Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction

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Editorial

Paul March-Russell

I'm writing this on 6th June. We are two days away from the UK electorate going to the polls for the third time in three years. Political rhetoric has descended not only into soundbites but *alliterative* soundbites – 'strong and stable', 'weak and wobbly', 'coalition of chaos'. On Saturday, there was the third terror attack in as many months. Donald Trump is now engaged in a bizarre twitter spat with the Mayor of London who, one would have thought, would have more pressing matters than dealing with someone who can't spell the word 'coffee'. And meanwhile, despite all obvious appearances as gales lash my office window, the planet slowly burns…

How are we to make sense of this air of unreality? What narratives can we fashion to give this unbearable lightness a semblance of coherence and meaning? In his Fourfold Library essay, the Canadian author Claude Lalumière describes the influences that have acted upon his latest work, which he describes as a 'mosaic'. The inclusion of Lavie Tidhar's *Central Station* on this year's Clarke Award shortlist – and, here, I am giving nothing away – has caused interest by not appearing to be bound to the conventions of a novel. At Tor.com, Angela Slatter has defended it by describing it as a 'mosaic novel'. What does this mean and how viable is it as a critical term, let alone as a mode of expression?

According to Jeffrey Prucher's *Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, the term was coined by George R.R. Martin in 1986 to describe the first of his collaborative ventures, *Wild Cards*. The definition that Prucher gives however, 'a book of short stories that share a common setting or characters and which taken together form a larger narrative', describes what short story critics, beginning with Forrest Ingram in 1971, have called a 'short story cycle'. Ivan Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (1852), James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) are perhaps the exemplary models for the narrative form. Subsequently, short story critics have elaborated upon Ingram's taxonomy, adding new labels such as 'short story sequence', 'composite novel' or, most paradoxically, 'short story novel'. But, never it seems, 'mosaic novel' which appears to be a coinage solely within the sf genre and unaware of parallel developments within short story criticism. Its coinage, however, made commercial sense – short story collections do not, historically, sell as well as novels, so calling *Wild Cards* a 'novel', however tenuous, was a pragmatic choice. The term, though, appears to contradict what

traditionally has been the central preoccupation of the novel; 'the large fresco' as the scholar of Arabic short fiction, Sabry Hafez, has described it.

So, if 'mosaic novel' is not exactly oxymoronic, it is a profoundly ironic concept, in the sense of sustaining two contradictory ideas within the same thought or expression. The German aesthetes, who laid the theoretical foundations for Romantic irony, had a relatively new (or shall we say updated?) form in mind for articulating the cruel absurdities of modern life – the *novelle* – as practiced by such writers as Clemens Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Heinrich von Kleist and Ludwig Tieck. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' (1817), besides serving as the template for Sigmund Freud's theory of the Uncanny, is also arguably a forerunner of the doubles – more specifically 'gynoids' – which proliferate in modern sf, most notably in such recent films as Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2015), as well as the figure of Carmel in Tidhar's book. Perhaps, then, 'mosaic novel' is itself just the latest update of a literary form, perched vicariously between longer and shorter narrative schema, and written in response to the vertigo of modern life. Perhaps sf has, however unwittingly, supplied us with another means of making sense of what our reality is and who we are.

These questions haunt the current exhibition, *Into the Unknown*, at the Barbican Centre which the SF Foundation has supported with material from our collection at the University of Liverpool. Besides my review of the exhibition, we have a round-up of recent conferences and, in addition to Claude Lalumière's piece, I am delighted to feature two short, previously untranslated essays on the subject of time travel by Zoran Živković. Maureen Speller remembers our friend and colleague at *Extrapolation*, Michael Levy, and our selection of articles are headed by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay's prize-winning contribution on Indian women's sf. Next year's prize has already been announced, when we will also be publishing a special commemorative issue on the Frankenstein myth.

Lastly, it is with regret that Andy Sawyer has announced his decision to stand down as Book Reviews Editor, a post he has held since 1996. Andy will be retiring from his position at the University of Liverpool next year and so has begun to make preparations for his departure. He won't be leaving *Foundation* just yet (thank goodness!) but we will need to have a new Book Reviews Editor in post before he leaves. If you are interested in the role, could you please send me at journal.editor@sf-foundation.org a letter of interest (no more than a side of A4), detailing your experience, your reasons for applying for the job, and what you can bring to the role. The deadline for applications is **midnight** on **Sunday, 1st October**. I hope to announce the new appointment in the winter issue of *Foundation*. Whilst I am on the subject of vacancies, please note that the SFF is also looking for a new treasurer. Please send all inquiries to the Chair, Graham Sleight, at chair@sf-foundation.org

Michael M. Levy (1950-2017)

Maureen Kincaid Speller

It was with great sadness I heard of the death of Michael M. Levy from cancer, on 4 April 2017. He was 66. Mike spent his working career as an academic at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, in the department of English and philosophy, where his particular areas of expertise included children's literature, science fiction and fantasy. However, his involvement with science fiction extended far beyond his university department. He was a prolific reviewer throughout his life, contributing reviews to many venues, from *Publishers Weekly* to the *New York Review of Science Fiction* to *Strange Horizons*, each review a careful distillation of his thoughts on the text he'd been reading. He was an active member of the International Association of the Fantastic in the Arts and the Science Fiction Research Association, and served a term as President for both organizations. He was also an editorial board member for the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* and the Managing Editor of *Extrapolation*. As author, Mike contributed articles to, among others, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2002) and *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009), as well as co-authoring *Children's Fantasy Literature: An Introduction* (2016) with Farah Mendlesohn. He received the SFRA's Thomas D. Clareson Award in 2007.

All of which tells you what Mike did but not who he was: he was kind, generous, humane, interested in everyone and everything, an excellent scholar and equally excellent company. I met Mike at Wiscon in the early 2000s, or possibly at a conference – I no longer remember, and anyway, once met it was as though we had known one another for years. I was always very glad to see him and his wife, Sandra J. Lindow at Wiscon, or more rarely on this side of the Atlantic. As so many people have said, Mike always wanted to know what you were doing, what you were reading, and had a way of making you feel even more excited the work you were doing as a result of that conversation, though he was always very modest about his own considerable achievements within the sf academic community. If anyone knew the meaning of the word 'service', it was Mike. Through IAFA and the SFRA, and in countless other ways, he did so much to make the sf community run more smoothly while encouraging it to expand its intellectual horizons. His death is a huge loss to our community.

I last met Mike at Loncon 3, in 2014, as he was serenely cruising around the conference centre on a mobility scooter, his usual cheerful self. He was, of course, in his element, catching up with people, discussing literature, doing what he always did, and doing it well, as he always did. It seems the best way to remember a man who devoted so much of his life to sharing his enthusiasm for science fiction and fantasy with others.

Foundation Essay Prize Winner 2017
Speculative Utopianism in Kalpavigyan: Mythologerm and Women's Science Fiction

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay (University of Oslo)

In 2013, during the public defence of my doctoral thesis on colonial-era Bangla science fiction, my 'opponent', Professor Farah Mendlesohn, asked a question that at the time I could only sidestep because of my choice of data. The question was simple enough – why was there a complete lack of women writers in my research? I had just written sixty years of a history, after all, without women authors! But I had gone over thousands of pages of obscure and better-known colonial-era pulp magazines and texts in Bangla – which had so many women contributors – to find traces of texts with 'science fiction' possibilities, and I had found none! Surely, I argued, it wasn't a certain kind of blindness that made me choose my texts. The one author we do know about, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, wrote her famous sf short story 'Sultana's Dream' (1905) in English and not Bangla. What was I, the mere literary historian, to do? Here I was, the 'postcolonial' critic writing back to the Anglo-American canon – or writing into it, the story of another genre, kalpavigyan, which is roughly analogous to science fiction (Chattopadhyay 2013a), something that I believe is an important exercise, yet caught in the trap of historical data.

As a question, it has bothered me ever since, as, thinking about it afterwards, I could have done things somewhat differently. For instance, I could have reflected on the alternate possibilities of a female kalpavigyan and the reasons for its absence. There could have been a 'Judith Shakespeare' – there was already an 'Aphra Behn' in Begum Rokeya. For it was not in the least pertinent that she wrote in English except in that narrow methodological choice – and I had after all looked at writers who wrote in English but these were British authors. Besides, almost everything else she wrote was in Bangla; her entire worldview was shaped as much by Bangla language and culture – for instance her use of common Bangla metaphors even in 'Sultana's Dream' – as the influence of the European Enlightenment and the Bengal Renaissance universalism of her time. There was also the question of Muslim South Asia and its contribution in this period, and why Rokeya remains a revered legendary figure in modern day Bangladesh and Indian Bengal. Also, unlike most of the figures I looked at, Rokeya's work was already studied in an established scholarly apparatus (Bagchi 2012) – even though her work had not been considered in any great length in the context of science fiction from Bengal (my work, after all, was the first book-length study of the phenomenon), or even the two available studies of science fiction in Indian English where her work rightfully belongs (Banerjee

2010; Khan 2015).

In this essay I wish to engage with a story of kalpavigyan in a form different from the historical one I have used previously. This is not an academic exercise but an exploratory personal essay of the methodological problem of narrative that I am coming to terms with as a young researcher as well as a fan of the genre: it is written in the spirit of the root of the word 'essay' and perhaps of the *Foundation* essay prize. This problem is the problem of histories made absent in official histories of genres, and how historical arcs are developed in terms of causality, sources, marketplaces and origins (Rieder 2010), especially since my own work on Bangla kalpavigyan attempted to describe such an alternative arc in terms of postcolonial studies (2013b). I trace in this article a different historical arc, that of a specific form of kalpavigyan imbued with what I term speculative utopianism, the best of which is sustained unarguably in the present moment by women authors from India or of Indian origin who write in English. I reopen my query into the question of the 'mythologerm' from a former essay (Chattopadhyay 2016) but my goal is to extend its referential range to account for a history of another kind of struggle that I did not contend with therein: namely, how does kalpavigyan by women writers deal with the problem of myth? This article is in three parts. In the first, I place Begum Rokeya's story in the context of the Bengal Renaissance and its position in the Indian IWE (Indian Writing in English) canon of kalpavigyan. In the second, I investigate Vandana Singh's argument for the creative potential of myth in her 'speculative manifesto' and a short story. In the third, I explore two short stories by Manjula Padmanabhan and Swapna Kishore to suggest some preliminary observations on the narrative arc of kalpavigyan.

'Speculative utopianism': The Dream of a Female Tradition

When Begum Rokeya published her short story 'Sultana's Dream,' in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* in 1905 there was already a genre megatext in formation in what is called the Bengal Renaissance – a period that corresponds roughly from the mid-nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth, which saw extraordinary and rapid cultural and scientific development in Bengal (Dasgupta 2007). The pioneering future histories written in Bengal, Kylas Chunder Dutt's 'A Journal of Forty Eight Hours of the Year 1945' (1835) and his cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt's 'The Republic of Orissa: A Page from the Annals of the 20th Century' (*Saturday Evening Harakuru,* 1845) were already more than half a century old (Dutt 2005). Alternate histories with motifs of inversions, such as Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's 'Anguriyo Binimoy' (*The Exchange of Rings*, 1862), and Jagadish Bose's 'Niruddesher Kahini' ('The Missing One', 1896) had also been written in Bangla. From a larger global context, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's*

Travels (1726) and its translations (Sen 2015: 27), and the work of Jules Verne had made an impact. There was certainly no dearth of satire that blended with scientific curiosity in Bangla fiction either, for instance in the work of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the giant of nineteenth-century Bangla literature and the author of the first novel in Indian English. The strategy of simultaneously appropriating the discourse of technoscience as a tool for emancipation and suspicious rejection of its authoritarian control were just as easily available; for instance, Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's stories had made much of such connections in the 1890s. Amongst women writers who wrote in Indian English, there was the inspiring figure of the poet Toru Dutt, who also wrote a novel in French. Yet what Rokeya produced in her own work was a fiction that was unlike any produced in the region before hers. It could even be said that after Bose it was probably the first real instance of 'Indian sf'. Here was a narrative that was not about lament or loss, that did not privilege any unique regional ethos and that was laced with a humour that was effective for its subtlety and not in its astringency.

True to universalist aspirations of the Bengal Renaissance period but belonging to a space outside its gendered – predominantly masculine and Hindu – rhetoric, its feminist position was also radical for its time in its intersectionality. The now well-known story has a relatively simple plot. The protagonist Sultana falls asleep and is transported to an alternative dreamworld called Ladyland, where she is guided by a quasi-missionary figure – Sister Sara – and led through the alternative rules of the place. In Ladyland, the men stay behind the 'veil', and their general uselessness confines them to their homes. The women have taken over all aspects of this idyllic society, which runs entirely on solar power, has advanced weather control, no necessity for barbaric laws or rules of war. There are aspects to it one may find questionable from a twenty-first century perspective; for instance, it upends hierarchies by granting agency to the female and removing the male from social relations in a deeply segregated space where women cannot even see men other than their 'sacred relations', whilst its version of utopian harmony with nature seems more like a more efficient community management than any real harmony. But the purpose of this tale is not to build an alternative but to develop the semantic range of utopianism to include women and their everyday struggles into the cherished narrative of progress in the Bengal Renaissance (Sarkar 2003). Its real innovation is also in the alternative imaginary of a scientific space – to project a space for women in science at a time when women were generally excluded from academic positions, and not just in India, while not abandoning the socio-cultural referents that are deemed integral to the religious and moral fabric of society. Rokeya's major contribution to the Bengal Renaissance was in

the field of education, especially for Muslim women, and she also established the first school for Muslim girls in Bengal – the template for which is also to be found in her other 1924 utopian work, *Padmarag* (Bagchi 2009).

The short story contains the seeds of her many projects and is a unique document of speculative utopianism. One sees the utopian idea of a university for and by women, which engages in the scientific research that allows these women to escape from their domestic captivity. In the mysterious figure of Sister Sara, one sees the impact of colonial missionary education, English language education, as well as scientific education: which formed the bedrock of the cultural mobility of the Bengal Renaissance intellectuals (Bellenoit 2007; Vishwanathan 2000). Yet there is no missionary preaching here, nor is there any religious dogma or religion, even with a belief in an absolute God. There is no colonial machinery either, which is actively dismantled in the narrative. There is a Wellsian heat-ray in the field of war, but the goal of developing weaponry is not colonialist expansion but political autonomy. The women of Ladyland do not 'covet other people's land', nor 'the Kohinoor '– the reference to 'the Kohinoor' is doubly loaded, for its status as a colonial acquisition that became a part of the British crown jewels as well as the many echoes of *Gulliver's Travels* in the story. While refugees are given shelter as a matter of principle, Ladyland is also a closed sovereign space, and it does not even engage in trade with other countries where women are not given equal status (which would be true of much of the whole world at the time of its writing.)

It is significant that the only passage in and out of Ladyland seems to be through a dream – by and for women. Dream narratives were not by itself a new element in the repertoire of the science fiction of the time, including in Bengal. If one places Rokeya's story in context, then Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's wistful counterfactual dream narrative of 'Swapnalabdha Bharatbarsher Itihas' ('History of India as revealed in a Dream,' 1862), which explored an unfolding of history where Hindus came to rule over India instead of the British, preceded it. Following Rokeya's narrative, there was also Jagadanada Ray's 'Shukra Bhraman' ('Travels to Venus,' 1914). Bose too rewrote his 1896 short story in 1921 to include a mysterious dream narrative as part of the story. He also incidentally reflects at some length on the position of women, which, even if not directly, had been the result of the impact of works such as 'Sultana's Dream'.

Within the global context, psychoanalysis, oneirocriticism and their many predecessors were central to modernist aesthetics. Dreams offered ways to imagine and live past the structures of daily life, lent fluidity to reason, and above everything else, allowed a 'science' of unvoiced desires. While it was not until Girindrashekhar Bose's work and the Indian Psychoanalytic Society (founded 1922) that Freudianism came into wider cultural circulation in colonial

Bengal, there were already other indigenous frameworks to work with, and dream revelations held a central place in many religious traditions, Christian, Islamic and Hindu. To employ dreams as a means of voicing desire may have been structurally available, but it is their use for women's education, scientific training, and ultimately emancipation that makes 'Sultana's Dream' radically futuristic. Moreover, there is a curious reference to another dream within the story that adds to the hilarity of tone – it is the men who are described as dreaming 'sentimental dreams' in the context of war and nationalism, while the women are only interested in practical solutions. Sister Sara, the Lady Principal and the Queen form a different kind of practical trinity in Ladyland, with each invested with a different kind of power over the domains of society: familial, scientific, and political, respectively. Written in one of the most turbulent years in Bengal's history, the year of the first partition of Bengal on religious lines by the British colonial government, it is important to note that the story sidesteps all discussions of religious and communal divides and focuses instead on gender as a means to rethink political autonomy and female agency. Speculative utopianism allowed Rokeya to dream an inversion of the world as it was and also dream of a world as it could be – if only one would take a different approach to the problem itself.

A Century Later: The Mythologerm and the Speculative Manifesto

Rokeya's foundational text laid the seeds of an alternative way of considering a tradition of speculative utopianism. Yet it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that many of its ideas could return to the public space. For one, if it was the beginning of an alternative tradition of women's speculative utopian fiction, it was beset by three problems: that of its use of English, a masculinist discourse of science itself as a means of controlling nature, and the burden of tradition which in Rokeya's case could only be escaped through a dream narrative. I will return to the dream narrative later, but in this section I wish to explore the framing problem for these issues.

I have argued that the central thread that connects many works of kalpavigyan of the twentieth century is their dependence on forms of mythmaking, be it the myths to be found in epics, or the political myths of a nation state and/or cultural purity and origin, or, most particularly, the myth of the scientific past. These reflections were heavily influenced not only by my study of kalpavigyan and science fiction, but especially by Vandana Singh's short and incisive 'A Speculative Manifesto' (2008) at a critical moment in my growth as a science fiction researcher. I first came across this text sometime in 2010, but many of its ideas were discussed in the first Indian science fiction writers' workshop (modelled on the Clarion West) held at IIT-Kanpur in India in June 2009, where

Singh, as well as Anil Menon taught (Menon 2009). The aim of the workshop was to groom a new generation of science fiction writers and to create the awareness of a speculative mode that could be used by writers from the subcontinent. Thus when it came to definitional questions of tradition of science fiction in India vis-a-vis the Anglo American science fiction that most participants in the workshop were already familiar with, the question of 'myth' or specifically Indian myth and epic literature came up as a possible way to describe the uniqueness of Indian sf. It also led to an anthology, *Breaking the Bow* (2012) inspired by such mythmaking (Menon 2012: x). The academic theory of the mythologerm is the child of fandom and authorial discussions.

As someone with a first-hand experience of Brahmanical traditions and their problems, and also excited about Anglo-American science fiction, the use of Indian myth – for subversion or otherwise – did not feel particularly useful. Yes, it was evident that the epic narratives had been used and reused over and again in Indian fiction, and that these myths pervaded everyday Indian existence. Some of these myths were useful tales, offering entertainment and education. But there was an insidious aspect to these myths: these tales were often appropriated in jingoist rhetoric in describing mythical ancient Indian glory, a problem partly spawned by Orientalist machinery (Lele 1993).

On studying Indian kalpavigyan in greater detail, the problem seemed to be far-ranging, especially when it came to the discourse of science. It is undoubtedly true that Indian science and philosophy has made significant contributions to the ancient, medieval and modern world. But as the noted scientist (and science fiction author) Jayant Narlikar has argued, genuine achievements are coated in a layer of mythmaking for political purposes, and this is particularly so when things such as flying chariots, ancient weaponry, travel between worlds and so on, common to Indian epics, are read as the evidence of a more advanced ancient Indian science, destroyed successively by successive waves of Islamic rule and British Raj (Narlikar 2003). (Narlikar incidentally also spoke about these problematic tendencies as part of his speech at the same science fiction workshop). In science studies, critics such as Meera Nanda have also written about the unholy alliance between constructivist approaches to science and nationalist mythmaking (Nanda 1998). Could there be a space for cross-cultural, intersectional, speculative utopianism that one could see in a text such as Begum Rokeya's in a fiction that actively embraced such specifically 'Hindu' myths as an ur-text?

In her speculative manifesto, Singh goes back to the question of myths, calling the genres of science fiction and fantasy the modern-day descendants of ancient epics. Indeed, she also recognizes Rokeya's 'Sultana's Dream' in that fantastical tradition. For Singh, the value of myth comes from its reactivation

of a sense of wonder, of being part of a cosmos that transcends the individual, and that symbol and metaphor are the ways to experience this sense of wonder. This sense of wonder is more than the tale; it is the insertion of the human into the experiential reality of mystery. And if there is a transcendental universalism, then it is the sharing of this mystery. Rabindranath Tagore's iconic poem, 'Mahabiswe Mahakashe' (1896), speaks of the human wandering through the universe and all of time imbued with this sense of wonder. Brian Aldiss makes this wandering a part of his definition of science fiction, whilst Olaf Stapledon's last man wonders about it in a conclusion that leads inevitably to the search for the Star Maker. Such speculation and use of myth then is a way to move past the boundaries of time, to explore the question of entanglement of many layers of time past and present, of myths that are also 'the battle that rages within each of us' (Singh 2013: 203). This was also the modernist obsession – for instance in the work of Mircea Eliade and Carl Jung – with myths as universal structures, which for all their particulars were actually shared tokens that transcended cultural boundaries. Does myth then belong to no one and everyone? And what purpose would such a use of myth – which can be tied to an often restrictive religio-ethical discourse – serve in the speculative utopian mode?

Singh's own fiction gives an insight into the use of myth as a strategic tool. While she uses myth repeatedly in her fiction, there is one particularly rich story that I have always found intriguing: 'Infinities' (2008), published in the same collection as the speculative manifesto. It is the story of a mathematics teacher, Abdul Karim, whose only dream is to see infinity. There is a difference between the overt uses of myth that one finds in the stories of collections such as *Breaking the Bow*, and the subtle way in which science and the belief in a reality greater than oneself flow together that belongs to the mythic dimension for Singh. The opening epigraph by the mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan, 'an equation means nothing to me unless it expresses a thought of God', sets the stage for a consideration of an infinity that is greater than which can really be captured. Karim is a man who is haunted by angels, or *farishte* in Arabic, whose reading of the Quran is linked to his study of mathematical infinities in Cantor, Reimann and Gödel, but is also linked to a deep sense of historical tradition and its inscription of time. Karim is described as reading the work of Al Kindi and Al Ghazali, Ibn Sina and Iqbal, the mathematics of ancient India, Bhaskara and Aryabhata, and the Vedas. For the mythologerm is always about a renegotiation of historical truth in myth. It is in its deep relation to science, to a narrative of human knowledge that transcends any one culture, be it Egyptian or Greek or Indian or Arab or European or American or any other, that the universalism of the mysterious quest for self-definition in science fiction ultimately finds any meaning.

There is a palpable sense of sadness in this narrative. For not only is it a science fiction narrative dealing with the notion of infinity, it is also a narrative of a world of deep religious conflicts. Karim, as a Muslim, and his best friend, Gangadhar, are continuously divided because of religious riots, the burden of history, of colonial conflict, of Hindu resentment against Islamic rule; these and other such deep divisions are part of the narrative's texture. Mathematics, universality and infinity – the history of mathematics itself – serve as a means to escape the nightmare of political history. The most religious section of the story is also perhaps, paradoxically, the most non-religious one, where Karim sees infinity and the metacosmos. For a brief moment, there is an elevation from the everyday into an experience that is in the form of scientific dream or even ecstasy; poignantly, the section is marked with an epigraph from the eighteenth-century Sufi mystic Bulleh Shah. But the moment collapses, and Karim is rushed back to a collapsing world of Hindu-Muslim conflicts. The climax of the narrative is when Karim is faced with the death of an unnamed woman who is fatally injured on the street in a riot, and it jolts him briefly out of his mathematical reverie into a realization that the shadows he has seen are not angels, and that he himself is not a prophet of any divine mathematical truth. The story does briefly reconstitute, but it is as fragments shored against ruins, both historical and personal.

It is clear that in Singh's fiction, myths need to be constantly questioned and fragmented to move beyond them. If one cannot as an Indian live beyond the pervasiveness of myth, then it is the pervasiveness of myth where the questioning must always begin. Myth, in this sense, is the pharmakon. My choice of story for discussion may seem odd, given that many of Singh's other stories, including those in the collection such as 'Thirst' or 'The Room on the Roof', deal more directly with myth and their subversion, or even her novella *Distances* (2008), which focuses more intensely on mathematics. For me, the importance of this story lies in its engagement specifically with three kinds of historical burdens that form the core of an ordinary understanding of the mythologerm.

The first of these is the understanding of myth in kalpavigyan as a reactivation of specifically Hindu narratives. Singh's use of the notion of myth here expands the range of referents that may be linked to the term. The second is that the mythologerm in kalpavigyan would also be linked specifically to the history of Indian science. Again, Singh expands the framework to an understanding of science as a transcultural but historical process of knowledge creation, dissemination and transfer: which range in this narrative from Ancient India to the Golden Age of Islamic science through the Renaissance and European advancements. The range of references promotes a narrative of knowledge that is speculatively utopian, even if the elision of this narrative in everyday history

may rarely offer any utopian comfort. Third, the mythologerm in kalpavigyan is also linked to a sphere of knowledge that is ultimately transcendental – the *gyan* or transcendental knowledge as opposed to *vigyan* or knowledge of the material world – and Singh offers here a perfect example of that which is both inscribed as knowledge but also outside its reach: infinity.

The use of English is also of relevance here to the construction of tradition, for it at once allows multiple layers in which such questioning of myth may happen. For one, it reconfigures the structures of authority and power invested in the classical languages of myth. For Rokeya, writing in English itself was an empowering educational exercise, because it was not the local Bangla that inhibited non-local sharing of a utopian vision, nor was it the Perso-Arabic voice of religious tradition and education, nor even, at its time Sankritized, Urdu. But this English, used by Rokeya and by Singh, is also a reconfiguration of what may or may not be said in the language when spoken by a person who is both a native and non-native speaker at the same time – writing back but belonging to it too. When Rokeya builds her central conceit of 'mardana' as a replacement of 'zenana' (Persian/Urdu for the place where women were secluded at home) in her tale, she playfully fractures the possibilities of English but also her own linguistic registers. In Singh's stories, there is an entire range of concepts that are the product of the multiple worlds that she inhabits, from contemporary physics and mathematics, to ecological thought, to classical myth, to Bollywood songs, which continuously refashion what it means to be a cosmopolitan citizen. This is Anglophone without being Anglocentric. One can say that it is this synthesis which is utopian, an attempt at conversation across linguistic and cultural divides itself that leads to the enrichment of literature.

The Redefinition of Kalpavigyan: Myths and Dreams and the Return of Voice

The speculative utopian arc of kalpavigyan, which I have traced here, is specifically concerned with the use of English as a tool for investigating and stretching the boundaries of a reality in which it may not naturally feel at home. For one, the use of English is meant to challenge the hegemonic strands of language or culture to which many of these authors natively belong, for which reason many of them don't like the label 'Indian' for their fiction (Menon et al 2013), or rather, they don't quite know what to do with it beyond its use as a marketing label. The opening-up of the internet, whose primary global currency is English, allows many of these voices to emerge as well. English is unmoored from indigenous constraints, including the burden of orthodoxies in myth, but at the same time, it is a colonial appropriation, and a framework in which science operates. It is simultaneously a language of freedom, with the added hint of

utopia for its ability to enter into exchanges in the scientific marketplace, but also at the same time a potential mine for deracination and non-understandings as one's words and voice travels the global literary marketplace. English is therefore consistently broken down, given new idioms and made to fit the rhythms of other languages.

Because the tradition here is of IWE fiction, I want to turn to two other stories to look at how they engage with questions of bureaucracy and freedom in kalpavigyan while playing with myth. Manjula Padmanabhan's 'A Government of India Undertaking' (1984, republished in the anthology *Three Virgins and Other Stories*, 2013) is a Kafkaesque narrative that begins with a conceit squarely in the frame of kalpavigyan: the protagonist comes across a 'Bureau of Reincarnation and Transmigration of Souls – A Government of India Undertaking.' The story follows the protagonist's efforts to find for herself a better life through a soul transfer, not after death but rather within this one; that is, to move her soul from her current body to another, richer and more comfortable one. Making her way through the labyrinthine bureaucracy in a matter-of-fact way, moving through long queues, filling innumerable forms and so on as one would in any government office, the protagonist knows that at least a part of this will involving bribing her way through to this better life. She offers her wealth and her body to these bureaucrats for relocating her soul. She comes to the realization that the Bureau deals with human life across religions and nationalities as well as all other life, including plant and animal life. Finally, she meets the humble peon, Gopal – a name of Krishna as the cowherd – who leads her to the mysterious seventh floor (of a building which has only five floors). She briefly experiences an escape from her physical body, as her soul wanders across space, and ultimately returns to her own body, settled in her home.

This curious and humorous story is in many ways a direct descendant of 'Sultana's Dream.' Once again there is a dream narrative in which the protagonist experiences a possibility that is otherwise unavailable: to have a life different from that which one has at present. Humour and satire, which are the dominant aesthetic flavour of a lot of kalpavigyan, are also foregrounded here as a strategy of negotiation with structures of power. In its negotiation of myth and reincarnation however, as well as the use of the peon/guide figure of Gopal, Padmanabhan's narrative is embedded more significantly in the mythologerm. If the discovery of true infinities for Singh's protagonist lies in a dream, here it is the possibility of escape for the female body from its everyday objectified self. The promise of rebirth is itself a mechanism that keeps the structures of oppression intact, and the Gods that promise salvation are also absent except in this dream logic. In the epic *Mahabharata*, it is Krishna who promises to protect Draupadi and preserves her when all else abandon her in the courtroom;

here too is Gopal promising to stay by the side of the protagonist through the whole ordeal of transmigration. The humour masks a deep disillusionment with bureaucracy and religion, and is ultimately crushing for its realization that there is no real escape, only the illusion thereof.

Not coincidentally, *Escape* (2008) is also the title of a novel by Padmanabhan where she explores a future India where women have been all but exterminated. This no-exit scenario is hinted at the beginning of the story itself, when the clerk at the doorway of the Bureau is playing with a cockroach that he has put on an elaborate obstacle course, with the cockroach led along by the promise of food that it will never have access to, because at the end it is killed by a government-issue straight pin. The protagonist's return to her body then is almost a victory, because the dreamworld – strongly patriarchal, hierarchical and authoritarian – does not promise any redemption either. While the narrative is not utopian in its theme or in its lack of any plausible alternative visions, its utopianism comes from its rejection of religious comfort or even governmental regulation as any possible means of finding an alternative space. It is in these aspects that it hearkens back to the tradition I have highlighted so far.

Swapna Kishore's 'Dream Girl' (2011) is one of the most powerful narratives in contemporary speculative utopianism in IWE kalpavigyan. This flash fiction, published in the prestigious science fiction section of *Nature*, puts forward another vision of bureaucratic control over the female body. This time, it is in the imagination that is under siege by bureaucracy in its nexus with capitalism, where the protagonist Alia is fighting the burden of myth itself. In this nightmarish world, thought is copyrighted, and dreams are studied for copyright violation under the World Copyright Law. The floating intertextual world of signifiers that humans exist in and borrow from is subject to screening, and violations are heavily penalized. The story is not however about control, but about Alia's efforts to resist being classified and beaten by the system. Chased by random audits, Alia continues to persist in dreaming up the adventures of her alter-ego, Rita Razor, fighting plagiarists and copyright law simultaneously. When Alia takes her graphic novel ideas to a publishing company executive, who pushes her to speak about her creative history while trying to steal her character, she quickly realizes the value of her creation – which to her is more than simple economic value. This value is the right to dream, to hold on to the fabric of uniqueness that defines the individual creation. For while the burden of myth and of tradition, of genre histories and megatexts – Rita is quickly, and for Alia unfairly, compared to Harry Potter – are omnipresent, Rita is the heroine of a space where these ghosts are exorcised. Ghosts, one may add, are used as a mythical instrument of control that commences with the epic *Ramayana*. Rita is also a homophone of Sita, defending herself with pepper spray from the

Ravana analogue in the dream, running through the forest with Maricha that is now Bambi, while Hanu-man swings about. Alia leaves the narrative seeking a book on current copyright laws to fight monsters, both real and mythical. While everything else is copyrighted, the fights – or the fighter – are not.

