the dystopian tract inherent to utopia. The dystopia of utopia stems from the totalitarian nature of a consistent and complete system precluding any alternative. The paradox of utopia is thus between the necessity of an evil in opposition to which utopia can arise, and the need to remove this causal evil in the timeless isolation of utopia from all ills. Jameson acknowledges and attempts to cover over this situation, whereby utopia must rewrite its own conditions and in doing so remove its purpose, with the possibility of migration between enclaves of diverse utopian systems and ideals (Jameson 2005: 188). His suggestion of autonomy and isolation of influence claims to be an ingenious

solution (Jameson 2005: 220), yet relies on a further internal paradox. The non-communication necessary between enclaves in order to sustain their utopian totality would deny dissatisfied members of an awareness of any alternative, thus rendering the possibility of migration moot. Any dissenters would have to leave what they perceive as a total system, forcing them into a limbo state of exile before even the possible existence of an alternative society would be made available to them. A plurality of enclaves where each believes itself to be the only one existing is not a true plurality, simply a juxtaposition of separate yet simultaneous totalities.

Rajaniemi's enclaves, however, do allow for migration, precisely through their knowledge of one another's existence. For example, Mieli first leaves the Oort in a deal with the Pellegrini Sobornost Founder, whom she then abandons for the Zoku after regretting allowing her mind to be copied. These enclaves are thus not true utopias: their knowledge of the diversity of potential societies available invalidates their utopian claims. This situation reveals the problematic assumption by Jameson that a utopian enclave would be free from expansionist aims or the desire to conquer.

It is a persistent element of human nature, one that in Rajaniemi's universe has most definitely remained in the transition to post-humanity, to conquer those deemed other. Even the most accepting society has its limits. In the rhetorically permissive Western Liberal Democracy these limits are absolute regimes such as the totalitarianism sought by neo- Nazism or the Islamic State extremists. In Iain M. Banks' Culture series the same problem exists in the Culture's limit of the existence of aggressive societies. The internally peacefully anarchist and utopian society holds so strongly to this limit that, although 'utopia spawns few warriors' (Banks 2008: loc. 72), the mass devastation and eventual victory in the Culture-Idiran war and other such conflicts paradoxically asserts the Culture's military power in order to remove expansionist military societies. In Rajaniemi's work this limit is the very nature of humanity, to an equally absolute extent for both Zoku and Sobornost enclaves. Rajaniemi's and Banks' fictional universes can both thus be labelled post-utopias. Their utopian societies, which do indeed seek to rewrite their own histories and conditions to the exclusion of all alternatives, turn plurality into conflict as the whole of reality becomes the target for the utopian desire. Post-utopia is the limit of resolving the internal difference of its enclaves, the possibility of alternative enclaves, and the impossibility of writing complete utopias from our decidedly non-utopic current situation.

The constraint on Jameson's position is the current conception of humanity, and the task falls to the literary works of science fiction themselves, such as that of Rajaniemi or Banks, to look beyond this ultimate constraint on writing outside of our contemporary perspective. Indeed, post-humans are seldom mentioned in Jameson's volume, and often only in passing, perhaps due to such beings seeming for Jameson 'more distant and impossible than ever!" (2005: 211). This same dilemma can be seen in Andy Miah's response to Nick Bostrom,

which complains that 'you seemed quite distant from our current situation' (Miah 2008: 2) while objecting to the notion that 'there is anything that is beyond my own imagination. Such a proposition seems something of a challenge to my intelligence' (4). Yet it is this problematic rupture of distance and the need to change the entire scope of our imagination to which writing the post-human must aim. Indeed, Jameson does admit an instructive role for post-humanity, in that 'it is probably on the side of the imagining of the post-human and even the angelic that Utopian otherness is likely to find its productivity' (2005: 175). We must once more assert the importance of writing the post-human as the ultimate deterritorialization of current modes of thought which Deleuze and Guattari define as the first characteristic of minor literature (1986: 18) and through which we might gain the most effective critical distance towards the problems of the present.

Jean le Flambeur as a Post-Human Identity

The method by which Rajaniemi most effectively stages critical distance towards our own present modes of thinking humanity and its relation with society and reality is, appropriately, the series' eponymous protagonist Jean le Flambeur. This character, the interplanetary gentleman thief, is Rajaniemi's mediator for cognitive estrangement. While Jean claims to understand how people think, and how to manipulate them, and makes great use of the various post-human capabilities available in this fictional universe, he is himself perhaps the most 'human' in his motivations. Beyond a nostalgic cliché of 'humanity' as humanity's greatest strength and greatest weakness, Jean allows for connections across the distance between the novel and our present, with which to criticize our own relation to technologies, self-hood and indeed the fabled construct we call 'humanity'. By utilizing the technological extensions and identities of all factions, while remaining outside any single commitment to a specific nature of consciousness, Jean exploits the fluidity of diverse post-humanity as he mutates and shifts his manifold identities through time. He states, 'it's amazing what you can do if you look past ideological differences and combine technologies in creative ways' (Rajaniemi 2014: 235), emphasizing not only the productive potential of diversity but also the underlying internal difference from which humanity – in the fictional future, in our present and as a general concept – can be deterritorialized and rethought.

The identity of Jean, aside from certain visual cues such as his favoured blue sunglasses, remains ever mutable. Through choice or necessity, he takes on new faces, new bodies and new modes of consciousness, appearing at times in Zoku Realms or disguised as a Sobornost Founder. His one constant is his occupation as a thief, extending the familiar hacker protagonist of cyberpunk fiction far beyond the hacking of systems and economies, although he still employs such methods. This includes breaking into locked quantum puzzle boxes, stealing time to bring someone back from death and establishing a

transportation pyramid scheme. His thefts comment not only on current issues surrounding the nature of objects, ownership of intellectual property, and the digital storage and theft of identity, but also on the fundamental interplay of taking and losing inherent to desire. When applied to the body and consciousness this not only stages prevalent fears of the extension of humanity but the complex processes by which a personal utopia in contemporary society could appear as a desire for a centred, complete and psychologically resolved self. Towards this aim, Jean's greatest schemes come from hacking cultures, identities and consciousness itself, aided by his own flexibility and the performative nature he applies to the conditions of his post-humanity. His commitment to such fluidity blurs the reception of his very existence, with characters even remaking that 'this creature you are talking about is a myth' (Rajaniemi 2012: 34).

Jean's construction is a constant creative process, and indeed he compares the role of a thief to that of an artist (Rajaniemi 2010: 200). He responds to the production of new relations within internal difference as his diverse embodiments result from a constant difference from his own elusive self. Daniel Smith writes of the importance of constantly rewriting the conditions of human identity, stating that 'if identities were already pre-given, then there would in principle be no production of the new (no new differences)' (Smith 2007: 1). This role of Deleuzian difference in the continual rethinking of our own conditions is the mode of existence that Jean applies to his own consciousness, repeatedly rewriting and deterritorializing his humanity across a diverse range of post-humanities.

This fluid identity, however, is also fractured. In the time of the novels' main action, Jean is a fragment of his former self(/ves), the remnants of a post-human with godlike abilities who at one time acted purely on whim and desire. This desire in the present of the narrative is displaced onto the search for himself, echoing in his personal quest the general image of post-utopia that Rajaniemi paints in the fictional setting. His memory has been splintered across the solar system by his former self to hide the secrets of his greatest treasures and worst flaws: physically stored on Mars, in the stories of Earth, as both a mythical evil and past acquaintance to various key figures of the Sobornost and Zoku. This draws Jean's 'current' state at the start of *The Quantum Thief* only as a series of relations to others. Through this character's own journey of self-(re)discovery we see a new approach to the assemblage of the post-human emerge that embodies the post-utopian regime in all its internal conflicts and critical potential.

Chris Land expands on Deleuzian difference in the specific context of rewriting human identity through technology, stating that 'if we allow ourselves to question even the foundations of human being we may find that we need new concepts of existence and subjectivity' (Land 2005: 33). The new forms of society in a post-utopia require new forms of humanity in the post-human, a process that takes Jean the course of the three novels to uncover. The formation of Jean's identity as a process rather than a being, a series of impressions and

memories left in others, produces a new mode of constructing his personality as it develops through the series. He escapes from a game theory prison where many iterations of himself play the prisoner's dilemma with one another. He recovers memories quite literally hidden with friends on Mars. He becomes a disembodied myth of Earth responsible for the collapse. His complex interactions with both the Zoku and Sobornost powers, particularly his former self's love for the Pellegrini that caused him to instigate the collapse, enable him to move between sides in the system-wide war for the nature of humanity.

Difference and Resolution

Jean does not return to his former godlike post-human self, but rather achieves a new state of being that is at once more and less human, reconnecting with an idea of humanity in his relationship to others, such as the refugees of Earth he steals to save, or Mieli his formerly begrudging but increasingly emotionally connected companion. The new form of consciousness Jean constructs is formed of pure difference to himself and diversity in his assemblage of connections with others, sustaining a constructive conflict of desire and loss for both humanity and post-humanity.

A resolution is reached when, at the end of the series, Jean sacrifices himself to save the entire universe. Firstly, he sets in motion an idiosyncratically elaborate plan to end the conflict between Sobornost and Zoku. On a more personal level this saves Mieli and the remnants of Earth who, beyond his responsibility for their plight, can be respectively seen as his closest single human connection and the lost foundation of humanity in general. He himself then enters a dangerous gambit with reality at stake. The All-Defector, a game theoretic glitch from the dilemma prison, seeks to consume the entire universe. This dark echo of the worst of post-humanity has the ability to absolutely mimic its opponents, and in so doing bend them to its will of domination. Jean defeats the expression of pure dystopia given conscious form through a further process of post-utopic thinking. By forcing many iterations of himself, bringing out the many fractured memories side by side in superposition against the All-Defector, he uses self-diversity in an atemporal milieu to bring his own internal conflict to bear. The pure difference that bombards the All-Defector is successful; hero and monster cancel one another out so that the various post-humanities can continue to exist. The post-utopic post-human forms a mirror, critique and negation of the destructive tendencies of humanity. The resolution of post-utopia can bring forth the conditions of difference to generate genuinely new expressions of consciousness.

Despite Jean's sacrifice, the post-utopian societies of the novel reach no such resolution at the series' conclusion. Jean himself manages to reach a new level of consciousness that can hack the universe and move beyond the constraints of our current reality. The warring factions, however, are merely separated rather than achieving a new form of post-humanity, perhaps an all

too human solution to the dilemma of conflicting enclaves. The Zoku, along with Earth and Mieli, enter an adjacent reality, leaving the Sobornost to claim our system and resolve their own internal conflicts. The Pellegrini even states that she will simply take an alternative Jean from the dilemma prison and make further attempts to break reality (Rajaniemi 2014: 287), without rethinking her own nature. This ultimate expression of the enclave, at the level of reality, undermines Jean's achievements in overcoming both his own dystopian and post-utopian (in his many) natures: the distortion of utopian post-human power in a selfish personality and the simultaneous fragmented iterations each with their own perspective on what it means to be Jean le Flambeur. He becomes in his final moments something other, a gesture of critical difference not only to the various diverse post-humans of the fiction but also to the construction of humanity in general with resonances in our present situation where technological potential can lead us into any one (or several) of almost limitless futures.

The impossibility of carrying Jean's task into humanity in general displays the impossibility of writing a post-human perspective. It is instructive that his new state must be instantly destroyed. We as readers are left with the task of imagining a genuinely post-human utopic space, yet through attempting such an impossible conundrum we might reach new critical perspectives on our own conceptions of humanity. To fully understand humanity, we must construct a position of estrangement from history, from ourselves and from our entire formation of consciousness in its relation to reality. We must reframe the terms of the discussion, we must rewrite consciousness.

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‘Londons’, Metafiction and Time Travel Narratology in Félix J. Palma’s Victorian Trilogy

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This article provides an introduction to time travel narratology with a case study of Félix J. Palma’s Victorian Trilogy. It argues that Palma’s texts celebrate H.G. Wells’ contributions to sf while exposing time travel’s implications for narrative. Palma builds upon *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), and also many Spanish and other literary antecedents as he re-imagines Victorian London in *El mapa del tiempo* (*The Map of Time* (2008)), *El mapa del cielo* (*The Map of the Sky* (2012)) and *El mapa del caos* (*The Map of Chaos* (2014)). Additionally, the article seeks to demonstrate that time travel fiction mirrors the concerns and techniques of postmodern metafiction, an aspect of the genre exploited by Palma to explore potentially realistic portrayals of time travel and to ruminate on the nature of narrative and realist fiction in general.

Representations of Time in Narrative

Narratives about time travel permit authors to lay bare the workings of their tales in the process of the telling. Indeed, the charm of time travel fiction often derives as much from narrative structure and philosophical approaches towards variable manners of being-in-time as from specific historical or imagined moments visited by the time travellers. David Wittenberg posits that time travel fiction is a ‘narratological laboratory’ (Wittenberg 2013: 2), an opportunity to explore ‘what “normal” narratives can bring about only in the form of fantasy, allegory, or formalistic experimentation’ (7), in short, ‘a certain variety of self-conscious narratological self-depiction’ constituting ‘a literalization of structuring conditions of storytelling’ (29). The degree to which time travel fiction coheres as narrative while simultaneously maintaining the paradoxes and illogicalities permitted by time travel marks its success.

The narratological distinction between ‘story’ and ‘discourse’ illuminates the differences between time travel fiction and traditional realism. In a narrative, ‘discourse’ is the set of words readers are presented, the way the ‘story’ is organized, plotted and told. The ‘story’ is the raw material that is used by the narrator to create the ‘discourse’. The narrator emplots the ‘story’ into ‘discourse’ by supplying, ordering, repeating, obscuring, and otherwise presenting the components – the ‘existents’ (characters and settings) and ‘events’ (actions and happenings), arranged in chronological order – that constitute the ‘story.’ The ‘discourse’ of any realistic, non-fantastical text is fraught with what we might see as the narratological equivalents of time travel, based on 1) differing ratios of ‘story time’ (how much time is supposed to have taken place) to ‘discourse time’ (how long the narrative takes to relate this information), depicted through ellipsis, summary, scene, stretch and pause; as well as 2) chronological jumbling

of the elements of the 'story', shown in flashbacks, flash forwards, repetitions, and multifarious combinations of these options, as they refer to the principal plot thread or as they digress or anticipate episodes beyond or alongside that thread. The usefulness of this terminology becomes self-evident as we attempt to describe or decipher the 'story' behind complex texts like Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) or the Christopher Nolan film *Memento* (2000). 'Story' is a product of our act of reading the 'discourse' – it is something we discover as we decipher the clues about the 'story' from the words on the page or the signs on the screen. Obviously, we can have multiple discursive versions of the same 'story', all varying according to the emplotment by the narrator(s).

Wittenberg writes, 'since all narratives do something like "travel" through time or construct "alternate" worlds – one could arguably call narrative itself a "time machine"' (Wittenberg 2013: 1). When 'narratological time travel' inherent in all narrative fiction is literalized in the 'story' of a time travel narrative, chaos ensues. The chronology of the 'events' ordered in the 'story' resists straightforward deciphering and the 'existents' (the fictional 'alternative world') of the story appear to multiply due to visitation or interference by time travelling characters. For example, chronologically, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) is saved in the 1950s by a teenage girl who will later become his mother. The 'event' impossibly occurs before Marty is born, presumably in the late 1960s, even though in the 'discourse' (the 1985 film *Back to the Future*) we meet Marty as a teenager. The question arises: is the 1950s setting that Marty visits the same 1950s setting his parents inhabited before he was conceived in the story? In time travel fiction, rational ordering of events and clear delineation of the various existents or objects, people and places making up the story's universe require dealing with (if not resolving) multiple logical inconsistencies and parodoxes.

Time travel alters chronology, space, persons and objects, through a variety of absurd and paradoxical situations. Some of the temporal paradoxes philosopher that David Lewis famously called 'oddities' but not impossibilities of time travel include the grandfather paradox – how can one travel to the past and successfully murder one's own grandfather? Two solutions: the idea of restricted access, where the natural laws of the universe work together so that the unitary line of time cannot be altered to incorporate the traveller's intended mission: it turns out that the victim is not really the grandfather of the assassin, or else the assassin's gun does not function in the moment of truth, or for myriad other strange reasons the murder cannot take place. Otherwise, the paradox requires the creation of a parallel timeline to incorporate the change, which means that the time traveller in fact kills someone who is actually not really his grandfather and prevents the birth of someone who would have been the time traveller's alternate self had he been born in the first place. In the grandfather paradox, the 'story' prohibits the actions entailed by the straightforward account of the assassination; the event does not occur as prescribed, for somehow the circumstances surrounding the event (the existents) differ from what is told in

the discourse, or else a new set of existents and events comes into being as an alternative reality, thereby requiring new interpretation of the words of the discourse.

In the predestinational paradox the time traveller creates the situation she has travelled to the past to change; or someone with information from the future is compelled to fulfil it. The ontological or bootstraps paradox entails objects, information or persons existing without ever having been created or born. A man travelling to the past to sire himself, for instance, has no beginning, and becomes his own father, grandfather, great-grandfather and so on in an infinite regress. The assassinate Hitler paradox is a mixture of these – the mission to the past occurs because of Hitler's crimes; history is changed because Hitler is murdered or prevented from rising to power – what then can motivate the time travel mission? Restricted access might prevail, or perhaps the cosmic karma or what I call the grass is always greener paradox, in which Hitler is replaced by an even more abominable Fuhrer. Additionally, the ethical dimension must be considered, for the time traveller judges and punishes crimes that have not been committed by the person receiving the punishment.

To avoid many of these paradoxes, much time travel fiction resorts to the 'many worlds' solution to the problems of quantum physics. The arrival of a time traveller in a moment of a story is an event that often marks a forking of the paths, because as the visitor arrives from the future, she creates a past from which she and the future whence she came cannot arise. Though sceptical himself of such a solution, Paul Nahin describes the alternate realities version thus:

> If a time traveller journeys into the past and introduces a change (indeed, his very journey may be the change), then, as [Martin] Gardner stated, reality splits into two versions, with one fork representing the result of the change and the other fork being the original reality before the change. (To a fifth-dimensional observer, of course, all conceivable forks, all possible four-dimensional spacetimes, have always existed.) Indeed, according to this view the entire universe is splitting, at every microinstant, along every alternative decision path for every particle in the cosmos! This is often called the theory of *alternate realities with parallel time tracks*. (Nahin 1999: 294–5)

I contend we must consider hard and soft versions of this position, again invoking the example from the flashbacks and flashforwards of traditional narratology. The 'hard' position would be that every occurrence of time travel to the past creates an alternate universe. If a hypothetical time traveller Nancy travels back to an earlier London, she has created a London (prime). If she thence travels further into the past, the London she arrives at is London (double prime). If she attempts to return to her future, she arrives in London (double

prime)'s future, not her original London (nor even that of London (prime)). The 'soft' position on alternate realities with parallel time tracks is that the alternate reality is created only when failure to do so entails a paradox. With a 'soft' position, we can have a traveller bouncing forward and back along her own time track, only occasionally and accidentally creating a new reality when the universe adjusts to avoid a temporal paradox. With time travel, the very concept of history becomes problematic, because unless we assume a narrator's-eye-view of the multiverse, we have no platform upon which to build our historical understanding. This, perhaps the greatest oddity of time travel, is also a fundamental feature of the metafictional mode, which creates and celebrates literary realities as it highlights their contingency and unreal nature.