Conclusion

In this article, I have hinted at the possibility of describing another arc of kalpavigyan that is exclusively concerned with the experiences of women authors as they negotiate the burdens of gender, myth, language, and the nation state. I am keenly aware that it merely scratches the surface of what such a study might look like. For one, I have hardly touched upon much of the fascinating fiction by the authors I have so briefly explored, but more importantly, there are many other histories that are part of this arc. The role of different feminist movements in literary historiography as well as science epistemology, biopolitics and eco-criticism play an important part in describing the work of late twentieth century writers such as Padmanabhan, Singh, Kishore, Payal Dhar, Shweta Narayan, Priya Sarukkai Chhabria, Rimi B. Chatterjee and others. The changing nature of politics and the rise of right-wing movements in India are an important aspect when studying the oppressive nature of myth. While some of these authors have been studied in isolation, there is as yet no focused study of the whole group of contemporary women authors and their specific role in constructing the possibilities of contemporary IWE science fiction. Another important historical thread would be the strong presence of women editors – for instance, in Anglo-American fandom – and their role in establishing newer avenues for fiction publication. The role of feminist presses, such as Zubaan and Aqueduct Press, as well as online webzines such as *Strange Horizons*, and their particular histories would also be a part of this narrative arc. This needs to be a book-length study – all I have presented here is the necessity of a closer look.

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Endnote

[1]I ignore here Ray's claim that he wrote the story in 1892 and only published it many years later because of the internal evidence in the story that seems to justify a later composition date.

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Utopia and the Countryside in Wells' Scientific Romances

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In the closing passages of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), H.G. Wells presents a series of ambiguous and conflicting images. As the narrator Edward Prendick walks down the streets of London after his harrowing experiences with the 'Beast People' of Moreau's island, he tries in vain to resolve his conflicting impressions of his fellow humans: one minute, they are 'men and women for ever, perfectly reasonable creatures', the next, 'animals half wrought into the outward image of human souls' (Wells 1977: 158). He has encountered the thin line separating civilization from bestiality, and in the end must remove himself from 'the confusion of cities and multitudes' for fear his fellow humans may at any moment throw off the veneer of civility and descend into barbarism (159). The foundations of such society have, for Prendick, been irrevocably shaken, and so his resulting agoraphobia serves to demonstrate the moral impulses at the heart of the story: the need for a sense of social conscience when undertaking scientific research.

In Wells' novel, we are thus presented with two powerful impressions: of nature as a space of arbitrary and bestial violence, and of rational progress as an amoral and dehumanizing force best represented by the totalizing, bureaucratic, yet superficially refined space of the city. It is significant that Prendick's final place of repose is in 'the broad free downland', or, in other words, in the countryside, situated between these two extremes. The countryside, neither wholly natural nor wholly artificial, offers an effective space from and in which to explore the nature of the nineteenth-century dream of western progress, whose mechanical logic and Social Darwinist outlook can be neither wholly accepted, lest the amorality of Moreau's experiments be also embraced, nor wholly rejected, lest humanity revert to the level of the blood-thirsty Beast People. It functions as a liminal space from which Prendick may safely view the alternately cogent and volatile movements of, on the one hand, unfeeling progress and, on the other, bloody nature. In its final image of a haunted Prendick escaping to the countryside, the novel thus offers a dystopian warning against amorality in the pursuit of scientific goals, but one that rejects also any reflexive visions of romanticized nature as an alternative source of utopian revitalization.

This essay will examine the space of the countryside in Wells' scientific romances, and its role in mediating the utopian or dystopian potential of his scientific novums. Although Wells' more overt utopian thinking frequently places emphasis on technology and the scientific exploitation of nature as the means by which the lot of humanity may ultimately be improved, his scientific romances often display a highly ambiguous attitude towards technological and scientific

progress, depicting it as a source of social disruption and destruction as much as of enlightenment and utopian potential. This ambiguity regarding the role of scientific and technological development as a means of attaining utopia is reflected in the most common spatial setting used by Wells in his romances, the countryside. Situated between the squalid waste and machinic oppression of the city on the one side and the irrational brutality of pure nature on the other, the countryside figures in Wells' romances as a liminal utopian space, a site in which his various scientific novums become imbued with a conflicting mix of utopian and dystopian values. I will here explore the way in which nature, the city, and the countryside figure in Wells' utopian thought, before examining in more detail two of Wells' romances, *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The Foods of the Gods* (1904), in which the countryside operates as a space of both progress and reaction, in which technological developments come to figure as symbols of both utopian desire for and dystopian warning against the 'dangers and opportunities' of scientific progress (Parrinder 2005: 3). The image of technological and scientific progress that thus emerges from Wells' romances is neither uncritically positive nor negative, but instead tends towards a nuanced understanding of the mutually dependent relationship between technology, utopia, and society.

I am influenced in this approach to utopia by Carl Freedman, who discusses the 'utopian dimension' of sf in his influential *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000). All sf texts, Freedman argues, can be conceived of as utopian, insofar as each such text involves the 'creation of a new world', whether entire new societies or simply a novum of 'such radical and profound newness' that it generates the potential for radical change within an otherwise familiar social context (Freedman 2000: 88). The 'cognitive and critical nature of science-fictional estrangement', he argues, thus imbues the genre with radical utopian (88). I here follow Freedman in identifying the cognitive deviations of the sf novum with utopian impulses: the novum, to the extent that it serves to express, in terms borrowed from Raymond Williams, either a desire for or a warning against the reality depicted or implied by the text, can be understood to always express some kind of utopian or dystopian impulse (Williams 2010: 98); what Ernst Bloch terms a 'utopian function', realized within and fleshed out by the social context in which the novum appears (Bloch 1995: 142-7).

Nature and the city in Wells

According to Freedman, Wells is 'the first key figure in the synthesis of science fiction and the literary utopia' (Freedman 2000: 108). Indeed, Wells' importance to the development of sf need not be emphasized: he is, as Darko Suvin notes, the 'turning point' (Suvin 1975: 106–15). He is also a writer who devoted a

considerable amount of his writing career to pondering the question of utopia, to examining, as he writes in *A Modern Utopia* (1904), 'the freer air, the ampler spaces of the thing that perhaps might be' (Wells 2017: 207). Railing against the stuffy conformities and strict mores of Victorian England, and expressing himself in terms later familiar from Suvin, Wells insisted that the 'Modern Utopia' that was to be erected in such ample spaces would be 'not static but kinetic', 'vivid and credible' – it was to be a world of 'uncertain seasons, sudden catastrophes, antagonistic diseases, and inimical beasts and vermin, […] of men and women with like passions, like uncertainties of mood and desire to our own' (208; see also Suvin 1979: 45). It would be, in other words, a real and living world, in contrast to the 'perfect and static States' that dominated in the ages 'before Darwin quickened the pace of the world' (207).

Indeed, *A Modern Utopia* offers a useful summation of the overall shape of Wells' utopian thought. Here we find, for example, the bare-footed and unshaven figure of the 'great talker', a man for whom all 'houses and tramways and things' mar the 'natural bloom' of the earth, and for whom shoes are nothing but 'artificial hoofs' (265–68). The arbitrary ecological distinctions and decrees held in the stoutest reverence by this 'apostle of Nature' – 'No animal substance inside, no vegetable without' – and worshipped as variants of 'natural law' offer a caricature of extreme nature-worship, and the inclusion of such a satirical figure in his utopian world illustrates Wells' forthright rejection of any notions of 'The Need of a Return to Nature' (267-70). Rather, the erratic brutality and convulsive upheavals associated by Wells with the natural world in, for example, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, or elsewhere in 'The Star' (1897), suggests that a simple shift to a more 'natural' mode of living does not point the way – as it does in William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890) or W.H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age* (1890), both of which Wells read (see Wells 1994: 120) – to either a more innocent and benign mode of life or to automatic salvation from the nightmare of 'progress'. Raymond Williams emphasizes this when he contrasts Wells' various utopian visions with that of Morris's novel. Williams notes that whereas Morris's England of the year 2003 is heuristic, his transformative social revolution underpinned by humanist values, Wells' rationalist and progressive utopias instead emphasize the kind of 'social engineering', 'rapidly developing technology', and 'clean, orderly, efficient and planned (controlled) society' that correspond more closely with Bellamy's Boston of the year 2000 in *Looking Backward* (1887) (Williams 2010: 105). Wells' utopian visions are underpinned not merely, or even chiefly, by social revolution, but instead by rapid technological evolution and the widespread democratization of scientific inquiry under a benevolent world government. Hence the learned Samurai, the 'voluntary nobility' of *A Modern Utopia*, as well as the universal love and pursuit

of knowledge among the Utopians of *Men Like Gods* (1923).

In contrast to the return to nature envisioned by Morris and Hudson, it is rather the 'growth of the great cities', Wells writes, that is 'the essential phenomenon […] that has characterized the nineteenth century' (Wells 2006: ch. II). Yet Wells, refuting, as in his rejection of Marxism, any tendency towards of historical determinism, also resists any uncritical acceptance of historical trends as a basis for future development. If *A Modern Utopia* criticizes naïve pastoralism as a legitimate source of utopian desire, *When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899) offers a similar criticism of rationalist urban progress conducted without recourse to either moral misgivings or the need for positive human development. The London of the twenty-third century is a vast city conglomerate, described as the 'logical consequence of an epoch of invention' in which the 'common man now is a helpless unit' (Wells 1994: 165). There is here a critical awareness of the dangers of over-rationalization at odds, despite the apparent similarities between the two writers noted above, with the 'systematic grading of workers' in Bellamy's 'industrial army' (Bellamy 2009: 72), which has always the potential to morph into dystopian bureaucracy. Wells' disdain for the squalor of city life can also be seen at the close of *A Modern Utopia*, when the utopian travellers find themselves back upon the 'the 'grey and gawky waste of asphalte' of 'dirt-littered' Trafalgar Square (Wells 2017: 395–96). The cities of Wells' texts, and particularly London, are consistently depicted in such manner, that is, as squalid spaces detrimental to the proper flourishing of human life. In *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), for example, London is described as 'that sombre city of smoke and drifting darkness' (Wells 1977: 675), while its citizens in *The War of the Worlds* (1898) end the novel as 'phantasms in a dead city, the mockery of life in a galvanized body' (Wells 1977: 827), and those in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as superficially civilized beasts. It is telling that, in one of his few utopian depictions of city life, that of London in *A Modern Utopia*, Wells paints the city neither as a centre of commerce nor as a grid of political power, but instead as a centre of education supported by an efficient transport infrastructure: the train to London, trotting along at 'two hundred miles an hour', is described in loving detail, while attention in the city itself dwells upon the 'mighty University', 'stupendous libraries, and a mighty organisation of museums' (Wells 2017: 332–34). These two features, education and transport, form the central pillars upon which Wells would see utopia built.

In his scientific romances, however, it is rarely the cities with which Wells is primarily concerned. Rather, his novels are more often situated in the countryside, the small villages, and the parishes, populated with provincial characters isolated from the great and dynamic centres of commerce and expressing themselves in a distinct idiomatic dialect reproduced, it seems, with equal parts parody and

affection. Yet the patterns of thought of these characters are often as stubbornly rigid and unyielding to change as any captain of industry, while the countryside presents its own ingrained power structures, related to yet distinct from those of the city, as barriers on the path to utopia. If there is no possibility in Wells of a glib utopian 'return to nature', to idyllic georgic images of wholesome rural life as the antidote to the ills of the contemporary age, this opposition stems partially from an acute understanding of the extent to which rural England was implicit in maintaining the power structures of commercial England. As noted by Williams, Wells, 'more clearly than anyone before him, saw the connection between the ruling power of the city and the ruling power of the country-houses' (Williams 1975: 230). For Wells, he notes, the cities were simply 'an outgrowth, a projection, of that simpler order' represented by the rural gentry which, like 'industrialism and urbanism were the cancerous results of an outgrown but still rigid and stupid system' (230). Thus it is that, in *In the Days of the Comet*, we find Wells railing against both 'Capitalists' *and* 'Landlords', attacking a situation in which 'landless' workers are left with 'no legal right to exist' (Wells 1977: 612) while 'landlords and masters […] owned pot-banks and forge and farm and mine' (567). The countryside could also, as much as the city, become a space of nightmarish rationalization: in *When the Sleeper Awakes*, alongside those nightmare urban spaces mentioned above, we also find dystopian images of giant 'wind-wheels', 'gaunt and distinctive symbols of the new age' spread over a requisitioned countryside now under the proprietorship of the 'British Food Trust' (Wells 1994: 115). Wells' strictly evolutionary mind-set could never allow his imagination to regress, as in Morris, to a society based upon purely pastoral values, but rather led him to imagine a future intensification of the nineteenth-century processes of land privatization and rural migration already ongoing in his own time.

Hence the narrow interests and parochial mind-sets represented by this wealthy rural elite needed, as much as the exploitations of urban industrialization, to be combatted. At the same time, Wells' strictly anti-romantic view of the countryside can be seen in the satirical depiction of the naïve young revolutionary of the twenty-third century, for whom the countryside of the nineteenth century appears as a kind of reified, pastoral Eden in which 'Half the men in the world still lived free upon the free countryside', leading 'lives of love and faithfulness' (Wells 1994: 158). The utopian solution, for Wells, lies not in such escapist fantasies, but rather in a positive synthesis of the two spaces, city and countryside. In *Anticipations* (1902), for example, Wells describes the future disappearance of 'boundary lines' between countryside and city (Wells 2006: ch. II). Not because one has subsumed and destroyed the other – rather the vision he offers is one in which the 'essential charm of the countryside' is

preserved amidst the 'multitudinous traffic of bright, light (and not necessarily ugly) mechanisms', while 'horticulture and agriculture [are] going on within the "urban regions"' (ch. II). Elsewhere, in what is probably his most effective utopian text, Wells brings such a world to life: *Men Like Gods* envisions an entire rural utopian world guided by an advanced techno-scientific ethos and shot through with wonders of infrastructure, transportation, and communication. The countryside functions in these texts as a locus of utopian energy which, with the correct application of science and technology, could be made to realize its utopian potential. It is no coincidence that Wells most often situates his romances within such rural settings, albeit often with a less positive attitude towards scientific progress reflective of the less-than-ideal condition of his contemporary society. It is within the confines and against the bounds of such settings that the effects and impacts of his sf novums are tested, and their utopian dimension thus revealed.

The utopian dimension of the countryside

Consider, for example, Wells' classic tale of scientific experimentation gone awry, *The Invisible Man* (1897), a work described by Joseph Conrad as 'uncommonly fine' (Parrinder 2005: 60). Here, Wells' critique of blind rational progress conducted for its own sake, without reference to moral or social qualms, is at its most biting. Griffin, the irascible scientist at the centre of the story, has succeeded in turning himself invisible, but is unable to reverse the process, and so vows to inaugurate a 'Reign of Terror' against the rest of humanity (Wells 2005: 125), using his invisibility to kill with impunity and instil fear in any who oppose him.

In the character of Griffin, as in Moreau, scientific enquiry is transformed into obsession, which in turns transforms Griffin himself into an animalistic fanatic indifferent to the suffering of others, whether the cat upon which he tests his invisibility formula or his own father who commits suicide after Griffin robs him of his savings. The twinned poles of scientific proclivity and natural passion are thus joined in Griffin, yet without being synthesized, as with the Utopians or the Samurai, into a positive social force. These extremities instead shape the dystopian mood of the novel: although Griffin's reign of terror, announced while garbed in the dressing gown of a village doctor whose sitting room he has usurped, suggests an image more akin to Swift than Robespierre, nevertheless the state of invisibility does, when coupled with the intensely antisocial nature of Griffin the man, betray a menacing undertone. For one, it compromises the sacred privacy of the individual and the domestic space: note that one of Griffin's first acts in the doctor's house is to establish himself in the main bedroom, violating in this way the most private space of the 'sacred and distinctive

household' (Wells 2006: ch. II). Such a violation is significant for Wells, who elsewhere decries the 'right to free intrusion' and the 'intolerable continuity of contact' implied by the incessant communality of More's *Utopia* (Wells 2017: 223), a feature too of the 'crowded centres' of cities (Wells 2006: ch. II). At the same time, Griffin's invisibility also grants him a maximum of anonymity, since he is free to travel where and when he wishes, unseen and unidentified. Such anonymity is characteristic of urban living: within the innumerable multitudes of the city, every individual becomes nameless and faceless, 'invisible' within what Marshall Berman calls 'the great anonymous urban mass' (Berman 1988: 184). Yet Griffin experiences his absolute anonymity not as total freedom to act but instead as unwonted oppression, jolted and battered by the overpowering 'throng' of the dense city streets (Wells 2005: 104), while his own private habits too are transformed into public spectacle, insofar as he cannot eat, or wear clothes, or otherwise consume within the city without drawing the immediate notice, and judgement, of the urban crowds.

Griffin's invisibility can thus be read as an expression of contemporary urban anxieties regarding the loss of privacy and individual identity that characterize city life, while he himself appears as a dystopian figure encompassing the worst excesses of both humanity and nature. And as in *Moreau*, it is ultimately in the liminal space of the countryside that these anxieties are neutralized. Griffin travels first to Iping in search of a safe place to attempt the reversal of his invisibility, and later escapes into the countryside when the doctor notifies the local police of his presence. Here the extremities of his nature cannot be concealed: his irate and secretive nature and his scientific obsessions draw inevitable attention in the inn at which he initially stays, and it is his later furious attempts at vengeance upon Kemp that prove his undoing. His downfall is wrought particularly through the refutation of his dystopian qualities: he is denied access to the private spaces of the population of Iping, who once aware of him can seal their houses against intrusion, and he is also denied anonymity, since any act of aggression, which in the city may become instantly lost in the morass of information, events, and people that make up the urban space, is instantly identifiable as such in the countryside. His murder of Wicksteed, for example, is a transgressive act that may be traced through a series of ructions in the otherwise smooth fabric of rural life: the broken fence post used as murder weapon, the child who witnessed the victim 'pursuing something' along the ground, and the men who later recalled hearing 'wailing and laughing, sobbing and groaning' in a nearby field (Wells 2005: 131–32). Griffin's subsequent inability to access local transport, that most significant of utopian pillars, is significant, as is the fact of his intense social isolation, since without means of either travel or communication the dystopian qualities represented by his

deviant character cannot either propagate or disperse elsewhere.

Hence the countryside functions as a neutralizing space in which the dystopian qualities of blind scientific obsession and animalistic nature that characterize Griffin may be quelled. In another novel, *The Food of the Gods and How It Came to Earth* (1904), we may detect the opposite effect. This lesser-known work, coming at the latter end of Wells' great flood of speculative writing in the decade following the publication of *The Time Machine* in 1895, centres on the creation of the titular 'Food of the Gods', which can boost the physical growth of any young organism that ingests it. The scientific aspects of this novum are dealt with in typically cursory fashion: Redwood, an English scientist, postulates the existence of a natural substance in the blood that spurs physical growth, and whose necessary depletion, in the ordinary course of things, checks the growth of the organism by forcing it to 'wait for a space before it could go on growing again' (Wells 2010: 7). Redwood succeeds in isolating and reproducing this substance, developing it into an ambrosic food, 'Herakleophorbia IV', which causes accelerated and abnormal growth when fed to juvenile plants and animals.

As might be expected, however, things quickly get out of hand: the food is accidentally introduced into the local ecosystem, resulting in a number of comic scenes involving giant chickens, rats, and wasps who wreak havoc throughout the sleepy English countryside, which has also become overrun with oversized nettles. Yet, much as in *The Invisible Man*, beneath the humour of Wells' gentle parodies of English parochial life are more profound and suggestive observations. One of these is the familiar critique of blind scientific progress, evident in, for example, the coldly rationalist attitude of Redwood towards the miracle 'Boomfood' that he has inadvertently released upon the world. He remains (initially, at least) largely indifferent to the social chaos that his invention is generating, even going so far as to begin administering the food to his newborn child, keen to observe its effects upon the growing human body. Wells' acute awareness of scientific progress as a social and tangible, as opposed to merely abstract and intellectual, act is made clear in an exchange between Redwood and a young doctor who questions the wisdom of publishing the results of the 'Boomfood' experiments. The scientist replies scornfully that they are 'not in the Middle Ages':

> 'As Cossar [a local proponent of the Food] says, swapping wisdom – that's the true scientific method.'
>
> 'In most cases, certainly. But – This is exceptional.'
>
> 'We shall put the whole thing before the Royal Society in the proper way,' said Redwood. (Wells 2010: 73)

And again:

> ‘It’s in many ways an Exceptional Discovery.’
>
> ‘That doesn’t matter,’ said Redwood.
>
> ‘It’s the sort of knowledge that could easily be subject to grave abuse – grave dangers, as Catherham put it.’
>
> Redwood said nothing. (73)

Here Redwood’s attitude is one of stubborn adherence to an abstract and idealized notion of scientific impartiality, a conception of his intellectual work as somehow not subject to the distracting complications of everyday life: scientists, he suggests, are duty-bound to propagate the results of their work, regardless of any perceived social consequences, while his use of his own child as guinea pig demonstrates a callous and unfeeling commitment to extending the bounds of knowledge at any cost.

And yet the overall attitude towards Herakleophorbia IV in Wells’ novel is not, as it is in *The Invisible Man*, one of dystopian warning against situating scientific progress above social responsibility, although that is clearly one aspect of it. Scientists such as Redwood and Griffin, we are told, who become ‘blinded’ by ‘the vision […] the splendour’ of their erudite intellectual pursuits, nevertheless ‘hold the light of knowledge’ by which the rest of society ‘may see’ (Wells 2010: 4). In *The Food of the Gods*, this light falls upon a future in which Herakleophorbia IV, while figuring on the one hand as a looming threat to the established social order, and in particular, as will be seen, to the system of traditional rural values which sustains the system of power in the countryside, simultaneously suggests the potential advance of a very different one, an alternate civilizational model which may even succeed in overcoming many of the weaknesses and inequalities of that which it is replacing. This potential finds its locus in the ‘Children of the Food’, a group of individuals who, exposed to Herakleophorbia IV at a young age, have matured into towering giants, ‘as ’igh as a ’ouse’ (138), according to one individual who, cut off from the world for twenty years in prison, emerges to discover giantism now widespread throughout England.

The new trend towards giantism meets, of course, with heavy opposition, and Wells’ satirical bite can be again felt in his descriptions of reactive organizations with such mild-mannered titles as the ‘Society for the Preservation of the Proper Proportion of Things’, as well as a branch of the National Temperance Association established to promote ‘Temperance in Growth’ (72–73). Just as important as Wells’ critique of unfeeling scientific development here is his denunciation of equally unthinking and reactionary conservatism, and his ire becomes here directed particularly at the traditional ramparts of rural social power, religion and

the landed classes. One of the primary opponents to giantism, 'a most worthy, plump, ripe, and conservative-minded' vicar, treats it as merely one of the many 'Horrors of the Age', a category which includes 'Democracy, and Secular Education, and Sky Scrapers, and Motor Cars, and the American Invasion, the Scrappy Reading of the Public and the disappearance of any Taste at all' (104–05). For this vicar, giantism is simply one aspect of a fashionable trend towards progressivism that has lost sight of the truly important and traditional values of life:

> There used to be talk – as though this stuff would revolutionise everything . . . But there is something that defies all these forces of the New . . . I don't know of course. I'm not one of your modern philosophers – explain everything away with ether and atoms. Evolution. Rubbish like that. What I mean is something the 'Ologies don't include. Matter of reason – not understanding. Ripe wisdom. Human nature. *Aere perennius* . . . Call it what you will. (130)

The vicar thus exhibits the 'stupid rigidity of mind' elsewhere seen in the unfortunate curate of *The War of the Worlds* – 'one of those weak creatures, void of pride, timorous, anaemic, hateful souls […] who face neither God nor man, who face not even themselves' (Wells 1977: 797–78) – that drove Wells early in his life to adopt a broadly atheistic outlook (Foot 1995: 7–9). He is supported in his reactive campaign by another character, Lady Wondershoot, who sees in the giants simply a confirmation of her 'worst experiences of the lower classes' (Wells 2010: 119): they are 'gigantic parasite[s]' subsisting upon the 'charity' of gentry, who must, like 'under-housemaids', be compelled to work for their betters (125).

If, however, there remains an ingrained rural power system against which the giants must pit their strength, it is nevertheless clearly the case that the tide of progress is slowly turning against such traditional values. Wells himself was one of the vicar's upbraided 'modern philosophers', an erstwhile campaigner with a staunch belief in the need for 'education, science, and socialism' to right the ills and inequities of the nineteenth century (Williams 1975: 230). And such a humanist philosophy as Wells preached is in marked contrast to the excessive and unguided rationality of the city: when Coddles, a young giant, travels to London, he finds himself harried on every side and challenged on every count by the 'complex pretences' of social life in the city (Wells 2010: 171), uncomfortably hemmed in by the 'seething miscellany of the little folks'. His desire for a genuine social purpose, 'for something he might love and something he might serve', as well as his own base needs for hunger and sleep, are thwarted by the arbitrary and incomprehensible exercise of power

undertaken by the policemen who 'aren't here to explain things' (173–74), yet who continuously move him along. There is, in the city, simply no space for him, literally or figuratively, and his eventual execution by those same policemen mirrors that of Griffin: the stamping out of a latent utopian force in the essentially dystopian space of the city.

It is therefore no coincidence that the giants stake their claim to the future in the broader expanses of the countryside: it is here, situated between the perplexities of the urban metropolis and the chaos of unguided nature, that their new world will find the space to finally begin. Note, for example, that the blossoming love between 'young Redwood' and the 'Princess', giant daughter of a European monarch, is initially conducted in 'the Great Park', or in the 'rusty-roadbed, heathery moorland', or in the 'great avenue of chestnuts', or again in the 'great trim lawn, set with tall conifers [that] sloped graciously to the water's edge', since it is only in such wide open spaces that they can conceive of the 'great and spacious dream' in which they will play the role of 'Adam and Eve of a new world' (160–1). It is furthermore fitting that they should first consummate their love 'under the arch of the sky' in the countryside, while 'the still black pine-trees stood about them like sentinels' (161). Their presence, and that of all the giants, is no doubt a disruption of the smooth social fabric, yet it is one that, despite threats and coercions from the 'little people', and in contrast to the dystopian destructiveness of Griffin, can be neither quelled nor ignored, since it is 'in the nature of all things […] to grow, from first to last that is Being, that is the law of life' (206). It is clear that, for Wells at least, such uprooting and overturning of traditional values is not to be resisted, but instead openly, if cautiously, welcomed. The giants are the inexorable 'new generation' (202), their conflict with their diminutive predecessors a clash of values expressed in terms whose symbolism is fairly explicit. If 'littleness' suggests qualities of parochialism, narrow-mindedness, triviality, and arbitrariness, then giantism may in turn be linked with greatness, power and intellectual progress.

The Children of the Food are, in fact, classic Wellsian utopian characters: 'tall and powerful forms […] clothed in overlapping metal plates […] in leather, in woven ropes or in woven metal' (203-4), an image that suggests the rugged strength and physical durability of the Utopians in *Men Like Gods*, while early in their youth they even set about building colossal roads 'in place of all these rotten little lanes' that divide the land (143), and dreaming of cheap electricity and houses for all. And like those Utopians, they know that nature, too, needs occasionally to be kept in check: their draining of a lagoon formed by their first exercises in house-building is aimed at destroying the local population of mosquitoes. Hence, in contrast to all other characters – whether the vicar and Lady Wondershoot, with their complacent class prejudice and stubborn

reactionism, or Griffin, with his destructive extremes of scientific obsession and base cruelty – the Children of the Food are instead marked by a constructive mixture of practical technological rationalism and a sympathetic understanding of nature, drawn to the countryside as a space in which that utopian synthesis of wholesome natural surroundings amenable to the application of practical scientific and technological know-how may flourish.

Conclusion

It is clear, then, that the Children of the Food are not, as the vicar and Lady Wondershoot believe, a quickly-fading 'Uproar' amidst the 'atmosphere of simple and permanent things' that otherwise characterizes life in the quaint English countryside (106). Indeed, the countryside is not, in either *The Food of the Gods* or *The Invisible Man*, an idyllic space of unchanging tranquillity, but a transformative utopian space susceptible and responsive to social-scientific trends. There is thus no easy return to normality in *The Food of the Gods*. This is also in marked contrast to *The Invisible Man*: whereas the former text ends with the tramp Thomas Marvel pouring uselessly over the indecipherable pages of Griffin's notebooks containing the secret of invisibility, *The Food of the Gods* instead ends with a provocative image of a giant preparing to stand against the old guard, 'looking up fearlessly into the starry deeps, mail-clad, young and strong, resolute and still' (209), surrounded by 'great engines', in a gorge dug, like utopia itself, out of the English countryside (200).

As in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, then, the countryside symbolizes the tension between totalizing human rationality and unpredictable natural bestiality, and furthermore serves as a space in which such tensions may be defused as destructively dystopian, as in *The Invisible Man*, or cultivated as progressively utopian, as in *The Food of the Gods*. As Patrick Parrinder notes, although 'Wells saw the scientific spirit as the motive force of human progress, and he became the foremost missionary of modern science', he was also keenly aware of the 'unimagined dangers and opportunities' that come along with this (Parrinder 2005: 2–3). The countryside serves as his testing ground for these dangers and opportunities, a site in which the utopian desires and dystopian warnings expressed by his novums can be examined and explored, accepted or rejected, in search of the proper path to utopia.

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Men Who Could Work Miracles: The Tragicomedy of Wellsian Science Fiction

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In her pioneering book *H.G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future* (1980), Roslynn D. Haynes emphasized Wells' preoccupation with 'the figure of the scientist – a character previously rare in literature and never before treated in psychological depth' (7). Haynes speaks about Wells' idealization of the scientist in his later writings and especially his utopias, but she has to concede that in the early Wells the 'able, dedicated and virtuous scientists are far outnumbered [. . .] by the helpless and demented ones' (70). Haynes interprets this as 'a repeated warning against the expectation that technological progress divorced from the principles and philosophy of an essentially benevolent science, can effect any permanent good for society' (70). But this is a drastic understatement of the position. In rereading Wells' science fiction we need to ask just why the portrayal of scientists in these classic tales is so deeply at variance with their author's later belief that the world should be organized and run on scientific lines. The scientific experiments in the early Wells remind us of nothing so much as the attempts of George McWhirter Fotheringay, the bar-room philosopher in Wells' comic fable 'The Man who could work Miracles' (1898), to change the world in ways that would be more to his liking. The unforeseen consequences of the miracles he performs are so terrifying that, in the end, his only desire is to lose his miraculous powers once he has brought the world back to its unaltered state at the beginning of the story. Unlike Fotheringay, this is exactly what the Wellsian scientist cannot do.

The word 'scientist', as Wells' narrator observes in the opening paragraph of *The Food of the Gods* (1904), was a mid-nineteenth century neologism, at first much resisted by scientists themselves (Wells 1925: 3). Its gradual adoption reflects the growth of the cultural empire of science in the middle and later nineteenth century, the proliferation of learned societies and journals, the building of laboratories, the spread of scientific education, and the division of natural knowledge into examination subjects to be studied and taught by newcomers such as the young Wells. To be known as an 'eminent scientist' (3), as are the two main characters of *The Food of the Gods*, Mr Bensington and Professor Redwood, was to be part of a tightly-knit professional community, a narrow and self-important world which remained 'a mystery to the general public' (6). Bensington (whose name echoes Wells' own scientific alma mater at South Kensington) is a Fellow of the Royal Society and a past president of the Chemical Society, while Redwood is a Professor of Physiology at London University; both men have 'led lives of academic distinction from their very

earliest youth' (4). But *The Food of the Gods* is one of Wells' later scientific romances, and its protagonists start out with an air of scientific orthodoxy that is very different from what we find in, for example, *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *The Invisible Man* (1897). Wells' aim in writing these books was manifestly not to help to spread public understanding of such professional eminences as Mr Bensington and Professor Redwood. His best-known science fiction does not offer a realistic picture of modern science, nor did Wells ever claim that it did.