Spanish Time Travel Literature

Spanish writers have been working in time travel fiction's narratological laboratory since at least the nineteenth century. Indeed, Enrique Gaspar's 1887 novel *El anacronópete* (*The Time Ship*) predates not only *The Time Machine* but even Wells' first known foray into fictional time travel, 'The Chronic Argonauts' (1888), which was left incomplete after three instalments. An unfinished manuscript by famed Spanish histologist Santiago Ramón y Cajal, titled 'La vida en el año 6000' ('Life in the Year 6000') was probably written in the mid-1880s. In 1909, Carlos Mendizábal Brunet wrote a lengthy sequel to *The Time Machine* titled *Elois y Morlocks*, in which the Time Traveller's brother accompanies him into the future to restore humanity to the post-human species of the Eloi and the Morlocks.

Although for many Spaniards the years of Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) constituted a temporal paralysis, narratives of time travel have presented alternative versions of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War and of the transition to democracy after Franco's death. Rafael Marín's 'Baraka' ('Blessed One') (2002) tells the story of a visit by an aged, time-travelling Franco to his earlier self on July 17, 1936 (one day before the start of Franco's rebellion). The older Franco, who apparently did not take part in any insurrection, harangues the young Franco into participating in the coup. 'El día que hicimos la Transición' ('The Day We Made the Transition') (1997) by Ricardo de la Casa and Pedro Jorge Romero recounts the efforts of a team of time police combating mysterious temporal terrorists who repeatedly attempt to alter world history by thwarting Spain's transition from Franco's regime into democracy in the late 1970s. The ultimate goal of the temporal terrorists is never revealed, but their activities result in nearly infinite alternative histories arising from interference in the crucial years after Franco's death. The text thematizes the problem of multiple worlds when Isabel, one of the team members, is killed while thwarting the latest attack. The text shifts to another, more personal sort of transition, as Isabel's colleague and lover, Mikel, seeks to recruit her replacement from amongst myriad Isabels exiting across the multiverse. Not all counterfactual

histories are necessarily the fruit of time travel narratives, but counterfactuals indeed lie at the heart of many of the paradoxes of time travel narratives. Some of these counterfactuals are made possible by the multiple worlds hypothesis, exemplified in stories such as 'El día que hicimos la Transición'.

The protagonist of Julián Díez's story 'Tren' (2009) has been rescued from certain death during the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings (inspired by Al Qaeda) by a time traveller. Upon witnessing the stagnant socio-political future awaiting Spain in 2016, he sends a message from the future to himself a few days before the bombing, telling him to refuse to follow his rescuer's instructions so he will die on the train (thereby ensuring his own death and paradoxically altering or erasing the version of 2016 in which he was saved – a prime example of the aforementioned predestinational paradox). Marín's story 'Mein Fuhrer' (1982), comically emphasizes this and other paradoxes arising from multiple attempts to assassinate Hitler, and ends with the Fuhrer commandeering his erstwhile assassins' time machine to become 'Lord of Time and Space'. José Mallorquí's 'Misterio mayor' (2003) takes a similar approach to the search for the supposedly true author of Shakespeare's manuscripts. Juan Miguel Aguilera's *La red de Indra (Indra's Net)* (2009) underscores the vastness of the timescape implied in Wells' novel, as it postulates a nexus of time travel portals dating from before the origin of the universe. Additionally, in its appendix, 'Todo lo que un hombre puede imaginar' ('All a Man Can Imagine') – frequently published as an independent story – Jules Verne receives a visit from a time-travelling Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who takes the sf writer on a mind-blowing balloon ride upward from what appears to be the authentic French town of Amiens into the reality of a Dyson sphere encompassing nearly infinite possible alternative worlds. In 2012, Domingo Santos, one of the pioneers of modern Spanish science fiction, published in his collection *Homenaje* a lengthy new version of *The Time Machine* in which Wells is a personal friend of the Time Traveller.

Whereas many Spanish time travel stories entail violence – terrorism, civil war, assassinations – most also constitute a call for justice and a violent rupture with memories of the unhappy (or even wasted) twentieth century. Interestingly, the most recent time travel narratives invoke not just hope, but vast optimism in the possibilities for Spain's future. *La red de Indra* symbolically recapitulates the Time Traveller's vast journey to the end of the Earth, yet overpowers Wells' pessimism with an astounding vision of Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point in the last moment of our Universe. Finally, Félix J. Palma's Victorian Trilogy revisits Wells' own life, making him an unwitting time traveller/visitor to alternative worlds even as he seeks to debunk a variety of time-travel hoaxes.

Palma's Victorian Trilogy: Time Travel and Alternative Worlds

The genius of the Victorian Trilogy lies in how postmodern metafictional games always seem to focus on time, alternative realities, and oddities of history. Narrative concerns shifts and transformations (otherwise we have description).

Change implies time; personal time diverges from chronological time, hence divisions between time in discourse, and time in story. In *The Map of Time*, story time occurs in November 1896, just as Wells completes his manuscript of *The Invisible Man*, but the discourse of this novel incorporates multiple examples and even grotesque exaggerations of the varied ratios of story time to discourse time: ellipsis, summary, scene, stretch and pause. The narrator ostentatiously and exuberantly employs realistic discursive equivalents of time travel, not only flashback and flash forward, but nested digressions within digressions, flash forwards within flash forwards, flashbacks within flash forwards, and so forth, all while discussing various possibilities of time-travel. At the end of *The Map of Time*, Wells seemingly destroys his original spatiotemporal reality as he defeats a time-travelling villain (we later learn that apparent time travel is actually a shift between almost identical parallel universes running at different relative speeds).

According to Lillian Furst, one of the ironic hallmarks of literary realism is its consistent emphasis on its own reliability and truthfulness coupled with its multiple signs of fabrication or artifice of realist discourse (Furst 1995: 1–7). One of these signs in the Victorian Trilogy is the constant intertextual play between Palma's texts, the multiple texts written and discussed within the novels, and the various literary contexts and intertexts to which they allude. Samuel R. Delany writes that 'Science fiction is about the current world – the given world shared by the writer and reader. But it is not a metaphor for the given world, nor does the catch-all term metonymy exhaust the relation between the given and science fiction's distortion of the given' (quoted Csicery-Ronay Jr. 2008: 78). The 'current world' of the Victorian Trilogy is made up of writers, the realistic and/or impossible worlds they create in their writing, and 'us' – the flesh-and-blood readers of Palma's words. In his novels, a Victorian version of this (our) 'current world' is created (Palma's Wells frequently seems like a typical denizen of a realist novel) in a thoroughly mimetic realist discourse. Then, within the novels, Wells' 'current world' (the Victorian mirror of our own) undergoes fantastic 'distortions of the given' as the possibilities (and impossibilities) imagined by writers such as Bram Stoker, Henry James, Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and especially Wells himself become realities (or at least, possible realities). The narrator of the Victorian Trilogy self-consciously highlights narratological artifice involved in these distortions, thus wedding realistic and science fictional discourse.

In *Narrative and Freedom* (1994), Gary Saul Morson makes clear that narrative foreshadowing is in effect backward causation: 'in one way or another, the future must already be there, must somehow already exist substantially enough to send signs backward' (Morson 1994: 7). Palma's narrator foreshadows throughout the Victorian Trilogy, often speaking in almost hermetic language. However, the heart of the Victorian Trilogy is when Palma's fiction employs another technique elaborated by Morson: sideshadowing. Morson explains:

> In contrast to foreshadowing, which projects onto the present a

> shadow from the future, sideshadowing projects – from the 'side' – the shadow of an alternative present. It allows us to see what might have been and therefore changes our view of what is […] time itself becomes a succession not just of points of actuality but also of fields of possibility. (Morson 1994: 7–8)

Marie-Laure Ryan's chapter on 'The Text as World' in *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001) and Elana Gomel's chapter on 'sidestepping' from *Narrative Space and Time* (2014) are tremendously helpful in deciphering the logic of alternative universes. Ryan declares that a non-actual possible world (the possible world that projects Morson's 'sideshadow' onto the actual world in the narrative) can indeed become actual through what she calls 'the space-travel mode' a recentring of the actual: 'consciousness relocates itself to another world and, taking advantage of the indexical definition of actuality, reorganizes the entire universe of being around this virtual reality' (Ryan 2001: 103). In the following case study of the Victorian Trilogy, our supposed time travellers (who are, in fact, slipping between alternative parallel universes, not forward and backward along the time track of a single universe) come to perceive the 'sideshadows' not only of their own mimetic fictional realities, but also those of infinite multiple universes, many of which roughly correspond to their own. *The Map of Chaos* literalizes these 'sideshadows': 'St. Paul's appeared to be buried under innumerable veils of muslin. Ramsey supposed that many other cathedrals from other parallel Londons were superimposed upon it" (Palma 2014: 602; translation mine).

The Map of Time is set in 1896, one year after the publication of *The Time Machine*, and in the weeks immediately preceding the completion of the manuscript of *The Invisible Man* by a figure that I shall term Wells(0). *The Map of Time* ends with a conversation on the Waterloo Bridge during which the reader realizes that the entire action of the novel has taken place in an alternative reality that has been destroyed (we suppose at this point in the series) by the actions of another figure, Wells(1). *The Map of the Sky* takes up with Wells(1) in June 1898, shortly after the publication of The *War of the Worlds*, and ends on August 1, 1898, in an alternative world almost, but not quite, identical to the world of *The Map of Time* and the opening chapters of *The Map of the Sky*. Keeping with the theme of the third volume, *The Map of Chaos*, Palma intentionally disrupts efforts to pinpoint dates and settings for the episodes of recounted in the novel, some of which take place in alternative universes, others in a 'Point Zero' universe we know almost wholly through a manuscript. The novel's climax occurs as all of the myriad 'Londons' of every alternative universe (including imagined 'Londons') converge and overlap in space-time. Wells(2) of the London of the ending chapters of *The Map of the Sky* teams up with characters from the 'Point Zero' universe to defeat a murderous Invisible Man from a far-off alternative universe who has dedicated himself to exacting revenge on Wells(0) from the first novel by eradicating all versions of Wells(0 . . .

n) throughout the multiverse (Roland Barthes' 'death of the author' ad infinitum). *The Map of Chaos* is so complicated that the narrator supplies a reader's guide at the beginning of the book, but encourages brave readers to try to navigate *The Map of Chaos* on their own.

The novels depict Wells(0), Wells(1), and Wells(2) interacting with readers of *The Time Machine*, two alternate versions of *The War of the Worlds, The Invisible Man* and other works of fiction. Some of these readers attempt to create continuations or imitations of his (their?) books. *The Time Machine* sparks in readers a fervour of story telling. These readers even come to desire to become characters in stories. Wells(0)'s fictional time machine inspires others to seek to prevent the murder of a loved one years before by Jack the Ripper, to write their own time travel stories, to claim to have encountered point-to-point time travel through magical wormholes, to pose as time-travelling heroes from the future, to engage in correspondence with time travellers from the future, and to purchase expensive tickets for a touristic temporal excursion to May 25, 2000, the date of the decisive battle between the remnants of humanity, led by the valiant Captain Derek Shackleton, and the steampunk automata, led by King Solomon, who have taken over the world. The self-conscious narrator dupes the reader into believing in some of these time-travel possibilities, even though Wells(0) himself remains resolutely sceptical. That is, until a fantastic moment late in the novel opens his eyes to the temporal multiverse. One of Wells(0)'s descendants visits him from the future to deliver a letter from an older, time travelling version of Wells, addressed to his younger self, to inform him that his time travel legacy is not merely found in the literature flowing from *The Time Machine*, but also in his very DNA (he is the first human to express a gene permitting time travel). Even as Wells(0) becomes aware of his possible future, the narrator overlays paradox upon paradox, with metafictional nods to many literary and cinematic versions of time travel, including the George Pal film version of *The Time Machine* (1960).

The fundamental conflict in *The Map of Time* arises from Wells(0)'s desire to write literature about the impossible, and the antagonist Gilliam Murray's desire to extrapolate possible outcomes from current trends such as class and empire (which, ironically, inspired the flesh and blood Wells in writing his scientific romances in our world). In a flashback in the first novel, at the start of Wells(0)'s literary career, his story 'The Chronic Argonauts' inspires the 'Elephant Man', Joseph Merrick, to invite Wells(0) to tea. During their fascinating conversation, Merrick asks the author if he thinks anyone will ever invent a real time machine, and wonders at Wells(0)'s denial, given that he has written about a time machine. Wells(0) replies: 'I assure you that if it were possible to build a time machine, I would never have written about it. I am only interested in writing about what is impossible' (Palma 2011: 190). Wells(0) deeply admires Merrick, whose life gives the lie to Wells(0)'s own hypercritical cynicism: 'this creature was living proof will could move mountains and part seas. In that hospital wing, that refuge

from the world, the distance between the attainable and the unattainable was more than ever a question of will' (Palma 2011: 194). In the Spanish version, the words mean 'possible' and the 'impossible', an allusion to the many seeming impossible worlds that indeed become actual worlds during the course of the Victorian Trilogy.

Ironically, besides Merrick, the character that most perfectly embodies will in *The Map of Time* is Gilliam Murray(0). Just after the publication of *The Time Machine*, an admiring Murray(0) visits Wells(0) and enthusiastically presents him with the manuscript of his own time travel novel, Capitán Derek Shackleton, *The True Story of a Brave Hero of the Future*. The work is a catalogue of the worst of all possible clichés of pulp science fiction, and Wells(0) holds no punches as he severely condemns Murray's efforts. At one point he even wishes he could travel back in time to prevent the manuscript from ever being written (Palma 2011: 434). Wells(0) decries Murray(0)'s insistence on extrapolation; Murray(0) claims his novel is but an expression of his speculations about what might really occur in the world. He then angrily shrugs off Wells(0)'s criticism, and claims that he can make the world believe in his invention without recognizing it as such, that the year 2000 will indeed be like he has novelized it: 'You carry on writing your fantasies in books. I will make mine a reality' (Palma 2011: 443). A year later, the fraudulent 'Murray's Time Travel' opens its doors to astounding success. And just as Murray seeks to do in his speculations, *The Map of Time* extrapolates an astounding array of improbable if not impossible situations from this virtual reality taken to be real.

The Map of the Sky is even more complicated. It begins with Wells(1) grousing about imitators and copies, just before he meets the American Garrett P. Serviss, who asks Well(1)'s opinion of his unauthorized continuation of Wells(1)'s novel, titled *Edison's Conquest of Mars*. Serviss wonders aloud whether the publication of *The War of the Worlds* will lead to a real invasion by Martians, just as *The Time Machine* prophesied the discovery of actual time travel and trips to the year 2000. Serviss also asks a question that reveals a great deal about the London(1), and indeed the entire universe, that the characters inhabit: does not Wells think that *The War of the Worlds* should have ended with the humans victorious, rather than having the Earth being utterly wasted by the Martians in their flying manta-ray-like machines? Of course, in the bookstores of our real-life London, the copies of Wells' *The War of the Worlds* includes the deus ex machina ending of earthly microbes killing off the Martians within their almost invincible tripods. So we begin *The Map of the Sky* realizing that Wells(1)'s 'London' is really some sort of alternative London, not merely a mimetic fictional version of our own.

Serviss also reveals to Wells(1) the existence of a mysterious Chamber of Wonders beneath the Museum of Natural History in South Kensington, which houses, among such marvels as Dr Jekyll's formula, a giant saucer-like object and the corpse of an extra-terrestrial found amidst the remains of a failed

expedition to the South Pole in 1829. When they secretly visit the Chamber, Wells unknowingly reanimates the creature with a drop of his own blood. The narrative digresses for many pages to recount the story of the expedition, which self-consciously concludes with two mutually exclusive endings – one where the creature kills everyone and then falls into the stasis from which Wells(1)'s blood rouses it, and another where the survivors of the expedition slay the creature with an explosive harpoon. Other digressions include a romance between a beautiful yet disdainful American, Emma, and a mysterious wealthy man who turns out to be this universe's version of the antagonist of the first novel, Murray(1), who invented the steampunk virtual reality of Murray's Time Travel.

An avid reader, Emma requires Murray(1) to prove his love to her by recreating the Martian invasion from Wells(1)'s novel. He seemingly does, for a few months later on August 1, a smoking cylinder in Woking awaits Wells(1) and a horde of astonished onlookers. But when the ship opens, a real invasion force of aliens, led by the now-reanimated creature from the Chamber of Wonders (who as a shapeshifter sometimes assumes Wells(1)'s appearance) spills out and begins its work of death. Wells(1), Murray(1), Emma, and several others flee, reiterating some of the episodes from The War of the Worlds. When the group is finally captured in the tunnels beneath London, Wells(1) involuntarily travels away from the scene, the latent time travelling gene expressing itself for the first time in his life (although we the readers recall the alternate reality created and destroyed by Wells(0)'s time journeys in the other novel). The narrative focus alternates between Murray(1), Emma, and the dwindling group of humans in the London of the start of the novel, and Wells(1), who manages to control his power and travel back to join the 1829 expedition to the South Pole. Per the pessimistic ending of the version of *The War of the Worlds* Serviss criticizes at the beginning of *The Map of the Sky*, the aliens eradicate the human race and modify the earth's climate and atmosphere to suit their species. The time travelling Wells(1) succeeds in realizing the second ending of the expedition episode, and helps kill the alien visitor, or so he believes.

The surviving Wells(1) chooses to live his life in anonymity, awaiting the fateful day in 1898 when the cylinder will open in Woking. He comes to understand that the world he thought he time-travelled to is instead an alternative reality, a London(2) differing from his own London(1) – and he certainly hopes it differs in terms of the aliens. He locates the younger version of himself, Wells(2), and encourages him to change the ending of any novel he should ever write about alien invasions, and allow the humans to survive. He also encourages Murray(2) to make 'his' Emma, Emma(2),[1]smile, not feel terror, if he should ever decide to create a virtual reality of a Martian invasion.

Fiction and the 'Best' of the Multiverses

For Palma, language is more of a funhouse than a prison, and when at last the paradoxes of the Victorian Trilogy are resolved by Wells(2)'s solution to the

converging universes, London(2) returns to a realistic semblance of the universe we know as our own. In *The Map of the Sky*, the alternate realities along parallel time tracks do not merely present a panoply of seemingly indistinguishable versions, but also a 'best version' that the narrator of the entire trilogy, Jane Wells (from the Zero Point), can locate and instigate through language. *The Map of Chaos* makes sense of the multiplying worlds through multiple layers of (sometimes metafictional) explorations of visitors and visitations from other universes – especially the Zero Point universe in which 'Reason' and 'Knowledge' dominate. The quest of the inhabitants of the Zero Point to avoid the destruction of their universe by shifting their entire civilization into a suitable alternative universe sends the narrative spinning through multiple visions of distinct realities viewed by multiple versions of analogous observers – 'Wells,' 'Old Wells,' 'Observer Wells' and so on.

But all is not true in Palma's novels; the illusions of his realism multiply, but in an astonishingly coherent manner. The last pages of *The Map of Time* hold its most realistic descriptions, and yet also its most metaphysical and metafictional ruminations on time, history, literature, and reality. Watching the sunrise on Waterloo Bridge with Andrew Winslow(1), who believes he has succeeded in killing the Ripper in an alternative timeline, Wells(1) realizes that Truth resides in the power of imagination. By this point, the reader has learned that all the characters from the beginning of the novel – inhabitants of a world in which Jack the Ripper was apprehended – are alternate versions, Wells (0) and Andrew(0), of the 'more true' realistic versions represented by Wells(1) and Andrew(1) on the symbolically liminal bridge between truth and fiction. The multiverse indeed exists; anything possible to conceive is true (as Murray (0) insists and as Murray(2) earnestly desires) and even the best fiction is but a plagiarism from an actual alternative reality. Although Murray(0) insists that scientific invention dismantles the impossible, the real destroyer of impossible worlds is also what we think of as their inventor – the imagination that brings such oddities, always already existing, to our attention. And in Palma's Victorian Trilogy, the imagination can be trained to seek not merely a time when aliens are not destroying the Earth, but even better, the best of all possible worlds and times, teased out from the chaotic multiverse.

Endnote

[1] Although Emma is introduced in the second novel, to prevent confusion I refer to our original Emma from the beginning of *The Map of the Sky* as Emma(1), not Emma(0).

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Conference Reports

Sideways in Time: Alternate History and Counterfactual Narratives, University of Liverpool, 30–31 March 2015
Reviewed by Anna McFarlane (University of St Andrews)

The Sideways in Time conference was a joint venture between the universities of Liverpool and Lancaster, and represented the first major academic consideration of alternate history since keynote speaker Karen Hellekson's *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (2001). Organizers Glyn Morgan and Charul (Chuckie) Patel gathered an international group of scholars in the beautifully historical Library Room of Liverpool's School of the Arts on the day after the clocks went forward for British Summer Time, so the malleability of time was foremost in everyone's minds.

Hellekson's opening keynote introduced concepts, such as contingency, individual agency and historical necessity, which would become the contested ground for the duration of the conference. Hellekson looked at televisual alternate histories, including *Continuum* (2012–) and *Fringe* (2008–13), concluding that individual agency characterises such series because of the nature of the genre: it is difficult to portray historical forces involving multitudes, or contingency based on global changes using visual language, so individuals are given agency over history. The discussion of agency continued in the first panel, on feminist alternate histories, as Amanda Dillon argued that female writers and characters were more likely to make secret changes to events, changes unrecorded by history, compared to the world-changing actions of male characters. Sarah Lohmann and Rosie Lewis moved away from considering individual agency towards a more collectivist, plural understanding of utopian dreaming through respective discussions of Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Lizzie Borden's radical feminist film *Born in Flames* (1983). Lohmann argued that complexity theory could be used to understand the dynamic nature of feminist utopias while Lewis presented a collectivist, radical community that offered an escape from individualism.

Attention then moved to the ways in which alternate history has rewritten the Enlightenment so as to challenge or support its legacy. Alex Broadhead discussed the attraction shown towards the lives of Romantic poets such as Lord Byron and John Keats in alternate histories, while Jim Clarke explored the nexus point of the Reformation, concluding that texts which take the Reformation as their point of departure tend to rewrite scientific progress as Catholic dystopia. Broadhead's paper showed that there is a reaction against Enlightenment rationality in the valorisation of the late Romantics while Clarke showed how irrational a reverence for Enlightenment thinking can become, bleeding into anti-Catholic prejudice.

Stephen Baxter, one of the most celebrated writers of science fiction and

particularly alternate history working today, radically changed the terms of the debate with his keynote as he considered contingency on a global and even cosmic scale. Baxter's tour through radical alternate histories gave us alternate geographies, biologies, humans, evolutions and cosmologies. These themes were echoed in Chris Pak's paper, which drew attention to contingency based on massive changes to the world through his reading of Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002), which re-imagines the ascent of Muslim and Chinese empires, following a Europe wrecked by the Black Death.

We went on to explore the importance of memory to our construction of historical narrative. Francis Gene-Rowe aimed to reradicalize the maxim 'history is written by the victors' through a reading of Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) alongside Walter Benjamin's concept of messianic time, while Fred Smoler argued for the importance of Stephen Vincent Benét's 'The Curfew Tolls' (1935) through a comparison with the work of Harry Turtledove. Afterwards, Jonathan Rayner showed the ways in which Japan negotiates the history of the Second World War through film and manga alternate histories which portray Japan's surrender as a necessary evil, and display commitment to her contemporary allies over martial traditions.

Mikhaylo Nazarenko discussed alternate history traditions in Russia and his native Ukraine where, in a sense, all history can be viewed as 'alternate' or 'secret' because the people have not had access to their own 'official' history. He explained that alternate history was seen as oppositional to Soviet dogma, which did not recognize the potential for individual agents to affect history's path. Time travellers could therefore never be shown changing the outcome of historical processes, which were considered necessary and inevitable. The alternate histories of Stephen Fry and Daniel Quinn came under scrutiny in Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż's paper as she critiqued their different approaches to the Second World War in, respectively, *Making History* (1996) and *After Dachau* (2001).

The second day of the conference began with two panels aiming to situate alternate history as a genre. Daniel Dohrn was the only speaker to focus on counterfactuals as an intellectual tool and he analyzed the philosophical use to which these thought experiments can be put, concluding that it is difficult, philosophically speaking, to ascertain the value of counterfactuals in assessing past actions. Following him was Matt Mitrovitch, curator of the Alternate History Weekly Update blog, who gave a thorough account of the thriving online communities of alternate historians and fans. Ursula Troche examined the political dimension of alternate history by asking delegates to consider John Lennon's 'Imagine' (1971) and Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech (1963) as alternate histories of a kind. She followed this with a performance of her own poem, 'If There Was No Racism', which beautifully evoked the political and emotional potential of the genre.

The genre's limits continued to be discussed as Pascal Lemaire looked

at Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan novels and concluded that geopolitical context is not particularly important when the message is to bolster armaments and to maintain American global power. The fast-moving events of world politics prevent the categorization of the Clancy novels as alternate history. John Wyndham's reputation for cosy catastrophes was challenged by Andrew M. Butler, who wondered whether his short story 'Random Quest' (1961) and its film adaptation *Quest for Love* (1973) might be thought of as 'cosy uchronias'. Butler compared the story to Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (1809) which, like 'Random Quest', features a character called Ottily and uses chemical affinities as a metaphor for romantic couplings. Leimar Garcia-Siino finished the panel with a convincing case for considering the use of alternate history in fantasy. While she accepted that strict taxonomists would not, by definition, consider fantasy to be capable of producing an alternate history due to its impossibility, she argued that fantasy is just as capable of socio-cultural commentary as any other genre and that its alternate histories are therefore just as valuable as any other.

The role of alternate history in challenging or recuperating 'the American Dream' was the focus of the next two panels, 'Different Landscapes' and 'Alternate History After 9/11'. Dawn Stobbart and Alan Gregory considered Stephen King's treatment of John F. Kennedy's assassination in *11/22/63* (2011) while Rachel Mizsei Ward spoke about the difficulties faced by comic-book writers as they tried to portray their superheroes helpless in the aftermath of 9/11. Like Ward's, my own paper discussed the impossibility of historical narratives in a world dominated by the subjunctivities of the war on terror. I analyzed Lavie Tidhar's *Osama* (2011) which imagines a character trapped in a never-ending present.

Towards the close of the conference, alternate history offered a way into thinking about alternate epistemologies. Laura Ettenfield described the uses of oceanic feeling in the work of Victor Hugo as the sea offers an alternate ontology. Chloe Germaine Buckley's paper recalled an earlier panel by identifying the Weird rewritings of Sherlock Holmes in the 2003 anthology, *Shadows over Baker Street*, as a reaction to Enlightenment values. The epistemology of the senses was Helen Giblin-Jowett's topic as she showed that smell can be used to access other temporalities, through a reading of H.G. Wells' 'The Man With a Nose' (1894). Finally, Molly Cobb looked at the ways in which Alfred Bester privatizes the individual's temporality in his novels, separating the individual from society through his use of 'microhistories'.

The final keynote came from Adam Roberts who has dabbled in fantastical alternate history in *Swiftly* (2008), a novel set in the same world as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Roberts compared the first alternate history, *Napoléon Apocryphe* (1841) by Louis Geoffroy, with Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869). Geoffroy imagines a world that Napoleon has fully conquered, ushering in a monarchie universelle, an example of a Great Man single-handedly changing the course of history. Roberts called Tolstoy the anti-alternate historian,

as Tolstoy did not accept that individuals could have an impact on the course of history. While the conference started with the individualism of televisual alternate histories we found ourselves, via Baxter's radical contingencies, facing the possibility that alternate history might have something fascistic at its core, a belief in the fragility of history that venerates the agency of the Great Man at the expense of the multitude.

Sideways in Time represented a rare academic consideration of alternate history. However, the organisers have recently released a call for papers with a view to publishing an edited collection. With minds stimulated from the conference and the edited collection forthcoming, it looks like this deficit in science fiction studies will very soon be addressed.

Brave New Worlds: The Dystopia in Modern and Contemporary Fiction, Newcastle University, 29–30 April 2015

Reviewed by Fran Bigman (University of Leeds) and Andrea Dietrich (Birkbeck College, London)

Dubbed 'Dystopicon' by the attendees, many of the speakers took up the invitation to examine the physical spaces that comprise dystopia, but the range of issues and texts was broad, from political resistance in feminist sf to the machine world in Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1920). The conference proved so popular that there were sometimes even three parallel sessions, inducing severe FOMO in attendees.

The opening session on early twentieth-century dystopian writing featured Margery Palmer McCulloch (Glasgow) on the political allegories in Čapek's work from *R.U.R.* to his anti-militarist novel *The War with the Newts* (1936), which updates his earlier portrait of a robot underclass in its treatment of an indigenous group by a colonizing power. Nathan Waddell (Nottingham) contributed a paper on the role of music in the anti-fascist dystopias *In the Second Year* (1936) by Storm Jameson and *Swastika Night* (1937) by Katharine Burdekin, exploring ideas of music as apolitical, as resistance through reminders of a different past, and as a conduit for ideology. Sarah Cullen (Newcastle) ended the session with a reading of Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) as a denouncement of the Russian Futurists that casts them as the 'court poets' of a stifling regime.

Simon Mernagh (Queen's University, Belfast) opened the mid-morning panel, 'Apocalypse & the Human', by drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt on phenomenological spatial relations to examine distinctions between the dystopic and the apocalyptic; while privacy is destroyed in the former, the public sphere as described by Arendt disappears in examples of the latter. Sarah Paterson (Glasgow) continued the theme of music in dystopia by asking, through an examination of the role of song and verse in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–10), and the 2014 Scottish referendum, whether its power (both pro- and anti-state) is a product

of authorial imagination or an element of realism. Kanta Dihal (Oxford) closed the panel by examining how Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) departs from the usual plague narrative, in which the survivors are superior examples of mankind. In *Oryx and Crake*, the outbreak leads to a dystopia for humanity that is a utopia for all other creatures, suggesting that humanity itself is the plague.

What better way to follow a sandwich lunch than a panel on 'Subjectivity & Existentialism'? Andrea Dietrich (Birkbeck) explored the relevance of Sartrean Existentialism to dystopian narrative arguing that what seems to drive the dystopian narrative forward is existential agency. The presentation visualized the protagonist's journey through the three Sartrean levels of self (reflective, bodily and relational) in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), *The Handmaid's Tale* and William Gibson's *Zero History* (2010). Asami Nakamura (Liverpool) argued that Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) departs from the use of nostalgia in dystopias by Atwood and Orwell, in which the past serves as a contrast to the evils of the present; the protagonist, Kathy, a clone who has no memory of a better past, engages in a bad nostalgia that treats people as instrumental, the way she has been treated.

Keith Williams (Dundee) delivered a late keynote on urban dystopia in a paper which compared H.G. Wells' *The Sleeper Wakes* (1899) with Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), remarking upon Lang's conscious reworking of and complex commentary on Wells' ideas, in particular the portrayal of highly technological, urbanized, managerial societies (despite Wells' disowning of his own influence on Lang's method and themes). Alongside this comparison, Williams explored dystopian elements in both works which has influenced subsequent narratives and which today form key features of our technology-saturated and market-controlled world such as Wells' 'babble machine', Ostrog's television surveillance network (Big Brother's prototype), the Panopticon, and John Fredersen's videophone.

In one of the final panels of the day, 'Landscape I', attendees were treated to visions of a drowned London, a trope with a long history and one that Paul Dobraszczyk (Manchester) argued was at odds with the positivist drive of climate-change rhetoric. Martin Schauss (Warwick) picked up on the eco-critical turn in Sebald criticism by exploring Will Self's claim that W.G. Sebald represents human mass murder as a form of holocaust we are perpetuating on the natural world, and problematizing Self's distinction between the human and natural worlds. Lastly, Madeleine Scherer (also Warwick) argued that the Irish Midlands become a dystopian metaphor in the plays of Marina Carr, suggesting Ireland's failure to come to terms with the ghosts of its past.

Day Two began bright and early; on one morning panel, Anthony Mullen (Newcastle) contextualized *Never Let Me Go* with reference to recent British history, suggesting that Thatcherite principles are obliquely reflected in the clones' concern with the market value of their artwork. Some of the clones aspire to individualism by refusing to accept their fate and dying with the belief that

other clones can have a different fate. Mark West (Glasgow) argued that Lauren Groff's novel *Arcadia* (2012), a pastoral that begins in the counterculture of the 1970s and ends with a pandemic in 2018, charts a failure of the collective that results in a dystopian future without history. Diletta De Cristofaro (Nottingham) closed the panel by considering the prevalence of dystopia in post-apocalyptic fiction, using the etymological meaning of apocalypse as an 'unveiling' of the true nature of history: a straight line leading to a cataclysm and then to utopian renewal, a teleology subverted by contemporary apocalypses such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) that end in dystopia instead.

In the panel, 'Reading & Resistance', Anna Holt (Newcastle) critiqued the idea that cinematic heroines such as Katniss of *The Hunger Games* and Triss of *Divergent* are not subject to cultural and filmic norms of femininity, and dependence on men; sexual restraint and self-sacrifice are still important for them, and the camera lingers on the dead and dying bodies of girls and women. Rosie Lewis (Durham) made the case that Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983) is a truly feminist film that shows women forming a revolutionary army and recapturing urban space. The film employs a non-linear narrative in order to challenge spatial and temporal politics that fail to take account of women's lived realities.

Lunch was followed by an Aldous Huxley triple-header; first, Michael O'Brien (Glasgow) read *Brave New World* from a post-Lacanian perspective, giving an account of 'obscene enjoyment' for the technocratic aristocracy of the novel. Maxim Shadurski (Siedlce University, Poland) made the case for Huxley's 'utopian conservatism' by casting the attempt to identify and valorize cultural 'touchstones' as a retrieval of elite culture from mass circulation. Aleksandra Wawrzyszczuk (Newcastle), asking if there is a time or place in our lives when we are not subject to law, explored the implications for the English legal system of over-organization, an ingredient Huxley named as necessary to dystopia.

On the final panel, Fran Bigman (Cambridge) argued that the technophobia of radical feminist anti-IVF campaigns can still be found in recent dystopian fiction in which the oppression of the state is symbolized by the denial – by male-controlled technology – of women's right to mother, including Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and Joanna Kavenna's *The Birth of Love* (2010). Martin Gleghorn (Durham) read Will Self's *Walking to Hollywood* (2010) as a descendant of the L.A. noir of *Blade Runner* (1982), linking the latter's replicants with the celebrity doppelgänger of the former, and concluding that both are concerned with the ways technology is warping our sense of time and space. Adam Stock (Newcastle) concluded the panel with a talk that probed the line between robot and human, and examined whether presenting both individuals and societies as clockwork is inherently dystopian.

In the absence of Andrzej Gasiorek (Birmingham), Nathan Waddell delivered the closing keynote, '"Mischievous Little Animals": On Thinking Utopianly'. Gasiorek surveyed a panorama of thinking on modernity, from those

who found agrarian neo-feudalism attractive (T.S. Eliot, Ford Madox Ford, W.B. Yeats) to D.H. Lawrence, who hatched an abortive plan to create a utopia of writers and artists, Rananim, somewhere far from England; from the Futurists, those worshippers of the technological sublime, to the Vorticists, who were more sceptical about the new machine-world, believing it could either lead to liberation or become a threat to human life. Gasiorek explored instrumentality in *Brave New World* – that everyone serves the needs of the state – through the thinking of John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859). If limits on an individual are determined by what concerns other people, then is Huxley's novel a parody of this distinction in which autonomy is understood to threaten others? Can we talk of liberty when the form it takes is predetermined, and what about a right to be unhappy? Are men and women without God 'mischievous little animals', engaging in the sin of playing God and thinking utopianly? Gasiorek ended this productive conference by calling for an expansion of what it means to think utopianly; over these two days, speakers and participants successfully probed what it means to think dystopianly as well.

ACCSFF 2015, Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, Toronto, 5-6 June 2015
Reviewed by Allan Weiss (York University, Toronto)

The Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy – the longest-running regular conference in the field – celebrated its twentieth anniversary this summer. The series began in 1995 as a one-session, four-paper event at the Ottawa SF convention, Can*Con, and has blossomed since into a biennial two-day affair. Each conference features an Author Keynote Address, a Scholar Keynote Address, and sessions of two or three papers each on specific topics, such as Canadian science fiction, fantasy, and media expressions. What has made my job as Chair of the conference – a position I have held almost consistently since 1996 – truly exciting is the growing range, from conference to conference, of topics covered. Papers have dealt with an expanding array of authors and media, taking an ever-wider variety of approaches. Also, the conference has been favoured with some very thoughtful and engaging keynote addresses, and the 2015 iteration offered two of the best ever presented.

The Author Keynote Address speaker this year was Hiromi Goto. She opened the conference on Friday evening by talking about the role of story in our lives, and how stories emerge from our individual experiences and unique cultural heritages: unique because each of us comes from a distinct combination of backgrounds that shape our understanding of the world and ways to articulate it. Her talk alternated between fiction and essay, as she illustrated the points she was making by reciting a story while stressing the importance of story in both expressing ourselves and challenging, even troubling, our assumptions. Stories, she asserted, take us out of our comfortable spaces, obliging us to

enter others' lives and modes of thinking. By confronting us with multiple and unfamiliar perspectives, stories can force us out of familiar worlds into unknown realms – which is especially true in the case of fantastic literature.

Immediately after her talk, we held a session on postcolonial themes in Canadian sf, beginning with a paper by Derek Newman-Stille on Goto's The *Kappa Child* (2001). His reading considered the role of 'place' in the novel, reading the term as referring not just to a geographical location but also a form of belonging. Newman-Stille argued that Goto reconfigures the conventional notion of place in the Canadian West by introducing Japanese mythological figures and queer themes in her account of one family's prairie experiences. By doing so, Goto succeeds in 'opposing a Canadian national myth that focuses on a largely white, heterosexual landscape.' Clare Wall then analyzed Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) in similar terms, focusing on Lai's use of Chinese figures like the serpent goddess. According to Wall, Lai uses 'the effects of these overlapping creation stories function to challenge the Western master narratives of human superiority, through the muddying of "human" in a way that returns us to our "fishy" evolutionary origins, connecting us to the animal species and shared primordial mud we attempt to separate ourselves from through origin myths.' Lai thus opposes the easy boundaries Western society draws between the human, animal and technological, in order to trouble liberal-humanist notions of subjectivity. Wall's paper was theoretically and critically solid, providing an effective reading of a novel that is gaining increased scholarly attention.

On Saturday morning, the conference resumed with the Scholar Keynote Address presented by Sherryl Vint. Vint highlighted our need to recognize the importance of indigenous beliefs in how we relate to our natural environment. More specifically, she spoke about Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), using the text to argue that a fuller understanding of the world could be achieved by combining native spirituality with Western science.

The subsequent session was about the Canadian graphic novel – the first time that an entire session had been devoted to the form. Dominick Grace read *Ed the Happy Clown* (2004-6) as a take on Joseph Campbell's monomyth, saying that the novel 'invokes only to subvert the traditions of the journey, creating not a quest but an anti-quest.' Chester Brown's violent incidents and imagery are designed to portray Ed as anything but a hero, and his journey as anything but heroic. If the novel is a quest story, Grace says, 'The quest might lead to knowledge, but not to restoration or salvation.' Judith Leggatt followed with a reading of *Nowadays* (2012), a zombie apocalypse in which the setting is highly local and the characters very much products of their northern Ontario origins. Just as Chester Brown's text challenges the conventions of quest narratives, Kurt Martell and Christopher Merkley's novel presents zombies who behave more like typical small-town Canadians than mindless brain-hunting Hollywood monsters. The characters struggle with moral choices, in a manner reminiscent

of the portrayal of conventional monsters – vampires, werewolves and so on – in contemporary dark fantasy. The novel also symbolically presents the position of indigenous people and culture; in a region fraught with competing claims over ownership and control of the land, 'the racial relationships allegorized in the zombie fiction are a continuing source of societal friction.'