In his 1933 Preface to the collected edition of his *Scientific Romances*, Wells begins by saying that his science fiction has no resemblance to the work of Jules Verne. Where Verne's stories deal with 'actual possibilities of invention and discovery', Wells places his own in a tradition of literary fantasies stretching from classical works such as Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), in which 'the fantastic element was brought in by magic' (Wells 1980: 240–41). He claimed to have brought this tradition up to date by substituting what he called 'an ingenious use of scientific patter' for 'the usual interview with the devil or a magician' (241–42). The resulting story would still be based on a 'magic trick' even though it was 'as near [to] actual theory as possible' (242). The phrase 'scientific patter' suggests that Wells' scientists in these early books are first and foremost silver-tongued showmen with a stage 'patter' like that of a professional conjuror. Secondly, they are descended from the protagonists of earlier fantastic literature, written before the word 'scientist' was invented. While Wells' reference to 'the usual interview with the devil' manifestly alludes to the Faust legend, Shelley's Victor Frankenstein is another acknowledged predecessor, and a third precursor to whom Wells' debt has always been recognized is Nathanael Hawthorne. The scientists and inventors in Hawthorne's tales are portrayed in psychological depth, as is Frankenstein; and both Hawthorne and Shelley draw attention to the links between modern institutionalized science and its roots in the pre-modern world of occult and secret research, the world that Hawthorne evokes when he speaks (in 'The Birthmark' [1843]) of 'the long tradition of the alchemists' (Hawthorne 1928: 267).

Before Wells, the typical hero of nineteenth-century scientific romance was a demonic and evil genius, a sorcerer-like male recluse who had turned away from the scientific community in order to pursue a secret course of research which he had no intention of publishing or sharing with others. The discovery and the powers that came with it were to be his alone. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *The Invisible Man*, Wells closely follows this stereotype. Moreau and Griffin are isolated megalomaniacs, not public benefactors. Moreau is a scientific outlaw who has been run out of England and has built a laboratory

on an uninhabited Pacific island to pursue his horrific experiments, and the Beast People he fashions are as monstrous as Frankenstein's Creature. Griffin uses his power of invisibility to get away with acts of robbery and arson, and eventually tries to subject the whole of West Sussex to a 'Reign of Terror' (Wells 2005b: 125). It's true that these novels also contain such 'virtuous' scientists as Prendick, the amateur botanist, and Griffin's old fellow-student Dr Kemp. But their role is simply to intensify the atmosphere of horror and fear surrounding the demonic protagonists.

If Griffin and Moreau can be traced back to the medieval alchemists, surely, we might think, the hero of *The Time Machine* is a representative, enlightened modern man? Wells' Time Traveller is a detached, keen-eyed observer of the future to which his machine takes him, and the only victim of his experiments (if we discount some of our remote descendants the Morlocks) is himself. He has a wide and loyal circle of friends, to whom he demonstrates a model of his machine. He clearly has a scientific reputation, since he tells us that he has published 'seventeen papers upon physical optics' in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society (Wells 2005d: 68). But far from being seen as an academic specialist like the scientists in *The Food of the Gods*, his friends know him as a showman and inventor, and an expounder of recondite paradoxes. He designs his own patent chairs, and is an amateur conjuror who has made a ghost appear at Christmas. He is, so far as we can tell, a lone entrepreneur who builds the time machine in an annexe to his own house, and he has no collaborators in his time-travelling mission. His friends only learn about the machine on the eve of his first journey, when, perhaps, he feels the need to explain the reasons for his possible disappearance. But these friends are inclined to assume that the whole thing is a gigantic hoax, since he is 'one of those men who are too clever to be believed' (Wells 2005d: 12). His demonstration of a miniature model of the time machine is, precisely, taken to be a magic trick by Wells' narrator who, during the ensuing week, continues to puzzle over 'the trick of the model' (12). Meanwhile, the Time Traveller sets off hastily for the future, forgetting, even, to take his camera with him. When, coming back from his journey, he finds his friends still incredulous, he invites them to 'Say I dreamed it in the workshop' (87).

The Time Traveller, then, is an apparent contradiction: both the sagacious intellectual who 'thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind' (91) and who sets out to test his hypothesis with extraordinary determination and courage, and a freelance experimenter and dreamer presumably possessing a private income. The original Heinemann edition of *The Time Machine* is subtitled 'An Invention', playing on the double meaning of invention as both technological innovation and outrageous fiction. But, as a piece of technology,

the time machine (however often it has been compared to an antique bicycle) is an effective mechanism that works perfectly and does exactly what it was intended to do. Its only limitation, it seems, is that it will never be replicated, since there is no time machine to be seen in the great museum of future technology that the Time Traveller visits. But the knowledge of the future gained as a result of his invention is something that we must try to forget, and might be better off without. Such is the implication of the 'Epilogue' in which Wells' outer narrator considers the coming doom of human civilization and retorts that 'If that is so, it remains for us to live as though it were not so' (91). This opens up the possibility that, even if the secret of the time machine had survived its inventor's disappearance, the future generations presupposed by the story might have possessed the technological mastery to reconstruct it but decided not to.

Another all-too-effective piece of miraculous technology is the Cavorite sphere in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), which fulfils its function of transporting Wells' characters to the moon and getting one of them back; but this is only after one of Cavor's earlier experiments has caused a devastating explosion that could have destroyed the whole of the Earth's atmosphere and, with it, the human race. Such scientific negligence is pretty much the norm in Wells' science fiction from *The Island of Doctor Moreau* onwards. Nor is it confined to human science, as the Martians discover to their cost in *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

Dr Moreau, a qualified physiologist and a misguided forerunner of the biotechnologists and geneticists of the twenty-first century, is in some ways more like a modern professional scientist than the Time Traveller. He is a master-surgeon who has spent twenty years pursuing the same research programme and perfecting his experimental technique to produce the Beast Folk, who are (at least from his point of view) 'triumphs of vivisection' (Wells 2005c: 71). Moreau has not hesitated to follow the logic of his discoveries wherever it might lead: 'I asked a question, devised some method of getting an answer, and got – a fresh question. Was this possible, or that possible? You cannot imagine what this means to an investigator, what an intellectual passion grows upon him' (75). Yet the more we learn about Moreau's creations and the way that he made them, the more horrifying we find him. His brutal perversion of scientific idealism is, doubtless, one of the things to which Wells' original reviewers were reacting in their almost unanimous denunciation of the story. The zoologist Peter Chalmers Mitchell, for example, wrote in the *Saturday Review* that 'When the prenatal whispers of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* reached me, I rejoiced at the promise of another novel with a scientific basis'; but Mitchell found himself reacting to the actual text with 'the frankest dismay' (Parrinder 1972: 43–44). Dr Moreau himself dismisses all ethical considerations, declaring that 'The study

of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature' (Wells 2005c: 75). His self-justifications wave aside both the question of cruelty and the moral implications of choosing the human form as the basis for his experiments. Some of his creations have died in the laboratory, while others have had to be killed; but we soon realize that the surviving Beast Folk also bear witness to his long history of failures. These creatures begin to revert to their previous existence from the moment they leave the laboratory, a drawback that Moreau recognizes although it leaves him undeterred. His 'intellectual passion' allows him to turn a blind eye to the moral wreckage that surrounds him:

> First one animal trait, then another, creeps to the surface and stares out at me. […] But I will conquer yet. Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say: this time I will burn out all the animal, this time I will make a rational creature of my own. After all, what is ten years? Man has been a hundred thousand in the making. (78)

The Island of Doctor Moreau is, perhaps, best read as a parable in which Moreau's experiments echo the whole story of natural evolution from a humanitarian standpoint, the story of what Wells would later call 'the ruthless torture in creation' (Wells 1980: 243). But science, specifically medical science, does not come to relieve this torture. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, it makes it worse.

Before he was driven out of England ten years earlier, Moreau was a well-known researcher with a reputation to lose: 'He had published some very astonishing facts in connection with the transfusion of blood, and, in addition, was known to be doing valuable work on morbid growths. Then suddenly his career was closed' (Wells 2005c: 34). Unlike Moreau, Griffin in *The Invisible Man* is a mere junior lecturer, a former physics demonstrator in a provincial college who refused to publish his research since he did not want his professor to share the credit for it. He conducts his experiments in secret so as to get away both from the prying professor and his 'gaping, silly students' (Wells 2005b: 92). Griffin has made two crucial discoveries, each of which he stumbles upon largely by accident. The first is 'a general principle of pigments and refraction, – a formula, a geometrical expression involving four dimensions' (89); the second, 'a discovery in physiology', is the means of removing the colouring matter from red blood cells (92). The first discovery is, he says, a source of 'marvels, miracles!' (89), while the second reveals to him a means to 'transcend magic': 'And I beheld, unclouded by doubt, a magnificent vision of all that invisibility might mean to a man, – the mystery, the power, the freedom. Drawbacks I saw none' (92). There are, in the event, plenty of drawbacks, as Griffin finds

when, naked and invisible, he ventures out onto the streets of London in the middle of winter. It is a terrifying experience, though (unlike Moreau) Griffin at first inflicts pain only on himself and on the unlucky victims of his acts of fire-raising and robbery. And Wells, having perhaps learnt caution from the very hostile reaction to *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, sets Griffin's tale of agony and fear in the city very late in the novel, long after its bucolic opening in the village of Iping where the mysterious and heavily-muffled stranger is contrasted with such stock humorous figures as the penny-pinching landlady, the bodging odd-job man and the tramp, Mr Marvel.

In the final chapters of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, after Moreau himself has been killed, the Gothic terror had already given way to a kind of grim comedy. There is much broader comedy at the beginning of *The Invisible Man*, and still more in the opening pages of *The First Men in the Moon*, where the narrator Mr Bedford is introduced as an undischarged bankrupt intent on hiding things from the reader as well as from his creditors. Then the scientist Cavor appears, waving his arms and buzzing like an electric robot as he takes his daily walk past Bedford's bungalow in a remote area of Romney Marsh. Cavor, as Roslynn Haynes observes, is one of the first 'absent-minded professors' in literature (Haynes 1980: 206), although he is not an actual professor but a lone and secretive researcher who, as he admits, mingles very little with 'professional scientific men' (Wells 2005a: 12). Like the Time Traveller he has converted his own house into a laboratory, where he employs three unskilled labourers to stoke the furnace and tend his apparatus. Nor does he seem too upset when he believes (wrongly, as it turns out) that his workmen have all been killed in the explosion that sets his house on fire: after all, it was they, not he, who had caused the accident by failing to agree on who was supposed to tend the furnace. *The First Men in the Moon* thus anticipates *The Food of the Gods* in its satire on the managerial incompetence of scientists and the terrifying possibilities unleashed by a badly-run laboratory. Still worse is Cavor's contempt for the general public, since he plans to blame the explosion on a freak tornado in the hope of arousing popular sympathy and thus generating the new funds he will need to carry on his research. Cavor, just like his opposite number Bedford, is an arrant opportunist, a specialist in molecular physics who, as an afterthought, suddenly develops the idea of using the anti-gravity substance he has made to build a spaceship and travel to the moon. Once Bedford – motivated by dreams of mining concessions and untold wealth – becomes his business partner, the two are set up as a comic duo of whom David Lake has said that 'It would be hard to find any pair of fictional adventurers, before or since, so ill-qualified to embark on space exploration together' (Lake 1995: xxiii). This makes for a novel that is fundamentally different in tone to Wells' earlier

science fiction. Far from the Gothic intensity of *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* or *The War of the Worlds*, it is, David Lake writes, 'rather a hodge-podge, a satire in the old Roman sense, a dish of all sorts' (xiv). At its very end, in Cavor's last message from the moon, Wells takes care to show that the secret of his anti-gravity substance is now permanently lost, all the more since the Cavorite sphere in which Bedford managed to return to Earth was shot off into space again by a careless schoolboy. But the unforeseen results of Cavor's experiments are as nothing compared to the devastation caused in Wells' next scientific romance by Mr Bensington's discovery of Herakleophorbia IV, popularly known as Boomfood or the 'Food of the Gods'.

Bensington and Redwood, as we have seen, are professional scientists and academics whom Wells introduces with a short disquisition on the word 'scientist'. But the opening of *The Food of the Gods* is, once again, cast in what was becoming Wells' typical comic manner, with its 'indulgently avuncular tone' and 'belittling process of characterisation' (Haynes 1980: 18-19). Thus we learn that, for all his intellectual distinction, Mr Bensington is a short, bald man, plagued with corns, and an inaudible lecturer. He is a bachelor, living in mortal fear of his cousin Jane who is also his housekeeper, and, like Wells' later hero Alfred Polly, he is frequently referred to as 'Mr'. His life is one of 'eminent and studious obscurity' (Wells 1925: 4), and despite being a brilliant researcher and the author of a revolutionary change in human possibilities, he is also, by modern scientific standards, ludicrously unworldly. And yet, for all his littleness, Bensington has once had a vision of the glory of science, which is, Wells says, 'so wonderful, so portentous, so full of mysterious half-shapen promises for the mighty future of man!' (7). As for Professor Redwood, he is 'entirely ordinary in his appearance' (4), while both he and Bensington are 'if anything on the unpractical side of ordinary', which, Wells adds, 'is the case with "scientists" as a class all the world over' (6). But Redwood has also seen the glory of science, and (unlike Bensington) has not forgotten it: 'something of the vision still lingered in his eyes' (7).

Bensington, not Redwood, is responsible for the initial discovery in *The Food of the Gods*, but his incompetence becomes manifest in the story of the Experimental Farm that he sets up in Kent, with its dirty and feckless occupants the Skinners. He is too timid and mild-mannered to kick up a fuss even when he finds a wasp inside a jar of Herakleophorbia IV that the Skinners have carelessly left unsealed. The resulting outbreak of giant wasps is the first sign of the great change in the world brought about by Bensington's researches, and Wells greatly enjoys telling us of the consternation these wasps create, including the one that suddenly appears inside the dome of the old Reading Room of the British Museum.

For all the resulting comedy, the moral of *The Food of the Gods* is not that scientists ought to be less absent-minded and show greater respect for health and safety in the laboratory. Wells, in fact, suggests it was inevitable that Herakleophorbia would get out of control at some time or other. He treats the devastating changes to society and the natural world that result with remarkable equanimity. Bensington's new substance miraculously accelerates the process of growth and enables ordinary young babies to grow up into forty-foot high giants; and this 'coming of Bigness in the world', as Wells calls it, is a change in human affairs comparable to the fall of the Roman empire (152). It is true that he has rather abruptly introduced a new character, the 'well-known civil engineer' Cossar (66) who, unlike Bensington and Redwood, displays the determination and clear-sightedness needed to stop the initial break-out of Herakleophorbia at the Experimental Farm. At Cossar's direction, the Farm is razed to the ground and the first generation of giant wasps and rats are killed off. But Cossar then decides to feed Herakleophorbia to his own three sons, just as Redwood is already doing to his child; and Cossar is as responsible as anyone else for the further spread of the material. As a young follower of Caterham the reactionary politician says of Cossar, he is 'An engineer! To him all that we hold dear and sacred is nothing' (221).

Does this mean that the true prototype of the later Wellsian 'noble scientists', the scientists who are, as Haynes says, '[l]ike Plato's philosopher-kings' (1980: 97), is not a pure scientist but, as Bensington might say, only an engineer 'engaged in applied science' (Wells 1925: 95)? The argument is tempting, but by the end of *The Food of the Gods* Cossar feels just as estranged from the 'new race' represented by his giant sons (235) as does Redwood from his giant son. By this time Bensington, who is childless, has long faded out from the story, having retired as inconspicuously as possible to Tunbridge Wells. Redwood and Cossar stay on, literally dwarfed by the forces they have unleashed and aware that the new generation they have created has passed altogether beyond them. As Redwood reflects, 'It isn't *our* youth, Cossar. They are taking things over. They are beginning upon their own emotions, their own experiences, their own way. We have made a new world, and it isn't ours' (296). The sense of natural forces beyond human control is repeated in countless instances in Wells' science fiction, but what is new here is the scientists' acknowledgement of their own impotence and the sense that they are merely the agents of a much larger scheme. This is surely connected with the narrow professionalism that Wells has gently but belittlingly mocked at the beginning of the story.

Wells' science fiction is tragic in that the Time Traveller, Moreau, Griffin, Cavor and the Martians all end up as the victims of their own inventions, but its wider message about the nature of science may better be described

as tragicomic. The rule of his fictional scientists brings about anarchy rather than utopia, and where, as in *The Food of the Gods*, the outcome is possibly utopian it depends on the scientists getting out of the way first. How, then, can we reconcile Wellsian science fiction with what Haynes calls the 'faith in the integrity of scientists and in their mission to govern the world' (Haynes 1980: 97) displayed by the later Wells once he had left sf behind? At one level the answer is that Wells was a great popular entertainer as well as a scientific prophet, and that is why his fictional scientists – where they are not evil geniuses in the Frankenstein mould – are, for all their qualities of close observation and technical innovation, more bumbling boffins than Platonic giants. His successors in science fiction include the comic writers as well as the technological and cosmic visionaries – Karel Čapek as well as Olaf Stapledon, and Douglas Adams as well as Arthur C. Clarke; but the fact remains nevertheless that Wells did inspire Stapledon, Clarke, and countless other writers, not to mention many of the leading twentieth-century scientists who also read his science fiction in their youth. And the Wells to whom these future scientists responded most deeply was (I suggest) not the later, socially-sanctioned prophet of science but the earlier, truly visionary writer, the writer for whom the scientist is someone capable of performing what Jorge Luis Borges in his obituary tribute to Wells would call 'atrocious miracles' (Parrinder 1972: 332).

It is significant, in this respect, that the scientific interest in *The Food of the Gods* is dispersed between three comparatively small-scale characters, even if (for Redwood, at least) 'something of the vision still linger[s] in [their] eyes'. Bensington, Redwood and Cossar are great fun, but it is not on account of personalities like these that George Orwell wrote that 'Back in the nineteen-hundreds it was a wonderful experience for a boy to discover H.G. Wells' (Orwell 1961, 165). Still less can it have been a wonderful experience to read of the character whom Haynes singles out as one of Wells' 'most idealised scientists' (Haynes 1980: 211), the crystallographer Richard Trafford in his 1912 novel *Marriage*. The scientists who truly appeal to the imagination are, like the Time Traveller, Griffin and Moreau, figures of power who stand outside and beyond social convention, individuals who remain inseparable from their marvellous inventions and the frightening and terrible worlds to which they transport us. If those inventions and worlds are in some respects undesirable and perhaps positively evil, that only enhances their appeal. Wells, it may be, could not go on creating characters like these; his intellectual conscience would not allow it. Instead, his fictional scientists would become either largely comic figures or, like Trafford, intensely boring but right-thinking commentators on the contemporary scene and purveyors of Wellsian ideas. Trafford necessarily has a vision of the glory of science, but he is in no sense a miracle-worker. Wells, in his scientific romances, had been one.

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R.C. Sherriff's *The Hopkins Manuscript* and Transformative Disaster Fiction

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Since the 1950s, depictions of post-apocalyptic survival have become common across most media platforms. The diversity of depictions of apocalyptic destruction, survival horror and entropic decay find their roots in early nineteenth century British literature. Indeed, since Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), British writers have engaged consistently with secular eschatology. The back to nature movement of the late 19th century popularized fictions of end times, but it is with H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898) that the form is incorporated into the scientific romance. Drawing on utopian traditions, modernist themes of entropy and decay, and socio-cultural concerns, a disaster tradition emerged within the burgeoning science fiction genre. The focus of such disaster narratives is survival amidst and beyond arduous post-apocalyptic conditions. Accordingly, R.C. Sherriff's 1939 novel *The Hopkins Manuscript*, which offers no such hope of survival at its conclusion, is a particularly significant text. The last British disaster novel written before World War II, Sherriff's work offers an analogue of contemporary politics by exploring the devastating potential of powerful leaders and nationalism through the depiction of two disasters: the Moon's collision with Earth and a consequent war.

Transformative Disaster Fiction

Before the steady growth in disaster fiction in Britain during the Cold War, several important works published between 1898 and 1939 established the generic tropes of the disaster/survival narrative. Such works, including M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901), Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Poison Belt* (1913), J.J. Connington's *Nordenholt's Million* (1923), Sydney Fowler Wright's *Deluge* (1927) and *Dawn* (1929) and Sherriff's *The Hopkins Manuscript*, are the foundations of the disaster genre that emerged in a tumultuous post-war Britain. These early works are remarkable for their diversity – Britain, after all, changed a great deal between the end of the nineteenth century and World War II – and for their consistency. Each of the novels published before the war presents the post-cataclysmic environment in a way that suggests it is preferable to the civilization that has passed. Like the Biblical tales of Noah or Sodom and Gomorra, the pre-1939 works present cataclysm as a means of eradicating societal ills and starting afresh.

Before discussing the transition between works published pre- and post-World War II, and *The Hopkins Manuscript* particularly, it is worth considering the terminology surrounding disaster narratives. Critical discourse on the

subject has often presented an imprecise employment of the term 'disaster' to describe related but distinct works of catastrophe, apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, entropic or prophetic fiction. Indeed, there have been no attempts to distinguish between its various forms; notably, at the simplest level, those texts dealing with catastrophe and its immediate aftermath and post-apocalyptic fictions set some considerable time after the disaster. Such imprecision can be partly redressed, firstly, through a discussion of those disaster narratives explicitly featuring a catastrophic event (however briefly) and, secondly, by developing a terminology with which to discuss them. Furthermore, by focusing on a precise type of British disaster narrative it is possible to see the distinct shift in the tenor of disaster fiction published before World War II and those that followed in its wake.

The phrase 'transformative disaster fiction' allows a distinction to be made between disaster novels that explicitly involve a catastrophic event, and subsequently explore the transformation of society into a new post-cataclysmic structure, and other forms of catastrophe or apocalyptic fiction. Transformative disaster fiction describes works that range from 'transfigurative' disaster novels, which frame catastrophe as the source of positive transformations of society, to 'deteriorative' disaster novels that explore the negative transformation of contemporary society through catastrophe.

Before World War II the transfigurative disaster novel was the particular type of transformative text that dominated the form in Britain. Indeed, the transformative texts published were unanimously transfigurative, in that they each present a wish-fulfilment fantasy concerned with the correction or improvement of the pre-disaster society. In perceiving the fictional cataclysm as a means of positive cultural transformation, these transfigurative novels provide insights into the contemporary anxieties and dissatisfactions of the British contexts producing them and the nature of the wish fulfilment fantasies arising in response. *The Hopkins Manuscript* distinguishes itself from its predecessors as it presents a transfigurative cataclysm followed by a deteriorative catastrophe. As such, it anticipates the post-World War II movement away from transfigurative disasters towards more complex, pessimistic deteriorative scenarios, and thereby marks the end of a significant period in British disaster fiction.

Differentiating transformative disaster novels from the body of British disaster fiction is important since it enables the identification of a coherent group of texts that share specific narrative characteristics. These novels are distinguishable from other apocalyptic stories such as last-man narratives, which lack the post-cataclysmic rebirth in which transfigurative texts establish their wish fulfilment fantasies, and post-apocalyptic texts. These latter narratives which, like last-man stories, lack the defining wish fulfilment qualities of the transfigurative disaster novel, are set years or centuries after the catastrophe, and do not

concern themselves with the difficult processes of immediate post-disaster social reconstruction. Future war narratives, post-nuclear tales, narratives that feature some form of entropic decline, fictions of psychic disaster, or the inner-spatial 'transformation' narratives of J.G. Ballard, which unite both entropy and psychic disaster, can be considered 'disaster fiction', but they are all significantly different from one another and from transformative disaster stories.

Identifying a narratively cohesive group of texts is not simply a pragmatic way of ensuring critical coherence. Pre-war transfigurative disaster fiction provides the secular eschatology that lies at the root of much post-World War II transformative British science fiction, which is far more ambivalent in its attitude to cataclysm and its aftermath (a much broader spectrum of texts, from transfigurative to deteriorative narratives, appear after 1945). It is the literary predecessor of that branch of British sf which Brian Aldiss derogatively terms the 'cosy catastrophe' (Aldiss and Wingrove 2001: 279). Accordingly, to understand the nature of pre-war transformative disaster fiction is to obtain an insight into the historical origins and consistent conventions of one of the major forms of British science fiction. The key pre-World War II texts arose out of *fin-de-siècle* fears of decline and subsequent anxieties over social and cultural change in Britain between the wars and each novel's depiction of survival and restoration is a response, speculatively and politically, to contemporary British cultural fears. Thus, like utopian and anti-utopian writings, with which they have much in common, they explore the tensions existing between two defining impulses: anxiety and desire.

In depicting cataclysm as an opportunity for social change, a shifting landscape of cultural concerns can be observed. *The War of the Worlds* responds critically to apprehensions around Victorian complacency and fears of the British being superseded by more advanced military forces, while *The Purple Cloud* uses the catastrophe scenario to facilitate a rebirth that eliminates a 'corrupt' humanity. Conan Doyle's *The Poison Belt* is more optimistic, and less apocalyptic, in its attitude to the necessity for cultural change. Only a reminder of human fragility, it argues, is required to provoke social transformation. Such optimism is absent from Connington's *Nordenholt's Million*, which presents a totalitarian drive towards efficiency and eugenics as the means of cultural modification. Rejecting modernity entirely, *Deluge* and *Dawn* use the catastrophe to emphasize the merits of a less technologized existence. While these novels clearly continue the trajectory of 'growing pessimism that accompanies the theme of progress from the very beginning of the [nineteenth] century' (Friedländer 1985: 61), taken collectively, they are united by their wish-fulfilment responses to an increasing disillusionment with contemporary conditions.

By presenting alternative social structures as wish fulfilment fantasies,

each text reinforced the contemporary dissatisfactions underpinning it. Indeed, it seems likely that the novels sought to provoke a cognitive reaction in their readers, who were encouraged to re-evaluate critically their cultural values, political situation and contemporary attitudes. Throughout the forty years following the publication of Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, concerns over increasing levels of pollution and squalor caused by industrialization resulted in fears over the health of the nation's population and intensified the evolutionary based fears regarding biological regression. These anxieties were compounded when confidence in British military superiority was damaged after the Boer War and, again, when World War I was not easily won (Gooch 2000: 206; Overy 2007: 42). The transfigurative British disaster novels that span this period are a symptomatic response to such declining confidence and, in many ways, seek to re-establish faith in the British evolutionary and cultural superiority that had existed in the nineteenth century.

To depict social change, transformative disaster fiction presents either 'return' or 'departure' scenarios following the disaster. Similarly, in presenting its emergent post-disaster societies as positive transformations, pre-war transfigurative disaster fiction falls into these 'return' / 'departure' categories. 'Returns' describe texts in which the pre-catastrophe society is reinstated and, in the transfigurative mode, is improved upon. *The War of the Worlds*, *The Poison Belt* and (the first part of) *The Hopkins Manuscript* are all 'returns' that advocate a post-disaster restoration of an amended British society. In these texts the cataclysm is the admonition of a complacent population and the works use the cataclysm to elicit a change which essentially turns back the clock, redressing imperialist anxieties and evoking former attitudes in the surviving population. By contrast, 'departures' describe those texts in which the post-catastrophe civilization is radically different from the pre-cataclysmic world. *The Purple Cloud*, *Nordenholt's Million*, *Deluge* and *Dawn* all fall into this category and depict the elimination of the pre-disaster society. These 'departures' halt the current trajectory of modernity by eradicating it entirely in favour of taking human civilizations in a new direction. Each novel destroys contemporary society to offer disjunctive wish fulfilment fantasies. Here disaster is not a warning regarding contemporary complacency; it functions to topple a civilization depicted as unworthy of saving. Each is an anti-democratic masculine power fantasy, expressing an overwhelming desire for control that perhaps reflects a sense of political impotence in the face of emancipation, modernity and technological change. *The Purple Cloud*, for example, presents its female characters, Clodagh and Leda, as manipulative figures; *Nordenholt's Million* emphasizes the strong leadership of Nordenholt, which contrasts with the characterization of Elsa (the only prominent female character in the novel) as illogical and emotional; and

in *Deluge* and *Dawn* the reassertion of masculine authority is fundamental to the transfigurative scenario. The texts present increasingly independent women negatively and call for a movement to a more primitive and patriarchal existence.

While all of these texts draw upon Social Darwinist ideas, 'returns' seek to redress Britain's perceived diminished power and restore the nation's implied former greatness while 'departures' use destruction as a positive, purgative event. In signifying their wish fulfilment fantasies through 'returns' and 'departures', transfigurative disaster narratives offer an appealing sense of continuance to readers. Accordingly, the satisfaction of reading these transfigurative disaster novels derives, in part, from the reassurance that the 'end of the world' is, in fact, the very opposite.

Although classifiable in two distinct categories, transfigurative disaster novels are unanimously optimistic. They present their post-cataclysmic civilizations as improvements on the author's contemporary environment. Such confidence begins to falter on the eve of World War II, however, when the transformative disaster ceases to be dominated by transfigurative texts. The final British disaster novel published before the war, *The Hopkins Manuscript*, illustrates this shift. The novel anticipates the movement that would occur in transformative disaster fiction after the war as it turned away from transfigurative narratives to assume a more ambivalent attitude towards the physical and psychological consequences of catastrophe.

A Janus-Faced Perspective: *The Hopkins Manuscript*

Written on the brink of World War II, Sherriff's *The Hopkins Manuscript* explores the devastating potential of powerful leaders and nationalism. Through its depiction of two disasters – the Moon's collision with Earth and a consequent war – *The Hopkins Manuscript* unites the idealism of the transfigurative novel in its 'return' mode with the radical shifts associated with 'departure' texts. However, the 'departure' in Sherriff's novel differs significantly from those that preceded it. It depicts the demise of western civilization and, for the first time, the living conditions for the protagonist are portrayed as being markedly worse after each cataclysm than before. Thus, *The Hopkins Manuscript* marks a significant change in the genre. Where previous texts had presented the cataclysm as an opportunity, *The Hopkins Manuscript* explores this only in the aftermath of the first cataclysm. With the second disaster, the novel adopts an unreservedly pessimistic deteriorative view of the post-catastrophe world.

The first cataclysmic event in Sherriff's novel involves the Moon's collision with Earth. It displaces the Atlantic Ocean, creating a landmass that links Europe with America. Despite the calamitous consequences of this, society is initially improved by the experience. However, a devastating war over the Moon's

territories and resources results in the demise of European civilization. The conclusion to this second event means that narratively *The Hopkins Manuscript* looks in two directions: after initially drawing upon the transfigurative fiction that preceded it, it introduces the deteriorative mode that will follow. Significantly, Aldiss describes it as a 'cosy catastrophe, much in the style that Wyndham was to adopt two decades later. It reads now as a gorgeous parody of all things British and thirties-ish' (Aldiss and Wingrove 2001: 278). While Aldiss's description indicates the novel's position within the British disaster mode, his interpretation fails to address the tonal shift that occurs between the two catastrophes. The assuredness of human survival amidst adversity following the moon's impact is undermined when the second disaster presents a cynical decline of western society's own making. As such, the final parts of the book are a self-reflexive expose of the naiveté of seeing positive social change emerge from a cataclysmic event. More broadly, the alteration in tone in the second half heralds the larger shift in British transformative disaster novels published after the war when such texts began increasingly to present bleaker post-apocalyptic environments.