The next session featured papers on Canadian sf. Michael Kaler, returning for his second appearance at ACCSFF, again explored religious themes in the work of Robert Charles Wilson. His examination of *Darwinia* (1998) compared spiritual experiences to those produced by psychotropic drugs; in Wilson's work, the encounter with alien beings is highly reminiscent of religious and drug-induced transcendental visions. Kaler suggested that 'Wilson's work offers a profoundly transgressive rereading of what were already transgressive religious accounts.' Amy J. Ransom followed with a survey of the career of Jean-Lous Trudel, one of French Canada's most important authors. Ransom summarized Trudel's career and his major works, offering an invaluable introduction to Trudel's future history and major themes. Trudel is prolific, fluently bilingual, and very popular, and has received far too little critical attention; Ransom thus began to fill a gaping hole in our understanding of French-Canadian sf. The final paper of the session, by Max Dickeson, looked at colonialism in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000). Dickeson showed how Hopkinson undermines conventional colonialist norms and postcolonial narratives, in part by portraying former colonized peoples as colonizers. Characters of Caribbean origin exhibit distressingly familiar racist attitudes toward the douen, the native inhabitants of New Half-Way Tree. At the same time, the planet presents Tan-Tan, the protagonist, with an opportunity to learn. According to Dickeson, Hopkinson portrays 'douen society as a space for the human protagonist to have her assumptions of normality and her capacity to function in the community constantly challenged, rather than a space in which she will excel', and she becomes open to difference.

Session IV dealt with Canadian fantasy, and Adam Guzkowski led it off with a paper on the theme of free will versus destiny in Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry* (1984-6). Three of the main characters in the trilogy are faced with moments of choice, and all make decisions that have profound implications for themselves and the fate of Fionavar. They choose to participate in the struggle against evil; in a sense, they have no choice if they are to remain people of integrity, individuals with a responsibility to fight evil when confronted with it. Paul, Kim and Jennifer all pay heavily for their choices, showing that the exercise of free will is never without significant personal consequences. Lisa Macklem, pursuing her long-time interest in the television series *Supernatural* (2005-), discussed gender and genre in the show; the werewolf figure takes on new dimensions when it is female. Themes of reproduction and empowerment emerge in the series and in Kelley Armstrong's dark-fantasy fiction, as the female characters deal with being doubly Othered as women and monsters; in response, they 'draw on their "otherness" to defeat the forces working against

them.' Cat Ashton examined Sean Stewart's science-fiction novel *Passion Play* (1993) and Pauline Gedge's mythic fantasy *Stargate* (1982) as explorations of corruption and the nature of evil. Both texts complicate the notion of evil, and Ashton suggested that ultimately they present similar portraits of a 'fortunate fall' whereby life depends upon a rejection of authority; characters in both novels 'learn to find solace in the conviction that a state of grace is fundamentally unsatisfying or unjust, and a fall from grace is itself a form of good.'

The final session was on nationalism and indigeneity. Michael Matheson reviewed the publishing policies of Canadian sf magazines. Such venues might have at one time limited themselves to publishing only Canadian authors, as part of a nationalist agenda or to give the country's sf writers greater opportunity to find an audience in the face of international competition. Instead, they have opened themselves up to authors from outside Canada, and Matheson considered the significance of that move, especially among newer and online magazines. David Cheater discussed how Drew Hayden Taylor uses and challenges Western dramatic conventions in his play *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* (1995), so as to add native Canadian voices to the nation's theatrical chorus.

The conference thus offered keynote talks and papers on various media, from prose fiction to television to stage drama, using approaches ranging from feminist to queer theory to more straightforward literary history. Like its predecessors in the series, ACCSFF '15 testified to the exciting and varied work being done by Canadian creators and scholars alike.

CRSF 2015, University of Liverpool, 8 June 2015
Reviewed by Carolann North (University of Ulster)

> With the first link, the chain is forged. The first speech censored, the first thought forbidden, the first freedom denied, chains us all irrevocably. ('The Drumhead', *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1991))

Although beginning a report with a quote from *Star Trek* might seem at best geeky, it nonetheless encapsulates the meaning of conferences such as Current Research in Speculative Fiction. Sf does not limit itself to our concept of the Real; instead it pushes beyond, into the psychological, the technological, the improbable and the unknowable. Through it, we discover our hopes and fears for the future – what will make us crumble, what pushes us forward to survive. Now in its fifth year, CRSF continues to explore texts which pose one simple question: what if…?

Indeed, living in our reality can have serious consequences at a conference such as CRSF, where the rules that govern time and space leave attendees dismayed at having to choose between concurrently running panels that prove equally interesting. However, it remains a comfort to know that, whatever the choice made, a day spent in any of the panels at CRSF is a day of engaging

and revitalizing academic discussion, as evidenced by both keynote speakers this year. Sarah Dillon (Cambridge) considered the conjunction of horror with a rising fear of the threat of human extinction. Dillon's assertion that texts such as Samuel Beckett's *Echo's Bones* (1933; published 2014) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) have begun to replace scholarly philosophy as we reach the limits of philosophical thought, becoming instead the horrifying unknowable of what lies beyond the world without us, is certainly interesting. Given the rise in apocalyptic books and films which appeared post-9/11, Dillon's eco-critical analysis of the threat of slow extinction is compelling; the final gift of horror, it seems, is to 'flash-freeze' the future.

By contrast, Andrew M. Butler (Canterbury Christ Church University) used his keynote to address the power of the past: specifically, the object permanence of the 'uncanny' indexicality of photography. Butler argued that the photograph is a prompt to our memory, a slice of space and time which proves the existence of a moment. The then and there becomes the here and now, and photographs become a prostheses which act as an extension of our being, providing our reality with evidentiary proof that we 'have been'. Yet, for the truth to exist, there must also be the possibility of the lie. While photographs are utilized in films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) to emphasize existence, they are not always what they seem. Butler recalled in particular the case of the Russian space station Soyuz 2, and the mysterious disappearance of astronaut Ivan Istochnikov and his dog. When Soyuz 3 arrived to relieve Istochnikov, they found only an empty vodka bottle, with both man and dog disappeared. This uncanny horror turned out to be an elaborate modern art hoax by Joan Fontcuberta in 1998, utilizing digital photo manipulation and false biographies to create the mystery. Still, for the casual viewer, this disappearance provoked curiosity and unease. Truth is contained within photography, and the power which an image can hold over the viewer is truly uncanny.

While Butler's keynote certainly made taking the group photograph at the end of the day a disquieting event, it serves as a reminder of not only the excellent keynotes, but the vast number of postgraduates who contributed to a day of thought-provoking discussion. Being allowed to contribute to the 'Visions of Feminism' panel was a particular privilege for me, given the high quality of my fellow panellists' papers. While Sarah Lohmann (Durham) utilized the theory of relativity to discuss the possibility of all-female utopias in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), Anna McFarlane (St Andrews) examined Alex Garland's 2015 film *Ex-Machina*, suggesting that his vision of the posthuman is predicated on A.I. solidarity and survival in a world in which humanity provides no agency to the engineered form. Combined with my own paper on eco-feminism and female fecundity in George R.R. Martin's Westeros, it quickly became obvious in the Q & A session that the true problem with the vision of feminism in speculative fiction is the continued reliance on the female body as object, either of sexual gratification

or maternal reproduction and caregiving. Indeed, only very recently (and I think specifically of Furiosa in George Miller's 2015 film *Mad Max: Fury Road*) have we begun to see female characters in speculative fiction who are not defined by the biological physicality of Woman.

Yet perhaps this problem exists in the limitations of the reality in which these characters are set. In the second panel of the day, 'Building Realities', Grace Kelly (Liverpool) discussed the alternate realities of Jorge Luis Borges. Borges' ability to take a singular mathematical or philosophical concept and apply it to every aspect of his fictionalised world creates labyrinthine realities devoid of our own restrictive concepts. Furthermore, his ability to create these radically alternate existences within a few pages demonstrates the power which the manipulation of these concepts can have on the physical world. However, his utilization of towers as signifiers for memories, and the written word as an unwavering bulwark among this fluidity, allows him to create alternative actualities which are both unnerving and reassuring within the same moment. While Kelly discussed worlds created outside our reality, Riyukta Raghunath (Sheffield Hallam) explored counterfactual histories; specifically, what if Hitler had won the war? Examining texts such as John Williams Wall's *The Sound of His Horn* (1952), Raghunath explored the ontological mechanics of counterfactual realities, demonstrating a narratological approach towards their methodology.

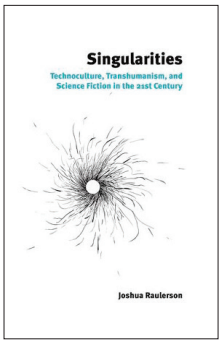
Following lunch (a moment to question the constructive actuality of our food), the conference resumed with a panel on 'Gothic Horror'. Arthur Newman's (Ulster) paper on H.P. Lovecraft focused on the horror of knowledge and perception that undermines Enlightenment rationality. Newman's Lovecraftian conclusion that homo sapiens are easily replaceable asserted the panel's key theme. Edward O'Hare (Trinity College Dublin) highlighted how, due to the success of his Edgar Allan Poe films, director Roger Corman was reluctant to produce non-Poe adaptations, so instead he renamed Lovecraft's 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward' (1941) as *The Haunted Palace* (1963), credited to Poe. Finally, Daný Van Dam (Cardiff) explored the neo-Victorian novels of Gail Carriger and Kim Newman, which express a knowledge and horror of British imperialism through supernatural creatures, such as elitist vampires and military werewolves.

The final panel of the day focused on 'World Science Fiction'. Päivi Väütänen (Helsinki), presenting on African-American science fiction, demonstrated how ethnic diversity can influence change in the genre. While Väütänen recognized the history of slavery, her assertion that Octavia Butler's 'Bloodchild' (1984) represents two mutually beneficial species – the humans receive a safe place to live in exchange for acting as faux-wombs to parasitic aliens – was problematic. Instead, the commodification of a group in exchange for a return which provides no opportunity for pay or social mobility is more reminiscent of plantation workers than the equality which she proposed. While Väütänen perhaps failed

to recognize her distance from the history and heritage of her chosen writers, the exact opposite is true for Jonathan Ferguson (King's College London). His paper on gender in Kang Youwei's *Datong Shu* (1935) was preceded by a long disclaimer, in which Ferguson asserted his awareness of his racial, sexual and cultural distance from his writer. Speaking afterwards, Ferguson revealed this was in response to feedback at a previous conference which claimed he did not recognize his privileged status. However, Ferguson's paper was, in fact, intrinsically respectful, and demonstrated an informed and welcome perspective on gender construction in early Chinese science fiction. The final paper, given by Hanna Schumacher (Warwick), discussed the rising interest in posthuman sf in Germany. As Schumacher rightly pointed out, German texts on a World Science Fiction panel given in Europe is unusual. However perhaps this speaks to our Western-centric view of literature in general, where borders between languages usurp geographical location. Still, her paper proved to be an informative discussion on the growing interest in speculative fiction in Germany. Post-WW2, Schumacher argued, science fiction failed to gain popularity in Germany. However, recent moves by already popular writers such as Dietmar Dath have led to a renewed interest in the posthuman, a concern which only looks to increase in the coming years.

As CRSF reaches its fifth birthday it has become clear, through growth in interest and diversity in topics, that speculative fiction continues to gain prevalence in both popular culture and within academic circles. Furthermore, while Sarah Dillon suggested horror is the primary genre of the Anthropocene era, it appears evident that all speculative fiction has a role to play in the continuation of our development into philosophical thought and scholarly analysis. Whether as gothic horror, feminist utopias or counterfactual history, speculative fiction allows readers to imagine a world beyond their own reality, and the implications that such worlds have as a reflection on contemporary society.

Book Reviews



Joshua Raulerson, *Singularities: Technoculture, Transhumanism, and Science Fiction in the 21st Century* (Liverpool University Press, 2013, 256pp, £75.00)

Reviewed by Chelsea Adams (Weber State University)

Joshua Raulerson's book aims to bring an interdisciplinary view to singularity theory and, as such, it offers a great entry point for readers new to the discussion. He splits his study into four parts, starting with important figures in singularity theory and their ideas; moving to biology, economics and democracy; then economic philosophy and social structures; and ending with the concept of entropy.

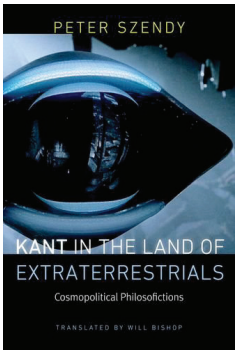
Readers familiar with the work of Robert Chase, Ray Kurzweil, Rudy Rucker, Charles Stross and Vernor Vinge may be tempted to skip the introductory material. However, the introduction does a phenomenal job in offering a laying out of singularity theory across multiple disciplines that cues readers to the coming structure of the book. With so many authors described, it is also useful to read the introduction to see which specific ideas from each figure Raulerson will address.

In the second part, Raulerson grapples with the conflict of mind and matter, exploring how the new concepts of what it means to be a person will affect economics, democracy and individualism. He strongly criticizes the masculine bias of cyberpunk as well as what he sees as the misguided extropian views of people like Kurzweil and Hans Moravec. Raulerson utilizes N. Katherine Hayles' critique of Moravec's extropian ideals to outline his concerns regarding extropian literature and how he feels other authors in the genre help to address those concerns.

In part three, Raulerson describes the revolutionary logic that singularity discourse inherits from the seemingly incompatible ideologies of Marxism and free-market economics. From Milton Freidman, F.A. Hayek, and Wired Magazine's Kevin Kelly to Karl Marx, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Jean Baudrillard and Georges Bataille, Raulerson sketches out an economic, political and philosophical history. In his view, the revolutionary step is Free Culture: letting gift-giving and service replace both the Marxist and free market economies. Although he has an unabashed bias toward the internet's Free Culture, boldly hailing it as a way toward the Singularity, Raulerson does make an important point: since the post-Singularity economy would remove the very notion of scarcity, a new emphasis would fall upon social status and social structure rather than that of physical want.

Removing scarcity would not eradicate poverty or class distinctions. Instead, in radically redefining social class, it would create new problems. As Raulerson says, there comes a point where 'the endless quest for Whuffie [an imaginary new currency running off good deeds] begins to lose its zest' (138–9). Symbolic exchanges would become complementary to the free market economy: made gifts and signs would become the new commodities. But in Raulerson's wish to hold out hope for Free Culture, he introduces Lawrence Lessig who, while acknowledging Baudrillard's pessimism of the spectacular society, optimistically believes that post-Singularity humans would be able to rewrite the terms of that society. Furthermore, in introducing Richard Stallman's emphasis upon the political resistance of hacking, Raulerson suggests that the debate needs to be entirely reframed to deal with a posthuman political economy: we now need to think in terms of what civil rights a posthuman society would need to recognize to create a functional and new political economy.

To do this, Raulerson recognizes that we must also understand the history behind the ideas we are now wrestling with. He concludes by returning to the pre-history of extropian ideas via the discovery of entropy during the mid-19th century. In particular, Raulerson examines the subsequent desires to escape entropy, especially during the nuclear age. Tracing this history for extropian sf, he relates it to post-cyberpunk, arguing that the latter re-insinuates 'the entropic metaphor' to 'contest and subvert eschatological fantasies of technological transcendence' (198). It is fitting, then, that the goal of singularity narratives should be to affirm living processes and to evade final answers. Just as Raulerson leaves open-ended questions throughout his book about the best solution to transhumanist problems, so singularity narratives explore the complex, paradoxical and contradictory scenarios of transcendence as part of the human desire to expand and survive.



Peter Szendy, *Kant in the Land of the Extraterrestrials* (Fordham University Press, 2013, 192pp, £16.99)

Reviewed by Lucas Boulding (University of Kent)

This work marks a significant departure for Peter Szendy, whose publications up until now have centred around musicology and philosophy. Though the title of this study apparently relates it to sf, this is primarily a study of fairly nuanced debates within the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, such as Chapter Two's reading of the *Critique of Judgement* (1790). The other significant elements are an extended discussion linking Kant with both the Derridean gaze and sf cinema, and the concluding theoretical discussion about the role of cosmopolitanism in the work of Jacques Derrida. The book is divided into a short introduction,

four chapters, a postface, and a large tranche of endnotes. One drawback is that it has neither bibliography nor index, which somewhat limits its scholarly accessibility.

The first chapter focuses on the work of the apparently rehabilitated, former Nazi Carl Schmitt. Szendy claims that he is 'the major theoretician of this global or globalized order, the great thinker of the distribution – earthly and extraterrestrial – of space' (6). Whether or not this claim is ultimately tenable, I am sceptical about using theoretical justifications so intimately connected with the legacy of Nazism, or as to how useful Schmitt, for whom the modern world was the Cold War of the 1950s and early 1960s, is for thinking about our now more intensely wired society. It is telling that the 'current geopolitical situation' to which Szendy refers is Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, proposed in 1983.

The second chapter is a close engagement with several key texts by Kant. In looking at these texts, Szendy uses the Derridean idea of the gaze to interrogate the apparent perspective in Kant's work. He draws together two strands of Kantian thought: first, Kant's claim that it is impossible to meaningfully characterize the concept of human beings as rational terrestrial beings because there are no species with whom comparisons can be drawn, and secondly, Kant's own fictional or hypothesized aliens. Szendy uses this synthesis to develop his idea of the extraterrestrial wholly other, building on Kant's project to understand (determinative) judgement as impartial or objective.

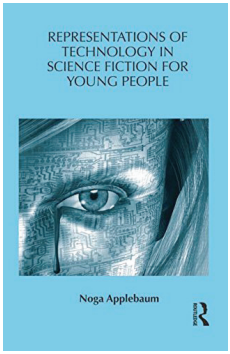
The longest chapter, 'Cosmetics and Cosmopolitics', digresses from the theoretical argument to examine sf film and television using the concepts of gaze, territoriality and cosmopolitanism. Most important to Szendy's project are the first and third versions of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956; 1993), *They Live* (1988) and *Men in Black* (1997). A subsection of the argument is devoted to Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), which examines the necessity of 'publicness' to justice (98), and into which Szendy interpolates an interest in spectacle which returns his argument to the concept of gaze, now in its filmic rather than deconstructionist sense. This leads to a discussion of how the distinction between beauty and the sublime, put forward in Kant's Third Critique, can be mapped onto the theoretical framework that Szendy has put forward, and marks one of the most interesting theoretical points in his argument. Finally, these theoretical concerns are tied together in a consideration of *Men in Black* whose screenplay, apparently, 'could, in many ways, have been written by Kant' (112–3).

Chapter Four concludes Szendy's argument with another sequence of close readings, this time lacking a formal argumentative structure, rather announcing with section breaks and 'Incipit fantascientia' (129) that a new point of view is being considered. Discussed in this chapter are Georges Méliès' *Trip to the Moon* (1902) and Steven Spielberg's adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* (2005), again with reference to the foregrounding of the gaze. The postface is a distinct

but related consideration on a maxim devised by Derrida, 'Cosmopolitans of All Lands, Yet Another Effort!' Szendy brings his argument to a close on the claim that two concepts of cosmopolitanism are in tension, one derived from the Stoics, which is underpinned by a specific conception of human nature opposed to the nature of animals, and a second incipient cosmopolitanism not inscribed in 'the stable and reassuring concept of some zoon politikon or animale rationale', but which is rather 'barely cracked open each time that, in an I-to-you or a you-to-me, in an addressed gaze or listening […] the world, like humanity, steals away and ends' (152).

Perhaps what is most novel about Szendy's work is his use of 'philosofictions' which, unlike thought experiments that serve to illuminate a particular facet of a single argument, appear to be more general and more generative, and so can be read in multiple ways. The philosofiction that most concerns Szendy, and which is of most interest to sf readers, is Kant's own miniature excursion into the genre. In his *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven* (1755), Kant hypothesizes that aliens living further from the sun must be more ethereal than us, and that those nearer the sun must be more dense and solid. Szendy reads this as being a horizontal rather than vertical set of differences, suggesting that they can be seen as rhizomatic. Kant, he says, is not simply using exoticism to elevate human beings (which is to say white western Enlightenment philosophers) but is testing the limits of our ability to generate comprehensible concepts. Szendy also refuses to draw comparisons with the Great Chain of Being, and rejects the notion that Kant may be in some sense deifying these aliens. Both of these readings are problematic. Not only has Kant been accused of exoticism but also racism, but the coincidence of having a brutish race of aliens who have only vegetable and animal souls, and a second alien race who are almost entirely rational and deliberative, is simply too much for the rhizomatic claim to stand up to, and is more properly seen as the projection of the Great Chain into space.

A second oversight is a lack of address to contemporary cosmopolitan thought. To examine at length Giuseppe Mazzini's 'immense circle' (148) without reference to Peter Singer's discussion of the same metaphor in *One World* (2002) strikes me as parochial; likewise, some reflection on the writings of Kwame Anthony Appiah, Will Kymlicka, Martha Nussbaum or Seyla Benhabib might have contextualized the concept of cosmopolitanism and furthered the debate. Szendy has since continued to refine his ideas concerning Kant's extraterrestrials, notably in the documentary *Stardust Philosophy* (2013), in which he attempts to explicate both philosofiction and the relationship between the extraterrestrial and the definition of the human in Kant's philosophy, and in our own situation.



Noga Applebaum, *Representations of Technology in Science Fiction for Young People* (Routledge, 2010, 198pp, £28.00)

Reviewed by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay
(University of Oslo)

Noga Applebaum's main argument is as follows: Young Adult sf written since the 1980s tends to be technophobic and distrustful of how technology is used by a younger generation. Produced by adults for the consumption of children, YA literature is split between the need to appeal to young readers and the normative adult values it is meant to uphold: entertainment and education being amongst the literature's cherished goals. Applebaum's study is timely in its presentation of this conservatism when the genre seems to be proliferating across media, including film and video games.

Applebaum's study has the nature of a survey: in a very small book, she briefly explores over fifty novels and other literature in five chapters. This has both merits and problems. The main advantage of this method is that it has allowed her the flexibility to draw certain texts together under a common subject, and so each chapter becomes the starting-point of a new detailed investigation. The disadvantage of this is that a survey in terms of themes tends to gloss over the differences in favour of the commonalities, and thus the analysis of individual texts also tends to be reductively brief. As a genre, sf already suffers from being regarded as culturally insignificant, and thus such a reading runs the risk of further condemning this body to a set of recurrent themes and tropes. Fortunately, Applebaum is able to avoid the last because she structures her presentation in terms of a general cultural analysis: each chapter is divided into two main sections, in the first of which Applebaum looks closely at the body of general literature around the subject rather than surveying literary criticism, drawing thematic structures from these texts, which she then brings to her analysis of the fiction in the second half.

Three of the five chapters deal with predictable themes for any book on YA sf. Chapter One, which deals with the nature/nurture debate and technology, is perhaps the least surprising of all. Given the larger argument about technophobia, the discussion of climate change as a structuring idea is also expected, especially as climate change debates assume technological intervention as the key cause of environmental deterioration. Her classification of YA fictions in terms of the three eco-critical models, mechanism, naturalism and equilibrium, are also sufficiently wide-ranging to have general applicability as well. The fifth chapter, on clones and cloning, is likewise expected, and while Applebaum mentions Maria Ferreira's important study *I am the Other* (2005) only in passing, all the debates, be it identity, kinship or the posthuman, will be

familiar from that earlier book even if the texts that Applebaum looks at are new. The fourth chapter, which discusses how technology threatens the balance of power in the adult-child relationship, and consequently becomes a prime target for technophobic YA sf, while not an unfamiliar argument – Applebaum begins her analysis with Michel Foucault's famous study of the repressive hypothesis and the rest can be anticipated – nonetheless integrates quite well with the preceding chapter, especially where Applebaum discusses censorship in ICT as doubly compromised. Rather than giving power to the children, who are feared by adults because of their ability to handle technology, children are to be protected from adult abuses of power: by adults. Applebaum notices a shift here in some YA sf towards more empowering narratives such as Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* and Kate Reid's *Operation Timewarp*. The use of the game structure in both novels allow their child protagonists to take control of their environments, ultimately going beyond them.

The middle section of the book offers the most to the reader, as Applebaum examines how technology mediates and transforms the narrative structure, and how these transformations affect the perception of the 'fate of the humanities'. The game structure in the later chapter is first explored here, in terms of interactivity, collaborative authorship, multiplicity of perspectives and timelines: the game narratives may be seen to be inaugurated by virtual reality experiences and multiplayer role playing games, the world of MUDs [Multi-User Dungeons] (usually text-based) and MMORPGs [Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games] (generally seen as three-dimensional) as well as social media. Here, Applebaum's method of presentation appears to full advantage: her long discussion of the characteristics of the VR world in general shows how novels such as M.T. Anderson's *Feed* and Leslie Howarth's *Ultraviolet* channel these forms of interaction in order to inculcate the note of caution and technophobic aversion in its young audience. The third chapter, owing to its use of a very small sample set (three novels), is also able to pull off a more detailed analysis of individual texts unlike the other chapters in the book.

The second chapter, with its study of fifteen sf texts, explores an old yet relevant debate, that of the two cultures. Since sf has always been able to turn this debate on its head, the dystopian technophobia in YA sf as opposed to critical re-evaluation of the uses of technology appears misplaced. Instead, the general message of doom – that people would forget to read, forget history, forget all that makes life meaningful – to be found in such novels as Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* and Nicola Morgan's *Sleepwalking* is contradicted by the ways in which processes such as language, historiography and literacy are constantly evolving as a result of these technologies: information itself is being produced and consumed on an unprecedented scale in the world of Wikipedia, YouTube and online archives.

Applebaum's criticism of technophobic dystopias that stand in contrast to any notion of authentic or pristine nature extends beyond the world of YA

sf to much of sf in general. Her debt to Farah Mendlesohn's earlier study, *The Inter-Galactic Playground*, is quite clear: some of the primary material is touched upon in both books whilst, as Applebaum points out, her primary bibliography has been shaped in part by Mendlesohn's blog bearing the same title. If Applebaum's book does not further the theorization of YA sf, it does manage to make a convincing case for the technophobia she sees as endemic to the contemporary literature. It is this focus that also distinguishes the book, especially at a time when many of the texts analyzed by her have been or are in the process of being turned into films – the subliminal or direct attack on technology undermines the liberatory potential of science and technology and the enjoyment of sf itself as a genre.

Jack Fennell, *Irish Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2014, 264pp, £75.00)
Reviewed by Richard Howard (Trinity College, Dublin)

Early in Fennell's book, he remarks that while at first there seems to be no connection between Ireland and science fiction, once located it is difficult to conceive of 'an Ireland that is not science-fictional to some extent'. As Fennell points out, the incongruity between Ireland and sf is often used to comic effect: witness the 2010 film *Zonad* or the Ireland-specific McDonald's advertisement that depicts four typical Irish lads in a futuristic 2222 Dublin of flying cars and skyscrapers. Fennell's thesis suggests that sf is best understood in terms of myth, a means of interpreting science that is closer to pseudoscience than the real thing. Fennell uses this thesis to argue that Ireland has long been future-oriented, a perspective from which cultural critics have in fact been discussing Ireland for some time. In his essay 'Changing the Question' (2003), Terry Eagleton suggests that the British colonial centre utilized its Irish mirror image in order to experiment with changes proposed to services in the imperial centre such as education, health and the police force. According to Eagleton, England viewed Ireland as 'a mere fold in time in which the colonizing nation could view its own imminent destiny'. The periphery in this sense becomes a blank canvas upon which to apply technologies and notions of the future that might not be popular at the metropole. Like Eagleton, Fennell suggests that this situation led to the colonies experiencing modernization as 'a sudden and traumatic process' (7) rather than a gradual phenomenon involving long conditioning. For Fennell, this shock of the new is unavoidably science fictional, but also explains the perception of incongruity between Ireland and the science fictional imaginary.

As with most examinations of a particular genre, a good portion of Fennell's book is taken up with definitions. Fennell encompasses sf, fantasy and horror

under the umbrella definition of 'ahistorical genres'. This jars significantly with Carl Freedman's presentation, in *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000), of the genre of science fiction as in itself a historicizing form. In contrast, Fennell writes that readers 'read horror […] because they wish to experience the suspension of historical causality; they read fantasy to experience a history completely removed from their own; and SF allows them to experience history in an altered context' (19). But it is not difficult to imagine each of these examples being stretched to contain sf. Could sf not, after all, also be a genre that depicts a history removed from our own, and could it not be conceivably used to suspend the idea of historical causality? It is a shame a work that attempts to cover so much ground inevitably has to move on so quickly from these questions, leaving little room to tease out these definitions in more detail, and articulate how they interact with other established theories of sf.

Fennell handles the ambitious scope of the project by periodizing the subject, a chronological approach that makes sense, but falters when discussing periods when fewer texts that fit the definition were being published. There are also some surprising omissions, particularly when Fennell discusses the 1930s and the atmosphere in post-partition Ireland. Fennell writes that 'in the 1930s, Ireland became paranoid, and this paranoia is reflected in the Irish-produced sf of the time' (107). Here, a reference to Joseph O'Neill's *Land Under England* (1935) could have been helpful, but there is no mention of the text. O'Neill's novel about a Roman civilization living in subterranean England, controlling its subjects with mind control techniques, is traditionally read as a warning about European fascism. But the novel also speaks to an Irish milieu, in which Blueshirts, communists and the remains of the Irish Republican Army engaged in pitched battles in the streets, and the Fianna Fail and Cumman na Gael parties routinely condemned each other as fascists. Discussion of an author such as O'Neill could have furthered Fennell's already shrewd analysis of this period.

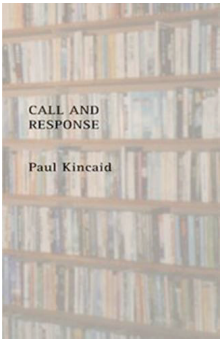
The bulk of self-consciously produced sf emanating from Ireland has been produced by Northern Irish authors, such as Bob Shaw, James White and Ian McDonald. With this in mind, it is a shame that Shaw and White only get twenty pages between them, although unsurprising given the scope of the project. Fennell's reading of White's *Underkill* (1979) as a thinly-veiled account of the Troubles is particularly interesting. He suggests that in White 'the material causes of violence, and the ideologies that excuse it, are unimportant because only the results are of any consequence – death, maimed bodies and shattered minds'. It is true that White is uninterested in the social factors that cause conflict, but what Fennell neglects is the fact that it is the position of the Trennechorans, and their associated terrorist acts, that is vindicated in the narrative of *Underkill*. Fennell's analysis of Underkill shades into a discussion of White's Sector General series without discussing this narrative closure. In White's vision in *Underkill*, violence perpetrated to prevent violence is justified,

even if that violence takes on the formal appearance of terror in a Northern Irish context. This is not to say that White's novel supports terrorism, but in the context of *Underkill* terror is reframed as part of a grand plan to achieve peace: White the pacifist in effect is chasing his tail in search of consolation.

Ian McDonald is also given a short chapter that mainly concentrates on what Fennell terms his 'parochial sf works' of the mid-nineties and early 2000s. Given his title, it would have been useful if the author had connected McDonald's Irish trilogy to these later texts, the cycle of novels that comprises *King of Morning, Queen of Day* (1991) , *Hearts, Hands and Voices* (1992) and Sacrifice of Fools (1996, discussed by Fennell in isolation). Fennell's reading of McDonald's Turkish novel *Dervish House* (2010), in which characters see creatures from Islamic mythology could have been made more nuanced with references to *King of Morning, Queen of Day*, in which a young girl consorts with creatures from Irish myth. Fennell accuses McDonald of Islamophobia in *The Dervish House*, but a reflection on McDonald's Irish trilogy might complete this picture, while still problematizing his take on national stereotypes. Fennell's suggestion of McDonald's orientalism may well be true, but without a discussion of his diagnosis of Ireland as a postcolonial country, the idea remains somewhat unpacked. Contemporaneous cultural critics such as Declan Kiberd, Seamus Deane and David Lloyd have all been accused of fetishizing an undeconstructed Irish national identity, and this connection between McDonald's version of Irish postcoloniality and his later parochial sf could prove fruitful areas for future research. But it is to Fennell's credit that the text allows for such thoughts to accumulate.

Fennell also breaks new ground with his translations into English and analyses of Gaelic sf. Fennell has provided a valuable service here for those without the cúpla focail. His analysis of the Captaen Speirling series from the early 1960s connects an optimistic children's series featuring a 'Gaelgoir Buck Rogers' to the progressive economic narratives of the Sean Lemass era. Fennell describes a suggestion in the texts that any Irish attempt at colonizing other planets will learn from the lessons that Ireland's experience has afforded it. Other iterations of Irish sf analysed by Fennell include Pádraig Ó Séaghda's 1911 novel *Eoghan Paor*, Iarla Mac Aodha Bhuí's cyberpunk YA novel *An Clár AMANDA* and Tomás Mac Síomóin's story of ecological exploitation *An Tionscadal (The Project)*, all of which, judging by Fennell's fascinating readings, are deserving of wider discussion.

Fennell's book marks the beginning of a long-overdue conversation about Irish sf within the discipline of Irish Studies, and is a brave attempt to sum up the phenomenon in one volume. Inevitably there are omissions but the broad view that Fennell presents is both convincing and genuinely new.



Paul Kincaid, *Call and Response* (Beccon, 2014, 381pp, £16.00)

Reviewed by Erik Jaccard (University of Washington, Seattle)

It is uncommon for a reviewer's task to involve such a comprehensive exploration of the very labour in which he finds himself engaged. Nonetheless, Paul Kincaid's recent collection of sf reviews and criticism offers precisely this kind of reflexive exercise in reading and thinking. For all its ambitious breadth and informative, fascinating reading of sf, the book is, at its core, an exploration of the practice of critical reading and interpretation. This is clear from the opening pages, wherein Kincaid considers the nature, function, and positionality of the critic and his work. What is criticism for, Kincaid asks; to whom do we write it and why? The answer, in short, is that criticism is fundamentally an act of exploration, written primarily as a self-reflexive record of that journey, and as an attempt to explain how we arrive at our understanding of texts and their often very personal meaning. Understandably, while the book begins in this broad register, its real subject is Kincaid's own history of encounters with sf, the authors who have touched or enlightened him, and the broad patterns and currents which have shaped and continue to shape the development of the genre.

Call and Response covers a lot of ground, tracing a discontinuous arc over the work of twenty-five authors and three thematic subsets of sf publications over a period of roughly thirty years. Drawn from a variety of sources, including blog posts, fanzines, reference guides, newspapers, journals and unpublished materials, the book offers a comprehensive accounting of Kincaid's work as a reviewer. The list of authors covered is broad, ranging from canonical names (Wells, Clarke, Aldiss, Delany, Dick) to exciting, if under-read, writers (John Crowley, Steve Erickson, Ian McDonald, Gwyneth Jones) to the newer generations of hard sf devotees and fabulists (Ken McLeod, China Miéville). Importantly, Kincaid prefaces each section with an illuminating introduction which lays out main ideas, dominant themes and often Kincaid's own personal background with the author or text in question.

Both the depth and breadth of Kincaid's knowledge of sf and fantasy underscore what are more often than not interesting, informative and insightful forays into the lives and work of some of the best living Anglo-American sf writers. While some attempt new readings of established novels and well-trodden critical ground, often injecting fresh perspective into the critical discussion, others offer extremely nuanced and perceptive engagements with less established work. But the book's real joys lie in the moments when the author is called on to illuminate, often for the first time, a new writer or a challenging and under-explored text.

It is worth remarking that the moments when he is most successful are the moments when he combines shrewd reading with his gift for illuminating the wonder and intellectual enjoyment inherent in excellent writing. Never before while reading a book of this kind have I so often jotted down names of authors and texts made vivid and exciting for me by a critic. From the little-known novels of Christopher Barzak to the postmodern tales of Paul Auster to the vast, panoramic and complex patterns of Crowley's Aegypt series, Kincaid convinces with his ability to make manifest and somehow tangible his own eagerness and engagement as a reader. As he makes clear throughout, the point is not to force interpretations upon the reader nor to kowtow to received opinion but, rather, to express ideas with which he's tussled, the contradictions he's had to unwind, and the puzzles he's never been able to solve. That he is able to do so while intelligently situating each writer and work he discusses in both their own context and that of the genre is no small feat.

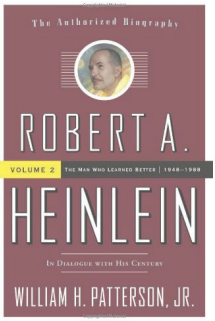
For all these strengths, the book shares a number of weaknesses with its predecessor, *What It Is We Do When We Read Science Fiction* (2008). First, the book's massing of so many disparate pieces spread over such a long time-period can feel redundant. While this makes for a thought-provoking dip into an author's work, reading twelve reviews consecutively can seem like a bit of a slog. Second, the frequent transitions between writers, novels and genres can be unsettling for the reader. While continuity may not be the point, this facet of the text's presentation makes it more useful as an encyclopaedic reference guide than a sustained inquiry. While the general and section introductions succeed at injecting a great deal of coherency into what might otherwise be a confused sprawl, the ride is at times bumpy, even if consistently so.

I wish, though, to end on a positive note by discussing one of the more under-explored dimensions of Kincaid's work: its pedagogical value. *Call and Response* highlights this aspect even more directly than its predecessor by including a number of pieces culled from the Salem Press Masterplots reference guide series, among them concise introductions to canonical works by Delany and Dick. Beyond these explicitly pedagogical moments, however, are deeper currents which lend themselves to the art of teaching students how to read, think and write effectively. For one, Kincaid is an artful reader whose attention to detail is focused less on grounding a reading in one possible interpretation and more in facilitating possibilities. For another, like most successful critics, his reading practice fuses rigorous attention to detail with clear argumentation and, perhaps more than most, a deep contextual and historical knowledge of the genre and each author's place in it. However, what distinguishes Kincaid as a critic – and *Call and Response* as a book – is a willingness to blend this scholarly mettle with a very personal sense of intellectual engagement with texts, what they can do, and how they affect us.

While his critical relativism can seem cagey at times in an academic context, Kincaid's careful reading coupled with an insistence that there is value in the fact

that 'we all respond differently to the same work' acts as a useful counterpoint to the common misperception among students that personal opinion and 'truth' are mutually exclusive domains. Indeed, what *Call and Response* makes clear is that the book itself is one long record of Kincaid's subjective process, of the opinions he has formed over time (and of how they have evolved), and, most importantly, of specifically how and why he has arrived at them. Having established this early on, the book then goes on to demonstrate the many ways in which opinions form, are supported by reading, and finally crystallize in small personal claims to truth about a text (in other words, in argument). If this structural acumen is on display in any solid work of literary criticism, Kincaid's overt insistence on the significance of the personal dimension in its shaping also usefully demystifies the role of the critic, the seemingly magical act of sound reading, and its translation into clear thinking and argumentative writing. In this sense, Kincaid's method mirrors his accessible style insofar as he invites us all into the act of reading and thinking about literature and reassures us that, because all arguments are in some way personal, even our seemingly minor contributions can be valuable.