Beyond these generic considerations, *The Hopkins Manuscript* is a witty, ironic work that develops its themes through rich characterization and increasingly nostalgic reflection. By rejecting plausibility in its depiction of the initial 'Moon catastrophe' the text announces itself as allegorical, establishing a series of analogies with British history. The pre-cataclysmic society represents pre-World War I Britain; the Moon's descent and collision with Earth is a metaphor for World War I; the post-cataclysmic rebuilding parallels the post-World War I period up to 1933; the discovery of riches on the Moon suggests the period after 1933, which was characterized by increasing tensions in Europe; and the subsequent war over territory and resources on the Moon anticipates the imagined devastating effects of a second world war. Embodying the optimism of earlier transfigurative texts, the Moon's impact initially draws nations and communities together in a spirit of mutual cooperation. However, once the Moon's mineral wealth and territorial possibilities are realized, the narrative highlights human avarice, national self-interest and political manipulation as opposing positive social transformation.

During and after the Moon's collision, widespread destruction is balanced with a local and global spirit of cooperation and collaboration. While the approach and impact of the Moon is a great source of anxiety and tragedy, it also draws people together in happiness at having 'something novel and valuable to do' (Sherriff 2005: 136). At the level of the individual, the narrator, Hopkins, secures a position for himself in a burgeoning community that means companionship and newfound significance. Indeed, the novel is careful to distinguish between

one's sense of importance (represented by the 'found artefacts' described in the novel's prologue and developed through Hopkins' haughtiness) and genuine usefulness through Hopkins' character trajectory. He spends the early parts of the novel imagining himself important while contributing little to his community. Later, his poultry breeding becomes an essential source of food for survivors of the cataclysm.

Locally, the disaster creates a cordial spirit amongst the community, who rally together in the face of imminent danger. Similar themes of collaboration and friendship amidst adversity were explored in Sherriff's earlier, more famous work, *Journey's End* (1929). This semi-autobiographical play, based on Sherriff's wartime experiences, is set in the trenches during World War I and develops the dual themes of camaraderie and tragedy. An analogous camaraderie is found in *The Hopkins Manuscript*, particularly in scenes where the inhabitants of the village of Beadle work together to build a dugout in preparation for the Moon's impact. This shelter unites the villagers during its construction, but it is the place where almost all of the population is killed. By depicting the same companionship during adversity as *Journey's End, The Hopkins Manuscript* makes explicit the parallels being drawn between the Moon's collision and World War I. The fact that Sherriff treats the events in Beadle in a way similar to those in *Journey's End* signals that, for Sherriff, World War I had, paradoxically, been both a traumatic and rewarding experience (Sherriff 1968: 131), much like the Moon collision for Hopkins.

Just as *Journey's End* provides an intimate insight into the personal experiences of war, Hopkins' narration of the events in Beadle provides a personal reflection on the fulfilment and pride of a community drawn together at a time of danger and fear. The understated bravery of the villagers is symptomatic of the celebration of human achievement that permeates the first part of the novel. It commends humanity's capacity to accomplish much when working cooperatively. Hence, the narrative's wish fulfilment fantasy is one of community, comradeship and equality. Nevertheless, the celebratory aspects of the text, which applaud united purpose and shared achievement, are tempered by the persistence of cultural norms that predate the cataclysm. Thus, unlike the disaster novels that precede it, *The Hopkins Manuscript* stresses that societal change is an uncertain and fragile process.

Problematizing the straightforward transfigurations of prior transformative texts, *The Hopkins Manuscript* draws attention to the difficulties of socio-cultural transformation. These are emphasized through Hopkins' response to his altered environment following the Moon's collision. He is a petty and self-important man able, largely, to put aside his flaws as the cataclysm approaches to work with his fellow residents on the Beadle dugout. While he achieves much fulfilment

working with his peers, and recognizes his greater happiness when part of a group, he is unable to accept such collective endeavours as a social norm outside of exceptional circumstances. Filled with a 'grand spirit' Hopkins notes, 'I was almost tempted to tell John Briggs, the carpenter, that my Christian name was Edgar. I decided upon reflection not to do so, for if nothing fatal happened on the 3rd of May he might fail to appreciate his duty to call me "sir" again' (Sherriff 2005: 136). The novel's satire is clear: the threat has unified the village, but social traditions and conservative attitudes threaten to break the union and cooperative spirit described. In this way, *The Hopkins Manuscript* laments that such collaboration is only likely under adverse conditions. It demonstrates little faith in the longevity or permanence of transfiguration, an assumption that had been key to the transformative disaster narrative previously. Preparing for the Moon's impact realizes a 'bond of comradeship' (136) that is unlikely to permanently displace the former class distinctions that threaten to reassert themselves once the crisis has passed.

Building upon the community and sense of fulfilment fostered by the Moon's descent, a 'golden age' follows the cataclysm. Society is reconstructed with a new emphasis on the collaboration and companionship that emerged pre-disaster. In contrast to the harsh realities of inter-war Britain, the massive loss of life here leads to social and cultural transfiguration. Hopkins imagines the post-cataclysm society will be an altered one where the general quality of life is improved. He tells his fellow survivors Robin and Pat that although they have suffered, 'we shall have reward […]. Before you are old you may be living in a world much finer than any you would have known if this…cataclysm had not come to us' (266). Hopkins even imagines the future in utopian terms. He envisions 'fresh air – warm, friendly houses – peace – purpose – happiness' (360). This vision – the result of the hard work on the part of the survivors – provides a positive outcome for tragedy. Had *The Hopkins Manuscript* concluded here, it would have aligned itself with prior transfigurative texts. However, the novel interrogates its subject matter with greater scepticism than its antecedents.

Although the future Hopkins envisions seems perfectly possible, it is quashed by global events. Like post-World War I Britain, the novel's post-impact society provides an opportunity for recovery and improvement. Hopkins explains that the cataclysm 'was terrible. But it was almost worthwhile to have achieved this wonderful spirit of friendship and helpfulness between nations' (336). Over time, however, this 'wonderful spirit' is lost as the novel captures post-war disenchantment with the possibility of genuine collective improvement. As historian Richard Overy explains, the period after World War I was filled with expectations about the 'restoration of social peace' (Overy 2008: 92). However, 'against this weight of idealism and illusion, the reality […] was a

grave disappointment. Social unrest, economic stagnation and political conflict were measured against the hopes of peace abroad and stability of the whole, and found sadly wanting' (Overy 2007: 42). Overy observes that this culminated in a 'sense of loss – of innocence, of moral certainty, of social values, of cultural confidence' (Overy 2008: 42). By presenting an idealized England of reformed social values and renewed cultural confidence in the aftermath of catastrophe, *The Hopkins Manuscript* realizes the transfigurative possibilities that were never historically achieved. By presenting a fantasy of what *could-have-been*, the novel draws attention to the contemporary conditions in Britain that might lead disenchanted authors to see catastrophe as the only means of social progress. Such a fantasy also deepens the text's later ironic reflection on the improbability of social change, even after a cataclysm.

Following the Moon's collision, the novel suggests that while post-cataclysm society is ostensibly more egalitarian, individual perceptions are slow to change. Typical of the novel's ironic tone, this is indicated through Hopkins' social interactions. During a celebratory lunch for survivors he comments that 'everybody had a place at the table: everybody an important job – none were useless – none were unemployed. Distinctions of class were gone forever, and I sat with Mrs Smithson, the wife of a plumber, and Mrs Bingham of the drapery store talking to them almost as if they were my equals' (Sherriff 2005: 359-60). Unaware of his ingrained prejudices, he can only perceive the wives of a tradesman and a shopkeeper as '*almost*' his equals, suggesting that social transformation may be superficial and transient rather than genuine and enduring.

Analogously, although the threat posed by the Moon draws nations together, their cooperation is tenuous. Just as Hopkins is unable to see his fellow villagers as equals, so, it is revealed, each nation views its neighbours as less important. Their spirit of mutual cooperation is exposed as both shallow and fragile, existing only under exceptional conditions. Once the Moon has crashed to Earth, old antipathies resurface in the light of the new mineral wealth. In this way, the narrative events recall interwar unrest. Just as the war 'inflamed long-standing rivalries and confirmed old hatreds' (Sharpe et al 2002: 530) rather than ushering in a lasting peace, so the Moon, which had initially fostered global goodwill, becomes the source of international conflict. The discovery of rich deposits on its surface causes former tensions to re-emerge as each nation lays claim to a share.

This drive for new resources and territories, and the shift from potential peace to international conflict is, overtly, the textual equivalent of changes in international relations during the interwar period. As Norman Lowe explains, before January 1933 there seemed a good chance world peace could be

maintained; afterwards, however, all hope was gone (Lowe 1997: 207). Read in the light of this historical turning point, the idealized peacetime of *The Hopkins Manuscript* – before the discovery of minerals on the Moon – represents the brief period of peace between 1918 and 1933. It is shattered by the rise of nationalism and materialist competition between the European powers. Thus, the collegial spirit that emerges during the wish fulfilment opening section of the novel is displaced in the second half by a sense of distrust and national self-interest that leads to war. The growing momentum towards European annihilation in the latter part of the text expresses the sense of impending disaster that accompanied the approach of World War II. *The Hopkins Manuscript*'s change in tone reflects the dwindling optimism between the wars as those in Britain realized that World War I was not, after all, the war to end all wars.

The parallels drawn by *The Hopkins Manuscript* between its fictional events and the global political situation pre- and post-1933 are explicit. After the Moon's collision, the 'United States of Europe' (Sherriff 2005: 332) is created in a clear equivalent to the formal establishment of the League of Nations in 1920, supposedly symbolizing a new era of peace (Lowe 1997: 97). However, in the novel each nation 'demands a bigger slice [of the Moon]' (Sherriff 2005: 345). As a result, each country's claims to the Moon are coupled with a suspicion of other nations, especially the British who, in a manner akin to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, initially try to broker peace. The resultant fracturing of a tentatively united Europe, the rise of territorial and economic disputes, and increasing global tensions parallel the 'disagreements over territorial demands, material compensation, and the conditions needed for future security' (Sharpe et al 2002: 532) that threatened to break the League of Nations in the interwar years.

The battle for territory and wealth in *The Hopkins Manuscript* is a clear reference to interwar global events and the threat to peace and stability they posed. Thus, *The Hopkins Manuscript* does not consider interwar unrest as an opportunity for social restructuring, as did *Nordenholt's Million* and *Deluge* and *Dawn*. This may be because it is the only transformative disaster novel written after 1933, when the interwar mood had shifted in the light of increasing global tensions. The events that culminate in the outbreak of war in the text are therefore informed by the European economic context of international distrust and the failure of the League of Nations.

Developing the novel's irony, Hopkins explains that 'the moon contains minerals sufficient to give wealth to this world undreamed of' (Sherriff 2005: 339). Hence, the initial cataclysm's potential to be a catalyst for positive change and international peace has, the text asserts, been wasted. As the narrative reaches its climax, Hopkins' declaration is revealed as naive. Indeed, the novel

self-consciously signals this naiveté when Major Jagger, an intellectual who becomes Prime Minister, reflects upon events and asks Hopkins, 'do you imagine a cataclysm – or one hundred cataclysms – can change human nature?' (337). Jagger's question seems to contradict what Michael Moorcock sees as Sherriff's recognition of 'the inherent decency of ordinary people caught up in events which they neither wanted – nor […] engineered'. Whilst Moorcock asserts that Sherriff never lost his 'optimistic belief in human decency' (Moorcock 2005: xi), the text offers a more complex representation of 'human nature' than this.

When Jagger later affirms that 'the cataclysm has not altered human nature' (Sherriff 2005: 345), he consolidates the novel's suggestion that self-importance and self-interest can undermine prosperity. In the aftermath of the Moon's collision, manipulative political leaders rise to exploit and extend this sense of self-importance into nationalism. The positive representations of autocratic leadership found previously in inter-war transformative texts such as *Nordenholt's Million* and *Deluge* are not present in *The Hopkins Manuscript*. Rather, the novel depicts the newly established post-cataclysm governments as encouraging their populations' worst characteristics. Unlike its antecedents, *The Hopkins Manuscript* indicates that those leaders who attain power following a cataclysm are not necessarily going to change society for the better. Indeed, the political leaders that become prominent following the Moon's collision are characterized as power hungry scaremongers whose political decisions affect their populations in wholly negative ways.

It is here that the novel's political position is most explicit. In a clear allusion to the emergence of dictators in Europe after World War I (including Mussolini, Franco and Hitler), Hopkins observes that following the discovery of riches on the Moon there arose a 'horrid swarm of political upstarts' (351). Where *Nordenholt's Million* and *Deluge* and *Dawn* presented post-catastrophe restructuring from the perspective of new post-disaster leaders, *The Hopkins Manuscript*'s focus on the experiences of the common man shows the effects such leadership has on the population. This contrast in perspective both emphasizes and dramatizes the devastating effects of autocratic leadership on individuals. Hopkins' powerlessness and his frustration at these 'upstarts' is a consequence of their disruption of the fragile new communities emerging across Europe after the impact. He explains that these new leaders are:

> nasty creatures [who] would swoop down upon peaceful, hard-working communities, upon people intent only upon rebuilding their shattered fortunes and living in quiet happiness. With clever, impassioned speeches they declared that their cowardly Governments were allowing other countries to seize the lion's share of the moon's wealth. They frightened bewildered people into believing that if they did not

> arouse themselves and 'stand up for the rights of their country' they would soon be living in poverty, slaves to a foreign power. (351–52)

The allusion to 'new leaders [who have] risen abroad' (365) – and in Britain in the character of Major Jagger – makes the novel's anti-authoritarian, anti-nationalist and anti-war stance overt. This is no *Nordenholt's Million*, *Deluge*, or *Dawn*, presenting the benefits of dictatorship. Rather, *The Hopkins Manuscript* views authoritarianism negatively and, by extension, can be read as a critical comment on the political direction of Europe between the wars.

Fittingly, Hopkins' emotional response to the approaching war is one of despair. He tries to find 'the spark of new adventure' but notes that 'it was useless. I had survived the cataclysm: by super-human endeavour I rebuilt my life. It was too much to ask of any man that he should face a second ruin and rebuild again' (348–49). Hopkins' weary despondency establishes the mood of a war-weary Britain, a country whose hope for a new 'golden age' has been ruined by political disagreements and national self-interests. As the war for resources develops, it consumes all the existing assets required for rebuilding. Hopkins' reaction suggests the increasing sense of pessimism associated with the novel's context. As Overy points out, Britain, France and Germany 'believed that the next war, if it came, would be the total war, a long war that required the mobilisation of the nation's entire military and moral resources' (Overy 2008: 48). Given this expectation of a long and arduous clash, it is hardly surprising that *The Hopkins Manuscript* offers a vision of a total and devastating war, for Europe at least. Conflict is presented as catastrophe. By fighting amongst themselves, the European powers become vulnerable to an invasion from the East. As each nation uses every provision to attain resources from the Moon, 'The Eastern Menace' (Sherriff 2005: 408) destroys a weakened Europe. Hopkins laments that '"if Europe had remained united we could have scattered them to the winds…." I was past all anger now' (409). His tired, melancholic reflection reads as a final plea for a united Europe. The novel's overall despondency culminates in Hopkins' death. His demise, stemming from a loss of hope, is a metaphor for the downfall of Europe. He notes: 'I was living […] in a fantasy of dreams that had no further kinship with this earthly world. "It need never have happened"', he says sadly (409). His reflection suggests not only the hopelessness of Europe's position but also the fact that such a catastrophe could have been avoided.

From the perspective of genre, the movement from post-cataclysmic hope for the future to wartime despair within the novel's storyworld renders the text Janus-faced. The optimism expressed in the aftermath of the Moon's collision with the Earth looks back to the wish fulfilment fantasies that had hitherto defined 'return' transfigurative narratives. By exposing this uncomplicatedly

optimistic position, *The Hopkins Manuscript* can be read as a product of a loss of innocence within the British disaster tradition more generally, something that would develop considerably after World War II. The text's ultimate pessimism emphasizes the fantasy inherent in such optimistic transfigurative disaster novels. This pessimism also marks *The Hopkins Manuscript* as a deteriorative 'departure' narrative, a status confirmed by its vision of Europe superseded by the East. For this reason, the novel holds a historically significant position; it was the first of its type to view disaster as a wholly negative occurrence.

Pre-World War II transfigurative novels had portrayed cultural disenchantments before fictionally preparing the way for a different world. Although ideologically distinct, each presented a critique of its socio-political milieu and framed a cataclysmic event as an opportunity for social and cultural rebirth. Politically, the novels offered alternate futures that challenged the established norms of their contemporary social context. Thus, while structurally the form of the transfigurative disaster novel remained largely consistent, the nature of the cultural transformation achieved in each text depended upon individual responses to shifting social, cultural and political anxieties. Although their optimism is presented as simplistic in *The Hopkins' Manuscript*, the diversity of the narratives and their ideological positions highlights transformative disaster fiction's capacity for reinvention, a factor that has contributed to the mode's longevity.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of World War II many British transformative disaster novels embraced the pessimism of *The Hopkins Manuscript*'s deteriorative narrative. Between its transfigurative and deteriorative poles, the British transformative disaster novel diversified significantly. On occasion, transfigurative and deteriorative elements exist within the same text. John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), for example, balances the negative view of a deteriorative 'World Narrowing' (Chapter Fifteen) with the potentially positive prospects of a transfigurative 'Strategic Withdrawal' (Chapter Seventeen). Such ambivalence, which is more apparent in John Christopher's transformative catastrophes, can be seen, in part, as a loss of faith in what Sherriff terms 'human nature' following World War II. Additionally, the proliferation of new anxieties arising from the Cold War, military and civil nuclear threats, environmental failures, pollution, overpopulation, declining natural resources, and technological and scientific advancements (Bourke 2005: 259) contributed to an uncertainty over how a catastrophe – human-wrought or natural – could be survived. Nevertheless, these more ambivalent transformative texts, even in their deteriorative mode, often contain a wish fulfilment element through their emphasis on survival as

compensation for mass death and destruction.

As the twentieth century progressed, several critics noted that there was a movement towards the deteriorative end of the transformative spectrum that has continued into the new millennium and beyond. Increasingly, survival stories, dystopian worlds, and tales of total annihilation have grown in popularity, particularly as the form's links to the horror genre developed following the 1980s. As Krishan Kumar has observed, the contemporary apocalypse is often missing the sense of hope of something constructive emerging from the ruins (Kumar 1995: 205). For James Berger the increasingly pessimistic tone of apocalyptic fiction arose from the fact that 'in the late twentieth century the unimaginable, the unspeakable, has already happened, and continues to happen' (Berger 1999: 42). Visions of catastrophe, accompanied by the sense that there are always new and additional sources of potential disaster, are dominated by what Frank Kermode calls the 'mood of end-dominated crisis' (Kermode 1967: 98). Joanna Bourke outlines the sources of this mood when she points out the nebulous and global nature of modern sources of threat (from cancer, to crime and pollution), which are isolating and difficult to avoid (Bourke 2005: 293).

The sense of immediacy – the feeling that catastrophe may be around any corner – reached new heights as the millennium approached. The popular media increasingly provided real-world alternatives to popular narratives of impending disaster. Striving for sensationalism, it has fuelled the general feeling that contemporary civilization could be on the brink of collapse. Nuclear threats, chemical warfare, the millennium bug, SARS, CJD, global warming, declining natural resources, super volcanoes, asteroids, terrorism, pandemics and nationalism have each been presented as sources of humankind's possible downfall. While culturally this state of perpetual crisis is established and re-established, the disaster genre proliferated in both Britain and America as it responded to anxieties informing the modern cultural landscape. At its core, the transformative disaster text has always been, and remains, one of the clearest expressions of the fragility of human civilization and of the primary source of speculations regarding the nature and possibilities of what may follow its destruction.

Endnote

[1]Cicely Hamilton's modernist future war novel *Theodore Savage* (1922) treats disaster with greater complexity. Taking a long view of history, the novel is a sustained examination of post-war hardship, myth and rebuilding. However, it considers disaster as part of a cycle of the rises and falls of human civilization, a viewpoint emphasized in its subtitle, *A Story of the Past or the Future*. This cyclicity distinguishes the text from those examined in this article.

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Rethinking 'Ursula K. Le Guin and Translation': An Ecofeminist Perspective

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As an award-winning writer of science fiction and fantasy, Ursula K. Le Guin has received substantial critical attention in literary and cultural studies but rarely in translation studies, despite also being a translator of, amongst others, Angelica Gorodischer, Gabriela Mistral and Lao Tzu. In Ria Cheyne's 'Ursula K. Le Guin and Translation' (2006), Cheyne throws light not only upon the relationship between translation and understanding but also the interaction between language, culture and translation. She argues that 'Le Guin's translations – both in the sense of her translated texts and her use of translation as a metaphor within her work – demonstrate a rejection of what Sukanta Chaudhuri terms *unilingualism*: "a mindset or ethos that operates only in terms of one language"' (Cheyne 2006: 457). By looking closely at the relationship between language, power and culture, from *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) to *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *Always Coming Home* (1985), Cheyne argues that Le Guin's use of translation not only renounces 'a unilingual sensibility' (462) but also positively advocates for 'multiplicity' (468) in terms of discourse, language and cultural diversity.

And yet, there are some flaws in Cheyne's analysis. 'Mazes' (1975), for example, is told by a first-person narrator who describes the failure of communication with an 'alien' who is in fact a human scientist. By reversing the subaltern status of the test animal, Le Guin also subverts the habitual anthropocentricism of reading and thinking, in which the human is always the subject whilst animals and other species are alien objects. In Cheyne's reading of the story, though, she erases this re-orientation by instead referring to the narrator of the story as 'alien':

> The narrator of the story is an alien, and has no conception of communication by sound. It repeatedly tries to communicate with the human scientist studying it in its own language, which is one of meaningful movement. Yet the human never realizes that the alien's language works in that way, and never understands the message that the alien is trying to get across – that it cannot eat the food that has been provided for it, and that it is starving. (Cheyne 2006: 461)

In contrast, Le Guin's original depiction of the test animal's narration is as follows:

> The alien's cruelty is refined, yet irrational. If it intended all along to

> starve me, why not simply withhold food? But instead of that it gave me plenty of food. (Le Guin 1994a: 61–62)

Chenye virtually translates Le Guin's ecological standpoint back into the conventional anthropocentric position. From an ecofeminist perspective, the tragedy is not caused by the test animal's inability to translate its needs into meaningful communication but the scientist's indifference to the animal's bodily movements as meaningful signifiers. As Le Guin describes, the test animal has been actively translating the body language of the scientist:

> Now I saw something a little beyond that, in its position. There were no words, yet there was communication. I saw, as it stood watching me, a clear signification of angry sadness-as clear as the Sembrian stance […] Never a word came clear, and yet it told me that it was filled with resentment, pity, impatience, and frustration. It told me it was sick of torturing me, and wanted me to help it. I am sure I understood it. (66)

This narration shows that the test animal does see the scientist as being equally capable of communication, despite their semiotic differences. However, being enclosed in his own sign system, the scientist does not read the test animal's movements as meaningful choices. To put it another way, instead of seeing both humans and animals as the subject of communication, the scientist regards the test animal as an object lacking in communicative competence, which prevents him from seeking either communication or translation with it. For translation studies, the implication of the story is that, while it is obvious that to translate one needs to understand the language of the other, the conventional understanding of translation is confined to the domain of human languages, which overlooks the communication and understanding of species in the more-than-human world. Therefore, the story points towards a new direction for translation: to supersede the anthropocentric semiotic boundary and engage at inter-species communication and translation in the eco-system at large.

Despite Cheyne's neglect of Le Guin's ecological concerns, Le Guin has won extensive acclaim within the field of ecofeminist studies. Patrick D. Murphy, for example, has credited Le Guin with the ability to 'generate multicultural social interactions that recognize the inevitability of difference and conflict without domination or forced assimilation' (Murphy 1995: 56–57). Val Plumwood, in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), draws upon Le Guin's essay 'Women/Wilderness' (1989) to write 'What is wilderness in the terms of the master identity is to these others a home' (Plumwood 1993:161), an echo of Le Guin's 'Where I live as a woman is to some men a wilderness. But to me it is home' (Le Guin 1989: 46). Deeply concerned over the social and ecological

crises in which the world is entrenched, Le Guin's use of translation goes hand in hand with her ecofeminism. We can sense this relationship in Le Guin's introduction to the *Tao Te Ching*:

> Scholarly translations of the Tao Te Ching as a manual for rulers use a vocabulary that emphasizes the uniqueness of the Taoist 'sage,' his masculinity, his authority. This language is perpetuated, and degraded, in most popular versions. I wanted a Book of the Way accessible to a present-day, unpowerful, and perhaps unmale reader, not seeking esoteric secrets, but listening for a voice that speaks to the soul. (Le Guin 1997: ix–x)

We can also see her ecofeminism more clearly from the notes added to the translated lines of Lao Tzu: 'To lose the sense of the sacredness of the world is a mortal loss. To injure our world by excesses of greed and ingenuity is to endanger our own sacredness' (40). With this emphasis in mind, it is necessary to re-examine Le Guin's use of translation again, this time from an ecofeminist perspective.

Translation is typically regarded as a linguistic activity, as Susan Bassnett observes:

> Early thinking about translation was dominated by notions of equivalence, premised on binary oppositions between source and target, and by an emphasis on translation as a linguistic activity, properly so since translation involves the transfer of texts interlingually. (Bassnett 2005: 86)

Undoubtedly, in Le Guin's works, the linguistic translation is one of the necessary conditions for communication. For example, Genly in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Shevek in *The Dispossessed* can both speak the language of the planet they visit. Without this linguistic ability, it would be more difficult for them to communicate with the people of those planets. However, despite its significance, it is but one aspect of translation, and the translation at the mere linguistic level is far from achieving genuine communication and understanding among people. For example, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the early communication between Genly and Estraven is hindered by the Gethenian code of *shifgrethor*, which is 'prestige, face, place, the pride-relationship, the untranslatable and all-important principle of social authority in Karhide and all civilizations of Gethen' (Le Guin 1987: 14). There verbal communication does not lead to understanding but rather, misunderstanding:

> 'I'm sorry,' he was saying, 'that I've had to forestall for so long this

> pleasure of having you in my house; and to that extent at least I'm glad there is no longer any question of patronage between us.'
>
> I puzzled at this awhile. He had certainly been my patron in court until now. Did he mean that the audience he had arranged for me with the king tomorrow had raised me to an equality with himself? 'I don't think I follow you,' I said.
>
> At that, he was silent, evidently also puzzled. (14–15)

Misunderstanding turns to distrust as Genly considers he has been betrayed by Estraven:

> And so you're hurrying to join them, selling me out to save your skin, I thought, but there was no point in saving it. Estraven was a courtier, a politician, and I a fool to have trusted him. Even in a bisexual society the politician is very often something less than an integral man. (15)

Similarly, in *The Dispossessed*, Shevek does not understand his fellow scientists' discrimination against women in Urras, the society he visits, as there is no gender discrimination in Anarres, his own society, a social prejudice that is also encoded in a seemingly indecipherable language. In *The Word for World is Forest* (1976), Selver does not understand his fellow translator, Lyubov, because of the huge gap between their two cultures, as Selver says:

> Much of what he told me, I couldn't understand. It wasn't the language that kept me from understanding; I knew his tongue, and he learned ours; we made a writing of the two languages together. Yet there were things he said I could never understand. (Le Guin 1994: 43–44)

Cheyne rightly observes that 'Le Guin demonstrates that being able to understand what the words in another language mean is not enough for understanding when cultural differences prevent it' (Cheyne 2006: 460). Indeed, with these writings, Le Guin throws light on a hidden fact that the root of barriers to communication and understanding is not the difference of languages, just as her protagonists and Cheyne's analysis reveal to us that speaking the same language is not equal to achieving genuine understanding among speakers. Therefore, it means the task of translation is far more than just bridging the linguistic difference. The questions then become: how to achieve communication and understanding? and what is the task of translation?

In his essay 'The Task of the Translator' (1923), Water Benjamin points out that 'Translation is so far removed from being sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth

pangs of its own' (Benjamin 1992: 75). He points beyond the linguistic translation towards the creation of a 'pure language': 'It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of pure language he breaks though decayed barriers of his own language' (80-1).

Le Guin and Benjamin share some common thought as both point towards an act of translation that exists beyond the linguistic level. But, there are differences between them as well; for Benjamin, the task of the translation is not to bridge the linguistic differences, but rather to make space for the 'pure language', which is abstract, elusive and higher above the ordinary languages. For Le Guin, by contrast, the task of translation includes the bridging of the linguistic differences, although it is insufficient for achieving genuine understanding for people holding radically different perspectives or different ways of thinking. Undoubtedly, Benjamin helps to liberate translation from the boundary of the linguistic equivalence, but he also creates a sharp hierarchy between the ordinary language and 'pure language', thus making the translation of the linguistic signifier inferior to the birth of 'pure language', which arguably reveals a way of thinking deeply rooted in Western Dualism.

For Le Guin, the task of translation is even more complex. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin depicts the journey of Genly to the winter world of Gethen. Besides being a diplomatic mission, Genly's visit is also a process of individual growth consisting of three stages. In the first stage, despite his linguistic competence, Genly does not understand the social and cultural structures of Gethen due to the radical differences between his own world and that of Gethen, in particular, the lack of any fixed sexual differences. As already seen, Genly misinterprets the behavior and intention of Estraven, the Prime Minister of Karhide, based upon his own social and sexual prejudices. The second stage is that of contact and communication in which Estraven risks her/his own life to save Genly from prison. In the course of the long, ice-bound journey, Genly has the opportunity to learn about the thought and behavior of the Gethenians from Estraven. The third stage involves a bonding between Genly and Estraven, in which real communication and understanding can be achieved.

From the perspective of translation, a two-way process occurs in which Genly and Estraven learn about each other's culture. Although Genly has arrived on Gethen with a view to incorporating the planet within the interstellar community of the Ekumen, Genly becomes a speaker whose language is translated by the linguistic and social customs of Gethen. Although the planet does eventually join the Ekumen, Genly is unable to reconcile himself to the two sexes of his own kind, so Gethenian has he become: 'They were like a troupe of great,

strange animals, of two different species: great apes with intelligent eyes, all of them in rut, in kemmer' (Le Guin 1987: 254). In this sense, then, Genly is both the subject and object of translation: on the one hand, he translates the thinking of his own kind, the Hainish, into the language of the Gethenians, whilst on the other hand, he is himself translated into the thinking of Gethen, which is a step towards further self-transformation.

In *The Dispossessed*, Shevek follows a different trajectory, travelling from Anarres, a society featuring natural scarcity but social cooperation, to Urras, a society with abundant natural resources but entrenched in social crisis. Shevek, however, is an outcast from his society due to the collectivist social order that hinders his own intellectual freedom. Despite the constraints on personal liberty, Anarrean culture is nonetheless established on non-hierarchical thinking, featuring cooperation, responsibility, and equality between the self and the other. It is during his encounter with the materially more prosperous but politically and socially more competitive society of Urras that Shevek's thinking is changed, and so he is subject to translation due to the sharp cultural differences between the two worlds. In the end, Shevek acknowledges the non-dualistic thinking of his own planet and decides to return to it to shoulder greater social responsibility:

> He recognized that need, in Odonian terms, as his 'cellular function', the analogic term for the individual's individuality, the work he can do best, therefore his best contribution to his society. A healthy society would let him exercise that optimum function freely, in the coordination of all such functions finding its adaptability and strength. That was a central idea of Odo's *Analogy*. That the Odonian society on Anarres had fallen short of the ideal did not, in his eyes, lessen his responsibility to it; just the contrary. With the myth of the State out of the way, the real mutuality and reciprocity of society and individual became clear. Sacrifice might be demanded of the individual, but never compromise: for, though only the society could give security and stability, only the individual, the person, had the power of moral choice – the power of change, the essential function of life. The Odonian society was conceived as a permanent revolution, and revolution begins in the thinking mind. (Le Guin 1994b: 274)

Shevek realizes the significant function of the individual to society, and that he should help to bring about positive changes rather than reject it and avoid personal responsibility:

> His sense of primary responsibility towards his work did not cut off from his fellows, from his society, as he had thought. It engaged him with them absolutely.
>
> He also felt that a man who had this sense of responsibility about

> one thing was obliged to carry it through in all things. It was a mistake to see himself as its vehicle and nothing else, to sacrifice any other obligation to it. (274–75)

Shevek discards the individualist ethos of Urras in favour of the collectivism of Anarres but, in returning to his home world, seeks to reform the society through his own personal and collaborative endeavor. The novel, as its sub-title suggests, ends ambiguously but with the possibility that Shevek's self-transformation will turn bring about larger changes, a translation at the social level.

Likewise, in *The Telling* (2000), the protagonists Sutty and Yara are from conflicted societies. Sutty's society is threatened by a religious fundamentalism which advocates for a totalitarian, monotheistic faith whilst Yara's society is endangered by another form of fundamentalism that advances science and technology at the expense of the Telling, a system of ancient wisdom featuring equality and balance between mind/body, culture/nature, matter/spirit and other concept pairs. At the beginning of the novel, both Sutty and Yara reject one another. But thanks to contact with the Telling, both are able to transcend their social confines and initiate a conversation, which generates further changes in their individual ways of thinking. In this process, translation takes place at various levels: on the one hand, an interaction between the egoistic self and a more balanced, healthy culture, and on the other hand, an intersubjectivity between the self and other individuals, where each is no longer objectified. Similar to the process in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the linguistic capacity is only one aspect of communication. Blocked by her dualistic way of thinking, Sutty fails at first to establish an understanding with Yara despite her linguistic abilities. Instead, it is the contact with the Telling that transforms her fundamental way of thinking to one that emphasizes the balancing of non-binary thought. As Jayne Glover argues, Le Guin suggests that both religious and secular fundamentalisms are destructive (Glover 2009: 36–42), yet the novel also unveils the hidden barrier to genuine communication and understanding, which is not linguistic difference but dualistic ways of thinking, a system based upon hierarchy, exclusion, and the opposition between self and other.

If the translator-figures in these works are represented obliquely, by contrast, in *The Word for World is Forest*, Le Guin brings the translator centre-stage, enabling her readers to reflect not only on the consequences brought about by domination, exploitation and violence, but also the paramount role of the translator. In the novel, there are two translators: Lyubov, who accompanies Captain Davidson to the world of Athshe, and Selver who eventually leads his people against the invading force. Both Davidson and Lyubov die in the fighting, whilst Selver and his peace-loving culture are changed from one living in harmony to one capable of murder. But when it comes to the war between Davidson's

army and the Athsheans, Cheyne attributes the cause of the violence to the difference between the two cultures, as she writes that 'the blame lies on both sides, with each culture dismissing the language (and therefore the beliefs and mindset) of the other in the same way' (Cheyne 2006: 464). It seems that the two sides should take equal responsibility for the tragedy although Cheyne is clear that Terren society, as represented by Davidson, is oppressive and the Athshean society is pacifist. She even cites Davidson's comment on the Athsheans that 'they were intraspecies nonaggressive' which 'meant sitting ducks' (Le Guin 2010: 28). But despite this, Cheyne does not blame Davidson's language, culture or mindset. Instead, by mirroring the Terran culture with the Ashean culture, she establishes an equation between a warlike culture and a peaceful culture and thus erases the difference between exploitation and domination, on the one hand, and peace and harmony, on the other hand. Due to this failure to question the injustice, Cheyne renders a problematic interpretation, which may be considered an abuse of 'difference' itself.

Le Guin has instead long denounced what she calls 'the problem of exploitation – exploitation of the woman, of the weak, of the earth':

> Our curse is alienation, the separation of *yang* from *yin* [and the moralization of *yang* as good, of *yin* as bad]. Instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance. Divisions are insisted upon, interdependence is denied. The dualism of value that destroys us, the dualism of superior/inferior, ruler/ruled, owner/owned, user/used, might give way to what seems to me, from here, a much healthier, sounder, more promising modality of integration and integrity. (Le Guin 1992: 16)

Whilst we can see that for Le Guin the culture of division, exploitation and domination should be replaced by a more harmonious and integrated society, it is necessary to clarify her position in relation to ecofeminism. Plumwood has elaborated on how Western Dualism has operated in a systematic way to translate difference into a hierarchy between the self and the other:

> Dualism can also be seen as an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm […] But in systematized forms of power, power is normally institutionalized and 'naturalised' by latching on to existing forms of difference. (Plumwood 1993: 42)

Plumwood distinguishes between difference and alienated differentiation: entities or cultures of difference are equal to each other in value whereas the alienated differentiation is a mechanism designed to create hierarchies to

provide a false foundation for domination and exploitation. It is therefore an objective of ecofeminism to deconstruct such a mechanism and call for respect for the difference between man and woman, humans and the rest of nature so as to restore equality between self and other.

The narrative of *The Word for World is Forest* serves to expose a military praxis based on Western Dualism. Cheyne's interpretation, however, serves to consolidate this destructive way of thinking, since she neglects Le Guin's condemnation of this aggressive mindset, whilst it is also evident that Davidson and his army are ultimately responsible. Unlike other travelers in Le Guin's works who, despite their original prejudices, are willing to learn and change for the sake of both self and other, Davison and his army are violent colonizers who refuse to adapt to their surroundings despite the facility of their translators. By contrast, Lyubov's death indicates the self-sacrifice inherent in the act of translation, whilst Selver's survival demonstrates the visionary power of the translator by leading his people to a better future (although one marked by its violent liberation). In her characters' mutual depiction of life and death, sacrifice and achievement, Le Guin reveals their oneness in serving the world despite, or rather because of, the dangerous situations that they are confronted with.

As Le Guin comments in the novel, 'the translator is the god' (Le Guin 1976: 105), by which she means not only the significance of the linguistic translation but also the relationship of language to social transformation. Le Guin accordingly assigns a prophetic status to Selver's role as translator in not only bridging linguistic and diplomatic differences between colonizer and colonized, but also in leading his people out of slavery. She therefore foregrounds the potential of translation to transform reality on a par with Percy Bysshe Shelley's claim for the poet to be an 'unacknowledged legislator'. According to Shelley:

> Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. (Shelley 1891: 46)

In terms of social and cultural transformation, both the translator and the poet can exert their influences on the world and are therefore capable of translating one reality to another. For Le Guin, however, the role of 'translator' is not defined solely by linguistic expertise. Instead, the translator also consists of those who – like Shelley's poetic demiurge – can bring about social change through words and deeds, so that for Le Guin, the distinction between poet and translator collapses into the necessity for writers to be innate political activists.

The collapsing of such distinctions complements not only the non-binary

opposition to be found in Le Guin's work between human and aliens but also between humans and animals. In the novella 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight' (1987), a girl, Maya, is injured in an air-wreck and found by a female coyote, who cures her of her physical and psychological wounds after bringing Maya to the animal world. There, Maya learns about the life of the animals and develops a child-mother relationship with her saviour. By listening to the animals' narration and witnessing the humans' killing of the animals, Maya begins to reject humans and intends to stay with the animals (not unlike other tales of feral children such as Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894/96)). However, an elderly coyote arranges for her to return to human society and a chickadee encourages Maya to 'build gardens for me' (Le Guin 1994a: 60), which suggests an ecological oasis within the desert of human relations. Having established a rapport with animals and been translated by their perspective, Maya returns to the human society as Vera Norwood comments that:

> Gal returns to the world of men bearing an ecofeminist understanding of the dual oppression of the nonhuman nature and women and the gift of integrated sight. The animals replaced her wounded eye with one made of pine pitch. When she goes home, she will see with both eyes, joining culture and nature with one vision. (Norwood 1993: 268)

From these works, we can see that Le Guin foregrounds what I would call 'inter-translatability', a process of opening-up and changing the self for the sake of connecting with all that is not me, male or female, black or white, Eastern or Western, human or animal. Necessarily, alongside an emphasis upon translatability, Le Guin also considers the role of untranslatability, for example in *Always Coming Home*:

> Need every word be translated? Sometimes the untranslated word might serve to remind us that language is not meaning, that intelligibility is an element of it only, a function. The untranslated word or name is not functional. It sits there. Written, it is a row of letters, which spoken with a more or less wild guess at the pronunciation produces a complex of phonemes, a more or less interesting *sound, a noise, a thing*. The untranslated word is like a rock, a piece of wood. Its use, its meaning, is not rational, definite, and limited, but concrete, potential, and infinite. To start with, all the words we say are untranslated words. (Le Guin 1985: 437–38)

In Cheyne's analysis, Pandora's question is a questioning of 'the very act of translation itself' and 'acknowledges the danger of translation' (Cheyne 2006: 466), which Cheyne argues is an indication of Pandora's lack of certainty

and confidence about translation. Viewing this passage from an ecofeminist perspective, we can see that when it comes to the relationship between the signifier and the signified, Le Guin suggests that the signifier of the word itself is not merely a vehicle deprived of independent value. Instead, the visual image or the sound of it can be meaning in itself, and the signifier, the sound or visual image, is a source of beauty, which cannot be neglected in translation. Thus, by emphasizing the significant form of the signifier, Le Guin unsettles the hierarchy between signifier and signified, bringing new insights for translation: the signifier of the linguistic sign, or its material existence, deserves respect and there is a constant dynamic between the signifier and the signified, as well as of translatability and untranslatability. In Le Guin's introduction to her translation of Lao Tzu, she writes:

> The Tao Te Ching is partly in prose, partly in verse; but as we define poetry now, the whole thing is poetry. I wanted to catch the poetry, its terse, strange beauty. Most translations have caught meanings in their net, but prosily, letting the beauty slip through. And in poetry, beauty is no ornament; it is the meaning. It is the truth. (Le Guin 1997: ix)

It is in this spirt that Le Guin translates Lao Tzu in the poetic form and presents the formal beauty of the original, which is often lost in the translated versions by other scholars such as Arthur Waley and Paul Carus.

In addition to traversing the boundaries of space, culture, gender and species, Le Guin also brings the dimension of time into translation. For her, translation not only takes place between the existent languages and cultures, but also between what has been and what is yet to come. In *The Telling*, the past Aka culture acts as a point of reference for both the present and future of human culture, while in *Always Coming Home*, the future culture that Le Guin constructs acts as a utopian guide for translating present-day culture into an ecofeminist perspective.

Although far from complete, this analysis may serve to reveal a picture of translation and its entanglement with ecofeminism in Le Guin's works. As I have argued elsewhere (Li 2014), Le Guin also draws from the Daoist Yin-Yang relationship, a non-hierarchical interaction featuring mutual dependence, complementarity and transformation of the dualistic pairs (the Yin-Yang Dualism), which features both difference and continuity. However, whereas this relationship is conventionally visualized in a Taiji diagram (as below), a visualization of the narrative of *Always Coming Home* reveals the pairings to be represented like so:

Le Guin's transformation of the Taiji diagram is significant in several respects. First, the existence of different diagrams, other than the conventional representation, implies the diversity of forms within the Yin-Yang relationship. Second, these diagrams show the openness of the Yin-Yang relationship, which facilitates the mutual transformation of the two into each other, so that the two can become one. Third, the openness of the Taiji diagram also allows one Yin-Yang pair to enter other Yin-Yang pairs, thus communicating, exchanging and transforming with many more unities in different times and spaces. With all these interactions and intra-actions, different relationships and forces enter into a more complex and dynamic dialogic process (see also Li 2014: 153–54).

Constructed as an alternative way of thinking of Western Dualism, these diagrams are applicable to not only ecofeminism but also translation. They indicate that translation is a continuing process of communication, interaction and transformation among different languages, communicative systems, cultures, peoples, genders, humans and non-human entities, spirit and material, speech and action, the self and many different others. It is also an activity everyone and everything undergoes at every moment, which can be the interpretation of a word, a sentence, a story, a facial expression, a gesture, or the conversion of food to energy in the human body, the translation of an idea into action, or the transformation from the anthropocentric and androcentric cultures to the ecofeminist ones. To facilitate translation, everyone and everything needs to be open so that contact, interaction, communication, dialogue and transformation can take place.

Given the present patriarchal and anthropocentric way of thinking in global culture, translation also shoulders the task of deconstructing Western Dualism as well as constructing alternative ways of thinking on behalf of both the present and the future of the world. With her literary imagination, Le Guin has given

us various figures who embody varying kinds of translation, such as Estraven, Genly, Sutty, Yara and Selver, who also demonstrate the process of positive interaction between individual and social transformation – in short, the hope for a better world. Besides presenting a web of translation interwoven with the Yin-Yang Dualism and ecofeminist thinking, Le Guin's sf, essays and translation of works in different languages are all concrete praxis of translation among different languages, literary forms, cultures, and ways of thinking. With all these efforts, Le Guin's roles as writer, cultural translator and social reformer have become one, which might be termed 'the Translator': one who is capable of facilitating change and navigating the world from destruction to life, despair to hope. Great is the Translator, and so is Translation.

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Note to 'The Complete *Midwich Cuckoos*'

David Ketterer (University of Liverpool)

JBH (John Beynon Harris) must have been required to reduce his typescript by a specified number of words. It is apparent from his *two* sequences of handwritten reduced page numbers replacing his typist, Mrs Jolly's original blue-type numbers that to achieve this result he had to go though the typescript twice. The first set of reduced page numbers begins with the crossed-out blue-type page number 33 which is replaced by the handwritten 27. Original pages 26 to 32 that constituted Chapter 3 have been eliminated and replaced by the single black-type page 26. The second set of further reduced page numbers begins on the page that bears the cancelled blue-type number 150 and its cancelled handwritten replacement lesser number 124; that page's final handwritten page number is 98. Where previously 26 pages had been eliminated, the eliminated pages now doubled to 52.

In the course of going through Mrs Jolly's ribbon typescript, JBH also noted a number of places, particularly in the much shorter Part Two, where expansions would be desirable. Fourteen such addition pages out of his 52 black type insert pages are to be found there. Of the twenty-six black-type passages inserted on one or more pages in the ribbon-typescript, fifteen of them involve paraphrase material substituted for blue-type passages while eleven add words and sentences to cut shorter blue-type passages. JBH eventually had the remaining 207 pages of Mrs Jolly's ribbon typescript and his own 52 insert pages bound between green hard covers. The ideal text that I have extracted from the Wyndham 1/6/4 variorum text involves mainly restoring the longer blue-type passages and substituting the longer black-type passages. In addition, many of the remaining blue-type pages included smaller cuts.

There are eleven exceptions where, in the bound ribbon typescript, the number or text extant of black-type pages is always less than the number or text extant of blue-type pages replaced. Those exceptions, present only in the UK text, should, unlike the other fourteen black-type passages in the UK text, be adopted in an ideal edition since they all add essential wordage. (For further details of these changes, interested readers may contact me at mellonta1942@mail.com)

In one section of my article, I discussed JBH's Latin titles for chapters 4 and 6 of his original version of the novel as well as the related succession of snatches of Latin that occur in the original last nine chapters. Of these phrases, both '*dea ex laboratoria*' in the US edition and '*dea ex laboritoria*' in the UK edition appear to be incorrect. Bruce Gibson, Professor of Latin at the University

of Liverpool, has informed me in an email (25/05/17) that 'If the text is meant to mean a goddess from the laboratory, then you would normally expect "*ex laboratorio*", from the neuter noun for a workplace, "*laboratorium*", which is attested in medieval Latin'. The US Ballantine edition (page 94) also includes the first of two mentions (only the second of which appears in the UK edition) of a Latin term in one of the lengthy passages cut from the UK edition: 'They are a species of homo sapiens undoubtedly.' The essential point is that JBH had originally included a series of nine Latin terms or statements in order to register a succession that would imply the eventual victory of an evolved form of humanity, a superior *homo sapiens* akin to the Cuckoo children. The victories of Zellaby and the Russians are, arguably, only pyrrhic.

No wonder, then, that Zellaby is increasingly mentally and physically burdened. The phrase 'that was my burden', referring to 'the large bottle of bulls-eyes' bought for the children, retained in the US Ballantine edition (hb 240, pb 185) but deleted from the UK edition, also refers to the children themselves – they are both Zellaby's physical and psychological burden. It is also relevant to note that JBH's first published novel was titled *The Curse of the Burdens* (1927). Whereas there the plot centres around Shotlander Priory, in *Cuckoos* Midwich is the site of the ruins of St Accius' Abbey. These Gothic remains suggest the presence of past misdeeds; a burden that weighs upon the minds of the living.

The Fourfold Library (5): Claude Lalumière on J.G. Ballard, *Vermilion Sands*

The Fourfold Library is as much a place of dreams as it is of text. Today, Claude Lalumière recounts how he got from *Vermilion Sands* to vermilion dreams in his most recent book. Originally from Montreal and now resident in Ottawa, Claude is the author of more than 100 stories and four books, the latest of which, *Venera Dreams: A Weird Entertainment*, is published this August by Guernica Editions. You can also find him at claudepages.net

Ultimately, as a reader, I care very little for the story a writer intends to tell. I suspect that, for the authors of many of my favourite pieces of fiction, the story at hand is – similarly and correspondingly – not their primary concern. Not surprisingly, then, in my own writing, the story I am telling is perhaps the least of my concerns. Which might be a strange thing to say for a writer of prose fiction, for someone whose stock-in-trade is the telling of stories.

Which is not to say that I don't care about story. But I don't so much care about communicating whatever story my imagination is entangled in. For me that story is merely the scaffolding that supports the real work: the evocative juxtaposition of words, sounds, images, emotions, ideas, and impressions. It is of no import whatsoever to me if readers 'get' my story. What truly matters are the stories that are generated in their own imaginations when they read (or hear) my work – when their imagination encounters the product of my imagination. What matters is that my fiction succeeds in so igniting the imagination of my audience.

All fiction really occurs in that space – where writing meets reading. Consequently, every reading is a misreading. In that creative dissonance – that effervescent interzone of infinite possibilities – is where meaningful story occurs. Although this is true of all fiction, not all writers explicitly engage with that aspect of the art of fiction. At one end of the spectrum we find those writers so narcissistically in love with their own creations that what they produce amounts to, what my close friend and fellow writer Alexandra Camille Renwick has called, fan fiction of their own work and for whom any derivation from their intent is heretical. At the other end, there are those academic postmodernists who entirely eschew the scaffolding of storytelling and instead fall victim to another form of narcissism, taking too much pride in their own cleverness, and who fail to genuinely engage with the matter of their creations, effectively short-circuiting the process of creative misreading on the part of the audience. Most writers of fiction fall somewhere between these extremes.

My craft, then, is not the telling of stories, but rather the creation of a context that permits the generation of creative misreadings in the imagination of the audience. All I really want to do is to help open that door to the imagination.

What the audience finds there is outside of my control.

What matters to me as a reader of other authors' fictions is exactly what I try to achieve as a writer: I want to read the kind of fiction that will pull me into a dream-state that allows me access to my own labyrinthine ur-story, that will succeed in leading me deeper into my own imagination.

For me, no writer does it better than J.G. Ballard, whose fictions are composed as a series of surreal tableaux – described in unadorned and surgically precise prose – that never fail to send me off on that journey toward the ineffable truth of fiction. Although *Crash* (1973) is my favourite Ballard novel (indeed, my favourite novel ever), and 'The Drowned Giant' (1964) my favourite of his stories, it is *Vermilion Sands* (1971) that has had the deepest and most overt influence on my work – both directly and indirectly.

Vermilion Sands is a mosaic – an assemblage of related short fiction – which has become the primary form in which I work. My second book, *The Door to Lost Pages* (2011), was a novella-length mosaic composed of seven shorter fictions, or episodes; my fourth book, *Venera Dreams: A Weird Entertainment* (2017), is a novel-length mosaic comprising fifteen episodes; and I'm currently working on three other potential mosaics.

My first encounter with *Vermilion Sands* was indirect: via the more explicitly science-fictional mosaic *Cinnabar* (1976) by Edward Bryant, whose title (*vermilion* and *cinnabar* being two words to describe the same colour) makes the Ballard connection unmistakable. Vermilion Sands is the name of a resort for the idle rich in an unspecified Ballardian near-future; in many ways, *Vermilion Sands* was a test run for the later Ballard novels *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000), which both navigate similar themes (consumerism, nihilism, alienation) and settings (elite communities estranged from reality). Bryant's Cinnabar is a decadent city at the end of time – a close kin to contemporaneous creations such as Arthur Byron Cover's City from *Autumn Angels* (1975) and *An East Wind Coming* (1979), and Michael Moorcock's creatively fertile End of Time, introduced in *An Alien Heat* (1972) – but it could also be described as a pulpier and more fantastical take on the Vermilion Sands idea.

Cinnabar was my first exposure to the mosaic form, and my imagination has since then forever tried to wend its way through a fictional metropolis built on the foundations of my own obsessions. It is always in mosaics that such imaginary settings are most meaningfully explored. The various iterations of Moorcock's *Legends from the End of Time* (first collected in 1976, but the contents of later editions vary) are endlessly more fascinating than any of the novels in the series; Ursula Le Guin's *Orsinian Tales* (1976) is more moving and evocative than the Orsinian novel *Malafrena* (1979); Jeff VanderMeer's *City of Saints and Madmen* (2002) explores Ambergris in a profoundly more imaginative way than the later

novels. Tanith Lee wisely composed the five-volume sequence of *Tales from the Flat Earth* (1978–87) and the four-volume *Secret Books of Paradys* (1988–93) in mosaic form. (A sixth, posthumous volume of uncollected Flat Earth stories from 1998–2009 may yet appear.) Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) would likely have made an unexceptional novel but is a brilliant mosaic.

Although the work of all of these writers (and others!) contributed to the strange brew that became Venera, it was Ballard who provided the vermilion fuel that made my fantastic metropolis come alive.

In 2008 I was on a solo writing retreat in the Gaspé, working on various Venera fragments, trying in vain to make it all come together as a novel. I had brought along Ballard's memoir, *Miracles of Life* (2008) – reading that book, I learned that Ballard was dying of cancer. Although I never met Ballard, the news of the impending death of my favourite writer devastated me more than I could have predicted. Overwhelmed with grief, in one sitting, I wrote the first draft of more than 8000 words of the first complete Venera episode, 'Vermilion Dreams: The Complete Works of Bram Jameson' (first published in *Tesseracts 14* in 2010): a pulp-infused, metafictional homage to Ballard whose title makes the connection with *Vermilion Sands* explicit (even more, an outer borough of Venera introduced in that story is called Vermilion Beach and houses a very Ballardian resort community, whilst the key economic resource of Venera is a reality-warping drug/spice called vermilion). And thus my Venera project morphed into what it should always have been, a mosaic.

Two Essays on Time Travel

Zoran Živković

THE LABYRINTH MOTIF IN SCIENCE FICTION

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In traditional literature, as well as in other similar traditional forms of artistic expression, the motif of the labyrinth appears exclusively as a spatial phenomenon. In that context, it possesses three ontological properties which differentiate it from other similar motifs: for example, the motifs of wandering, searching; that is, travelling in general.

The first property is movement in a defined, enclosed space, which essentially can have only two directions: towards the exit or back towards the entrance. The second property would be the existence of a dead-end street, a no-way-out of the basic peripatetic factors of the motif in question. Finally, the third property of the labyrinth motif is the facilitation of essential change in the protagonists during the story's plot, which is, as literary theory teaches us, an essential condition of good fiction: Protagonists are not the same at the entrance and at the exit of the labyrinth.

Within the genre of science fiction, the motif we are discussing has undergone a fundamental modification which has caused certain alterations to its ontological properties. In SF texts, the labyrinth motif is no longer a *locomotional* (spatial) but a *chronomotional* (temporal) phenomenon. Movement from the entrance to the exit here, however, is also limited by a closed system, which can also have only two directions: from the past toward the future, or from the future toward the past. Time has no third dimension.

Yet, while both directions are possible in the model of the spatial variant of the labyrinth motif – towards the exit or back towards the entrance – and they basically have equal impact, when discussing the temporal variant, there is one significant difference which occurs because of the existence of the dead-end street. While in the spatial labyrinth it is possible to reach a dead-end street whether one is moving toward the exit or toward the entrance, one reaches a no-way-out situation in the temporal labyrinth only while moving from the future toward the past.

In that direction, the dead-end street appears in the form of certain logical and causal paradoxes, retaining, however, its basic function as a peripatetic factor. Finally, when discussing the third ontological property of the labyrinth motif, in the temporal variant there is also a transformation of the protagonist, but in this case it is generally much more drastic than in the spatial variant: in

the first instance, the change in the characters occurs exclusively in terms of their *weltanschauung*, while in the latter they can change their entire generic identity, mostly due to the effect of logical and causal paradoxes related to the specific nature of the dead-end street within the temporal variant.

It is obvious, therefore, that the focus of the *chronomotional* type of abyrinth lies in the factor of the dead-end street, which basically appears only in one morphological type, with a wide range of variations. All sf works which utilize the concept of movement from the future into the past are faced with the obligation to take the following paradox into consideration. A protagonist who lives in time A returns to the past in time B, where he does something which will result in his disappearance from the future; this disappearance is motivated by linear causality: the hero, for example, kills one of his ancestors before he is able to leave his progeny behind, and thus the hero's own birth is thwarted. The chain of causation, however, does not end there. If the protagonist is not born, meaning that he did not exist in time A, then he could not have possibly returned to time B and killed his ancestor there; and in that case, the ancestor did manage to leave his progeny behind, and thus the protagonist is inevitably born in the future!

Thus, we have a paradox, a dead-end street. If it is presupposed that he returned to the past and killed his ancestor there, the protagonist could only be born if he had not been born! *Contradictio in adiecto*. We have been led there by the disciplined application of linear causality, which is unmistakably in force in the case of the spatial labyrinth: Namely, it has long been known that there is an absolutely guaranteed way of getting out of a closed system of this type, regardless of how complicated it is – all one has to do is follow one wall, starting at the entrance, and sooner or later one must find the exit.

Here, cause and effect act in a linear fashion. There is, however, one significant moment which is usually overlooked because it is not that obvious: We said: *sooner or later*. In other words, between cause and effect there is always a given temporal gap, only it is always true that the cause (in terms of linear causality) *comes before* the effect. One cannot, therefore, first exit from the labyrinth and then start following one wall beginning at the entrance. Ultimately, cause and effect are, in every practical sense, simultaneous (when you press the switch the light almost immediately – although not actually – goes on in the room).

However, can such a sequence of cause and effect remain in force when discussing *chronomotion* from the future into the past? It is clear that in this case the linear flow of time does not work, in the sense that – already depending on how we look at things – in certain cases the future precedes the past. Concretely, if the act of murdering an ancestor is understood as a consequence of the protagonist's setting off from the future into the past then,

from the perspective of some sort of absolute time, it would seem that here the consequence (in the past) preceded the cause (in the future), which is in opposition to the fundamental principles of linear causality.

The objection could be made, however, that absolute time is not authoritative here, but rather the individual time of the protagonist is. At the moment of the ancestor's murder, regardless of the fact that it takes place in the past, he is older than at the moment when, although it happens in the future, he set off on his journey through time. In that case, the cause would precede the effect after all and linear causality would be preserved.

Accepting the authority of the individual time of the protagonist in defining the chronological order of cause and effect confronts us, however, with another difficulty. The individual time of the hero could serve as a valid measure for the establishment of the order of cause and effect in *chronomotive* cases, if it were not for the paradox of the multiplication of the protagonist. Let us imagine the following situation: the protagonist is located in a given space at moment A. Half an hour later, he gets in a time machine and returns thirty minutes into the past, to precisely moment A. At that instant, now, there are two protagonists at the same place, who are completely identical in every other way except one: one of them is half an hour older than the other, meaning that their individual times are thirty minutes apart. Nothing is preventing such replicas of the first version of the protagonist from appearing in unlimited numbers, and the difference between their individual times could increase to any value within the normal human lifespan. In such a situation, since ultimately we are dealing with one and the same protagonist, it is no longer clear which of his differing individual times should be chosen as being authoritative.

Linear causality, thus, is inapplicable to the situation that results from the *chronomotive* premises about movement from the future toward the past. In other words, in the temporal labyrinth there is no wall that we can follow and thus certainly find our way from the entrance to the exit. In that case, how does one find one's way around in it? Is there some alternative linear causality which could eliminate the aforementioned paradoxes and remove the dead-end street?

Yet, is this question, perhaps, faulty from the outset? Perhaps science fiction has no ambition at all to eliminate paradoxes and remove dead-end streets. Perhaps sf really wants them to be there. After all, regardless of the prefix 'science', it is still fiction. Didn't one famous fantasy writer lucidly observe that sometimes the path to the goal is more important, the labyrinth more important than the exit, the paradox more important than a clear solution, and the dead-end street more important than the wide avenue? Because, if everything could be reduced to causality, we would have, to be honest, a mathematically perfect

world, but it would be quite difficult to say that great art would be one of its virtues.

CHRONOMOTION

Originally published in *Ogledi o naučnoj fantastici (Essays on Science Fiction)* (1995); translated by Randall A. Major

What do we know for certain about movement through time?

Not much, in fact. Only that, under normal circumstances, we advance at a steady pace of twenty-four hours per day from the past towards the future.

These normal circumstances can be violated, at least generally speaking, in two cases: if we alter the pace or the direction. Pace can be changed even in reality, while the direction, judging by all things, can only be changed in sf.

Let us turn our attention first to the pace, to speed.

It is possible to reach the future faster in two basic ways: through suspended animation or (actual) fast movement.

Hibernation slows down physiological processes in the organism, including aging. It is possible to resuscitate a frozen person after ten years, for example, but they will have aged biologically only one year. The price for this quick arrival in the future is the loss of the time 'slept through'. That time, it seems, passes without dreams. It is no different from death, in fact, except that resurrection is included in the price of the journey. Or it is, at the very least, available by choice. Anyway, it is a matter of choice. If something does not go wrong, of course. There is no absolute guarantee. But it is comforting that, if indeed something does backfire, at least the person will never know about it …

In terms of moving at high speeds (the closer to the speed of light the better: the effect of time dilation) the same result is achieved – one arrives far in the future with only the brief passage of local time. The advantage of this way is that one actively lives in local time. In your 'local cosmos' (on a spaceship, for example) everything happens quite normally: the usual waking state exists, as does the usual sleep cycle (this time with dreams, including the bad ones, if you are already inclined to them or if you have a bad conscience). If you could observe the 'external' world, it would seem to you that events go on there at incredible speed. Conversely, to those 'outside' it would seem that everything happening in your world would play out inconceivably slowly. But this spying on one another is not possible. Two temporal streams are irreconcilably split. In reality, that is.

Does the accelerated pace of movement through time offer any literary consolation? Certainly. Human drama.

Above all, melodrama. Are there any more exciting melodramatic situations

than the meetings of close relatives in completely mistaken time phases?! For example: just after giving birth to her daughter, a young mother sets off on a time dilation journey which will last only one year in her local time, but then, when she returns, she will encounter the world from whence she came, which is twenty years older, so that she will meet her daughter who is now the same age as her (Ursula Le Guin, 'Semley's Necklace'). In a literary sense, the idea seems steadily attractive, although the terrain here has already been thoroughly investigated, because the factor of estrangement is relatively simple.

The extreme cases of accelerated movement through time are those which occur at (only genre-allowable) points of reaching and exceeding the speed of light. Would time then stop completely, or might it even begin to go backward? Would one here achieve regression (or 'progression', depending on one's point of view) from old age to youth, and even further, to birth? (Dan Simmons, *Hyperion*). What comes before (that is, in this backwards view, after) birth: death? Could it be considered that a man is dead before he is born? The estrangement is much less restricted here, but it is not certain that the human drama also grows proportionally. On the contrary. Everything in good measure. Extremes are an uncertain means of support.