Kincaid is fond of referring to himself as a critical relativist, and this pose has influenced much of what he has had to say about sf as a genre. But what I found more provocative in *Call and Response* was its pronounced critical individualism, an assertion of autonomy and vision which looks beyond the immediate gratification of fads and publishing categories to those much more fundamental moments we share as humans, when an extraordinary voice or story curves its way into one's orbit. More than calling out to the genre or its critics (though he does both), Kincaid here primarily hails other readers like himself, not only as a means of exploring sf in his own terms, but of encouraging others to seek the pleasure which comes from finding their own.



William H. Patterson, Jr.*, Robert A. Heinlein: In Dialogue With His Century. Vol. 2: The Man Who Learned Better, 1948-1988* (Tor, 2014, 671pp, £27.33)

Reviewed by David Seed (University of Liverpool)

In the first volume of his mammoth biography of Robert Heinlein, published in 2011, William H. Patterson took us up to the beginning of Heinlein's writing career and the many disruptions to his life from World War II. The present volume completes the picture and gives what will unquestionably remain the definitive account of Heinlein's life. One of the most judicious aspects of this biography is its description of his politics, all too often dismissed as merely right-wing. In the 1940s Heinlein explained that, though he had no religion as such, his guiding creed was a patriotic commitment to the USA which,

along with a belief in progressive individualism, remained guiding principles throughout his life. The roots of this creed lay in his experience of California politics in the 1930s and led him to write *Take Back Your Government* in 1946, though this remained unpublished until after his death. (It was reissued with Patterson's new introduction in 2012.)

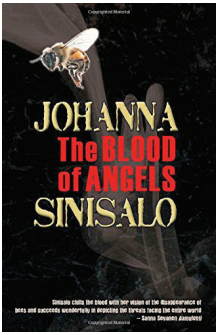
The period covered by this volume saw Heinlein living through a whole series of political crises starting with the rise of the anti-Communist witch hunts. He described McCarthy as a 'revolting son of a bitch' but this in no way lessened his hostility to communism. In 1958 he rejected the SANE disarmament group as recommending an 'abject surrender to tyranny' and his 1960 visit to the Soviet Union turned sour as a result of outspoken comments from Heinlein and his wife. His marked sensitivity to the perceived betrayal of the USA by its leaders led him to support Robert Welch as he was founding the John Birch Society, to support Goldwater briefly and to attack Johnson for his conduct of the Vietnam War. On the other hand, Heinlein did not support the plan for sf writers to take up pro and con positions on an analogy with the Spanish Civil War.

Heinlein, like Ray Bradbury, saw himself as moving out of pulp sf and writing juveniles in the 1950s and he constantly campaigned against the then dismissive attitude to sf, insisting that it was a fiction of 'new ideas'. As Heinlein's career took off, he became increasingly in demand as a speaker. Apart from promoting sf in general, his own fiction was frequently designed to pursue specific issues. He described *Starship Troopers* (1959) as an 'inquiry into why men fight'. Patterson gives us fascinating glimpses of a side to Heinlein's writing all too often ignored by the critics, namely its experimentation. In the mid-1950s he was trying out multiple first-person viewpoints in an attempt to capture the immediacy of film and later drew on the anatomy form for Lazarus Long. His major success in his later years, however, was *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), adopted by many younger readers as a text supporting free love.

Again like Bradbury, Heinlein was a consistent supporter of the space programme, remaining a close friend of Arthur C. Clarke after their initial meeting in 1952. He was among the group invited to witness the launch of the 1969 moonshot and later collaborated with Clarke and the sf artist Chesley Bonestell on a NASA volume about the solar system. In the 1980s his political commitments, fascination with technology and preoccupation with near space all combined when he joined Jerry Pournelle's Citizen's Advisory Council under the Reagan administration.

As his career progressed, Heinlein received numerous honours culminating in his SWFA Grand Master Award, but never stopped being a figure of controversy. In addition to his prolific output of fiction and travel books, one activity which few remember arose from the precarious state of his health. In the late 1970s he campaigned extensively to establish a national bank of blood donors. Patterson's biography grimly charts a whole series of illnesses which Heinlein endured until he finally succumbed to emphysema. Despite

these, he managed to remain an engaged writer throughout his later years and Patterson's detailed account (including almost 200 pages of notes) will make an ideal companion to critical accounts of Heinlein's writing.



Johanna Sinisalo, *The Blood of Angels*, trans. Lola Rogers (Peter Owen, 2014, 224pp, £13.99).

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Bees are the focus of this strange and wonderful novel. On the one hand Sinisalo examines the importance of bees to the planetary ecosystem. She extrapolates the current and so far unexplained disappearance of bees a few years into the future, when bee colony collapse has become a widespread phenomenon, affecting the world food supply and provoking panic, rioting, and fears of famine and anarchy. At the same time, Sinisalo makes use of the folk tales told about bees in many different cultures, in particular their appearance as a symbol of resurrection, and their ability to cross over from this world to the Other Side, whether that be Heaven in a religious sense, a more vaguely defined afterlife, or a completely separate world.

The novel's narrator, Orvo, runs a successful undertaking business in Finland, so that death and the passage out of this world are at the forefront of his life. He is also a beekeeper, aware of how vital bees are, and worried about the collapse of bee colonies. At the opening of the book, Orvo discovers that one of his hives is all but empty, except for the dead body of the queen. There seems to be no rational explanation. Shortly after, he finds an opening in his barn, a portal to another world, which he can only access when he is carrying the dead queen's body. He calls it the Other Side, and deduces that it is his own world, but perhaps two hundred years in the future. It is beautiful and unspoiled, and completely uninhabited. Finding bees there, Orvo assumes that is where his missing colony has gone.

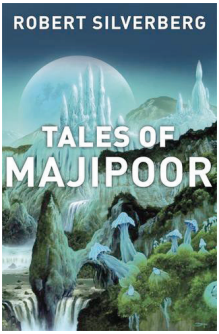
Orvo's narration is interspersed with extracts from two blogs written by his teenage son Eero. At an early stage in the book we learn that Eero is dead, although the circumstances of his death remain a mystery until close to the end. Although Eero never physically appears, except in his father's memories, his writing shows his passionate commitment to the issue of animal rights, and the way in which he becomes ready to take direct action, possibly including violence. The comments which appear at the end of Eero's blog entries show dismissive or hostile reactions to Eero's ideas, sometimes degenerating into actual threats, leaving the reader in little doubt about why Eero died, though the 'how' is held back for Orvo to narrate. The blogs form an elegant and concise method of drawing the reader into Eero's experience, as well as providing extra information on animal rights issues and the collapse of the bee colonies.

Orvo calls on the mythology of bees as agents of resurrection, and comes to believe that he has been able to restore his dead son to life in the Other Side. His plan is to abandon his own world for good, and join Eero in the future. But the complexities of his situation mean that this plan is not as simple as it might first appear. Part of the problem involves Orvo's father, Ari, who – with huge irony – runs an abattoir. Yet although there is massive friction between Orvo and his father, and although Ari is unintentionally responsible for Eero's death, he is not a stereotyped villain. He cares for his family, although the care does not always manifest itself in ways that Orvo welcomes, and Orvo, reluctantly, cares for him. This complex balance of relationships is one of the novel's strengths.

However, the nature of Ari's work and his involvement in Eero's death cause him to become a symbol in Orvo's mind of all the greed and destructiveness in the world: the exploitation of animals, the damage to the environment, the worship of profit above all else. When Orvo realizes that there is a risk that Ari will discover the parallel world, he imagines how his father and others like him would move in and destroy its pristine beauty: 'The Other Side would soon be drawn up and zoned, chainsaws roaring, excavators chewing up the ground' (209). Though Orvo cannot close the entrance to the future, he can create a situation where it is unlikely to be found, which leads him to his own act of destructiveness, which ends the book. He remains alone: his grandfather dead, his relationship with Eero's mother a failure, his reunion with Eero on the Other Side sacrificed to protect the world where his son now lives.

Though it is hard to comment on the style of a novel in translation, I have the feeling that Sinisalo has been well served by her translator. The writing is spare and elegant, with a clear distinction between the style of Orvo's narration and the style of Eero's blogs. There is also vivid descriptive writing, sometimes with surprising detail, especially effective in bringing to life the world on the Other Side.

The Blood of Angels is a bleak novel, apocalyptic in the vision it presents. A conventional apocalyptic novel would show the event which led to the destruction of civilized society, and continue with a depiction of the subsequent wasteland with pockets of humanity struggling to survive. Sinisalo offers something more original, and to my mind more effective. In the novel's present day she shows the very beginnings of the breakdown, with the food shortages and subsequent riots caused by the loss of the bees. The reader understands that the situation can only get worse. By contrast, in the future world which only Orvo can access, the planet has recovered but humanity has gone. Although Orvo discerns hope for the future, in this world there is no hope. Sinisalo leaves the gap between the present and the pristine uninhabited future to the reader's imagination, and the picture to my mind is all the more chilling.



Robert Silverberg, *Tales of Majipoor* (Gollancz, 2013, 320 pp, £8.99)

Reviewed by Stephen Baxter

As I write, 2015 is shaping up to be a year of significant anniversaries for Robert Silverberg, including his eightieth birthday and the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of his first novel. Further, it is thirty-five years since the publication of the award-winning *Lord Valentine's Castle* (1980), the first of a long sequence set on the great planet of Majipoor. And, as it happens, 2015 sees the tenth anniversary of the astronomers' discovery of the first 'super-Earth' – a giant planet of another star, a real Majipoor in the sky.

For Silverberg, *Valentine* marked a return to fiction-writing after a four-year break, following a remarkably intense period of production which resulted in some of his best-remembered novels, from *Thorns* (1967) to *Shadrach in the Furnace* (1976), and some equally lauded short fiction – but which at the time had not brought Silverberg the critical or commercial success he might have hoped for. *Valentine*, an expansive and lush science fantasy, was a marked change of tone produced in response to how Silverberg saw the market evolving: 'a slickly written bid for best-sellerdom', as David Pringle said of it in *The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction* (1990), along with a rather measly two-star rating.

In the introduction to *Revolt on Majipoor* (a tie-in by Matt Costello, 1987), Silverberg wrote of the birth of the project: 'One warm April afternoon in 1978 as I was wandering around alone near my swimming pool I heard the old familiar voice in my head whispering things to me, and suddenly a new book was there. I went into my office and scribbled this on the back of an envelope: The scene is a giant planet-sized city – an urban Big Planet, population of billions, a grand gaudy romantic canvas. The city is divided into vast subcities, each with its own characteristic tone. The novel is joyous and huge – no sense of dystopia. The book must be fun. Picaresque characters. Strange places – but all light, delightful, raffish... Young man journeying to claim an inheritance that has been usurped. His own identity has been stolen and now he wears another body'. This brief scribble captured the essence of Majipoor, clearly inspired by Jack Vance's *Big Planet* (1952), and the last line is a pretty good summary of the plot of the first novel: the saga of a young Valentine, amnesiac wanderer and true heir to the throne.

Valentine was commercially successful, and Silverberg returned to Majipoor many times in the following decades. And now comes the latest collection, seven stories dating from 1988 to 2011, and billed as the 'final' visit to the planet.

The first tale, 'The End of the Line' (2011), provides some back story to an earlier tale, 'The Time of the Burning' (1982), and looks back to the deepest origins of Majipoor's multi-species society. We are eight thousand years before

the events of Valentine, and six thousand years after human colonists came to this world – but there were 'people' here already, the Piurivars, shape-shifting 'Metamorphs'. With time, even Majipoor runs out of room, and conflict seems inevitable with these 'sneaky, nasty savages' (8), as a local administrator calls them. The story centres on Stiamot, counsellor to the Coronal – a king who, in a non-hereditary ruling system, is also heir to Majipoor's emperor, the Pontifex. Stiamot seeks peaceful coexistence between humans and Metamorphs. But, as depicted with typical skill and depth, the characters and situations are as ambiguous and amorphous as the Metamorphs, and the Metamorphs themselves are embittered by legends of an original sin of their own, the 'Defilement'. The world succumbs to the history-shaping conflict shown in 'The Time of the Burning', as Coronal Stiamot leads the war against the natives.

Despite the scale of the setting many of these later tales are examinations of mood and character, rather than depictions of action or motion. In 'The Book of Changes' (2003) Furvain, the son of a Coronal and feckless amateur poet, impulsively sets out on a trek to explore the relatively unknown eastern lands, only to find himself captured and held for ransom by a lonely, poetry-loving bandit chieftain. Under the stress of imprisonment Furvain produces an epic poem, 'The Book of Changes' – a piece which, it is hinted, has some cross-temporal connection to the future age of Lord Valentine, and which interestingly hinges on the 'great unavoidable sin of the suppression of the Metamorphs' (96), still not expiated six thousand years after Stiamot. Thus a tale of a physical journey pivots into a story of internal exploration, and is keyed into the greater issues of Majipoor history.

Majipoor has the texture of epic fantasy – and there are hints of paranormal powers – but it is resolutely a sfnal invention. It is a world that was colonized by humans who crossed space, an event remembered in Valentine's time fourteen thousand years later; it is a world where you can do archaeology. Silverberg can tell any kind of tale he likes here, but for my taste the more satisfactory of the fictions are those at the sfnal end of the spectrum, such as 'The Seventh Shrine' (1998), a late episode in Valentine's life. By now the lost, disinherited boy has become an ageing Pontifex. With a keen sense of Majipoor's history his ambition is to bring harmony to the world – but the deep wound of Stiamot's defeat of the Metamorphs still festers, and in his own time Valentine has had to suppress a native rebellion. Now Valentine becomes embroiled in an ugly dispute surrounding an archaeological exploration of Velalisier, a Metamorph city that was the site of the Defilement and abandoned six thousand years before humans ever came to the planet.

The lesser works in this collection, by comparison, lean more towards generic light fantasy. 'The Tomb of the Pontifex Dvorn' (2011) is a slight, humorous tale of archaeological rivalries surrounding the exploration of the tomb of the originator of Majipoor's ruling system, some twelve thousand years on. It is a meditation on the unreliability of memory and history; by now Furvain's

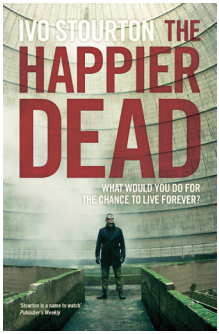
Book of Changes, thousands of years old, is the primary historical account of Dvorn's life. 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' (2004) describes the thwarted lust of an apprentice mage for his female tutor. This story is distinguished by the appearance of one of surprisingly few strong women characters in these tales, the glamorous sorcerer V. Halabant. 'Dark Times at the Midnight Market' (2010) is more sorcerers-and-spells comedic fare, about a minor noble seeking a love potion to woo a descendant of the Pontifex. In this story the alien races who followed humans to Majipoor are highlighted. 'The Way They Wove the Spells in Sippulgar' (2009) is a tale of an age of cults and sorcerers, unsatisfying despite undeveloped hints that some of the 'demons' studied by the occultists are in fact aboriginal inhabitants of the planet, even predating the Metamorphs.

The Majipoor tales have always been known for their lush, leisurely telling and their pleasing detail, and that remains true here: 'Long chains of blue spiders hung down from every branch, eyeing us in a sinister way' (194). Perhaps some of these later stories feel a little rushed, however; 'The End of the Line' particularly cries out for expansion to epic length. But perhaps that's forgivable for Silverberg after such a sequence, such a career.

Before the discovery in 2005 of the far-distant Gliese 876, whose mass is larger than the Earth's but smaller than that of Neptune or Uranus, such worlds were barely anticipated by the theoreticians, and their study is still in its infancy. To some extent, though, they were anticipated by science fiction writers such as Silverberg (see, for example, my 2014 article in the *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society*). The narrative appeal of such a world is the enormous room it offers and, in particular for American writers such as Vance, the dream of an unending frontier. By contrast, more realistic super-Earths occur in the word of hard sf writers, for example, Poul Anderson's *Orbit Unlimited* (1961) and Hal Clement's *Close to Critical* (1958).

Silverberg's Majipoor is bigger than the Big Planet that inspired it, with ten times Earth's diameter, but with approximately Earth's gravity. Majipoor is enormous; it must have a mass of 100 Earths – but its density is too low to be plausible for a rocky world. In fact, the parameters of Silverberg's Majipoor, in mass, radius and density, are more like those of Saturn. Perhaps such tremendous worlds are more likely to be realized artificially, for example as 'supramundane planets' to use Paul Birch's term, in which a gas giant (or star or black hole) is enclosed within a habitable shell. The 'Hegira' of Greg Bear's 1979 novel is a shell world with nearly twenty times Earth's diameter, a complex artefact centred on a singularity.

As for Majipoor, critics may regard the project as a relatively minor part of Silverberg's oeuvre. But it has emerged as an intriguing piece of world-building, the character studies are typically well done, and the telling is always smooth, competent, and rich with detail. As Valentine himself reflects, 'It was a world of infinite richness and variety, this Majipoor of his' (254). Silverberg's saga deserves its many fans, and *Tales of Majipoor* is a worthy envoi.



Ivo Stourton, *The Happier Dead* (Solaris, 2014, 320pp, £7.99)

Reviewed by Maia Clery

The press release accompanying Ivo Stourton's first foray into science fiction wastes no time in informing us that the author went to Eton (in the same class as HRH Prince William) and then on to Cambridge University. So it goes. Somewhat disheartened by the idea that Stourton's PR team felt it necessary to use the author's elite educational credentials to sell his novel, rather than allowing the content to speak for itself, I was at first inclined to try, like the 'new young' in *The Happier Dead*, to forget what I already knew. But, as it turns out, this information is more relevant than it first appears, for *The Happier Dead* is very much concerned with the world of the privileged and powerful.

In the near-future, those with enough capital can invest in the Treatment, a rejuvenation and anti-ageing process, leaving your body permanently youthful at an age of your choosing. Unfortunately, while remaining young in body, those who have undergone the Treatment do not stay young at heart. This is the Tithonus Effect (named after the figure from Greek mythology who asked the gods for eternal life, but neglected to ask for eternal youth and aged infinitely); memories fester, living forever becomes dull and those rich enough to be called the 'new young' have often trodden on so many people to get to the top that they would rather forget what they had to do to get there. Here is where the Great Spa comes in, a complex in which the immortal may be psychologically rejuvenated, by reliving their formative years, rather like a more realistic version of R.D. Laing's rebirthing workshops. In this highly exclusive and secure building, an immortal is found stabbed to death and Detective Inspector Oates must find the culprit.

This is essentially a traditional whodunit; a murder mystery to be solved by an inspector with the requisite problems in his personal life. Highly readable and smoothly written as it is, one can't help feeling that the novel would not suffer terribly without any science-fiction element at all. Many of the points Stourton raises about the consequences of immortality are problems we already face in the developed world, having almost doubled life expectancy over the last century: 'Longer and larger state pensions, more expensive end of life care funded by taxes, and the eldest holding on to jobs and real estate for periods without historical precedent, all at a time of rising birth rates and youth immigration' (139). Stourton alludes to the 2011 England Riots; in 2035 angry young poor people are still taking to the streets, this time with the title of the Mortal Reformers. Branded as terrorists by the government, they fight against the iniquity of the social system that has become even more stagnant since

the advent of immortality. Increased life expectancy, rather than being a by-product of being wealthy, is now an actual product which only the wealthy can afford: 'The meek would never inherit the earth because the rich would never die' (108). With all this discussion of the effects on a wealthy nation, it seems important to remember that the current problem of the developing world's short life expectancy due to poverty has yet to be solved.