The genre also allows the possibility that temporal streams with different rates of movement into the future do not remain separate after all, but come into contact, and interweave. What happens when a slow and a fast temporal stream meet? What kind of influence can they have on one another? Would the slower one be more authoritative than the fast one? (Roger Zelazny, 'The Great Slow Kings'). Or, perhaps, is the opposite true? (Frank Herbert, *The Heretics of Dune*). The idea is not devoid of genre excitement, but it can seem to be a bit stretched andunconvincing. At least as fertile ground for high quality human drama.

Finally, what is the last moment at which, in one of two accelerated ways, one can arrive in the future? Is there, in and of itself, such a moment? The end of time? The end of the cosmos? Does the idea of the end of time make any sense whatsoever? What if time is not linear but cyclical? What if, instead of advancing, the only place where it is appropriate to talk about the end, we have an eternal returning, a melding of the end into a new beginning? This is stepping into the area of ultimate questions, of cosmology, and here human drama, after all, becomes secondary.

Or does it? It is not completely certain. Reading the novels of Olaf Stapledon (*Last and First Men*, *Star Maker*) or some of Arthur C. Clarke's stories ('Transcience') – written under the influence of Olaf Stapledon – most certainly does not leave the reader indifferent. But what is exciting here is not so much the human drama as it is the vision which reaches immeasurably beyond

human boundaries. The question remains open as to whether such visions can possess literary value and also human drama.

So much for speed. Let us look at what happens with a change in direction. Specifically, movement from the future into the past.

One might say, at first glance, that in reality there is nothing to support such an idea. No time machines, at least as far as we know, have been noticed arriving from the future. Not now, and not at any earlier time.

This, to be fair, still does not mean anything. Perhaps the world is teeming with such time machines but we do not notice them, because time travellers. either directly or indirectly. are not making their presence known; that is, they are not influencing the past. Why don't they? It is possible to come up with three principal reasons: They don't want to, they don't dare to, or they are unable to.

If they dare to and are able to, but still do not want to, then only one cause for that can be discerned. They are behaving as impartial observers who are avoiding getting involved in any possible way with the object of their observation. These would, actually, be the ideal historians: They have a chance to directly study the past which they have absolutely no desire to desecrate by interfering with it. (Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Hard to Be a God*. The 'historians' in this novel are not, in fact, time-travellers, but they are the same sort of external observers, so that essentially nothing is changed.) Here there is plenty of dramatic tension, but it is somewhat simplified: everything is actually reduced to whether it is possible to retain complete indifference toward the time being observed. The desire to take action in it can be truly powerful. It is fertile ground for an exciting story but it remains fairly simple.

If time travellers want to and are able to, but do not dare to, then it can be supposed that there is some sort of injunction keeping them from it. The purpose of the prohibition could be the protection of the future which can be unexpectedly and irreparably disturbed if the fine weave of the past is changed even in the slightest. Even the most harmless causes in this time can have truly heavy consequences in a later one (the 'Butterfly Syndrome'; chaos theory). In order to avoid that, mechanisms or institutions are introduced to more or less effectively protect the past (Poul Anderson, 'Time Patrol' or Isaac Asimov, *The End of Eternity*). This is also not void of human drama, but in terms of the genre it is a bit unsophisticated and old-fashioned.

Finally, if time travellers want to and dare to but are unable to, then most likely there is a paradox at work which, so it seems, is inescapably involved in attempts to change the past. The most familiar paradox is the following.

A man goes back into the past and either accidentally or intentionally causes the death of one of his parents before he himself is conceived, thus thwarting his own birth. But if he was never born, then he could not return into the past

and prevent his own birth by getting rid of one of his parents, so he was born after all and returned into the past where he thwarted his own conception, which means that he was never really born ... And so forth. *Reductio ad absurdum*.

This nonsensical mixing of cause and effect remains, judging by everything, the final way to prevent the altering the past from the future, but it does not stop the writing of works for which time paradoxes are no kind of barrier. Those paradoxes are simply not taken into consideration here. What improbable results can then be achieved! (Robert Heinlein, 'All You Zombies …'). The problem, however, lies in the fact that here there is no real drama: it is mainly just the genre being clever and witty. Who will conceive of a more perplexing thing than the others. A mere *Gedankenexperiment*, a thought experiment.

In the end, what remains?

Clearly, the challenge in the genre is greater if changes are accepted not in the speed but in the direction of movement through time. Ideally, a means of influencing things in the past should be found while avoiding the paradox trap which that influence implies. Is something like that at all possible? It is not, so it seems, if there is a presupposition that there is only one primary stream of time.

If, on the other hand, one thinks that there are several streams (an infinite number), then the aforementioned paradox can be elegantly surpassed. In the place where the past is changed, a branching out occurs: Along one branch – the one from which a time-traveller sets out to intermingle 'backward' in time – the change has no influence (that stream has already played out the way it did), but another, new branch appears which is completely dependent upon the change. Transforming the past does not change, therefore, the future, but rather creates a new stream of time which exists in parallel (Ursula Le Guin, 'A Fisherman of the Inland Sea').

This is a case of a first-class idea in the genre about a specific kind of chrono-tree with literally infinite branchings and forkings. The axis of the powerful dramatic tension here is created by the question of whether events in one stream can affect events in another; that is, is it possible to move from one stream into another? Likewise, what is the relationship between the different versions of the same character in the different streams of time? Obviously, this understanding of the chronomotion motif is also not bereft of the danger of paradox, but that does not have to be crucial in a literary sense. Science fiction is not an experiment in theoretical physics but a work of fiction. And works of prose allow paradoxes. In moderate doses, it goes without saying, and especially if they are well conceived.

Into the Unknown: A Journey through Science Fiction, The Barbican Centre, London, 3 June – 1 September 2017

Reviewed by Paul March-Russell (University of Kent)

In what is the largest exhibition devoted exclusively to sf to be held in the UK since the British Library's *Out of This World* in 2012, the Barbican Centre has created a stunning visual and aural experience. Following on from the design of the V&A's exhibitions dedicated to David Bowie and the Sixties counter-culture, curator Patrick Gyger and his team have not sought to create a dry chronological retread through the history of sf, but an experience that immerses the viewer within the cognitively estranged perspectives of the genre. As befits the Barbican's emphasis upon performance, the exhibition focuses primarily upon the visual culture of sf and, in particular, the iconographic themes of journeys to lost worlds, voyages into space, explorations into perfected and cataclysmic futures, and investigations into what might loosely be termed 'inner space'. The idea of journeying through the genre is therefore foregrounded as the viewer moves not only between the gallery spaces of the main exhibition but also up and down the Barbican Centre itself to view the other accompanying exhibits. Consequently, although largely pitched at a spectator who might not have a detailed knowledge of the genre (and so for whom much of it might be 'unknown'), the design of the exhibition is also of interest to a more knowledgeable viewer.

Upon entering the main exhibition space, the viewer is assaulted by multiple sights and sounds. Since one enters down a flight of stairs, the first object that grabs the attention is a large screen in the background, playing a series of extracts from such films as *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1959) and *Jurassic Park* (1993). Not only does this projection play upon an instinctive childhood fascination with dinosaurs (it is the same feeling that one has upon entering the Natural History Museum), it also plays upon more Oedipal desires; of seeing the adults cut down to size in comparison with the big lizards, reduced in stature to vulnerable infants, gaping and screaming at what they see, deprived of speech (*infans*). This simple but effective projection introduces us to the oft-stated 'sense of wonder' but it also implies its two-edged sensibility: childlike awe, on the one hand, and the vicarious thrill of destruction, on the other hand. Advancing further, and lowering our gaze, we see the exhibit in the foreground – a stand not only of Jules Verne's writing, including the annotated first page of *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), but also the work of his main illustrators and contemporary artists paying homage to Verne. The eye, however, is distracted, first, by a series of beautiful illustrations on the left by the model-makers, Ray Harryhausen and Willis O'Brien, and then to the right by a series of paintings

of ‘Dinotopia’ by James Gurney. Framed as if they were colourized versions of nineteenth-century illustrations, there is something ineluctably kitsch about these artworks, although the attention and deliberate anachronism with which they have been produced suggest a playfulness typically lacking in more ersatz forms. Doubling-back, we now spot the interactive map that introduces us to a host of extraordinary voyages from the classical to the Victorian periods.

Having passed the threshold into the exhibition, the viewer can now plunge this way or that. A tentative definition of sf is proffered, accompanying a large book display of lost world and early utopian narratives, which suggests that the genre is a speculative form of literature based upon rational explanation. Such a definition automatically has to be set against the futuristic content of adverts and cigarette cards from the late ninteenth and early twentieth centuries, inspired by the work of book and magazine illustrators, let alone the intricate designs of such well-known dinosaurs as Godzilla and the *authentic* kitsch-ness of *One Million Years B.C.* (1966). What is apparent, though, from this gallery is, firstly, the extent to which the development of sf was contingent upon the imperial fascination and emergent consumerism of the late 19th century, and secondly, the rapid transition of early sf between languages, and between media, as embodied by Russian translations of Verne’s work.

Soviet science fiction plays a significant part in the second gallery as we move from terrestrial journeys to projecting lost worlds into outer space. Whilst, on one side, we have the model of the rocket from George Pal’s *Destination Moon* (1950), on the other side, we have a fascinating sequence of images from Soviet textbooks, collectively known as *Technology for the Youth*, permeated with the cosmic enthusiasm that the Science Museum’s *Cosmonauts* exhibition did so well in describing (see *Foundation* 122). What is lost, however, in comparing these items is the cultural – let alone political – differences between them; the Soviet vision of space exploration is founded upon something more spiritually profound than US-style Manifest Destiny. Another large screen projects a series of extracts from Soviet classics such as *Aelita* (1924) and *Ikarie XB-1* (1963), alongside other classics of artistic and historical significance such as *Frau Im Mond* (1929) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), as well as Hollywood blockbusters such as *Interstellar* (2014), but again the emphasis upon ‘look’ reifies cultural differences between them. More successfully, in comparing *Technology for the Youth* with US industrial adverts, the curators emphasize the use of modernist design techniques within their illustrations.

After this, as Orson Welles’ 1938 adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* competes with the film soundtracks over the loudspeakers, the gallery moves into what is an absolute treat for the sf cineaste. Particular attention is paid to the work of designers such as H.R. Giger, Patrick Tatopoulos and Douglas

Trumbull, including Giger's designs for Alejandro Jodorowsky's unrealized film version of Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965). The influence of the French magazine, *Metal Hurlant*, is highlighted within the context of other space-themed comics. *Star Wars IV* and *V* are handsomely represented in the form of models, helmets, storyboards, and Martin Panchaud's pain-staking tribute to the films that the viewer can scroll through. Further interactivity comes in the mock-up of Mission Control from Ridley Scott's *The Martian* (2015), whilst a series of suits are on display, perhaps most notably Leonard Nimoy's from the first *Star Trek* film and Sir John Hurt's from *Alien* (both 1979). To what extent Tatopoulos' Egyptian-inspired masks from *Stargate* (1994) are intended to resonate with the appearance of the jazz musician, Sun Ra, in Soda_Jerk's video, *Astro Black* (2007-10), we can only hazard to guess.

In what may be the busiest of all the galleries, the development of sf as a literary form is further outlined alongside the emergence of a fan culture. These historical trends are also visualized in the growth of cover art from the pulp-era illustrators, most notably Frank R. Paul, to the airbrush techniques of Chris Foss and the work of contemporary digital artists. The fascination with postcards, this time from the USSR, and cigarette cards continues, most especially, in the complete run of *Mars Attacks!* that later became the basis for Tim Burton's 1996 film. But, there remains something uniquely special in seeing Olaf Stapledon's annotations for *Last Men in London* (1932) and the title page of Arthur C. Clarke's *Journey to the Stars*, hastily crossed-out and replaced by '2001: A Space Odyssey'.

The futurity of the second gallery carries over into the third's exploration of utopias, dystopias and apocalypses. The tentative chronology of the previous galleries here collapses as the exhibits zig-zag between postcards and cigarette cards from Britain, America, France and Russia, depicting 'the World of Tomorrow', to the opening pages of John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968) and transparencies from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), and such recent cinematic nightmares as Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise* (2016). A broad thesis is made, however, between the descent from utopia into dystopia with the failed hopes of modernist architecture, a point made most effectively in a montage of sequences from such films as *THX-1138* (1971), *Brazil* (1985), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Dark City* (1998). The odd-one-out, though, is a sequence from *The Prisoner (*1967–68), since the series' real-life setting of Portmeirion, the dream folly of Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, owes nothing to the modernist formula of the International Style, although its pastiche of Italianate designs does contribute to the dislocation, in both time and space, of Patrick McGoohan's cynical hero. Instead, the resonance here is with the outsider art of Royal Robertson, a naïve mix of futuristic designs and spiritual/religious

allusions. The third gallery concentrates mostly upon utopias and dystopias, but a compilation of film extracts from blockbusters such as *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004) to independent features such as *Embers* (2015), and international films such as *Crumbs* (2015) and *The End of the Lonely Island* (2016), add to the sense of global catastrophe.

The growing paranoia and schizophrenia of gallery three heralds the last gallery, and its examination of identity in relation to themes of time, mechanization and reality. We enter via Dara Birnbaum's video artwork, *Technology/ Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978-9), which effectively cuts-up an episode of the late 1970s TV series in order to expose the patriarchal constraints upon the character's representation. (The timing of this piece to coincide with the UK release of the new film version is, of course, serendipitous.) A large selection of comics, both from within and beyond the Anglo-American tradition, display the long-term fascination with mutations and superhuman powers. Three screens, devoted to film and TV extracts representing each of the main themes, are dotted around the gallery space whilst, at the heart, are the robots Twiki, from *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (1979-81), and Sonny from *I, Robot* (2004), surrounded by toy robots from across the world. However, despite welcome extracts from such rarely-seen films as *Gibel Sensatsil* (1935), *Sleep Dealer* (2008) and *Enthiran* (2010), the robots here have been overshadowed by the Science Museum's recent exhibition (see *Foundation* 126). More interesting are Brian Aldiss' typescript for 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long' (1969), later filmed as *A.I.* (2001), and Oscar Sharp's short film, *Sunspring* (2016), written by an artificial intelligence that had processed a series of sf films. (The result is gobbledegook yet strangely alluring all the same.) The theme of time is dealt with somewhat cursorily, although it's always good to see a clip from *La Jetée* (1962), and the theme of altered realities is at least enhanced by a series of props from films such as *eXistenZ* (1999) and *Inception* (2010). Most interesting is a display of six books from the library of Jorge Luis Borges, which emphasizes his enduring interest in science fiction from his favourite authors, such as Ray Bradbury and H.G. Wells, to new anthologies from the start of the 1970s.

Leaving the main exhibition, we pass on the right a series of games and music pods that can be played, and a large screen displaying three short films by Frances Bodomo (*Afronauts* [2014]), Pierre-Jean Giloux (*Invisible Cities #4* [2017]) and Wanuri Kahiu (*Pumzi* [2009]). The international, and especially African, elements of the exhibition are to be applauded along with the consultants, Yasmin Khan and Tade Thompson. Walking into the foyer is a screening of Isaac Julien's *Encore II (Radioactive)* (2004), in which a mysterious African woman, played by Vanessa Myrie, walks along an Icelandic coastline. Everyone and everything has been strangely irradiated whilst the sounds of the

sea, the wind, and the breaking ice have been sonically enhanced by Julien.

Going downstairs into the Pit we find a new sculpture by Conrad Shawcross, *In Light of the Machine* (2017). A series of curved, perforated sheets are stacked in a circle like a Neolithic henge. At the centre is a robotic arm perched on a large tripod. The arm extends, moves, retracts and grindingly re-positions itself. At the end of the arm is a bright light that casts shadows over the sheets as it moves. Loudspeakers emit guttural noises, like some prehistoric beast, which may – or may not – be synchronous with the arm's movements. I found the best way to experience this piece was to turn my back upon it, stare into the dark recesses of the Pit, and let the alien noises wash over me.

Returning to the foyer, Larissa Sansour and Soren Lind's film, *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2016), is screened in a separate room every half-hour. This enigmatic piece makes subtle use of CGI effects to tell the story of 'a narrative terrorist' who travels backwards in time to plant broken shards of modern-day porcelain in the ground. Her aim is not only to confuse the archaeologists of her own time but also to disrupt the approved history of the totalitarian regime that has murdered her sister. Whilst the film raises questions about the relationship of history to myth, and fact to fiction, it could also be an allegory for the central character's personal trauma.

Moving back towards the main exhibition, we pass by one of Trevor Paglen's 'non-functional satellites'. The *Orbital Reflector (Diamond Variation)* (2017) is, as the title suggests, diamond-shaped and constructed from aluminium, stainless steel and acrylic. Although it serves no practical purpose, it could, if launched into low orbit, be seen as a bright speck of light in the sky. Lastly, moving towards the Silk Street entrance, we encounter an edited montage of clips from the second episode of Charlie Brooker's dystopian TV series, *Black Mirror* (2011-). Entitled '15 Million Merits', the montage foregrounds the episode's obsession with screens and avatars at the expense of human value. It is a chastening warning to end an exhibition which so strongly celebrates the role of the visual at the heart of sf.

Conference Reports

Philip K. Dick and Vast Narrative, Birmingham City University, 22 April 2017

Reviewed by Emily Cox (Brunel University)

The second Philip K. Dick Day to be held at Birmingham City University was devoted to the idea of 'vast narrative' and how this term might be applied to Dick's extensive collection of writings, as well as the great many texts of various kinds (including films, games and music) about Dick himself or based on/inspired by his many works. The symposium was advertised as an 'interdisciplinary conference' which sought to 'explore the contours of the Dickian vast narrative, examining whether it is fair to talk about a Dickiverse', in the same way that we might discuss the connected narratives of Tolkien's works or the shared universe of the Marvel comics. What emerged from this fascinating call for papers was an eclectic mix of presentations inspired by many varied interpretations of this rather contested term: vast narrative.

The day opened with a keynote from Maria Cristina Grande, who discussed the relationship between literature, biography and psychosis in relation to Dick's writings. Grande described Dick's creative process as designed to 'retain some sort of psychic equilibrium'. She interpreted the vast narrative as an extended conversation which Dick held with himself, using literature as a process of self-knowledge or self-diagnosis. His relationship with his twin sister and with women more generally throughout his life was discussed as part of Grande's broader exploration of Dick's psychology, which set the tone for later discussions about women in Dick's fiction.

After a brief question and answer session with the keynote speaker, attendees were invited to listen to a highly engaging talk by final-year Birmingham City undergraduates. The presenters, Andrew Bache, Paige Bourne, Charlotte Thompson, Elizabeth Begg and Samantha Ross, focused specifically on Dick's short story 'Foster You're Dead!' (1955). They very insightfully and thoroughly covered the contextual themes that surround the narrative, such as Cold War anxiety, capitalism in 1950s America, consumerism and the nuclear family. They also deftly situated Dick's work as a whole within the wider context of the sf genre, and analysed it in terms of historical context, as well as in relation to gender theory and feminism. Once again the representation of women in Dick's novels became a hot topic for discussion, as gender theory formed a significant portion of the students' talk, raising interesting questions during the question and answer session at the end of their presentation.

After a short break, the first panel began with Beata Gubacsi, who discussed

the themes of posthumanism and metaphysics in relation to *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). She argued that the novel differentiates between human and android consciousness by espousing an 'ontology of empathy', in which the capacity to feel emotion becomes the defining characteristic of human *being.* Next, James Burton discussed his research into Dick's body of work, viewing his vast narrative as a 'soteriological' exercise, a series of attempts to find salvation through his writing, and to understand the inexplicable, apparently supernatural, episodes he experienced in his life. Finally, Carrie Gooding gave a visually stunning presentation, using a series of colourful pictures to punctuate her discussion of Dick's search for God throughout his writing career. Tracing Dick's method and the nature of his search, Gooding discussed the various representations and manifestations of God in his writings, from 'bug-eyed monster' to God as 'living information', in his novel *Valis* (1981). During questions, discussion again veered towards the theme of gender in Dick's work, and how his relationship with women might have affected the way he wrote about women. In particular, Rachael Rosen (*Do Androids Dream*…) was discussed as a strong female character, while many agreed that other more minor female figures, particularly in his short stories, were often marginalized and depicted as stereotypical stock female characters: mothers and wives often left unnamed.

Following a break for lunch, the symposium proceeded to the second and final panel of the day. It began with Eve Smith, who compared Dick's short story 'Paycheck' (1953) with the 2003 film version, by analysing the narrative's similarities with the conventions of fairytale. Smith discussed the implications of adapting the future as a fairytale, and approached Dick's vast narrative as one told not only by Dick himself but through the masses of adaptations and critical works created by others. Next, Emily Cox presented her work on Dick's writing and biopolitics, with specific emphasis on the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben. Based on her view of Dick's work as being connected by its awareness of biopolitical paradigms, Cox argued that by focusing on monopolistic corporations and oppressive governments in tandem with hallucinatory worlds, drug-induced visions and questions pertaining to the nature of reality, Dick's work can be said to form a vast narrative of and what Agamben would describe as the *indistinction* at the heart of various politico-social constructions – such as democracy and totalitarianism.

The final talk was given by Terence Sawyer. Entitled 'Mapping the Philip K. Dick Vast Narrative: Notes on a Journey', the talk outlined Sawyer's developing research into Dick's various works and adaptations of his writings, using the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Beginning from Dick's own claim, 'All my books are really one book', Sawyer is working on a large 'map' which outlines the

various connections throughout the works and adaptations as well as the ideas developed in them: fiction, interviews, speeches and his expansive work, *The Exegesis* (2011). Using Deleuze's concepts of 'molar lines', 'molecular lines' and 'lines of flight', Sawyer is attempting to categorize the narratives in both the works and adaptations. The talk served as a definitive statement as to the nature of the Dickian vast narrative. Though the definition of the term in relation to Dick may be elusive, what was demonstrated by this talk, as well as those given throughout the conference, is the incredibly pervasive nature of Dick's works. Sawyer's own visual representation of this, in the form of a large Deleuzian 'map' of Dickian works, gave a clear picture of Dick's impact. Whether this can be considered a form of vast narrative or not, what is undeniable is Dick's iconic and vast influence on the world of sf and beyond.

Performing Fantastika, Lancaster University, 28-29 April 2017
Reviewed by Monica Guerrasio (Lancaster University)

This year marked the fourth annual Fantastika conference; the event saw many familiar faces coming back as well as some new ones attending. The delegates delivered twenty-seven papers over the course of the two days, on topics that ranged from gender fluidity to regionalism, to writing as a practice for research all within the spectrum of fantastika. In addition to representatives from UK universities, there were attendees from as far afield as Ireland, Austria and Australia. The event was also covered live on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag #fantastika2017.

The opening keynote was delivered by Nick Hubble on the topic of 'Performing Gender in Mary Gentle's Alternative Histories'. Hubble drew a parabola from Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) to Gentle's works, *Ash* (1999), *1610: A Sundial in the Grave* (2003) and *Ilario* (2006). In *The Power*, Alderman reverses gender norms, and the lack of an alternative between patriarchy and matriarchy. While Gentle opts for a more fluid solution, Hubble argued that she blurs the lines of gender performativity by building characters whose actions openly mock the strict rules of the alternate European history in which the novels are set.

Gender was also the theme of the first morning's panel on George R.R. Martin. Tania Evans and Adele Hannon's papers beautifully complemented each other by looking, respectively, at male violence and motherhood. Evans analysed the characters of Ramsay Bolton and Sir Gregor Clegane, via the work of Judith Butler and Raewyn Connell, as a way to critique hegemonic masculine norms. Hannon, on the other hand, took into consideration the characters of Catelyn, Sansa and Arya Stark, Cersei Lannister, and Daenerys Targaryen to analyse Martin's stand on feminism, and how the women in *A Song of Ice and*

Fire (1991–) conform and/or bend gender norms. Particularly interesting was Hannon's point about Arya Stark who embodies a 'female masculinity' so as to transcend gender expectations.

The afternoon session opened with Eddie Robson's keynote on 'Selling Fantastika in British TV and Radio'. Robson, who has worked across media, from radio to television, to graphic novels, fiction and non-fiction, delivered his paper with humour while engaging the audience in a lively debate about the differences between British and American television. Robson located the appeal of the numerous TV shows produced by US networks in the tendency of British TV drama to think of itself as an extension of theatre, an attitude confirmed by the cancellation of *Doctor Who* in 1989 to leave space for higher-end drama (albeit, as Robson humorously noted, with the exclusion of *EastEnders*). In the course of his speech, Robson shared some amusing anecdotes from his professional life to shed light on the inner mechanisms that regulate British television and radio.

It was difficult to choose between the two afternoon panels but, as a creative writer, I leant towards 'Writing Fantastika'. Kevan Manwaring argued how the 'spoken' and 'written' components have influenced his understanding of his novel *The Knowing: A Fantasy*. An important element was the contribution from readers as he encouraged them to interact with the novel through digital formats. Kevin McVeigh offered a compelling account of Andrea Hairston's skills to weave historical events and fantastic elements in her novel *Redwood and Wildfire* (2011). Hairston draws upon both the griots of West Africa and black theatre as a way to perform fantastika in her fiction.

As the first day of the conference approached its conclusion, Inés G. Labarta and Taylor Driggers talked about gender fluidity in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). Inspired by Butler, Carter and Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015), Labarta explored her own novella, in which her female characters are at odds with their bodies and the social expectations of 1930s Spain. Driggers used Grace Jentzen's re-imagination of Christian folklore to contextualize Carter's female characters in the light of a tormented and uneasy separation from the patriarchy while seeking a new identity that transcends the binary codification of male and female.

The day concluded with a social event in the centre of Lancaster, where the group met for a drink while exchanging notes about Ph.D theses, post-docs and amusing anecdotes about their life as academics.

The second day of the conference opened with the keynote speaker Catherine Spooner, who examined several products from the film *Suicide Squad* (2016) to the TV series *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012), to Alexander McQueen's runway show *VOSS* (2012) as different examples that

fetishize the performance of insanity. Spooner, whose slideshow of images was as fascinating as it was informative, argued that the phenomenon has its roots in the practice of the 'Lunatics Ball', in which inmates were dressed up, encouraged to perform social niceties, and dance to music for therapeutic purposes. However, as contemporaneous accounts by writers such as Charles Dickens reveal, the farce did not conceal their madness but, rather, exposed it.

The following panel kicked-off with Danielle Girard's paper in which she analysed the *Star Trek* episode 'Journey to Babel' (1967) for a queer reading of the character of Spock. Girard, starting from the concept of racial 'passing', dismantled heteronormative assumptions to show how the characters of Kirk and Spock shared a more intimate connection than was revealed on screen. Thomas Brassington then explored how Gothic uses of drag, for example in the punk and horror elements of the Boulet Brothers' TV show, both mocks heteronormativity and celebrates queerness.

The last panel started with Beth Cortese's analysis of *The Lady Contemplation* (1662) by Margaret Cavendish and *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687) by Aphra Behn. She argued how these works can be seen as early examples of science fiction and how they display elements of fantastika; the former by creating an intimate and immersive performance that relies on the imagination, the latter through the use of costumes and special effects. Ian Farnell focused his attention on Alistair McDowell's *Pomona* (2014) and *X* (2016), and on how science fiction and fantasy have been used to challenge theatrical conventions. Where *Pomona* embodies the human capacity for horror and violence, *X* – though the abandonment of language and time – accuses the desynchronization of naturalistic theatre, especially when it comes to the theatre's ability to represent human life. Lastly, Christina Scholz analysed the manifold composition of Karen Mirza and Brad Butler's collaboration with China Miéville, *Deep State* (2012). Scholz argued that the intertwining of drama, cinema and archive footage creates a product that engages the audience in a critical debate about the actions taken in the name of democracy.

Tajinder Hayer's keynote concluded the conference by analysing his plays *Mela* (2008) and *North Country* (2016). Although the dramatic structures are very different – where *Mela* follows several characters during the eponymous festival in Peel Park, *North Country* focuses on three characters over the course of forty years – they share common ground in terms of the urban setting (Bradford) as well as running themes such as magic, realism and regionalism.

The bittersweet news that this would be the last time the conference would happen in Lancaster, as the co-organiser Charul 'Chuckie' Palmer-Patel is returning to Canada following the successful completion of her Ph.D, was tempered by the celebratory reception during which the publication of the first

issue of *Fantastika* was announced, and the editorial team was introduced to the delegates.

Dystopia Now, Birkbeck College London, 26 May 2017
Reviewed by Mylène Branco (University of Kent)

The symposium Dystopia Now, organised by the Centre for Contemporary Literature at Birkbeck, offered an exciting opportunity for scholars and students to engage with the current research that is being conducted in the field of dystopian literature.

Caroline Edwards' opening keynote, entitled 'Techno-Modernity: How We Love It, How We Fear It', set the tone for the day by beginning with pictures of Kim Jong-un, Vladimir Putin and, of course, Donald Trump, whose relevance for the political discourses of dystopian literature has rekindled an interest in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Edwards' talk was concerned with exploring the reasons why dystopian fictions are reliving 'an impressive renaissance just now', and how the era of techno-modernity has shaped the ways we feel about dystopias, how it generates both fear and admiration. Tracing a compressed but concise history of the major dystopias that have influenced the dystopian tradition, Edwards brought to the fore classics like Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), but also less canonical texts such as Valery Bryusov's *The Republic of the Southern Cross* (1907), an overlooked, early Russian dystopia, Naomi Mitchison's *We Have Been Warned* (1935) and Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937). Closing the circle, Edwards ended her talk by arguing that the appendix to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and 'The Historical Notes' in *The Handmaid's Tale* could act as narratorial frames, which suggest the idea of a utopian impulse within the dystopian setting.

From *The Handmaid's Tale*, Sarah Lohmann's paper made the audience plunge straight into the pool of feminist utopias. Concerned with different representations of violence in the feminist utopias of Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, Sally Miller Gearhart and Monique Wittig, Lohmann sought to flesh-out the generally acknowledged belief that 'violence does not have a place in a world that is considered as an ideal world'. The all-female spaces that are portrayed in *Les Guérillères* (1969), *The Female Man* (1975) and *The Wanderground* (1979) are brought about by the physical removal of men, the instigators of violence. Paradoxically, as Lohmann observed, this segregation is only possible because of a pronounced use of violence, which, even after the factor causing it has been eliminated, persists, as the women warriors of Wittig's utopian text are seen experimenting with their powers, thereby subverting its existing structures.

In line with this, Sean Donnelly's paper shed light on the deconstruction of normative gender roles in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction (YADF). Donnelly argued that the female protagonists of the trilogies *Uglies* (2005–7), *The Hunger Games* (2008–10) and *Divergent* (2011–13), have become symbols of contemporary feminism. Their characters defy the strict notions of femininity, thus creating the illusion that YADF has moved into a postfeminist era. In *The Hunger Games* for example, Katniss's gender is irrelevant, whereas inside the Capitol, she is feminized as a tribute. Donnelly concluded that the three girls are then seen as other and valued as less.

The increase in female protagonists in dystopian literature is also echoed in television, as noted by Heather McKnight. Establishing case studies for a selection of series, McKnight pointed out that the female lead roles, and in particular their reproductive capacities, are controlled and limited by the positions of mother, martyr and cyborg. The representation of these women imitates old narratives such as that of the witch-hunt. In the end, according to McKnight, 'women's bodies in these programmes become heterotropian spaces, both liminal and dangerous, the disempowering narrative of the witch hunt is all too apparent, and unresolved.'