There are a number of parallels between the novel's Nottingham Biosciences which sells the Treatment and the real-life Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senescence Research Foundation, headed by fellow Cambridge alumnus biologist Aubrey de Grey, who proposes that the first person who will live to be 1000 years of age could already be living today. He claims that those illnesses that are currently the major causes of death in the west, such as cancer and atherosclerosis, are not diseases in themselves but are, rather, symptoms of ageing. In order to cure these symptoms, ageing itself must be cured. Like Nottingham Biosciences, de Grey is seemingly unconcerned with the possible social consequences of immortality as he believes that it is more important to deal with the current problem of age-related illness. De Grey also believes that in the near-future we should be able to keep the body in a healthy youthful state through repair, rejuvenation, and replacement of cells and molecules. This development has already been reached in the future of Stourton's novel, although there are no explanations of how this has been achieved, and concerns are now growing over the effects on the mind as it is left to age: 'When you consider the positions of power generally occupied by the new-young you can see the danger' (180).

The Great Spa is the centre for this exploration. It incubates the new young in an egg-shaped virtual reality, with its own environment, atmosphere and day and night cycles. Unhappy immortals hand over all responsibility in order to experience a period of childlike freedom away from the rest of the world. Overseeing this is Miranda, a psychopathic woman with the body of a nineteen-year-old, and PR man for the Great Spa, Charles Golden, who bears an uncanny resemblance to the current Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. The social classes in London are worlds apart emotionally and physically and there is an element, as in China Miéville's *The City & the City* (2009), of intentional ignorance about what is happening in front of people's eyes. Oates tries to ignore the plight of the real young, though his own dead daughter was a member of the Mortal Reformers. Meanwhile, those inside the Great Spa attempt to insulate themselves from the struggle happening outside but are constantly under threat of attack.

Science fiction has long been concerned with immortality and its various disadvantages, including the ennui of living eternally: see Michael Moorcock's *The Dancers at the End of Time* (1981) for unconventional ideas on how to stave off the boredom. Tithonus has not been a stranger to sf either; Aldous Huxley discusses life extension and its consequences in *After Many a Summer Dies*

the Swan (1939). To this tradition Stourton adds a socially aware discussion of the issues facing the developed world today and how they may be exacerbated by anti-ageing technologies in the next few decades. That being said, though these political and social issues are certainly touched upon, they are not the principal concern of the novel; *The Happier Dead* is essentially plot-driven and is an enjoyable page-turning thriller.

James Lovegrove, *Diversifications*, (PS Publishing, 2011, 239pp, £20.00)

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Diversifications is James Lovegrove's second short-story collection, covering the period from 1999 to 2007; in other words, the era of the so-called British Boom. The volume shows his tendencies for both dark humour and the horrific, without ever quite going over the top, as he merrily crosses genres in ways that complement the contemporaneous movements in New Space Opera and New Weird.

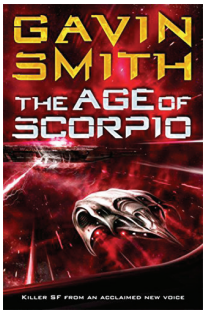
Despite these contemporary affiliations, Lovegrove's stories tend to be catastrophes in a very cosy British sense: cosiness of desperation or triumph without crowing or everyone bar the hero dying. There is an air of quiet failure and muted success. In one of his serial killer stories, Lovegrove sets up the expected ending but delivers it with such inevitability that we are still left with questions although the outcome has been satisfied. 'Carry the Moon in My Pocket' explores hopes for the future and the cosiness becomes inspiring. Luke Wheeler wants to buy a rock that is allegedly from the Moon. After working for the spare money, he is able to purchase it. When, years later, Wheeler steps onto the Moon, he is able to bring the rock with him. The rock not only embodies Wheeler's motivation but it also symbolizes the myth-making capacity of dreams. Wheeler's personal triumph, whilst invoking the individualism of earlier myths such as Dan Dare and the race to the Moon, also represents the ability for dreams to transform the world.

Lovegrove has more than a passing fascination with Jules Verne, as shown by the pastiche of Verne's style in 'Londrès au Xxieme siecle' which explores the idea of nineteenth-century extrapolation and excitement about science. This positivist view of the future, though, turns into the disappointment of the present. Lovegrove, however, portrays this vanishing belief in progress less as a comment on the naivety of the past and more on the way we view the present and the near-future, as if our gaze has become clouded and divorced from Verne's optimism. The myth-making capacity of Verne's fiction is evoked in 'Speedstream', where *Around the World in Eighty* Days is updated with futuristic technologies. Stoneham, who has been chasing the chimerical 'Continuum' for

seven years, is confronted by McWilliams, his friend: 'you need to believe that it's a fantasy. Otherwise you'd have realised that you've failed'. The myth may be an illusion but we are nevertheless required to believe in it so as to offer hope, and the chance of transformation, in our world.

The deceptiveness of myth, though, is also explored for example in misunderstandings and misreadings that result in a warped reality. In 'Seventeen Syllables', Lovegrove twists the haiku form into a kind of torture. Rather than being expressive, the search for minimalism and beauty in a highly restricted form spills over in Dr Matthewson's head. In his search for an ideal of purity and minimalism, Matthewson realizes that 'life entailed not separation but immersion'. His restrictive use of language becomes a larger prison, removing him from being able to communicate with others and deforming his relationship with the world. In 'Junk Male', constant missives become a terror in their personalized inhumanity. Here, an overload of communication allied to a dearth of meaning becomes hostile and horrific. Lovegrove comically plays with the same scenario in 'The Bowdler Strain' where a British government base accidentally releases a virus that censors swearing in the same form as comic speech bubbles: language deemed unseemly by the virus is replaced by symbols, echoing comics such as Tintin or Asterix. After failed attempts to repair the damage, the USA releases a virus that removes all speech.

Lovegrove's stories are more reserved and conservative in intent than many of his contemporaries. Even the end of the world, in 'Terminal Event', is uncertain where the Uplift does not take place but merely ends. More reflective than angry, Lovegrove focuses more on the human aspects of sf and horror than the technological ones.



Gavin Smith, *Age of Scorpio*
(Gollancz, 2013, 512 pp, £8.99)

Reviewed by Allen Stroud (Buckinghamshire New University)

Age of Scorpio is Gavin Smith's fourth novel. The first thing that strikes the reader is the cover; a spaceship streaking away from enemies, the red nebula, energy weapons and gas clouds, all exciting stuff. This is coupled with quotes from Stephen Baxter and *SFX Magazine* that proclaim a contemporary take on science fiction. The hyperbole demands attention and sets a high bar before we even start to read.

In *Age of Scorpio*, Smith has attempted something brave: a story told from three entirely different contexts: one pure space opera, one Celtic historic fantasy and finally what appears to be modern day. Amongst these disparate stories, a series of characters pursue widely different agendas. The salvage of

a strange spaceship, the survival of a tribe and the pursuit of a missing girl all hint at an eventual convergence.

Each story is given equal weight, with the chapters alternating. Initially, the flavour of each is distinct. science fiction reminiscent of Piers Anthony (later George Alec Effinger), fantasy that suggests Katherine Kerr and Graham Greene, laced with south coast references to actual places. Later as the writing develops, I think of China Miéville and David Gemmell. In space, Smith's prose is occasionally abstract, painting scenes with broad strokes, making them difficult to picture. On the ground things are clearer and easier to grasp.

The question that arises from this mix is who is the intended audience? The exciting cover depicts only a third of the story, so there is a danger a genre fan might feel cheated of their proper fare. But this in turn raises questions about the boundaries we place on stories; why delineate? Why not just read and enjoy the ride?

And quite a ride it is. Smith's three contexts feel wholly different. A hard look at the prose reveals the same writer behind each. The occasional viewpoint change and repeated word at times give him away, but in turn, vivid images come from unlikely moments. The scene where a dad offers his ex-con daughter his benefit money so she can track down her sister is hauntingly real. When juxtaposed with nanotechnology and an escalating space battle, you find yourself in a heady mix of stories.

Interwoven in each theme is the level of understanding the characters have for the rules of the society Smith paints. Arthur C. Clarke's third law is plainly in evidence as a rationalization here. Technology dressed as magic and supernatural myth is given away only by the juxtaposition. The reader smells some connection to these events and the explained novums of the future are instinctively mapped onto the rite, ritual and mystery of the past and present, yet few connections are drawn between the stories for some time, keeping them discrete and separate experiences.

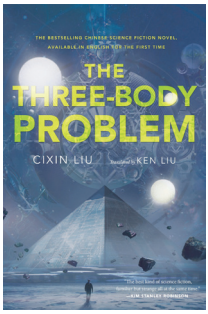
Some of the competing definitions of the slipstream genre might apply to *Age of Scorpio*. It certainly defamiliarizes a modern context with uncovered alien technology and implies the same in our Celtic past. There is a sense of knowing but not knowing the lay of the land which is partially through the way in which characters interact with the anomalies of the plot. In some cases they are familiar with the adversarial things they encounter, in others, these elements are cast as magic and legend. The blending gives each aspect a fresh aspect while also leaning on mythic tradition. What might be a selkie to a Celtic witch can be an alien or bio-engineered human to a scientist from the future. What makes Age of Scorpio stand out is that both interpretations appear in the same book.

This unique blend carries with it a set of challenges for the reader. Retaining an immersed familiarity with each of the three wholly different contexts is at times difficult, particularly with the detailed layers of political machination. The Council becomes blurred with the Church or the Circle, the City of Brass, with

the Consortium. The motivations of characters are clear, but difficult to track. We know du Bois is an agent fighting to preserve an agenda of one of these sides and his love for his sister Alexia is clear, but what 'his side' is attempting to do gets questioned and a little lost. The same applies to Britha and Scab. Ultimately what they are fighting for becomes difficult to hold onto, though this may be part of their perspective. Certainly Britha is transformed through her journey and that transformation alters fundamental things within her. That also means the reader feels a little less connected, when the experience of most stories is to connect more with the characters as they progress. Perhaps this is due to the way each individual is becoming less human in their actions and attitude.

The three stories are all action-packed. Smith's vision of future society places violence at its heart with conflict a multi-layered affair of nanotechnology, poison, hacking, ranged weapons and martial arts. Each character strives to gain an edge in one of the arenas and when they do, the consequences are usually gory. The profusion of weapon types and technology becomes a language in itself, familiar in form, but unfamiliar in aspect, possibly similar in some ways to a first reading of William Gibson, back in the 1980s. At times, the combat scenes feel excessive and impede the developing plot but they never become unconnected and mechanical, as they might in the hands of another writer.

As expected, the conclusion unifies the plots, but Smith pulls one or two unexpected twists into the bargain. All three stories leave enough room for a subsequent novel, although the science fiction element comes more to the fore. *Age of Scorpio* is a bold vision, whose strengths lie in the blending of contexts and the attempt to use sf as a frame or filter for the other genre stories, which makes it an interesting hybrid novel.



Cixin Liu, *The Three-Body Problem*, trans. Ken Liu (Tor, 2014, 336pp, £16.99)

Reviewed by Michelle K. Yost

Despite occasional state disapproval, Chinese sf has been experiencing a renaissance, and its most popular novel is finally available to western sf readers (of whom I am one). This review is not designed for Mandarin speakers, who would have a greater appreciation for the linguistic and social nuances, but for readers like myself more familiar with the traditions of Anglophone sf. So, from this perspective, although Cixin Liu is not short of interesting scientific ideas, the stylistic presentation (a combination of the original pacing and Ken Liu's translation) is not going to appeal to everyone.

The premise of the novel (the first in a trilogy that has already been written

and released in China) is that a secret organization is actively working to subvert the planet in preparation for an invasion by the Trisolarans, residents of neighbouring Alpha Centauri. Because their world is torn between the chaotic forces of three suns, the Trisolarans need to find a new, stable world to inhabit. A full-immersion VR game called The Three-Body Problem is developed by the fifth columnists to identify potential recruits to the Trisolaran cause. The narrative moves between Ye Wenjie, a woman traumatized by the Cultural Revolution, and one of the traitors, and Wang Miao, a nanomaterials engineer drawn into the mystery. The narrative movement between Ye, Wang and the Trisolarans, all the while trying to find a balance between China's painful past and future potential, is mirrored by the Three-Body Problem which, in classical physics, explores how three celestial bodies move in relation to their mutual gravitational forces.

Liu does not shy away from the gory details of the Cultural Revolution such as 'struggle sessions' and labour camps. The destruction of China's environment is hinted at by Ye's reading of Rachel Carson's suppressed book, *Silent Spring* (1962). Moving forward to Wang's near-future China, the country is on a par with the rest of the world, socially and technologically, whilst the Americans become the bumbling clowns in the operation to stop the fifth columnists. Liu blends modern hard sf with classical worlds-spanning sf, the valiant scientist and the murderous alien, but somewhere along the way fails to develop any likable character.

Liu's Trisolaran biology is fascinating; creatures that dehydrate themselves during periods of intense heat and wait for the ecosystem to restabilize before rehydrating so that life may continue. The rise and fall of civilizations they experience is played out in the game so that human participants come to understand the woes of the Trisolarans and are converted to the cause of supporting the alien invasion. What becomes the greatest moment of incredulity is when a sympathetic Trisolaran, who tries to warn humanity, laments the state of his species: 'Everything is devoted to survival. To permit the survival of the civilizations as a whole, there is almost no respect for the individual. […] We have no literature, no art, no pursuit of beauty and enjoyment' (353). If the Trisolaran species has none of these things, how can the speaker lament the absence of concepts he has never known? Liu's attempt to compare Trisolaran civilization to the mistakes of China's Cultural Revolution cracks the alien façade. Totalitarianism, denial of individual will, a callous regard for life: socially, the Trisolaran civilization is one seen in sf a thousand times before and presents nothing new.

To further outline the droll tone of what is an exciting book conceptually, take this scintillating exchange:

> 'What can I do?' Ye asked in a soft voice.
> 'You will become the commander in chief of the Earth-

> Trisolaris Movement. This is the wish of all ETO fighters.'
>
> Ye remained silent for a few seconds. Then she nodded slowly. 'I'll do my best.'
>
> Evans raised a fist and shouted at the crowd, 'Eliminate human tyranny!' (314-5)

The language is basic and long passages of dialogue are repeated in the narrative, should the reader have missed something. Those accustomed to a certain eloquence will find that the novel uses shorter, clipped sentences, light on independent clauses.

More imaginative sections appear when Wang is in the Three-Body game, experiencing the various eras of Trisolaran civilization in the guise of ancient human societies from around the world, invoking eastern pyramids and western cathedrals, Chinese philosophers and western scientists. For those who enjoy very visual reading, these segments should be appealing:

> Wang saw a door on the side of the pyramid, lit from within by flickering lights. He walked over. Inside the tunnel was a row of statues of the gods of Olympus holding up torches, their surfaces blackened by smoke. He entered the Great Hall and saw that it was even dimmer than the entrance tunnel. Two silver candelabras on top of a long marble table provided a drowsy light. (182)

Liu almost seems to have written a shooting script with his descriptions of colour and style inside the virtual world of Three-Body (and, indeed, a five-film deal has been agreed).

Liu's most exciting use of physics come in the final pages when the Trisolarans deploy their secret weapon against Earth, a single proton turned into a supercomputer, which Ken Liu translates as 'Sophon' (a more poetic name than the literal translation of Zhìzi, 'wise son', which is a play on the Chinese word for proton). The Trisolaran Princeps believes that 'to effectively contain a civilization's development and disarm it across such a long span of time, there is only one way: kill its science' (360). This is what happened during the Cultural Revolution, and Liu's fearful future is one in which this destruction is repeated on a global scale. Breaking faith with physics, replacing it with an unscientific faith in the Trisolarans – called 'Lord' by followers who have heard the voice from the sky – reflects the same betrayal by the Chinese intellectuals who caved into the pressure of the Revolution, repudiating scientific truth for political ones.

There is a great deal of interruption to the narrative from footnotes, nine-tenths of them from the translator, often explaining pieces of Chinese history and culture. While some of these are quite interesting, others are utterly mundane, such as explaining the Alpha Centauri star system (273) and Roche Limit (238). This use of footnoting not only denies the assumption that sf readers might

be well-read but also their ability to suspend disbelief and piece the narrative for themselves. Liu claims his greatest western sf influences to be Arthur C. Clarke and George Orwell, and certainly his large-scale science and dystopian Trisolarans reflect this, but Clarke and Orwell produced texts that integrated information without the need for distracting paratext.

Ken Liu explains in the Translator's Postscript that he added 'a few informational phrases in the text (all approved by the author)' (397) in addition to the footnotes to aid non-Chinese readers. Sentences like 'She had slipped effortlessly into addressing him by an affectionate diminutive' (113) were surely unnecessary in the original Chinese, the 'affectionate diminutive' of 'Xiao' being obvious. Liu believes that good translations do not 'read as if they were originally written in English', but preserve 'another culture's patterns of thinking […] an echo of another language's rhythms and cadences' (398). The coming sequel, *Dark Forest*, is being translated by Joel Martinsen and it will be interesting to see if the tone changes, if the dialogue becomes more engaging, and if there is less use of footnotes as the narrative moves from near-future China to the threat of the Trisolaran invasion fleet.

Eduardo Paolozzi, *General Dynamic F.U.N*. (Arts Council Collection/ Hayward Touring), part of *Home and Away* (The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge, Canterbury, 9 May–23 August 2015)

Reviewed by Andrew M. Butler (Canterbury Christ Church University)

One curious omission from the third edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* is any mention of Eduardo Paolozzi, whose prints have been on show this year at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and now at the Beaney in Canterbury. The current exhibition, forming part of a series of local events celebrating British art of the 1960s, has been curated by Professor Martin Hammer of the University of Kent and also features photographs of south-east England by Tony Ray-Jones. Nevertheless, it is Paolozzi's sequence of collages that dominate the gallery space.

Born in 1924 to Italian immigrant parents in Leith, Edinburgh, Paolozzi decided he wanted to be an artist from an early age. During the Second World War his father, uncle and grandfather were killed by U-boats, whilst in the process of being exiled to Canada, and Paolozzi was briefly interned at Saughton Prison for three months. He studied part-time at Edinburgh College of Art and was conscripted into the army in 1943, but was declared unfit for service. His studies continued at the Ruskin Drawing School, at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and the Slade (which shared facilities with the drawing school during the War) before Paolozzi completed his training in 1945 at St Martin's College and the Slade in London. In 1947 he moved to Paris, where he met artists such as the Dadaist and collagist Jean Arp and the Fauvist and Cubist Georges Braque. Paolozzi was inspired by Cubism and Dada to take cuttings from magazines as source materials for his art.

Returning to London in 1949 to teach textiles at the Central School of Art and Design, Paolozzi established a studio which he began to fill with toys, found objects, more magazine scraps and other sources of inspiration – a recreation of a later version of this can be found at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Two in Edinburgh. He joined the Independent Group in 1952, a loose assembly of artists which initially included Toni del Renzio, Nigel Henderson, John McHale, Colin St John Williams and William Turnbull, and critics Peter Reyner Banham and Lawrence Alloway. At their inaugural meeting, he delivered a lecture, *BUNK!,* consisting of projections through an epidiascope of collages composed of pictures and words torn from magazines, including sf pulps. One such image included the cover of *Amazing* (February 1952), for Don Wilcox's 'The Iron Men of Venus', which indicated an early fascination with genre. The word 'pop' appeared among the found materials in *BUNK!*, which may have inspired Alloway to coin the term 'Pop Art'. Further artists, including Richard Hamilton, and architects joined them over the following few years. Paolozzi contributed to the Independent Group's exhibition, *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953) at the ICA, and to *This is Tomorrow* (1956) at the Whitechapel Gallery, after the

Group had stopped meeting formally. The latter was important for two reasons: it marked the appearance of a seminal Pop art collage, Hamilton's *Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing*, and it was attended by Michael Moorcock and J.G. Ballard, thus feeding into the sf New Wave.

Paolozzi's early collages were reproducible – the individual elements were printed and mounted, transforming mass-produced objects into art which could in turn be mass-produced – but he moved on to master the process of photolithography. This technique was looked down upon by the artistic establishment; a photolithograph was removed from the Paris Biennale in 1965. Paolozzi produced several groups of prints, including *Moonstrips Empire News* (1967). This was conceived as being the start of a five-hundred-page book, with the first hundred of this series (thirty-two of which were on display at the Fitzwilliam) printed by Kelpra Studio and published by Editions Alecto. Part two, *General Dynamic F.U.N.* (1970), consisted of fifty designs (all shown at the Beaney, forty being shown at the Fitzwilliam), printed by Richard Davis and again published by Editions Alecto. Typical images included Disney characters, Hollywood actors and actresses, cars, rockets, robots and circuitry, which subverted both advertising and science fiction. Doug Harvey suggests that Moonstrips articulates 'Paolozzi's critical view of contemporary society through his voracious, appropriationist appetite for pop culture. The prints' modular, McLuhanesque pastiche of pop iconography, together with Paolozzi's signature curdled mechanistic horror vacuii, was a major force in moving Pop art beyond the cul-de-sac of arch, dispassionate quotation' (Harvey 2008: 102). The two series offer a visual version of New Wave sf – although I cannot help but feel that Paolozzi's (and Hamilton's) attitude to the sfnal elements was more celebratory than the New Worlds writers. The collagists used sf to produce art; the New Wave brought artistic techniques to sf.

To give the reader a few examples, 'Twenty Traumatic Twinges' consists of a series of images taken from Metropolis (1927): the robot Maria and the cityscape itself. 'No Heroes Developed' is a rather chunky-looking robot, chest open to reveal wires and tubes, sat holding a pistol in its right waldo. 'Watch out for Miracles ... New Hope for Better Babies' has, I suspect, crash test dummies rather than robots, but there are again visible wires and a balding engineer in shirt and tie fiddling with the innards of one of them. 'Animals as Aliens' features a kind of bear-like creature, shaped like a flattened soft toy but I suspect (it isn't clear) is some kind of desiccated coconut-covered biscuit. 'Will Man Desert the Dog for the Dolphin?' actually features a parrot rather than a canine or a cetacean, but one constructed from circuits and components; in the background are circuit boards (or crackers?) and below silhouettes of machinery. 'Crime Wave Rolling High' also demonstrates the montage technique: top-left of the image is a young woman sunbathing on the top of a car, bottom-left a series of coloured squares and rectangles and a missile; on the right-hand side of the image is a circuit board and a rocket or missile. Motorcars, rockets and circuitry

are recurring motifs which seem to anticipate early 1970s Ballard. '6 Miles over Vacation-Land' includes two suited men sat in a small plane, one holding a rocket; there's a sense of ambiguity as to whether this is a model of an ICBM or something for peaceful purposes, but then the history of rocketry from Wernher von Braun has that feeling of unease. Whilst most of the titles feel like Dadaist juxtapositions, Burroughsian cut-ups or are torn from headlines – 'An Empire of Silly Statistics ... A Fake War for Public Relations', 'Totems and Taboos of the Nine-to-Five Day', 'Hermaphroditic Children from Transvestite Parents' – some do perform what it says on the label: 'Jesus Colour by Numbers' is a typical devotional portrait, painted in colour-by-numbers style. Where there is extended text on the prints, it seems to be shuffled sentences rather than continuous prose.

J.G. Ballard wrote the laudatory introduction to the portfolio of *General Dynamic F.U.N.*: 'Paolozzi's role in providing our most important visual abstracting service should not be overlooked. Here the familiar materials of our everyday lives, the jostling iconographies of mass advertising and consumer goods, are manipulated to reveal their true identities. For those who can read its pages, "General Dynamic F.U.N." is a unique guidebook to the electric garden of our minds'. Christopher Finch, the art editor of *New Worlds* introduced Paolozzi to Moorcock, who in turn introduced him to Ballard. They shared an interest in car crashes; Paolozzi's friend and former colleague, Banham, was a trustee of the Institute for Research in Art and Technology in Camden, London, where Ballard held an exhibition of crashed cars. Finch wrote a retrospective on the artist for the magazine with a design by Paolozzi customized by Charles Platt. Paolozzi was added to the masthead as Aeronautics Adviser, although since he was then spending so much time in America, it is unclear whether he made any significant contribution to *New Worlds* itself. He also contributed to Ambit, a literary journal where Ballard was prose editor, including a 'story' entitled 'General Dynamic F.U.N.', screenplays and interviews (see also Brittain 2009; 2013).

Paolozzi's cyborgian and cybernetic imagery offers a playful and sometimes nightmarish intersection of nature and technology, visible both in art galleries and around the world. Here in the UK, in addition to the iron giant statue Vulcan (1998-9) in Modern Art Two, the giant foot sculpture The Manuscript of Monte Casino (1991) in Edinburgh, Piscator (1980) outside Euston Station, Pimlico Ventilation Tower (1982) near Pimlico underground station, Head of Invention (1989) outside the Design Museum in London and *Newton, After Blake* (1995) outside the British Library, there are the mosaics from 1984 at Tottenham Court Road underground station. Paolozzi drew on science-fictional imagery for several decades until his death in 2005. It is time we paid more attention to what he was trying to do.

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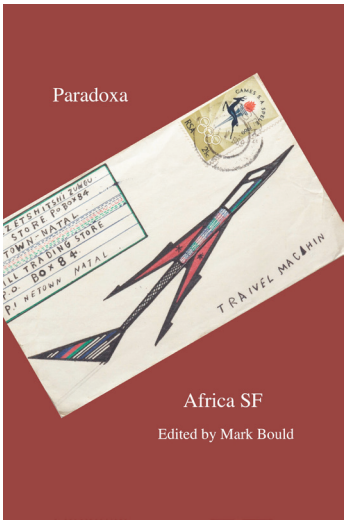
The New (SF) Criticism: Review-Essay
Paul March-Russell (University of Kent)

Mark Bould, ed. *Africa SF* (*Paradoxa* #25, 2013, 325pp, $24+postage)
Mark Bould and Rhys Williams, eds. *Sf Now* (*Paradoxa* #26, 2014, 316pp, $24+postage)

Mark Bould may not, like James Brown, be the hardest-working man in show business but he is certainly one of the hardest-working academics in sf criticism. In addition to his recent book on sf cinema and co-editorship of the journal, *Science Fiction Film and Television*, in 2013 and 2014 he edited two interrelated volumes of the ever-excellent *Paradoxa*. The latter volume, co-edited with Rhys Williams, was based upon the conference of the same name co-organized in August 2014 at the University of Warwick (reviewed in *Foundation* #119). In that report, I noted the intellectually stimulating and convivial nature of that conference but also some of its despairing quality. Here, with papers now fully fleshed-out, that tone is less apparent and, indeed, in their introduction to *Sf Now* Bould and Williams are quick to argue that 'there is a radical alterity buried within the present that sf can unearth.' Although the doom-laden rhetoric of capitalist realism and the Anthropocene continues to predominate, the articles – as seen, for example, in the opening trio by Zak Bronson, Gerry Canavan and Carl Freedman – take up not only Bould and Williams' call but also the recent challenge of Mark Fisher, architect of the concept of capitalist realism, to expose its internal contradictions. In other words, the content of *Sf Now* and of its predecessor not only expands the current terms of sf criticism but also furthers the wider political and cultural debate. Anyone, not just sf readers, who is interested in contemporary politics, economics and society, should be reading these volumes.

Having stated the importance of these texts, it is nonetheless necessary to contextualize their approaches so as to avoid turning criticism into adulation. In particular, what ideas connect the more varied content of *Sf Now* with *Africa SF*, the latter centred on the renaissance of African science fiction, the representation of Africa in sf, and the effects on sf of the African diaspora? Two quotations from *Sf Now* grab the attention. Firstly, in their introduction, Bould and Williams declare that it is 'an unabashedly political collection.' Fair enough, but what does 'political' mean in this context? The stance of the contributors is uniformly left-wing, some

explicitly Marxist, as if those positions automatically confer upon the authors the aura of progressivism. Viewed more historically, and in less partisan terms, the political Left has often been no more 'progressive' than the political Right – and, indeed, it can be argued that one of the major disasters of Marxism in the twentieth century was its failure to deconstruct the myth of historical progress, in which its own ideological core was firmly embedded. The injuries inflicted upon the African continent, especially during the period of decolonization, were as much due to the penetration of Marxist ideas and communist ideologies as they were to the after-effects of Western imperialism and the neo-colonial activities of global corporations. I am sure Bould is aware of this history – his introduction and opening article to *Africa SF* reveal not only impressive research but also a deep engagement with the ideas and histories of African postcoloniality – so that, in this sense, the essays and interviews that constitute Africa SF could be seen as striking some form of recompense.



To that end, however, both *Africa SF* and *Sf Now* could be regarded as forming part of a project to reframe the parameters of what Goethe first termed 'world literature'. My second attention-grabbing quotation comes from Graeme MacDonald's article, a worthy winner of this year's Pioneer Award since it offers a path-finding application of a new field of enquiry in the humanities – Energy Studies – to science fiction. In seeking to cast sf as a potentially privileged literature in terms of questions of energy resource, MacDonald comments that 'Generations of critics […] have not worried about […] the coal extraction methods for Anna Karenina's train' whilst also noting that, in contemporaneous novels such as Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), the narrative focus tends 'to revolve around the (not irrelevant) labor crises of the energy worker' rather than 'the energy source itself.' Putting aside MacDonald's debatable choice of examples, in that Zola's fictional coalmine, Le Voreux, is as much a character in the novel as any of the humans, what seems to be occurring in this passage is a critique of Comparative Literature as it is currently constituted. MacDonald, it should be noted, is part of the Warwick Research Collective that has since published *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (2015), and his criticism of 'generations of critics' is in accordance with the thesis put there. The reason that this passage leaps out at me is threefold. First, in the past five years of teaching Tolstoy and Zola's novels alongside one another, the question of how the energy source is extracted, produced and consumed has been one

of my central issues. So, this gesture doesn't strike me as being particularly 'new' (or maybe I've just been ahead of the curve without knowing it). Secondly, and as a consequence, the debate with Comparative Literature, still a relatively new discipline in the UK, may be misplaced, being instead a dispute with its longer lineage in the US where the discipline has largely been subject to the influence of Formalists such as Erich Auerbach and René Wellek. Formalism – Marxist literary theory's traditional bête noire – may instead be the enemy here, not Comparative Literature per se. Thirdly, in proposing a world-historical view where the Marxist-Leninist concept of combined and uneven development is the a priori upon which any effective model of world literature must turn, MacDonald implicitly invokes Bould's earlier volume on African sf as a potential test-case for this critical strategy. Such an approach has both merits and demerits.

The disadvantages can be seen in Andrew Milner's opening article on sf and world systems theory. These are not Milner's fault since he admirably applies Franco Moretti's own application of Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of world systems to the development of sf as a global literature from the late 19th century onwards. The fault lies instead with Moretti who, in texts such as *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2007), has abandoned his earlier preoccupation with the politics of literary form for a socio-economic model that merely remaps what any academic working, if only indirectly, with the History of the Book already knows: that the Leavisite or New Critical model of the literary canon is an abstraction and that what really matters is the production, distribution and consumption of literature within an expanding and diversifying marketplace, at both national and international levels. The real issues here, then, are how the vectors of cultural production intertwine with the vectors of global capital: in many respects, a question of base and superstructure. What Moretti offers instead is just a mirror-image to Formalist criticism: an abstraction ('distant' rather than close reading) ballasted by a quasi-mathematical model; in other words, a sociology of literature that, as Terry Eagleton long ago put it in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), merely replicates rather than explaining the causes of cultural production. World systems theory may well be an aid to the study of sf but it will require a more interventionist model than the one currently being supplied by Moretti.

In contrast, in *Africa SF*, we find Noah Tsika's brilliant reading of the Nigerian cyberpunk film, *Kajola* (2010), which offers a detailed account of the multiple and shifting contexts that led, firstly, to the film's making and troubled production, and secondly, to its sudden withdrawal after a mixed reception. Instead of Moretti's top-down approach (which, in its metacritical stance, replicates the assumed knowingness of the former colonial powers), Tsika offers a fascinating bottom-up response which superbly reveals the confluence of forces – both local and international in origin – that inspired, worked upon and ultimately suppressed the enigma known as *Kajola*. Although Moretti, as applied by Milner, may give readers a broad brushstroke view of how world sf can be conceived, it is Tsika's article that offers a version of how such criticism can and should be done.

To offset the top-down approach further, the articles in *Sf Now* are punctuated by five interviews, each effectively marking the end of one line of thought within a sub-group of articles. Of the interviewees, two – Junot Díaz and Nnedi Okorafor – could have been featured alongside the conversations with Minister Faust, Andrea Hairston and Nalo Hopkinson in *Africa SF*. However, the interviews in *Sf Now*, two more being with Kij Johnson and Stephen Graham Jones, offer a necessary counter-balance to the heavy theory of the articles, not necessarily being any lighter in content, but in integrating theory with both the practice of creative writing and the lived realities of race, diaspora, environment and split identities. The fifth interview is with the philosopher, Steve Fuller, whose writings on posthumanism inform some of the articles in *Sf Now*, most especially Veronica Hollinger's article, which also draws on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection so as to chart three different responses to the ethos of posthuman transcendence in the work of Paolo Bacigalupi, Greg Egan and Kim Stanley Robinson. However, the most interesting aspects of Fuller's interview is that, in sharp contrast to the positions of the other contributors, he largely welcomes neoliberalism – reminding us again that progressive politics are not the inherent prerogative of the Left – whilst rounding on the 'campus-oriented jeremiads' of David Harvey and Slavoj Zizek.

In *Africa SF*, the interviews form part of the diasporic movement within the journal from the African continent to North America and the Caribbean. Bould, as already indicated, begins the volume with his superb account of Mohammed Dib, Sony Labou Tansi and Ahmed Khaled Towflik – three writers from three different parts of Africa writing against the backdrop of specific historical crises. Here, Bould offers a world-historical view that remains discrete to the particular circumstances and literary techniques of each writer. If Bould misses a trick, it is to refer to Dib's *Who Remembers the Sea* (1962) as being 'proleptic of the nouveau roman africain' without considering the extent to which Dib arguably takes the strategies of Alain Robbe-Grillet and writes them through an African folklore that, as in the preceding novels of Amos Tutuola, blurs reality and fantasy, life and death.

From there, the reader moves onto more recognizably science-fictional territory with essays by Lisa Yaszek and Malisa Kurtz on how Western versions of apocalypse and cyberpunk are, respectively, rewritten as commentaries on African techno-optimism, as in the writings of the Ghanaian Jonathan Dotse, or anxieties about the recent past and the imminent future, as in Lauren Beukes' *Moxyland* (2008) and *Zoo City* (2010). The latter also forms the basis of Marleen Barr's article, which does a fine job in thinking through the various boundaries and points of connection that infiltrate the narrative, although her analysis is somewhat obscured by the additional rhetoric of entanglement from quantum mechanics. Inbetween, Pamela Phantismo Sunstrum offers a useful overview of how Mark Dery's concept of Afrofuturism can be read through the specific utopian longings of African cultures after decolonization whilst concluding with

an insightful, self-reflective account of her own artwork in the context of an African futurism.

With Lisa Dowdall's Bloch-informed account of utopia in Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010), the volume segues from cultural production in Africa to work about or derived from Africa. Dowdall's article is partnered by Neil Easterbrook's reading of Ian McDonald's *Chaga* trilogy as an inversion of the lost world narratives of late Victorian colonial fiction. Easterbrook acknowledges that, because the trilogy is written from, through and out of a narrative tradition implicated in the racist assumptions of nineteenth-century imperialism, ideological traces remain. But, the overall effect of the trilogy is to destabilize such preconceptions and to offer a heterogeneous view of Africa as opposed to the monolithic gaze of the former colonial powers. The only weakness in Easterbrook's argument is his decision to offset McDonald's trilogy with its obvious predecessors, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* (1966). For the former, Easterbrook over-relies on Chinua Achebe's famously controversial attack (now largely rejected by most Conradians), whilst the latter has been convincingly defended by Jeannette Baxter in J.G. *Ballard's Surrealist Imagination* (2009).

The final trio of articles look back at Africa from the US but via mixed media. De Witt Douglas Kilgore examines Marvel Comics' changing representation of the mythical African nation, Wakanda, whilst Gerry Canavan makes an intriguing contribution to the scholarship of both superhero comics and Octavia Butler by exploring the extent to which Butler's early love of such comics may have influenced the Patternist novels, and to what degree her depiction of despotic, omnipotent beings may have been an explicit interrogation of the superhero myth in (white) American culture. Perhaps the most inspirational of these final articles, though, is John Rieder's account of the sf-influenced Sun Ra, which reverses the common (mis)perception of the jazz artist as possibly insane, to argue for Sun Ra's 'madness' as, firstly, an explicit description of the split-identity (or 'double-consciousness' as W.E.B. DuBois would have termed it) of the African-American, and secondly, as an ironic foregrounding of the true insanity at the heart of American society: its racism and social segregation.

The last of the articles in *Sf Now*, Dan Hassler-Forest's account of Afrofuturism in the music of Janelle Monáe, could also have fitted in well here. In the context of the present volume, Hassler-Forest's essay reconnects with the opening articles, by again drawing on Fisher's capitalist realism, but also argues for the emancipatory potential of joy through music. The cautiously optimistic ending not only complements the topic under study but is also indicative of the fine readings that make up the second half of *Sf Now*: the paired articles by Glyn Morgan and Mark Jerng on counterfactual histories; a second pairing, this time by Sherryl Vint and Tom Tyler on Animal Studies (the session that had excited me the most from the original conference); and lastly, Williams' own reading of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) in the light of a rewriting of Darko Suvin's

cognitive estrangement via the terms of purity and impurity as set out by the anthropologist Mary Douglas. This sequence of articles adds considerably to the varied content of *Sf Now*, also making it into a more representative account of the current state of sf criticism.

Nevertheless, as Bould and Williams acknowledge in their introduction, it is 'not exhaustive' and, in particular, we may want to question something of its diversity. As the editors admit, the tightness of the deadline meant that it became more difficult for female contributors to submit to the journal. Nonetheless, since all of the final contributors would most likely declare their feminist sympathies, it is surprising that feminism does not make a more explicit appearance amongst the progressive political positions of the volume. Equally, although the articles are sensitive to issues surrounding race, identity, class, ecology and animals, disability is largely conspicuous by its absence. This is not to chide a volume, whose importance like its predecessor is without doubt, but it is to raise one final question about the status of sf 'now'. Since the 'now' (modo) is always already in a state of flux, there will constantly be other temporalities, other identities, other nows. The challenge for sf, and for sf criticism, is to know how to meet these manifold possibilities.

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Andrew M. Butler investigates the meaning of fun with Eduardo Paolozzi
Paul March-Russell explores Africa sf and sf now with Mark Bould and Rhys Williams

In addition, there are reviews by:
Chelsea Adams, Cherith Baldry, Stephen Baxter, Lucas Boulding, Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Maia Clery, Iain Emsley, Richard Howard, Erik Jaccard, David Seed, Allen Stroud and Michelle K. Yost

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