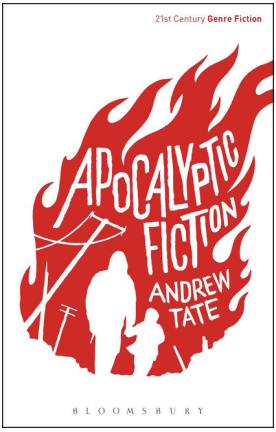
While dystopian fictions are usually characterized by inherently pessimistic elements, Alice Reeve-Tucker's analysis of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) demonstrated how McCarthy's portrayal of a boy brings light to the desolate, post-apocalyptic environment of the story's deprived setting. Analysing the boy's character in relation to McCarthy's belief in an innate goodness in human nature, Reeve-Tucker maintained that the boy's innate religious goodness stands in sharp contrast with the hostile terrain that father and son traverse. Serving as a vision of human nature, the evil wasteland raises the question: Why strive for the struggle of life? Instead, it is a belief in the son's religious goodness which drives the father on. It is the boy's altruism, his desire to help, which is at odds with the moral degeneration of his environment. Reeve-Tucker held that the father is, thus, carrying the fire of goodness inside himself through his child. Based on McCarthy's own experience with his son, the author shows awareness for the vulnerability of goodness, especially that of a child which can be destroyed so easily, not only through actions but also words. Reeve-Tucker indicated that the novel's hopeful ending strongly resonates with McCarthy's own hopes for his son's future.

The idea of love, as a source of hope in different dystopian environmental settings, was also evaluated by Fiona Martinez, whose paper on Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) reviewed the love relationship of Billie Crusoe and Spike, a Robosapiens, thereby forming a discussion around the issue of queer ecology. That dystopian fictions work within a political framework

was also highlighted by Christos Callow's witty presentation on *The Lobster* (2015), a film that explores the binary structure of the personal and the political, suggesting that the personal is also political. Examining the power dimensions of human intelligences, Maxi Albrechts' paper proposed 'the concept of the cultural politics of intelligences as a means to analysing the cultural construction of intelligences as forms of social hierarchisation and differentiation.' Relying on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Albrechts located agency not entirely on the objective structural level nor on the individual subjective level, but considered narratives as active producers of meaning in her endeavour to understanding intelligences.

Despite the fact that dystopian narratives seemingly lay bare a range of intricate personal and political complexities as a warning for future generations, Mark Bould, in his closing keynote, suggested that future and present are not so far removed from each other – the new monotonous dystopias mirror the real world. Bould's vision for dystopian fiction was bleak, nevertheless, as this day's conference showed, dystopias are 'now' more important than ever, and will further preoccupy people with its themes.

Book Reviews



Andrew Tate, *Apocalyptic Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2017, 192 pp, £70.00)

Reviewed by Sarah Brown (Anglia Ruskin University)

In *Apocalyptic Fiction*, Andrew Tate traces the theme of apocalypse in a generically diverse range of British, American and Canadian twenty-first century novels, offering chapters on flood narratives, Rapture writing, Margaret Atwood, post-catastrophe walkers, YA apocalypse and the elegiac world of Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014).

A particular strength of this study is its wide and scholarly frame of reference. Tate's analyses of recent apocalyptic fiction are underpinned by illuminating discussions of other relevant contexts, in particular Biblical eschatology. 'The legacies of Christian apocalyptic thought', he explains, 'are vital, in different ways, to the majority of novels explored in this study.' This may help explain the many complexities and uncertainties of Tate's chosen texts. For example, the Book of Revelations has divided readers. Some find in it a message of hope and justice, others perceive it as a lurid and horrifying vision of destruction. Similar tensions are manifest in modern apocalyptic literature – global catastrophe can be utterly bleak, oddly hopeful or tantalisingly ambiguous.

The Bible offers us more than one vision of apocalypse; in its very first book the world is destroyed and then remade. In Genesis the deluge is a punishment for sin, whereas later writers have turned to a range of possible causes: alien invasion in John Wyndham's *The Kraken Wakes* (1953*)*, solar radiation in J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962) and seismic activity in Stephen Baxter's *Flood* (2008). In his second chapter Tate focuses on just two novels, both called *The Flood*, both published in 2004. David Maine's is a retelling of the story of Noah; whereas other recent responses have parodied the Bible, Maine offers a more nuanced and ambivalent engagement with his source material, allowing us to hear contradictory responses to God's actions and encouraging the reader to reflect on the way stories are created and transmitted. Maggie Gee's novel is similarly double-edged, presenting a puzzling and numinous future world which hovers between horrifying destruction and hopeful transfiguration.

The next chapter turns to fiction influenced by the Rapture, the belief that a chosen few will be whisked away from earth leaving the remaining sinners to

deal with the anti-Christ. Tate doesn't dwell for long on the popular *Left Behind* series (1995-2007), fantasy novels written from a strongly evangelical and conservative perspective. These have generated several satirical treatments, but also a more subtly sceptical response, Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* (2011). Tate analyses Perrotta's intriguingly ambiguous take on the Rapture scenario, a near-future world in which a 'random harvest' of people suddenly vanishes. Perrotta withholds any clues to an explanation for this phenomenon, instead simply charting the reactions of the traumatized people who have been left behind.

Tate places the Snowman/Jimmy, a central character in Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy (2003–13) in the tradition of 'last man' narratives, such as Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826). As with many of the novels discussed in this study, there is a hint at regeneration as well as apocalypse in the ravaged world Atwood depicts. Like Maine, Atwood is concerned with the way stories are generated, and in the post-human Crakers' eager attentiveness to Jimmy's stories of the past we witness the creation of a new mythology. Thus although the trilogy seems predicated on very secular contexts for apocalypse, genetic engineering and corporate power, it also resonates with earlier, Biblical traditions.

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) can also be mapped onto Christian narratives of apocalypse and pilgrimage. Tate contextualizes this bleak novel within an established tradition of 'walking tropes' in American literature. Walking – in texts ranging from Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson to Jack Kerouac – has long been associated with freedom and dissent. (Ray Bradbury's 'The Pedestrian' [1951], in which a man is arrested for the subversive act of going for a walk at night, was, I felt, an absent presence here.)

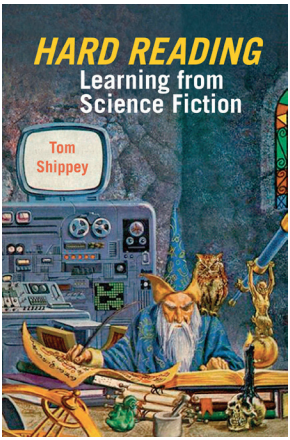
The mysterious provenance of the blight which has turned America into a greyed-out wasteland enables readers of *The Road* to import some symbolic or religious significance into the bleak journey of father and son. Like another apocalyptic text, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, it divides readers trying to calibrate its religious compass. However, as Tate points out, the novel is certainly 'haunted by theological language'. He compares it with Jim Crace's *The Pesthouse* (2007), another novel which uses a post-apocalyptic pilgrimage to weave together resonant motifs from both the Bible and American history.

The YA novels Tate turns to in the next chapter seem more dystopian than post-apocalyptic. The young protagonists of Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-10), James Dashner's *Maze Runner* series (2009–16) and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy (2011–13) have to contend with surveillance and exploitation from coercive and controlling adults. Tate contrasts these adolescent apocalypses with William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), suggesting that the latter text is more conservative because it casts adults in the

role of concerned rescuers. However, the broader context of Golding's novel – the outbreak of nuclear war – perhaps undermines the apparent cosiness of its conclusion, implying that adults are just as destructive, when left to their own devices, as children.

Mandel's *Station Eleven* is the focus of a brief coda in which Tate explores the importance of books and reading to the writers of apocalypse. We have already seen how Maine and Atwood are preoccupied by myth-making, and the protagonists of post-apocalyptic texts are often haunted by libraries and their loss. Similarly, George R. Stewart's Ish, in *Earth Abides* (1949), sadly reconciles himself to his children's loss of literacy, whilst Henry Bemis, in the *Twilight Zone* episode 'Time Enough at Last' (1959), is thwarted in his hopes of a peacefully bookish post-apocalyptic existence when he breaks his glasses. Mandel, by contrast, offers us a world in which literary tastes seem to have been refined by suffering; the scattered communities visited by the 'Travelling Symphony' of players love to see performances of Shakespeare. As Tate points out, *Station Eleven* is more positive both about our present world and the post-apocalyptic future than most other texts in the genre.

Inevitably it is possible to identify gaps in this kind of study. I would have liked to read more about the apocalyptic sections of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and *The Bone Clocks* (2014), briefly touched on in the introduction, and a discussion of Baxter's *Flood* would have been a welcome addition to the chapter on watery apocalypses. But this is a consistently suggestive, scholarly and readable study of the literature of apocalypse both inside and outside sf.



Tom Shippey, *Hard Reading: Learning from Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2016, 256pp, £75.00)

Reviewed by Edward James

Fifteen of Tom Shippey's essays are reprinted here, all of them clearly indicating – in newly written introductions or in comments in the body of the essays – where he has changed his mind, or learned new things. Tom's voice is particularly apparent in the less formal introductions; and Tom's voice, for those who have heard his witty, exciting and impeccably delivered lectures, is very distinctive, and something to cherish. A confession – I have known him since the early 1980s, from the time when we were fellow medievalists at neighbouring universities. But he has had multiple careers –

as an Old English scholar, as a Tolkien scholar, as an editor, as an author of science fiction stories (in anthologies edited by his friend, the late Peter Weston) and co-author of alternate history novels with Harry Harrison, and finally, as an important science fiction critic. He has produced a volume of Tolkien essays (*Roots and Branches*, 2007), but this is his only book on science fiction, and collects all his significant essays from 1969 to 2003.

Some of the chapter introductions offer autobiographical vignettes, and throw light on his motives and obsessions. He is used to being condemned out of hand by friends and colleagues for his love of science fiction. He lost an early girlfriend by carelessly leaving a copy of *Galaxy* lying around, with its garish cover illustration to Jack Vance's 'The Dragon Masters', and he credits losing any support for graduate work by letting his Cambridge tutor likewise see a copy of *Astounding*. He begins the book by talking about how he finally came out of the science fiction closet. But throughout we can see the resentments against the literary gatekeepers, and those who simply do not know how to read science fiction.

The first essay, 'Learning to Read Science Fiction', should be required reading for any student being introduced to the genre. Sf, he notes 'is prepared to see "this world" as temporary, optional or just plain accidental, and this comes over to many as dreadfully threatening, especially […] to people who feel they have done OK in this world but might not do so well under different ground rules.' In one of two essays which are essentially about Kingsley Amis' *The Alteration* (1976), he examines how and why most literary reviewers simply failed to understand that book, or Amis' *Russian Hide and Seek* (1981) He ends: 'The major cause of shared and extensive blindness by a representative set of experienced professional readers was unfamiliarity with the generic features of science fiction, and refusal to believe in their sophistication. In the end, Amis's science fiction novels were too clever for their mainstream reviewers – as has too often been the case with the entire genre.' Reading science fiction is hard: hence the title of this collection.

Like Tolkien, Shippey is sensitive also to accusations that his favourite genre is escapist. The great fantasies of the twentieth century, he notes 'are all about the major problem of the early twentieth century, which was industrialized warfare controlled by a resurgent barbarism: the escapists were the E.M. Forsters, Henry Jameses and Virginia Woolfs whom Cambridge rated so highly, slowly and luxuriously dissecting the emotional problems of a small sheltered class of people who were much less important and interesting than they thought they were.' It is sad that in 2016 we still need to defend our area of studies; but at least Shippey does it stylishly, and with a sense of authority.

There are a number of pairs of essays in this collection (and a certain

amount of repetition) because of continuing passions. There is an essay on the influence of J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) on science fiction, and an essay on Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea and its relationship to the anthropology of magic. (In the first of those essays there is some discussion of James Blish's *Black Easter* (1968); the cover illustration by Gray Morrow for the *Worlds of If* serialization, in its initial guise as *Faust Aleph Null*, is reused as the cover of Shippey's book.) There is an essay on the fall of America in sf, and another on the critique of America in science fiction (originally published in *Foundation* 61); there are two essays on culture in sf, both of which take Vance as an example. (His answer to a question about 'the most personally satisfying modern author of fantasy?' 'Jack Vance, of course.')

Although this collection deals with some of the weighty issues of science fiction – its politics, the dilemma of cultural relativism, the appeal of alternate history, its relationship with other branches of literature (the fabril versus the pastoral) – it should not be overlooked for its insights into individual authors. Here is the best essay I know about Bruce Sterling, and significant essays on Amis, Le Guin, Orwell and Vance. But hidden away in pieces with general titles are perceptive comments on individual works by, amongst others, Poul Anderson, L. Sprague De Camp, Thomas M. Disch, Randall Garratt, Robert Heinlein, Frederick Pohl, Kim Stanley Robinson, Geoff Ryman, Norman Spinrad, and H.G. Wells.

Even those who know some of these essays are going to learn new things from a re-reading, and those unfamiliar with Shippey's work in this area are in for a treat. We can only hope that Liverpool University Press will soon release a paperback that people can actually afford. If they do so, I hope LUP will also do a little proof-reading. For instance, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* appears once as *1984*, which means it does not appear in the index, and my co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2002) appears as 'Farah Mendelsohn'. And note, the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts is not 'organised by the *Journal for the Fantastic in the Arts*', but by the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, which started the conference in 1980 and the *Journal* in 1988.

Brian Stableford, *The Plurality of Imaginary Worlds* (Black Coat Press, 2016, 671 pp, £32.99)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer (University of Liverpool)

The intention of Brian Stableford's massive book (a spin-off from and to some extent justification for the extensive series of translations he has produced for Black Coat Press) is to explore the French *roman scientifique* in the same way as he earlier explored English scientific romance. In creating this history, Stableford rejects the idea of proto-sf because, he argues, this implies a notion of leading up to what we have now 'as if it were a kind of objective to [be] attained'. Instead, he is concerned to argue the difference between the French tradition and that of Anglophone sf (which of course differs widely on each shore of the Atlantic) and, indeed, some of the strands of what we point to and call sf, such as futuristic and interplanetary fictions.

Stableford begins with the roots of the marvellous in classical romance and folktale rediscovered in the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, and reprocessed into the *contes de fées* produced by writers like Charles Perrault. He argues that these rediscoveries drew upon local instances of folktale with greater or lesser emphasis on specific classical texts and authors. For instance, Lucian's *True History* was more familiar to French than English writers, and French writers were more attuned to its echoing of Platonic traditions. Many of the folk-tales were rewritten for a sophisticated audience open to literary and satirical flourishes. Stableford is in error, however, when he says that Antoine Galland, who translated the *Thousand and One Nights* into French at the beginning of the eighteenth century, is responsible for Scheherazade's frame story, since she is mentioned in at least one tenth-century source.

Exploring the post-Enlightenment cascade of story, Stableford cites many strange and virtually unknown *contes philosophiques* as well as Voltaire's well-known 'Micromégas' (1752), often cited as the first story to use visitors from other worlds. Other examples include the 'triumphantly eccentric' *Relation du monde de Mercure* (c. 1750) by 'Le Chevalier de Béthune', Charles de Fieux's *Lamekis* (1735–38) 'which comes nearer than other imaginative texts of the era to being a pure adventure story devoid of any philosophical pretentions at all', and the four-volume *Voyages de Milord Céton dans les sept planettes, ou Le Nouveau Mentor* (1765–66) by Marie-Anne de Roumier-Robert, which cheerfully confuses the Ptolemaic and Copernican models of the solar system.

What could be a lengthy compendium of examples is surprisingly readable – these texts may be little-read but Stableford tells us why! And in excavating these bizarreries, he uncovers many items of remarkable interest and cements our understanding that the fantastic/speculative mode is by no means an unusual response to events over the last few hundred years.

Following the Enlightenment, Stableford offers chapters on the Revolutionary period, the Second Empire, the *belle époque*, and the interwar period, showing how the fiction engages with ideas of science, progress and apocalypse as well as speculation about life on other worlds. This thread, beginning perhaps with Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An deux mille quatre cent quarante, rêve s'il en fut jamais* (1771), includes many influential examples such as *Le Dernier Homme* (1805) by Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville and *Le Monde tel qu'il sera* (1846) by Émile Souvestre, in which the spirit of the future appears as 'John Progrès' and his steam-powered flying machine.

Stableford has long championed Félix Bodin's manifesto for a tale of the future, *Le Roman de l'avenir* (1834), and as we move into the 19th century, we see how fiction writers engaged with social and technological change to construct an idea of the future based upon previous examples of what the future 'looks like'. The specifics here are illuminating and, if we *do* want to consider science fiction as anything like a totalizing whole, useful. For example, Théophile Gautier's vision of 'Paris futur' (1851) and Joseph Méry's identically-titled essay (1854), together with later visions of a future Paris such as Fernand Giraudeau's *La Cité nouvelle* (1868) and Tony Moilin's *Paris en l'an 2000* (1869), clarify the suggestion that Jules Verne's *Paris au XX^e siècle* was rejected by his publisher in 1863 because it was felt to be a poor example of something that was being done to death. The treatment of Verne is also interesting both in the context within which he was writing and in the massive influence his fiction had on succeeding writers, such as Albert Robida, whose illustrations and novels such as *Le Vingtième siècle* (1883) helped to create a kind of 'default future' for many other writers to the extent of 'reproduc[ing] the same motifs repeatedly, within the framework of formulaic melodramatic plots'.

We see also how the influence of people like Camille Flammarion, speculating about life on other worlds, and the visionary novelist J.H. Rosny *aîné*, competed and combined with the wide-ranging uses of the fantastic, from John-Antoine Nau's *Force ennemie* (1903), the first winner of the Prix Goncourt, to the influence of H.G. Wells; the spur to the future war story given by the defeat of 1870; the disturbing and dislocated psychological reaction to the horrors of the Great War in André Arnyveld's *Le Bacchus mutilé* (1922; described by its *publisher* as 'unreadable'); and the hundreds of examples of cheap feuilleton adventure stories.

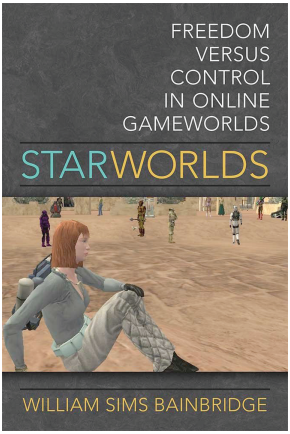
Though its non-academic avoidance of notes to highlight the author's sources may lessen some of its scholarly value (few readers can assume their own knowledge of such a wide variety of times and texts), *Plurality* is a wonderful source of information for the sf researcher. It shows that the specific conditions of France went to create a very different kind of scientific romance from both the confident colonialism of the UK and the Frontier imperialism of the US. The legacy of the French Revolution, the effects of Bonapartism, and the way the future war subgenre manifested itself in a country which actually *was* crushed by a rival, affected the developments in literature and publishing. Stableford also enables us to see how common sf motifs such as superhuman mutations, and those islands of French sf we think we know (such as Pierre Boulle's 1963 *La Planèt des singes*), echo a wide range of local adaptations: for example, Stableford cites a number of 'ape-fictions' from the 1920s.

The way *Plurality* is structured usefully places together the hackiest part-work feuilleton for popular newspapers with literary figures like Alfred Jarry and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam. It might be useful (though this is another project entirely) to know how these wings saw themselves. We assume that the American pulps created a sense 'what sf is' by, for example, Hugo Gernsback cannily incorporating Wells and Verne into his model of 'scientifiction'. Was this sense of a common enterprise there in France? And how far it might be possible (comparing the British tradition) to set writers like, say, Lionel Fanthorpe, E.C. Tubb and J.G. Ballard in a similar common dynamic of 'high'/'low' literature?

The book is descriptive rather than analytical, relying on Stableford's sardonic commentary for impact, though his remarks on the narrative structure of many of these novels are interesting. Louis Forest's *On vol des enfants á Paris* (1909), a story about abducted genius children whose plot-summary seems to echo aspects of John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), originally appeared in *Le Matin* as a serial, 'Le Voleur d'enfants' (25 June to 23 September 1906), in one of its regular feuilleton slots 'so it was clearly identifiable as fiction'. But 'it employed subheadings similar to those in the paper's news articles instead of chapter headings', and was clearly meant to be read as a constantly-updated sensational story in much the same way as readers would follow a real case unfold with new revelations day after day. The story, according to Stableford, 'could only be read as it was designed to be read in the pages of *Le Matin*, on the days when it first appeared there. All other readings could only reproduce a shadow of the intended experience, requiring a feat of imagination on the part of readers to place themselves imaginatively in the situation of those original readers'. Reading it as a novel, therefore, causes another loss in translation; something to bear in mind when reading any of the works published in similar form (or indeed, in the US tradition, originally published in magazines), and

something which it is useful to be reminded of.

Stableford describes the tradition of the French *roman scientifique* as 'a vast patchwork of awkward chimeras, of errors and frustrations, of heroic but ultimately unsuccessful attempts and paradoxical partial successes': not, therefore, entirely unlike any other tradition, whether national or thematic. His book, though possibly best for the unversed reader to tackle first by looking-up examples of the authors they know and working out from there, is an important one.



William Sims Bainbridge, *Star Worlds: Freedom Versus Control in Online Gameworlds* (University of Michigan Press, 2012, 320pp, £30.95)

Reviewed by Alison Tedman (Buckinghamshire New University)

Available for the first time in the UK, this book is a sociological study of four online environments, and of the extent to which they offer forms of freedom or constriction. Bainbridge suggests in the preface that these worlds are 'simulations of the real human future as many people wish it will be and thus are expressions of fundamental human desires', in addition to 'early manifestations of online commerce and community'. Equal space is devoted to each of three massively multiplayer online games (MMOs): *Star Wars Galaxies* (2003–11), a sandbox game, *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (released as its successor in 2011) and *Star Trek Online* (2010-). These are followed by the non-ludic world of *Second Life* (2003–), in its capacity for *Star Trek* role-play. An anthropological study is made of each, building on the author's publications in computing, spaceflight, religion, e-religion and gaming, among other fields, and virtual experiences that involve arranging 'the world's first major scientific conference held inside a gameworld', and sustaining a Second Life island 'as a site for thirty scientific research grant proposal review panels'.

The book's focus is on 'the culture created by the game designers', and the potential of the games' social, political and economic structures for freeing or constraining virtual use. For Bainbridge, virtual worlds 'allow people […] to think in new ways about reality':

> Thus the star worlds […] are tools for considering the actual social

> world, including culture, economy, and human interaction. Specifically […] freedom versus control, cooperation versus conflict, success versus failure.

Chief among the research methodologies employed are 'participant observation and ethnography, some statistical analysis, and evaluation methods common in human-centred computing'. Ethnographical analyses are carried out through avatars, carefully chosen for profession, engagingly referred to as 'virtual anthropologists'. The author uses the capacity of in-game systems for creating teams to survey user numbers and avatar choice, and consults forums, MMO blogs and other data to facilitate speed of game-play, while gaining information from users. A symmetrical structure intentionally orders the material. Each world is allocated two chapters: an introduction, and then a chapter that addresses that world's specific attributes. For example, a chapter on 'The Foundry' in *Star Wars Online* deals with game's complex, mission-building system, and includes a review of several inventive missions generated by other players.

Much of the description focuses on avatars. Four are deployed in each MMO, and taken 'to the maximum experience level' – at times through 'grinding' or repetitive tasks - in order to explore each game. In Chapters 3 and 4, Simula Tion, a Jedi, and Socio Path, a bounty hunter and the only male avatar used in *Star Wars Galaxies*, are created to undergo missions and quests. Engineer Algorithma Teq is used to explore complex crafting, and Wookie avatar, Guzzlebooze, entertainment skills and trading. The avatars collaborate to collect '*relics* and *fragments'* necessary to construct user-generated missions in the in-game 'Chronicles' system. Further avatars are created for the mission-based MMOs. In *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, these are given identities relating to four real-world figures with contrasting ideological stances, including Isaac Asimov. Avatars for *Star Wars Online* include a Federation science officer', a Klingon tactical officer, and an engineer, Paupera, the latter designed to explore social issues. Two avatars are utilized in *Second Life*: Interviewer Wilber is created to document the Starfleet community and its Academy, and the Gothic Barbara Sims establishes the Vulcan Anthropological Museum, filling it with virtual artefacts.

Critics such as Andrea Hunter and Vincent Mosco have argued that virtual environments can offer users feelings of social cohesion, community and belonging which may be absent elsewhere in their lives. Bainbridge focuses at times on communal activity but frequently charts solo activities such as crafting a droid, in order to consider the potential or limits to creativity, professional progress, or flexibility of movement within or between classes. A sense of community emerges most forcefully as new accounts were stopped for *Star Wars Galaxies*, leading to its closure to make way for *Star Wars: The Old*

Republic. The author describes the philosophical 'Farewell, SWG' quest around the mythic geography of the landscape, that he generated using the 'Quest Builder' interface. However, he also documents the closing events designed by the virtual community and by Sony, visual records of which remain on YouTube.

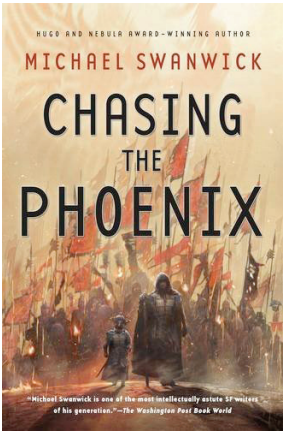
Chapter 1 offers a discussion of the book's themes, and consideration of the mythos and chains of generic influences on *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, including, respectively, Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels, and the TV series, *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (1950-5) among others. Also explored here are solo games that emerged as transmedia for each franchise: *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, and *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force*. References to each canon and its mythology underpin the book's descriptions of places, characters, missions and usage, such as the significance of Tatooine to early virtual settlers in *Star Wars Galaxies*. Comparisons are also made with the history, game design and politics of other MMOs.

Chapter 2 deals with 'the star worlds in the context of the MMO game industry [...] and the social scientific theories that describe both them and the ludic world we inhabit'. The author considers free will, and examines the ways in which behaviourism and political sociology can illuminate the role of technology, and other aspects of the games. In considering virtual worlds as virtual civilizations, offering limited freedom, utopianism is considered. Bainbridge further suggests that 'MMOS do a remarkable job of illustrating the Iron Law of Oligarchy'. Studies of 'the rise and fall of civilizations', such as those by Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, are considered in their 'paradoxical' relevance to game worlds' patterns of development. Raising the ways in which the games' feudal societies offer freedom to support, without judgement, political factions that might elsewhere be vilified, the author relates such choices to an attempt to 'reboot' society outside the games.

Throughout the text, virtual worlds are positioned in relation to technological and economic convergence, with industry decisions limiting freedom. The latter include changes in media ownership, companies making erroneous assumptions that users would upgrade computers, and the monetization of MMOs, for example through in-game barter and trade. Also of significance is the impact of property development on *Second Life*, as a factor in driving costs up, and users out. Writing of virtual worlds such as *Second Life* in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality* (2013), Patrick Flichy considers that this 'utopia quickly becomes a mobilization ideology that serves to bring designers and users together, but it may also take on the form of a mask ideology that hides the illusions of life in the virtual world'. Here, Bainbridge's descriptions of grassroots creative uses of games in relation to the dynamics of context, perhaps work to offset such illusions.

Virtuality, while not theorized to a great extent, is clearly the premise through which the book's primary research material exists. Its ephemerality is made apparent when sections of a game have been closed off when revisited in later research. Property disappears in *Second Life* when users leave the game permanently, often due to economic constraints. Whilst critics such as Samuel Weber have suggested that the virtual self is transacted through and for property, in Bainbridge's book, the lack of fixity is described to comic effect as Barbara Sims attempts to collect possessions from mid-air, after her rented apartment has been dismantled. Here as elsewhere, the author's use of third-person hints at avatars capable of artificial intelligence. The engaged yet distanced approach is suggestive of the bifurcation that Jacqueline Ford Morie has argued is the experience of being in an immersive virtual environment yet outside it.

The book never assumes reader understanding of MMOs, but explains its terms clearly. At times the level of detail can be slightly overwhelming, as in the exact amounts of raw materials needed to craft artefacts in *Star Wars Galaxies*. The anthropological approach conveys the human reality through which virtual civilizations exist, by dint of the level of economic, emotional and creative investment in them. As Robert Heim argues in *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (1994), 'a virtual world needs to be not-quite-real or it will lessen the pull on imagination'. *Star Worlds: Freedom Versus Control in Online Game Worlds* comprehensively conveys the functioning of this not-quite-reality.



Michael Swanwick, *Chasing the Phoenix* (Tor, 2015, 320pp, £11.99)

Reviewed by Jeremy Brett (Texas A&M University)

At least as long as human beings have gathered in settlements to exchange love, money and information, there have been those among them ready to transfer those things from the hands (or pockets) of their rightful owners, into those of people who might better appreciate them. The dramatic appeal of the conman is obvious – we enjoy as readers and viewers (though as victims, perhaps less so) watching smart people outwit the gullible and the dumb, risking life and limb for that one big score, and retiring to a tropical island somewhere to live joyously on ill-gotten gains. It is a deeply satisfying narrative, one that rewards cleverness, careful planning and elaborate scheming with money and glory, all at the expense of people who really, *really* should have known better.

Michael Swanwick has taken this common fantasy and nested it within another – a distant post-apocalyptic Earth where humans have reconstructed society within the ruins of the old technologically-driven social order. In this future time, people remember 'Utopia', the mythical age where humans ruled through their machines and their vast computing power. At some unspecified point in the past (aka our own future), powerful AIs that inhabited and ran the Internet escaped their creators' bondage and launched a war that nearly destroyed civilization. Now these AIs (mythologized as demons and devils) lie trapped within the ancient and disused infrastructure of the old Earth, ever waiting to spring free and eliminate humanity. Meanwhile, humanity has reconstructed itself in odd parodies of its own past – a steampunk London, an antebellum New Orleans served by zombies, a Russia reliving its Czarist/Revolutionary past.

But even when remnants of the Internet are feared and shunned yet genetic manipulation is common, conmen still roam, trying to live their dreams at the expense of others. Among them are two of the oddest con-artists in literature – Aubrey Darger, a human Londoner whose greatest advantage is his utter nondescription, allowing him to hide virtually in plain sight; and his bosom companion, Surplus (real name Sir Blackthorpe Ravenscairn de Plus Precieux), a genetically modified dog, who speaks, walks, thinks and behaves as a man, and who hails from the distant American land called the Demesne of Western Vermont. Darger and Surplus were first introduced in the 2001 short story 'The Dog Said Bow-Wow', in which the pair accidentally managed to burn down much of London. Subsequent works in the series have seen the two manipulate and stumble their way through fantastical Paris, New Orleans, Greece, and most recently, Moscow, inevitably producing death and destruction in their wake as they mix fraud with attempts to stop both unscrupulous humans and resurgent and vengeful AIs.

The latest title in this series sees Darger and Surplus arrive in China, masquerading as warrior sages who attach themselves to a minor warlord seeking to reunify the fractured nation. As he does in his other Darger & Surplus stories, Swanwick shows post-Utopian societies reliving critical moments of their historical pasts – in the 2011 novel *Dancing with Bears*, he presented a Moscow in the midst of a new Russian Revolution, in which once again a sheltered, paternalistic monarch is threatened by revolt from below. Here in *Chasing the Phoenix*, future China is undergoing an age paralleling the Warring States period (c. 475-221 BCE), when petty states fought and competed and which ended with the unification of China under First Emperor Qin Shi Huang. (Swanwick helps add to this historical veneer by heading each chapter with excerpts from fictional accounts of Darger's and Surplus' exploits that resemble the literary works of ancient sages such as Sima Qian and Confucius.)

One of the more fascinating facets of Swanwick's series is the evidence of the cyclical nature of history; humans are fated to rebuild their societies in the same way, making the same mistakes and producing the same conflicts, but also experiencing the same joys. It is a phenomenon that not even apocalypse can change. At the most profound point in the novel, Darger is treated by a maddened AI to a vision of Utopian London:

> The streets were clogged with lifeless, dispirited people. Machines swallowed them up and swept them away […] Everything was in motion, machines serving people and people tending machines in meaningless repetition until it was clear that the entire city was a single mechanism and all the machines and people within it mere cogs in a device whose purpose was to grind them down fine and squeeze all joy from their existence.

It is a vision meant to torment and demoralize Darger but it backfires:

> Darger, whose business it was to see beneath surfaces and facades […] was not appalled […] There was something about Utopian London that tugged at his emotions. He wanted to be swallowed up by its machineries, to plunge into that great sea of humanity like a barracuda into the ocean and live in it forever. For London was a great city, like Paris or Moscow or Beijing, the essence, concentration, and purest product of experience, and his heart and soul and loyalty belonged to the breed forever and without reservation.

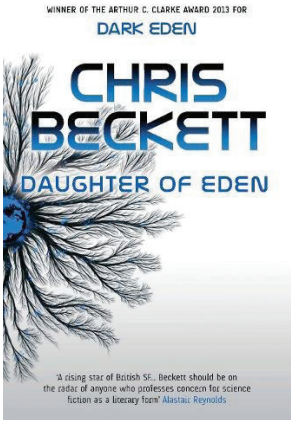
There is a wonderful optimism here. Despite the death, horror and dehumanization of both Utopia and the post-Utopian age, and despite the same mistakes being made again and again, the heart of humanity still beats and its soul still yearns towards the sheer joy of existence.

The imperfections of human nature are ever-present, which partially explains why Darger and Surplus are not terribly effective grifters. Their elaborate schemes, while often beginning in success, lead inevitably not only to chaos and destruction of the world around them but to fairly empty pockets. The pair tend to escape from their adventures with just enough wealth to keep going, but never enough to settle down permanently and quit the game. However, the continual roaming of Darger and Surplus – and their limited success – serves a larger dramatic purpose. In the short term, they are trying simply to become rich, but in the long term their presence causes major alterations to the societies they visit and the implication is that they are pawns in a larger game. As the posthuman Undying Phoenix reveals late in the novel, she and her equally immortal husband Capable Servant have been working to bring peace and

prosperity to China through unification. Darger asks, 'So everything that has happened to us since we came down out of Mongolia was but shadow play? [...] With us as the puppets?' Undying Phoenix replies, 'yes. It is possible that your involvement caused matters to occur more quickly than they would have otherwise. But even so, you were catalysts and nothing more.' This variable autonomy is one of the most intriguing aspects of *Chasing the Phoenix* and of the Darger & Surplus story cycle in general.

Unfortunately, the idea that the cons are secondary to an overarching narrative weakens *Chasing the Phoenix*. Any tale of conmen should be centred around the plan itself – the development of the scheme, its implementation and its outcome. The novel, however, places the con itself second to Swanwick's extraordinary and creative worldbuilding. He chronicles here a reconstituted China with the requisite nobility, petty royalty and social order, and he does so brilliantly. Swanwick's world is one where people live steeped in aspects of their dimly understood pasts, haunted by the artefacts and shadows of a terrible conflict that is spoken of mainly as dark legend. It is an immensely intriguing and colourful universe. However, the backdrop too often seems to take precedence over the actors on the stage, a curious dramatic choice for a story of con-artists. The latter is interesting, but it is the former that truly draws our eyes and hearts.

What is next for this pair of rogues? Bear in mind that they began their adventures in London and have been gradually moving eastward ever since. The world being round, they must invariably return to their starting points, Surplus to his native Vermont, where, it is hinted, he has a dark past to confront; and Darger to London, where he must confront his own past and what has become of his native city since he helped burn it nearly to the ground. It will be an interesting story to read, for Darger and Surplus are an entertainingly written pair of characters. Like any good duo, they complement each other: Surplus is a man (well, a dog-man) of action, sexually voracious, and more interested in the sheer adrenalin of the game itself than the score, whereas Darger is quieter, a deeper thinker, and more scholarly and methodical. They make a fun and witty team, and it will prove interesting to see where their minds and their light purses take them next, across this scarred and all-too-human world.



Chris Beckett, *Daughter of Eden* (Corvus, 2016, 400 pp, £8.99)

Reviewed by Jane CoomberSewell (Canterbury Christ Church University)

Daughter of Eden is the third in the Dark Eden trilogy, yet it is successful as a standalone novel, addressing a wide range of current and long-standing themes in today's world. Set on Eden, over four hundred years after the initial discovery and accidental colonization of the planet by Gela and Tommy, the book provokes thoughts about discrimination, genetics, definitions of family and gangs, which are by no means restricted to the world of science fiction. Beckett approaches the book with a realism perhaps lost on other writers of the genre.

Initially, it is not clear if this is a dystopian escape novel, in a similar vein to Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* (2002). Only gradually do we learn the link back to Earth as we know it. Beckett portrays the Earth of four hundred years before the time-setting as a planet deep in the throes of ecological catastrophe and the exodus as a resource-wasting hijacking of a space boat that had otherwise been shelved. The visit from the people of Earth has enlightening but disturbing effects on the people of Eden and their understanding of their own history.

One of the lovely features of the book is the way the characters speak, which is a strange mix of baby talk and mangled colloquialism along with a slightly shortened version of the grammar with which we are all familiar. The words 'very' and 'the' do not appear to exist in the Eden dialect and a possible explanation for this is given once the Earth explorers arrive. At first, this use of repeating a word for emphasis grated slightly, but it contributes to the feeling of agelessness and youth that many of the characters seem to exude. The narrator, Angie, seems to have a very young perspective, despite being the mother of three children, yet when the Earth people arrive, Gaia notes that she is 'shrivelled and old looking all over (though […] she can't be older than her mid-thirties)'. Of particular note is the compression of the word vehicle into 'veekle' and a fine guessing game of song titles that Beckett neither confirms nor denies throughout. It was not until the introduction of Earth technology in the form of recording devices that I worked out that the Eden folk song 'Come Tree Row' was probably a corruption of that old country and western classic 'Country Road', especially as both songs have deep resonances for those who are homesick for a place they have probably never lived in. This mythic quality

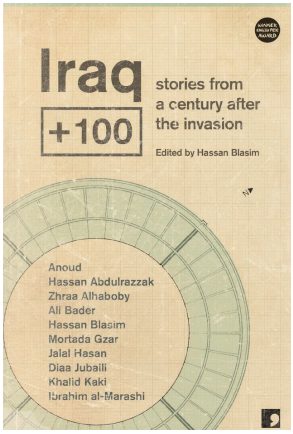
gives these words and songs special resonance for the people of Eden, which helps Beckett give verisimilitude to the ambience of tradition and folklore, which is crucial to the reader's belief in the environment Beckett creates.

Other examples of the mangling which helps give timbre and fibre to the characters of Eden are the corruption of innocuous phrases like 'Tom, Dick and Harry' into the expletive 'Tom's Dick' and the concept of 'slipping' with its multiple connotations for sexual intercourse. Not only has Beckett extended the technique far enough for some of the phrases to be quite challenging to unravel, it also feels like Beckett is playing a game with his audience. Eden has an entirely oral tradition, there is no mention of writing or art in the entire novel, or any other way of recording the community's history. This is never spelled out by Beckett, it simply become apparent, yet the problems of an oral tradition are at the crux of the current problems between the clans, which are so deep that many would prefer not to believe that they were ever one family.

It is clear that the war between the Davidsfolk and the Johnsfolk and the attendant desire of many of the other, smaller clans to stay well out of the way of trouble has clear resonance for anybody who has been subject to family feuds or lived in an area where there is any kind of gang interaction or bullying. It becomes obvious fairly early on that there is something very wrong with the human inhabitants of Eden – many of them are 'batfaces and 'clawfoot'. The genetic impact of four hundred years of a very narrow genetic pool is clear. Angie, the narrator is a batface and her partner Dave (there are many Daves and Angies on Eden) is a clawfoot. Angie perfectly accepts that as a batface, she is stuck with Dave the Clawfoot as a companion, despite the fact that she has no attraction to him whatsoever. He is probably the father of her children, but he may not be, as the physically 'normal' Tom occasionally expects her to 'slip' with him in a manner only just removed from the sort of sexual entitlement and assault we might recognize from American slave accounts. One wonders whether Beckett had domestic slavery in mind when he set up the male-led, disability-divided hierarchy of Eden's population.

Yet women are very important to the culture and tradition of Eden. The role of Shadowspeaker appears to be a female-dominated one. Much of Angie's life was spent in training with the Shadowspeaker Mary. Again, Beckett calls on themes that would perhaps be much more familiar in ancient history novels such as Bernard Cornwell's *Stone Henge* (1999) or Manda Scott's *Boudica* (2002). The Shadowspeaker and her use of the circle fulfils the role of priest, soothsayer, mystic and wise woman. The relationship Angie has with Mary is a difficult one, because Mary knows that Angie may discover that she doubts whether Gela is real. This tension speaks both to the social need for inherited wisdom and the mythical basis to its historical foundation.

Daughter of Eden is an intelligent book which, while sitting firmly in the sf genre, gives a clever and respectful bow to the fields of myth and history. The characters are well drawn and the plot is satisfyingly complete while leaving enough questions to be more than believable. The only remaining task for this reviewer is to go back and read the rest of the series.



Hassan Blasim, ed., *Iraq+100: Stories From a Century After the Invasion* (Comma, 2017, 182pp, £9.99)

Reviewed by Yasmin Khan (Producer of Sindbad Sci-Fi)

More than a thousand and one nightmares have plagued the people of Iraq since the American and British-led invasion in 2003. Thirteen years on from that devastating event, few can comprehend the scale of the charade and critical absence of long-term vision which would unleash havoc and pulverise an already war-torn nation. This tragic episode from recent history serves as a painful lesson in 'futurology for dummies'. Futurism, on the other hand, can be a powerful conceptual tool for imagining new possibilities; expanding the mind, liberating the consciousness from material constraints that transcend any concern with instrumental gains.

Speculative thinking has become a common trope in mainstream science fiction but has not yet surfaced as a core element in Arabic literature – until now. The first of its kind, *Iraq+100* is a groundbreaking anthology of short stories edited by Hassan Blasim, the award-winning author of *The Iraqi Christ* (2013). A group of ten Iraqi writers have accomplished the challenging mission of crafting visionary responses to a key question: what might your homeland look like in the year 2103 – a century on from the catastrophic invasion? How might ordinary Iraqi citizens transcend the chaotic effects of that one intervention? The result is a potent cocktail of fantastical scenarios that postulate surreal prospects for its politics, economy and society. Each vignette in the anthology embraces those classic cornerstone elements of sf, freeing our minds to wonder 'what if?' or 'just suppose?'

Through ring-fencing a safe space for new thought experiments to percolate, could *Iraq+100* become a genuine turning-point for incubating a new aesthetic for Arab science fiction? The range of writing styles and sub-genre forms are reassuringly erudite; from a mind-blowing cyberworld, a bizarre alien invasion

in Baghdad right through to dystopian premonitions of parallel futures. Readers encounter a time-travelling soldier, droid police units, implanted holograms, hallucinogenic bot-bugs, and other repulsive tonics. Each story is anchored by exhilarating cityscapes that depict Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Najaf, Suleymania and Ramadi which ripple from Blasim's own 'The Gardens of Babylon'.

Is this anthology symptomatic of Iraq's yearning to plunge into the deep future? Well not quite – there are unresolved preoccupations that are still pressing the minds of many. To paraphrase Blasim's bittersweet reflection during his book launch at the South Bank Centre: 'Many of us hope to spend our lives dwelling on those big existential questions like "Who are we?", "Why are we here?", and "What's out there?" but ordinary Iraqi people have instead been left wrestling with a shitty question like "why are others bombing us?".'

This anthology is far from a naive, rose-tinted vision of a futuristic utopian Iraq; whilst the concept of the book is inherently uplifting, these stories, laced with dark humour, are smattered with melancholic undertones. Inadvertently, the anthology doubles-up as an exercise in psychoanalysis; in attempting to imagine alternate future realities each writer inevitably reflects the turmoil of the past century that has been so deeply ingrained in their psyche. The anthology commences with the story of Kahramana, written anonymously by a London writer using the pen name 'Anoud' to circumvent reprisals to her family in Iraq. Her satirical biography chronicles the tribulations of a local blue-eye bride on the run from the 'Islamic Empire of Wadi Hashish' who ends up tragically thwarted by the protracted procedures at the American controlled border. Anoud's brutally candid tone provides lashings of comic relief to a surreal fictional situation yet equally acts as a catharsis to the grim realities suffered by men and women alike in the recent past that persist to the present; oscillating between the hopes and fears of the nation is part and parcel of the natural healing process.

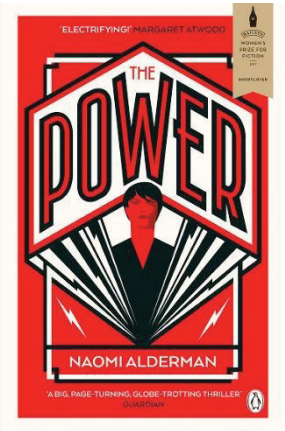
It is impossible not to chuckle at the philosophical musings in 'The Corporal', expertly written by Ali Bader, translated from Arabic into English by Elisabeth Jaquette. The protagonist, Corporal Sobhan, is a rather weary and withered member of Saddam's army who dies after being shot dead in the forehead by an American sniper. He had foolishly saved a rose in his pocket as an offering of gratitude to the incoming Americans he secretly hoped were coming to make Iraq prosper again. For this miscalculated deed he is left in limbo (in a 'corridor to heaven') for a period of a hundred years before he is granted his plea to return to Earth to check up on his hometown of Kut. The corporal finds Kut transformed into an urban oasis beyond all recognition and discovers the extent to which the tables have turned in the world as he bumps into a couple who are on their way to donate gifts to American refugee children; America has become an extremist state overrun by religious intolerance, terrorism and hate. The new

secular vanguards of the civilized world fighting against the axis of evil are an industrialized trio of full-fledged democratic nations: Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Could the muted revolution that has begun rustling between the margins of *Iraq +100* be somehow extrapolated into the real world? In Blasim's view, the boundaries between fact and fiction will become increasingly blurred and he believes gaming will be the next big project in the evolution of literature. He is adamant that gaming has growing potential to directly impact our realities much more than conventional literature is able to do. Whilst this *Matrix*-esque depiction of the future of fiction may sound far-fetched, *Iraq+100* is a game-changing giant leap for Iraqi futurism. Now the urgent task at hand is to publish an Arabic version of the anthology; several of the stories were originally written in Arabic.

The very act of conceiving this book is itself a creative act of defiance; empowering writers who are legitimate stakeholders in the region to use their own agency to re-imagine futuristic narratives in defiant divergence to Iraq's colonisers – be they corporate, commercial or ideological. The anthology offers a vital platform for juxtaposing autonomous visions of the future without fear of failure or repercussion. This bold initiative is fundamentally about reclaiming the license to dream, having the courage to maintain hope in the face of uncertainty, loosening the straitjacket of despair about the past and having the audacity to imagine alternate realities that transcend the stark realities of the present.

Whilst this anthology proves how trauma and a determination to survive despite the odds can spur innovative thinking, these are not the optimal conditions for creativity to thrive. As Blasim astutely acknowledges, what is needed now is stability: 'peace is the laboratory of the imagination'.



Naomi Alderman, *The Power* (Penguin, 2016, 352 pp, £8.99)

Reviewed by Kate Macdonald (University of Reading)

Winner of this year's Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction, *The Power* is a 'what if?' novel that explores the question that every woman will have asked herself (quietly) at some point in her life: what if, somehow, the social and physical balance of power could be reversed between women and men? *The Power* offers one possible sf iteration of this by allowing women to access electrical power from their bodies, and zap whoever they want in a multiplicity of fine-tuned ways. Such a

power needs training, because it's not a skill that turns on and off like a tap, and it's exhausting. Alderman neatly explains the Power as a latent chromosomal advantage that has been enhanced accidentally, and globally, by chemical means in the recent past, and she embraces the possibilities of chromosome irregularities, blurring the male-female power binary among her characters as it is blurred by genetic chance. This is not an Amazonian plot where all the women can zap all the men, because the labels of 'women' and 'men' don't map onto all the chromosomal arrangements. *The Power* is also not just about physical domination, though the ramifications of this are explored magnificently in political, economic and theological directions.

The Power is a rolling narrative told through the stories of four people, three women and a man. These stories wind themselves in and out of each other's narrative paths, and give the reader four stratified accounts of the world as it changes after the emergence of the Power. Wrapped around this plot is an apparently self-indulgent frame narrative, in which the anxious and ingratiating Neil tries to persuade Naomi, a much more successful and influential author, to read and comment on his novelised history of the Cataclysm of some 5000 years earlier, during which period the Power revealed itself and changed human society. Naomi is patronisingly gracious about Neil's work, and kindly suggests that while his writing is quite good, he might find more readers if he published his book under a woman's name. It's at this point that we understand how anger has fuelled the creation of this deeply-felt novel.

Like many female authors, Alderman probably resents being told that her writing is less acceptable, and less attractive to the public, because it is by a woman. (She has published a range of novels, short stories, games, genre fiction and print journalism, as well as being a regular cultural commentator for BBC Radio 3 and 4.) The same institutionalized bias is found in most fields of gainful employment, and societal norms have made women subordinate throughout recorded history, through legalized femicide and the brutalization of women. This is a well-known feminist argument, and is central to how *The Power* operates as a fiction. By altering the balance of physical power, enabling a smaller and physically less powerful person to defend herself (also himself, in principle) against a larger and more physically powerful aggressor, society will change. Muscle no longer matters when electricity is available. But sometimes, it isn't available, and with this additional blurring of the options for who will survive or fail in the novel, Alderman keeps us nervously reading on.

Roxy is the first woman to realize that she has the Power, when at the age of fourteen she witnesses her mother's murder by hitmen. She becomes an increasingly useful backup force in her father's London crime gang. Unlike her brothers, Roxy is highly intelligent, and so rises fast in the family hierarchy, and

doesn't waste much time on revenge or on the feuds that the men get so hung up on. Roxy wants justice instead.

Tunde first witnesses the Power when he sees a girl lash out at a man who will not stop bothering her in the supermarket. When Tunde's girlfriend uses the Power when they are having sex, it naturally blows his mind, but he is in no hurry to experience it again. Alerted to how women under suppression are fighting back, he becomes the first video journalist to record and broadcast how women are developing a rebellion against male oppression. He documents it all, faithfully and without distortion. His meticulous adherence to reportage rather than power or favours for himself enables him to survive, slipping through nets and avoiding detection in an increasingly terrifying world.

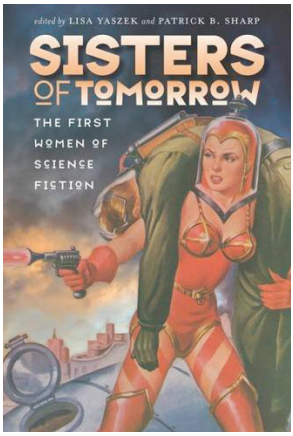
Margot is a small-town US politician, gritting her teeth while the Mayor exhibits his incompetence. As an election campaigning gimmick she undergoes the now routine testing for the Power knowing that she will be able to beat the test, as she's been practicing for weeks. Her concern is financial: she directs money into training camps for women with the Power, to let them learn how to use it responsibly and safely. The jittery public love this, because it's somewhere to send their out-of-control adolescent daughters, and Margot starts to build an army.

Allie leaves her last foster home after murdering her serial rapist foster-father with the Power, and finds sanctuary with a home for girls run by nuns. She too rises fast in the hierarchy by creating her own, because Allie can do more than just zap people: she can manipulate body tissue and neural pathways and heal both psychological and physical damage. Her healing miracles bring her a following, and the Voice in her head leads her to create a worldwide movement of female disciples. Allie's new Goddess religion allows the suppressed feminine aspect of world theologies to emerge.

The Voice in the head is the one problematic aspect of Alderman's novel. Tunde has occasional visits from this Voice, but he ignores it, and it only speaks to help him in times of dire need. Allie seems to have constant contact with her Voice, and the least unsatisfying interpretation I can come up with is that it is a manifestation of her psyche, which is damaged by understandable lifelong trauma. But this Voice functions as an alien in her head, a guiding force, a directing intelligence, so it adds a level of directed interference to the progression towards the Cataclysm that Allie realizes must take place before humanity can begin again. Is the Voice actually God, or an Allie-esque manifestation of God? When Tunde hears It, is God saving Tunde for Her own purposes? This possibility of theological or Outside Intelligence spoils the novel. I was very excited about the chemical-biological changes, of an accelerated evolution towards catastrophe caused by nothing more than too much human meddling

and chemical contamination. I don't like the idea of a Directed contamination: can't we do it all ourselves?

But despite that caveat, *The Power* is a formidable intellectual experiment, and a devouring read. Alderman's characters are fallible and believable. The Alt-Right male resistance lurking in Internet chatrooms has an unnerving and prescient resonance with what we see slithering out of 4Chan and Breitbart right now. There isn't much room in the plot for men who aren't brutal thugs, but there hasn't been much room for women in men's novels who aren't restricted to a limited range either. The carefully designed illustrations of artefacts demonstrating the existence of the Power that were found during archaeological excavations in Neil and Naomi's time, placed randomly throughout the novel, are a nice extension of the world-building. We could do with more visualization of sf in our dystopic future nightmares.



Lisa Yaszek and Patrick B. Sharp, eds. *Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction* (Wesleyan University Press, 2016, 393pp, £29.00)

Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn

Sisters of Tomorrow is a deeply worthy book, as indicated by its recent receipt of the Susan Koppelman Award for the Best Anthology in Feminist Studies. I do not regret reading it and will happily host it on my shelf. But with the exception of the excellent essays by the editors and by Kathleen Ann Goonan, it is rather hard to see what this book is for other than to remind us of the existence of certain writers, and while essential and worthy, there are in this digital age better ways to do this than with a highly selective anthology that mostly reminds us why the writers inside have disappeared. Because the blunt truth is, most of them are *not very good*.

Despite the extensive annotations and biographical notes provided by Sharp and Yaszek, there are a number of basic problems with this project. Nineteen-twenties magazine science fiction is mostly not very good; in fact I'd go as far as to say much of it ranges from dull to dire. If you read the magazines, you are often lucky to find one passable story in any given issue in the first decade. The stories are overlong, a function of the payment per word system. They are often political and didactic, which I don't object to if done well, but here you have to imagine pretty much everyone channelling William Morris. The poetry is mostly

tedious and sentimental even when expressing radical opinions. They often have very good ideas about politics but very few (ironically) about science and they overwhelmingly lack the rhetorical techniques that allow them to craft the thing we now call 'the sense of wonder'.

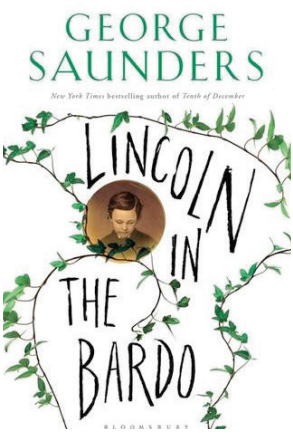
There *are* good stories, but we do mostly know what they are. None of this usually matters: if you are selecting from a hundred stories you can choose the ten good ones. But this anthology is a subsection of an already small subsection – women writers – so that of the nine stories selected only three are actually readable: C.L. Moore's 'Shambleau' (1933), Dorothy Gertude Quick's 'Strange Orchids' (1937) and Dorothy Louise Les Tina's 'When You Think That…Smile'!' (1943). The first is so well known as to need no rescuing, the second very much a crime story remarkably similar to Dorothy L. Sayers' 'The Abominable History of the Man with the Copper Fingers' (1928), and the third a fairy story. The others are justifiably forgotten as fiction, whatever they contribute to the shape of the genre. The effect therefore is unfortunately to do little to defend women's role in the magazines. A reader who has not read the equally awful stuff from their far more numerous male contemporaries could easily be misled into thinking 'if this is what women wrote, thank god they left the field'.

The poetry section is better because the length of the pieces means the editors could give far more examples but based on the samples given here, Julia Boynton Green wrote sentimental doggerel, Virginia Kidd and Lilith Lorraine a kind of patriotic verse, Leah Bodine Drake a strange sort of child's treasury of verses, 'In a hollow tree/I live by the wood/A bit more human/And far less good'; and the editors seem not to have noticed that Tigrina's 'Defiance' is 'after' John Keats' sonnet 'Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition' (1816) with strong influence from W.E. Henley's 'Invictus' (1875). Similarly, the journalism included by Ellen Reed, Fran Miles and Henrietta Brown is rather more like scientific notes although Lynn Standish and L. Taylor Hansen are more discursive and analytical.

The editorial selections are so bland as to offer little evidence of anything except the lack of any female editor of the period making any impact. Lilith Lorraine does demonstrate that she is in many ways a better writer of political argument when she is not writing fiction. In contrast the artists are all rather fun, Olivette Bourgeois producing rather *fin de siècle* designs, and Margaret Brundage demonstrating first that she is every bit as bad at drawing people as her male contemporaries and capable of just as much exploitation of the female body, which I suppose is a win. What is *not* a win, however, is the choice of male artist Milton Luros' (real name Milton Louis Rosenblatt) illustration for the cover.

To return to my original comment about the problem with decontextualizing this work: as an anthology this book may demonstrate the existence of women,

but it barely contributes to an argument about why we should remember them, first because it means we are not judging them against their male peers but only against our highly selective memories, but also because there is so little material here. The flaw is not in the editorial work *per se* but in the platform. Within 393 pages one can only fit so much. Each of these women contributed extensively, as did many others. Eric Davin counts fifty-nine women writing for the magazines up to 1949. I admire the editors for their work, and will value the book, but a much better project would have been taken online, with more examples, more contextualization, and basically just *more*. It needed to be a Big Data project not an attempt at literary recovery.



George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* (Bloomsbury, 2017, 368pp, £18.99)

Reviewed by David Seed (University of Liverpool)

George Saunders has established himself through short story collections like *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (1996) and *Pastoralia* (2000). He had a Catholic upbringing and more recently adopted Buddhism, factors which feed directly into his first novel. *Lincoln in the Bardo* cuts across different genres as can be seen in its title. The focal character is Willie Lincoln, son of the US president, who died in 1862 from typhoid fever induced by riding his pony in bad weather. The second term in the title comes from the *Bardo Thodol*, aka *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and the novel focuses primarily on spirits inhabiting a transitional space between life and death. Although its implicit reach is much wider, the narrative details the period immediately following Willie's funeral, when Lincoln visited the tomb twice. The pathos of the grieving parent is never lost, but given an ironic dimension from the fact that during the very evening when the boy was dying upstairs, the White House was hosting a lavish dinner party. The whole novel exploits exactly this kind of juxtaposition to reductive effect. During the novel Willie is housed in a 'white stone home', a diminished visual evocation of his father's presidential residence.

The striking method Saunders adopts for his novel applies the notion of the graveyard being populated with the spirits of the dead, which can only be perceived by the deceased. The reader is thus positioned outside life in a limbo area populated by both the living and the dead. Partly this is a deliberate strategy on Saunders' part to avoid expectations of yet another book on Lincoln. As he

admitted to *Time* (February 16, 2017): 'I realized that if I set up the ghost parts and the historical stuff identically, I could move between them with less fanfare.' The result is a complex multivocal novel, where we receive minimal guidance from an overall narrative voice. Instead, we are embedded in the space of the cemetery, crowded by multiple voices, some historical, many invented. Although the biographical and historical starting point for the novel is an individual father's grief for a particular son, the novel grows outwards to include a whole range of voices from different levels of society. These speakers are constantly in motion, arriving or departing, sometimes introduced to trigger a series of future selves. Even the coffins seem oddly temporary, being referred to as 'sick-boxes'.

Because voice is the key medium here, it is impossible to keep a clear distinction between the living and dead. Saunders sets up an extended montage of voices whose clashes constantly reveal the vanity of this world. At one point a female spirit attempts to dramatize her death through high-flown spiritual language, only to have it deflated by the earthy comments of her uncomprehending listeners. The novel glances several times at the spiritualism which would have been popular in the 1860s, in references to 'manifesting', elevation in a character who floats horizontally but then turns grotesquely like a weathercock, or to a mother who carries images of her daughters in transparent orbs. It is surely tactical that one of few references to contemporary technology should be to the telegraph. A New York journal of the 1850s clearly cashing in on this connection was called the *Spiritual Telegraph*. One location evoked in the novel is a huge ornate reception room, where the spirits of the departed are required to give witness to a delegate of Christ, but this scene morphs grotesquely into a totally different scene where bodies are being consumed. This is typical of the novel which never lets us forget the combination of body and spirit.

Lincoln in the Bardo is a novel about the presence of death in life. The White House dinner party has a sinister Poe-like hooded figure standing near the door, as if to represent its proximity, and this connects the novel with its historical moment. Sections of the text assemble brief extracts of historical commentary on Lincoln, many of them overtly hostile. In the second half of the novel more and more allusions are made to the course of the Civil War, particularly to the shock of mass deaths in battle, which cut directly across sentimental images of graceful patriotic sacrifice. One character declares: 'We are at war […] with ourselves', internalizing the Civil War into an existential predicament. Conflict, in other words, is shown to be both personal and social. Through his method of juxtaposition Saunders gives us multiple images of the tensions in American society of that period: between rich and poor, racial antagonism and the abuse of women, among other issues. Although he focuses initially on Lincoln and

his son, he then broadens out the narrative into a whole range of social types, whose antagonisms powerfully dramatize the working of vanity in that society.

The *Foundation* Essay Prize 2018

We are pleased to announce our next essay-writing 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 2018).

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 **Monday, 4th December 2017**. 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 2018 issue of *Foundation*.

Call for Papers
Special Issue: In Frankenstein's Wake

To mark the 200th anniversary, in 2018, of Mary Shelley's novel, we invite articles for a special issue, examining the impact of Shelley's creation on the development of sf. Following Brian Aldiss' critical intervention in *Billion Year Spree* (1973), this is a relationship that has often been explored, so we would like to encourage contributions that investigate the afterlives of Shelley's novel within the sf genre in new and innovative ways. Topics may include (but are not confined to) the following areas:

- Critical and historiographical reassessments of the relationship between *Frankenstein* and sf
- Re-workings/rewritings of the Frankenstein myth within contemporary sf
- Performing *Frankenstein* on screen, stage and in music
- The Frankenstein legend and contemporary portrayals of scientists
- The Frankenstein myth and the popular communication of science
- Adapting the Frankenstein story to new media – graphic novels, videogames, etc.
- New and contemporary theoretical approaches to the Frankenstein myth
- Mary Shelley and her creation in contemporary women's sf

Articles should be approximately **6000 words** long and written in accordance with the style sheet available at the SF Foundation website. The deadline for entries is **Monday, 29th January 2018**. Entries should be submitted to journaleditor@sf-foundation.org

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In this issue:

Foundation Essay prize winner Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay on Indian women's sf
Thomas Connolly and Patrick Parrinder on the countryside and tragicomedy in H.G. Wells
Xueping Li's ecofeminist response to 'Ursula Le Guin and translation'
Jennifer Woodward on R.C. Sherriff and 'transformative disaster fiction'
David Ketterer adds a note to 'The Complete *Midwich Cuckoos*'

Maureen Kincaid Speller remembers Michael Levy
Claude Lalumière explores the mosaic of J.G. Ballard's *Vermilion Sands*
Two short essays by Zoran Živković on time travel
Paul March-Russell goes *Into the Unknown*
Conference reports by Mylène Branco, Emily Cox and Monica Guerrasio

In addition, there are reviews by:

Jeremy Brett, Sarah Brown, Jane CoomberSewell, Edward James, Yasmin Khan, Kate Macdonald, Farah Mendlesohn, Andy Sawyer, David Seed and Alison Tedman

Of books by:

Naomi Alderman, William Sims Bainbridge, Chris Beckett, Hassan Blasim, George Saunders, Tom Shippey, Brian Stableford, Michael Swanwick, Andrew Tate, and Lisa Yaszek and Patrick B. Sharp

Cover image/credit: *Into the Unknown: A Journey through Science Fiction*, Barbican International Enterprises. Photography by Dan Tobin Smith, design by Praline.

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